OBSCENITY IN BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE: A CASE STUDY OF PAUL GROOTBOOM

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER TECHNOLOGIAE: DRAMA

In the

Department of Drama and Film

FACULTY OF THE ARTS

TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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April 2013
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the degree M Tech: Drama at the Tshwane University of Technology is my original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher education. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

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Signature

Student Number: 209188767.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to:

- My Supervisor, Prof Patrick Ebewo: thank you for your guidance.
- My beloved mentor Prof. Lutge: I am truly grateful for your love, support and encouragement in this journey. Thank you for believing in me at a time I did not readily believe in myself.
- Dr L. Singh: thank you for your optimism and encouragement.
- Professor Alan Munro: for your encouragement.
- Paul Grootboom: for your time, information and interview.
- Tshwane University of Technology Librarians: Rina White and Mamphake Lydia Sechele.
ABSTRACT

Obscenity in the realm of theatre is certainly not new. If one looks as far back as the Greek classics, medieval literature, or Restoration theatre, obscenity has always been present. Even during the messengers’ speeches narrated in Greek theatre brutal deaths, dreadful suffering, rape, incest, mutilations, sexual orgies and humiliations underscore the violence and highlight the obscenity of antiquity. Restoration theatre with raucous plots, bawdy themes, characters centred on rakes and whores, dialogue of witty double-entendres, inciting controversy derived from sex comedies and sexually suggestive titles also made a mark in theatre history.

More recently, an explosion of provocative plays by young British writers, confront the taboo of obscenity, eminently reflected in Sarah Kane’s *Phaedra’s Love*. These plays have been aptly dubbed “*In Your Face theatre*”. Grootboom’s productions share similarities with these global trends as they are reflexive of this definition in portraying this type of theatre. The definition asserts a theatre of profane language, overtly sexual characters in blatant acts of copulation, violent dispositions, and internal turmoil where turbulent natures experience unpleasant emotions, and relationships involve mutual humiliation (Sierz, 2001:5).

With the rich history of obscenity in theatre, it should come as no surprise that in reflecting more open current trends, obscenity is perceived as increasingly more tolerable in South African theatre. Grootboom’s plays have managed to edge closer to controversy visible in the local furore with the frontal nudity in *Cards*, the boundaries pushed in *Foreplay* as well as the violence in *Relativity: Township Stories*. The reactions to Grootboom’s productions have to do with the fact that full frontal nudity
is unacceptable in African culture (except of course during traditional ceremonies and protests). This study seeks to discover why Grootboom’s obscene theatre is so popular amongst black South Africans though at odds with their cultural perceptions of respect, relationship boundaries, communal address and personal demeanour rather than exhibitionism. It also seeks to contribute to a clearer understanding of what theatrical content current South African audience prefers.

This study reveals a prevalence of voyeurism where crowds may initially be drawn by the “sex and violence sells” notion, evidenced in the media dubbing Grootboom the “Township Tarrantino.” In Paul Grootboom’s productions, one cannot help but recognise the identities transferred from real life to stage characters and the echoing issues depicted as those of the typical South African township experience. The relevance of Grootboom’s productions demonstrates a theatre practitioner with his hand on the pulse of present day black South Africa.

Even though Foreplay is an adaptation of Schnitzler’s Le Ronde written in Vienna in 1897, Grootboom’s adaptation equates sex and death. This too holds immense truth especially in present day black South Africa. In Foreplay, the characters fear HIV and AIDS. In the play, all the characters spread HIV to each other and this is symbolised by the chewing of red bubble gum that is passed from one character to another. In the play, Grootboom exposes the dysfunctionality of black South African township life. The violence, language and sex are not exaggerations for mere entertainment purposes, but rather a reflection of reality that is likely to make one extremely uncomfortable. Grootboom depicts the “township” as a place that has degenerated, a crude environment lacking civility. One cannot help but compare suburbia to the world of the Township, with its veneer of politeness and its efforts to conceal any sign
of vulgarity. South Africa has long been infamous for its extreme contrasts: high levels of humanitarian inequality; gross chasms in racial entitlement, and economic disenfranchisement.

In *Relativity: Township Stories*, it is made clear that the township is a law unto itself and does not necessarily follow the law of the land. This fact brings about the concept that the environment conditions and determines what happens to an individual. Historically, this is supported by legal entrenchments that amounted to black meaning criminal and white meaning system. *Foreplay* in particular reflects on the inability of the individual to rise above circumstance or the dictates of these historical cycles.

Grootboom also depicts the township as a chauvinistic or patriarchal domain. There is reoccurring use of terminology and action simulating female degradation with characters reduced to objects of desire, used and abused by men without any emotional connection. In this view women are defined in terms of men’s needs with regard to pleasure, provision of services and children. This view of women dates back to Aristotle who argued that while the “rational soul” is “not present at all in a slave, in a female it is inoperative, in children undeveloped” (p.14). Aristotle linked ‘rationality’ to ethical virtues and self-control. Women, in his view, are therefore in need of care and control and are morally unstable (see Beasely, 1999:6). Mosala (1999) sums up the plight of South African women by stating: “When men are oppressed, it’s a tragedy. When women are oppressed, it’s tradition”.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Obscenity is certainly nothing new to theatre. From as far back as Greek theatre, medieval theatre, Roman theatre and Restoration theatre obscenity has been present. Theatre ordinarily is expected by the average theatre-goer to first and foremost be a place of entertainment (Grotowski, 1968:28). Since its inception, it has gone through many evolutions. Classical plays have dabbled into forbidden areas. An example of this is the Greek tragedy, a play by Euripides titled, *The Bacchae* (also known as *Bakchai* or *Bacchantes*): “This play is about the triumph of Dionysus, god of wine and ecstasy, over those who refuse to permit the observance of his worship. This play contains obscenity in the form of orgies as well as savage violence, when the women in a mad frenzy mistake the king for a lion and tear him limb from limb” (Gassner and Quinn, 1969: 516).

Also in Greek theatre, certain dramatists were accused of creating obscenity. In ancient Greek society (Green, 1996), Aeschylus accused Euripides of creating “sluts” such as Phaedra and Stheneboia. Euripides is further presented as the kind of dramatist who selects from the common body of myths, stories of people in shameful situations, such as women in the grip of illicit passion. In Greek theatre there were also festivals that were nothing short of risqué. One of the Dionysiac festivals was called the Great or City Dionysia and during this festival phallic symbols were carried as a symbol of fertility and phallic songs of crudity and obscenity were sung (Freedley and Reeves, 1941:8).
Roman theatre also had its fair share of what was then considered obscene. Roman theatre was known for its mimes and the famous mime, *The Fugitive Jester* was obscene in its use of violence. This mime concerned itself with the crucifixion of a slave, Laureolus. On some occasions, the part of Laureolus was played by a real criminal who actually died in agony on the cross. This was for the benefit of the spectators whose gladiatorial contests had taught them to enjoy bloody and cruel amusements (Freedley and Reeves, 1941:44). Furthermore, dramatists such as Seneca did not merely indulge in violence but also went so far as creating mimes about sex and displayed the acts on stage as well as ridiculing Christianity. Freedley and Reeves (1941:46) state further that it was not strange for private performances of mime orgies to take place at the Emperor’s Court as well as in the houses of the wealthy.

Restoration Theatre was definitely another type of theatre that did more than just dabble in forbidden areas; Restoration comedy was known for its sexual explicitness (Sharma, 1965:223). Collier (1976:352) states that in William Wycherly’s plays, *The Country Wife* and *The Plain Dealer*, “some characters appear coarse and slovenly offensive”. He further states that there is a large amount of debauchery and questions whether its only purpose is to titillate the audience, to extinguish shame and make lewdness a diversion. Restoration theatre’s first critics vehemently accused it of flouting decency and morality. Whatever its moral deficiencies, the Restoration comedy of manners does give “a brilliant picture of its time” (Sharma, 1965:1). Restoration comedy reached its peak of brilliance between 1668-1678 with its comedy of wit or bluntly, “sex comedy”. Dryden’s smuttier works like *The Kind
Keeper, or Mr. Limberham (1678) as well as Marriage a la Mode (1672) are witty and spirited commentary on the games of sexual intrigue (Londre, 1999:33).

In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, modern art in the form of drama had decided to concern itself with sex: not, as light comedy had always done, in “profligate farces and thinly sentimentalized tom-cat love tales”, but as a moral challenge to reigning obscenity standards (Peters, 2006:208). Modern art would present the “frank discussion and presentation of all subjects pertaining to sex” to destroy “the murky, unclean, timid and defiled mental attitudes which make sex a matter of shame, secrecy, uncleanness and dirty jokes” (Gurstein, 1998).

Contemporary British theatre has witnessed an explosion of provocative plays by young writers, a generation ‘X’ of new writers whose debuts startled critics and audiences with their heady mix of sex and violence. These plays have been dubbed “In-Yer-Face theatre. These plays jolt the audience out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. It is certainly a bolder, more experiential theatre” (Sierz, 2001:4). Sierz (2001:5) breaks down the main characteristics of this “confrontational” theatre as:

- The language is filthy
- Characters have sex
- Characters become violent
- Characters experience unpleasant emotions
- Characters humiliate each other
• Characters talk about unmentionable subjects

XXX, a play described as “shocking” and the most sexually explicit ever staged in the UK made its debut in London on Wednesday, 23 April, 2003 (BBC News). The two hour multi-media show involves naked actors performing simulated sex acts in front of video screens depicting further explicit sexual activity. The play, created by Valentina Carrasco, has caused outrage in some European cities because of its theme of sexual violence. William Burdett-Coutts, the artistic director of the Riverside Studios was quoted saying, “It is very, very graphic, probably the most explicit, shocking thing ever seen in a British theatre” (2003:1). The co-producer of the show, Carlos Padrissa was also quoted saying, “It looks like real sex and the actors are often naked but it’s just touching and kissing”. In South Africa of the twenty-first century, obscenity has to some extent become not only a regular feature in university theatres but in the State Theatre as well. In contemporary South Africa, Paul Grootboom has become a household name in the realm of obscenity in theatrical productions.

Paul Grootboom was born in 1975 in Soweto and was raised by his Grandmother. If not for her strict parenting, life for Grootboom could have taken a dramatically different turn. One day as a fourteen year old, Grootboom and his friends marched through the streets of Meadowlands, Soweto, where a fight was scheduled to take place. They were stopped by the police and Grootboom was searched and found with a deadly weapon. He was intending on taking revenge on a child who had smeared blood on his shirt during a football match in Soweto. The incident escalated, and Grootboom had decided to go to town to buy a knife to end the vendetta once and for all. Inevitably, his Grandmother heard of the situation and came out of her house and
beat Grootboom so badly that the police decided that he had been punished enough (De vries, 2008:1).

In an interview with Grootboom by Rafadi (2011), Grootboom revealed that he was a pupil at Moruta Thutho Primary School, Meadowlands, from grade one to seven. His Grandmother was the Principal and had a set path for Grootboom’s future. After completing primary school, he was enrolled at Mokgoma High School in Meadowlands and attended for two years; grade eight and nine. His grandparents decided to relocate to Garankuwa, North of Pretoria to live with his aunt. Grootboom then attended Odi High School in Hebron, North of Pretoria where he completed grade twelve. While attending at Odi High School, he developed an extreme interest in Shakespeare’s English literature and Drama, particularly King Lear, which became his most favourite play. Grootboom admits that he was not involved in any school plays; however he enjoyed reading and critically analyzing Shakespeare’s style of writing.

Due to his Grandmother’s emphasis on the importance of education, Grootboom registered for a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of the Witwatersrand and three months later decided that science was not for him, and that “the artsy downtown cinema was more alluring”. There he saw the works of Fellini, Scorsese and Bergman and also the prison drama, American Me, which forever changed his ideas on film as entertainment. In America Me, Grootboom was drawn to the rape scenes and the aggressive reaction they solicited from the audience (De vries, 2008). He then embarked on a career that involved his love of film and writing. This shift in his focus did not sit well with his grandmother who feared that he would never receive
recognition or be able to support himself. As a result of Grootboom’s choice for the arts, his Grandmother became furious and kicked him out of her house. In 1993, John Rogers of Bataleur Film contacted Paul about a script that he had submitted. Subsequent to their first meeting, Rogers became Grootboom’s mentor and offered him unlimited advice and guidance (Schuring, 2008). Rogers began to educate Grootboom about the British theatre world, about London’s Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and actors such as John Gielgud. Slowly but surely, Grootboom began to develop a profound love of theatre. Rogers also took it upon himself to house Grootboom and introduce him to top writers like Barney Simon and Aubrey Sekhabi. Sekhabi and Grootboom subsequently co-wrote many plays including Not with my Gun, The Stick, and a 13-episode television series entitled, Orlando. Complementary to his writing, Grootboom is also a director. His directorial credits include A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Cards, King Lear, Julius Caesar, In This Life and Dikeledi, an African adaptation of the Greek play, Electra. In 2002, Grootboom was employed by The State Theatre in Pretoria as a Development Officer and soon earned his stripes to become Resident Director (Artsmart, 2005:1). Grootboom is a passionate theatre practitioner who believes any type of theatre that involves hard work becomes good theatre. When discussing the quality of theatre in South Africa Grootboom (2011) states:

Good theatre is about working very hard, sometimes there is theatre I don’t like but if they work hard then it’s okay. An example of theatre I did not like; years ago I saw Shopping and Fucking by Mark Ravenhill. It was full of whites, white things/issues. Despite everything else the treatment was done very well. It’s about working very hard.

Grootboom’s work has started a revolution in the South African theatre industry, drawing crowds from all over the country as well as numerous awards. In an
interview (2011), when he was questioned about what he believes he had added to the South African theatre industry, Grootboom responded:

Well I think for starters, original work that is confrontational of the issues you know. I like that very much. I like the idea of, you know… you find a lot of people who want to be theatre makers always thinking of my work. Even those who don’t like it, I see them coming to the work and I see them enjoying and responding. Even what I think is difficult work in terms of subject matter. So I think I can say my contribution is not doing boring theatre, so it’s an arrogant reply but I think it’s what I believe in.

In South Africa, Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom, is an influential theatre director who is known for his use of sex and violence in his popular productions. Grootboom made his name with the 2003 drama, *Cards*, which smashed local taboos against black actors simulating sex on stage. “It was really gratuitous,” says Grootboom. “And for me, that is the whole point” (Logan, 2006). In Grootboom’s Directors notes on *Cards* (2003), he states that the play has been controversial in the past because of his daring approach, namely the explicit sex, nudity and strong language. Furthermore, in an article by Fred De Vries (2008), it is stated that Grootboom’s work pulls crowds, with numerous people walking out, because they cannot take the realistic sex and violence. This earned him the accolade “Township Tarantino”. Linking Paul Grootboom to “Tarantino” is indeed apposite. Quinton Tarantino is an American film director, screenwriter, producer, cinematographer and occasional actor who is famous for directing films with nonlinear storylines and the aestheticisation of violence. His most notable films include *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Jacqui Brown* (1997), *Kill Bill* (2003-2004), *Death Proof* (2007), and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), all of which enjoyed critical success to varying degrees (Whorton, 2010).
In a blog review of Grootboom’s *Foreplay*, Tlelima (2009) stated that sex, prostitution and infidelity are what theatre-goers can expect from Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom’s latest productions. According to Tlelima (2009), Grootboom’s provocative style does not allow for sugar-coating prickly situations. She further asserts that often his work evokes two distinct emotions from the audience: either the truth is too much to swallow and it is rejected or the audience is appalled by what is said, yet still appreciate its truthfulness.

Arguments have been made regarding whether this sexually explicit and violent type of theatre is obscenity or art and furthermore whether art can be obscene. Peters (2006:216) states that the definitional opposition between what is obscenity and what is art that had developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had created a classificatory norm preserving the realm of art from the obscene: if a work was obscene, it could not be defined as art and vice versa.

Crude as the contents of the plays are, Paul Grootboom’s plays attract a mammoth crowd of enthusiastic audiences. These plays are opposed to the cultural norm of traditional Africa, yet they attract African audiences. What pulls audiences to see Paul Grootboom’s plays in spite of the odds they exhibit? This is in fact, part of what this study seeks to investigate.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION:

What makes Grootboom’s obscene theatre popular though it is at odds with the cultural perception of the black South African community?
1.3.1 **Aim:**

To analyse the contents and investigate why the obscene plays of Paul Grootboom are popular among the black South African community.

To determine the extent of obscenity and violence in the stage plays of Paul Grootboom.

1.3.2 **Objectives**

The objectives of this research project can be summarised as follows:

1. To ascertain where the boundary lies with regards to what constitutes art in the black South African theatre context.
2. To contribute to a clearer understanding of what contents the current South African audience wants to view.
3. To popularise the dramatic works of a budding black township playwright.

1.4 **METHODOLOGY**

1.4.1 **Qualitative research:**

This research depends largely on qualitative methodology of inquiry; Shank (2002) defines qualitative research as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning”. By systematic he means “planned, ordered and public”, following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By empirical, he means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience (Ospina, 2004:2).

According to Conger (1998), the advantages of doing qualitative research are:

- Flexibility to follow unexpected ideas during research and explore processes effectively
• Sensitivity to contextual factors

• Ability to study symbolic dimensions and social meaning

• Increased opportunities to develop empirically supported new ideas and theories.

According to Patton and Quinn (1990:4), there are three types of qualitative data; interviews, observations, and documents.

