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## Political shifts and black theatre in South Africa

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# Political Shifts and Black Theatre in South Africa

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## Introduction

The democratization process in South Africa that started in the early 1990s and culminated in the first multiracial general election in 1994, marked a new political era in the history of South Africa. Thanks to this political shift the people of South Africa were for the first time perceived as equal regardless of race, while the concept of race itself could be criticized and displaced.

However “race” remained (and still remains) a problematic knot in South African society. Tribal, ethnic, and most of all “racial” divisions inflamed confrontations as the different groups jostled for the control of the land and its resources. Fatima Meer observes the South African tragedy is that the country does not have a “people,” it has “race groups.” Meer argues that over the last three centuries, those who took control were informed and guided by “race;” for example, public utilities became classified as white and non-white by the apartheid government, and people were slotted in accordingly. The “non-whites” developed a political front as the disenfranchised, and later, as black people, but felt little identity beyond the political divide.<sup>1</sup>

The South African political shift triggered a chain reaction, which launched a process to redress all the imbalances of the past. The political shift, therefore, called for reflection on what came to light and on the concept of “race” itself in order to bring about genuine reconciliation, reconstruction and development benefiting all the people of South Africa. Meer notes:

We need to understand what happened in order to come to terms with current problems; we need to know why it happened in order to prevent it happening again.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the importance of reflection on the political shift, Meer argues that one of the areas that need to be revisited following this political landmark is Black Theatre<sup>3</sup> given the role it played under apartheid and the sacrifices and experiences South African black playwrights and practitioners endured.

In Southern Africa, the written word is a recent phenomenon popularized by white colonial settlers following their arrival on the continent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, this does not imply that there was no form of drama before colonization, especially when considering ritual performance. Steve Biko comments:

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<sup>1</sup> Fatima Meer ed., “The CODESA File-Negotiating a non-racial Democracy in South Africa” – Institute of Black Research Project, Madiba Publishers, March. [1993], p.69

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.12

<sup>3</sup> The definition of Black Theatre will be dealt with later.

They have deliberately arrested our culture at the tribal stage to perpetuate the myth that African people were near-cannibals, had no real ambitions in life, and were preoccupied with sex and drink.<sup>4</sup>

On the contrary, just like Biko argues above, performance has always been and still is central to the African way of life, whether in the form of rituals to honor the dead or to mark birth of a new baby, or to bless seeds prior to ploughing, as a prayer for rain during drought or to thank gods after harvest. The closest form of indigenous drama to Western theatre was through story telling around the open fire before bedtime. The eminent Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o observes that drama has origins in human struggles with nature and other human beings. In pre-colonial Kenya, drama was not an isolated event, but part and parcel to the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community, there were rituals and ceremonies to celebrate and mark birth, circumcision or initiation into the different stages of growth and responsibility, marriages and the burial of the dead.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Brazilian theatre director and political activist Augusto Boal has argued that in many nations considered not civilized, theatre was a dithyrambic song, free people singing in the open air with a carnival and festive feeling.<sup>6</sup> Kees Epskamp reinforces this imagery:

In pre-colonial Africa the performing arts had a strong ritual function and also served the purpose of entertainment and education. Dance, music, song, poetry and drama were used for intellectual, sexual and moral socialization and also to give instruction in practical skills. The transmission of myths strengthened young people's cultural identity. It prepared them for the future by teaching the 'why' of social behavior and societal tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Epskamp argues that throughout the centuries and in various parts of the world, theatre has been used in transferring all kinds of knowledge, instructions and entertainment. As a result, theatre as a vehicle for non-formal education in post-colonial countries has attracted more and more attention.<sup>8</sup> Epskamp writes:

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<sup>4</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness" in Hendrik van der Merwe ed. *Students' Perspective of apartheid*. [1972], p.200

<sup>5</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Languages in African Literature*. [1986], p.36

<sup>6</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. [1979], p.119 Since the '70s the idea of a dichotomy between "civilized" and "non-civilized" cultures has been forcefully criticized in anthropological and literary studies. See Mineke Schipper, *Imaging Insiders: Africa and the Question of Belonging* [1999], pp.13-29.

<sup>7</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Learning by Performing Arts*. [1992], p.8

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.17

In the traditional education of children in rural areas, the performing arts were taught by exposing children to music, dance and drama. From the time they were young, knowledge and skills in these arts were transferred during work, in the evening hours on festive occasions or simply during everyday games.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, Samuel Hay concurs that in colonial North America, theatre had a dual origin. First came the indigenous theatre consisting of folk tales and songs, as well as music, dance and mimicry that African Americans performed in cabins, at camp meetings and in open parks. These forms of expression were African in spirit and were transformed by the American environment.<sup>10</sup>

However, despite Africa's rich cultural heritage and practices, Ngugi laments that the arrival of the white settlers destroyed most of these cultural practices:

It was the British colonialism which destroyed all that tradition. The missionaries in their proselytizing zeal saw many of these traditions as works of the devil. They had to be fought before the bible could hold sway in the hearts of the natives.<sup>11</sup>

Ngugi argues that both the missionaries and the colonial administration used the school system to destroy the concept of the 'empty space' among the people by trying to capture and confine it in government-supervised urban community halls, church-buildings, and in actual theatre buildings with the proscenium stage.<sup>12</sup> Like Ngugi, Boal regrets that walls of division were built following the ruling class' appropriation of the theater. First, the walls divided the people, separating actors from spectators. Second, among the actors, they separated the protagonist from the mass. Thus, coercive indoctrination began.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Biko contests that the wide-spread crime often found in the African townships was a result of the interference of the white settlers with the natural evolution of the true native culture. "Wherever colonization is a fact, the indigenous culture begins to rot and among the ruins something begins to be born which is condemned to exist on the margin allowed by the European culture," writes Biko.<sup>14</sup> Jim Walker, too, argues that colonial rule did not only impose political and economic domination but ruptured the normal learning experience of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.193

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Hay, *African American Theatre*. [1994], Preface

<sup>11</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Languages in African Literature*. [1986], p.7

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp.7,8

<sup>13</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. [1979], p.19

<sup>14</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness" in Hendrik van der Merwe ed., *Students' Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.200



people it colonized, and hence brought forth the disintegration of the indigenous African cultures. Walker points out that for the Portuguese, to “educate” meant to “de-Africanize” Africans. As a result, black children could no longer learn by a process of participation in the ongoing life of the family and community, gaining skills, understanding of life and work through living and working. This meant elders could neither pass tribal wisdom through daily conversation between young and old effectively, nor could the body of traditional beliefs and values expressed in rituals and ceremonies preserve the integrity of the community.<sup>15</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, as well, points out that the culture of the oppressed was and continues to be a target of imperialism and as a result the existence of indigenous cultures was and still is endangered. Consequently, the cultures are likely to cease to exist as they had before Western civilization and its culture’s arrival.<sup>16</sup> Africans, however, were not just victims, for they developed strategies to negotiate the social, economic, and cultural changes.

