Book Section:
Levick, C. orcid.org/0000-0002-6310-753X (2021) Against 'Glocalisation': Issues of Intercultural Performance in Two Gents' Production Kupenga Kwa Hamlet (The Madness of Hamlet). In: Minier, M. and Kahn, L., (eds.) Hamlet Translations : Prisms of Cultural Encounters across the Globe. Legenda (Modern Humanities Research Association) , Cambridge . ISBN 9781781889237

Against 'Glocalisation': Issues of Intercultural Performance in Two Gents' Production *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* (*The Madness of Hamlet*)

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At the beginning of his book *Imagining Shakespeare*, Stephen Orgel advocates the scholarly necessity of taking the so-called 'bad quartos' into consideration for a fuller theatrical understanding of Elizabethan and Shakespearean stage history. In his support for the 'bad' texts, Orgel mentions the contested topics of authority and canonicity as main obstacles in the way of a more in-depth evaluation of the performative capacities of the 'bad quartos':

> There are those notorious 'bad' quartos that seem to derive directly from performing texts, or even conceivably (like the first quarto of *Hamlet*) from a recollection of performance itself, and whose evidence, therefore, in this respect, is not bad, but excellent. If we were less concerned with the authority of texts, and more with the nature of the plays, these would be good quartos. (Orgel 2003, p. 4)

This chapter attempts to discuss issues of authority and canonicity within the framework of intercultural and postcolonial performance praxis. By discussing the main problems of the binary opposition good/bad, connected to the first quarto (Q1 from now on) of *Hamlet* and by closely analysing the performance text and context of Two Gents' production of *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* (*The Madness of Hamlet*) based on Q1, I intend to address the political shortcomings and theoretical trappings of the term 'glocalisation' and propose a reading that encapsulates both the aesthetic variety of intercultural performance and the political underpinnings of postcolonial theatre. In the context of this volume about translation and adaptation in theatrical performance, Two Gents' performance of *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* will be interrogated as an example of intercultural adaptation that gives scope for a wider discussion about metanarratives, cosmopolitanism and globalisation.

In his essay '*Border Culture*: The Multicultural Paradigm', (Gómez-Peña 1990) Guillermo Gómez-Peña advocates the recognition of immigrant and border culture as an intrinsic part of the multicultural performance paradigm in the United States and calls for more widespread debates on the definitions of the terms we use in our theoretical readings of multicultural and intercultural

performances. In response to this theoretical context, I wish to start this discussion by observing some of the main issues that are often applied to the fabric of intercultural, cross-cultural or glocal performance practices. In his exploration of cultural hybridity, Patrice Pavis proposes an intercultural performance model that addresses, in his opinion, the problems of transmission and hybridisation taking place between the source culture and the target culture. The hourglass model assumes a filter-like quality, the performance piece (I am using performance as an example in this case, but the model could be used with any type of cultural exchange) travelling from the source culture at the top towards the target culture at the bottom, through a large variety of filters (including artistic modelling, cultural modelling, reception, readability, choice of theatrical form, etc.) that change, adapt and ultimately translate the piece from one culture to another. It is not difficult to immediately question the one-way cultural flow of Pavis's model, as the multiplicity of filters do not account for any 'blockage, collisions and retroactions' (Lo and Gilbert 2002, p. 43). Although Pavis allows for the hourglass to be turned upside down, this movement would only encourage another process of translation and it would also assume that there is complete equality between the two exchanging cultures. In view of a framework that would encourage dialogue and negotiation, Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo propose a new model in which the target culture is fluidly positioned at the tension between source cultures, the intercultural exchange being characterised by both gain and loss. The complementing centrifugal and centripetal forces bring together intercultural and postcolonial methodologies and practices in a fluid movement that encourages continuous exchange (both positive and negative) between source and target cultures.

Lo and Gilbert's model is based on the elastic spaces between cultures and encourage elements of hybridity, both organic and intentional, and its methodological basis is secured by intercultural practice informed by postcolonial theories. It might appear that at this stage in the development of politically engaged theatre, postcolonial theories are becoming obsolete, however, the theatrical exchanges that I am interested in require a theoretical vocabulary that moves away from the aesthetically constant multicultural theory and towards a theory that combines visual aesthetics with sociopolitical and

historical dynamics. Rather than Pavis's vertical fall this model encourages a horizontal cultural fluidity between source cultures with the target culture following the elastic tensions between them.

