

# Brechtian Theatre and the Glocal South

The Case from South Africa

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## Abstract

The *glocal* scale offers a more productive frame for analyzing the *transculturation* of theatre, particular Brechtian theory and practice, than either the singularly local or the generalized global. Glocalization brings into focus networks of imaginative representation that may be missed in overbroad applications of global frameworks, particularly the Global South. Thinking *glocally* also enables historians to trace legacies of transculturation—the production of new forms and practices that emerge from these encounters through *embodied transmission* through performance. In contrast to the binary opposition between center and periphery that bedevils the “postcolonial,” glocalization tracks multiple lines of contestation, including those sites of theatrical and social contestation that acknowledge the glocal domination of elites in the South as well as the subordination of subaltern classes in the North and thus encourages more precise attention to ways in which people and ideas from the north are not *merely* from the north. Dissident socialist theatre-makers occupied glocally subaltern positions in Germany acted on their understanding of class struggle rather than any presumption of European superiority. Conversely, their black interlocutors in South Africa engaging with European culture, whether genteel Anglophile or militant Communist, as well as popular African practices, understood the glocalized entanglements of north and south. Using as a case study the transcul-

turation of Brechtian theory and practice in testimonial plays and other forms in anti-apartheid and post-apartheid performance, glocalization tracks *mutual and multiple* networks of transculturation that move within as well as across diverse Souths and Norths.

### **Keywords**

Glocalization, transculturation, Brecht, South Africa

## Prologue

A literal-minded historian might begin an essay on Brecht in South Africa with the first professional production of a play by Brecht. A critical historian might point out that the term “professional” hides discrimination that denied blacks professional training during the apartheid era. In 1963, two years after the Berlin Wall, the more radical opposition groups, the African National Congress, the Pan-Africanist Congress, and the South African Communist Party, were banned, and the police enforced detention without trial.<sup>1</sup> In this period, white players treated Brecht as a canonized author rather than a leftist, as his politics were not welcome in a state that was violently suppressing non-violent opposition. Thus, at the same time as the German Democratic Republic was elevating Brecht posthumously to the classic socialist pantheon after his dissidence no longer a threat to the state, anti-communist white South Africa saw in Brecht a guarantor of access to Western civilization “at the tip of Africa” as the apartheid Department of Information put it in 1966 (1).

With these ironies in mind, the critical historian might compare the all-white *Caucasian Chalk Circle* that was subsidized by the state in 1963 with the more modest but more influential production in 1964 by blacks who earned their living not as actors but as teachers, clerks, and industrial workers. Working with Athol Fugard who was not yet the renowned leader of overseas tours that he became in the 1970s and 1980s, the Serpent Players used *Verfremdung*—best translated as critical estrangement-- as well as their own experience of apartheid to create theatre.<sup>2</sup> In particular, they combined their experience of political persecution and dramatic conflict to forge their own *Lehrstück* [learning play] *The Coat* (1966) to test scenarios for political action. This experiment preceded the better-known *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973), devised by Fugard and actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, which set the format for the distinctively South African political theatre of the 1970s and 1980s. Characterized by vigorous movement, rousing song, direct testimony of the oppressed, and satiric impersonation of the oppressor, these collaborations included *Survival* (1976), *Woza*

*Albert!* (1981), and Junction Avenue Theatre Company (JATC)'s critical history plays such as *Randlords and Rotgut* (1978).

This era may seem long ago now that South Africa has navigated nearly three decades as a democratic nation but the role of political theatre today depends on transnational history and the multiple currents and networks that have made this history. The common assumption that South African political theatre begins with Fugard (Mda "Theater") is incomplete because it omits the impact of international socialist movements that shaped Brecht's formation in the 1920s and South African theatre and politics by the 1930s, long before Fugard. In order to evaluate the visible history of "Brecht in South Africa," which appears to begin with white amateurs in the 1950s, we need to investigate the virtual history that emerges from the intersection of international socialist and local syncretic forms from the 1920s, forms which have since been claimed as Brechtian, even though Brecht was one of many in Weimar Germany influenced by socialist agitprop alongside the Berlin cabaret and the Bavarian *Volkstück* [folk play]. Recognizing the formation of this political theatre through the interaction of native and immigrant progressives in South Africa enriches our understanding of the explicitly Brechtian theatre that followed, from the Serpent Players in the 1960s to the anti-apartheid heyday of the 1970s and 1980s, to the current theatre tackling post-apartheid social problems. The history of Brechtian theatre in South Africa thus begins *before* Brecht's plays take the stage.