Looking at drama, it can be argued that Africans were compelled to change their indigenous ways of performance and storytelling to accommodate the European style under colonial rule. This may explain why European playwrights such as Beckett, Ibsen, Brecht, Shakespeare and the like were to have such an enormous influence in many parts of the African continent, including South Africa. The influence undoubtedly brought about the current style in modern African theatre, including Black Theatre with regard to literary conventions. Nevertheless, to understand and/or appreciate Black Theatre, especially its protest or militant nature in South Africa, one has to view it in line with other theatrical forms spurred by movements of their times, such as the 19<sup>th</sup> century European Women’s Suffrage Movement. Dale Spencer and Carole Hayman remark:

When in the last century some women decided that they wanted the vote, they found themselves in quite a predicament. Why not write and act speeches which were specifically suited to the occasion? Why not a character-sketch or a monologue that contained some of the arguments for the vote. Why not, indeed! And out of this need emerged a sort of one-woman political theatre. ‘Entertainment’ became part of the suffrage gathering and was enormously popular and effective. Drama and political agitation were seen proceeding hand in hand.<sup>17</sup>

However, the closest resemblance between Black Theatre in South Africa to other forms of theatre in other parts of the world, is with Black Theatre in

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<sup>15</sup> Jim Walker, “The End of Dialogue: Paulo Freire on Politics and Education” in Robert Mackie’s ed. *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*. [1980], p.131

<sup>16</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991], p.122

<sup>17</sup> Dale Spencer and Carole Hayman, *How the Vote was Won*. [1910], pp.10,11

America, which resulted from the Civil Rights Movement. Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman note that just as the Black Theatre movement in the US may be seen as a product of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, so too is it possible to see a Black Theatre movement in South Africa, and to attribute it to social and political consciousness among the black peoples of South Africa.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.1 The Creation of Apartheid South Africa

At this stage, it is instructive to briefly highlight the social and political contradictions that might have led to the development and militancy of Black Theatre in South Africa. Jordan Ngubane explains:

To understand the factors which have produced this state of mind, we have to go back to 1652. For Jan van Riebeeck, Hollander, landed at the Cape of Good Hope with a group of men and women who had been sent out by the Dutch East India Company to establish a victualling station for its ships sailing between Europe and the Orient. The arrival of white settlers and their establishment of a separate colony on land that the Africans regarded as their own was an important assertion of white initiative as the main factor which was to regulate relations between black and white.<sup>19</sup>

Ngubane argues that the climax to the friction that developed was reached about a year after van Riebeeck's arrival in 1653, when the Hottentots made a bold bid to stop white encroachment on their land. The Hottentots raided van Riebeeck's company cattle post, killed the herd-boy, David Jasen, and made away with over forty of the company's cattle.<sup>20</sup> Ngubane recalls:

By 1660, van Riebeeck had been compelled to pursue a vigorous policy of residential segregation in endeavors to protect his group against the Hottentots. After the war he fought with Kaapmen [another Hottentot group] during that same year, he took over the Liesbeeck lands and enclosed them within a fence to mark them out as white territory. The whites were to keep to one side of the fence, the Africans to the other.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South African Theatre*. [1984], p.44

<sup>19</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*, [1963], pp.4,5

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.5

<sup>21</sup> Ibid pp.5,6

It can therefore be argued that the racial issue in South Africa started the day Jan van Riebeeck set foot in the Cape. Similarly, Leon Louw and Frances Kendall note that the first apartheid law was passed in 1660, only a few years after whites arrived in the Cape, when van Riebeeck planted his hedge of bitter almonds to keep the Hottentots and free burghers apart.<sup>22</sup>

However, since this thesis is on Black Theatre and its relationship to political shifts in South Africa, the issue of race will be traced from the coming to power of the National Party in 1948, which was undoubtedly made up of the descendants of Jan van Riebeeck and his people. After all, it was the National Party that legalized and entrenched the apartheid system in South Africa, and this generated many forms of protest and resistance including Black Theatre. It is worth noting that in the same year that the National Party came to power and the apartheid system was legalized, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

One of the major achievements of the United Nations was the adoption by the General Assembly, on 10 December 1948, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration state that “all Human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” and are entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”<sup>23</sup>

This declaration was undoubtedly instigated by the effects of World War II and the atrocities committed by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, especially against Jews in Germany and occupied countries. As much as it is understandable that South Africa was engaged in the war because of its Commonwealth membership, it often makes one wonder if the Boers [Afrikaners] were truly against the racist ideology of Hitler given the fact that they embarked on a similar discriminatory policy as soon as World War II was over:

Apartheid, as a State-imposed system of institutionalized racial discrimination and segregation, has been practiced by South Africa as an official policy since 1948. Under apartheid, black South Africans, the overwhelming majority of the country are denied fundamental rights and liberties. They are not allowed to participate in the political life of the country and are subject to hundreds of repressive laws and regulations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Leon Louw and Frances Kendall, *South Africa: The Solution*. [1986], p.31

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, *Basic Facts about the United Nations*. [1978], p.108

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.62

Given the National Party's apartheid system, which legalized discrimination and dehumanization of blacks, as observed by the United Nations, it was therefore not surprising that both the General Assembly and the Security Council declared apartheid incompatible with the Charter of the United Nations. It condemned apartheid as a crime against humanity, the conscience and dignity of mankind.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, the ruling National Party government from 1948 fervently tried to implement forms of racial separation to safeguard political rights, economic benefits and social privileges for white people at the expense of blacks. This meant a society in which blacks suffered political discrimination, economic exploitation and many forms of social oppression.<sup>26</sup> What exasperated the situation was the fact that under apartheid blacks were denied means of communication or expressing themselves by the system. In short, they had no voice. On the other hand, white people in South Africa had exclusive access to powerful means of communication that projected their views and images of blacks. These views and images were spread in many ways by word of mouth, through speeches, lectures, jokes and ordinary conversation. As a result, these racial prejudices and negative stereotypes of blacks abounded and were endorsed by the apartheid system.<sup>27</sup> Here, one sees similar patterns perpetuated by the Nazi Party during its rise in the early 1930s and as part of its propaganda later.<sup>28</sup> This similarity goes back to the question of whether the Boers were really against the Nazis during World War II, or whether they idealized Nazi racism and saw it as inappropriate for South Africa to join the allied forces

Two factors might have saved the native South Africans or blacks from the white settlers' onslaught. First, the white settlers were intruders and aliens, and as a result unfamiliar to the land. This gave blacks an advantage since they were familiar with their land and therefore could find or devise means to survive despite the onslaught. However, this is what made the whole scenario unacceptable, that is, to have an alien minority group enforcing unjust laws on blacks in their own land. Second, the fact that the white settlers were in the minority denied them an opportunity to commit horrendous acts on a massive scale within a short period. Paul Gilroy remarks that indigenous people's traditions that have been constituted against the odds amid suffering and dispossession are often overlooked by the ignorant, the indifferent and the actively hostile, but these traditions contributed important moral and political resources to modern struggles in pursuit of freedom, democracy and justice.<sup>29</sup> It

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.62

<sup>26</sup> HPP Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace-The Case of South Africa*. [1997], p.21

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.30

<sup>28</sup> John Solomos and Les Back, *Racism and Society*. [1996], p.167

<sup>29</sup> Paul Gilroy, "Against Race: Imagining political culture beyond the color line" [2001], p.13

is possible that the different African traditions contributed to the survival and triumph of the black people in South Africa by binding them together.

## 1.2 Black Theatre in Apartheid South Africa

Unlike the white South Africans who owned means of communication, blacks were too poor to own, run or have access to formal forms of media, like newspapers, radio and television, and were compelled to find other means to communicate and express themselves. Theatre was one of these means. There were also other forms of performance, such as dances and rituals. Kees Epskamp notes that throughout the centuries and in various parts of the world, theatre has been used in transferring all kinds of information and knowledge, both educational and entertaining. As a vehicle for non-formal education in Third World countries, it has attracted increased attention.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, change and developments in Black Theatre were influenced by theatrical performances, especially those by white settlers and missionaries.