In *The Politics of Cultural Practice*, Rustom Bharucha already questions the simplicity and inherent generalisation of Pavis's model, arguing for a view of interculturalism anchored in the political and social realities that define the cultural exchange. Thus, the intercultural and the global should not be synonymous: while interculturalism 'embraces all possibilities of dissent', the global has 'homogenizing, commoditizing and anti-democratic tendencies' (Bharucha 2000, p. 25) that, according to Bharucha, are not just accepted, but actively promoted in the West. Our readings of performance must be more politically engaged and should move away from what Bharucha calls 'breezy utopian universalism', identified in Richard Schechner's reading of interculturalism 'as a primordial state that has been arbitrarily disrupted by the ruptures of the nation-state' (Bharucha 2000, p. 31). While Bharucha does not offer a template for intercultural performance, Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert's model usefully distills his theoretical musings on the distinction between the intercultural, the multicultural and the global by introducing cosmopolitics at the basis of intercultural performative engagements.

This model can also be used as a more valid alternative to the new term of 'glocalisation', introduced in the vocabulary of theatre and performance criticism by Jean Graham-Jones in her editorial comment to a special edition of the *Theatre Journal* in 2005. In her article, Graham-Jones traces the initial uses of the term, concluding that, after being borrowed from Japanese business, 'glocalisation' has been used by cultural theorists 'to underscore the relationship between the local and the global as neither oppositional nor exclusive but rather interactive and interpenetrative' (Graham-Jones 2005, p. viii). This view is reinforced by sociologist George Ritzer who argues that glocalisation is 'the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas' (Ritzer 2003, p. 193). Ritzer relates the term to the sociological binary something/nothing, observing that globalization encourages the creation of

'nothing'[1] while glocalisation encourages the formation of 'something'[2]. However, based on Ritzer's further discussion of the term, it transpires that glocalisation is organically connected to globalisation and, given the fact that it is actually a combination of globalisation and localisation, it is also a term that provides the uncomfortable juxtaposition of nothing and something. Dan Rebellato critiques the term by observing that 'combining two bad ideas is not obviously a great way of creating one good one' (Rebellato 2009, p. 59). He notes that there is a false opposition between the global and the local and proposes cosmopolitanism as globalization's 'other'. While Bharucha does not introduce cosmopolitanism as a term to satisfy the theoretical needs of scholars exploring intercultural performances, he highlights the essential difference between multiculturalism, which 'is increasingly identified with the official cultural policies of western democracies' (Bharucha 2000, p. 33), and interculturalism. Intercultural practitioners 'have a greater flexibility in exploring – and subverting – different modes of citizenship across different national contexts, through subjectivities that are less mediated by the agencies of the state' (Bharucha 2000, p. 33). Perhaps indeed the most appropriate term that would engage with the tension between interculturalism and globalism is the idea of cosmopolitics.

However, although I believe that cosmopolitanism is a much better alternative to glocalisation, I am unsure about the almost utopian character of the term. According to Rebellato, cosmopolitanism 'is a belief that all human beings, regardless of their differences, are members of a single community and all worthy of equal moral regard' (Rebellato 2009, p. 60). While a laudable point of view, it seems to me that it avoids recognising the difficult political issues that underpin intercultural performances. This reminds me of Bharucha's unease at reading interculturalism from an exclusively privileged, Western point of view, and his conclusion that brings us back to Gómez-Peña's border performances: 'my closest compatriots in intercultural performance should be border artists, who, unlike their liberal counterparts who assume the crossing of borders as

[1] The 'nothing' in Ritzer's argument is a social form that is centrally conceived and controlled, and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantial content.
[2] The 'something' in Ritzer's argument is a social form indigenously conceived and controlled, and comparatively rich in distinctive substantive content.

their birthright, never fail to take the border for granted.' (Bharucha 2000, p. 30) Thus, in order to move away from the cosmopolitan ideal but also from glocalisation, my reading of Two Gents' production of *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* will focus on the fluid movement of intercultural exchange proposed by Rustom Bharucha and reinforced by Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert.

Before discussing the performance and its context, it is important to observe some of the intricate critical issues that define the scholarly debates about the text of the Q1 of *Hamlet* and identify the relationship between the 'bad' text and the Two Gents' production. The analysis of the source text chosen by Two Gents' Theatre Company for their adaptation of *Hamlet* is relevant in the context of the intercultural exchange. The position occupied by Q1 in the Shakespearean canon ensures the fluidity and flexibility required by the intercultural model proposed by Gilbert and Lo and discussed earlier. It is useful at this point to see how the text of Q1 obtained its liminal position that made it attractive for a postcolonial translation and a transposition to nineteenth century Zimbabwe.

