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Class Movements in the New South Africa: Post-Colonial Politics, Neocolonialism, and Mimicry in Pieter-Dirk Uys's *MacBeki A Farce to be Reckoned With*

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Good Laugh, Bad Laugh, Ugly Laugh, My Laugh Graduate Conference

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Introduction

In her essay “Reconciling Acts: Theatre beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission” Marcia Blumberg identifies 2001 as the beginning of a “second interregnum” for South Africans (139). Making this claim, Blumberg’s temporal model outlines two phases of post-apartheid drama: “an initial period of euphoria, patience and hope” that begins with Nelson Mandela’s inauguration and a second interregnum after “the Mandela years” marked by a “desperation to break silences” (139). Blumberg’s two-part division of South Africa’s post-apartheid history builds on Grant Farred’s argument that the nation is going through an “idiosyncratic interregnum,” moving “between reconciliation and disaffection” (64). Adapting Farred’s theory to South African drama, Blumberg posits that some dramatic productions stage disaffection towards continuing oppression, especially black experiences of poverty and economic exploitation, while other performances “stage successful acts of reconciliation” by voicing concerns of minority groups after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (140). For Blumberg the second interregnum is a period plagued by instability and morbid symptoms, a time of transition when drama spurs a broad rethinking and reworking of the nation’s identity (140).

Mapping the fragmented social and political landscape of the second interregnum, this paper analyzes the portrayal of the new black upper class – politicians and young professionals – seeking wealth and territory in Pieter-Dirk Uys’s *MacBeki: A Farce to be Reckoned With* (2008). Using farce to highlight corruption and entitlement problems within President Thabo Mbeki’s administration, Uys foregrounds the increasingly tenuous division between classes in the new South Africa. Oppression occurs economically, but also culturally and socially as indigenous customs and knowledge are displaced by characters that revere and adopt colonial culture. Embracing the social codes and mannerisms of European or apartheid colonizers, colonial mimics in *MacBeki* highlight a South African nation-state that, while undergoing a process of decolonization, is still jaundiced by South Africa’s colonial legacy¹. In Uys’s play escape from idealizing colonial codes and language in the postcolonial moment is achieved through hybridization, blending European and African cultures in *MacBeki*.

In his essay “Of Mimicry and Man,” Homi Bhabha defines the colonial mimic as a recognizable colonized other who is “*almost the same* [as the colonizer], *but not quite*” (126) due to his inability to “fully become that which he is not” (128). In essence, the colonial mimic is “the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis” which emphatically prevents the colonized from gaining acceptance within the colonizer’s position of power. While the colonial mimic may master the language, knowledge, and even imitate the gestures of the colonial power, they are barred from acceptance because of their ethnic difference. In Bhabha’s words, they are “[a]lmost *the same but not white*” (30). Castigating corrupt leaders and citizens who imitate colonial culture, language, and customs, Uys’s work speaks out against the danger of perpetuating colonial forms of cultural and economic oppression. For Uys the imitation of colonial behaviour leads either to neocolonial abuses of power or continuing social divisions, especially amongst

classes. Castigating divisions continuing to affect the contemporary nation-state by ridiculing hypocritical leaders, *MacBeki* also underscores the artificiality of colonial performances of power by showing how the colonizer's gestures can be repeated in order to ridicule.

Political and Economic Context

In a recent article in the *Daily Maverick*, political analyst Chris Gibbons describes South Africa as “a society that remains deeply divided, perhaps more so now than at any time since 1994.” Although describing a single event in South Africa's recent history – public outcry towards a nude painting of African National Congress (hereafter ANC) President Jacob Zuma created by Brett Murray – Gibbons's assertion captures the general condition of the post-apartheid nation-state. For example, while Gibbons illustrates the clear political and racial divisions still haunting South Africa, foreign affairs reporter Bill Schiller uncovers a similar trend when analyzing class and economic differences amongst citizens. Comparing unemployment rates in South Africa between 1994 and 2012, Schiller notes that at independence the nation had a 20% unemployment rate whereas eight years later the rate had risen to a staggering 33%, “when including those who have given up looking for work.”ⁱⁱ Taking these figures into account, Schiller draws a similar conclusion to that of Gibbons: divisions between groups, especially wealthy and poor South Africans, are growing wider than at independence and people are becoming increasingly disenfranchised.

Extending from the growing division between rich and poor in South Africa is the uncomfortable reality that the country is continuing to sustain apartheid economic inequalitiesⁱⁱⁱ; this is occurring in a modified form however, with a black upper class also potentially exploiting poor black South Africans. As political analyst Brent Meersman notes, reports as early as 2002

suggest “that inequality was starting to track class not racial lines,” and that “Stats SA in 2008 confirmed that the highest inequality is now *within* the African [black] population,” not between white and black South Africans as was the case historically (emphasis added). Many critics of the current system of economic redress criticize BEE – the Black Economic Empowerment policy – as a process that has exacerbated divisions in South Africa. Described by the Government of South Africa as: “[a] necessary... intervention to address the systematic exclusion of the majority of South Africans from full participation in the economy,” BEE seeks to rebalance historical inequalities through affirmative action policies, private-sector agreements, and by increasing the proportion of black South Africans owning and managing businesses. Contrary to the goals of this economic strategy – to facilitate economic equality – many South Africans believe that BEE has encouraged a number of black politicians and entrepreneurs to continue exploiting poor populations historically disempowered during apartheid.

A system of economic exploitation is precisely what one encounters when reading Meersman’s criticism that “BEE businesses [are] engaged in ruthless labour practices, while tenderpreneurs further impoverish (if not actually kill) the poor.” In the wake of the Marikana mine massacre the extent of the divide between wealthy and poor became clear. As Schiller reminds his readers, while platinum traded at US\$1,600 an ounce, miners at the Lonmin-owned mine in Marikana used open-pit toilets and often occupied inadequate housing. Lonmin is an excellent example of South Africa’s current neocolonial condition because the mine is owned by a British company based in London but has local South African members who encouraged the police intervention that led to the deaths of many protestors^{iv}. The control of the Marikana mine by foreign investors and the role local politicians and police played in violently disbanding strike

lines exemplify Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's assertion that neocolonialism is sustained through economic reliance abroad and oppression of citizens and workers locally (12).