Likewise, blacks in South Africa, being denied political means, used cultural means to express their aspiration above. Blacks' skin colour consciousness, provoked by discrimination and oppression by white settlers, gave rise to a positive notion of theatre in the cause of black liberty. Black Theatre came to mean theatre that espoused the principles of Black Consciousness<sup>31</sup> and reintegrated blacks into their history and culture to forge solidarity and political consciousness. In the face of apartheid, Black Consciousness had to unite blacks and theatre was to be part of this attempt.<sup>32</sup> Ndebele writes,

At the end of the fifties, and following the banning of ANC and the PAC, we begin to see the emergence of what has been called protest literature. This kind of writing follows the disillusionment that came in the wake of the banning of the major political organizations. Here we see the return of the concerns of Dlomo. We see the dramatic politicization of creative writing in which there is a movement away from the entertaining stories of *Drum*, towards stories revealing the spectacular ugliness of the South African situation in all its forms: the brutality of the Boer, the terrible farm conditions, the phenomenal hypocrisy of the English speaking liberal, the disillusionment of

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<sup>30</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Learning by Performing Arts*. [1992], p.17

<sup>31</sup> Black Conscious in South Africa will be dealt with in the next chapter

<sup>32</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South African Theatre*. [1984], p.144

educated Africans, the poverty of African life, crime, and a host of other things.<sup>33</sup>

In this context, Black Theatre became politicized as black playwrights sought means to address issues of concern under the apartheid system. Hauptfleisch and Steadman assert that for Black Theatre, the major contradiction was apartheid. Therefore, playwrights and theatre practitioners created major works in Black Theatre to expose the contradictions of this ideology.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Epskamp argues that by explicitly juxtaposing 'theatre' and 'politics,' theatre-makers of the 1960s and 1970s accepted social responsibility with respect to the State (the administrators and policy makers), the Regime (the politicians) and that part of the population which they called the people. At any time there was friction between political and state interests on the one hand, and the interests of the people on the other, theatre-makers used 'popular' or 'people's' theatre as a political instrument in the struggle for social change.<sup>35</sup>

The statements by Hauptfleisch and Steadman, together with that of Epskamp define the role Black Theatre played under apartheid. It can be argued that the reason Black Theatre assumed this role is that theatre was not only an accessible and cheap means of communication for the oppressed black masses, but was also the most effective since it could not easily be monitored, sanctioned, suppressed or censored by the apartheid system the same way the system did with literary works. Epskamp observes:

Popular workers confronted the authorities with a new phenomenon that they did not know how to control, by opting for new forms, theatre groups discovered gaps in the oppressive system. The performers created points of reference for the audience by sticking to the forms that the audience appreciated, thus making the message acceptable. It was expected that these critical actors had something more to offer than a straightforward play.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, South African black playwrights could conceive, write and produce plays based on their experience and that of their people with minimal interference from the apartheid system or censorship until much later when the plays reached a considerable audience. Apart from that, the fact that productions were minimalistic permitted production companies to move from place to place with ease. As a result, black playwrights could reach the widest audience possible within the oppressed black masses. Ernest Pereira observes:

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<sup>33</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991]. p.40

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.144

<sup>35</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Chang*. [1989], p.61

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.146

Theatre had many advantages; it was cheap, mobile, simple to present, and difficult to supervise, censor, or outlaw. Clearly it was the one medium left to the people to use to conscientize, educate, unify and mobilize both the cadres and rank and file.<sup>37</sup>

The importance, influence and effectiveness of Black Theatre under apartheid are widely acknowledged. For example, prominent anti-apartheid activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu affirms that there is no doubt in his mind the arts played a crucial role in the life of black people, nor can anyone doubt protest theatre was a powerful instrument in people's struggle for liberation. Tutu argues that enacted on the stage for the audience to see were the experiences of blacks' daily lives; the shame, the attacks on their dignity, their failures, triumphs, joys and laughter. He believes the catharsis was a vital element, and consequently, the people came to the forceful realization that they were not impotent playthings of powerful forces. He is of the opinion that somehow the denouement of plays did say something about good and evil, there was a nemesis in the scheme of things and ultimately even if stated indirectly, evil would be defeated.<sup>38</sup> "And so they (the people) come away having seen *Woza Albert*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* or *You can't stop the revolution* and they felt better inside themselves, knowing deep down that it would be okay one day," writes Tutu.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Gcina Mhlophe, one of the prominent black women playwrights in South Africa, concurs that theatre played a very important role in the past. It allowed blacks to speak about things they were not allowed to by the apartheid system. It gave blacks a voice.<sup>40</sup>

At this stage it is important to ask what exactly in this thesis is meant by "Black Theatre." The term "Black Theatre" refers to the theatre whose practitioners, playwrights, performers and directors are black and the objective is to capture and dramatize as closely as possible the lived experiences of the black masses. Some of them might have even gone through similar, if not the same, experiences as those they dramatize. Most of all, the content of the issues addressed should pertain to the black masses represented. Finally, the main target audience should be the oppressed black masses. John McGrath comments:

Whether the hubris is presented in its context on the stage, or is an act of creative defiance by the playwright, its effectiveness as part of a learning paedia or socialization process relates to two main features; its accuracy: the audience must recognize and accept the emotional and social veracity of what is happening on stage, must identify with the

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<sup>37</sup> Enerst Pereira, *Contemporary South African Play*, [1977], introduction

<sup>38</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa*. [1990], Foreword

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Foreword

<sup>40</sup> Gcina Mhlophe, in Perkins Kathy Ed, *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.81

core situation, whatever style may be used to present it. Its relevance: The core situation must reflect the central, most profound realities of its time, must speak to its audiences about a truth that matters in their lives, whether social, moral, political, emotional, or individual.<sup>41</sup>

As McGrath states, “race” is key to practitioners of Black Theatre and in particular the personal experience of racism. Similarly, Philomena Essed asserts that experiences are a suitable source of information for the study of everyday racism because they include personal experiences as well as vicarious experiences of racism.<sup>42</sup> It can be argued that the “race” of the target audience under apartheid South Africa was also crucial since it determined how much the audience would identify with the subject matter addressed and portrayed on the stage as well as the kind of reaction thereafter. Hauptfleisch and Steadman note that Black Theatre can be seen as theatre that identifies with a set of values. It is theatre which deals with the lives, needs and aspirations of the majority of South Africans, and which tries to instill a consciousness in its audience of what it means to be black.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Peter Larlham explains the role and the nature of Black Theatre in South Africa under apartheid thus:

The content of much Black theatre, especially theatre committed to social and political change, deals with everyday life in the township or the plight of men fighting for survival, for dignity, for individuality and for freedom of expression and action within a context of racial discrimination and oppression. In many instances the playwrights’ aim is to expose the consequences of racist legislation practically applied—job reservation, the migrant labour system, the application of the pass laws, and discrimination in all areas of the social, economic and political life of the individual, based entirely on racial or color differences.<sup>44</sup>

Theatre is also, among other things, a mirror or watchdog of a society and consequently reflects the nature or state of a society at a given time. David Pammemter explains:

Theatre, at its best, is the communication and exploration of human experience; it is a forum for our values, political, moral and ethical. It is

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<sup>41</sup> John McGrath, “Theatre and Democracy”, *New Theatre Quarterly*, May. [2002], p.138

<sup>42</sup> Philomena Essed, “Everyday Racism” in Philomena Essed and David Goldberg’s ed. *Race Critical Theories: Text and Context*. [2002], p.178

<sup>43</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch, and Ian Steadman, *South African Black Theatre, Four plays and an Introduction*. [ 1984], p.144