The historical ironies mentioned above affect the interplay between Brecht and political theatre not only in South Africa but also in what used to be called the Third World, those parts of the globe resisting the pressures of both capitalist and state socialist forms of imperial overreach. Even if, as researchers on political theatre in Brazil (Pelzer), India (Dharwadker), or the Philippines (Torres-Reyes) point out, practitioners have deployed Brecht's plays and Brechtian modes of estranged, gestic, and other forms of analytic performance to critique local elites, some members of those elites have treated Brecht as a sign of arrival in the club of Western culture. Despite these ironies, the interplay between Brecht and local theatre practices in South Africa can illuminate the promise and the pitfalls of transcultural

turation elsewhere, hence this paper's goal to situate Brecht in South Africa and the *glocal* South. Before discussing Brecht in South Africa in more detail, I should define the key term *glocal* and its collocation with *transculturation*.

### **Glocal scales and glocalized stages**

The idea of the Third World (*le tiers monde*) emerged in part from the French Revolutionary concept of the third estate (*le tiers état*) that challenged aristocratic and clerical authority in 1789 but dates more directly from the Bandung Conference in 1952 of postcolonial nations, whose Non-Aligned Movement disputed the hegemony of first (capitalist) and second (communist) blocs. The idea of the Third World has in the last several decades given way--even if the fact of its continued subordination has not--to the Global South, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union ended the rivalry between capitalist and communist blocs. But as guiding concepts--capitalized to highlight their ideological weight--the Global South and the Global North may be *too global* to aid the analysis of complex networks of transculturation, to the extent that they replace the Cold War polarity of East vs West with a similar oversimplified South vs North. To be sure, the division between the rich North and the underdeveloped South, even in its original 1980 articulation by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, was more complex than a simple hemispheric split; the Brandt line dipped down below the equator to scoop Australia and New Zealand into the North, while it relegated some countries in the northern hemisphere, such as India and China, to the South. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, historian Arif Dirlik, writing in the inaugural issue of *The Global South*, highlighted the "predicaments" and "promise" of the concept "global South" (12), as competing revisions have shifted to include China, India, and in some cases Brazil and South Africa as players in global networks. More recent critics have attempted to draw attention to discrimination in supposedly rich countries by conceptualizing the "South in the North" (Smith 5) and calling for the investigation of areas, peoples, and cultures affected by structural inequality in the North, such as the underdeveloped rural South of the United States (hereafter: U.S.).

Nonetheless, the formulation “South in the North” still preserves “the North” as the norm from which the subaltern “South” diverges.

*Glocal*, on the other hand, sets up a more productive scale of analysis than either the singularly local or the generalized global. Introduced by urbanist Eric Swyngedouw in the 1990s and refined in his 2004 answer to the question “Globalisation or ‘Glocalisation?’” the *glocal* frame foregrounds “networks, territories, and rescaling” and thus the ways in which “local, urban or regional configurations” both connect and complicate supranational links among cities and countries. By attending to smaller-scale permutations, the glocal scale corrects the “global” tendency to “obfuscate, marginalize and silence intense and ongoing socio-spatial struggle” (25). Swyngedouw uses glocal to highlight “socio-spatial struggle” or lines of tension in the realm of geography, especially the pull and push between cities of glocal prominence and their hinterlands. His examples are European but his model works in other contexts. In the Philippines, for example, one might look at the history of Manila as a glocal point of contact between Spain and China (Tremmi); in the U.S., one could contrast the global prominence of New York as capital of transnational finance with Chicago’s “second city” subordination but revise that alignment by pointing out Chicago’s past and present *glocal* pull for migrants from the South and the Midwest (Kruger “Glocal South Sides”).