Interviews:

For the purpose of this study I used interviews to collect data. Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge (Patton and Quinn, 1990:4). The first interview was conducted with Paul Grootboom who is Producer/Director of popular black South African Theatre for whom obscenity has become a trademark. I interviewed him to find out why he chooses to write and direct these types of plays and what he hopes to accomplish with his work. I attempted to find out whether he directs with the intent to shock the audience as well as to contextualize the parameters of this study.

A large portion of my research focuses on the analysis of Paul Grootboom’s productions, namely Foreplay and Relativity. I intend to analyze these plays to ascertain whether indeed they do contain violence and obscenity. According to Polit and Hungler (1997), case studies are detailed investigations of individuals, groups, institutions or other social units. The researcher conducting a case study attempts to analyse the variables relevant to the subject under study. The principal difference between case studies and other research studies is that the focus of attention is the individual case and not the whole population of cases. Stake (1995) supports this
notion by stating that in a case study the focus may not be on generalisation but on understanding the particulars of that case in its complexity. The two plays under scrutiny thus, become case studies.

1.5 ETHICS

It is important to understand what the definition of ethics is and how it affects how the researcher conducts his or her research. Ethics are vital to any research project that is undertaken. Ethical issues in designing qualitative research arise in the several steps that are addressed by design issues in all the stages of the research process. A major part of research ethics consists of the ethical dilemmas researchers face in the contact with the field and the concrete persons in it and in handling the data. Beyond immediate field relations, it is the ways in which data are analysed, presented and perhaps fed back to the field that make a project ethically sound (Flick, 2007:69).

According to Christians (2005:146), there are basic principles of ethically sound research. The first of these being that there has to be informed consent, which means that no one should be involved in the research as a participant without knowing what the project is about this and without having a chance of refusing to take part. The second being that the participants' privacy should be respected and confidentiality should be guaranteed and maintained. Furthermore, the accuracy of the data and their interpretation should be the leading principle, which means that no omission or fraud with the collection or analysis of data should occur in the research practice. In relation to the participants, respect for the person is seen as essential and their well-being should be considered at all times. There should also be justice which addresses the relation of benefits and burdens for the research participants.
With this understanding of the vital role of ethics in research, I obtained informed consent from Paul Grootboom to not only interview him, but also to undertake this research into these erotic plays. Furthermore, I fully intend to respect the participants’ privacy and maintain and guarantee confidentiality. This study is not concentrating on the playwright as an individual but rather on the analyses of issues raised in the plays.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The principal purpose of the literature review is to establish the academic and research areas which are of relevance to the subject of the research. Leading from that, this literature review chapter seeks to lay a foundation for the current research. It sets the thesis within a research context consisting of relevant research studies and other analyses of related ideas and sources (Oliver, 2004:107).

According to Galvan (2009:13), a literature review sets out to establish two main goals. First, it attempts to provide a comprehensive and up to date review of the topic studied. Secondly, to arm the researcher with tools to use to demonstrate that he or she has a thorough command of the field that is being studied. Galvan further asserts that the literature review should provide the basic rationale for research, and the extent to which the researcher accomplishes these goals will contribute in large measure to how well the project will be received. Mouton (2001:86) supports these assertions by explaining that when one embarks on a study, one of the first aims should be to find out what has been done in the particular field of study, a review of the existing scholarship or available body of knowledge to see how other scholars have investigated the research area of interest, how they have theorised and conceptualised on issues and what they have found empirically. In short, one should be interested in the most recent, credible and relevant scholarship in the particular area of discourse and identify gaps.
It is of utmost importance to define some of the key terms used in the literature review within the context of this study. For the purposes of this research the following terms will be defined as follows:

Art: “the quality, production, expression, or realm, according to aesthetic principles, of what is beautiful, appealing, or of more than ordinary significance” (Baldick, 2001:40). In order to correctly define art, it is necessary, first of all, to cease to consider it as exclusively a means of pleasure but as one of the conditions of human life. Viewing it this way, we cannot fail to observe that art is one of the means of intercourse between human beings. Every work of art causes the receiver to enter into a certain type of relationship with him/her who produced, or is producing, the art, and with all those who, simultaneously, previously, or subsequently, receive the same artistic impression (Tolstoy, 1896). Further to the definitions above, the study is in full agreement with James (2012), who considers the following in determining artistic value: the authenticity of the playwright’s voice in establishing a unique angle that challenges social dynamics in an attempt to bring a fresh yet confrontational interpretation into the public arena as a direct reflection and evocation of political and socio-economic mindset. Artistic value is additionally attributed to the frameworks, both spatial and in terms of theatrical spectacle or setting, thus redirecting the audience/artists perception which in turn is determined by the notion of the Reception Theory (Jauss, 1982). Finally, the immediacy of the performance text strives for integrity which lies beyond the limitations of the written text as it communicates through artistic interpretation allowing for additional value that is both artistically collaborative in meaning and more widely accessible in understanding than the written text (Berns, 2012:1).
In-Yer-face theatre: “any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message. It is a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm” (Sierz, 2000:1).

Obscene: “Offensive to morality or decency; indecent; depraved causing uncontrolled sexual desire. Abominable; disgusting; repulsive” (Sierz, 2000:53). For something to be "obscene" it must be shown that the average person, applying contemporary community standards and viewing the material as a whole, would find (1) that the work appeals predominantly to "prurient" interest; (2) that it depicts or describes sexual conduct in a patently offensive way; and (3) that it lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value (The Lectric Law Library, 2012).

Theatre: is a branch of the performing arts. As a performing art, it focuses almost exclusively on live performers creating a self-contained drama. The presence of an audience is central to the definition of theatre (Freshwater, 2009:1). Theatre is what takes place between spectator and actor (Grotowski, 1999:11). Since its inception, theatre has come to take on many forms: utilizing speech; gesture; music, dance, and spectacle; writing; and combining arts including performing arts installations and visual arts, into a single artistic form. Performance art, while not essentially theatre, is a collaborative form of fine art that uses live performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place. Site specific performances frequently fall within this category. The performers may communicate this experience to the
audience through traditional performance combinations: gesture, speech, song, music or dance. Elements of design and stagecraft are used to enhance the physicality, presence and immediacy of the experience (Alonzo, 2012).

**Violence:** can be defined as exertion of any physical force so as to injure or abuse, infer injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation, or imply intense, turbulent and often destructive action, or force (Koop & Lundberg, 1999). According to *World Report on Violence and Health* (2012), there are three types of violence. The first is self-directed violence, this refers to violence in which the perpetrator and the victim are the same individual and is subdivided into *self-abuse* and *suicide*. The second is interpersonal violence, which refers to violence between individuals, and is subdivided into family and intimate partner and community violence. The former category includes child maltreatment; intimate partner violence; and elder abuse, while the latter is broken down into violence against acquaintances and strangers and includes violence against youths; assault by strangers; violence related to property crimes; and violence in workplaces and other institutions. The third is collective violence, which refers to violence committed by larger groups of individuals and can be subdivided into social, political and economic violence or may refer to anti-social mechanisms where mob justice turns to blind rage. This study shall concentrate mainly on the second category: interpersonal violence.

**Voyeurism:** the practice of obtaining sexual gratification by looking at sexual objects or people or acts especially in secrecy (Weiner and Hawkins, 1986:582).
2.2 SEX AND VIOLENCE ON STAGE

In black South African circles, when one mentions the topic sex simulation and or obscenity within the context of the theatre there is often a reaction of embarrassment and shock. However, sex and violence are scarcely new to theatre; as mentioned earlier, the greatest of the ancient Greek tragedies contained brutal deaths, dreadful suffering, rape, incest, mutilations, sexual orgy and humiliations. The purpose of these tragedies was the conception that they were meant to purge the bad feelings of the audience. The concept of putting oneself through hell in order to exorcise the inner demons is at the root of experiential theatre. However, Greek drama was probably intended not to shock but to heal the audience, to make it better able to face the realities of its time (Sierz, 2001:10).

In *Tartuffe*, a French comedy in five acts, Molière holds up a less than complimentary mirror to reflect on society and social ‘norms’ in a disparaging way. Moliere relates the story of an attempt, by an irreclaimable hypocrite, *Tartuffe*, who tries to woo the wife of his host (Oregon) who, charmed by his seeming piety, received him as a prominent guest. The play focuses mainly on the issue of religious hypocrisy. Tartuffe is the obvious hypocrite and antagonist who represents those members of society who preach religious piety but do not themselves live by the morals they try to force upon others (Bates, 1906: 181). *Tartuffe* was revised many times as it was considered to be obscene and like most of Moliere’s work it was accused of being artless, unoriginal, obscene and irreligious (Leon, 2005:452). Although severe, much of the criticism was in keeping with the aesthetics, as well as the moral and religious concerns of the time.
As far as obscenity in theatre is concerned restoration comedy was best known for its sexual explicitness. Restoration comedy attempted to rationalise sexual relationships; hence love, marriage and manners were the main themes of this comedy. The comedy of this time shows strong uniformity in the attitudes of the playwrights; particularly with regards to their opinion of love.

Love was treated flippantly and was generally regarded by the playwrights as a physical appetite, a mere sex-hunger which clamours for satisfaction and which is natural to gratify (Sharma, 1965:223).

Also according to Sharma (1965:1), Restoration comedy always excited keen controversy. Collier (1976:352) states that there is a large collection of debauchery and lewdness in Restoration comedy. He makes a further point by claiming that obscenity in any company is a rustic, uncreditable talent, but among women it is particularly rude. He then asserts that smuttness is a fault in behaviour as well as in religion. It is a coarse diversion, the entertainment of those who are generally least both in sense and station. This mob has no true relish of decency and honour, they are in need of an education and thought to furnish out genteel conversation. Barrenness of fancy makes them often take up with those scandalous liberties: “The modern poets seem to use smut as the old ones did machines, to relieve a fainting invention” (Collier, 1976:352).

Restoration theatre’s first critics accused it of flouting decency and morality. In 1668, when it was at the height of its glory, Shadwell denounced its -

two chief persons, the hero and the heroine, as Swearing, Drinking, Whoring Ruffian for a lover, and an ill-bred mistress. Whatever its moral deficiencies, the Restoration comedy of manners does give a brilliant picture of its time(Sharma, 1965:1).
The topic of sex which was so prominent in Restoration comedies is still evident in some modern drama, hence modern drama being referred to by Ackerman and Puncher (2006) as “unhealthy” and “disgusting”, “very demoralizing in its tendency”, characterised by the “worst kind of erotic perversion” of corrupt humanity. By 1907, Colette could appear in a play entitled *Flesh*, in which the heroine’s dress was ripped from her body, revealing naked breasts and an exposed expanse of skin, shoulder to ankle. Equally important, the serious drama began to talk about syphilis and abortion and other unsavory topics, it began to come under attack from both moral crusaders and the police (Ackerman & Puncher, 2001: 208).

Henrik Johan Ibsen often referred to as "the father of realism" was no stranger to obscenity. In *Ghosts* performed in 1881, Ibsen assailed the hypocrisy of moral codes, offering a daring treatment of current taboo issues including infidelity, venereal disease, and illegitimacy. Ibsen substituted the modern scientific idea of heredity for the ancient Greek concept of fate, exposing hidden sins of the past as the roots of corruption (Ibsen, 1999). *Ghost* created the biggest stir in Europe of all of Ibsen’s plays. It shocked respectable middle-class audiences everywhere; it was subsequently condemned and banned (Corrigan, 1957:171). The shock came with the treatment of Osvald’s illness, the presumed syphilis inherited or caught from his father. The same can be said for Mrs. Alving’s open rejection of conventional religion and morality, in opposition to the reverend Manders:

Finally, Osvald’s gruesome degeneration evokes consternation with his mother hovering irresolutely over him, not knowing whether she is able to provide the euthanasia she had promised. Once again theatre has turned a confrontational mirror on society. Booksellers returned unsold copies, the theatres refused to stage what was universally regarded as obscenity (Haugen, 1979:11).
The negative reactions towards sex(y) scenes in theatre have continued with a clear example which occurred in 1923, when a performance of Arthur Schnitzler’s *Reigen (la Rogen)* was given at a private party in London. Sierz reports that members of the Bloomsbury Group were there and Virginia Woolf complained that “the audience felt simply as if a real copulation were going on in the room and tried to talk down the very realistic groans made by Ralph Partridge” (Sierz, 2001:13). In an essay by Julie Stone Peters (2001:208), she states that over the course of the nineteenth century, pornography and erotic performance; which were products of mass culture, the rise of leisure and, specifically, the rise of erotic pleasure as a leisure activity became important commercial enterprises. In the second half of the century the notion that sex was not merely an accessory to the propagation of the species but a necessary part of physical and spiritual health began stirring, this concept ‘sexual modernization’ slowly began to enter the intellectual mainstream.

Peters (2006:210) confirms the impact of obscenity in modern drama. He states that discussions of theatrical obscenity helped to articulate some of the central modern and anti-modern discourses about sex in the public realm: as health and illness, purity and pollution, vitality and degeneracy, nature and perversion, enlightenment and demoralisation. Modern drama, steeped in the work of Richard von Krafft-Ebbing, Otto Weininger, Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud, not only talked about syphilis and abortion, but gave embodiment to the strange new figures created by modern sexology: the sadist, the masochist, the fetishist, the necrophiliac and the sexual invert. In modern drama, with its parables of obscenity, sex became a vehicle for the rebirth of tragedy; it became the problem for modern culture.
American theatre practitioners are champions in obscenity and one of these practitioners is Tennessee Williams. In his play Orpheus Descending (Williams, 1955), a young charismatic musician named Val descends on a small southern town. He forms a relationship with a passionate woman who is trapped in a bad marriage. Val is mutilated and sacrificed for his sexual potency, which is a threat to other men because the sexually free agent is a magnet, drawing women outside the boundaries of marriage (Roudane, 1997:136). The play exhibits desire, sexuality and violence. Also in William’s A Street car named Desire (1947) there is a fair share of obscenity in its content, from the vulgar Stanley’s violence to the rape of Blanch as well as the exposure of her promiscuity.

As long as there has been obscenity in the theatre so too has opposition against it existed. The strongest threat to obscenity in the theatre was without a doubt censorship. France (until 1905), Germany and England had highly visible institutions of dramatic censorship, which generated heated public debates. In the United States, prosecutions for theatrical obscenity which were usually tried in public, proved to be magnetic for public attention as scandalously entertaining as the plays themselves (Peters, 2006:212). Generally, the censorship encompassed outlawing nudity, swearing and anything regarded as ‘promoting’ homosexuality or homosexual acts (Gilmartin, 2008).

There has been no formal censorship of theatres in Britain since 1968, but the issue is still alive. In an article, “Censorship in the Theatre” written for the UK Telegraph, Nathan (2010) discusses how in September 1968 the Lord Chamberlain was stripped of his power to censor any play wishing to be licensed for public performance.
Furthermore, the reporter states that since then there has been an inexorable pushing back of boundaries. An example made was when the reporter followed two older women to Mark Ravenhill’s breakthrough play, *Shopping and F*cking. The play is an uncompromisingly explicit depiction of anal, oral and violent sex. The two older women appeared unmoved by the shocking scenes. Eventually, one said to the other: “Well, there wasn’t much shopping” (Nathan, 2010).

In South Africa there has been a presence of obscenity outside of Paul Grootboom’s production. Steven Van Dyk, a former Tshwane University of Technology Drama lecturer directed many plays that contain trademarks of the obscene. In 2009, Van Dyk directed a play titled, *Festen* by David Elridge at the Breytenbach theatre. The play revolves around a dirty family secret about a father who molested his twin children from a very young age. It begins at the father’s sixtieth birthday celebrations as the family is reunited after a long period of separation. The play contains graphic onstage sex simulation, violence and vulgar language. Van Dyk has a history of exploring obscenity on stage, and in a written discussion of his work (2010) he attested to the fact that most of his productions tilt toward obscenity. Van Dyk also directed *Eskort* at the Breytenbach theatre in 2004, *Skimmespel* at the Rostrum Theatre in 2005, *Waterman* at the Rostrum Theatre as well as at Aardklop, *Terugkere* at the Rostrum Theatre in 2007, Macbeth at the Breytenbach Theatre in 2008, and most recently *Holiday Snap* at the Breytenbach Theatre in 2010. All these productions displayed the trademark of obscenity. Theatre is seen by many as following contemporary cinematic trends where frequently gratuitous sex and violence have determined box-office demands (Lutge, 2012: 15-17).
Patrick J. Ebewo in “The Emerging Video Film Industry in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects” contends:

One of the major criticisms of this new industry is its thematic obsession with the occult world (juju, black magic, sorcery, ritual murder, witchcraft, etc.), obscenity, prostitution, and "money worship"…. One journalist recently described their content as "an odd cross between the ultra-violence of Shaft and the gabbiness of My Dinner with Andre" (Solapek). There is nothing wrong with a film dealing with any of these themes, but critics frown at the fact that they recur, film after film. The industry seems beset with a seen-one-seen-them-all syndrome. Worse, some productions seem to celebrate the evil inherent in the themes, with no serious effort to highlight their moral message. (Ebewo, 2007:47).

Conversely, Grootboom uses cinematic technique on stage rather than gratuitous violence to portray obscenity in order to confront society with the degeneration of social morals (Lutge, 2012:15-17).