<sup>44</sup> Peter Larlham, *Black Theatre, Dance and Ritual in South Africa*. [1982], p.90



concerned with the interaction of these values at a philosophical, emotional and intellectual level.<sup>45</sup>

From Pammenter's general statement, the same might be said about Black Theatre that it was and still is the experience of South African black playwrights and their people that informed and continues to inform Black Theatre as reflected in the plays to be discussed. Because Black Theatre expresses social as well as personal experiences of racism, the definition given here opposes what some white critics and scholars thought under apartheid and continue to think even today that a person can conceive and mount plays on and about blacks without being black him/herself. Such a definition of Black Theatre also opposes what white playwrights concluded and portrayed under apartheid when they thought they were in a position to represent or portray lives of blacks on stage, lacking experience of what it is to be black, living amongst blacks and or in black communities. Some of the assumptions, based on their claims, seemed to have hidden agendas meant to discredit Black Theatre and advance the apartheid system aspirations. It is important to note that to these South African white playwrights Black Theatre was and still is a literary subject, a profession and most of all a business, as Terry Eagleton notes:

Literature may be an artifact, a product of social consciousness, a world vision; but it is also an industry. Books are not just structure of meaning, they are also commodities produced by publishers and sold on the market at a profit. Drama is not just a collection of literary texts; it is a capitalist business which employs certain men [authors, directors, actors, stagehands] to produce a commodity to be consumed by an audience at a profit. Critics are not just analysts of texts; they are [usually] academics hired by the state to prepare students ideologically for their functions within capitalist society. Writers are not just transposers of trans-individual mental structures, they are also workers hired by publishing houses to produce commodities which will sell.<sup>46</sup>

In line with Eagleton's comment, it can therefore be submitted that to white South African playwrights, Black Theatre is foreign, a business to cater for their mainly white audience eager to wallow in a fantasy world of what it means to be black as imagined and created by their white playwrights. It can be argued that Black Theatre was and is based on blacks' lives and experiences, for they were the ones who suffered the effects of oppression and understood the necessity of liberation.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> David Pammenter, "Devising TIE" in Tony Jackson Ed., *Learning Through Theatre*. [1980], p.42

<sup>46</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. [1976], p.59

<sup>47</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. [1968], p.29

The debate around white South African writers' alienation from blacks, Black Theatre and their claim to be Black Theatre practitioners, can explain why some black playwrights resented the works of their white counterparts. Rob Graham notes that in South Africa, the white liberal writer Athol Fugard was attacked for not fully representing the black situation.<sup>48</sup> This was possibly due to the fact that as a white person, Fugard had limited knowledge about blacks, in addition to trying not to offend his fellow white nationals in power. Paulo Freire argues that the pedagogy at work for white playwrights, which began with the egoistic interests of the oppressors and was often cloaked in false generosity of paternalism, makes the oppressed objects of its humanitarianism while embodying and maintaining oppression.<sup>49</sup> This may explain Zakes Mda's reservation regarding liberal white playwrights like Fugard. Duggan remarks:

In fact, Mda sees Fugard's plays, no matter how radical, as depicting blacks as helpless, dispirited, dumb and bereft African workers, suffering in silence and stoically enduring their tragic situation. Consequently, unconsciously discouraging a struggle for autonomy. Fugard 'does not rally men to any cause', a role Mda sees as belonging naturally to that of the playwright. Quoting from a conference in Gaborone, Botswana, he declares 'any person who stands behind a pen [a brush, camera, saxophone for that matter] must be just as effective as any person who stands behind a gun in the service of progress.'<sup>50</sup>

Mda's assertion confirms Biko's, that the most dangerous white man in South Africa is a white liberal, possibly due to a white liberal's ability to maneuver between black and white, enjoying trust and benefits from both to ensure and maintain comfort.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, Biko recommends:

We must reject the attempts by the powers that be to project an arrested image of our culture. This is not the sum total of our culture. We must relate the past to the present and demonstrate an historical evolution of the modern Africa. We have to rewrite our history and describe in it the heroes that formed the core of resistance to the White invaders. It is through the evolution of our genuine culture that our identity can be fully rediscovered.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rob Graham, *Theatre*. [1999], pp.130,131

<sup>49</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. [1968], p.39

<sup>50</sup> Carolyn Duggan, "Strategies in Staging Theatre Technique in the plays of Zakes Mda" in Martin Banham ed. *African Theatre in Development*. [1999], p.2

<sup>51</sup> Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*. [1978], p.23

<sup>52</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness" in Hendrik van der Merwe ed. *Students' Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.200

For Biko, it is therefore important that given the hard earned democracy, blacks in South Africa should engage in research of this nature to rectify the misrepresentations perpetuated in the past by most white writers, whether under apartheid, colonialism or post-colonialism. This is in light of the observation by Cornel West that the notion that black people are human beings is a relatively new discovery in the modern West. Furthermore, the idea of black equality in beauty, culture and intellectual capacity remains problematic and controversial within prestigious halls of learning and sophisticated intellectual circles.<sup>53</sup>

For Black Theatre in South Africa, what a researcher chooses to analyze and under what circumstances is intimately related to its implications or what it may or may not expose. The need for blacks to redefine themselves is what makes research of this nature so paramount especially when carried out by players or participants in Black Theatre under apartheid, because they have personal experience in Black Theatre both under apartheid and in post-apartheid South Africa. Employing their accounts will limit bias and present the nature of Black Theatre and issues around it. Norman Fairclough states, in this regard, that it is widely understood people researching and writing about social matters are inevitably influenced in the way they perceive them, as well as in their choice of topics and the way they approach them, by their own social experiences, values and political commitments. Fairclough believes it is important to acknowledge these influences, rather than affecting spurious neutrality about social issues, as well as being open with one's readers about where one stands.<sup>54</sup> Likewise, Ndebele argues that the task of interpreters is to come up with a method of observation and study that will yield high explanatory value. They should aim at objectivity that will leave little room for wishful thinking in blacks' understanding of their history, because in the new African Renaissance blacks place great emphasis on presentation of history. The history of blacks needs to be written as it is, not as a story of European adventures' the way it has been under colonialism and apartheid.<sup>55</sup> Ndebele adds:

Society, as a rule, strives constantly after more and more efficient means for ensuring its survival. In this task, the role of designated specialists is to work towards knowledge through the discovery of consistent patterns in the operations of both natural and social phenomena. Once they have discovered these patterns, they come up with a conceptual understanding of reality, which gives society a capacity to deal with that reality more efficiently.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cornel West, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism" in Philemona Essed and David Goldberg's *Race critical theories: text and context*. [2002], p.90

<sup>54</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. [1989], p.5

<sup>55</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991], pp.40,122

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.83

It is in this regard that black scholars must bear in mind that this stance, research and writing by blacks on their ways of life as espoused by Ndebele, might not be acceptable to white writers, who have been seen as the core source of information and knowledge, even on blacks, over the centuries. As a result, blacks might be faced with many challenges, especially when it comes to publishing, which is crucial given the fact it is mainly through publishing that the damage done in the past can be rectified. Samuel Hay observes:

Rejection, the third trouble, is the most pervasive problem facing African American theatre people. These professionals are brushed off not but because of racial prejudice but also because of artistic preferences, unjust accusations, poor judgments, jealousies, and politics.<sup>57</sup>

Despite Hay's observation, regarding challenges facing blacks and literary work on and about blacks, this exercise of writing about their cultures and risks related to it is worth taking. The exercise will prevent black cultures, traditions and customs to continue to be seen as viable area of research by people who, not being 'black' themselves, look for instant recognition, since there are limited works by blacks to refute that. Otherwise, the history of misrepresentation of blacks will continue to persist from one generation to another.