While it seems that the good/bad binary in connection to the first quartos of Shakespeare's plays has been around for a very long time, it is actually a rather new development in Shakespeare scholarship. The Q1 of *Hamlet*, for example, was discovered in 1823 by Sir Henry Bunbury in his manor home, Barton Hall, and it was initially considered to be an early variant of the canonical 1623 text published in the Folio. What sealed its fate as a 'bad' quarto was Alfred Pollard's thesis of 1909 entitled *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos: A Study in the Bibliography of Shakespeare's Plays 1594-1685*. In it, Pollard divides all quartos in two classes: good and bad, 'ignoring the large and multiple differences among the texts that are comprised within each of his categories' (Werstine 1990, p. 65). Pollard's binarism has been appropriated by twentieth century Shakespeare scholars and developed into lengthy discussions about authenticity and the canon. Some, following Pollard's argument, believe that Q1 of *Hamlet* 'represents the play in an intermediate stage between the lost *Hamlet* [of Kyd?] and the fully Shakespearian *Hamlet* of the Folio and the second and subsequent quartos' (Pollard 1909, p. 74). The idea of Q1 as an intermediate version is juxtaposed to that of it being based on the memorial reconstruction of the text by, most

probably, an actor or actors who performed in the early productions. Howard Jenkins, editor of the Arden edition, accepts the status of Q1 as memorial reconstruction, noting that 'the usefulness of Q1 is that it throws light on the theatrical and textual history of the play' (Jenkins 1996, p. 36). Giorgio Melchiori reinforces this argument by stating that among Shakespeare scholars 'there is general if not unanimous agreement that the First Quarto is a reported or memorially reconstructed text of an early acting version of *Hamlet*' (Melchiori 1992, p. 201). William Davis, in his essay 'Now, Gods, Stand up for Bastards: The 1603 "Good Quarto" *Hamlet*', proposes an alternative theory that further complicates the scholarly discussion of the quartos. He analyses the texts of the first and second quartos and the folio of *Hamlet* based on differences and similarities connected to biblical patterns, like the complex chiasmus.[3] Davis believes that this analysis is 'capable of revealing the presence of either corruption or revision' across the three versions of the text, and concludes that his method shows 'a systematic process of textual manipulation at play' (Davis 2006, p. 62). Authorial revision becomes the main theory that springs from this analysis, close textual reading revealing 'the presence of calculated and deliberate modifications' (Davis 2006, p. 62) and a clear textual development from the first quarto to the folio. Only if we accept that Q1 is a first or early version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the analysis of the textual development from Q1 to Q2 and the Folio begins to make sense as it shows poetic and character development identifiable in both Q2 and the Folio texts.

This theory clashes with that of memorial reconstruction, especially as far as the legitimacy of the text is concerned. After Pollard divided the quartos into good and bad ones, a general suspicion enveloped the bad quartos, a perception that they were illegitimate variants, memorial reconstructions by minor actors, and did not have the importance and authority of the Folio text. According to Davis however, Q1 of *Hamlet* resembles more a first draft of the play rather than one reconstructed from memory. The fact that the first quarto seems to be Shakespeare's early attempt at *Hamlet* offers the quarto the legitimacy of an early version against the illegitimacy of a pirated copy.

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[3] Davis describes *chiasmus* as a grammatical figure by which the order of words in one of the two parallel clauses is inverted in the other.

More recent scholarly discussions on the topic highlighted the importance of the distinction between print and performance. In her seminal book *Young Shakespeare's Young Hamlet: Print, Piracy, and Performance*, Terri Bourus convincingly argues that the position of Q1 as resulting from memorial reconstruction and thus being inherently 'bad', is due to cultural circumstances rather than textual or historical proof. She notes that 'decades before the 1603 edition was reintroduced to the world, reading the canonical *Hamlet* had become a foundational experience, affecting not only our view of that play, but our view of ourselves, and our sense of what literature should be.' (Bourus 2014, Loc.1414) The battle of the texts will continue for a long time but it is important to note Steven Urkowitz's conclusion about this scholarly debate: he considers that the surviving texts of Shakespeare's plays should be studied for what they are, without the aura of their author as the foundation of the literary canon (Urkowitz 1986).