Theatre containing obscenity continues to make waves even in current black South African theatre e.g.: Grootboom’s erotic plays such as *Relativity* (2006) and *Foreplay* (2009). The audience of this type of theatre is a point of interest when taking into consideration the significance of the black South African cultural context. With this point in mind, the role of the audience in theatre must be discussed.

### 2.3 AUDIENCE

The audience traditionally fulfils the function of the spectator (Freshwater, 2009:4). The audience plays the most vital role in theatre - at every step of the process, from the first word to go down on paper to the dress rehearsal the audience is always kept in mind. This is due to the fact that the audience reaction can make or break the show (Hatlen, 1992:373).
The presence of an audience is central to the definition of theatre. ‘A man walks across an empty space and calls it a bare stage’. ‘A man walks across this empty space whilst someone is watching him, and that is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged’ (Brook, 1968:11). Grotowski (1968:32) supports this notion by defining theatre as ‘what takes place between spectator and actor. At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance.

There are several barriers that block a better understanding of the relationship between theatre and its audiences. One is the tendency to confuse individual and group response; another is the persistent circulation of exaggerated and unsubstantiated claims about theatre’s influence and impact (Freshwater, 2009:5).

The common tendency to refer to an audience as an ‘it’ and, by extension, to think of this ‘it’ as a single entity, or a collective, risks obscuring the multiple contingencies of subjective response, context, and environment which condition an individual’s interpretation of a particular performance event. Each audience is made up of individuals who bring their own cultural reference points, political beliefs, sexual preferences, personal histories, and their immediate preoccupations to their interpretations of a production (Freshwater, 2009:6).

A clear example of how important the individual perspective can be is in Jill Dolan’s *The Feminist Spectator as a Critic* (1988) which investigates the process of being a feminist spectator and reminds us of the varied responses of spectators mixed across ideologies of gender, sexuality, race and class. She states that the feminist spectator might find that her gender – and/or her race, class, or sexual preference – as well as
her ideology and politics make the representation alien and even offensive. It seems that as a spectator she is far from the ideal (Dolan, 1988:3).

As a drama student, I can say without doubt that an audience is essential to any performance. It provides the actor with an energy that enhances the performance. An example of this occurred in 2009 when I directed a play by Alan Ayckbourn entitled, *Absurd Person Singular* at The Rostrum theatre. On the opening night there was a very small audience and the performance fell flat and later the actors complained that they had no energy with which to utilise in order to propel. On the second night, however, there was a big and active audience and the performance was nothing short of spectacular as the performance was fueled by the energy provided by the larger audience. The South African audience, particularly the youth and black professionals is the backbone of Grootboom’s theatre.

### 2.4 THE NUDITY CONCEPT IN AFRICA

Contrary to Western perceptions, nudity for the sake of it in traditional settings in Africa is certainly not acceptable. Traditional Africans do not publicly approve of nudity, indecent exposure or explicit public display or sexual exhibition (Ratele, 2008:515-536). South Africa in particular has had strong reactions to women ‘showing too much skin’. A recent example was when a young lady by the name of Nwabisa Ngcukana was attacked at the Noord Taxi rank in Johannesburg by a group of taxi drivers and street hawkers, who said she was indecently dressed when wearing a miniskirt (Vincent, 2009:11-18).
The only occasions where nudity is accepted in Africa is cultural ceremonies as well as protests. Cultural ceremonies such as the Reed dance also known as Umhlanga is an annual Swazi and Zulu tradition held in August or September. Tens and thousands of unmarried and childless girls and women travel from their villages to participate in the eight day event. Virgin girls cut reeds and present them to the queen mother. The reed dance also allows king Mswati III to choose a wife if he wishes. The women are proud of their virginity and thus parade and dance showing off their breasts and thighs in front of the royal family as well as the crowds of spectators (Reed, 1998).

The exposure of breasts and thighs are also a traditional form of protest in Africa amongst those who consider themselves powerless. Ukeje (2004) states that in many African cultures, women stripping themselves nude or semi-nude in public is recognised as a form of protest. This point is supported by Allman (2004) who states that African women have traditionally used their bodies as a form of protest for generations. Many have used the threat or actual act of nakedness/undress as a form of effective political protest for centuries. In Nigeria, most believe their mother’s bodies are to be revered. As such, it is taboo for a woman, and particularly a married or older woman, to choose to disrobe in reaction to a social/political situation. An example of how powerful this method of protest can be took place in the 1930s when members and supporters of the Abeokuta Women’s Union walked naked in protest of the Alake of Abeokuta’s political actions and forced him into exile. The women of Ado Ekiti in Nigeria protested the recent local political elections. The elections, which were a rerun after faulty elections in 2007, concluded without the results being released and with antics from officials suggesting an attempt to thwart the democratic will of the people. The naked and mostly older women took to the streets to challenge
the delay in releasing results from the election (Sutton, 2013). In 1929, Aba women in Eastern Nigeria employed the nudity of their bodies to protest against the imposition of tax by the British colonial masters. Similarly, in 2006, female South African prisoners staged a sethwetla- naked protest – to prevent their relocation to another prison facility. If nakedness is generally unacceptable in African culture except during certain traditional ceremonies, why is it a bonus in Paul Grootboom’s play productions?
CHAPTER 3

RELATIVITY: TOWNSHIP STORIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

*Relativity “Township Stories”* was developed in the State Theatre and premiered at the 2005 Grahamstown Festival, South Africa. It is co-authored by Presley Chweneyagae of *Tsotsi* fame. The subject matter revolves around a serial killer in the Soweto Township and the characters include several women who have abortions, get drunk, cheated on, raped and murdered; men who trade in violence, abuse and torture (De Swardt, 2006). The violence that is so graphically presented from a witness-bearing perspective is said to be Grootboom’s attempt to explore his own traumatic past. Furthermore, it aims to provoke a response on the experience of living in what seems to be a morally chaotic South African present (Flockemann, 2010:22). De Vries (2009) supports this notion by stating that one of Grootboom’s primary concerns is the cyclical nature of violence, its motivations and effects. ‘I write about my own experiences and I try to make them artistic’ (Ngcongo, *Personal Interview*, 2011).

This statement seems to be true because Grootboom’s violent past seems reflected in the words he chooses to use, common phrases, analogies and the images conjured in his plays. Furthermore, Chweneyagae and Grootboom’s collaboration seem to be artistically fenced by certain parameters. It is important to question why they are still writing about townships when they have worked their way out of them and created a better life for themselves. It could be argued that their township roots run so deeply that they cannot move on emotionally and creatively. This notion is also supported by the type of roles and productions that Chweneyagae chooses to perform. He has
played Zipper in *Cards* (Market Theatre, Grahamstown Festival, and the State Theatre). In 2000, he was cast in a supporting role in *Orlando* for the SABC. Presley recently achieved international recognition in the title role of the Oscar-winning film, *Tsotsi*, an adaptation of Athol Fugard’s novel (Grootboom & Chweneyagae, 2006:7). All these characters are based in the township and all these productions speak to township issues.

### 3.2 THEMES OF RELATIVITY: TOWNSHIP STORIES

Though Grootboom’s plays are replete with violence, nudity, simulated sex and obscene language; the main themes in *Relativity: Township Stories* resonate deeper. The play speaks to economic location in the capitalist system. The township, being of one race (African) and being at the very bottom of that system brings light to the relevant themes of justice, safety and human rights for the rich who live in safe environments. Life in the townships is cheap and no one cares, people live their lives going around in circles rather than making a head-way; no one responds, there are no witnesses, and therefore no accountability.

In South Africa townships were a creation of the apartheid system and its predecessor regimes of white rule. The Townships were racially discriminatory in that black, coloured and Indian people were ordered by the Land Act of 1913 and the Group Areas Act of 1950 to live separately. Townships originated from South Africa’s unique economic requirement for inexpensive migratory labour, and they were managed using brutal policing systems (Bond, 2000). Previously called “locations”, Townships have a unique and distinct history, which has had a direct impact on the socio-economic status of these areas and how people perceive and operate within
them. About forty percent black households in South Africa are living in Townships. 

Since South Africa’s democratic elections in 1994 conditions in urban townships have not substantially improved. Income in Township households has remained static, more importantly more households in Townships live in informal settlements and lack access to municipal services (Co-operative Governance & Traditional Affairs, 2009:5). In most of the Townships people still live in tiny make-shift houses that look like train carriages. The so-called houses are overcrowded with most of the inhabitants dealing on drugs and other criminal activities.

Grootboom draws attention to the two distinct worlds in which the majority of South Africans reside: these worlds being those of the wealthy middle class suburbs and the Townships. He depicts the Township as a place that is degenerated, crude, and lacking civility. He also pays particular attention to the notion that the Township does not look beyond the physical. One cannot help but compare Suburbia to the world of the Township, with its veneer of politeness and its efforts to conceal any sign of vulgarity. South Africa has long been known for its high levels of inequality. Speaking in parliament in 1998, the then-Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki described South Africa as divided into “two nations, the black one and the other white” (Nattrass & Seeking, 2001:45-47). The notion of a society comprising of two nations is certainly not unique to South Africa. Benjamin Disraeli, who was later to become Prime Minister of Britain, first used the imagery of “two nations” in his 1845 novel, Two Nations. Mbeki’s use of “two nations” is like Disraeli’s in that it is intended to draw attention to injustice. However, there are important differences in how they use the imagery. For Disraeli, the inequality is that of class: the rich and the poor. Mbeki’s however, reduces inequality to race: black equals poor, and white equals rich. Some characters
that feature in this play are replicas of township dwellers as found in Alexandria, Soweto, Soshanguve or Garankuwa.

3.3 VIOLENCE

There is a strong presence of violence in the *Relativity: Township Stories*, however, as intense as this violence is, it is viewed by the characters as normal. This begs the question that as a country, have we gone past the stage where we cannot tell what is normal and what is not? A shocking yet accepted form of violence in South African Townships is ‘necklacing’ that was introduced during apartheid unrest and re-emerging during xenophobic violence in 2008. ‘Necklacing’ involves placing a tyre soaked in petrol around the victim's neck and setting it alight (Ball, 1994). In the violent 1980s and 1990s, necklacing was a common sentence imposed by "people's courts" on collaborators with the apartheid regime and criminals. It was frequently carried out in the name of the now-ruling African National Congress (ANC) and was alleged to have been endorsed by Nelson Mandela's former wife, Winnie. Recently, South African Townships witnessed the resurgence of necklacing against Zimbabweans and Mozambicans in xenophobic attacks (Evans, 2008). Many happenings in *Relativity* compare favourably with the brutal act of necklacing.

In *Relativity: Township Stories*, an example of brutal violence being accepted as normal and even justified is in the imagery that is conjured as Dario, one of the male characters re-lives how he beat Sbongile. Pelo (Dario’s friend) laughs excitedly as Dario describes how he assaulted a man Sbongile was hugging, how he “rearranged her face” and raped her repeatedly. Pelo, sadistically enjoying the horrific narration goes so far as to enquire why Dario did not shoot her in the vagina (p.25).
Dario: I gave that bitch a thorough beating! I gave her a chase with my parabellum from Mamikies until that “one for all” pussy of hers got all sweaty.

Pelo: You’re a bad arse, my friend… Dario only once, for the second time it’s only on a photo! I heard that story my friend…

Mavarara: Which “chick” is that?

Dario: That bitch called Sbongile.

Mavarara: Oooh that one who didn’t want you to fuck her the other day?

Dario: The very whore. Even that time when she didn’t want to give out, I hit her with a hot slap and took her home. I won’t beg for pussy.

Pelo: You gave her a filthy beating my friend! I saw her yesterday at the street where she lives… I didn’t even recognize her – if it wasn’t for that unique arse of hers, I wouldn’t have known her. You’ve really re-organized her face, even those sunglasses she had on couldn’t hide her ugliness…you’ve really made her ugly my friend! (p. 23).

It is interesting at this point to note how people are identified by sex and nothing more. Women are repeatedly referred to as “pussy” and “whore”, and not as thinking and feeling human beings. They are reduced to their sexual organs, purely to satisfy
the men’s lewd needs. Furthermore, it is hard to miss how vulgar these men behave and express themselves. Their use of certain terminologies is aggressive and lacks civility. They repeatedly use words like “arse”, “filthy beating”, “hot slap”, “bitch”, “fuck”, and “pussy” when expressing themselves. As the scenes in the play unfold, deep rooted beliefs about township life come to light. The men in the Township are notoriously envious of their women and would not tolerate their girlfriends associating with other males, even on professional grounds. Male chauvinism and the unequal social relationship between men and women are graphically captured in many scenarios in the play. Laziness and hanging around shebeens (local pubs) are favourite past-times of the young male population that should be hunting for jobs:

Dario: You know me, you know me!

Mavarara: Why did you beat her up? What did she do to you?

Dario: She takes me for shit; that whore! I go to Mamikies and I find her hanging out with some arsehole— ‘n charma-boy wannabee…They were hugging and laughing as if they’re in The Bold and The Beautiful.

Mavarara: Crap! Crap! Fuck “the Bold”! We’re in the township here!

Mavarara’s statement alludes to the fact that the Township is a law unto itself and does not necessarily follow the law of the land. He brings about the concept that the environment conditions and determines what applies and this is precisely what makes life “relative”.

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Dario: When I went over, where they were sitting and I told that bitch we must go, she answered me like shit...jumping around like popcorn.

And that idiot says to me “you heard the lady, she doesn’t want to go”...with a coconut English! I hit him with a flying kick before he could even stand up!

Dario’s comment is typical of the attitude of the township towards educated people. It is common and also ironic that someone who is uneducated would refer to someone who is well educated as an “idiot.” Education has clearly created a divide; the educated are perceived as Eurocentric clones. In South Africa, black adolescent boys who go to former model C schools are called derogatory names like “coconuts” by their male counterparts in the Township because they speak English in what is perceived to be an American accent, wear baggy jeans, play basketball and listen to rap music rather than listening to kwaiito music (popular Township music) and playing idiski (soccer) (Durrheim, Mtose, 2006). These educated boys are also seen as lacking African masculinity (Langa, 2010: 1-13).

Dario seems to be mimicking Van Damme’s character in his films, as he is never held accountable for the violence and destruction he inflicts and he believes he can never be defeated. These men look up to a character that is a law unto himself, who goes so far as to call himself the "Fred Astaire of karate." Van Damme thrills his film audiences with his ability to deliver a kick to an opponent’s head during a leaping, “three hundred and sixty degree turn.” To Dario in Relativity, martial art is township glory.
Dario: When he was still trying to recover from my kick, I stepped on his chest with my nine millimeter already out!

Pelo: You showed him a movie?

Dario: Now, as I was turning to deal with the bitch, I find out she’s gone! I went after her! When I caught her, I beat her up. I’m telling you, I beat her up like crazy, and then I brought her here, and I fucked her like crazy!

It is interesting to see how the characters admire violence and strive to be like the fictional character embodied in Jean Claud Van Damme. Van Damme is famous for making such films as: Bloodsport, Kickboxer, Double Impact, Universal Soldier, Nowhere to Run, Timecop, Maximum Risk, Legionnaire, The Order, and Derailed (Corcoran & Farkas, 1988).

As these characters continue their dialogue, it becomes clear that vengeance, desire, love and lust are all confused and bound up in each other. There is an inability to express oneself and a fear of appearing weak, especially when the black Township community believes manhood and aggression go hand in hand. These men embrace what has been coined “tsotsi masculinity”. A study by Mokwena (1992) and Glaser (2000) revealed that tsotsi masculinity is a township masculinity that hinges on fighting skills, street wisdom, poor clothing style, proficiency in tsotsitaal, and success with women as trophies of masculinity. Had Dario reacted in a more civil
manner towards Sbongile he would have certainly appeared weak and would no longer command fear in the community. He would have tainted his image and lost his “street credibility”. He would no longer be a ‘man’.

The township world depicted in this play is driven by sex. The women are treated as sexual objects and men boast of their sexual prowess using them as toys. The characters indeed cannot distinguish between love, lust and desire. Women are no exceptions. Mamiki seduces the young boy, Thabo (a serial killer) and then confuses the lust they share for love. Stage directions state:

> She manages to get him dancing. They dance and then she kisses him. He is highly surprised. She is panting, though. She kisses him passionately. He decided to fall into it. She throws him on the chair and tears her blouse open.

Thabo: Wait a minute.

Mamiki: Shhhhh… Don’t speak!

Stage directions further state:

> She climbs on top of him and kisses him again. She stands up after a while and begins undressing him until he is in only his shorts and vest. The bed is moved to a more central position and MAMIKI’s bedroom is set up. We now have both the shebeen area and the bedroom on stage. MAMIKI and THABO go into the bedroom and they fuck under the sheets. After the fucking, MAMIKI gets out of the bed and puts on her morning gown (p. 63).

It soon becomes apparent that Mamiki has confused sex with love when she desperately and jealously tries to cling to Thabo when he shows interest in her
daughter. She believes that because he had sex with her that he loves her and belongs to her. She says to him:

**Mamiki:** Don’t come and tell me rubbish! You sleep with me and then you want to fuck my daughter?! Do you think I’m just going to say, “go ahead, I give you my blessing”?! What game are you playing at? You can’t fuck the both of us, I won’t let it happen!

**Thabo:** It’s not like that! I don’t just want to fuck her! Don’t you understand? I love her! She means everything to me! More than you or anyone can ever mean to me! She makes me- every, everything that is bad in me, she turns good… do you know what I mean? Do you even know what that feels like?!