Robert Young's statement that independence in many colonised nations "brought to light an apparently new form of subservience, to the economic system of capitalist power" captures the essence of what is happening in South Africa (45). While the political system is under new management, plays such as *MacBeki* make clear that the incoming leaders are eager to maintain the exploitative practices of their predecessors by placing their own interests above those of the general population. As a result, economic equality has been slow to arrive and corruption remains rampant throughout the country^v.

Although this paper focuses on a white Afrikaner playwright's fear of corruption, the play offers a nuanced examination of economic abuse amongst South Africa's black population. Reflecting current economic trends in the country – 64% of black South Africans continue to live in poverty – the play foregrounds the multiple class and educational divisions within a racial group traditionally viewed as homogeneous under apartheid's system of racial categorization (Schiller). Furthermore, while I seek to examine a non-black perspective on the new black elite, one should not assume that criticism only comes from non-black South Africans. As major playwrights such as Zakes Mda exemplify, there is also a body of criticism from indigenous South African artists attacking the "unbridled accumulation of wealth in the so-called black empowerment frenzy" (Amato xviii) and staging dissent through dramatic styles that intermingle the "stink of decayed old Europe and corrupt new Africa" (Amato xiv). Mda's words, taken from a note he wrote to his publishers, express the disenfranchisement many South Africans carry towards economic imbalances in the current nation-state^{vi}.

Pieter-Dirk Uys's *MacBeki: A Farce to be Reckoned With*

With Uys, one can understand how drama – historically used for political protest and staging “sites of conflict” in apartheid South Africa – continues to play a key role in criticising government shortfalls after 1994 (Orkin, *Drama* 5). As playwright, Uys has a well documented history of using drama as a weapon against political injustice. He is one of the longest standing satirists in South Africa, with a broad and detailed literary career spanning from his first play *Faces in the Wall* in 1969 to the present day^{vii}. In the book *Subversive Laughter: The Liberating Power of Comedy*, Ron Jenkins asserts that Uys historically used comic improvisation and theatrical satire to highlight anxieties affecting white South Africans during apartheid (94). In making this claim Jenkins notes that Uys’s work was so influential that, “In July 1992, the Sunday magazine of the *Johannesburg Times* ran an article featuring Evita [a character Uys performed in drag] as one of the decade’s ten most influential South Africans, [in] a list that included former president P.W. Botha and Nelson Mandela” (95). Understanding Uys’s mainstream status and his long history of politically subversive writing helps to identify him as a canonical satirist in South African theatre circles.

Uys’s *MacBeki*, first performed at The Little Theatre 25 February 2009 by University of Cape Town drama students, highlights corruption and hypocrisy within President Mbeki’s administration (v). Attacking shortfalls of the BEE system, embezzlement, and Mbeki’s contentious denial of the link between HIV and AIDS, the play is a scathing response to the failures Uys sees in the South African government. As a work of political protest, *MacBeki* was widely praised by critics for its response to inadequacies in Mbeki’s leadership, being hailed as “the first theatrical rendering in 15 years that directly confronts and exposes those who would wield enormous power over our lives” (Thamm). Using farce to highlight corruption and the

sense of entitlement to wealth held by leaders within Mbeki's administration, *MacBeki* foregrounds the increasing distance between political leaders and their voter base in the new South Africa. At the same time, casting Mbeki as a mimic man, Uys draws direct connections between South Africa's current class crisis and the nation's history of colonization.

MacBeki, a parody of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, farcically portrays Mbeki's rise to power in the new South Africa. Incorporating famous politicians into Shakespeare's play, South African leaders such as Mandela, Mbeki, and Zuma make appearances, renamed Maduba, MacBeki, and MacZum respectively; in doing so the play speaks to different generations of South Africans and reflects major changes within the ANC leadership since 1994. Other prominent ANC politicians depicted in the play include Mbeki's political rival Cyril Ramaphosa^{viii} as Ramabanquo, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel as McTrev, and Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang as Lady Manta, MacBeki's wife. The play's Porter is a white liberal seeking inclusion in the new South Africa. At moments he exhibits a desire to be viewed as a model for successful transformation, while at others he is also quick to point out the limitations affirmative action policies place on his inclusion in the workforce and the nation^{ix}. It is due to such behaviour that theatre practitioner Megan Furniss argues the character is an embodiment of "every white man in the country," although the Porter's dialogue (38) and his imitation of Celine Dion at the conclusion of the play (87) identify him specifically as Uys, who is well known for his drag acts. Collecting all of these figures on stage, *MacBeki* farcically recreates South Africa's post-apartheid political history ahead of the 2009 national election.

In his rewriting of *Macbeth* Uys recasts the play in a post-colonial South African context. For example, Shakespeare's witches are cast as news reporters, able to predict MacBeki's future because, quite literally, they write it. Subsequently, MacBeki's rise to power is facilitated

through publicity campaigns and deceit. The play begins with Maduba serving as King of the Rainbow Nation, overseeing the transition between apartheid and the new South Africa. Soon after the play's opening MacBeki is promoted to Deputy, causing Lady Manta to plot a coup to secure the throne for her husband. MacBeki carries out the plot peacefully, seizing power through hypnosis by subduing Maduba with an iPod full of Celine Dion songs. Crowning himself King of South Africa, MacBeki sets about limiting the power of other characters such as Lord Ramabanquo by relocating them to lucrative positions in corporations formerly managed by white South Africans. While MacBeki's plan to acquire ultimate power works for a short period, his greed and materialism ultimately lead to his downfall. MacBeki is overthrown when MacZum wins popular support of the people at a convention in Polokwane forest, resulting in a confrontation with MacBeki at Luthuli Castle. MacBeki refuses to abandon the fortress, choosing to oppose MacZum at all costs. Importantly though, unlike Shakespeare's play, Uys's work concludes with the deposed King escaping death by going "back into the collective leadership" (vi). In doing so, Uys's conclusion consciously avoids the violent end his audience anticipates as political opponents, workers, and impoverished citizens storm Luthuli Castle to oust MacBeki.