The glocal scale also allows performance studies to bring into focus networks and sites of imaginative representation that may be missed in overbroad applications of global frameworks, whether in exchanges between practitioners in cities of glocal stature, such as between Chicago and Johannesburg (Kruger, “Glocal South Sides”) or translations and reformulations of dominant European cultural theories on sites at the edge of Europe such as Croatia (Blazević and Feldman). More than the idea of “post-colonial Brecht,” which retains the binary opposition between center and periphery, “European nations” and “the countries they colonized” (Silberman 244), glocalization tracks multiple lines of contestation, including not only US imperialism that has engaged in economic exploitation often without colonization but also those sites of theatrical and social contestation that acknowledge the glocal domination of elites in the South as well as the subordination

of subaltern classes in the North. Thinking *glocally* also enables theatre historians to trace legacies of not only of interaction and mutual influence but crucially of *transculturation*-- the production of new practices that emerge from these encounters--(Ortíz 97-98), in particular through what I would call *embodied transmission* through performance.

The glocal scale also encourages more precise attention to ways in which people and ideas from the north are not *merely* from the north. In the turbulent years of Weimar Germany (1918-33), dissident socialist theatre-makers occupied glocally subaltern positions and acted on their understanding of class struggle rather than any presumption of European superiority. Conversely, black interlocutors of these socialist migrants in South Africa engaged with European culture, whether genteel Anglophile or militant Communist, as well as popular urban African practices, and thus understood the glocalized entanglements of north and south. Unlike globalization, which implies the adaptation, often painful, of people of the South to the norms of the North, *glocalization* tracks *mutual and multiple* networks of transculturation that move within as well as across diverse Souths and Norths.

### **Brechtian Theatre Before Brecht: Glocalization of International Socialism**

We can see the glocal transculturation of international leftist theatre, which we might call Brechtian, in action a good generation *before* any play by Brecht appeared on a South African stage. Already in the 1920s, the black literate class of New Africans were experimenting with African, European and (African) American practices--from indigenous storytelling to school-taught drama, blended with forms from nationalist hymns to vaudeville sketches, to challenge exclusive Western claims to modernity, in the name of universal emancipation.<sup>3</sup> By the 1930s, this activity included theatre sponsored on the one hand by neocolonial institutions such as the British Drama League, and on the other by industrial unions and the Communist Party, which were among few integrated organizations in this segregated society. The Drama League was neocolonial in that it subjected educated Africans to the norms of genteel English culture and sponsored English comedies by

Oscar Wilde and similar playwrights. In contrast, unionists, whether white (Guy Routh) or black (Gaur Radebe), worked within egalitarian structures to create plays on topics such as segregation and forced removals from the land. These projects were enriched by leftist immigrants, especially the Berliner Kurt Baum and British Belgian André van Gyseghem, who shared the techniques of European avant-gardists with black interlocutors. Baum had worked in Berlin with Erwin Piscator, who used the term *episches Theater* to describe the “narrative progress of [discrete] scenes” propelled by a strong political point of view (Piscator 74)—thus incisive narration rather than grandiose epic—prior to Brecht, who used “epic” thereafter to distinguish critically estranged theatre emphatically from dramatic empathy (Brecht 63). Van Gyseghem observed Vsevolod Meyerhold at work in the Soviet Union and the Living Newspaper in the U.S. and drew on their vivid visual design and precise ensemble work for projects as distinct as the anglophile Pageant of South Africa and African revisions of American labor plays such as *Stevedore* by Paul Peters and George Sklar. The Garment Workers Union, which included white Afrikaner women and men of color under the leadership of Jewish unionist Solly Sachs, produced plays and pageants to dramatize labor struggles and tension between Afrikaner Nationalism and international socialism. The Bantu Peoples Theatre (BPT) produced local versions of metropolitan experiments such as Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* directed in 1936 by Van Gyseghem and performed in African English, and drama on pressing issues such as Routh’s *Patriot’s Pie* (1940) about African conscription, or Radebe’s *Rude Criminal* (1941), about men criminalized by laws restricting Africans seeking work in South African cities. Although these plays were never published, BPT documents invoked international socialism to focus on “the economic disintegration, the breakdown of tribal economy, and the impoverishment of Europeans, the massing of classes in their trade unions and employer organizations,” as well as the “emotional complications of race and colour” at home. <sup>4</sup> These projects prompted Herbert Dhlomo, a prolific if at the time largely unpublished playwright now celebrated as the father of South African drama, to turn from plays about African kings, whose heroic pathos recalled more Friedrich Schiller’s Romanticism than



