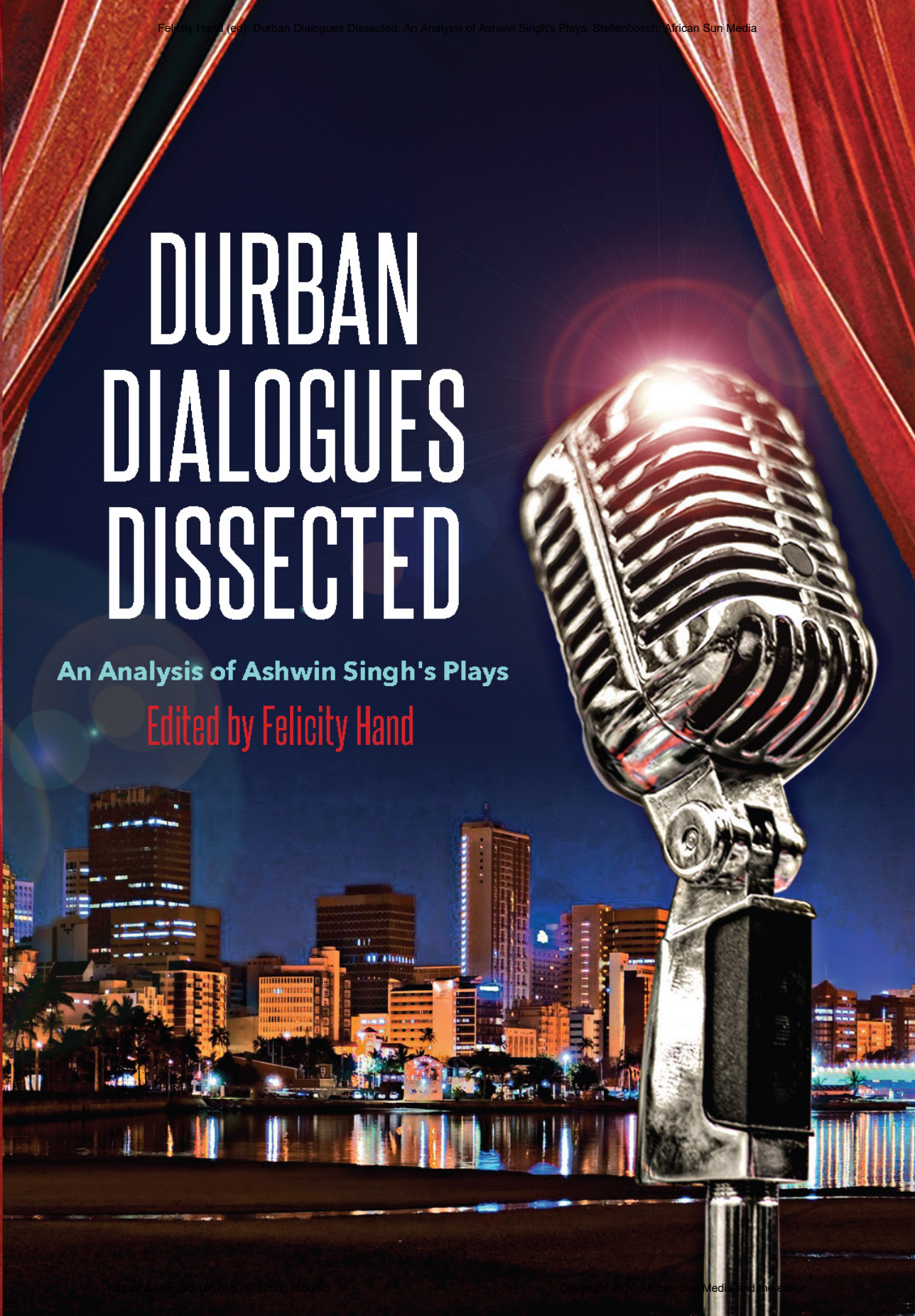
DURBAN DIALOGUES DISSECTED

An Analysis of Ashwin Singh's Plays

Edited by Felicity Hand



https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357650/05

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout the text for quotations from Ashwin Singh's plays.

H	*To House*
SS	*Spice 'n' Stuff*
Sh	*Shooting*
RL	*Reoca Light*
D	*Duped*
BBB	*Beyond the Big Bangs*
Sw	*Swing*
IG	*Into the Grey*

Note on Terminology

We have chosen not to unify the authors' use of the term *black* so readers are encouraged to think beyond straightforward definitions. Each author uses the term in his or her own way and spells it with either a capital B or a small letter b. Likewise, authors have opted for capital or lower case letters for other ethnicities, such as white or coloured, in accordance with their specific purpose.

https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357650/05

From Rockets to Robots: The Function of Science Fiction Icons in Ashwin Singh's *Duped*

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Introduction[1]

In 2018 the National Arts Festival in Makhanda, South Africa, featured a performance written and directed by Johann Smith titled *Gods of My Country*. The production, presented by Theatrerocket, satirically responded to political scandals and national crises affecting South Africans. In one salient moment, a character makes a pitch to a panel of entertainment industry executives for the next blockbuster by describing the logic and structure of apartheid as a possible plotline. Satire occurs when the executives reject the proposal on the basis that they do not want to produce a work of science fiction, or SF. For the panel, South Africa's recent past sounds so surreal that it must be a work of fiction. The incongruity of this moment required audience members to reconcile the slippage between a genre associated with alien landscapes and strange encounters to a known historical reality. In doing so the 2018 performance in Makhanda encouraged its audience to view the nation and its history from a different angle, considering how apartheid might be classified as SF by someone unfamiliar with the nation's past.