Uys's avoidance of a violent conclusion in *MacBeki* reconfigures Shakespeare's tragedy as a comedy. Due to the changes Uys makes to Shakespeare's play, MacBeki is not a tragic character. My assessment here is based on Mark Roche's definition of tragedy as "an action in which the hero's greatness leads inexorably to suffering" (49). For Roche, tragedy is the contrast between a hero's greatness and "the negative consequences of this greatness" (49). The tragic flaw that causes a hero's fall is a result of their magnanimous attributes; these can include characteristics such as virtue, loyalty, discipline, or courage (49). MacBeki is not a tragic hero because his flaws are greed, egotism, and hypocrisy. Although he is quite intelligent and well

educated, he ultimately fails because of his self-centredness. It is MacBeki's disregard for those around him that causes his fall, not his intelligence; this prevents Uys's play from being interpreted as a tragedy. However, as theatre reviewer Robyn Sassen posits, Uys's reworking of *Macbeth* into a comedy does not prevent the play's serious political messages concerning corruption, xenophobia, and governmental misinformation from coming through: "[*MacBeki*] is a farce, not a tragedy, even if the underlying layers hit home with profundity more than the rolling heads and blood baths in other interpretations." Sassen's review exemplifies how Uys embeds salient political criticisms beneath the surface of his comedy, highlighting a number of national crises such as HIV/AIDS, political corruption, and instability in the ANC leadership.

Written in 2008, *MacBeki* serves as an exemplary model of second interregnum drama. While a number of theorists outline different temporal models for studying post-apartheid theatre, it is widely accepted by scholars such as Greg Homann and Blumberg that the period immediately following the 1994 elections marks a time when drama celebrating the nation's achievements prevailed. Homann labels this period a "honeymoon" for the nation, a time when "[o]ur achievements were inviolable. Criticism and pessimism were almost taboo" (6). Although there were still large social, racial, and economic divisions during South Africa's initial period of independence, a general exhilaration prevailed that kept many citizens from openly voicing discontentment. Following this transitional period of euphoria, Blumberg argues a second interregnum occurs in South Africa, a period where disenfranchisement is often voiced openly (139). *MacBeki* adheres to this temporal model because, unlike the jubilation of the first interregnum, Uys's play underscores government corruption and the continuing economic exploitation of many working class South Africans. In doing so, the play carries out an attack against a number of political leaders, particularly Mbeki and Zuma.

As Uys poignantly states in *MacBeki*'s introduction, "My fury and frustration had to be filtered through that essential definition of 49% anger and 51% entertainment" (v). In this regard farce helps Uys find a balance between political criticism and humour as the comic form mixes laughter with disdain. As Chris Baldick explains, "[farce is] a kind of comedy that inspires hilarity mixed with panic and cruelty in its audience through an increasingly rapid and improbable series of ludicrous confusions, physical disasters, and sexual innuendos among its stock characters" (82). It is precisely this type of humour that occurs throughout Uys's play as the plot endures increasingly fantastic twists while at the same time MacBeki and Lady Manta fall farther and farther out of favour with characters in the play, and by extension its audience. While comically improbable events occur – such as Maduba being ousted from power through the hypnotic singing of Celine Dion or the sudden relocation of an entire forest in the play's final act – King MacBeki is consistently ridiculed for being a corrupt leader who mimics colonial ideals^x.

Portraying MacBeki as a mimic man, Uys's play contains a number of moments when MacBeki brandishes his European education as proof of his intelligence and ability to lead. In a sequence when MacBeki is plotting with Lady Manta to oust Maduba from power, MacBeki absurdly announces that he has "read enough to understand the need for original thought" and that his genius will help to assure their success (18). This statement is ridiculous within the context of the play because, from its very outset, the audience sees the comic flaw of MacBeki's hubris. MacBeki believes he is superior to other political competitors precisely because he can mimic colonial performances of power. Educated in exile during apartheid, he believes that he is the only suitable choice to govern the new South Africa.

During another pivotal moment in the play MacBeki's monologue reveals the sense of entitlement that grows out of this European education. Announcing that he feels a "poetic moment coming on," MacBeki addresses the audience directly as he composes a poem that describes his experiences studying abroad in Britain (5):

I would sit in Brighton after classes,
 Sussex University was the place.
 Studying UK history and farces,
 Meanwhile dreaming of the day
 I would be only second in line to the rainbow throne.
 It is now all coming true.
 But there are some in my way, like you.
 Comrades always, star or runt,
 Comrades in a collective front (5-6).

Critically, in this example, the play's structure helps to show the inadequacy of MacBeki's education. While MacBeki has read farces at Sussex University, his character is not able to realize he is living one. MacBeki's purportedly advanced knowledge of farce does not guarantee he can see himself as ridiculous. He cannot identify his own life as a farce. As a result, MacBeki is unable to predict, and thus prevent, his own overthrow in the final pages of the play.

Furthermore, this quotation illustrates that MacBeki's knowledge of history is primarily focused on the United Kingdom. When challenged on his absence during apartheid, MacBeki defends himself by stating: "Not all of us could languish in prison, Comrade MacZum. Someone had to be there to answer the phones, [and] collect financial support" (27). MacBeki's inappropriate response is not intended to redeem his role in the anti-apartheid struggle, but

rather, his comment is intended to draw scorn. MacBeki's argument that he needed to be abroad to collect financial support suggests his greed precedes apartheid's end. While many comrades successfully carried on the struggle from abroad, MacBeki's involvement in resisting apartheid is portrayed as liminal, contradicting the historical reality of Mbeki's time spent in exile^{xi}. This is the realm of farce because Uys downplays Mbeki's extensive historical involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle for the sake of criticizing the politician's desire for wealth and his support of capitalist policies once President of South Africa.