For the purpose of this chapter, a useful element of the good/bad quarto debate is connected to the idea of performance and the close and often repeated connection between the text of the first quarto and its heightened performativity. A number of scholars note that Q1 of *Hamlet* is more suited to the stage for a variety of reasons: it is shorter than the folio text, and thus fits easier within the theatrical requirements of time; it is fast paced, following the popular structure of a revenge tragedy, and it is less prone to mediation through long soliloquies and introspection. These views are sustained by Graham Holderness and Bryan Loughrey as editors of *Shakespearean Originals: First Editions*, published in 1992. They observe that the text of the first quarto is more likely to be a performance text given its theatrical characteristics mentioned above. The views presented by the editors in the introduction to the volume are contested however by Janette Dillon in her essay 'Is There a Performance in this Text?' who argues that the connection between the text and the stage is used as an 'authenticity factor' especially in performance oriented criticism (Dillon 1994, p. 75). Dillon dissects Holderness and Loughery's argument connected to a higher level of performativity in the Q1 text, by observing that the majority of the theatrical performances based on Q1 reverted to some of the text and plot in either Q2 or the Folio, precisely because of the sometimes illogical plot and text

of Q1. This arguably goes against the theory that the Q1 text is more suitable to the stage.

Dillon's observation is supported by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor's performance history of Q1 in the introduction to the third series of the Arden Shakespeare *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*. There are not many performances based on Q1 since its discovery in 1823 and most of them made changes to the text rather that following it closely. From William Poel's production in 1881 to London's Red Shift Theatre's production in 1999, the performances based on Q1 of *Hamlet* have received mixed reviews. While Poel's production in the 19th century was found lacking by the critics, who deplored the language as 'barbarously mutilated' by 'botchers and pirates', the Red Shift production in 1999 prompted kinder reviews, Lyn Gardner of *The Guardian* noting that the text has a vital energy and "what you are getting is theatre, not literature" (*The Guardian* 13 September 1999). Looking at the performance history of the Q1 text of *Hamlet*, what becomes clear is that the text is frequently considered to be of a lower quality than the Folio text, with less intellectual impact on the audience. Gunnar Sjögren, the dramaturg and translator of Q1 for the Swedish production of the text in 1968 noted that this early text of *Hamlet* is 'not a high brow *Hamlet*, but it does very well for an unsophisticated audience. That is, I believe, what it was meant for. In this swift and thrilling version, some of the poetry has been lost, but it still touched with Shakespeare's magic' (Sjögren 1979, p. 44). The idea of Q1 being a text edited for a less sophisticated audience is supported by other scholars who consider it to have been a touring version of the accepted, Folio text, more suitable for audiences in the countryside and the limitations of touring practicalities. The association between Q1 and popular theatre, or,–as Lyn Gardner describes it–theatre and not literature, adds a new layer to the discussion of the text within the framework of authenticity and literary authorship.

In the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's plays were published explained with notes and with their texts corrected and updated for a new audience that was more interested in reading the plays rather than seeing them on stage. This led to a public remodelling of Shakespeare as a poet and man of letters rather than a playwright. The new

Protestant taste for moral stories required a cleansing of Shakespeare's language and image and a refashioning that becomes clear in Alexander Pope's 'Preface to Edition of Shakespeare': 'we shall hereby extenuate many faults which are his, and clear him from the imputation of many which are not' (Pope 1903, p. 47). As Jacky Bratton notices in her book *New Readings in Theatre History*, Pope constructed an image of Shakespeare 'as a natural, untutored genius, and all the material that did not fit the mould was attributed to the trashy, vulgar or unsophisticated interpolations of the actors' (Bratton 2003, p. 86). By the second half of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare became deeply de-popularised, existing in the lofty circles of the British bourgeoisie. Douglas Lanier observes that Shakespeare 'was being repositioned as a British bourgeois culture hero, brought in line with canons of domestic respectability, regarded as the genius of a newly empowered middle class and of British national culture' (Lanier 2002, p. 30). This literary genius could not have written a play like the Q1 text of *Hamlet*. The text must have originated from those trashy and vulgar actors who dared to pirate it based on their memories of earlier productions. Shakespeare himself must have written the Folio text from the very beginning and the actors corrupted it.