Gods of My Country is by no means the first South African performance to foreground links between apartheid and concepts associated with SF. This tradition can be traced back at least as early as the nineteen-seventies with Credo Mutwa's *uNosilimela* (1973) and Pieter-Dirk Uys's *God's Forgotten* (1975). However, recent references to SF indicate this genre continues to support critical responses to national crises. As the example from *Gods of My Country* illustrates, SF can encourage people to view the nation and its history in new ways. Approaching this joke from another angle, such humour also highlights the dangers of discounting SF as imaginative, and therefore of no interest to a national body confronting serious challenges beyond independence. Paraphrasing John Rider's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, James H. Thrall's statement that it "is something of a truism that colonial themes have permeated science fiction from its earliest years" suggests otherwise (2009). The intersection between imperialism and SF may serve as an important

1 I wish to thank the Acadia University Research Fund for generously supporting this project

https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357650/05

site for intervention, a space where South African playwrights can challenge apartheid discourses in order to rethink post-independence nationalism.

Science Fiction and Ashwin Singh's *Duped*

Similar to *Gods of My Country*, Ashwin Singh's *Duped* (2011) mixes satire and SF to explore apartheid's traumatic legacy. In doing so, Singh's play epitomises Ericka Hoagland and Reema Sarwal's assertion that SF is often "a forward looking project that is frequently rooted in anxieties about the present (as well as the past)" (2010:9). In *Duped*, these anxieties manifest through characters' relationships to technology. Rather than making life easier, technology frequently alienates characters from one another or causes them to confront hard realities around social and political divisions in Durban. Although technology is ubiquitous in the play, Singh uses three prominent SF icons to explore national crises in the post-apartheid period: a spaceship, an android, and computer chip technology capable of mind control. By situating his audience in the future through SF icons, Singh maps how apartheid power structures continue to shape people's personal relationships, use of space, and national unity. Importantly, Singh uses SF icons to present current anxieties about the nation's future as part of a linear arc originating in the state's traumatic past. *Duped* concludes by warning its audience that the distrust and self-interest dividing South Africans can be exploited to establish neo-imperial systems of control.

Discussing the role of icons in SF, Gwyneth Jones posits they "are the signs which announce the genre, which warn the reader that this is a different world; and at the same time constitute that difference" (2003:163). Icons should be recognisable and overt in their signalling of a different society with its own set of codes. For Jones, the construction of an alternate world is the defining attribute of the genre, a "feature that unites every kind of sf" (2003:163). Icons are not only crucial in foregrounding an alternate reality, their alterity adheres to specific conventions. Jones explains this by tracing the etymology of the term icon back to Byzantine art where "ikons" are stylised portrayals of saints and Jesus Christ (2003:163). Merging this concept with SF conventions, she outlines the three guiding principles of an icon: they signify something "other-worldly" or "supernatural," they are "artistically conventional," and yet they also "clearly belong to the public domain" (2003:163). So, while icons tend to possess compulsory attributes, they are also widely adapted and modified by writers so that "it is probably fruitless to trace any of the icons of sf back to a single, original author" (Jones, 2003:163). For Jones, the unique modifications that each author makes produce a "variant iconography (a differently designed robot, an idiosyncratic form of faster-than-light drive), to match the writer's particular intention" (2003:163-4). In this sense, studying the

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adjustments Singh makes to his SF icons can help us better understand the social and political critiques he undertakes in *Duped*.

Singh's play is set in Durban but is temporally situated in a near-future South Africa. The plot revolves around the experiences of Captain Sandra Snyman and Lieutenant Sizwe Khumalo, commanding officers on South Africa's new airship. The vessel, the Airship Equity, hovers invisibly above Durban and is on a mission to uncover a terrorist plot connected to an international conference. With only a few days to solve the case, the crew is working with limited knowledge to locate an Islamic terrorist cell planning to attack visiting delegates. Contributing to this crisis, a junior politician named Julio Masimola joins the mission for the sake of political advancement. While he is not authorised to handle sensitive information, Masimola frequently reveals he has more information than his commanding officers. As this is the first deployment of the airship, the crew also has its American creator, Dr. David Johnson, aboard to ensure the mission goes smoothly. While all characters appear to work towards the same goal, that of maintaining social equilibrium in Durban, secrecy and self-interest fragment the crew. *Duped* concludes by revealing the terrorist plot was a ruse orchestrated by Johnson. His plan to steal the airship is ruined by the arrival of American forces. *Duped* ends with Johnson being arrested and South Africa agreeing to help America in a global war on terrorism in exchange for the return of their airship.

While *Duped* is one of Singh's older plays, it is also one of his lesser-known creations. In recent correspondence he attributes the lack of critical interest in the work to its "mixed-genre style and the science fiction elements" it contains (2019). Although *Durban Dialogues, Indian Voice* identifies its inception as 2011, its synthesis occurred earlier (2013:11). A preliminary version appeared at the 2005 Performing Arts Network of Southern Africa's (PANSA) Playreading Festival. Directed by Megan Furniss, the staged reading was held at the University of Cape Town and Singh performed one of the parts (Singh, 2019). *Duped* was the only finalist from KwaZulu-Natal at this event, a detail which, as Adrienne Sichel's review laments, "says a lot about the ravages of commercialisation on serious theatre in this region" (2005:10). The only complete staging of *Duped* occurred at the Durban University of Technology's Digifest arts festival on 11 November 2017. The production blended performance with multimedia elements, "integrating theatre, film, and virtual reality [in] attempts to push boundaries," as the production's Director, Debbie Lutge, explains (2017). This protracted history means the play reflects upon a range of national crises. However, its brief performance run also means limited scholarship exists on the play.