Throughout these examples there is something inherently humorous in MacBeki's performance of colonial mimicry. He is a comic character because he inadvertently betrays his own flaws. While he acknowledges and at numerous points embraces his position as a colonial mimic, MacBeki problematically believes he has total control over the process and can manipulate it to his advantage. At one point in the play MacBeki goes so far as to proclaim: "The enemy trusted me. They saw me for what I displayed for their scrutiny. But remember, I was educated in Sussex halls of hallowed wisdom and so I can act like them while thinking like me" (15). Making this assertion, MacBeki puts forward the argument that he can control the process of colonial mimesis. Being able to "act like them while thinking like me," MacBeki claims to be able to perform colonial behaviour at opportune moments, while preventing himself from being controlled by colonial structures of power (15). MacBeki's stance is flawed here because, as Bhabha states, "Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*" (128). And in the case of this play, Bhabha's words hold true. As a mimic man MacBeki repeats, or continues to sustain, the purported superiority of European culture^{xii}. For example, in the quotation previously cited, MacBeki still reveres the hallowed halls of Sussex University – an education that causes ANC rivals such as MacZum to defer to MacBeki's judgement^{xiii} (26).

Although MacBeki imagines he is able to cease privileging colonial culture at any moment and simply think for himself, the decisions he makes throughout the play point to a process of mimicry that is unable to escape imitating colonial authority. MacBeki's bid to gain power, predicated on his European education and mannerisms, relies on a hierarchy that he can never fully surmount. There is always a white European at the top of mimicry's system of power, a colonizer who refuses to extend privilege to the colonized on the basis of their racial difference. This is the meaning behind Bhabha's phrase: "[a]lmost the same but not white" (130). Regardless of how well MacBeki masters European cultural codes and knowledge, such as developing an appreciation for Vivaldi because "it soothes [his]... native intelligence" (18), he can never fully master the system he relies upon. At the same time MacBeki is also unable to escape the system as easily as he claims. Rather than re-presenting colonial authority, a process that would rework or subvert the structured hierarchy upon which colonial mimicry relies, MacBeki must continually praise the superiority of European culture in order to sustain his own privileged position in South Africa. It is due to this system of control that MacBeki's claim to be able to "act like them while thinking like me" is, in the context of the play, impossible (15). Unconsciously, MacBeki betrays himself.

Henri Bergson's *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* helps to explain how self-betrayal produces humour. According to Bergson, "what is essentially laughable is what is done automatically. In a vice, even in a virtue, the comic is that element by which the person unwittingly betrays himself – the involuntary gesture or the unconscious remark. Absentmindedness is always comical" (71). MacBeki is an absentminded character because his remarks and actions constantly betray his flaws. His belief that he can control his mimicry is unsound because, through his thoughts and actions, he continues to consciously and

unconsciously imitate gestures of European culture. Even MacBeki's rejection of critics who call him a "coconut" – a derogatory term implying a non-white South African is a colonial mimic – indicates he is a new type of colonizer (15). MacBeki's retort, "They say 'Coconut'? No. Coconuts fall off a tree. I will become that tree and all who follow me will be rich as golden fruit," establishes him as a colonizer in the metaphor because he envisions himself as the tree producing coconuts, or in the metaphor's terms, additional colonial mimics (15). Throughout such examples MacBeki absentmindedly repeats colonial norms without effectively subverting them.

The humour extending from MacBeki's behaviour, gestures, and speech in Uys's play creates laughter that assails corrupt and hypocritical leaders. The audience laughs at MacBeki because we despise him as a corrupt and self-serving leader whose flaws include ignorance, egotism, and greed. As one reviewer notes, the play "airs the country's dirty laundry with glee" and leaves audiences "laughing at the hypocrisy and chiding the inadequacies" in their leaders (Bosman). Laughter is thus a social corrective, working to highlight and castigate MacBeki's numerous flaws, particularly his failure to live up to the expectations of his voters.

Bergson argues that laughter can serve as a social corrective because it is "a social gesture that singles out and represses a kind of absentmindedness in men and in events" (46). It is in this light that *MacBeki* becomes a tool to ridicule Mbeki's shortfalls. As Uys explains in an interview, "We make it clear who's who in our zoo. I am not deconstructing Shakespeare, but Thabo Mbeki." (*Daggers*). Presenting Mbeki as a colonial mimic in the play, Uys links apathy towards addressing the gap between rich and poor in the nation back to apartheid and power imbalances between the colonizer and the colonized. MacBeki's colonial mimesis is yet another

threat to the nation, extending out of apartheid and potentially ushering in a new era of, in the words of the play, Mbekivellian intrigues (Uys v).

In this light MacBeki can be read as both a critique of Mbeki and of a post-colonial fixation on European cultural superiority. While the audience laughs at MacBeki because he unwittingly betrays himself throughout the play, MacBeki also serves as a double for the English colonial master. In doing so, he also mocks the admiration and esteem associated with European culture and education. MacBeki's ability to pass as a colonial mimic – regardless of how poorly he fulfills the role – illustrates how colonial notions of cultural superiority rely on performance; language, knowledge, and even gestures are codified and repeated to show one's status. Bergson's description of the automaton helps to explain how imitation leads to comedy. As Bergson states:

I find that a certain movement of the head or arm, a movement always the same, seems to return at regular intervals. If I notice it and it succeeds in diverting my attention, if I wait for it to occur and it occurs when I expect it, then involuntarily I laugh. Why? Because I now have before me a machine that works automatically. This is no longer life, it is automatism established in life and imitating it. It belongs to the comic. This is also the reason why gestures, at which we never dreamt of laughing, become laughable when imitated by another individual... To imitate any one is to bring out the element of automatism he has allowed to creep into his person (22).

The automatism – or predictability – of an imitation indicates absentmindedness in the individual being impersonated. In the case of Uys's play, MacBeki produces both corrective laughter but also becomes a clown imitating the colonial master. In doing so, MacBeki exposes the reliance

of colonial authority on performance. As Bhabha explains, “The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (129). MacBeki’s imitation of the colonial master reveals the generic performances of colonial superiority. Performing these gestures – even improperly – still gives MacBeki the advantage he needs to prevent rivals – such as MacZum and Lord Ramabanquo – from blocking his rise to power.