**Mamiki:** I am taking this bitch away… I am taking her to her grandmother far, far away in Limpopo where you cannot find her.

**Thabo:** I thought you said she means everything to you? And now you are calling her a bitch?

**Mamiki:** Just get out of here; I don’t even want to talk to you anymore!

**Thabo:** But-
Mamiki: Just go

He starts off

Mamiki: (Tearful) wait! Please...don't go...I love you...Please, let’s start on a clean slate and forget all about this... you stay away from Thuli and I will forget the whole thing ever happened. Just forget about her. I can give you anything you want... I have money... huh... I know it’s not much, but it’s enough... Just for the two of us...please.

3.3.1 Police Brutality

In Relativity: Township Stories brutality and violence goes beyond individuals and settles in the state. State violence manifests in the form of police brutality. Dario, a petty Township criminal is beaten when he is brought in to be questioned about the serial killings that have occurred (p.16).

[Police]

Rocks: Listen here, I’m not going to play games with you. Just tell me why you killed her and the others.

Dario: I didn’t kill her! What’s your problem? Didn’t you hear me, I said—

ROCKS hits him.

Rocks: WHY DID YOU KILL HER?

Dario: You can’t beat me up like this, I have rights. I know the law. I can sue you for this!
Rocks: The law doesn’t apply to filth like you! Why did you kill her? Are you going to answer me or do you want me to light up you balls with a cigarette lighter? (p. 16).

This violence escalates as the detectives deliver on their threats. The detectives’ words and actions highlight the idea that the law is selective. When Rocks says, “The law doesn’t apply to filth like you”, he is making it clear that the police choose who has rights and who does not. Furthermore, this implies that the law does not necessarily equal justice. Though South Africa has such an advanced constitution, the reality is the people are still shackled and possess no voice:

Rocks: Take his pants off!

Molomo: What?

Rocks: Take his pants off!

Molomo: Can we talk first?

Rocks: Talk about what? Take his pants off, I got the matches – do your part!

Molomo: Can we talk in private first?

Rocks: Talk about what?!

Molomo: Look man, I don’t think he did it.
Rocks: We talked about this; let’s not go back to that.

Molomo: But Rocks, we can’t torture him. He didn’t do it.

Rocks: Whose side are you? Were you there when this girl was killed?

Molomo: No, but—

Rocks: Then don’t say he didn’t do it.

Molomo: But he doesn’t fit the profile. He’s not the serial killer type!

Rocks: Don’t come and tell me about the profile, written by some woman who knows bugger all about police work. I’ve been a cop for over twenty years. And anyway, if he didn’t do it, we’ll see after I’ve burnt his balls… this always works, he won’t lie when his balls are being roasted like chicken, he’ll tell the truth. Now come on, cuff him and let’s take off his trousers.

The manner in which Dario is interrogated highlights the issue of police brutality as well as the notion of a tortured truth. The brutality of the police and the brutality that Dario inflicts share an identical strategy. That strategy being that in order to exercise and maintain power one must create victims. If this is true then there is no difference between the police and criminals. As for the so called truth being tortured from Dario,
it is fair to say that people will admit or say anything when being tortured. Therefore this “truth” lacks merit.

Music. They manhandle him.

Dario: Wait, wait, wait.

Rocks: Keep quiet!

Rocks: Hold him, hold him!

Stage directions state:

They cuff him and take off his pants. They burn his balls. He screams and screams.

The law does not treat Dario with respect therefore how else is he expected to respond? How can people in the Township view the police as protectors when they can so easily fall victim to them and their investigations. The beating and torture of Dario certainly resembles the growing number of cases of South African police being accused of brutality. Prince and Mclea (2011) explain how six police men viciously beat and shot a protester. The vicious assault was shown on a prime time TV news bulletins and shocked the nation. This type of brutality, however, is certainly not new. In an article by Slaughter entitled “South African Police Caught on Film” (1999), Six Johannesburg policemen were suspended from duty after a BBC film was broadcast that showed them beating suspects and attacking them with police dogs. One piece of footage screened on British and South African television, showed police officers in
Brixton, Johannesburg, arresting two suspected car thieves. The men were handcuffed and forced to lie on the ground. The police officers then proceeded to kick the men in the face and set a police dog on them. One of the men had a cigarette stubbed out on his head and was then repeatedly struck with a rifle butt. Both men were later released without being charged. In a second incident, two men who were suspected of car hijacking were seriously injured when the driver lost control of the car. They were unconscious when they were dragged out of the car and were brutally kicked and rifle-butted whilst lying on the ground.

More recently, police violence escalated into a fully-fledged massacre at the Lonmin Marikana miner’s strike near Rustenburg. Malala (2012) stated that the event garnered international attention following a series of violent incidents between the SAPS (South African Police Services), Lonmin security, the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and strikers themselves which has resulted in the deaths of approximately 47 people, the majority of whom were striking mineworkers killed on the 16th of August 2012. At least 78 additional workers were also injured on the 16th of August 2012 in what News Media equated with the Sharpeville Massacre (21 March 1960). In a speech addressing the issue of the Marikana Massacre Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu (2012) stated:

When we consigned apartheid to history, we said never again would it happen that our police and our soldiers would massacre our people. These were our police, and never again would we suffer the pain of a Sharpeville, Boipatong, or Ciskei Massacre. But our police appear powerless to stop tidal waves of violent crime and what we euphemistically refer to as “service delivery protests”, the latter regularly accompanied by violence and destruction committed with utter impunity. While we rightfully condemn the police for massacring thirty four mine workers, and demand the use of non-lethal methods of crowd control, we also sympathise with the vast majority of good policemen and women who have battled to do their very difficult jobs while making sense of corruption scandals in the highest ranks – not to mention being exhorted by their leader to “shoot to kill”.

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Business Unity SA Chairperson, Bobby Godsell, spoke out on the issue of the Marikana Massacre. He asserted that in a constitutional democracy, violence is not understandable and should not be tolerated. He emphasised that the South African Police Services’ actions were outrageous and that they must be held accountable for those murders (Dlamini, 2012).

There is further police brutality in *Relativity: Township Stories* as Mamiki gets into an altercation with the police detectives who have come to question her. Rocks, the police detective is extremely rude to her and she returns the disrespect. He then uses extreme violence to retaliate. He grabs Mamiki by the throat and brings his gun to her head.

Mamiki: I have nothing to hide. And I’m not scared of the police… My ex-husband used to be one. If you don’t have a warrants then get the hell out of my place before I sue you for trespassing and police harassment.

Molomo: *(Trying to intervene)* No, no, listen—

Rocks: *(To Mamiki)* Are you threatening me?! Coz if you are I’ll arrest you, right now on the spot! (p. 38).

Rocks makes it clear that if Mamiki does not do as he says, regardless of whether it goes against her human rights or not, he will punish her. With the power that comes with being a police man, he will ensure her punishment will be harsh and possibly include “incarceration.” The police are using their power to victimize Mamiki. The
manner in which the police treat Mamiki brings about memories of our apartheid history of absolute power vested in a police state. Black police were regarded with disdain by the Township community during apartheid and were branded as sell-outs by political activists. Since the police failed to maintain law and order in the Townships and this failure coupled with their oppressive role in enforcing apartheid legislation and crushing political dissent, their lack of popularity should come as no surprise (Kynock, 2003:307). With the role that the police played in our apartheid past still so fresh in South Africa’s mind, it is important to address the question of “how do we begin to evaluate them as protectors and not aggressors”? Furthermore, the reputation of the police has not improved since the end of apartheid. The renamed South African Police Services (SAPS) is widely viewed as an inefficient and corrupt institution whose members are often implicated in criminal activities (Kynock, 2003:299).

Mamiki: I’m not scared of you, detective!

Molomo: Rocks, wait!

Rocks: You’re not scared of me?

Molomo: Wait, wait! Rocks, you’re not making this easy for us. Please, stay back… I’ll handle this.
Mamiki: Look, I’m not giving you any names. Come with a warrant before you talk to me. This is a classy place, I don’t serve killers here!

Rocks: Let’s just arrest this *slut* and get the names from—

Mamiki: Hey, hey, I’m no *slut*! Who are you calling a slut?! Go and call your *whoring wife* a slut!

Rocks: *(Charging her, offended)* What?!

Molomo: *(Blocking him off)* No, no, Rocks, wait!

Miss Nkhatho: *(Overlapping with Rocks)* What is this now?

Rocks: *(Overlapping with Miss Nkhatho)* Did you just call my wife a slut? *(To Molomo)* Let me go, Mouth!

Molomo: No, no, but wait, Rocks… You called her a slut first.

Rocks: She is a slut. She’s a bitch. What’s wrong with calling her what she is?
Mamiki: Hey, I’m not a bitch! It’s your wife you’re talking about! Your wife, your mother, your grandmother all combined together!

Go call them bitches before—

Stage directions state:

ROCKS lunges at her before she can continue and grabs her by the throat...

He has already drawn his gun and has put it to her head.

Again, we see that there is one rule for the victim and another for the police. There certainly exists no balance of justice. Rocks is permitted to call Mamiki a slut but she is not allowed to defend herself, thus rendering her voiceless.

3.3.2 Violence against Women

It is important to understand that the degradation of women begins with vulgarity and this is a recurring issue in Relativity. The use of words like “slut”, “whore” and “sfebe” (bitch) reduce women to objects to be used by men without any emotional connection. This degradation ensures that the quintessential value of women is devalued, thus destroying the ability of women to nurture, and creating a negative cycle from generation to generation.

Dario’s use of violence against women takes a turn for the worse after he is beaten by the police. It is as if their (Police) violence begets his, as he cruelly beats his pregnant wife, Matlakala. Matlakala speaks directly to the audience explaining how she got herself into this predicament.
Matlakala: His balls had healed. He was out almost every night, fucking around. When I complained to him, he didn’t listen. It was as if he didn’t care. And because of that I started going out, hanging out with my friends, and spending as much time away from my new home. He warned me about this, but I wasn’t prepared to be a stupid housewife, who stays at home, reading Bona Magazines and gossiping about neighbours with other neighbours. So I went out with my friends. We went to parties, we went everywhere… I didn’t care about my showing tummy, I just went everywhere and I had fun… And that’s why he beat me up. He found me at my friend Patricia’s house, and he beat me up all the way home… As if trying to embarrass me in front of people… after beating me up like that, strangely, the baby survived… I resented that fact. I felt he had no right beating me up that way and still having his baby survive it. How could God be so cruel? How could God make him so happy? (p. 44).

This monologue by Matlakala speaks to the idea that after the wounding the healing is physical not emotional. Escapism seems to be the only way to avoid the confrontation of one’s pain. Dario avoids his inner pain by drinking, partying, playing “Jean Claud Van Damme” and engaging in promiscuity. Matlakala’s constant living with the consequences, rather than making choices means inflicting the same damage on the yet unborn. Dario’s violence has Matlakala fearing for her life, she even fears to leave him. So great is her fear that she cannot go home to her father or call the police.
Matlakala: He beats me… He sleeps around… He’s never home, Papa… I killed the baby. My own baby. I killed her. I killed my own child just to get back at him. I… I killed her (p. 52).

Matlakala is clearly unable to cope with her environment; she kills what she does not want to deal with. Furthermore, she is inexperienced and damaged by her past. She is essentially a lost, powerless little girl. That she, like Medea, had the guts to take the innocent life of her baby speaks volumes. It is her father who laments:

Dan: Ooh, my baby… What are you doing to yourself? Is this what you want? Look at you…just look at you. I mean young as you are, living with a man under one roof? At your age? He-eh, my baby… You’re leaving with me, we’re going home…

Matlakala: No Papa, I can’t. I can’t leave… And besides, Mama doesn’t want me back (p. 52).

A cycle is emerging here; Matlakala’s relationship with her family, including her mother is not good at all. She abhorred her pregnancy the way her mother did not want her. It could be said that it is difficult for one who has never been wanted to want another. When we are introduced to Dorah, Dan and Matlakala the family dysfunction is made clear as the language becomes particularly explicit. Dorah begins by threatening her daughter, Matlakala:

“I’ll hit you till you shit yourself; you are just a vagina always waiting to be fucked” (p. 19).
When Dorah once quarrelled with the husband and Matlakala tried to defend her
father, Dorah slapped her and screamed;

“Fuck off! You’re telling me shit, you fucking bitch! And don’t ever come
back here, you fucking bitch” (p. 22).

In essence, Matlakala has had no maternal role model; she has not been nurtured and
has had no guidance as she entered womanhood. She has been thrown out with the
trash, as if her life does not matter. She is emotionally unstable and does not possess
the maturity to understand that her decisions have consequences. It seems that indeed
broken homes certainly make for broken people.

Dan: Your mother is not home. You have nothing to worry about.

Matlakala: What?

Dan: Yes, she left me. Your mother left me for a kirigamba from
Malawi. After fifteen years of marriage! Fifteen years!

Matlakala: Oh, I’m sorry Papa.

Dan: It’s okay. I’m a man. I’ll get back on my feet again. She even
took my furniture with her. The house is empty now, I’m all
alone here. I hear voices… I think I’m going mad… Please
come back home, my baby…please…I miss you.
Matlakala: I can’t.

Dan: Yes, you can. This is no life for you…I’ve stopped drinking; I’m busy looking for a job again… I’m trying to get my life into gear… Come and live with me.

Matlakala: Dario won’t allow it, Papa. I’ve threatened to leave him before…he said he’d kill me. He’s a dangerous man, he’s a criminal. He hijacks cars, he kills people!

Dario’s use of violence certainly gives him control over the community. Though Matlakala is at her wits end and is being offered help, she will not leave him for fear of his wrath. For Matlakala it is a simple choice between losing her life and perhaps the lives of those she loves, and gritting her teeth through regular beatings. The idea of men using violence to re-enforce their manhood and to gain control seems to be a norm.

Like Dario, Mavarara, another male chauvinist firmly believes in violence as a method to control women and to get what he wants. However, this way of conducting himself does not end well for him (p. 52). His relationship with a young girl friend, Thuli is graphically captured in this scene where he stupidly attempts to assault a young man he finds in the company of the girl:

Mavarara: Why do I get the sense that you are seeing someone else? What? Have you found someone else?
Thabo  *(To Thuli)* Look, I’ll just wait over there, if you still want me to help you with your books.

Mavarara: Actually, who the hell are you?

Thabo: Me?

Mavarara: Yes you! Who the fuck are you?!

Thuli: Just leave him alone.

Mavarara: What? Are you fucking her?! Is that why she’s giving me the cold shoulder nowadays?

Thuli: Just leave him alone. Why don’t you just leave before I call my, mother?... I told you I am busy. Just–

Mavarara: *(Taking out his gun)* Fuck you! Fuck you, bitch. You think I’m scared of your mother? I’m sick and tired of this. How long have I been seeing you without you putting out anything – only to find out that you are being fucked by this four-eyed idiot? I’ve been patient and patient, understanding when you told me you’re not ready for sex yet. It’s been too long now! Too long.
Mavarara’s actions and vulgarity cement the notion that the men in the township think that women exist purely to satisfy their ego and sexual desires. Mavarara views Thuli as a possession and shows no respect for her and expects her to please him and when she doesn’t he begins degrading her with his vulgarity by referring to her as a bitch. He feels that he is owed sex; so much so that he has come to forcefully collect what he believes is due to him. We also see the repeated irony of an uneducated person calling an educated person an idiot.

Thabo: Leave her alone!

Mavarara: Fuck you, you fucking piece of shit!

Stage directions state:

*He turns the gun to THABO and shoots. It is a spur of the moment thing.*

*Thabo is shot in the shoulder and falls to the floor. There is a moment of silence as MAVARARA realizes what he has done. He turns to THULI.*

Mavarara: You see now what you made me do? Yeh? You see now?

Stage directions state:

*All of a sudden, THABO jumps at MAVARARA from behind and grabs him by the neck.*

*Music*

*They struggle for a while for the gun. The gun goes off, but THABO doesn’t let go. He strangles MAVARARA, who finally dies. THABO moves away from him and sits on a chair, thoughtful. THULI checks MAVARARA’s breathing.*

*Music fades (p. 52).*
Thuli: He’s dead.

Again, this scene reveals to us that violence is normal because of the way the characters act and react towards it. Thabo is shot in the shoulder and then continues to strangle a man to death. There is no sign of panic from Thabo or Thuli (a virgin girl). In fact, Thuli is completely calm and proceeds to check if Mavarara is still breathing. The killing of Mavarara shows that life is cheap and no one cares, here today and gone tomorrow. He is erased as if he never existed. He is never mentioned again in the play, no investigation or search for him is conducted. There is no mourning and the community neither notices nor reacts.

THABO, the serial killer in Relativity: Township Stories goes on to kill many women and is never stopped, as the community responds to Mamiki’s death, also reinforcing the idea that in the township life is certainly cheap. It barely takes a moment for Thabo to weigh Mamiki’s life against his desire to be with her daughter, and it takes a moment for him to extinguish her life.

Stage directions state:

She kisses him. He says nothing and he doesn’t resist and doesn’t fall into the kiss.

Thabo has an inability to respond here. This perhaps speaks to the township community as a whole. It seems that people who live with the violence, poverty and other issues that plague townships seem to be of the opinion that life happens to you and that the environment and not the person is in control.