Brecht, to experimental drama on labor themes, such as *The Workers* (1941), which reflected the influence of expressionism, in this case Brecht's contemporary Georg Kaiser.

### **Learning Beyond Brecht: From the *Lehrstück* to the Testimonial Play**

Although their names may be unknown to many South Africans as well as readers abroad, the practitioners mentioned above created political theatre a generation before Fugard and before Brecht's work circulated in South Africa. Their engagement with Soviet and German experiments alongside African practices shows the global reach of the socialist and modernist trends that shaped Brecht, as well as the glocal particulars that transformed this inheritance at home. Even if these currents ran dry for a generation after the Afrikaner Nationalists took power in 1948 and created the police state that survived until democratic elections in 1994, they trace a long history of anti-apartheid theatre and thus provide essential context for Fugard's discovery of Brecht in the 1960s and for performative transculturation more generally. *The Coat* (1966) blended Fugard's reading of *Brecht on Theatre* (Willett ed.) and an incident at one of many political trials involving members of the Serpent Players to dramatize the choices facing a woman whose husband, convicted of anti-apartheid activism, left her his coat before departing for prison. In the manner of Brecht's *Lehrstück*, the company created an experiment for practitioners to test social as well as theatrical action. The performers focused not on the portrayal of sympathetic character but on the analysis of social relationships--between the waiting wife and her impatient son, between the police and the political group to which the convicted man belonged, and between the black performers and their different audiences--black in the township as against the white theatre appreciation group in town. Using the coat to prompt debate about who needed this and other scarce resources and why, the participants were engaged not only in representing social relationships on stage but in enacting their own dealings with each other and apartheid institutions from the law courts to employment and residence discrimination. This experimental staging of alternate scenarios

for action has made *The Coat* an important model for theatre training and revival into the post-apartheid 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Serpent Players' more famous play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), which toured Britain and the United States with *The Island* (1973), and later reached stages across Europe and the Americas well as in China, was also prompted by an object. In this case a studio photograph of a smiling black man in a suit led actor John Kani to remark that the man looked happy most likely because his pass—the document every adult African had to carry in the apartheid era—was in order. In the drama that Kani, Ntshona and Fugard made about such a man. Sizwe Bansi [the nation is strong], who is denied authorization to work in the city, is persuaded by Buntu [humanity] to appropriate the authorized pass of a dead man, Robert Zwelinzima [heavy world], whose body they find in an alley (see Fugard and casts). In contrast to the sober presentation of *The Coat*, this weighty decision in *Sizwe Bansi* was preceded by lively comic sketches improvised in the African variety concert manner by Kani who developed his character—a garrulous township photographer—while also impersonating his former mates and bosses at the Ford factory where Kani himself had worked, nosy neighbors, and even township cockroaches. But the scenario returned unexpectedly to Brecht when the township audience interrupted Kani in the quieter role of Buntu as he pasted Sizwe's photograph in Robert's pass with a vigorous debate about whether he should risk the illegal act of tampering with official documents (Fugard 31-32).