Building on Uys’s remark that his play is “not deconstructing Shakespeare, but Thabo Mbeki,” I posit *MacBeki* should be read, more broadly, as a general critique of the dangers of mimicry and neocolonialism in the South African political system (*Daggers*). Although my paper has thus far focused on MacBeki’s mimicry of European culture and gestures, he also imitates colonial systems of governance and control. This is particularly apparent in MacBeki’s dealings with the three businessmen from Angla, Sosal, and Giltfelds. The three businessmen, beneficiaries from apartheid, originate “from the old structures” of South Africa and possess particular “expertise and talents” they believe will help MacBeki’s new government, namely in corrupt and dishonest dealings (36). The trio represent the wealthy business class from apartheid seeking to retain power after the nation’s transition to a free democracy. Although the men are clearly beneficiaries from apartheid’s injustices, MacBeki establishes a mutual relationship with them. As a result, the corporations continue to hold great economic sway over the post-apartheid nation while, at the same time, their finance corruptly backs MacBeki’s rule.

Representing a class that historically oppressed a majority of labouring black South Africans, Angla, Sosal, and Giltfelds’s inclusion in the post-apartheid nation highlights the continuation of economic and political inequality in the country. These characters represent “the old structures” of apartheid, but have a lot in common with MacBeki’s government (36). Most

obviously, they are in business together. Noting that many of the comrades, especially MacBeki, “have learnt so well from... [the] old structures,” Angla acknowledges that South Africa’s leaders appear to be using similar strategies as the apartheid government to monitor citizens (42). In the play’s context the three men are discussing private business ventures in a bathroom of Luthuli Castle and presume the room continues to be bugged after the transfer of power in 1994. Similar to the days of apartheid when government-sanctioned surveillance was frequently used to uncover subversive activities, the businessmen believe MacBeki is using surveillance for control: “it used to be bugged in the old days. No reason to think they’ve removed all the things that were aimed at them. If you know what I mean” (42). Such accusations from former colonizers indicate MacBeki, in addition to imitating colonial culture, is also modelling himself off of colonial systems of control and dominance.

Viewing apartheid as a system of colonization because of the physical and psychological oppression effected under “direct-rule domination” (Young 57) in a “non-democratic [apartheid] state” (Homann 2), MacBeki’s willingness to profit from systemic inequalities established during apartheid suggests he is simply another colonizing force, unable to fulfill his claim that he can “act like them while thinking like me” (15). MacBeki’s inability to accomplish the split that he envisions between his personal goals and the repetition of colonial oppression is his greatest shortfall. As a result, MacBeki continues to believe he is different from other colonizing powers while, simultaneously, continuing to support many of the institutions and systems of oppression that flourished during apartheid.

MacBeki even convinces the three businessmen to hire Lord Ramabanquo, a political rival, to prevent the Lord from obstructing his progression to the throne. During the negotiations with the company representatives, MacBeki’s bargaining chip is the threat of affirmative action

and financial redistributions after apartheid. MacBeki threatens the men by stating: “You realise that those structures of the past cannot be tolerated any longer. Our people have been marginalised by minority-greed and manipulation” (36). Although one might hope this to be an indication MacBeki has had a change of heart, in reality it is only a ploy. As a result, MacBeki’s actions leave the power and influence of these businesses untouched because he assures them Ramabanquo will be “instrumental in adding noughts to your profit margins” (36). MacBeki’s decision seals Ramabanquo’s fate, condemning the man to a living-death trapped in CEO board meetings for the rest of his life (47). In this manner MacBeki continues the economic oppression established during apartheid, opening only a liminal space for corrupt comrades such as Ramabanquo to enter into the upper levels of business and politics in South Africa. MacBeki exploits the nation’s affirmative action policies to remove political opponents from office instead of using them for their intended purpose: to help rebalance economic disparities caused by apartheid labour restrictions. Disregarding the need to limit divisions between wealthy and poor citizens, MacBeki sustains systems of economic oppression that were a cornerstone of apartheid oppression.

In essence, there is always – as Bhabha asserts – “a partial vision of the colonizer’s presence” (129). While one might be tempted to argue that MacBeki productively opens a space for black South Africans to attain wealth and political power in the new South Africa, the play indicates these opportunities are only available to influential political leaders and those educated abroad. Racial discrimination is largely succeeded by economic and political discrimination, continuing to perpetuate a system that keeps a majority of South Africans, especially non-white citizens, oppressed. Uys’s criticism throughout the play parallels historical condemnation levelled against Mbeki’s aloofness in addressing the needs of the poor (Friedman 120).

MacBeki's co-conspirator, Lady Manta, underscores the couple's intention to exploit economic imbalances by reminding MacBeki that, once he has completed his climb to power, the South African poor will be rewarded with his face on their coins (40). Or, as Lady Manta prefers to explain, "coin" because "few [of the poor] have more than one" (40). The imagery invoked in this example is salient to my discussion of mimicry because minting MacBeki's face on South Africa's currency would place his likeness in a location often reserved for imperial monarchs. By extension, the image of the minted coin also entertains the possibility that MacBeki can reproduce his likeness with a reduced emphasis on racial difference. Because mimicry is sustained through racial difference – "[a]lmost the same, but not white" (Bhabha 130) – MacBeki's portrait on a coin would eschew any identification based on skin colour. Images on coins typically being minted without colour, Lady Manta offers MacBeki a way to distribute his likeness in a fashion identical to any European monarch. At the same time, her disregard for the poor shows no effort to rebalance the economic injustices wrought by apartheid.

Although Uys's introduction states the play's intended target is Mbeki because Uys felt "he was not the right comrade for the job of building on the legacy of Nelson Mandela," the work's characters and events suggest corruption is more deeply embedded than Mbeki's administration itself (v). For example, when planning MacBeki's overthrow in Polokwane forest, MacZum's dialogue indicates opposition forces are just as greedy as the politician they seek to oust:

I see the overweight Politburo of the King arrive in their Hummers and 4x4s,
hooting at the ordinary people in humble wagons and on tired donkeys, making an
entrance like Emperors on a hunt. There are also many boys here too young to

have beards, but who will have joined our battle before they will be men. They are not impressed by the imbalance (67).