In terms of timing, its genesis in the early years of the new millennium is significant because it coincides with a major shift in South African theatre. As Greg Homann explains, by "the turn of the millennium there had been a change; theatre-makers were finally confronting contemporary issues rather than rehashing past preoccupations" (2009:11). As citizens grew increasingly

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sceptical about the achievements related to the nation's transition from apartheid to a democratic state, theatre responded by exploring unresolved divisions and raising serious questions about social and political conditions. Similar to Homann, Marcia Blumberg posits South African theatre after apartheid's dissolution went through two phases: "an initial period of euphoria, patience, and hope; then, the past decade, which has been a 'second interregnum' in South African politics" (2009). For Blumberg, theatre beyond the year 2000 reflects "the instability of conditions" and epitomises a "desperation to break silences" (2009). Singh's handling of topics such as American neo-imperialism, scepticism about national projects of reconciliation, and the dangers corruption poses to economic and geographical redistribution suggest the play is part of the new wave of theatre Blumberg describes erupting a decade after the advent of democracy.

The timing of the play also coincides with a major shift in contemporary SF. As Eric D. Smith explains, the period following the year 2000 witnessed "the phenomenal efflorescence of narratives written within a speculative framework that radically reconfigure the conceptual machinery of SF and utopia to address the exigencies of postcoloniality and globalization" (2012:5). *Duped*, like Lauren Beukes' award-winning cyberpunk novel *Zoo City* (2010) and Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009), is part of the movement of artists using SF to explore postcolonial conditions. Notably, the production of postcolonial SF, a subgenre Andy Sawyer defines as exploring "the nature of Otherness and Futurity, and what happens when these ideas are expressed by those who were the *subjects* of earlier versions [of SF]," was also occurring outside of South Africa (2010:2). Smith locates Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan's *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction* (2004) as a catalyst in this new tradition (2012:5). Singh's satire constitutes the kind of reconfiguration that Smith describes because the tools of domination have been stolen from imperial powers, via Johnson's theft of airship technology from America (D 111), and given to victims of domination, specifically those who suffered under apartheid. In doing so, *Duped* uses SF icons to negotiate past trauma and discuss fears people have towards policing, technology, and the dangers South Africa faces in global trade systems.

The Spaceship

Jones's article articulates the difference between rockets and spaceships so as to identify the unique roles these icons inhabit in conventional SF. In the former instance, she notes the rocket's phallic resemblance, its original use as a weapon on medieval Chinese battlefields, and its function as a "symbol of energy and escape" (2003:164). In contrast to the rocket's phallic shape and direct association with weaponry, the spaceship is more often associated with voyage. "Designed not for experimental parabolas but for exploration," Jones explains, "the spaceship

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(whether it carries colonists or invaders, or hides monsters in its secret depths) is an alternative, contained world in itself" (2003:164). Jones's assertion that the spaceship serves as a limited world reflects one of the three roles the airship occupies in *Duped*. The spaceship itself serves as a microcosm of the state, a vessel which confronts crises similar to those affecting the nation. However, as a mode of transportation, the spaceship also operates as a tool for exploration. Lastly, *Duped* builds on this second attribute to emphasise how narratives of voyage and surveillance parallel imperial processes of control, especially through spatial relationships and visual power structures. This gives rise to the ship's third configuration, as a weapon.

The Spaceship as a Microcosm of the State

The airship's name and the diversity of its crew are allusions to rainbow nationalism. Snyman, a woman of mixed-race ethnicity, works closely with Khumalo, a Zulu, Bobby, an android programmed to sound like a Indian South African, and Johnson, an American who migrated to South Africa. As a microcosm of the state, the crew's diversity reflects the unity and inclusivity conveyed through terminology like Rainbow Nation, a symbol used by leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu to redefine South African nationalism beyond apartheid. As Meg Samuelson explains, "The transition [from apartheid to a democracy] heralded a shift away from a nation characterised by division to one united under the heavy glow of the 'rainbow'" (2007:2). Naming the vessel Airship Equity, Singh begins *Duped* in a manner that places this national metaphor under scrutiny.

Advancing this mode of critique, characters frequently connect the airship project with the country's new spirit. Khumalo, for instance, argues his return to South Africa is proof he "still believe[s] in the dream … a new nation to inspire Africa" (D 78). While Snyman is sceptical of Khumalo's intentions at this point, she accepts his explanation that serving on the airship can help "make a difference" in the new state (D 77). In Khumalo's view the airship, much like the rainbow metaphor, is a model to inspire people. Khumalo reveals this idealism when convincing Snyman not to resign because "too many people are walking away" (D 115). The logic of this argument indicates he sees the ship as a form of technopolitical project, a device which, to employ Paul Edwards and Gabrielle Hecht's definition, entangles "technology with narratives of national and social identity" and which has "concrete political and material outcomes" (2010). In this sense, the Airship Equity embodies the dream of a modern and unified South Africa. Khumalo's view is similarly held by his uncle, the Deputy President, who emphasises the overlap between technology and the nation's spirit when describing the vessel as "South Africa's soul" (D 113). In this regard the ship functions as an allegory as the crises the vessel faces parallel those of the state.