This debate highlighted the power of theatre as testimony and established the *testimonial play* as the distinctive anti-apartheid form. Whereas the Serpent Players had emerged in a period of deep repression in which theatre could risk only indirect political expression, the rise of militant anti-apartheid activism, inspired in part by the U.S. Black Power movement and by African decolonization, especially of neighboring Mozambique in 1974, emboldened activists to stage more agitational performances, even if this activism ended in prison or exile. Among those groups who mixed influence by Brecht and the imperatives of anti-apartheid testimony, Workshop '71 was founded by white Witwatersrand (Wits) University lecturer Robert McLaren (aka

Kavanagh), with black workers. Their testimonial play *Survival* (1976) was created by four performers who testify directly to the audience, explaining in sober Brechtian reporting how the individuals they represent landed in prison, whether for overt political activity or for speeding to get an ill parent to the hospital, concluding with a rousing anti-apartheid chorus calling for an end to “these days.” (Workshop ’71 167). The play’s critical use of multiple points of view drew on Brecht’s epic practice continued to inspire audiences in town and township even after the student uprisings in Soweto and beyond led the censors to ban the play. Police threats sent the performers into U.S. exile and the director to graduate training in Britain and later theatre practice in Zimbabwe, but remaining members collaborated with others to create a repertoire of plays in this testimonial mode. Some of these plays were written by individuals such as Maishe Maponya’s *Hungry Earth* (1978), which depicted the structural poverty that forced black rural men into the mines—and still does so today--or Gcina Mhlophe’s *Have You Seen Zandile?* (1986) whose author-actor dramatized her own and other women’s conflicts with their mothers’ enforcement of African patriarchal norms of submission and early marriage. More frequently, these testimonial plays were like *Survival* the product of workshops. *Born in the RSA* (1985) by director Barney Simon and the original cast at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, which was from its founding in 1976 to the 1990s South Africa’s most influential home for anti-apartheid drama, was prompted by the state of emergency and the cast members’ diverse experiences with apartheid violence to depict a range of characters, including not only militant activists and their hardened opponents in the police force but also people caught in the middle trying in vain to avoid politics. Using African hymns, struggle songs, and American showtunes to comment on the action, this play and its kin drew both on Brecht and on the musical, in both its Broadway and township variants.

In post-apartheid South Africa since 1994, testimonial theater practitioners have turned their sights on new social problems, such as the rate of HIV infection here and in neighboring states, which is still among the worst in the world. DramAide, the longest-lasting applied theatre organization, founded by Lynn Dalrymple, and HIV educators such as Dennis Francis,

and others working at the interface between art and activism have applied Brechtian techniques and the forum theatre and participatory dramaturgy that Augusto Boal repurposed from Brecht to challenge HIV+ people and their kin to experiment with new roles and thus change their understanding and enactment of social mores as well as sexual behavior. In the initial rush of the AIDS epidemic in the 1990s, these organizations aspired to use theatre didactically in the hope of curtailing risky sexual and social conduct, but 21<sup>st</sup> century projects have broadened scope to encourage participants and target audiences especially young people to learn by way of participatory dramaturgy how better to negotiate the social and economic constraints and incentives affecting their behavior and thus to better their options for action beyond the stage. Ideally, these are action that might bring closer to realization the South African Constitution's mandate promulgated and reiterated by the Dept of Arts and Culture *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* in 1996, which, in sharp contrast to the apartheid document defending "aspirations to European culture" (1) in 1966, argued for "access for all to, participation in, and enjoyment of the arts" as a "basic human right" (7).<sup>5</sup>

### **History and Comedy as Sites of Critique**

The historical dimension of epic theatre may have been eclipsed by testimonial plays that focus on urgently pressing problems but critical history plays have drawn on Brecht's practice of critical historization to narrate and analyze South African history. This historical investigation distinguished the work of Junction Avenue Theatre Company (JATC: 1976-99), whose members included director Malcolm Purkey, designer and now world-famous artist William Kentridge, and worker-players such as Ramolao Makhene who had his start with Workshop '71. In collaboration with writers in Wits University's History Workshop, JATC created musical history plays. *Randlord and Rotgut* (1978), like the article by historian Charles van Onselen whose title it borrowed, critiqued the collusion between mining capitalists, Boer farmers, and liquor producer that kept black miners working despite bad wages and conditions from the consolidation of the mining industry around 1890 to the present, and thus highlighted both the power of the