In this instance MacZum's comment aptly captures the massive economic divide between the politicians and their supporters. The humble wagons of the ordinary folk serve as a foil for the wealth and opulence of MacBeki's affluent political rivals. Describing the Politburo as arriving "like Emperors on a hunt" one can presume that, even as opponents to MacBeki's corruption, should any of them secure the lucrative throne of South Africa it is unlikely economic conditions will change significantly for the majority of voters who placed these leaders in power. So the common people are left in a bind: either support the corrupt mimicry of MacBeki or fall behind his former Politburo, themselves likened to emperors amongst the working class. Uys's use of the term "Politburo," the upper leadership of a communist party, suggests that socialist and pro-communist South African leaders are equally as corrupt as their capitalist counterparts^{xiv} (67).

MacZum's use of the adjective "overweight" in this quotation is also important because of its association with greed (67); it is a term commonly used by Uys to describe the dishonesty of South Africa's politicians. In a statement taken from another of Uys's works – a website he created for a false political party – the satirist comically critiques the changing physical stature of politicians following South Africa's first free elections. Noting that "corruption is in the width of the seat," Uys jests: "Mandela's cabinet of 1994 was trim, slim, elegant and looked their age of hope and optimism... [whereas the] same people today are so wobbly and bulbous, they can scarcely move without an entourage of underlings there to bounce them along" (*DATE: 25 January*). Producing a similar type of criticism by equating body weight with corruption, the two examples caricature greedy politicians by exaggerating one "particular feature or detail" – their weight – to emphasize their corruption, greed, and apathy (Propp 64). In doing so, the "hope"

Uys associates with the Mandela years on his website (*DATE: 25 January*) is replaced with beardless youths who are “not impressed by the [economic] imbalance” of the subsequent Mbeki years (67).

Using farce because it produces both humour and cruelty, in this instance encouraging the audience to scorn MacBeki, Uys plays an important role in South African politics and social change. The vital date of the play’s debut, just prior to the 2009 national vote, is underscored by a number of South African critics who assert the play is “downright good for democracy” (Thamm) and provides “some sobering perspectives just ahead of the elections” (Bosman). In this manner Uys’s work not only foregrounds the broad problems of corruption and economic abuse in the government, but does so at a watershed moment in South Africa’s political timeline. The play sits at a turning point in the second interregnum, being staged during a period of significant political changes in ANC leadership preceding the 2009 elections. Although the ANC won a clear victory, it was the first electoral retreat for the ANC since the first free elections in South Africa, indicating Uys is not alone in his criticism^{xv}.

Uys’s introduction to the play captures the political ambiguity at the time by recalling the swift political changes that led up to the April 2009 election: “Imagine my surprise when President Mbeki was thus swallowed and replaced. A daily pattern of scanning the news became essential. Who was the President today? The political landscape was changing so quickly that... [the play] was in constant danger of being outdone by events” (vi). Uys’s emphasis on a lack of visible political leadership within South Africa indicates a moment when serious questions needed to be asked about the political future of the ANC. The only two productions of *MacBeki* both occurred in South Africa prior to the April 22nd election: The Little Theatre in Cape Town in February 2009 and The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, in early April 2009 (*Pieter-Dirk Uys*

CV). The fact that Uys has not presented the play since 2009 suggests the timeliness of the production as a political response to the contemptible condition of the nation's government at the close of Mbeki's leadership; it also indicates the temporal limits of satire more generally, as a good satirist "must describe, decry, denounce the here and now" (Hight 17). The impact of the play diminishes outside its political moment, likely causing Uys to abandon it in favour of more recent productions^{xvi}.

Strikingly, Uys's criticism of government corruption in 2008 and 2009 appears to be uncomfortably apt in light of recent occurrences such as the Marikana mine disaster^{xvii} and accusations that Mbeki's successor, Zuma, has embezzled twenty-seven million dollars from the treasury to enhance his home with an airstrip and an underground bunker (Schiller). Attacking economic abuses of power and the sense of entitlement many politicians carried with them on their rise to power, Uys directs laughter towards those who should feel disgraced. As a line from *MacBeki* summarizes, "There's an old saying: the dead will have their revenge. But worse than that is if the living need not seek revenge, because they hold the weapon of bitter shaming laughter" (51). It is precisely this type of shaming laughter that *MacBeki* produces, castigating colonial mimicry while also critiquing those who allow corruption and greed to occur.

Concluding my analysis of *MacBeki*, I argue Uys's solution to colonial mimicry can be located in the structure of the play itself. In addition to ridiculing government corruption and neocolonialism in South Africa, Uys's *MacBeki* is also an important rewriting of Shakespeare in a post-apartheid context. The play occupies a space between Shakespearean drama and African politics. Many scholars note that during colonization Shakespearean texts were used as guides for language "and a measure of humanity itself" (Loomba & Orkin 1). As a result, Shakespeare's works have been, and continue to be, widely distributed throughout the African continent. David

Johnson records that, in the 1930s, Shakespeare is one of the few elements of English high culture to be widely prized by indigenous African populations; beyond Shakespeare, “English high culture has a minority appeal” (223). So, for many colonized Africans, a mastery of Shakespeare indicates a mastery of English language and, by extension, identifies them with European high culture. Comparing this historical reality to Uys’s play, this is precisely what *MacBeki* attacks through its sustained criticism of colonial mimicry.

Uys’s play borrows from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, but does so in ways that make the adaptation distinctly South African. Uys’s *MacBeki* is a hybrid reworking of Shakespeare. Using the term “combination” to describe the inspiration behind his play, Uys highlights a cognizant blending of Shakespeare’s works with his own political criticism: “By July 2008 I had this new play on paper. It seemed a logical progression as a combination of the best of drama as inspired by William Shakespeare and the worst in politics as signalled by Thabo Mbeki” (*MacBeki* v). Uys’s rewriting of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* highlights the cultural superiority some post-colonial Africans attribute to Shakespeare and a British education, exemplified by MacBeki’s rise to power which is facilitated through his recitation of Shakespeare (15). At the same time, *MacBeki* also reclaims Shakespeare’s works from solely being associated with acts of colonial violence, as Shakespeare was historically used “in the classroom as [an] ideological weapon of oppression” during apartheid (Orkin *Possessing*, 191). Orkin’s remark that Shakespeare was chosen by apartheid educators because his texts would “impede rather than facilitate [the] acquisition of [English]” (*Possessing* 191) is reversed during the debut of Uys’s play, which was performed entirely by a cast whose first language was not English (Jordan).