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As a national allegory, the array of problems the airship faces reveal the Rainbow Nation is not working. Devarakshanam Betty Govinden discusses Singh's critique of rainbow nationalism throughout *Durban Dialogues, Indian Voice* by commenting that the collection of plays "contribute to the deepening of our democracy in that they prompt a critique of many emerging issues in the present time as we ask: *whither the rainbow nation?*" (2013:13). The critique Govinden discusses extends to Singh's spaceship icon. The airship, like South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, is a complex mechanism that its officers are still learning to operate. As there are no instruction manuals to follow in either case, errors are inevitable. Some mistakes aboard the airship are mundane and embarrassing, such as Khumalo accidentally activating the intercom while discussing his disaffection at the "orgy of greed" that has hijacked politicians like Masimola (D 78). However, others such as Khumalo's misplaced trust in Luke Jedison, his half-brother, are serious; Jedison's attempt to steal the airship reveals family bonds can be broken by citizens disenfranchised with national conditions (D 106).

As an enclosed environment, the spaceship is an excellent device to foreground personal divisions. For Jones, "[w]hatever shape the vessel takes it will be the locus for a drama of human relationships, an examination of the ideas of conflict and dependence" (2003:165). As such, the spaceship signifies the opposite of "the rocket's promise of escape from our origins" (Jones, 2003:165). In *Duped*, the spaceship both serves as a self-contained entity, yet it is also vulnerable to national crises. For example, labour protests on Durban's streets spread to the ship when an illegal strike from the Dumisani Domestic Training Union breaks out (D 99). In another instance, Khumalo wonders if an unexpected blackout is load shedding (D 109). The limited space of the vessel amplifies crises because, as a smaller version of the state which is operating on a limited timeline, disruptions are felt immediately.

For instance, the Dumisani Domestic Training Union's illegal strike severely affects its functionality, necessitating a swift resolution. Moreover, this conflict reveals how past trauma and racial divisions influence current labour debates. For Snyman, the labourers' expectations are too high, bargaining for accommodations such as "tea breaks, cappuccino breaks, smoke breaks, Sangoma breaks" as well as "Royal wedding leave" (D 99). Ruminating on the situation in her captain's personal log, she attributes the breakdown in negotiations to racial prejudices carrying over from apartheid. In her view, the union sees her as a "mixed race madam" who is "not black so I don't know struggle" (D 99). Such views, Snyman believes, eschew the exploitation that her own family historically experienced, her monologue noting that her mother was a domestic labourer but "didn't work in the excellent conditions that they do" (D 99). This conflict illustrates how apartheid racial categories continue to compromise projects meant to foster unity.

The prevalence of racism and class divisions aboard the vessel confirm Blumberg's assertion that, while South Africa has one of the world's most progressive

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constitutions prohibiting "discrimination with respect to race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation, it cannot decree changes in the mindsets of individuals and the dynamics of communities" (2009). Such conflicts play out at personal levels, as in the showdown between Snyman and the Dumisani Domestic Training Union (D 99), Snyman's fight against gender-based abuse from Masimola and Khumalo (D 74, 77), but also competing visions for the redistribution of resources after apartheid, a conflict that divides Khumalo and Masimola. In the latter case, Masimola, a parody of Julius Malema, seeks to accrue power through projects intended to rebalance political leadership after apartheid.[2] Such conflicts confirm the Airship Equity is not, in fact, an equitable space at all.

The mobility of the airship has the added advantage of serving to critique the sense of entitlement some hold in the new dispensation. While Masimola is the opportunist fighting to politically control the ship, others such as Johnson and Jedison are liberals-turned-cynics who plot to steal it for their own ends. Johnson plans to sell the ship to China, whereas Jedison plans to sell it to Russia. In this case both view the airship in a manner consistent with Jones's description of a rocket, a vessel that offers the "promise of escape" (2003:165). What is interesting about Singh's use of a spaceship to critique the liberals' cynicism is that, for Johnson, once escape has been effected, the isolation he envisions reflects conventional attributes of a spaceship. Jones's description of the spaceship "forging its lonely way through a vast inimical ocean" (2003:165) parallels Johnson's dream of the "blue waters of an uncomplicated island," a description lacking any reference to national identity (D 110). His rejection of rainbow nationalism connects with SF conventions in that he dreams of a closed space reflective of a conventional spaceship, rather than the dynamic and hybrid space of the airship. Johnson defends his decision to sell the ship on the basis that he is "servicing the demands of the market," a view predicated upon a hierarchy in which capitalist ventures supersede national needs (D 110). Johnson's plan is the ultimate capitulation of South African nationalism to capitalism and self-interest.