Although this is not the space to discuss any further the good/bad binary, what emerges from this debate is useful in discussing the position of Q1 within the framework of Shakespeare's texts, its connection to the stage and its significance when chosen as a main text for a translation of *Hamlet* into a foreign language and a subsequent performance. There is an obvious uncertainty connected to this text, not only because of the lack of clear evidence for any of the above theories but also because of its liminal position between legitimacy and illegitimacy, between literature and the stage. This fluidity can be disconcerting but, at the same time, it can provide a feeling of liberation from the constraints of tradition and the canon. The Q1 text of *Hamlet* allows itself to be played with, manipulated, deconstructed, without clashing with the preconceptions or expectations of the audience. This is a text that is open to appropriation from others in various new forms and in various new translations, without the pressure of meta-narratives like the canon. It can create performances that although familiar, manage to de-familiarise *Hamlet* for new

audiences. This relative freedom can be extremely attractive, encouraging creative adaptations. What is even more important in connection to the performance of the text by the Two Gents Theatre Company is the fluidity the text allows for within intercultural exchanges. Q1 is perfectly suited for the intercultural model proposed by Gilbert and Lo, one that focuses on the permeability of the cultural space of interaction and the fluidity of the cultural space between source and target cultures.

I saw *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* (*The Madness of Hamlet*) in November 2010 at the Oval House Theatre in London. Since intercultural theatre stages a meeting of cultures in both physical and imaginative realms, it is important to look closer at the space where the play was performed. The Oval House Theatre is in London's district of Kennington, in the South-East of the city. The space has a very close relationship with the local communities, largely from immigrant backgrounds. The Oval House provides a wide variety of community based projects and the performances they usually invite to the main house have a very strong political and social agenda. On their website, the theatre administrators reinforce their community centred policy, also noting the activist character of the performances presented on the main stage. Very similar in political status to the Tricycle Theatre in London, the Oval House engages with various forms of political activism, encouraging performances that fit the framework of intercultural practice. In this case, and in any case really, space is neither neutral nor homogeneous, it is constructed in the nexus of power as a real trope that addresses the cultural other.

As a cultural space, The Oval House is inscribed by both the source cultures and the target culture of the intercultural exchange. It is a space that facilitates the meeting between Western (in this case English) culture and its multiple 'others'. However, given the fact that it is mainly supported by the Arts Council of England and the Lottery Fund, the Oval House Theatre becomes a dialogic space that combines the authority of the central culture with the artistic vibrancy of the marginal others. Mel Jennings, ACE Arts Consultant, notes on the theatre's website that the Oval House 'develops excluded communities and links south London to key national and international networks'. The theatre also

provides a space for pioneering fringe theatre groups, mainly representing immigrant communities of African descent.

Within this framework, *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* was produced by a theatre company, Two Gents Productions, founded by two Zimbabwean actors who came to England hoping to develop their theatrical practice within a cultural framework that allows for creative autonomy. Tonderai Munyevu and Denton Chikura live and work in London, but, as Chikura says, they 'live in between Harare and London, feeling differently, but equally at home in either city' (Woods 2013, p. 16). This in-betweenness is theoretically reinforced by Homi Bhabha in his reading of the intercultural: 'the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space' (Bhabha 1994, p. 38) Although the two performers seem to share a positive feeling about their displacement, the political underpinnings of their lived experience have a considerable impact on the reading of their performances. The rather uneasy relationship between 'home' and 'away' is suggested by Pheng Cheah in his discussion of Homi Bhabha's idea of hybridity: 'It is unclear how many migrants feel that they belong to a world. Nor has it been ascertained whether this purported feeling of belonging to a world is analytically distinguishable from long-distance, absentee national feeling.' (Cheah 1998, 37) These issues inevitably collide in the company's performances, creating the framework for their intercultural exchanges. Two Gents' performance practice largely fits within the politics of relocation as discussed in recent postmodern cultural theory. Bharucha argues that '[i]t is assumed in such narratives that the formerly colonized peoples will seek other futures in former colonies where they will be in a position to challenge the civilizational premises of their erstwhile rulers.' (Bharucha 2000, p. 6) It is also worth mentioning that the director of the company is Arne Pohlmeier, a German theatre practitioner who infuses the Zimbabwean notes of the Two Gents performances with elements of German contemporary theatrical practice. In an interview with Michael Walling after the Globe to Globe festival at the Globe theatre in London in 2012, Pohlmeier talked about the important issue of appropriation in relation to the performances of the company: 'I think the process of taking ownership is what is crucial in staging Shakespeare, and working across cultures serves to highlight that. I think that a lot of 'established'

productions of Shakespeare that I see in London do not make that process of taking ownership visible' (Walling 2013, p. 89).