Rather than mimicking European dramatic styles and language throughout his play, or subverting them entirely using ridicule, Uys employs Shakespeare as both a model of good drama and also a tool to deride characters fixated on European culture. In doing so, Uys's work opens up a space that draws on both cultures simultaneously to criticize Mandela, Mbeki, and Zuma's shortfalls. The political critique Uys creates is heightened by its comparison with *Macbeth* because audiences familiar with Shakespeare's play are aware that Uys's work is an adaptation from a tragedy. The salient connections between *Macbeth* and South Africa's political climate ahead of the 2009 national election encourage voters to take action. In this case the hybrid structure of Uys's play creates a new way of viewing South Africa's political circumstances. The hybrid moment is, as Bhabha argues in Jonathan Rutherford's interview, a "'third space' which enables other positions to emerge" (211). This is how I argue Shakespeare's plot and language work in *MacBeki*, opening a new space from which to criticize colonial mimicry's absolute elevation of European culture and knowledge over indigenous forms.

Although *MacBeki* paints a somewhat bleak picture of the contemporary South African nation-state, it concludes in a contradictory manner. Uys's concluding lines – spoken by a character impersonating Mandela – leave the audience with a positive image of the rainbow nation: "Whatever happens, we will all cope in one way or another. Let the Rainbow come back. The terrible hailstorm, at last, is over" (88). While the final passage is unquestionably hopeful, the ending seems hard to accept in light of the repeated examples of failed leadership throughout *MacBeki* – beginning with Maduba's departure, followed by MacBeki's colonial mimicry, and concluded with MacZum's showerhead^{xviii}. Rather, the ending seems to be done ironically, suggesting that perhaps the rainbow cannot return due to the extensive corruption and violence in the nation. This is presumably a final attempt to encourage South Africans to seek political

change at the ballot box. Ending the play in this manner indicates the country's future rests in the hands of its citizens. Speaking out against the "instability of conditions" in the second interregnum, *MacBeki* draws attention to economic and social divisions still needing to be addressed in the nation-state in a manner that is both constructive and entertaining for citizens of the new South Africa (Blumberg 139).

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ⁱ Ashraf Jamal describes South Africa as experiencing a "jaundiced present moment" (19). For Jamal this crisis is caused by a "South African imaginary [that] has by no means weaned itself from the oppressive legacy" of colonialism and its stand-in, apartheid (19). MacBeki's imitation of colonial culture exemplifies one of the ways that colonial and apartheid structures of domination continue to influence the post-apartheid nation; MacBeki models his behaviour and governance off of colonial ideals, continuing to oppress impoverished South Africans.

ⁱⁱ The recent global economic crisis has exacerbated South Africa's financial condition, contributing to the nation's heightened unemployment rate. Steven Friedman's article "An Accidental Advance? South Africa's 2009 Elections" acknowledges that South Africa "has been affected by declines in investment and exports and is experiencing its first recession in seventeen years" (119). For Friedman, this economic shortfall increased anxiety amongst the business community as Zuma's incoming ANC government was seen as a leftist-leaning leadership supported by trade unions such as COSATU, the Congress of South African Trade Unions. The situation that Friedman describes in South Africa also indicates that global investment has had a significant impact on South African politics because the economic downturn has encouraged politicians to consider the needs of the poor. This is most apparent in Friedman's warning that South African politicians need to take the needs of the poor seriously if any recognizable changes in poverty reduction are to occur (120).

ⁱⁱⁱ Anne-Maria Makhulu argues that post-apartheid nation building may actually be continuing inequality, especially economic disparity, long after apartheid's end: "National reconstruction, though a corollary of liberation, has been much complicated by the liberalization of markets in the past decade or so, fostering the conditions for perpetuating rather than eradicating inequality" (553). The opening up of markets to capitalist ventures in particular has heightened the imbalances in the nation, leading to increased urbanization as large numbers of citizens flock to cities. Highlighting the nation's increased reliance on financial institutions after apartheid, Makhulu describes South Africa existing in an era "characterized by phenomena more or less global in scope" (553).

^{iv} Schiller's article reports that at the commission for the Marikana massacre "lawyers for the miners' families produced emails depicting the one-time anti-apartheid hero [Cyril Ramaphosa] as a hard-hearted businessman, decrying the miners' 'criminal conduct' and calling on the government to crack down hard." This is the same

Ramaphosa that Uys satirizes throughout *MacBeki* for corruptly leaving government in favour of financial rewards in the private sector. Uys's criticism was written five years before the massacre. It should also be noted that Ramaphosa is the former leader of the National Union of Mineworkers, a position that one expects to be occupied by a leader sympathetic to miners' needs. Surrounded by such betrayal and violence, it is understandable that many labouring and impoverished South Africans feel abandoned by political leaders and heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle.

^v A Mail & Guardian article titled "Mbeki 'Paid R30m Arms-Deal Bribe'" alleges Mbeki accepted money to ensure a contract for three navy submarines was awarded to MAN Ferrostaal, a German shipbuilder. The newspaper reports Mbeki defended himself from the accusation by claiming he gave two million rand to Zuma and transferred the rest of the sum to the ANC. Zuma's involvement in the scandal broadened the scope of the political crisis as both Mbeki and Zuma were leading members of the ANC in 2008 when accusations were made. Zuma narrowly dodged corruption charges just prior to the 2009 national election, leading the ANC to a victory.

^{vi} Describing the 2009 national election, Friedman asserts that the ANC's victory was described as an overwhelming victory by South African media because the party received more votes than was anticipated (116). Friedman argues the election results actually indicate dissatisfaction amongst ANC supporters as many who did vote appeared to be supporting the party, rather than its leadership: "neither the media commentary nor the ANC's understanding of the election takes into account that, months before the election, many voters said that they would not vote for the ANC but did so in the end. These voters were not expressing allegiance to the current leadership; they were expressing loyalty to the party in spite of the leadership" (117). Friedman's findings suggest a voter population that, in 2009, was growing dissatisfied with ANC political leaders and the numerous scandals that high profile politicians were involved in. Refer to Friedman for a description of Zuma's court cases and voter response (114) as well as Mbeki's inability to address the needs of impoverished South Africans (120).