### 1.3 Challenges

The misinterpretation and misrepresentation of blacks that have been perpetrated by white writers over the centuries is evident in Hauptfleisch and Steadman's assertion with regard to Black Theatre. This assertion presents a challenge to black researchers and writers. The two assert:

It should be apparent that the theatre of Black consciousness is defined as 'Black' not in terms of the 'colour' of its creator, but in terms of their ideology or their social consciousness.<sup>58</sup>

This assertion by Hauptfleisch and Steadman precipitates a series of questions; was the concept of 'Black' and 'White' as a means of classification not introduced by the white settlers based on skin color or pigmentation? Was apartheid not based on color or pigmentation? Was Black Theatre and its militant

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<sup>57</sup> Samuel Hay, *African American Theatre*. [1994], p.144

<sup>58</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch, and Ian Steadman, *South African Black Theatre, Four Plays and an Introduction*. [1984], p.146

nature not provoked by the apartheid system? Amy Ansell argues that 'whiteness' and 'blackness', as constructed categories of identity, developed and evolved together throughout the centuries of colonialism and apartheid, constituting imagined notions of 'selfhood' and 'other.'<sup>59</sup> Even if it is not a biological issue but a cultural construct, the concept of 'race' has affected and still affects the position of authors and critics. Given the fact that both Hauptfleisch and Steadman are of European descent, are they in a position to define what Black Theatre is? Or are they assuming high moral ground, or by the virtue of their race feel informed enough to make such judgment? Was their assertion meant to legitimize their involvement in Black Theatre while also inviting other white playwrights, or was it an attempt to discredit Black Theatre and whatever it was meant to achieve? Their failure to make a similar claim in as far as White Theatre and/or Afrikaner Theatre are concerned may imply their racially motivated selectivity. Seow Lee and Crispin Maslog note in relation to "framing":

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more silent in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation to be described, the concept of agenda setting and framing represent a convergence, in that framing is an extension of agenda setting. In fact, the concept of framing has been explicated as second-level of agenda setting.<sup>60</sup>

If the assertion by Hauptfleisch and Steadman was not either "Framing" or "Agenda setting" the question would be if the two have any idea what transpires in the mind of a black playwright to write a dialogue of this nature: "Abelungu abathakathi. Bulala abathakathi" (Whites are witches, kill the witches) Do they have any experience what it feels like for a black actor to take the stage and utter such words and end chanting: "Amandla! Amandla! Amandla!" which means "Power! Power! Power!" Could a white playwright compose such dialogue? Even the white liberal playwright like Fugard fell short, as both Rob Graham and Zakes Mda note. Given their race, it would be honorable for the two to admit as Eric Bentley does:

What success black theatre is having in raising consciousness, I am not equipped to say, and in the nature of things is hard to measure. What a

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<sup>59</sup> Amy Ansell, "Two Nations of Discourse: Mapping Racial Ideologies in Post-Apartheid South Africa", *Politikon* 31 [1] May. [2004], p.7

<sup>60</sup> Seow Lee and Crispin Maslog, "War or Peace Journalism, Asian Newspaper Coverage of Conflicts", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 55, No2, June. [2005], p.313

non-black observer can observe is the very considerable variety of approaches among black theatre people.<sup>61</sup>

D.A. Masolo traces this history of misperception and misrepresentation of Africans as demonstrated by Hauptfleisch and Steadman back to scholars like Hegel:

Hegel said, 'History is in fact out of the question.' In Africa, life is not a manifestation of dialectical reason but of a succession of contingent happenings and surprises. No aim or state exists whose development could be followed. Africans live in a state of innocence. They are unconscious of themselves, as in the nature and state of Adam and Even in the Biblical paradise before the emergence of reason and will. Africans are intractable. The condition in which they live is incapable of any historical development or culture. They have no history in the true [Hegelian] sense of the word.<sup>62</sup>

Similar arguments with regard to blacks' inferiority can be found in David Hume's writing, where he claims that "Negroes of Africa" by nature have no feeling that rises above the trifling. Hume goes on to challenge anyone to cite a single example in which an African, of the hundreds of thousands of blacks transported elsewhere from their countries during slavery, showed talents possessed. In a way, Hume seems to justify the catching and enslaving of Africans since they were supposedly of no (intellectual) value. He argues that even after slaves were freed, they had nothing to show in terms of art, science or any other praiseworthy quality.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, Hume ignores the fact that during their enslavement, slaves were not regarded as humans and were denied the right to think or show their capabilities; arts and science rely, if are not based, on imagination. Angela Davis notes that according to the ideology of blacks being inferior, which prevailed during slavery, blacks were thought to be incapable of intellectual advancement. After all, they had been chattel, naturally inferior as compared to white epitomes of humankind.<sup>64</sup> Cornel West writes:

Winthrop Jordan and Thomas Gossett have shown that there are noteworthy pre-modern racist viewpoints aimed directly and indirectly at nonwhite, especially black people. For example, in 1520 Paracelus held that blacks and primitive peoples had a separate origin from

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<sup>61</sup> Eric Bentley-*Theatre of War*. [1972], p.404

<sup>62</sup> D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*. [1994], p.5

<sup>63</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the color line* [2000], p.58

<sup>64</sup> Angela Davis, "Education and Liberation: Black Women's Perspective" in Philomena Essed and David Goldberg, *Race critical theories: text and context*. [2002], p.71

Europeans. In 1591, Giordano Bruno made a similar claim, but had in mind principally Jews and Ethiopians. Lucilio Vanini posted that Ethiopians had apes for Ancestors and had once walked on all fours.<sup>65</sup>

West observes that in the 1750s Carolus Linnaeus acknowledged that hybridization of species was possible. Linnaeus is said to have identified blacks and apes, black women and male apes, as candidates but made no mention of such a possibility when it came to European, American or Asian women.<sup>66</sup>

Regardless of such slandering by the likes of Hegel, Hume and others, which even today some whites in South Africa seem to still harbor,<sup>67</sup> Africans in institutions of higher learning are obliged to refer to and be graded in comparison to those authors, as Samuel Hay implied. Consequently, they are compelled to interpret, perceive and review themselves, their entire realm of life, culture, theatre, music, poetry, dance and so on, through the very European theories of race from which they are trying to redeem themselves and rectify. Even Hegel's prominent disciple and founding member of the so-called 'young Hegelians,' Karl Marx, remarks:

Hegel's writing dialectically stands on its head. You must turn it the right way up if you want to discover the rational kernel hidden away within the wrappings of mystification.<sup>68</sup>

It was not surprising then that these 'young Hegelians,' once they "turned it the right way up," discovered errors in their master's philosophy and consequently dismantled its total meaning.<sup>69</sup> But still blacks are expected to reference people of this caliber or write with these white writers' works at the back of their minds as points of reference. The question is, what does this imply? Does it not uphold or reinforce the notion that Africans are naïve even about their own existence, as Hegel implies? Masolo argues that the expression of pre-Hegelian white attitudes toward blacks, the Hegelian expression itself, and the entire legacy after him achieved two things; first, the missionaries and Western travelers made the emotive relations explicit and, second, they made these relations active by setting their dialectics in motion. In this context of emotive relations, Masolo refers to attitudes based on value judgments held mostly by missionaries and Western travelers in Africa before and after anthropology was established as a science. Masolo submits that their notes contained value judgments about Africans,

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<sup>65</sup> Cornel West, "A Genealogy of Modern Racism" in Philomena Essed and David Goldberg, *Race critical theories: text and context* [2002], p.99