global trade in gold and the glocal networks of power and resistance more complicated than a simple opposition between capital and labor or black and white. *Sophiatown* (1986) depicted the more recent history of apartheid from the 1950s to the 1980s; the play used original songs as well as quotations from the memoirs of exiled writers to celebrate the eponymous neighborhood's vibrant integrated culture and progressive politics that were destroyed by apartheid in the 1950s to build a white suburb called Triomf. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *Sophiatown* is back and the critical history play *Sophiatown* has endured despite a plethora of nostalgic film and stage treatments of the period that writer Louis Nkosi ironically called the "fabulous fifties" (24). JATC's last play *Love, Crime, and Johannesburg* (1999), created in the uncertain transition from Nelson Mandela's presidency (1994-9) which favored democratic reconstruction and development to Thabo Mbeki's neoliberal administration (1999-2008) which favored developing a black elite through what he called Black Economic Empowerment, revised the drama of capital and corruption that it began with *Randlords and Rotgut*. *Love, Crime and Johannesburg* loosely adapted Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, especially Brecht's reminder that owning a bank was more dangerous than robbing one, to dramatize the ways in which post-apartheid capitalism was corrupting former struggle heroes as well as enabling new and old elites to exploit development funding for their own gain.

Although recent history plays use a more conventional family saga framework than JATC's epic "narrative progression," some weave Brechtian elements into more intimate family drama. Neil Coppen's *Abnormal Loads* (2012) uses 21<sup>st</sup> century reenactments of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Zulu and Anglo-Boer battles to explore rivalries and resentments in a town in perennially contested KwaZulu-Natal province. The central character Vincent is compelled by his Anglo grandmother to reenact his Anglo grandfather but turns to the legacy of his Zulu father who was likely killed by apartheid police. Haunted by his father's ghost, Vincent responds ambivalently to his grandmother's role play; his estrangement is thus political and psychological as well as theatrical. Drawing also on the history of colonial dispossession, *The Native Who Caused All the Trouble*, an anti-apartheid play

written by theatre makers Vanessa Cooke and Danny Keogh in collaboration with historian Nicholas Haysom (1983), was based on a 1937 incident in which a Sotho man, Tselilo (played by Kani), claimed ownership of land in Cape Town. In 2017, Nwabisa Plaatje revised the original to highlight the gendered dimension of labor, with the actress Faniswa Yisa playing Tselilo, who kept her womanly appearance while showing the character's masculinity.

In addition to critical juxtapositions of past and present which recall Brecht's epic historicization, testimonial plays have used sketch comedy that draws on African variety skits while also recalling the satirical cabaret that was an important part of Brecht's inheritance. *Woza Albert!* (1981), devised by Simon, Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, spins a skein of sketches from the premise of a visit to apartheid Johannesburg by Jesus, mixing clowning with pointed indictment of state violence from the colonial period to the era of high apartheid. It is possibly the most revived play in the anti-apartheid repertoire, and its combination of politics and physical comedy with sober reportage animating minimal props came to dominate the Southern African stage, even in the post-apartheid twenty-first century. Another play much revived into the 1990s was Zakes Mda's *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1978), which was written in exile in Lesotho, and in this context, turned to satirizing post-colonial states whose corrupt leaders betrayed the promise of liberation. This drama depicted corruption in an unnamed African country where veterans from the independence struggle freeze to death in a park from which the newly rich attempt to evict them. Younger post-apartheid playwrights draw on this satiric example to challenge present-day malfeasance, as does Omphile Molusi's *Itsoseng* (2008-9) that played at home and abroad in the first year of the notorious presidency of Jacob Zuma (2008-18). Author-actor Molusi used pointed political commentary, inventive play with found objects and plastic tarp, and physical comedy to dramatize resentful displaced people who torch Itsoseng shopping center, as well as the fat cats who pocketed the rebuilding funds, as well as a broader indictment of the rampant corruption in government that the crusading Public Protector in the Zuma era called the "state of capture" (Madonsela).