Stage directions state:
Music

She kisses him again, this time more passionately. He plays into it after a while. She moves him to the bed, trying to take control like the last time, but all of a sudden he reverses the power play and he takes control. He becomes aggressive. MAMIKI is impressed by this: she laughs with pleasure...

The only type of response that Thabo is able to give is a violent one (p.64). This action speaks to how manhood is viewed in the township. The idea that the environment controls what happens to people makes men feel powerless and unable to respond. The only way to claim their manhood is through aggression and violence. Therefore, the only way to prove ones masculinity and to acquire respect is to be violent and to be feared.

Mamiki: Oooh, I like that!

Stage directions state:

He is now on top of her. He takes off her red G-string and continues to kiss her before he strangles her. After MAMIKI dies, THABO gets off the bed and tries to wrap the body with a sheet (p.64).

The last person that Thabo kills is Matlakala. Matlakala’s murder resembles the one the play began with. “Thabo chases Matlakala until he catches her; he then rapes her and strangles her with her G-string.” (p.70). The fact that the sequence resembles the opening scene exactly brings powerful imagery of a movement in circles. What
happened in the beginning remains unchanged at the end. The imagery of cycles also
speaks to the repetitive nature of crime and violence in township history.

Thabo: It’s just too fucking complicated. I didn’t stop killing as I had
thought I would. I still had the urge, I still had feelings, the
demons were still with me… I really did try to stop for a while
but the feelings were just too strong. Now, I don’t stress much
about it… the way I look at it… It’s like the theory of
relativity: “the appearance depends on where you’re standing”.
From where I’m standing, this is necessary… it’s all relative,
really… I feel because I have a damaged soul, I am not wrong
in doing this… The people that die, I no longer feel much for
them… It’s relative, I feel… If you look at it another way,
through my eyes… these people are sacrifices to my demons…
It’s all like indigenous African culture or society, where this
tribe still sacrifice their virgins to the Gods. The West may get
outraged all it wants to, but the tribesmen will never see
anything wrong with it because it is their culture. It is what they
believe in… So you see; things are all relative… It all depends
on how you look at it… It’s all relative (p.71).

Thabo believes that we are the sacrificial victims of our circumstances, that we are not
challengers nor are we shifters of our circumstances. He believes that someone has to
pay for the warping we have been subjected to. This idea begs the question, “If we do
not change our own reality then who will be held responsible”? Who will be the one
to pay? Who is the “they” he speaks of? If someone did pay, how would their payment unwarped us? Thabo’s monologue touches on the concept that is also alluded to in the title of this play, the concept of “relativity”. Thabo believes that crime is relative. It merely depends where you are standing, and in South Africa you are either standing in a township or in a suburb. Like the majority of poor black South Africans in townships, Thabo’s world view is limited to his environment. In Thabo’s environment, you have to be feared in order to avoid being a victim. Furthermore, Thabo is not by any means asking for change he is only excusing his behaviour by pointing out that this is the way it has always been in Africa and this is the way it will always be.

3.3.3 Child abuse

*Relativity: Township Stories* reveals how history is even reflected in the incestuous violence that occurs in child abuse. Thabo experiences a flashback where a younger version of himself tells his father that the sexual abuse he undergoes is causing him pain (p.43). Rocks convinces Thabo not to tell anyone about what goes on between them. The buried secrets of the past extend to the violent socio-political history of apartheid where the physical abuse uncovered is part of the patriarchal system whose consequences reverberate in post democratic socio-cultural systems and this is reflected in the family unit, the social environment and the consequent personal spaces impinged (Vora & Vora, 2004:301-332). This socio-political warping engages the very fabric of the socio-cultural body, filtering abnormalities into the relationships. According to Rape Statistics South Africa (2011), South Africa has the highest incidence of child and infant rape in the world with more than sixty seven thousand cases of rape and sexual assault against children (both girls and boys).
reported in 2000. Welfare groups believe that the number of unreported incidents could add up to ten times that number. The reason for the low number of reported cases is exactly the same reason why the character, *Thabo* never seeks help. This complicity in the act between aggressor and victim concretizes both parties as inextricably interwoven, suggesting polar attitudes that define each other. This notion consolidates the aggressors’ power and disempowers the victim completely (Angelides, 2004:141-177). The child abuser, a relative that takes on this absolute power over their victims, is featured particularly as fathers and providers. Children are disempowered by the same patriarchal abuse evident in police states where the citizens’ rights are compromised by an imbalance in the power.

Thabo’s childhood abuse could be argued as a contributing factor to him becoming a serial murderer, essentially the violence begets violence syndrome. According to Widom and Maxfield (2012), being abused as a child increases ones risk of delinquency, adult criminal behaviour and violent criminal behaviour. Simply put, abused children are likely to become abusers and victims of violence or may even become violent offenders. Though this does not excuse Thabo’s actions it may definitely be a contributing factor. Thabo experienced violent sexual abuse from his father for a prolonged period of time, and by raping and killing his victims, he completes his cycle of violence.

The cyclical action in this play is even evident in the structuring within the plot where in the very beginning of the play a young girl is seen running and screaming for her life (p.7). Her screams stop as she searches for a place to hide. Her invisible pursuer finds her, rapes and strangles her with her G-string. This is depicted through Bongi
miming the action, alone on stage with the invisible killer. Interestingly, Bongi does not continue to scream for help, instead she hides. She begins by running and screaming for help in the township and she realizes very quickly that she is on her own and that her community will not help her. If there is no community response to violence and crime then surely there can be no consequences, and ultimately no one will be held accountable for their actions. This episode in the play lends itself as a strong metaphor, the metaphor being that as a country, there are hidden issues that need to be addressed. Furthermore, our lack of response to our problems has truly disempowered us. With South Africa’s history and the part that the police played in it, it is reasonable to believe that the community feels that by speaking against crime they betray their fellow men. If the legal system criminalizes an ordinary person then the definition of what a criminal is becomes blurred. It becomes more difficult to differentiate between a victim and a perpetrator.

3.4 SUMMARY

*Relativity: Township Stories* certainly speaks to many issues plaguing South African townships. The fact that townships are at the bottom of the economic system and one race speaks to how our apartheid past still affects us today. There can be no justice for the poor when the person with the better and usually more expensive lawyer wins. Life is evidently cheap as people are brutally murdered, beaten, tortured and abused in townships every day. Nobody speaks out, nobody is held responsible, nobody truly heals and therefore nothing ever changes. People are constantly living with consequences instead of making choices thus rendering them victims to their environment. With these issues to contend with, it is no wonder that the township becomes a law unto itself. In the townships there are murders, rapes and violence
every day and they are never reported and are viewed as the norm. Essentially, crime and justice and the constitution are relative to where you are standing, whether you are standing in the Suburb or the Township.
4.1 INTRODUCTION

*Foreplay* (2009) is a scene by scene adaptation of Schnitzler’s play, *Reigen*, better known by its French title, *La Ronde*. In the field of literature like in film, more and more creative executives are turning to adaptations for their materials (Seger, 1992). Adapting from one source to another is a process. Adaptations, according to some experts involves rewriting of a work from its original form to fit another medium or environment or culture (see Myers and Simms (1989). An adaptation retains the actions, characters and much of the language and tone of the original. Adaptation can also involve reworking the same literary work in the same genre, which is from one context to another. Many a time a judicious deviation from the original is also tolerable. Poems, novels, plays, operas, paintings, songs and dances are constantly being adapted from one source to another. For the sake of this study, few examples of adapted plays will be recounted here. Edward Bond’s *Lear* is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*; Jean paul Sartre’s *The Flies* in French is an adaptation of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*; Rotimi’s *The Gods are not to Blame* is adapted from Sophocles’ *King Oedipus*.

Another well-known adaptation centred in the world of crime is that of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* from which *The Threepenny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht was adapted. An amalgamation of *The Beggar’s Opera* and *The Threepenny Opera* were adapted into *Opera Wonyosi* by Wole Soyinka (Lindfors, 1981:22). Shroyer (2009) states, that John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* satirises the corruption of the political and
legal system in London in 1928. The character of Peachum is loosely based on the real life personage of Jonathan Wild, who made surreptitious dealings with prosecuting lawyers and local government officials to bail out imprisoned beggars and thieves. In return these paupers and criminals would be back on the streets, stealing exclusively for their “benefactor”. In Wild’s history, the stolen goods were then laundered through a clearing house, also controlled by Wild. If any of these unfortunates stepped out of line, or did not live up to Wild’s financial expectations, he turned them in again to the authorities and charges were filed. Wild would then receive forty pounds apiece for their conviction and hanging. This is reflected through Peachum’s exploitation. The character Peachum attests to this by a song he sings in the finale to Act I:

There is of course no more to add.

The world is poor and men are bad.

We would be good, instead of base

But this world is not that kind of place (p.16).

Soyinka, like Grootboom, took cognizance of these classics and contextualized the action within an African diaspora. Soyinka’s adapted work dealt primarily with the evils visible in Nigeria. Yesufu (1983) supports this fact by stating that, apart from the artistic universals of the satiric mode which Opera Wanyosi shares with its European predecessors, Soyinka’s play is original and African in matter. He elaborates by pointing out that Opera Wanyosi is a satiric statement on life in post-civil war “oil boom Nigeria” under a directionless and anti-civilian “militocracy”. Soyinka paints a grotesque picture of a world cross-referenced with petty thieves and big time crooks, corrupt officials, betrayal, and opportunistic love. Soyinka’s Opera Wanyosi is similar
to Gay’s *The Beggars Opera* in that he was striking at specific targets in his own community. It can be said that Soyinka’s *Opera Wanyosi* was more topical satire than Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera*. An interesting difference between Gay and Soyinka is that Gay was content to expose social evils without denouncing them or inquiring into their origins. Soyinka on the other hand was interested in provoking the audience to raise questions (Lindfors, 1981: 31). An example of Soyinka’s approach is at the end of *Opera Wanyosi* when the character of Anikura sings:

> What we must look for is the real beneficiary
> Who does it profit? That question soon
> Overtakes all your slogans- who gains?
> Who really accumulates and exercises
> Power over others? (p. 83).

Lindfors (1981) states that *Opera Wanyosi* follows Brecht rather slavishly in some places and transforms far less of the *Threepenny Opera* than Brecht’s play transformed John Gay’s *The Beggars Opera*. Soyinka adopted most of Brecht’s plot, organising the dramatic action into virtually the same sequence of scenes as had been used in *The Threepenny Opera*. In this study, Grootboom too follows the *Le Ronde* plot line closely, yet identifies the context as particularly South African.

*La Ronde* was written in 1897, and was condemned in Vienna as obscene, the cause of vandalism of shops which sold the script and a work that earned Schnitzler the name “Jewish Pornographer.” *La Ronde* is about sexual hypocrisy among characters identified only by their social roles (Kruger, 2010:453). *La Ronde* consists of ten self-contained scenes. There are two characters in each scene, a man and a woman. The
first full staging of La Ronde took place on the 13th of October 1912 in a small Budapest theatre (Schnitzler, 2007: XIX). In the first scene, there is The Prostitute who offers The Soldier sex for free, however, he refuses to go home with her and instead they have sex by the river. The Soldier laughs off her request for a tip and further refuses to give her his name. In the second scene, The Soldier and The Maid meet for the first time at a dance hall and have sex in the park. He quickly loses interest in her. He reluctantly promises to take her home but soon finds a new dancing partner and forgets about her. In the third scene, The Young Master is home alone and decides to seduce The Maid. They have sex and she asks him to stay with her but he chooses to leave. As soon as he is gone she steals a cigar. In the fourth scene, The Young Master borrows an apartment to meet The Young Wife. He pretends the apartment is his and she allows herself to be seduced. The Young Master suffers from a bout of impotence and she mocks and teases him. They make love and she leaves hurriedly to get home to her husband. Afraid to tell her husband lies, she admits to her adventures and declares that she will never see him again. In the fifth scene, The Young Wife is in bed and The Husband tells her that the time has come once again for them to be more than ‘just good friends’. He explains to her that their repeated periods of sexual abstinence mean that they keep having ‘honeymoons’. He then recalls their honeymoon in Venice, secure in the knowledge of her fidelity. In the sixth scene, The Husband is having dinner with The Sweet Young Thing. She is both flirtatious and innocent, she swoons declaring that someone must have drugged the wine and then they have sex. The Sweet Young Thing enquires if he loves her and when she would see him again. He then sends her home to her mother. In the seventh scene, The Sweet Young Thing visits The Poet’s room. He claims to love her and asks her if she loves him in return. After having sex, he claims to be a famous playwright, and moments
later informs her that he is only a shop assistant who plays the piano in a bar. She is bewildered. In the eighth scene, The Poet is with a famous Actress and she declares her passion for him but also her devotion to another man. She tells him about the other man and then they have sex. When he becomes upset with the Actress for not performing in one of his plays, she replies by saying she was ill, sick with longing for him. In the ninth scene, The Count is paying The Actress a visit. He tells her that he was enchanted by her performance the previous night, and she flirts with him. She then teases him about his mistress but later offers herself to him. He, at first, declines, pleading an aversion to sex in the mornings. Soon he succumbs and promises to return after her performance that evening. In the last scene, The Count wakes up in the squalid room of The Prostitute. When she awakes he asks her questions about her life. He learns that they had sex before he passed out. He leaves as another day dawns over Vienna (Schnitzler, 2007: X).

Schnitzler’s *Le Ronde* takes its structure and title from ‘the round,’ a medieval dance in which alternate boys and girls join hands to form a circle (Berry, 2012). This dance certainly has sexual connotations, subversive in the idea of sexual fidelity to a single partner; for each boy is linked to two girls, and vice versa. This notion of a *ménage à trios* is reflected in the transitions between scenes. The circle too is continuous as the effects are carried from one partner to another. At the heart of *La Ronde* lies the juxtaposition of sex and death. In his diary, Schnitzler (1895) states that love is in fact a symbol for something else. Though his characters talk of love, once the illusions of romance are stripped away, what is left is the hunger for connection, for a moment of intensity which is also a moment of oblivion. Death stalks the play in the form of the unspoken fear of syphilis in Schnitzler’s work as HIV/AIDS haunts the characters in
Grootboom’s Foreplay. Sex can be said to stand as a surrogate for death in La Ronde. It is the great leveler, the common denominator. It is all consuming, like death itself - the thing to which everything the characters do and say ultimately leads (Schnitzler, 2007: XIV).

4.2 THE PLAY: FOREPLAY

Foreplay, set in Mamelodi Township, localises Le Ronde’s drama of sex and violence, identifying with a merry-go-round of encounters between unlikely partners, consumed occasionally by guilt or resentment but always by lust (Tlelima, 2009:1). Foreplay is written in an episodic style and seems to question society’s sense of morals. According to Grootboom (2009), the scenes and structure of the original play, La Ronde has been faithfully maintained. Kruger (2010) supports this point by explaining that some of the characters duplicate those stereotypes in the original but in Grootboom’s work they are contextualised within a South African society:

The Soldier is portrayed as drunk and disorderly within a racially classified township, and the uniform acquires attributes that classify his role as a thug inferring a fascist disregard for order; the Prostitute is portrayed as a homeless junkie opportunistically awaiting a victim on which to ply her trade; the Barmaid works the Shebeen (a formerly illegal South African Township tavern selling sorghum, home brewed beer); the Spoilt Young Man is a capable but irreverent scholar governed by a capitalist construed class system; the Playmaker (‘Mbebeni’ which directly translates as ‘fuck him’) is a pseudo-creator-educator type emulating a voice in the wilderness in order to exploit inner pain; the Schoolgirl is adjusting to downward socio-economic mobility and desperate to achieve reinstatement via the ‘sugar-daddy’ syndrome; the Politician abuses power derived from his total immorality and disregard for any human life, his insecurities are evident in the attempted domination of both his own people and his ‘white’ wife; the Preacher explains his weaknesses and foibles through excusing his lack of discipline and the Preacher’s wife conveys the social veneer appearing as a defunct pillar in society. In Foreplay, the sex is explicit and often violent, both in its description and its enactment, though an element of stylization, extending to dance in some instances, makes it a little more comfortable to watch. The closely approximated relationship established between sexual drive and violence reflects in both Grootboom works issuing a commentary on the social
context of the South African works and insinuating how these derive from a history of violence and inhumanity (p.2).

In his Director’s notes, Grootboom (2006) is very clear about his intentions. He unapologetically states that his primary reason for writing and directing *Foreplay* is for “fun”. He further asserts that there is nothing more fun than watching ten people having sex with each other, talking about nothing but crap and giving each other STD’s (Grootboom, 2009:3). Grootboom’s inclusion of the spreading of STD’s as something “fun” to watch leaves a lot to be desired, especially considering the fact that South Africa is regarded as having the most severe HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world. According to Suligoi (2008) three hundred and ten thousand people died from AIDS in South Africa. The impact of the AIDS epidemic is seen in the increasing mortality rate of young adults, the age group most affected by the epidemic; almost one in three women aged twenty five to twenty nine, and over a quarter of men aged thirty to thirty four, are living with HIV.