But what does 'taking ownership' mean within the context of intercultural performance? And how is it made visible? In Pohlmeier's opinion, performing Shakespeare in a different language, one that is unfamiliar to Western audiences, helps renew our connection to the Bard's works much more than an established production in English or in another well-known European language. The issue I have with Pohlmeier's suggestion is not only that it stems from a position that is clearly European and privileged, but also that it reinforces the narrative of almost exclusive Western gain from intercultural performance. While the intercultural exchange does not happen, usually, between equal cultures because the idea of cultural value is often inscribed by Western cultural tropes, the 'othering' of Shakespeare in this case feeds into the rather overworked theoretical construction of the appropriation of the dominant culture by the margin, in order to enrich *our*, Western perspective of the Bard's works. As Bharucha aptly put it: 'we have to get beyond the 'use' of other cultures for the assumed rejuvenation of our inner states of desiccation; instead, we need to develop a more heightened awareness of the ecology of cultures, whereby we do not enrich ourselves at the expense of others.' (Bharucha 2000, p. 159) The intercultural connection needs to work both ways in order to create a public space for meaningful cultural exchange. While the Two Gents' performance of Q1 of *Hamlet* can certainly be critiqued through the lens of postcolonial practice, if we move beyond Pohlmeier's ideas of cultural enrichment, *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* addresses an essential element of the intercultural exchange: language. Language and translation become crucial elements in the process of destabilizing the master narratives that the company director himself seems to reinforce. In the large majority of their performances, the two performers take full ownership of the text they perform by translating it themselves. Thus, language becomes an extremely important aspect of Two Gents' productions of Shakespeare plays. While at times they only translate parts of the text into Shona, the clash of that text with the fragments performed in English ensures the vibrancy of the performance. Shona, the principal language of Zimbabwe, is used by the two actors sporadically, intertwined with English, the two languages achieving the

same status in performance. This fluidity between the two languages of performance is discussed by Bharucha as an intrinsic element of intercultural translation. He argues that Pavis's model moves in straight lines, the text neatly making its way from the source culture towards the target culture. What this model does not account for are the interruptions, the breakages, the slippages of language and culture that are at the basis of any intercultural exchange: 'the translation process is constantly being interrupted, reversed and questioned from multiple angles, so that the determinism of source and target cultures are subjected relentlessly to reflective and collective scrutiny'. (Bharucha 2000, p. 79) It is also important at this stage to highlight another ideological issue with language and translation in the intercultural context. Critiquing Walter Benjamin's observation that a language of translation should 'let itself go, so that it gives voice to the intention of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself' (Benjamin 1969, p. 79), Talal Asad problematizes the idea of 'unequal languages'. He argues that 'the breaking down and reshaping of one's own language depends on the willingness of the translator's language to subject itself to this transforming power'. (Asad 1986, 157) According to Asad, some Third World languages are weaker than Western languages (and English is often considered *lingua franca* especially due to its colonial past and globalising future) because culturally they find it more difficult to negotiate global structures of power. By using both languages, English and Shona, Two Gents do obviously think about their English-speaking audience in the UK where they perform their shows, but such fluidity of language has significant implications in the theoretical reading of their performances. In the case of *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet*, the original text itself becomes of paramount importance in the translation process. The source text, as discussed above, comes with a plethora of cultural and political markings which will inevitably feed into the translation process. The decision to translate a 'bad' text into what Asad calls a 'weak' language has quite a determining impact on an intercultural reading of the work. While it can be argued that the choice was influenced by the highly performative quality of Q1, it is essential to move beyond the simplifying cultural narrative that emerged in some reviews of the piece at the time, which equated the perceived cultural value of the source text with the value of the translation and performance.

In this performance, the importance of English was counterbalanced by the importance of Shona as a narrative device. Shona brought a certain musicality to the production, which became more pronounced when juxtaposed with English, but also highlighted when linguistic comprehension was not available. As a narrative device, the use of Shona stemmed from the importance in Zimbabwean culture of folk tales that encourage an active participation from the audience. Shona folk-tales, or *Ngano*, often have a didactic or ethical narrative function, clearly implicating the audience, 'through their inbuilt structures of call and response' (Woods 2013, p. 20). This structure is often used in the Two Gents' productions of Shakespeare, creating an atmosphere of relaxed fun, and moving away from the traditional boundaries of theatrical experience. The audience feels part of the production and after some moments of embarrassed awkwardness the spectators almost forget that the performance they are witnessing is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