## Critique, Care, and Performance in the Suspended Revolution

Brechtian techniques have been taught now for two generations by community theatre studios as well in university drama departments, and have certainly provided practitioners with tools to educate and entertain audiences with critical depictions of current conflicts such as those between venal elites and the deepening impoverishment of the majority. But the enlightenment premise—which animates activist theatre as it did Brecht—that exposing social conflicts hidden by ideology or false consciousness will emancipate publics as well as performers—has met unexpected obstacles. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC; 1996-2002), in which two thousand out of a documented twenty thousand survivors of torture and other human rights violations testified in public hearings, prompted theatre practitioners to work with survivors without always acknowledging the gulf between testimony and emancipation opened up by the retraumatizing effects of recalling unspeakable pain. Among the few that succeeded, the collaboration that brought together the survivor group Khulumani (Speak out!), the Centre for Violence and Reconciliation, and theatre facilitator Makhene produced *The Story I am about to tell*, which used theatre to provide tools and space for survivors speak in their own voices, but complemented this public exposure with group therapy to fortify participants against the re-traumatization that it might provoke. Even with therapy, the experience of repeated self-exposure could prove fatal, as in the case of Duma Khumalo. Khumalo joined Khulumani in 1996, and in the context of *The Story* told his story of being convicted for a political murder that he did not commit, only to be reprieved at the last minute due to international pressure—after he had been measured for his coffin. In the succeeding years, he tried to clear his name by giving talks and appearing in a better-known play, *He Left Quietly* (2002-5; published 2008) devised from his TRC testimony by director Yaël Farber. Khumalo, who had pondered the imponderable question on stage—“Is it possible that I stayed here among you—the living—long after my soul left my body behind?”—committed suicide in 2006 (Farber and Khumalo 188), ten years after the TRC began hearing testimony.<sup>6</sup> Acknowledging the limits of enlightenment theatre in the wake of the TRC, the strongest drama

in 21<sup>st</sup> century South Africa combines a critique of economic and social injustice with reparative work to restore psychological and affective bonds.

Adding to Brecht's critical pedagogy and Boal's participatory dramaturgy, practitioners have used the work of local analysts of political impasse and the "suspended revolution" (Habib) and therapist-theorists analyzing patriarchal violence and the abuse of power (Gqola; Gobodo-Madikizela) to reshape socially engaged theatre that accounts for affect as well as action, care as well as critique. In contrast to the glocal dominance of Johannesburg in the anti-apartheid moment, Cape Town has in the post-apartheid period become the center of theatrical experiment. I therefore turn in conclusion to organizations that bring together the skills of trained theatre artists in Cape Town and practitioners in the townships and informal settlements on the arid Cape Flats.

Baxter Theatre and its development extension *Zabalaza Intsika* (Xhosa: stand firm pillar) have produced work with seasoned as well as emerging players that brings together expertise and experience of diverse stakeholders to dramatize the violent impact especially on women and girls of growing inequality as well as endemic poverty, while showcasing the capacity of designers as well as performers for tragic and lyrical scenography as well as social satire (Morris). *Karoo Moose* (2007) by Baxter's artistic director Lara Foot is set in an impoverished village in the arid Karoo, hundreds of kilometers from affluent Cape Town and depicts women, children and the men who prey on them in a world "where children don't stay children for very long and where adults cannot really afford to be adults" (Foot 9-10). The players blended Xhosa *iintsomi* (storytelling) with experimental forms including poor theatre inspired by Jerzy Grotowski and mime from Le Coq and other schools, as well as techniques of estrangement, quotation, and musical punctuation from Brecht to represent both the specific conditions of hunger and struggle in a Karoo village and spin a tale that has universal resonance. The drama juxtaposes the harsh experience of fourteen-year-old Thozana, played in the 2007 premiere and 2016 revival by Chuma Sopotela whose recent work has deepened her performative investigation of gender violence, traded to a thug by her drunken father with the magical tale of a