The interplay between the politics of decolonisation and South Africa's post-apartheid entrance into global trade is played out through the allegory of ship as nation. This tension seems to confirm Eric Smith's assertion that, "[b]

2 Malema was the leader of the African National Congress Youth League when *Duped* debuted in 2011. Singh's parody exaggerates accusations levelled against Malema at this time. Specifically, Malema caused conflict amongst the African National Congress Tripartite Alliance by proposing the nationalisation of South Africa's mines. The ensuing debate saw increasing tensions between Malema and other organisations in the alliance, including the South African Communist Party. Martin Plaut records this conflict led the South African Communist Party to attack "Malema and his associates for being corrupt politicians whose favours had been bought in exchange for an opulent lifestyle" (2010). In Singh's play Masimola lives a lavish lifestyle, drinking "imported sherry at a five star Ballito hotel" prior to a political rally and travelling around Durban in his personal airship (D 76). Throughout *Duped* Masimola comes across as greedy, selfish, and fixated on political promotion.

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orn in the imperialist collision of cultural identities and taking as its formal and thematic substance the spatial dislocations that inhere in the imperial situation, science fiction would seem the ideal instrument with which to engage critically the transition from the postcolonial condition to that of globalization" (2012:4). For Singh, the challenges of decolonisation in South Africa dovetail with threats posed by globalisation and neo-imperialism, instigated by the opening up of South Africa's economy to both legitimate, and illegal, global trade. In *Duped*, the slippage between sanctioned trade and illicit trade is nuanced by the fact that Russia and China are visiting Durban for the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) conference, an arena where trade deals are struck, yet both delegations plan to illegally purchase the spaceship after it is stolen. Connecting this back to the ship as a microcosm of the nation, *Duped* suggests disenfranchised liberals, men with political power and technological expertise, may try to profit by selling state resources to global trade partners who exploit political instability for their own benefit.

The Spaceship as a Device of Exploration

While personal conflicts fracture the equilibrium onboard the Airship Equity, reflecting divisions in the nation overall, the relationship between the vessel and Durban's landscape is equally unsettling. The spaceship connects back to colonial processes of exploration through its arrival and subsequent role policing the state. The airship, like its predecessor the sailing ship, sits at a distance, surveying Durban from a position that affords it safety and an expansive view. Its separation from Durban means the vessel's crew must, like early European explorers landing on Africa's shores, shuttle between the ship and a distant landscape. In *Duped* the smaller ships are described as "supershuttles" and serve the same purpose as their rowboat predecessors, carried aboard sailing ships to grant access to territories without ports (D 88). As there is no landing pad for the airship in Durban, the supershuttles are the only means to access Durban. In this fashion Singh's spaceship icon resembles the technologies and practices of European imperialism.

Scholars of postcolonial SF have widely documented the similarity between spaceships and imperialism. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. notes, the "dominant sf nations are precisely those that attempted to expand beyond their borders in imperialist projects: Britain, France, Germany, Soviet Russia, Japan, and the US" (2003). Working from this premise, he argues SF icons such as super-weapons, spaceships, and robots, "represent the power tools of imperial subjects, the transformations of the objects of domination, and the ambiguities of subjects who find themselves with split affinities" (2003). Spaceships, as vehicles of exploration, frequently produce situations reminiscent of colonial contact with other cultures. Hopkinson exemplifies the violence inherent in this convention by arguing SF memes such as exploring new territories and colonising inhabitants are "not a

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thrilling adventure story" for the formerly-colonised, "it's non-fiction, and we are on the wrong side of the strange-looking ship that appears out of nowhere" (2004:7). Singh's decision to place South Africans at the helm of the airship reworks this meme.

One of the ways *Duped* modifies such narratives is through the personal log entries that Snyman performs in acts two and three. This feature is part of the play's "parody on the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* serials," yet they also identify specific crises dividing Durbanites (Meersman, 2005). In addition to recounting Snyman's dispute with the Dumisani Domestic Training Union, her monologues note inadequate "service delivery, racial tension, [and] economic uncertainty" (D 83). Snyman records the changes she sees in Durban, a space she is returning to after an absence. In this sense, she is both an outsider separated from Durban by time, but also an insider as she grew up in the city. By configuring Snyman as an explorer, *Duped* enacts the kind of subversion that Hopkinson suggests postcolonial SF can instigate by taking "the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizee, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it" (2004:9). Snyman performs the explorer's role in conventional SF, but as a South African she also exposes how certain spaces remain divided, closed-off, or invisible to a majority of citizens.

Snyman is able to see new perspectives via the surveillance equipment on the airship. Although she is familiar with Durban's topography, she is unfamiliar with the protests erupting in certain areas of the city. This reality is underscored by her confusion over whether she sees "tourist Durban or the other parts" on the display screen during routine monitoring (D 89). Noting the other parts "look just as chaotic as the pictures they're showing on TV of the Joburg CBD," Snyman's comments stress political frustration is spreading (D 89). Moreover, her confusion over which region of the city she is viewing reveals how this frustration remains hidden from many citizens. Snyman's exploration of the city via surveillance equipment reveals the tourist sector "looking beautiful as usual" (D 90). This utopian description contrasts the other regions, which are omitted from everyday news reports as "TV cameras don't go to the outskirts of Durban" (D 89). In doing so, *Duped* uses narratives of exploration to map the tensions in unseen areas of the nation, as opposed to the foreign topography of a distant planet. Such views lead Snyman to wonder "how much longer before the streets are littered with violent protests and calls for regime change[?]," a didactic warning for politicians who fail to address the divisions she witnesses on the monitors (D 83).