^{vii} Uys posts his CV online on a personal website. For a full list of his publication history see: <http://pdu.co.za/CV.html>

^{viii} Mbeki and Ramaphosa were in competition for the position of Deputy President prior to South Africa's first free elections. While Mbeki had more diplomatic experience, Ramaphosa's role negotiating with the apartheid regime prior to the 1994 elections meant he was a strong contender to be Mandela's deputy. After the election "Mandela chose Mbeki to be the first deputy president in the Government of National Unity," causing Ramaphosa to quit politics and seek a business position in the private sector (South African History Online).

^{ix} The Porter's direct address to the audience on page twenty three underscores how affirmative action policies have influenced his career in theatre. He laments the changes privately, because there were more job opportunities for him under apartheid, however he still claims to be "[a]n example of the surfeit of transformation in theatre" (23).

^x The portrayal of Mbeki in Uys's play is based on a number of historical events in the politician's life. Uys gives particular emphasis on Mbeki's education in exile at Sussex University from December 1962 until May 1965 completing a bachelor's degree in economics and a subsequent Masters degree in the same field between 1965 and 1968 (South African History Online). Additionally, characteristics such as Mbeki's love of Shakespeare and music are accurate (South African History Online). Uys's play diverges from a realistic portrayal of Mbeki and the circumstances surrounding his withdrawal from leadership by exaggerating negative attributes and incorporating characters and events from *Macbeth*. For example, while critics have accused Mbeki of supporting capitalist ventures in South Africa by enacting "pro-capitalist policies" and "endear[ing]... himself to global capitalism," his blind greed and disregard for suffering Africans is presumably overblown (Van Wyk). Both during and after his presidency Mbeki has dedicated himself to resolving conflicts throughout Africa in countries such as Rwanda, Ivory Coast, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (South African History Online). This being the case, Mbeki's compassion for Africans suffering from conflict does not necessarily extend to impoverished South Africans. The former President has been faulted by many critics for failing to address the needs and concerns of poor South Africans during his presidency (Friedman 120) and favouring global capitalist ventures (Van Wyk). Lastly, events such as the usurpation of Maduba's throne and the peasantry storming Luthuli Castle in Uys's play were, in reality, political transitions that occurred through ANC party negotiations and an electoral loss at Polokwane.

^{xi} Uys's criticism of Mbeki's years spent in exile eschews some of the key victories the politician helped secure abroad for the anti-apartheid movement. These victories include giving a speech at the UN in support of preserving the lives of the Rivonia Treason Trialists, leading numerous Sussex University Student Union marches and petitions, and also operating as an "ambassador to the steady flow of delegates from elite sectors of white South Africa" (South African History Online).

^{xii} Thamm notes that Uys's play "gives literal expression to Karl Marx's famous maxim that 'history repeats itself as tragedy and then as farce.'" *MacBeki* epitomizes this transformation as events of grave importance and political gravity from South Africa's past are reworked into comedy.

^{xiii} In this instance MacZum defers judgement to MacBeki concerning Maduba's health. Having found a shirt covered in what he believed was blood, MacZum declares Maduba dead. Correcting MacZum, MacBeki points out that it is actually beetroot juice. This segment of the play also emphasizes the educational differences between Zuma and Mbeki, particularly when MacZum states: "I am humbled by your intellect and guile. You have a university degree and, according to the media, I have only Standard Three" (26). It is the educational difference between the two men that convinces MacZum to listen to MacBeki, preventing MacZum from probing further into the mysterious disappearance of Maduba.

^{xiv} The same kind of sentiment appears when the three businessmen, Sosal, Angla, and Giltfelds convince Ramabanquo to leave politics and join the business sector. Angla describes Ramabanquo as a "socialist fatally compromised by the trappings of wealth and affluence," suggesting that even those opposed to commerce and economic exploitation of the workers are finding it difficult to resist corruption (45).

^{xv} Friedman argues the formation of Congress of the People – COPE – played a significant role in dividing the ANC's traditional voter base (114). Acknowledging that Zuma's narrow avoidance of corruption charges prior to the election strained relations between the ANC and judges (118), and presumably many South Africans following the legal case, Friedman describes the electoral defeat as "the first sign that the ruling party was losing touch with some voters" (116).

^{xvi} Uys's CV describes *MacBeki* as "his first new play since 2003" and documents Uys's other creative works since *MacBeki*. Recent creative contributions include a cookbook, a fictional diary-journal for his character Evita, a fictional autobiography for Bambi Kellermann, the creation of his own cabaret theatre in a railway station, and the anticipated release of his newest play, *The Merry Wives of Zuma*.

^{xvii} Schiller describes the deaths of thirty four striking miners at the Lonmin platinum mine as "a massacre that rocked the nation." It is within such a climate of instability and class unrest in South Africa that Schiller reports "some of the 'young lions' of the struggle against apartheid have become the 'fat cats' of a new, small black elite."

^{xviii} Zuma, accused of raping an HIV positive woman in 2005, has often been lampooned in cartoons and media by depicting him with a shower nozzle extending from his head. Uys uses this prop to remind his readers of the serious accusation of rape levelled against Zuma, the ANC's leader at the time of the play's debut. David Smith explains the circumstances surrounding the rape case and the pertinence of the shower nozzle in a review of *MacBeki*: "Nor is there any mercy for Zuma. Three years ago, while standing trial for the rape of an HIV-positive woman, the politician, who did not wear a condom, said the sex was consensual and he then took a shower to minimise his chances of contracting the virus." For Roxanne Bain, the rape trial epitomizes the dire location of women in post-apartheid South Africa because Zuma's accuser "suffered terrible stigmatisation on the part of Zuma and his supporters outside the court as well as by the Judge" (55). Although Zuma was eventually cleared of all charges many satirists, Uys included, gesture to this court case as an example of Zuma's questionable ability to lead South Africa in the right direction after Mbeki.