moose. The moose, an exotic import, apparently fell off a truck bound for a game farm. Its presence, rendered by players carrying long reeds that evoke the moose's antlers, charms the villagers until they realize that they can kill and eat it. This contrast between supernatural dread and everyday ordeals like chronic hunger, embedded in the overall tension between aspiration and exhaustion, pervaded the revival staged in 2016, the year of the damning *State of Capture Report* (Madonsela) detailing the Zuma regime's expropriation of public funds, even if it ends on a note of hope with a vivid picture of actors miming children riding out on a brightly coloured bus. This tension highlighted the artificiality of "fictional solutions to real social problems," as Brecht warned the purveyors of Stalinist "realism" in 1953 (268) as well as the challenge of effecting real change. In *Karoo Moose*, the entangled problems of poverty, misogyny, AIDS and government incompetence may appear overwhelming, but rather than presuming to offer global solutions, the play modestly suggests the potential of individual and collective agency in the glocal scene.

Also based in Cape Town, Magnet Theatre has worked with people in informal settlements to create drama about migration, especially about people who have come from the impoverished Eastern Cape seeking work in the affluent Western Cape. While some are able to support families back home, others struggle and return only after death, including those who die young of AIDS. Some of these bodies are conveyed to ancestral burial sites where they can be interred where their umbilical cords lie as tradition requires but others, such as those in Mandla Mbothwe's *Ingcwaba lendoda lisecalen' kwendlela* (The man's grave is next to the road; 2009), haunt the national highway that links one of South Africa's most affluent provinces with one of its poorest. Marshalling choral groups singing praises and dirges as well as named characters whose journeys to the glocal center of Cape Town and back are marked by simple props like abandoned shoes and suitcases weighted down by stones, Mbothwe extends the testimonial form to bear witness to suffering exacerbated by neoliberal policy and corrupt governance, while at the same time celebrates the lyric power of the Xhosa language and sacred song to honor the ancestors.

### **In Lieu of Concluding, Looking Forward**

Attempting to represent material conditions and invisible forces together may seem to contradict the critical aspirations of a Brechtian “theatre of the scientific age.” Nonetheless, the two plays sketched above reflect the achievement of companies that have created evocative and thought-provoking performances and established networks for pedagogy as well as play to create scenarios to change their world. Change has come more slowly than the more militant anti-apartheid activists featured in the earlier part of this essay may have wanted but the theatre makers working today’s vibrant if imperfect democratic South Africa aspire to meet the constitutional mandate to create structures and practices that promote not only individual liberties but also social rights such as access to justice and wellbeing. In the transculturation of Brechtian theatre with a view to dramatize current conditions of struggle and possibility, they have made an important contribution to improving the lives of individuals and communities in South Africa and to highlighting the potential of theatre in other points in the glocal South.

## Notes

1. For the history of the anti-apartheid struggle, see Karis et al. This essay revises “Brecht in Southern Africa,” published in *Bertolt Brecht in Context*, and also draws on my books *Post-Imperial Brecht* and *A Century of South African Theatre*. This essay reframes my thoughts on Brecht within the *glocal* as against the global South, which I began to develop in “Glocal South Sides.” My intention here is to show essential elements of Brechtian theatre in a range of South African contexts without burdening this essay with dense citation. For detailed analysis and more bibliography, readers might consult the above publications.
2. The editors of the new and expanded *Brecht on Theatre* chose to leave *Verfremdung* untranslated (5-6) in contrast to the inaccurate but familiar “alienation” (Willett); “alienation” translates *Entfremdung* (Marx’s term for dispossession) and is thus the opposite of *Verfremdung*, which is adequately rendered by *critical estrangement*.
3. For the “New African” intermediate class, see Couzens; for New African theatre and anti-apartheid drama, Kruger, *A Century*, 37-74; 121-46
4. Bantu Peoples Theatre, *Drama Festival Program* (25-27 July 1940), 10; Johannesburg Public Library, Strange Theatre Collection; for discussion, see Kruger, *A Century*, 38-43
5. For these and other developments in post-anti-apartheid theatre between apartheid and post-apartheid eras, see Kruger, *A Century*, 147-65
6. For this and other performative responses to the TRC, see Kruger, *Post-Imperial Brecht*, 337-375, and *A Century*, 157-65; for the TRC hearings analyzed as performance, see Cole.

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