Singh's foray into the SF genre avoids creating a simple binary between explorer and the people under assessment by identifying both parties as members of the same nation. Surveillance allows Snyman to document the most pressing crises and note the dangers they pose to the health of the nation overall. However, her distanced perspective also betrays ignorance. From her vantage point the city's problems appear at a macro level, as angry crowds rather than individuals, and

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national crises rather than local challenges. This contrasts the local views that characters such as Bobby have. Ultimately, Snyman's attempt to reintegrate into Durban can not be accomplished from the bridge of an airship. Her decision to visit Durban's beaches and meet her Uncle Charlie at the play's conclusion suggests integration occurs through individual connections, not technopolitical projects like the airship (D 116).

The Spaceship as a Weapon

Jones posits spaceship icons situated in a "foreseeable future reflect the military origins of real-world space flight" (2003: 106). The militarisation of the spaceship icon is a logical extension of its associations with aircraft, but also boats. In *Duped*, the spaceship's role policing Durban exposes the danger that apartheid-era power structures continue to shape people's behaviours. In Shantal Singh's estimation, *Duped* broaches "the multi-faceted themes of 'Big Brother is watching' as South Africa enters the realms of international politics; the threats of internal security and challenges of maintaining a productive workforce;" among other crises (2013: 18). Surveillance, in particular, raises the spectre of ongoing apartheid violence because panopticism was one of the central ways the former police state attempted to maintain control.

Edwards and Hecht's description of apartheid as a "technopolitical project" that was "erected not only on technologies of surveillance and control but also on technologies of transportation that would allow vast numbers of blacks to commute to work in white areas" identifies a number of characteristics that apartheid projects have in common with the Airship Equity (2010). As a mobile tool of policing, airship technology shuttles politicians like Masimola around, allowing free movement at a time when the country's streets are overrun with protests (D 73). Putting aside this secondary role, its primary function is to carry out surveillance and enforce the law. Notably, while it boasts an array of "awesome firepower," the airship does not deploy this weaponry in the play, even when threatened by Masimola (D 74). Instead, panopticism is its primary means of control. This power structure is reminiscent of Michel Foucault's description of the panopticon, a prison structure organised around surveillance.

Panopticism, as Foucault explains, "induce[s] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1995: 201). Deconstructing the structure of the prison, Foucault describes visibility as "a trap" that causes inmates to police their own behavior, "caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers" (1995: 200-1). This is achieved through a tower that houses a guard who can see into a ring of cells circling the guard station. As Foucault summarises, "in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything

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without ever being seen" (1995: 202). It is the potential of being watched that causes prisoners to regulate their behaviour. This strategy was adopted by apartheid authorities via systems such as the passbook, which Edwards and Hecht note "began as a modernist attempt at clean, panoptic surveillance [but] ended as the daily routine of an unexceptional police state" (2010). Evoking this history through the spaceship icon, *Duped* proposes the legacy of such violence undermines national unity.

Snyman's view of Durban goes beyond witnessing people's frustration with government failures, it exposes the continuation of racial divisions entrenched during apartheid. This critique arises through her monitoring of Rainbow Beach, a space Snyman sees operating along apartheid racial divisions. Her description of South African Indians "acting as a buffer between whites and blacks" emphasises the continuing violence of apartheid's system of racial segregation (D 90). This event exposes a population that continues to uphold divisions long after racist laws have been dissolved. Although there is no tower, the continued divisions suggest the mundane spaces of Durban have been transformed by the apartheid state apparatus. People assume they are being watched and, subsequently, regulate their behaviour in the sense that Foucault describes. In addition to exposing the challenge of changing mindsets, Snyman's panoptic gaze foregrounds the danger that the new police force will adopt apartheid-era tactics.

For instance, the police force still uses panopticism to exercise control. The crew's primary mission to find a terrorist group operating in Durban revolves around surveillance, a cornerstone of apartheid state control. Although citizens are not aware of the airship, they are correct in assuming they are being watched. In this way the spaceship critiques policing practices in the new state, suggesting they run the risk of maintaining apartheid-era divisions. Furthermore, like Edwards and Hecht's description of the passbook system (2010), *Duped* explores the risk that panoptic control will devolve into police brutality. Examples such as Johannesburg's officials requesting supershuttles to assist with riot control reveals that, when surveillance fails, the state may use the vessel's armaments against their own people (D 88). Johnson ultimately rejects the request on the basis that the current mission is of greater importance, but he also blames politicians for the unrest. Johnson argues it is the country's "politicians [who have] messed up with your lack of service delivery" and must face the ensuing protests (D 88). Such moments reveal how technology risks being co-opted to empower a minority elite, much like apartheid technopolitical projects. It is salient, then, that Snyman describes the airship as "a weapon of mass destruction," a phrase which echoes former President George W. Bush's terminology to justify the second Gulf War (D 102). Her vocabulary reveals two threats the spaceship poses to citizens: it can harm people via weapons and surveillance, but it is also an object America can use to justify intervening in national affairs, a danger confirmed when America seizes the vessel in the conclusion.

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The Android

Bobby, an android, is the second SF icon to appear in *Duped*. Although its symbolism is less developed than the airship, Bobby similarly tests the limits of the Rainbow Nation. While the vessel surveys Durban from afar, Bobby is an undercover agent sleuthing out terrorists at street-level. However, the two icons are similar in terms of their clandestine nature policing the state. The term robot, Jones notes, is derived "from the Czech *robota*," or worker (2003: 166). As a tool of police enforcement, Bobby fulfills the role of unrelenting labourer. Johnson begins the description of his creation with the adjective "hard working" (D 81). However, the other adjectives he uses shift Bobby from a symbol of labour to a stereotype of South African Indians: "super smart, takes any orders, he's a brilliant chef, can sell you anything, and he has a photographic memory" (D 81). Bobby's speech further emphasises this connection as the stage directions note he talks with a "*stereotypical South African Indian accent*" (D 81). Through this icon Singh explores crises of alterity and otherness in the Rainbow Nation.