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.100

<sup>67</sup> David Bullard, "Officially tongue tied" *Sunday Times* July 11 [2004], p.10

<sup>68</sup> Karl Marx in Peter Demetz, *Marx, Engel and the Poets*. [[1967], p.25

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.25

viewing them as primitive and savage, which are not justifiable. He believes the evolutionists' theory expounded by Herbert Spencer, Edward Tylor and Lewis Henry seems to give such judgments even greater credibility under the guise of scientific explanation.<sup>70</sup> By tracing the matter that far back, 'before anthropology was established as science', Masolo implies that even before such research could be carried out there were already assumptions by some Europeans of what Africans were. Similarly, Paul Whelan comments in this regard "Hegel is rejected by all who value the freedom of the Human spirit and set down by many as the prophet of 20<sup>th</sup> century fascism and Nazism."<sup>71</sup>

It is possible to view Hauptfleisch and Steadman's claim as what Paulo Freire terms cultural invasion, meant to manipulate the oppressed into submission. Freire argues that in cultural invasion, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group in disrespect of the latter's potentialities. They, the invaders, impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. He observes that the invaders are the authors, actors and leaders, as it was the case with whites under apartheid. Consequently, cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those invaded, which makes them respond to the values, standards and goals of the invader and in the process, the victims are molded into the patterns and ways of life of the invaders.<sup>72</sup> Freire writes:

Cultural invasion is on the one hand an instrument of domination, and on the other, the result of domination. Thus cultural action of a dominating character, in addition to being deliberate and planned, is in another sense simply a product of oppressive reality.<sup>73</sup>

Freire notes that the oppressors consciously tend to transform and reduce everything surrounding them to objects of domination, whether land, property, creation of people, people themselves, culture and time itself. In cultural invasion it is essential those invaded come to see reality through the lens of the invaders rather than their own, since the more the invaded mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the invaders becomes.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Frantz Fanon points out that in order to have the oppressed people mimicking the oppressor, the latter are not satisfied by merely holding the oppressed in their grip and emptying brains of all form and content, but rather by a kind of perverted logic where the oppressor turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> D.A.Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*. [1994], p.9,10

<sup>71</sup> Paul Whelan "Minister's vision bodes ill", *Sunday Times*, May 9. [2004], p.17

<sup>72</sup> Paulo Freire, *Literacy and Revolution*. [1970], p.150

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. pp.151,152

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. pp.44,151

<sup>75</sup> Melissa Thackway *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspective in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film*. [2003] , pp.37,38



Hennie Lotter terms this cultural imperialism and recalls how in apartheid society, the white minority exercised dominance over the black majority through political domination. Lotter is of the opinion this dominance would have been impossible without the support of a whole group of ideas constantly reinforced through cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism, he argues, means imposing the ideas and views of one group onto a whole society making these ideas and views look natural and true. This cultural imperialism was another kind of exclusion of black South Africans, especially those critical of the apartheid system.<sup>76</sup> Based on both Lotter's and Freire's arguments, it is therefore understandable why the Boers called themselves "Afrikaners," which means "Africans". By so doing, the Boers were not only legitimizing their presence in South Africa but also claiming to be the sole natives of Africa while pushing the blacks to the periphery as the other, hence the marginalization of and discrimination against blacks. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael argue that, for decades, Afrikaners have recognized or identified themselves as Africans, regarding themselves as the only Africans in the world while positioning everybody else, including the indigenous peoples of Africa, as the other.<sup>77</sup> Nuttall and Michael write:

The one who is doing the decreeing defines himself and the class to which he belongs as those who know or were born to know; he thereby defines others as alien entities. The words of his own class come to be the "true" words, which he imposes or attempts to impose on the others: the oppressed, whose words have been stolen from them.<sup>78</sup>

Hauptfleisch and Steadman's claim is not an isolated case. The damage the apartheid system may have caused in the psyche of some whites, the deep-rootedness of racism and persistent superiority some whites feel even in post-apartheid South Africa such as defining and representing blacks is also evidenced by David Bullard's<sup>79</sup> comment on vernacular languages in South Africa. Language forms the base of people's identity because it is through language people communicate and relate their customs, cultures, traditions and history, their identity. Melissa Thackway argues that there is a close correlation between identity and language with the latter being one through which people define their identity. Thackway notes that this observation made African artists realize they could represent their identities and cultures using their local languages.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace-The Case of South Africa*. [1997], pp.29,30

<sup>77</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, *Senses of Culture: South Africa culture studies*. [2000], p.111

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p.128

<sup>79</sup> David Bullard was *The Sunday Times* newspaper columnist, but the newspaper fired him in 2008 accusing him of racism due to his articles.

<sup>80</sup> Melissa Thackway, *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspective in Sub-Saharan Francophone*

Nevertheless, in his column in *The Sunday Times* newspaper, Bullard ridicules local languages:

Fortunately, South Africa was colonized by the English so we can communicate with all civilized nations [that is, those which speak English] and even with the Americans who speak a form of English. Thanks to the days when Britannia still ruled the waves, English is spoken and understood all over the world. One might have hoped for a little more gratitude from those who advocate using their own barely developed tongues instead of English.<sup>81</sup>

There are many issues Bullard's claim provokes, but since they are of little relevance to this study they will be ignored.<sup>82</sup> Suffice it to observe that this reinforces the notion that there are some white people in South Africa who seem to regret that colonialism and apartheid ended and the opportunities accompanying it. This attitude from Bullard calls for rigorous redressing of the past to save future generations from further damage. Furthermore, assertions like Bullard's, reminds one of the revolt and subsequent massacre of black pupils in 1976 when they rejected Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools because they realized the language was meant to entrench the apartheid system. This uprising over a language dispute changed the face of the struggle for freedom in South Africa, indicating the relationship between languages, cultures and politics.

Bullard does not mention such incidents (uprising against Afrikaans) nor of the relationship between language and imperialism which Jim Walker observes.<sup>83</sup> Likewise, Norman Fairclough notes with regard to teachers of English as a Second Language (ELS) that ESL teachers are dealing with some of the most disadvantaged sections of society, whose experience of domination and racism are particularly sharp. Therefore, some teachers see their role in terms of empowering their students to deal with communicative situations outside the classroom in which institutional power is weighed against them by preparing students to challenge, contradict and assert themselves in settings where the power dynamic would expect them to agree, acquiesce and be silent. Fairclough believes this educational process must be grounded in a dialogue about the meaning of power and its encoding in language.<sup>84</sup>

The question of power and its relationship to language is acknowledged variously in South Africa. One situation occurred when Jaco Kriel, the

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African Film. [2003], p.45

<sup>81</sup> David Bullard, "Officially tongue tied" *Sunday Times* July 11. [2004], p.10

<sup>82</sup> The idea that there are non-developed languages is completely out-of-date and based on evolutionary racist ideas.