Sadly, South Africa’s HIV and AIDS epidemic has had a devastating effect on children. There were an estimated three hundred and thirty thousand under-fifteens living with HIV in 2009, a figure that has almost doubled since 2001. HIV in South Africa is transmitted predominantly through heterosexual sex, with mother-to-child transmission being the other main infection route. Due to the fact that the virus is transmitted from the child’s mother in cases of mother-to-child transmission, the HIV-infected child is born into a family where the virus may have already had a severe impact on health, income, productivity and the ability to care for each other (Avert HIV and AIDS, 2012).
President Zuma in the landmark 2009 World Aids Day speech stated:

At another moment in our history, in another context, the liberation movement observed that the time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come in our struggle to overcome AIDS. Let us declare now, as we declared then, that we shall not submit.

In Grootboom’s play, is he echoing the wise words of the State president or going in a different direction?

4.3 THEMES IN FOREPLAY

*Foreplay* essentially holds a mirror to the ills of life in Mamelodi Township near Pretoria and perhaps townships in general. *Foreplay* centres on the themes of violence, education, alcoholism and obscenity. The work reflects on the inability of the individual to rise above circumstances or the dictates of historical cycles, and simultaneously negates the significance of personal choice through the classification attributed by character type (Nicoll, 1963). This conjures notions of the dehumanisation of those disempowered as characters are associated with social job descriptions i.e. “PROSTITUTE, POLITICIAN and PREACHER”, turning them into stereotypical representatives that do not invoke our pity rather than personal victims. These generic names feature allegorically as a distancing Brechtian technique eliciting more consideration of their plight and more awareness of the social ills that breed them (Morgan, 2010).

4.3.1 Violence

The very first scenario in *Foreplay* introduces the theme of violence. A very drunk Soldier is seen walking down a deserted street. He is subsequently followed and
violently mugged by the Thug. The manner he is beaten by the Thug is sufficiently violent as to render him immobile and the SOLDIER is literally kicked off stage (p.15). This incident is typical of the growth and spread of interpersonal crime in South Africa where crime pervades suburbia, city landscapes, and pastoral spaces, affecting systems, businesses, and personal lives. Forgey, et al (2000) attributes this level of crime to the limited response by the police and criminal justice system. Grootboom certainly projects his experiences with violence through his *Foreplay* as in *Relativity: Township stories*. In an interview Grootboom (2011) explained:

> Violence revolts me, I fear it, I am traumatised by it…that’s why it fascinates (sic) me… it brings out strong emotions out of me… I am fascinated (sic) how a human being who should be good can behave this way. What causes it, how it can be fixed, does it comment on our society?

Another incident of violence in *Foreplay* is that after a failed attempt at blackmail, the POLITICIAN tortures and shoots the PIMP in the head and the pimp dies instantly (p.69). The violence continues as DUMA enters with the tied up PROSTITUTE. The POLITICIAN threatens her by grabbing a gun and graphically tells her how he killed her pimp and that the same fate will befall her. The POLITICIAN sends DUMA to find the negatives of the blackmail photos and then he proceeds to brutally, anally rape the PROSTITUTE.

THE POLITICIAN: You know what gets me about this whole thing? I didn’t even fuck you! Stand up… Get the fuck up!... *(She slowly does)* Take off your clothes!... Come on, do it!... Don’t come and act shocked here, you’re a whore anyway!
He takes off some of her clothes but doesn’t take off the rest...

Why are you stopping?...take them off!... (She shakes her head to denote ‘no’) What!?...

PROSTITUTE: No!

THE POLITICIAN: NO!... (He furiously lunges at her.) Did you just say no!?

PROSTITUTE: (Stubbornly.) NO! (p.73).

Stage directions state that he proceeded to slap her and she tries to run away from him . . “He catches up to her and beats her senseless as she screams and screams… He then begins to rape her, as he says…”

THE POLITICIAN: Have you ever been fucked up the ass!!?... Today you’re going to find out how it feels!!... I don’t like the ass myself, but today I am going to tear it apart!!...

As he rapes her, he also rains obscenities on her:

Shut up!!... You’re nothing but a filthy whore!!?... Why are you screaming!?... Have you never been fucked in the ass before!? (p.73).

Much like the line from Relativity: Township Stories when Dario excuses his actions with: “You don’t shoot pussy, man, you fuck it!” there is a supposition that women are whores that are good for one thing - casual sex.
The implication is that these consequences are to be expected, and they always entail going for the jugular. The degree of force or aggression is viewed as neither surprising nor irregular and conveys the world of a damaged humanity. It is not just the indignity of the assaults that signify the pecking order but the name calling that reeks with disrespect and instinctual kneejerk reaction rather than cognitive consideration (Morrell, 1998). This captures the underbelly of the environment in which the characters live, and comments on the irreverence of the society that frames us as South Africans. In these plays *Relativity: Township Stories* and *Foreplay* all responses are relative to location, governed by disadvantage and poverty, with all actions perceived as sexual interludes before the final climax:

> Both titles are abstract notions of the spaces and actions that constitute life prior to death and both are positioned in rough worlds of debauchery where we question the value of life itself. The concept of hanging onto the edge of a precipice by the nails seems to inspire a ‘living on the edge’ philosophy filled with immorality and obscenity as tomorrow is a day that remains unprepared for. This immorality is evident in the narration captured as a sequence that includes drunkenness, prostitution, ménage a trios, blackmail, sexual pimping, “compromising photos”, drunken amnesia, “torture”, “shootings” and death. The obscenity is equally prevalent in the scene that follows where “fuck” features four times followed by obscenities in quick succession between stripping off clothes, slapping, beatings, and anal rape (Lutge, 2012: 15-17).

### 4.3.2 Education

The Spoilt Young Man epitomizes the prevalent sexual immorality as a character in *Foreplay* who reveals some insight into the black South African youth in townships.
The youth is perceived as jaded in their attitude towards education, seen as unessential and valueless.

In the depressed surroundings education acknowledges the direness of your situation without necessarily opening doors to improved conditions or presenting possible opportunities. Conversely sex is an activity that drowns out surroundings and is frequently associated with gang inclusionary initiations and unwanted pregnancies exacerbating poverty but providing positive proof of potency (Bradfield, 2008: 81-100).

Sexual prowess is therefore regarded as an imperative from which status is derived. According to Morna, (2008), learners from townships seem to have a negative attitude towards education primarily due to their environments. Informal settlements with almost entirely black populations have infrastructure that is poor, many residents live in shacks, and poverty levels, crime, HIV/AIDS prevalence and unemployment are all time high. Without additional support, most learners from these areas are unable to perform well enough in Matric examination to qualify for tertiary education. The lack of career guidance and mentoring at schools in the townships lead to low awareness of post-school options, opportunities and self-esteem. Challenging home environments provide little or no academic support, and in many cases even complicate the learners’ efforts to obtain good education for themselves. These factors have led to a significant drop in the number of students that complete matric and pursue tertiary education. The Spoilt Young Man who has low self-esteem of himself seems to lack ambition. This is evident when the Barmaid inquires about his studies:

BARMAID: Have you gone back to school?
SPOILT YOUNG MAN: School… No…

BARMAID: But you’re always studying- I don’t know why you don’t go back…

SPOILT YOUNG MAN: I wish I were studying MARY… I just read, that’s all…

Well I guess it’s the same thing, but… I wish I were studying…then, I would have passed my courses, of course… but…oh no! All I do is read…read for recreational purposes. Studying is hard, Mary…and yet…reading is fun…recreational almost…like uh…uh…like sex…yes, like sex (p 25).

In the extract, the equation is drawn in pleasure-seeking activities that do not demand accountability or effort. The Spoilt Young Man shows resentment for his mother’s expectations of him and he shows absolute disdain for ambition. He says:

My mother thinks I’m too obsessed with sex… she wants me to be more ambitious…her exact word… Ambition… ‘YOU LACK AMBITION!’… That’s what she said to me… A fucking shebeen queen!!... How fucking ambitious is that!?... You know what my mother does not know? Ambition is not a virtue, it’s a vice… It even killed Macbeth? That’s why I like you so much… You don’t care about ambition, do you? You come here every day, without any ambition whatsoever… and you know what you care about? Something more important MARY… Something more virtuous…
‘LOYALTY!’… I admire you, MARY…I wish I had what you have…

LOYALTY! (p. 26).

For the apathetic young man, society is no longer value-driven. The pillars of society are driven by the wrong triggers and therefore he withdraws from communal involvement and pursues personal or individual desires. Society has been whittled down to self-rewarding and personal gratification without any grander scheme. Sewell, Haller, and Ohlendorf (1970), view family background as key determinants of educational expectations and academic performance. Parental educational assumptions influence the educational expectations of children and indirectly influence their levels of achievement. According to Orr (2003), family background typically has been measured in terms of parental education, occupations and income, that is, socioeconomic status (SES). Higher SES families hold higher educational expectations for their children and provide an environment that encourages children to achieve higher educational goals for themselves. Moller (1998) points out that groups that have lived under oppressive social systems (e.g. Apartheid) and have had disadvantaged educational systems tend to have lower educational expectations. In a society without flux this reflects on Marx’s patterns of historical cycles in terms of those empowered and those disempowered (Marx, 1978). The work, by contextualising itself within a South African political framework signifies the movement from a South African Apartheid state to a democracy, suggesting radical shifts. The shift in Grootboom plays goes unacknowledged as both systems rely on capitalist class structures. Notwithstanding the radical shift then, the work reiterates Marx’s call not to merely replace one authority with another but to examine the system itself in order to exact meaningful change. Marx implies a reinvention through
new systems (Maksakovski, 2004). In Grootboom’s *Foreplay*, the acknowledgement of total disillusionment is evident in the repeated cycles that persist notwithstanding the political change. This leaves the society with only one desire, to escape.

4.3.3 Alcoholism

Alcohol has played a central and often controversial role in the life of South Africa since the arrival of European settlers. Initially, a refreshment station was established at what was to become Cape Town, so that passing ships could take supplies. Drunkenness, smuggling of liquor, gambling and violence earned it the nick name ‘Tavern of the Seas’. Furthermore, alcohol was exchanged for cattle and labour from indigenous populations (Parry, et al 2005:1). Parry, et al (2005) further state that the present day South Africa still struggles with issues of alcoholism, roughly one in four adult males and one in ten females experience symptoms of alcoholism. Perhaps more concerning is that one in four high school students report “binge” drinking regularly. Substance Abuse South Africa (2012) defines an alcoholic as someone with an alcohol addiction and an irresistible urge to drink, which dominates every aspect of their lives.

The Spoilt Young Man portrays the theme of alcoholism by saying, “My only ambition in life is to be an alcoholic” (p. 24). The statement features as an oxymoron in connoting both tramp and go-getter as analogous within the same sentence. In his intoxicated state, he is not sure whether this quote is derived from Dylan Thomas or Bob Dylan. The quote is derived from Dylan Thomas who often joked about his excessive drinking. According to the official Dylan Thomas website (2011), Thomas was a famous Welsh poet born on October 27, 1914 in Swansea who died November
9, 1953 in New York. During his lifetime he wrote many great poems, including *Fern Hill, The hunchback in the park* and of course *Do not go gentle into that good night*. He is also famous for writing the play for voices *Under Milk Wood*, and a collection of stories, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*. Bob Dylan, however, was an American singer and song writer, musician, poet and painter, born on May 24, 1941, has as his most celebrated works from the 1960s, social art that lifted him to an iconic status.

Historically, payment in alcohol to indentured servants and slaves entrenches the notion of alcohol as a reward. In South Africa, the reality of empowerment being hopeless because of a drinking problem emphasises the converse “I drink because I am hopeless”. Township men frequently attribute their heavy alcohol consumption to economic, social and psychological problems. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that in townships drinking has become an important social activity for men to pass the time. Drinking among the men also fosters a sense of common identity and a feeling of camaraderie. South African men are commonly perceived as taking pride in their high tolerance levels and the slow visible effect of alcohol. In an alcohol and drug abuse research project Marojele, et al (2006) quote a young township male as saying:

> An example of me, my record is still standing in one of the shebeens around… I took five days around the clock not sleeping, drinking throughout five days and five nights. I am a record holder… you get used to it… This becomes a bad habit and when we are drunk we start talking stupid things and we want to compete and carry on and on.

In *Foreplay*, the degree to which the Spoilt Young Man drinks is exposed.
SPOILT YOUNG MAN: It’s okay…you can get me as drunk as you want me to be…this is your week…you showed us LOYALTY… And that’s something I admire… Actually, bring yourself a glass too…and let’s also get drunk like the other night…

BARMAID: I was not drunk the other night; I just had two ciders… I don’t drink much…

SPOILT YOUNG MAN: Let me give you advice MARY…you should never do anything in Moderation…always live life to the fullest…that’s my motto…

BARMAID: What bottle should I bring?

SPOILT YOUNG MAN: Another Vodka… Better yet, in keeping with our theme, bring something stronger… Let’s live life to the fullest… fuck mother… with her Christian fucking moderation…

BARMAID: What’s stronger?
SPOILT YOUNG MAN: Stronger than Vodka? I don’t know… Maybe Stroh Rum… But then, you won’t enjoy that… Anyways, just bring the Vodka… (p.26).

The abuse of alcohol in this extract acknowledges the peer pressure being used, the pseudo-euphoria of pushing limits and the tendency to lead to irresponsible behaviour. The latter is evident when the Spoilt Young Man refers to alcohol as an “aphrodisiac” (p. 27). Towards the end of the scene, the Spoilt Young Man has unprotected sex with the Barmaid. According to Morejele, et al (2006), males report having strong feeling of regret after alcohol - induced sexual encounters. Some lament about peers who had contracted HIV and died of an AIDS-related illness as a result of a lifestyle of drinking and risky behaviour. He further states that the alcohol numbs their feelings, ignores the potential dangers of sexual encounters, and allows risky behaviours. Drinking and risky sex reinforce the vicious cycles. For those without jobs, feelings of hopelessness and emasculation seemed to become temporarily absent during outings of heavy drinking and “drunken-sex”. The insensitivity and aggression born of this ‘devil may care’ approach links the debauchery and violence in the skewed dysfunctionality of Township life adding to the inherent danger.

4.3.4 Obscenity

Sex in theatre extends from the orgies contained in Greek and Roman theatre to the romping sexual infidelities of Restoration Comedies and later farces. Sex has predominating in driving modern theatre too from the Musical Broadway hit Hair (1967) covering the sexual revolution of the 60s, to the inclusion of same gender sexual encounters in modern plays from the late 70s onwards as seen particularly in
plays such as Carol Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* (1978) and culminating in the complications evoked in films such as *Philadelphia* (1993) (Chedgzoy, 1995). Sexual exploration in contemporary theatre and particularly in *Foreplay* explores more freely: fornication, adultery, child molestation, prostitution, the sugar-daddy syndrome, voyeurism, fallatio, doggie-style sexual encounters that specify areas beyond merely missionary sexual positioning (Sierz, 2002: 17-24).

*Foreplay’s* obscenity therefore rests in the form of sex. There is sex in almost every scene. In the second scenario the PROSTITUTE offers the SOLDIER free sex by saying,

“Easy… Soldier… easy. I told you, I don’t care about your money… I love official men… I do it with cops all the time… even those as low as security guards… a fellow like you, can get it for free… any time - any day” (p. 20).

The prostitute’s word “love” in line one appears out of place and is attributed a superficial value as here everyone is about to ‘rip each other off’. The two argue back and forth about where to have sex. They finally agree to have sex in the park. The sex scene is presented by suggestive movements, accentuated by bubblegum popping from the Prostitute. As the two continue to have sex, the Prostitute rifflles the Soldier’s pockets and steals his cell phone and wallet. As the music continues the prostitute passes her bubblegum to the Soldier. The movement ends as the Soldier, having had his sexual desires, pushes her off him violently.

Sex also occurs in a shebeen between the SPOILT YOUNG MAN and the BARMAID. The SPOILT YOUNG MAN begins by admitting that he witnessed the
BARMAID having sex with her boyfriend (p.25). In doing so, a flashback is enacted as if to invite the audience into a voyeuristic ménage à trios. In the flashback the Soldier arrives chewing bubblegum extravagantly and then has sex with the barmaid. The sex is represented by a suggestive dance. After the sex, the barmaid is now the one chewing the bubblegum, and as she blows it, the lights change back to the present. The swapping of what has been chewed and of gum embedded in old saliva carries images of disgust in the reused gum that is routinely chewed and passed on. This conjures an analogous image of the partners that lack special meaning but are routinely used as a function rather than a relationship. The gum may equally symbolise the transmission of disease (perhaps HIV) from one partner to another.

The Spoilt Young Man convinces the Barmaid to join him in his drinking. He philosophises about the act of foreplay and tells the barmaid he plans to write a book about it. The Spoilt Young Man grabs the Barmaid and kisses her. They exchange gum in their kissing. The kiss is meant to represent the transference of sexual favours rather than imply an appetizer to love making (p.30).

The most graphic sex takes place between the SPOILT YOUNG MAN and the PREACHER’S WIFE (p.38).

SPOILT YOUNG MAN: EMMA!... You’re going to leave me like this?... Five minutes more…
PREACHER’S WIFE: Five minutes?...
SPOILT YOUNG MAN: Yes please… you don’t understand… I mean, even though I uh… I didn’t …you know… I love you EMMA…please… Five minutes…

PREACHER’S WIFE: Okay…five minutes more… But stand still…

The PREACHER’S WIFE removes the SPOILT YOUNG MAN’s trousers but does not allow him to touch her (p.39).

Hey, hey!... Still!... I’m just giving you a goodbye kiss… Don’t budge, or else I’ll get right up and go…

SPOILT YOUNG MAN: Okay…

PREACHER’S WIFE: Shhhht!... Quiet…And still!...