Androids often foreground issues of alterity because, as Jones explains, although they "may resemble humans, they remain defined and devalued by their artificiality" (2003: 167). Relating this back to Bobby, the motivation behind his performance of stereotypes is a result of his programming (D 91). While Bobby's co-creator wanted him "to have the capacity to aspire to be human," Johnson blocked this feature for the mission (D 91). Instead, Johnson programs Bobby to perform racist stereotypes because, as he reasons, "everyone loves a good Indian stereotype" (D 81). Bobby, in this instance, bridges concepts related to SF and postcolonialism through his otherness. As Hoagland and Sarwal explain, "the 'Other' is one of the most well-known markers that science fiction and postcolonial literature share in common" (2010: 10). In *Duped*, Bobby is a non-human Other performing stereotypical characteristics of a racialized Other in an attempt to integrate into the broader society. Bobby's stereotypes are a form of mimicry, a postcolonial concept discussed by Homi K. Bhabha.

For Bhabha, mimicry occurs when a colonised subject imitates the mannerisms of the coloniser. While the colonised seeks to perfect the coloniser's behaviours and language so as to gain inclusion within their position of power, the colonised remains outside as they are "*almost the same but not quite*" (Emphasis in original,1994: 127). The colonised subject's racial difference forms the basis of their exclusion. As Bhabha explains, the colonial subject is "*Almost the same but not white*" (Emphasis in original,1994: 128). Rather than performing the language and mannerisms of the coloniser in order to gain inclusion within a colonial European cultural hierarchy, as Bhabha's theory discusses, Bobby instead seeks to pass as human by internalising and regurgitating Indian South African stereotypes. Bobby's exclusion from society is based on his non-human status, but he is also marginalised while emulating South African Indianness. In this fashion the SF

https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357650/05

icon foregrounds the othering of South African Indians in the post-apartheid social landscape.

Johnson's decision to program Bobby to perform South African Indianness reflects apartheid violence because, like the passbook system, the scientist arbitrarily assigns Bobby an ethnic identity. Such acts reiterate Bobby's non-human status by denying him the choice of how to self identify. Masimola parallels Johnson's refusal to treat Bobby as a human in the play's conclusion when, after becoming the commanding officer of the Airship Equity project, he boasts: "Once I had an Indian boss … now I have an Indian slave" (D 114). Such views adhere to SF conventions that present the android as a "futuristic underclass," but they also reveal how specific ethnic identities experience ongoing marginalisation beyond apartheid (Jones, 2003: 167). Masimola's comment reveals he revels in bossing Bobby around because of his South African Indianness, not because he is an android. In this example Bobby has exchanged one position of alterity for another. However, the identity Johnson forces Bobby to adopt leads him to realise the pervasiveness of racism in society, eventually causing him to take a stand against it. When Masimola calls Bobby a "coolie," the android confronts him (D 98). So, while Bobby begins as a stereotype of South African Indianness, his experiences interacting with this community during patrols suggest he has grown sensitive to the racism levelled against its members.

Bobby's experiences critique racism by implying an android, an entity created outside apartheid, can still be othered by its legacy of racial division. In this sense, the centrality of South African Indianness to Bobby's character shows ethnicity remains a primary marker of identity in Durban. Writing about identity and skin colour in Greig Coetzee's 2009 play *Happy Natives*, Anton Kruger notes it features performers playing a range of identities, but "the fact that the black actor plays all the black roles (Mto, Xaba, Prudence, policeman) while the white actor plays the white roles (Kenneth, Chenaye, Jimmy), perhaps shows that skin colour is still very much tied to perceptions of identity" (2010: 46). The android body opens up new ways to think about identity. Although Bobby is versatile at shifting identities, he emulates groups marginalised by colonial violence. And yet this may be a safer option than not possessing an ethnic identity. Returning to Snyman's discovery of racial segregation on Rainbow Beach, Bobby's non-human status means he would not have a space on Durban's beaches if he does not adopt an ethnic identity.

In contrast to Bobby, *Duped* also contains a cyborg. Its body differs from the android because it is a fusion of biological material and mechanical devices. Put succinctly, the cyborg is a human which is "entirely dependent on machine parts inserted into their bodies" (Jones, 2003: 167). While Bobby is an imitation of humanity, a being that mimics human behaviour in an attempt at inclusion, both as human and South African, the cyborg is a sinister reinterpretation of unity and the connection between biology and technology. Originally an American soldier in Iraq, the man's body was damaged in combat and only survived through the fusing

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of his body with biological material from a deceased Iraqi soldier. In many ways this scenario reflects concerns contained in Manjula Padmanabhan's postcolonial play *Harvest*. Hoagland and Sarwal contend *Harvest* brings "into sharp relief how First World comfort and health is quite literally realised at the expense of the Third World" (2010: 12). It is in a similar way that the Iraqi soldier's body is dismembered in order to revive the American soldier, a clear act of biological imperialism.