<sup>83</sup> Jim Walker in Robert Mackie ed. *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*. [1980], p.121

<sup>84</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. [1989], p.235

Doornfontein School's Governing Body Chairperson, objected to the merger of predominantly black Mphempe Primary School with the former whites-only Doorfontein Primary School, which instructed in Afrikaans. Kriel argued that Doorfontein Primary School could not merge or accommodate the pupils from Mphempe Primary School, as Doorfontein had used Afrikaans for the past 111 years for fear of English becoming the dominant language of instruction.<sup>85</sup> Kriel adds "Our children must be schooled in their language."<sup>86</sup> This provokes one to question why Kriel is not "grateful to live in a country where English is the medium of instruction" as Bullard proposes, especially when he is white and can easily identify with a European language like English? The continuous imposition of former colonial masters' languages on blacks seems to have a negative effect on a lot of blacks to the extent that they grow up to hate these languages as soon as they learn of their historical background. Ntozake Shange comments as follows:

The man who thought I wrote with intention of out-doing the white man in the acrobatic distortions of English was absolutely correct. I can't count the number of times I have viscerally wanted to attack and deform and maim the language that I was taught to hate myself in/the language that perpetuates the notions that cause pain to every black child as he/she learns to speak of the world & the "self".<sup>87</sup>

The threat to indigenous languages is apparent in Duncan Walker's article "In Defense of 'lost' Languages". Walker argues that of the 6000 odd languages in the world, one is said to disappear every fortnight. He observes that in the remote parts of the north Australian coast, along the Timor Sea, lives Patrick Ndujulu, who is one of the three remaining speakers of Mati Ke. And it is problematic enough that one of the other speakers does not live nearby and speaks a slightly different dialect. Ndujulu also has to cope with the fact that the other speaker is his sister, who according to traditional culture has forbidden him from speaking to since her puberty. Ndujulu's language then is almost certainly going to die out. It is not the only one. The problem is repeated in varying degrees in practically every country, with dialects vanishing under the weight of major languages like English.<sup>88</sup> Joy Hendry points out that cases like Ndujulu's are crucial, especially where the languages are threatened and elders are the only ones who remember the traditional stories, medicinal herbs and other things important for the survival of the tribe.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Tendai Dhlwayo, "Language Snarls the School Merger" *The City Press*, July 23. [2004], p.4

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p.4

<sup>87</sup> Ntozake Shange, *Play: One*. [1982], p.68

<sup>88</sup> Duncan Walker, "In Defence of 'Lost' Languages", [www.bbc.co.uk/UK/Magazine..](http://www.bbc.co.uk/UK/Magazine..) [2005], p.1

<sup>89</sup> Joy Hendry, *Reclaiming Culture: Indigenous Culture and self-representation*. [2005], p.206

The proponents of English and other colonial languages as mediums of instruction rely on 'unity' and exchangeability to support their claim. Like Bullard claims, given the different languages spoken by different tribes, 13 official languages in South Africa, English and colonial-era languages are favoured because they unify and facilitate communication, since they can be understood by many people from different tribes. As much as that can be the case, it is a one-sided unification whereby Africans compromise their languages for colonial masters' languages. Karen Cronacher notes that white slave traders destroyed the language, culture, kinship system and legal order of the African subjects. They replaced the African symbolic order by destroying kinship ties and renaming the slaves as their "property".<sup>90</sup> Ngugi wa Thiongo argues in this regard:

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and carrier of culture. In my view, language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to domination of the mental universe of the colonized.<sup>91</sup>

Philemona Essed concludes that domination of blacks can be described as systematic domination, which means it is through a pattern of organization of the system as a whole that dominance is reproduced. As a result, whites can dominate blacks without the former being aware of the ways in which the system is structured, that it is the whites' interests rather than those of blacks that are met. This is what Essed terms 'Everyday Racism'.<sup>92</sup> This everyday racism is evidenced by Bullard's attack of African languages, and Hauptfleisch and Steadman's claim of right to define Black Theatre. The Awareness of everyday racism can be seen as a call to blacks to reclaim their languages, cultures, customs, traditions, their existence and redefine and represent themselves through any means including theatre.

Having argued that Black Theatre was more a tool employed in the struggle for freedom in South Africa than a form of entertainment, it is worth noting critics of Black Theatre thought it would collapse and vanish with apartheid. This is what makes this exercise so paramount in the light of the demise of apartheid. It is crucial to explore the nature and role of Black Theatre in post-apartheid South Africa given its history. Raymond Williams is of the

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<sup>90</sup> Karen Cronacher, "Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic" in Ntozake Shange's *Spell* #7, *Theatre Journal*, May. [1992] p.185

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.9

<sup>92</sup> Philemona Essed, *Race critical Theories: Text and Context*. [2002], p.183

same view, and emphasizes that without theatre there would be lack of dimension in as far as direction(s) taken are concerned in portraying society. As a result, to study and understand it is a major critical challenge.<sup>93</sup> For this reason, the main objective of this thesis is to explore the nature of Black Theatre in post-apartheid South Africa, given the political shift from apartheid to democracy. It therefore focuses on issues that the selected playwrights address in the democratic South Africa.

The question of form, style and aesthetics shall be mentioned but is not paramount to the study. Arts in white institutions of higher learning were one of those subjects black students who happened to be lucky enough to be admitted could not take. Consequently, most black playwrights were and still are self-taught including copying from others. Isolated from the mainstream theatre and its discourses, their concern in writing plays was and still is not mainly 'how?' but 'what' to compose. 'What' to compose pertaining to their communities and themselves, meaning they were and still are preoccupied with the content and/or message a play communicates.

However, it is important to point out that not all South African black playwrights were or are self-taught. Therefore, this assertion might not include a limited number of black playwrights like Zakes Mda, Maishe Maponya and others who managed to acquire knowledge in this area as reflected in their works, where they integrated the question of style and form. Nevertheless, Maponya asserts that it was not theatre studies that mattered much. However, they could not address issues without strategy and thinking in terms of discourse, which led to extensive reading and consequently being influenced by other writers including their European counterparts such as Brecht and Ibsen.<sup>94</sup>

It can be argued, therefore, that the main influence that shaped Black Theatre were the needs of the communities. Hauptfleisch and Steadman assert that apartheid became the main area of debate around which Black Theatre was to develop and revolve. Consequently, black playwrights were to create and produce works to critique and expose the system and its policies.<sup>95</sup> Banham cautions regarding this uniqueness of African theatre with regard to analyzing and critiquing it:

It follows from this that the critic of African play writing and theatre from outside the continent of Africa, used to the form and nature of, say, the British or American drama, may have to accept a different set of criteria if he or she is to come to terms with much African drama,

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<sup>93</sup> Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. [1952], p.1

<sup>94</sup> Maishe Maponya, Personal Interview

<sup>95</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South African Black Theatre, Four Plays and an Introduction*. [1984], p.142

and understand it more readily. Some of the shifts of critical expectations are slight, some gigantic.<sup>96</sup>

Similarly, Raymond Williams recommends that any drama must be judged in the context of its own conventions.<sup>97</sup> It can, therefore, be argued that the failure to read African plays, theatre, music and the like within their context by critics poses the main problem, especially their understanding and interpretation. This is due to the fact that most of these critics are so used to their Western ways where pigeonholing, often based on genre and aesthetics, are the norm for them to understand and appreciate things. The way the research is approached, is therefore, based on personal experience<sup>98</sup> including in Black Theatre.

#### 1.4 Experimenting in Black Theatre

As much as the influence of European naturalist and realist playwrights is notable in the South African black playwrights' work, the latter did not simply copy and incorporate the first into their plays. Instead they borrowed from different forms of theatrical concepts including Variety Theatre to formulate their own unique theatre to meet their needs. F.T. Marinetti comments, regarding the difference between Conventional and Variety Theatre, that Conventional Theatre exalts the inner life's monotonous cries of conscience, analyses of feelings and psychology. On the other hand, Alternative or Variety Theatre in principle exalts action, heroism, life in the open air, dexterity, the authority of instinct and intuition.<sup>99</sup> It can be argued that this Alternative Theatre South African black playwrights created was imperative to explore more effective ways of communicating to its target audience, involve the audience directly through interaction and / or indirectly by thematic stories with which the audience could easily identify. John Pepper argues that "Art was a tool for self-exploration that also interpreted the world of black persons."<sup>100</sup> Consequently, the intention was to catapult the audience into action as opposed to Conventional Theatre, which its primary purpose is often to entertain. Black Theatre was more of an experimental theatre, whereby artists try other ways of telling stories as opposed to mainstream conventional methods. Duggan observes that the playwrights had to adapt some Western theatrical conventions to the South African setting to achieve their goal despite their situation of mass oppression and poverty. Boal

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<sup>96</sup> Martin Banham and Clove Wake, *African Theatre Today*. [1976], p.2

<sup>97</sup> Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen Brecht*. [1952], p.25

<sup>98</sup> Three factors in analyzing and interpreting data to discussed later.