SPOILT YOUNG MAN: Yes mam!...

Stage directions state:

*She finishes taking off his trousers and he is left with his under pants… They have maneuvered themselves away from the audience – the SPOILT YOUNG MAN’S back is to the audience as the PREACHER’S WIFE gives him fellatio…*

SPOILT YOUNG MAN: I was determined to go all the way this time – no premature ejaculation… But I had to use foresight – that
Stage directions state:

_He moans and moans until he abruptly pulls her up. Music begins to play. Their frenetic love making which is represented with a dance, the music is then paused and the two fuck realistically – doggy-style... The SPOILT YOUNG MAN addresses the audience as he fucks..._

SPOILT YOUNG MAN: (To audience.) I imagined when she got home what she would tell her husband… and the thought, almost like ‘foreplay’, tantalized me… I called it ‘mind play’ in my book…though I titled the whole chapter, ‘DREAM LOVER’… Dedicated to my beautiful EMMA...

Stage directions state:

The music unpauses and the dance goes on until the end... At the end of their dance, the setting has been changed to the bedroom of a house where the PREACHER’S WIFE lives... Lights change...

In this play, Grootboom contrasts the techniques used to stimulate, first in voyeurism, next in premature ejaculation, then in erectile dysfunction, the fellatio and finally in fantasizing as reality is no longer able to conjure romance or even healthy lust. The interpersonal relationships are distanced and unimportant as the frenetic activity of sexual intercourse takes centre stage. The activity is all that counts and the characters do whatever must be done to ensure the continuance of the cycle (Krueger, 2010:453-454).
In an interview with Grootboom (2011), he explained his use of obscene situations within his productions and *Foreplay* in particular. He stated; “I just wanted to play with facades, with people pretending to be others…that was the major intention of the play”.

It could be considered obscene for a Preacher’s Wife, or any married woman for that matter to have an extra-marital affair. The Preacher’s Wife being a respected spiritual leader in the community is certainly expected to conduct herself in a respectable manner. Having sex with the young son of a good friend and church donor would certainly not be the type of behaviour expected from someone of her stature in society. Even in the affair with the Spoilt Young Man she still demands respect. This is signified when he calls her by her first name Emma and in her vicious reprimand she says,

“Hey behave! Don’t call me Emma; I’m old enough to be your mother” (p. 33).

The obscenity of this situation deepens as it is revealed that this affair has been happening for a while in public and inappropriate places (p.36). The PREACHER’S WIFE, also lights a cigarette after the SPOILT YOUNG MAN has a premature ejaculation. The PREACHER’S WIFE’s ‘hooker’ status is confirmed in the act of lighting the cigarette, and her degradation from PREACHER’S WIFE to a slut is consolidated in this action. It is perhaps significant to note that in traditional African culture it is looked down upon for a woman to smoke, so much more so for a preacher’s wife and a spiritual leader and role model in the community. This in itself
could be considered obscene. What could be even more disturbing is when the Preachers Wife says,

“Ag, don’t worry about it…its nothing new to me” (p.38).

Her comment although ambiguous nonetheless smacks of contempt. It is not clear whether she means that she often has affairs that are disappointing or whether she experiences premature ejaculations with her husband.

The next sex scene takes place in the church office between the Preacher and the Schoolgirl. The scenario begins with the Preacher holding communion wine in a jug and two already filled glasses on a tray. The Preacher convinces the Schoolgirl to drink the wine after praying over it. He then inquires about the number of people she has kissed and the number of people she has had sex with. They delve deeper into the topic of sex (p.57). By this time even the audience’s voyeuristic seduction has been numbed and Grootboom resorts to the symbolic use of the bubblegum to suggest virginity, hence the unwrapping of the gum. Coercion and the use of biblical quotes are seen as advantageous, inviting acceptability rather than horror at the misuse of his religious office:

PREACHER: Forget what I say at church… I’m talking to you as a man now…forget what I am…think of me as a man…a man with needs…Ephesians 5, verse 31 says… ‘For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and they shall be one flesh’… You see, there is nothing wrong with sex… Even the bible says so… There is even a sexual style named after religion…
SCHOOLGIRL: What?

PREACHER: Missionary position... *(She giggles.)* But really...there is nothing wrong with needs... I mean, why do you think God would create pleasure...libido...and then deny man to explore it?... Why create man with free will if you don’t want man to have his free will?... I have needs, my dear...and I need to kiss you right now...

*He kisses her...*

SCHOOLGIRL: What are you doing to me PASTOR?

PREACHER: Call me RAY!...

SCHOOLGIRL: *(Still weakly.)* But, Ray, listen...wait...if someone should come in...

PREACHER: No one will come in, don’t worry...

Stage directions state:

*MUSIC: something like ‘Hallelujah’...*

*Their mating is represented in movement and a wrapped bubblegum... The PREACHER unwraps it and gives it to her... As she chews it, it represents her receiving him* (p.60).
Support from the biblical references smacks of religious hypocrisy as well as total irreverence and the manner in which society is manipulated in order to excuse the actions of the powerful or the pious. The obscenity continues as the PREACHER conducts an embarrassing sermon for his congregation defending sexual sin. As the PREACHER begins talking about sin he quotes a world famous evangelist, Reverend Jimmy Swaggart. He then talks about Preachers who have been held culpable of sexual transgressions. He refers to sexual transgressions by Catholic priests as well as priests who father children as a result of inappropriate physical involvement outside of marriage. He then excuses such acts as part of being human and emphasises that priests and Preachers are only but men, not God himself. These are simply defence mechanisms employed by the Preacher to cover his shameful deeds.

It is shocking and obscene for a Preacher to so vehemently defend sexual sin in public in order to excuse sins perpetrated by religious leaders. This scenario brings about the suspicion that the Preacher maybe simultaneously confessing and defending his own actions. This scenario also makes a strong statement about the fallibility of religious leaders. When speaking of catholic priests and preachers his stance is made perfectly clear.

People call it moral failure and in turn demands that those preachers must step down from pastoral leadership…but I call it ‘proof of pastoral humanness’…Because, my people, pastors are people…they have human weaknesses…their role is to spread the word of God and not to try emulate him. (p. 46).
The PREACHER’s attitude attempts to excuse infidelity and possible sexual abuse by religious leaders; this is without a doubt an obscene notion. According to Sims (2011), a church pastor Royden Wood was charged with sexual assault. From the pulpit in the now-defunct Ambassador Baptist Church, he would tell his flock that women's breasts weren't sexual and that God wouldn't be upset about adultery. Complainants at his London sexual assault trial say Wood was practicing what he preached. These types of cases are certainly nothing new. According to Marriott (1988), Rev. Thomas Streitferdt, 59, a white Pastor in charge of the mostly black seven hundred-member True Church of God in Harlem (USA), was charged with rape and sodomy of two young sisters (ages 14 and 16) in his congregation. Law enforcement officials charged that Streitferdt told female worshippers that they could end up in hell if they refused his sexual advances, and he raped at least one woman during premarital counseling. Members were told that if they were not buried under church auspices at an additional fee in the church cemetery that "they would not go to heaven." This reliance on blind faith is key to Grootboom’s concept of people taking advantage of the power their positions bring to them. Furthermore, the Preacher’s mention of Catholic Priests hits a nerve. McVeigh (2011) reports that victims of sexual abuse by Catholic priests have accused the Pope, the Vatican Secretary of state and two other high-ranking Holy See officials of crimes against humanity, in a formal complaint to the international criminal court (ICC). Pam Spees, human rights attorney with CCR (Centre for Constitutional Rights), said:

The point of this is to look at it from a higher altitude. You zoom out and the practices are identical: whistleblowers are punished, [while the Vatican refuses] … to co-operate with law enforcement agencies…. [Priests remain protected] and are left in the ministry and … [because of this social
negligence] other children are raped and sexually assaulted." From these recent cases, it is safe to say that the character of the Preacher is treading on dangerous ground.

The PREACHER further acts obscenely when he invites the SCHOOLGIRL into his office, and encourages her to drink with him, even the Schoolgirl is aware of the inappropriateness of the situation she finds herself in and asks,

“What do you want with me then? A Pastor shouldn’t be in his room with a young girl like me like this…especially if the Pastor is married” (p. 58).

Appropriateness is conferred by our expectations and in Grootboom’s play power appears to be absolute as he (Preacher) muscles and coerces her into having sex with him. When the sex is over and the SCHOOLGIRL is blaming the wine, the PREACHER subverts his guilt by wiping off his conscience with his authority as a religious leader, and attempts to convince her that their actions were good. He blasphemes; “It’s not just the wine my dear, it’s the Holy Spirit.” (p. 60).

It is obscene that the PREACHER would seduce such a young girl and do so by using biblical references and “holy” wine to suit his intentions. He is perpetrating a crime that could have severe consequences. In terms of South African common law, sexual penetration is unlawful when it occurs under coercive circumstances. Coercive circumstances include the application of force, threats, the abuse of power or authority and the use of drugs (Sexual Offences, 1999: VI). The Preacher uses his authority as well as alcohol to coerce the young girl. Around the world similar actions have brought institutions into disrepute and have had severe financial repercussions.
According to Montgomery (2011), in what is believed to be the largest ever payout in Canada by a religious order, a Montreal private school and its religious owners agreed to pay their victims eighteen million dollars for decades of sexual abuse committed by members. After denying and covering up widespread sexual abuse for decades, Congregation de Ste. Croix and Notre Dame also have apologised unequivocally for acts by teachers and school employees "that should never have happened." The question posed by Grootboom though is how much does a life cost when HIV/AIDS is the consequence?

In another scenario, the POLITICIAN behaves in an obscene manner because although he is in a position of authority and is married he still has sex with the ACTRESS and also solicits sex from the PROSTITUTE (p.69). This scenario is particularly relevant in present day South Africa. Recently, the married South African Sports Minister, Fikile Mbalula was involved in a sex scandal splashed across the media. According to Mboyisa & Basson (2011), Mbalula was the victim of extortion at the hands of a woman he had had an affair with and who claimed she had been impregnated by him. Mbalula however, is not the first South African politician to be embroiled in a sex scandal. The South African President, Jacob Zuma was recently involved in a scandal that shook the country. At the time, the President had three first ladies, and a soon to be fourth, but fathered an out of wedlock child. Essentially he cheated on his three wives and his fiancé (Hughes, 2010). Furthermore, this is not the first sex scandal involving Jacob Zuma. In 2006, he was tried and acquitted of raping an HIV-positive woman. During the trial it was revealed that he did not use protection, saying that he showered after having sex as a way to keep himself from becoming infected. Zuma’s escapades can be said to have inspired The Spear, which
is a painting by Cape Town-based South African artist, Brett Murray. The picture of Zuma is a facsimile of a famous poster of communist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin. In the red, black and yellow drawing, the president is depicted as striking Lenin's heroic stance, except his genitals hang outside of his trousers. ANC spokesman, Jackson Mthembu stated; “It's making a mockery of the highest office”. Mthembu said the artist was within his rights to express himself but said "The Spear" was "vulgar" and ridiculed President Zuma's stature (Govender, 2012). According to reports, Zuma felt he was portrayed as “a philanderer, a womaniser and one with no respect” and that he was “personally offended and violated” by Murray’s parody (Minnaar, 2012). Interestingly, since coming into office in 2009, Mr Zuma has been widely regarded as unimpressive on the policy front, while making headlines with his colourful personal life. The president has been married six times and fathered twenty one children (Laing, 2012). Hence, Grootboom’s work acquires greater social relevance when positioned within this socio-political framework.

Social conscientising extends further than the framework of the play as it is embedded in the dialogue. Foreplay is littered with obscene language, even to the point where one becomes numb to it. In the second scenario involving The PROSTITUTE and the SOLDIER, the obscene language is extreme. The Soldier’s expletives are used in repetition as a means of expression. An example of this is when he shouts at the Prostitute for asking questions about the service: “Fuck the service! This is what needs servicing” (p. 18). He also uses obscene language when the Prostitute expresses her fear of the police (p. 20). “Fuck the police- I’m a soldier!” Furthermore the Soldier continues his use of obscene language when he is addressing the audience, “Whoever came up with AIDS is a fucking asshole”. Even the last line of the scenario
contains obscene language by the Soldier (p. 22). When the Soldier realises that the Prostitute has stolen his wallet and phone, he chases her shouting: “Hey! Hey wena sfebe! ... Give me back my fucking money wena!!! The Prostitute is certainly not innocent and resorts to using obscene language herself. Furthermore when she addresses the audience during sexual intercourse she states: “Women all over, even those who are not prostitutes use their cunts as bargaining chips” (p. 21).

Towards the end of the scenario (p. 22), the Prostitute’s last line contains further expletives: “So long, shit head”! There are, indeed, further examples of obscene language in The BARMAID and the SPOILT YOUNG MAN scenario. After the Barmaid asks the Spoilt Young Man what she should bring him, he replies: “Vodka… Let’s live life to the fullest… Fuck mother with her Christian fucking moderation” (p. 26).

Expletives pervade the dialogue with further examples of obscene language when the Barmaid refuses to sit next to the Spoilt young Man: “No, no, no, no, fuck your moderation. Sit on the fucking table!” The Spoilt Young Man also takes pleasure in graphically giving the Barmaid his definition of foreplay (p. 29). He begins by saying: “Yes, sexual foreplay, blowjobs… you know, stroking the dick, finger fucks, anything you can think of”. After his pseudo-intellectual ramblings contained in the varied hypothesis offered by the Spoilt Young man, he sums up his thoughts abruptly“Anyways, my point is…God is a fucking pervert, and all mankind, nothing but his whores!” (p. 31). The juxtaposition between what characters profess and the reality of the baser instincts that drive their alternate dialogue, by inscribing a myriad of expletives that underscore the words, insinuate an underlying satire.
4.4 SATIRE IN FOREPLAY

Grootboom skillfully uses satire in *Foreplay*. Satire is indeed difficult to define due to its amorphous nature (Ebewo, 2002:3). However, one way of defining satire would be to say that it is the systematic exploitation, with aggressive intent, of what are, or are made to seem, deviations from the norm within a context. In other words, satire can be said to protests against something or someone that the writer of satire does not believe to be inherently good or morally correct (Sutherland, 1958: 4).

Nokes (1987), puts forward the notion that satire is a two toned genre. He believes that satire can be seen as both a weapon as well as a toy. Van Vuuren (2004) echoes this idea by stating that satire actually functions as a form of punishment for, or perhaps denunciation of, a person’s immoral deeds. Conversely, it also functions as a toy, in that as a literary or aesthetic object, satire exists to amuse and entertain. The ability of satire to evoke laughter in response to a critique of serious issues plays a vital part in its public acceptance. By seeking the endorsement of laughter, satire draws the sting of its own attack (Nokes, 1987: 17).

In Grootboom’s *Foreplay*, when the PROSTITUTE seduces the SOLDIER to be her boyfriend, the SOLDIER says:


This statement insinuates that some Nigerian men who reside in South Africa are pimps who get into relationships with their prostitutes. This statement acknowledges
common stereotypes that South Africans may believe about Nigerians. It is no secret that South Africa has xenophobic issues and has gone so far as to dub Nigerians and foreigners from other African countries as “amakwerekwere” (foreigners). Adesanmi (2008) states that black South Africans have found an easy explanation for the myriad problems invoked by poverty, housing, transportation, unemployment, crime, violence, decay of public and social infrastructure; the explanation being of course that “amakwerekwere” have caused all these problems. He further asserts that Black South Africans tend to believe that most Nigerians are criminals:

When they are not busy trafficking drugs, they are taking over our jobs, our houses and, worse, our women. All foreigners must leave this country! (p. 1).

Another satire emerges, when after stealing the SOLDIER’S wallet and phone, the PROSTITUTE says:

“Soldier my ass! It is I who should be called a soldier…besides; I have the most powerful weapon in the world” (p. 21).

This comment suggests that the PROSTITUTE feels that she is fighting a war against men and prides herself in her skillful use of her weapon; her vagina. It could also be said that the Prostitute is insinuating that she does not want to be seen as a victim of circumstance but rather as someone who has made a choice, a choice she perceives to be heroic; a choice akin to Shen Teh-Shui Ta in Brecht’s The Good Person [Woman] of Szechwan. This idea of using sex to attain ones goals is not new. As far back as biblical times, women have conquered through sex. When Samson fell for Delilah, a woman from the Valley of Sorek, it marked the beginning of his downfall and eventual demise. It did not take long for the rich and powerful Philistine rulers to
learn of the affair and immediately pay a visit to Delilah. As Samson was judge over Israel at the time and had been taking out great vengeance on the Philistines, hoping to capture him, the Philistine leaders each offered Delilah a sum of money to collaborate with them in a scheme to uncover the secret of Samson's great strength. Using her powers of seduction and deception, Delilah persistently wore down Samson with her repeated requests, until he finally divulged the crucial information. Having taken the Nazirite vow at birth, Samson had been set apart to God. As part of that vow, his hair was never to be cut. When Samson told Delilah that his strength would leave him if a razor were to be used on his head, she cunningly crafted her plan with the Philistine rulers. While Samson slept on her lap, Delilah called in a co-conspirator to shave off the seven braids of his hair. Subdued and weak, Samson was captured (Judges, 16).

During sex with the SOLDIER, the PROSTITUTE speaks directly to the audience and says:

“Women all over, even those who are not prostitutes use their cunts as bargaining chips” (p. 21).