After a performance of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the Globe theatre in London, Munyevu observed that in Zimbabwe, the audience get very involved in the story line and they become actively engaged in the performance. This does not often happen in the London venues where Two Gents perform, but the performers are trying to encourage the London audiences towards a greater responsiveness through the traditional Zimbabwean narrative forms of call and response. Music is another element that plays an integral part in all performances produced by Two Gents. The traditional Shona instrument, the *mbira*, is often used to enhance the theatrical expressivity of the performance. It can also become a recognisable theatrical prop. In *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet*, for example, the *mbira* became Ophelia's lute, but also marked Queen Gertred's lament at the beginning of the performance. A lamellophone, the *mbira* is described by ethnomusicologist Claire Jones as 'emblematic of "culture" in Zimbabwe, virtually a national instrument' (Jones 2008, p. 125). It is traditionally used in story-telling, at religious rituals and as accompaniment for protest and resistance songs, thus having a strong political and social relevance. Arne Pohlmeier, the company's director, noted that traditional Shona music has an integral part in all Two Gents productions. He argues that 'we use music to evoke location/cultural context, to give an insight into characters' emotional states, to

clarify the story or to give the audience a moment to breathe and relax' (Walling 2013, p. 93). In *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet*, the music played by Denton Chikura, punctuated the performance as a constant reminder of the story line but also of the frequent changes of character, all being played by the two performers. Although many of their previous productions have used the Folio texts of Shakespeare's plays and performed them in English, *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* provides a very different approach to the canonical authority of Shakespeare.

The choice of text reflects the political stance of the performance, attempting to discuss authenticity as a politically charged concept. *Hamlet*, seen as the epitome of the Western canon, is challenged from a textual point of view and displaced from its high status by the use of a version which does not fit the desired canonical form. It is interesting to note the reasons why the two actors/directors, Tonderai Munyevu and Denton Chikura, decided to opt for the Q1 version of the text. Both noted that the 'bad' quarto version of *Hamlet* speaks much clearer to them as actors and to their 'African sensibilities'.[4] The First Folio version seems to them 'overworked' and too static from a performative point of view. The attraction of the first quarto is obvious for the two actors: the text is fast, plot-driven and 'less ruminative' (Thompson and Taylor 2006, p. 16). They do not mention the logical challenges of the text or the loss of poetry. What they are interested in are the raw passions of this version of the play which are much more effective as an ensemble piece and *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* was performed as an extraordinary example of ensemble possibilities. The two actors alternated all the roles, with quick, on-stage changes influenced by both traditional Zimbabwean dance theatre and *commedia dell' arte* techniques.

Rather than comfortably setting the performance in contemporary Zimbabwe, that would provide obvious opportunities to explore the issues of surveillance and political power so prevalent in the play, the programme notes reminded the audience that the action was taking place in 1888, on the brink on British colonial rule: '1888, Bulawayo, the race for Zimbabwe is on...' In this Shona version, Hamlet was a tribal prince, struggling to honour his family and his

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[4] This reminds me of an interview with the famous South-African actor John Khani, who, talking about his role as Caliban in Janice Honeyman's version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the RSC, mentioned the close relationship that Shakespeare has with the African people. It is a raw, real connection that goes much deeper than the Bard's connection to contemporary Western cultures.

ancestral obligations (with various distractions from a corrupt uncle, meddling witchdoctors and, apparently, a pregnant girlfriend). According to Collette Gordon, 'this works as an interesting African recontextualisation of the play's religious and social preoccupations, one that speaks also to Ndebele traditions. But social practices of ritual, music, song, celebration, mourning and storytelling are so thoroughly woven into the production that they constitute both its represented world *and* a large part of its theatrical language' (Gordon 2011, p. 65).

The production opened with the two performers greeting each other and having a conversation in Shona until one turned to the audience, telling them that the story they were going to see on stage 'all happened when the old king died and the queen married his brother...' This opening was clearly connected to the traditions of storytelling theatre, followed by music and the re-enactment of the events. There were various comic moments connected to the chosen text of *Hamlet* but also to the use of both English and Shona. At one point, sensing the confusion of the audience when presented with names like Corambis, Gertred, Rossencraft and Gilderstone; Chikura, playing Ofelia, turned to the audience and told them in English: 'Corambis, my father, also known as Polonius. We are doing the first quarto, you see. It's different – but we know our lines.' The well-known and eagerly awaited soliloquies 'To be, or not to be, ay there's the point' (Q1, 7. 115) and 'Why, what a dunghill idiot slave am I! (Q1, 7. 404), spoken in English, created a long-lasting effect of defamiliarisation.