The Reconciliatory Chip

Jones's chapter does not discuss computer chip icons. However, in many ways it resembles her description of virtual environments. A central convention of virtual worlds is the process through which humans enter an alternate reality, usually by fusing themselves with technology. For example, Jones points out that some "authors have found a modem-jack inserted into a hole in the back of the skull sufficient" (2003: 166). Like this example, Singh's reconciliatory chip works by placing it on a person's forehead. Shantal Singh's foreword to *Durban Dialogues, Indian Voice* describes the chip as "the standout genius in the play" because it awakens memories of the nation's TRC and juxtaposes "the healing of our nation following the atrocities of apartheid" with "the positioning of our democracy in present day South Africa" (2013: 18). The computer chip is a powerful icon to conclude *Duped* because, while the other SF icons expose the trauma inflicted by apartheid, the chip critiques a post-apartheid project intended to address past violence.

Singh's decision to use a computer chip to explore issues around reconciliation is well considered. This is because computer chips are icons immediately identifiable as repositories for information, particularly in terms of digital memory such as RAM. Conversely, in *Duped* the computer does not store information, rather it shapes a person's memory. This means the device can be used as a weapon. As Johnson explains, once the chip is in place "Any thoughts of exposing" corrupt politicians "are suppressed" (D 110). Configuring the icon in this way, Singh's computer chip raises questions around the agency of victims in national processes of reconciliation. Johnson, via the reconciliation chip, controls the conditions of forgiveness. This aspect is made explicit when he states: "It's time to forgive me," a comment which emphasises the control he has over the witnesses to his crimes (D 111). While this violence plays out in the limited space of the Airship Equity, Singh broadens the critique by having Johnson link the reconciliatory chip directly to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, or TRC.

Johnson's claim that South Africa's "scientists were hoping to develop a reconciliatory chip for the TRC hearings, but they didn't quite have the skills to get it right" broadens the critique to a national level (D 110). This statement

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reiterates his belief that South Africa is technologically inferior to America. But it also cynically implies organisers of this event may have wished to coerce individuals into accepting reconciliation on the basis of advancing national unity. In this sense, the chip critiques some of the contentious aspects of the TRC, such as how some victims were denied legal recourse against perpetrators as a result of the Amnesty Committee. Annelies Verdoolaege records the "granting of amnesty was controversial, as it acquitted perpetrators [who met specific criteria] of any further legal or civil prosecution" (2005: 185). This historical reality bears semblance to Johnson's plan to use reconciliation as a means to avoid justice. By manipulating victims into forgiving his crimes he curtails amnesty proceedings as victims no longer wish to prosecute him.

Singh's use of the chip icon to critique reconciliatory processes also exposes the complex compromises necessary for South African nationalism to succeed. After Johnson's attempt at using the chip on Khumalo and Snyman, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) arrests him. However, the device falls into Khumalo's hands, leading to a debate about whether forcing people to reconcile is an appropriate compromise for nationalism to prevail. The play concludes with Masimola in charge of the airship project. When Snyman attempts to resign because Masimola is collaborating with the CIA, he attacks her. In the scuffle Masimola is badly injured. Khumalo uses the reconciliation chip on Masimola to prevent Snyman from being charged with assault. Although Snyman dislikes this resolution because "[i]t's so deceptive," Khumalo uses the chip so that good citizens can remain in positions of power (D 73). This strategy suggests neither feel that Snyman will see a fair trial if her case were to go to court. And yet, it also leaves Snyman confined to a position of silence. Only she and Khumalo know she is a victim of Masimola's aggression, and neither of them can speak of this as it would lead to her arrest. In this regard Snyman, the victim in the situation, retains the memory of violence while the aggressor is freed through the amnesia created by the reconciliatory chip. This conflict epitomises how this icon raises questions about memory and unity at a time when theatre was exploring crises around the transition from apartheid to a democracy.

Conclusion

Duped uses SF icons to foreground national crises in the early years of the millennium. In doing so, the play remains sceptical about technopolitical projects and the relationship between the state and its citizens. This scepticism reflects the role technology traditionally occupied during colonisation. As Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. notes, there "can be no doubt that without constantly accelerating technological innovation imperialism could not have had the force that it did" (2003). Singh's three icons reflect such tensions as they alternate between tools that usher in

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stability and weapons that perpetuate imperial violence. The link between technology and imperialism is clearly developed in the conclusion when America, a neo-imperial power, seizes control of the Airship Equity. Such actions constitute neo-imperialism because they combine "the practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory," Edward Said's definition of imperialism, with digital technologies to assert control (1993:9). Further conveying this link, the title reflects how characters have been deceived into manufacturing equipment which ultimately serves American interests. The ending reveals America has spied on Snyman in the same way that she has monitored South Africans, a reality which reconfigures technology from solution to problem. While Shantal Singh contends that *Duped* ends by alluding "to the possibility that the chief officers can contemplate some semblance of normality in ordinary pursuits," this vision excludes the technology people have relied on throughout the play (2013:18). In addition to Snyman abandoning the ship for Durban's beaches, she and Khumalo blame Masimola's concussion on Bobby's programming and do not mention the computer chip in order to keep their secret. Although Bobby's fate remains unknown, this conclusion reveals the ongoing distrust people have towards new technology and marks a continuation of his othering. These themes remain topical to South African theatre and, through examples such as Laine Butler's *Gaslight*, a 2018 Standard Bank Ovation award winner, reveal South Africans' continuing interest in SF and the ways that this genre intersects with lived reality.

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