Her statement gives amazing insight and relevance. Recently, sixty three year old World Bank president, Paul Wolfowitz was involved in a scandal that threatened his control of the worlds’ largest and most influential anti-poverty institution. Behar (2007), states that Wolfowitz’ scandal evolved from his girlfriend’s (Shaha Riza) promotion and consequent pay hike. The controversy dates back to 2005, when Wolfowitz, then the Bush Administration’s second in command at the Pentagon, joined the bank. At that time, Riza, who joined the bank in 1997, occupied a
communications advisor job involving the Middle East region. In recognition of Wolfowitz’s conflict of interest as her ultimate boss, Riza was moved to a post at the U.S. State Department where she worked directly for Liz Cheney, the daughter of the Vice President — even while remaining on the Bank payroll. Her job title was bumped up to a managerial level. Her tax-free World Bank salary also moved—in fact it rocketed, from $132,660 to $193,590 by 2006. This made her better paid than the then Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who earned a gross salary of $186,000 (Cole, 2007).

Riza’s financial gain from being in a relationship with a powerful man definitely attests to the sexual power women can hold over men as well as the affluence of the social circles that accompany this rise to power. Riza’s sexuality is used as a weapon that moves through the political and socio-economic ranks. Furthermore Wolfowitz’s actions lead to his down fall. Riza becomes his fatal flaw. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that ironically masculine ego is centred on sexual activity, yet simultaneously it is the very tool used by women all over the world as a destructive male force. Women and sex, like politics and religion are indeed essential elements in works of satire (Ebwo, 2002:181).

Grootboom also satirises false prophets and charlatans. The SPOILT YOUNG MAN speaks for a long time philosophising about his environment and his beliefs. He satirically reveals that when his father died he left his mother a business and therefore the money. He then supposes it was only as a matter of natural progression that his mother, the “shebeen queen” became very good friends with the preacher and his wife. This friendship served an ulterior motive;
Of course, if you ask me, I’d say “the larger the tithe, the stronger the friendship” (p. 31).

The SPOILT YOUNG MAN insinuates that the PREACHER is a false prophet, taking advantage of his mother’s wealth. Grootboom is not the first African playwright to satirise fake prophets. The Trials of Brother Jero by Wole Soyinka satirises Christianity and religious hypocrisy, particularly, the unquestioning devotion that many converts display towards their spiritual leaders, often exposing themselves to manipulation in the process. Birungi (2011), states that The Trials of Brother Jero is about a charlatan preacher, Brother Jero who is a cunning beach diviner that woos customers (penitents) to his church by using Christian superstition for his own salvation. For him, the church is a business and the “worshippers” are the “customers”.

Brother Jero is suave while his followers are gullible. He lures people to his church by promising them material gains and promotions through prayer. Chume, his assistant often seeks for permission to beat his arrogant wife Amope, but Brother Jero disagrees:

“I keep them dissatisfied. Once they are full, they won’t come again....”

Grootboom uses this important stylistic satirical device in Foreplay to exhibit the social underbelly, the dissatisfied and the needy in order to mock and deflate, rather than exalt bad characters such as the PREACHER, PROSTITUTE, SOLDIER and POLITICIAN. The use of satire in Foreplay is skillful and relevantly mirrors township life in Mamelodi and South Africa as a whole. Grootboom admits to
confronting, titillating and tempting his audience to react in order to affect the reception that the play receives. The gratuitous sex, the obscene language, the violent underbelly are all part of Grootboom’s plan to confront the audience with horrific visions of themselves.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this study, it has been revealed that Grootboom’s popularity as a contemporary South African playwright is overwhelming. His productions are known for their depiction of violence, frontal nudity, simulated sex and general irreverence evoking the media analogy “Township Tarrantino” (De Vries, 2009). This literary esteem acknowledges the social contradiction, contexts and contrasts within which the South African milieu navigates. South Africa in particular is reportedly notorious for undeservedly violent actions against women, ignited by such trite facades as wearing revealing clothing such as mini-skirts (Vincent, 2009:11-18). This contradiction is inscribed in my research question: “What makes obscene theatre popular though it is at odds with the cultural perception of the black South African community”?

There is no denying that Grootboom’s works at first glance appears to be nothing short of pornographic. He is the first South African theatre practitioner to have nude black actors on stage with these actors simulating sex. Grootboom admits that audiences are drawn to his work primarily because of the sensationalist lewdness of frontal nudity and simulated sex and this is something he exploits. Grootboom (2011) states:

Even with something as graphic as Cards for its sexual nudity, those reactions are planned you know…when you reveal the nudity. I don’t think I’m doing a soft porn thing but at the same time I have to obey sexual titillation rules.
Though Grootboom denies that his work is pornographic, it is worrying that he is aware that people are attending his shows driven by the titillation offered by simulated sex and frontal nudity and yet he readily delivers. When I questioned Grootboom (2011) about where he draws the line between pornography and theatre, he defended his work by saying: “It’s the treatment. The minute you tell yourself that you will treat sex like art and that you want to say something with it, it’s not for titillation”.

Interestingly, when Grootboom attempts other genres of theatre the audience often feels disappointed. The mere mention of Grootboom generates certain expectations. When discussing the pressures of being a Resident Director and the expectations that arise Grootboom declares:

It’s always problematic for me when I do a play. It’s very scary because some of them [referring to audience members] look at me a certain way. It’s not my own doing but it’s … so … they give me so much pressure. Sometimes I feel that it is very unfair. But some of the comments are always, “it’s a good play but not as good as the other one”. With such statements, you stress and then you wonder what you did wrong. Until you accept that - no, this is a different play. I stress too much about what I receive from the audience because I take notes very closely. I think the only thing that bothers me is when people expect the nudity and sex all the time. Even if somebody is getting dressed and taking off their trousers, you can tell that people are expecting something. It’s a problem because then people are not watching the play they are just waiting. On a good note, sometimes the nudity markets itself though (Ngcongo, Personal Interview, 2011).
I accept Grootbooms’ idea that his works are not pornographic when the sex and nudity are part of a bigger picture, a vehicle for a certain message. I believe that audiences may initially be drawn by the “sex and violence sells” angle evident in *Foreplay* and *Relativity: Township Stories*. However, in all the excitement it should not be overlooked that Grootboom’s productions are by a black South African for Black South Africans; and that perhaps this provides a cathartic experience for a misunderstood and disempowered township society. In an interview with Grootboom (2011), he revealed that his popularity stems from the fact that his work is original and confronts real black South African issues. He essentially holds a mirror to black South African township life and thus exposes its evils in the form of satire. One cannot help but recognise the characters and issues depicted as those of a typical South African township experience. The relevance of Grootboom’s productions show that he is indeed a theatre practitioner holding the mirror for and beating the same rhythm as present day black South Africa.

Grootboom’s success is an indication that contemporary playwrights should be exploring and confronting issues facing South Africans on a daily basis. Black South Africans do not want to attend theatre productions that they consider boring or irrelevant. Grootboom’s obscene theatre is precisely what brings audiences flocking to theatres. This seems to be the genre of production audiences are demanding. It is always said that theatre in South Africa is dying and audiences are no longer interested in attending productions. Stylised representations, outdated norms and moral codes no longer in practice demand fresh interpretations, questioning the
content that theatres mount on stage. Contemporary theatre seems to survive on the utilisation of shock effect.

In Grootboom & Chweneyagae’s *Relativity: Township Stories* and Grootboom’s *Foreplay* the cycle dictates the plot and structurally holds the works together. In the former the sequence of repeated violence creates a precision of activity irrespective of the participants and in the latter the revolutions created by the ménage à trios identify the primeval, instinctive drive within shifting socio-economic strata where sexual appetites satiate irrespective of social veneer or character occupations. This signifies passive rather than active characters hinging both works on existential frameworks (Lutge, 2012).

The passivity of the characters in both plays is very concerning as Grootboom fails to render a voice against horrible and horrenduous happenings in the Township. Thabo, the serial killer character in *Relativity: Township Stories*, who like the majority of poor black South Africans in townships, has a world view that is limited to his environment. In his environment, you have to be feared in order to avoid being a victim. Thabo never asks for change he only excuses his behaviour by pointing out that this is the way it has always been in Africa and this is the way it will always be. One has to question Grootboom’s commitment as a playwright if he is exposing the ills of Township society but makes no attempt to heal or exorcise these communities. Why are his productions not confronting the problems the way playwrights did against apartheid?
Furthermore, in his Director’s notes, Grootboom (2006) states that his primary reason for writing and directing *Foreplay* is for “fun”. He further states that there is nothing more fun than watching ten people having sex with each other, talking about nothing but crap and giving each other STD’s (Grootboom, 2009:3). Why does Grootboom celebrate crime, sexual lapses and violence and the spreading of sexually transmitted disease? Is Grootboom creating art for art’s sake? Though arts for arts’ sake is still current in theatrical praxis, the emphasis today is in arts with a message – arts with a redemptive voice. We admit that Grootboom is indeed a young playwright who is newly emerging in the scene. We hope that with time and as he gains experience, he would go beyond the obscene and tackle important issues that will contribute to the good health of society. We are hopeful that with time, he will follow in the footsteps of African playwrights such as Zakes Mda, Masitha Hoeane, Bode Sowande, Efua Sutherland, ‘Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi and of course, Wole Soyinka, all playwrights who have made a difference in the socio-political lives of their societies.
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1. What is art from your personal perspective?

You must remember that I am answering with the perspective of art in the theatre. Art for me is when dramas become profound for me; deal with feelings not just issues. I believe when you treat things with a profound objective they become artistic.

2. What do you believe is good theatre?

Good theatre is about working very hard, sometimes there is theatre I don’t like but if the participants work hard then it’s okay. An example of theatre I did not like; years ago I saw ‘shopping and fucking’ by Mark Ravenhill. It was full of whites, white things/issues. Despite everything else the treatment was done very well. It’s about working very hard.

3. Which theatre practitioners inspire you?

In terms of the older theatre practitioners, I know Lara Foot; I really love her as a director. I really think you know that she’s the greatest. I really admire Lara Foot.

4. Why are your intimate scenes so direct/ graphic?

I think it’s from a long time ago you know. I remember when I used to watch films, and they didn’t show the real stuff and it bugged me. You know, when find a man and woman in a bedroom and you know, they are covered. They are supposed to be naked. They are meant to be naked, and I’ve always had a problem with it. Only to realize, that when I watch art movies, that you know... they don’t care. You find the greatest
5. What do you think you have added to the South African theatre industry? Would you describe your work as revolutionary?

Well I think for starters, original work that is confrontational of the issues you know. I like that very much. I like the idea of, you know... you find a lot of people who want to be theatre makers always thinking of my work. Even those who don’t like it, I see them coming to the work and I see them enjoying and responding. Even what I think is difficult work in terms of subject matter. So I think I can say my contribution is not doing boring theatre, so it’s an arrogant reply but I think it’s what I believe in.

6. What is your biggest career achievement thus far?

Hmmm- that’s very difficult... recently something that really made me feel like I have achieved something; you know I really always have insecurities, not too much but a little bit. But the one thing that really killed me, that gave me arrogant pride, was recently when I was in Germany. A critic that I really fear, she was interviewing me and ...she came to South Africa when Foreplay was on. She said, “I saw Foreplay and I know some people complained about the end of Foreplay but I really liked it.” She believed that the final action could work as a full play.
7. As the Resident Director: what pressures do you face in terms of bringing a constant flow of audience/bums on seats?

Even if I was not resident director, I would have pressure from my peers, especially from the black crowd. It’s always problematic for me when I do a play; it’s very scary because some of them look at me in a certain way. It’s not my own doing but it’s... so they give me so much pressure. Sometimes I feel that it is very unfair, but some of the comments are always, “it’s a good play but not as good as the other one”. With such statements, you stress and then you wonder what you did wrong. Until you accept that no, this is a different play. I stress too much about feedback from the audience because I take notes very carefully. I think the only thing that bothers me also is when people expect the nudity and sex all the time. Even if somebody is getting dressed and taking off their trousers, you can tell that people are expecting something. It’s a problem because then people are not watching the play they are just waiting. On a good note, sometimes the nudity markets itself though. When I’m creating nudity it’s not something that I think to myself, “I must have it’ or “I must not have it”. You know. Like in Foreplay it was like, you will excuse my language but it was like “fuck you to people who were thinking that I’m all about Cards” you know. That was my sole intention with it at the end of Foreplay initially, but once you go ahead you find other issues. When I did it, it was to say to people who want nudity; you won’t get it the way you want it. I will give it to you at the end and when I give it to you at the final scene it won’t be about sex, it will be about rape and it will be about violence. I made it specifically like that; I thought it out very intentionally for that. Even when I worked with the actors I would tell them, the women that we really need to make the violence very graphic. So that people can see that it’s not that we can’t do the nudity it’s just that we don’t want to.
8. Is getting a reaction your main objective when you direct?

The funny thing is that when we play overseas they don’t respond to anything. I actually like the response, but the actors prefer the overseas audience because then they don’t get disturbed. I prefer our audiences because then it gives that special thing. Like earlier when you asked me what theatre is for me, it’s about that reaction. Even when I write, the structure is based on these things. Like that final scene in Foreplay, it’s really something that one works towards. If people don’t react the way you want them, then for me it is a serious problem. Even with something as graphic as Cards for its sexual nudity, those reactions are planned you know...when you reveal the nudity. I don’t think I’m doing a soft porn thing but at the same time I have to obey sexual titillation rules. So the answer is yes.

9. What demands do you place on your actors?

I don’t take no for an answer. I tell people beforehand what I expect. I never accept that... that’s the problem within the rehearsal room. Once you are in there you have to do what I tell you to do.

10. Who is your main audience?

Initially it was a lot of white people because of the Grahamstown and with the word spreading. At the end of that play Interracial I said “fuck white people” and that’s when I fell out of favour with them, but the one consistent audience since cards has always been younger black people. Due to transport and other issues it tends to be young black professionals.
11. When you are casting, what do you look for in actors?

I look for many things; you have to be able to work hard as an actor. I work with development actors a lot; it’s a gamble because sometimes you find at the end of the process that they are really not where they should be. But it’s always a risk but I think people are used to that risk in my plays, because then people see raw talent. I treat them as professional productions but sometimes they are very developmental, very semi-professional. Rehearsal process is very long because I’m very specific about stage movement. That process takes longer, dealing with development actors because you have to teach them. It takes me longer than other directors, even up to the opening.

12. Would you say your work is revolutionary?

I think it’s a dangerous label because I think it would be conceited of me to say that. Honestly it’s a dangerous label because I think one can say that after some time in the business but I only started professionally in 2005. So I haven’t done many things. I think when I do films one day; I could say that maybe, but not now. When I do more theatre that’s – but it’s not something I will admit to now. It’s very scary to admit.

13. When people write about your work in years to come what would you like them to say?

Ingmar Bergman, Martin Scorsese and Federico Fellini; these guys are always considered everywhere as the greatest film makers ever. This is because of their body of work; you know... it remain the greatest. So I would like to be thought of like that. That my whole body of work, there may be plays that did not work but you have never done a horrible one.
14. In *Foreplay* why is it the Thug who becomes the Soldier?

*I just wanted to play with facades, with people pretending to be others...that was the major theme of the play...but why the thug becomes a soldier? I don’t know, I guess it came to me like that... I don’t know how to analyse it.*

15. In the *Mail and Guardian* interview you were quoted as saying that *Foreplay* is about getting people to think about their sexual morals. What do you mean by this?

*Maybe because you are black you will understand. Every time I say that to white people, they pretend like they don’t understand. I feel sometimes we are unemotional about sex. Where people can preach about promiscuity at one level and in the same breath go back and do it. I have never understood that, I feel that people, those people shouldn’t go back and preach against the things they themselves do. This is what *Foreplay* deals with. I feel that people they see sex as a tool and I will give an example, there’s an actor I know- it’s just that I can’t mention names. He likes going to prostitutes and he truly believes he hates the emotional attachment you get from normal women. That’s what he keeps telling me. Even when prostitutes are just like robots you know... So for me it’s almost symptomatic of a whole lot of people where I’ve always said to those people why don’t they just wank, I mean if its only about relieving. I think it’s the treatment of sex to a certain extent, and sometimes I think, the problem is when you do that and you have a partner. When you are doing that action. So it’s always affecting people you are connected to. This is the question that comes out of *Foreplay.**

16. Where is the line between Pornography and theatre?

*It’s the treatment. The minute you tell yourself that you will treat sex like art and that you want to say something with it, it’s not for titillation.*
17. Why is it only the women who are exposed in Foreplay?

There is only one nude scene in Foreplay, in that last scene... it is not done for sexual purposes but to assault the senses of the audience... the idea was to deal with clothed sex for the whole play as one dealt with sex issues but then only show nudity when it is least appealing. I think your choice of word “exposed” is quite apt. That was the intention. Almost to get an opposite reaction from the audience, “please dress her up”. Much like Kubrick used nudity in Clockwork Orange, as some form of revolting idea for that character in that film.

18. With particular reference to Relativity “Township Stories”, what is your fascination with violence and serial killers?

Violence revolts me, I fear it, I am traumatized by it...that’s why it fascinates me... it brings out strong emotions out of me... and serial killers are a supreme embodiment of evil, of violence... I am fascinated how human being who should be good can be weird this way. What causes it, how can it be fixed, does it comment on our society?