The action continued with Queen Gertred singing a Zimbabwean funeral song and it ended with two gravediggers collapsing dead to the ground. Between these events there were eighty minutes of pure theatrical pleasure created with the help of only two props: a mat and the *mbira*, the traditional bowl-shaped instrument mentioned above. On a bare stage, the two actors, dressed in orange boiler suits, recreated a world that vibrated with comedy and tragedy at the same time. The characters, based on Q1, became more human in the Two Gents' rendering, through a combination of languages, songs and a simplicity of movement that, according to one of the spectators present, revitalized a play that has become a literary and theatrical institution. Many spectators also mentioned that by being presented with the Q1 version of the play, they felt much more at

ease and they could enjoy the production anew. The text has indeed the capacity to defamiliarise the audience and present a story of Hamlet which is at the same time familiar and strange but without the spectre of all the great productions past.

There is also another layer of strangeness added by the use of various languages in the production. From an intercultural point of view, the use of two languages– English and Shona– brings to the fore the problem of cultural authority attributed to language in such exchanges. As the former British colony of Southern Rhodesia, Zimbabwe has as official language both English and Shona. *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* uses both in ways that they intertwine and English loses the cultural authority expected given the choice of text. However, English is not subverted. This is not a production that attempts to disrupt the postcolonial binary of centre and margin. *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* is an example of the rhizomatic potential of interculturalism, of the permeable layers of cultural fragments, responding to what Gómez-Peña calls 'border art', in which the performer's role is 'to trespass, bridge, interconnect, reinterpret, remap and redefine the limits of culture' (Gómez-Peña 1996, p. 12). The actors' bodies, taking up a large variety of roles, did not only enhance the relative democracy of the ensemble but also allowed for a distinctive cultural reading. The body, recognizably African through its appearance and movement, became a site in which converge various contesting discourses. Denton Chikura was always Hamlet but at the same time he was also Queen Gertred, Ofelia and a gravedigger. The same can be said about Tonderai Munyevu who was always the King but he was also Corambis, Ofelia or Leartes. The transition between roles was achieved through simple physical gestures that enabled the audience to easily identify the characters, regardless of who was performing them. Hamlet's characteristic gesture was hand to brow; the King, arms aloft; Gertred, hand to cheek; Corambis, with an old man's stoop; Ofelia with a haughty adolescent strut; Rossencraft and Guilderstone, whose movements suggested a pair of witchdoctors.

In their creation on stage, these characters make the connection between the world of the Q1, that of nineteenth century Zimbabwe and the present performance in twenty-first century London. The simple technique of physically

defining the characters allowed for a fast-paced performance that managed to tell the story of Hamlet in 80 minutes. This Hamlet did not spend too much time soliloquising but was always in the centre of the action. This technique also ensured a relative equality between characters, as there was no time, or scope, for a clear character development through introspection.

In this performance, the source and target cultures intersect by a simple gesture that fluctuates the body and makes it unstable. However, this is an instability that targets construction rather than deconstruction. Both actors used their bodies on stage effectively, telling the story of Hamlet but also relating that story to their own, that of Zimbabwe in the last decades of the nineteenth century during resistance against British colonial occupation. The songs of war were perfectly intertwined with the Shakespearean language, providing not only relevance but also appropriation. And still, this is not a version of the Shakespearean text, it is not an adaptation. What *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* achieved very successfully was the use of the unofficial *Hamlet* text to provoke questions about authority, tradition, canonicity and issues of intercultural performance. It also prompted questions about the reconsideration of the local and context-specific through the global and vice-versa. The two actors were frequently using, during the performance, a variety of metatheatrical devices through which they also questioned the position of the spectators within an intercultural exchange. Reluctant spectators played parts in the play within the play sequence and story-telling devices were used to engage the audience further.

The evening I saw the performance in November 2010, 90% of the audience were white, middle-class and almost 60% were academics or Shakespeare scholars. This make-up reinforces the findings of the editors of the Arden Shakespeare edition of the 1603 text who, attempting to find out more about stage productions based on Q1 concluded that while many productions of the Folio text include sections from Q1, the majority of the stage productions based on the Q1 text alone were mainly academic experiments with a similarly academic spectatorship. Regardless of the version of the text, *Hamlet* is still attracting a particular type of audience with a specific cultural expectation. *Kupenga Kwa Hamlet* hoped to change that and what it managed to do on the night was to make people play rather than worship. It also reinforced Talal

Asad's suggestion that the best way of translating another culture is not through ethnography but through 'a dramatic performance, the execution of a dance, or the playing of a piece of music'. (Asad 1986, p. 159)

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