<sup>99</sup> F.T Marinetti, "The Variety Theatre" in Umbro Apollonio ed., *Futurist Manifestos*. [1973], p.129

<sup>100</sup> John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid* [2009] p.6

writes in connection with George Ikishawa's observation regarding the difference between bourgeoisie and proletariat theatre:

George Ikishawa used to say that the bourgeois theater is the finished theater. The bourgeoisie already knows what the world is like, their world, and is able to present images of this complete, finished world. The bourgeoisie presents the spectacle. On the other hand, the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently their theater will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle.<sup>101</sup>

However, as much as the oppressed black playwrights did not know what their world would be like, their plays advocated a world whereby the oppressed would enjoy equal rights like the bourgeoisie white South Africans. This is evident in almost all plays written under apartheid South Africa, which is understandable given the deprived situation under which blacks lived. The South African black playwrights' stand under apartheid is supported by Martin Banham and Clove Wake argue that in any art form, if it is to have strength, vigor and relevance, it must be seen to have purpose, and to be generated by a clear sense of function. Banham and Wake observe that the contemporary African theatre draws upon traditions and needs that are not remote in time but which co-exist alongside it.<sup>102</sup> Banham and Wake write:

The playwrights' role may be to sophisticate or to develop the themes, but their references are often directly to things familiar and accepted by millions of ordinary people.<sup>103</sup>

Just as Banham and Wake contest, Black Theatre was to employ mimetic devices in order to convey its messages, educate and, if needed, instruct the black masses. Black Theatre in South Africa was therefore bound to change to meet needs and challenges of the oppressed black majority, just as Boal argues that theatre is imitation of life.<sup>104</sup> Duggan observes that from the 1970s, black drama in South Africa became increasingly useful to the purposes of the black person as a tool of liberation and it needed, therefore, to move away from being, as it was previously, merely entertainment, because the issues of living were too vital and pressing.<sup>105</sup> For this reason, the new political environment is likely to challenge

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<sup>101</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. [1979], p.119

<sup>102</sup> Martin Banham and Clove Wake, *African Theatre Today*. [1976], p.2

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>104</sup> August Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. [1979], preface

<sup>105</sup> Carolyn Duggan, "Strategies in Staging Theatre Technique in the plays of Zakes Mda" in Martin Banham ed. *African Theatre in Development*. [1999], p.2

the relevance of Black Theatre in its original protest or militant form and consequently compel it to change accordingly. Enerst Pereira argues that literature solely relying on the strength of its 'protest' is unlikely to survive as literature, just as 'black' writers who have nothing but their ethnic label to justify themselves as writers, will soon find they have no special claim to the public or audience's attention.<sup>106</sup>

As Pereira implies, following the dismantling of apartheid, South African black playwrights are likely to be compelled to address different issues other than those related to apartheid and the politics around it. This will by no doubt have an impact on and determine the nature of Black Theatre in post-apartheid South Africa.

## 1.5 Research Method

Being arts orientated, this study employs a qualitative research method. Jennifer Mason notes that the 'young' disciplines of media and cultural studies rely quite heavily on qualitative ways of knowing.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Niel van Niekerk concurs that the qualitative research method is particularly suited to conducting research into the complex, emotional and very often unconventional field of theatre.<sup>108</sup> Anselm Strauss and Juliel Corbin define qualitative research as follows:

By the term 'qualitative research' we mean any type of research that produces findings, not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of qualification. It can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations.<sup>109</sup>

Strauss and Corbin add that for the purpose of concepts of interpretation in raw data and organization into a theoretical explanatory scheme, data can consist of interviews and observations but can also include documents, films or videotapes.<sup>110</sup> Mason adds that qualitative research should produce social explanations to intellectual puzzles,<sup>111</sup> which in this case would be the nature of Black Theatre in a democratic South Africa.

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<sup>106</sup> Enerst Pereira, *Contemporary South African Plays*. [1977], introduction

<sup>107</sup> Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching*. [1996], pp.3,5

<sup>108</sup> Niel van Niekerk, "The Problematics of Qualitative Research in Theatre", *South African Theatre Journal*. [2001], p.141

<sup>109</sup> Anselm Strauss and Juliel Corbin, *Basic Qualitative Research*. [1998], p.11

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p.11

<sup>111</sup> Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching*. [1996], p.3



## 1.6 Thesis approach

In order to understand the current state of Black Theatre in post-apartheid South Africa, a critical analysis of selected plays written in this era is performed. The objective is to explore the issues South African black playwrights raise and address in democratic South Africa as opposed to under apartheid. Personal interviews with Black Theatre practitioners and personnel from relevant government departments; Arts and Culture, are also included. Martina Attille and Maureen Blackwood remark that the person who controls the image is the one who creates it and the reality is that the image says more about the creator than about the people it is supposed to represent.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Peter Brook posits that in naturalistic plays the playwright contrives the dialogue in such a way that while seeming natural it shows what she or he wants to be seen.<sup>113</sup> This exercise will therefore reveal black playwrights' standpoint, which in turn will indicate the direction Black Theatre is likely to take following the political shift in South Africa.

However, prior to the critical analysis of the plays, there will be a brief outline of narrative structure and analysis of characterization, since it is through characterization a particular group represented racially, religiously or otherwise can be identified by the audience. It is mainly through characters that playwrights communicate to the audience. The representation of a given group or community in any play can be achieved through a character's occupation, class, costume, diction or language, setting, props, or in many other ways. Stephen Halliwell states the following in relation to Aristotle's notion of character:

If character is to play a part, as it is ideally required to do, there must be no uncertainty or ambiguity about it; we must be able to identify it. The first and most important principle of characterization is goodness or excellence.<sup>114</sup>

Halliwell notes how Aristotle elaborates this boldly and simply through the statement that moral choices revealed in speeches and action should be virtuous ones. He argues Aristotle's second principle of characterization, 'appropriateness,' needs scarcely any explanation because it derives from the belief that there is a strong link between moral character and the objective conditions of life, including age, gender, social origins and status. The third requirement for character is 'likeness.' He is of the opinion the principle of likeness in Poetics should be such that an audience can experience a sympathetic

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<sup>112</sup> Martina Attille and Maureen Blackwood, "Black Women and Representation", in Charlotte Brunsbon ed. *British Film Institute*. [1986], p.207

<sup>113</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*. [1978], p.53

<sup>114</sup> Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*. [1986], pp152,158,160

moral affinity with the characters, rather than characters standing at an ethical extreme.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Michael Chekov states that a characterization or peculiar feature can be anything indigenous to the character, that is, a typical movement, a characteristic manner of speech, a recurrent habit, a certain way of laughing, walking or dressing up.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, Gerald Bentley observes, regarding Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, that the characters are not only familiar types of Londoners of the year 1610, but they are set forth in such a way that the audience may be edified as well as amused by their conduct.<sup>117</sup> However, it should be noted that as much as this is the case, all theatrical components are there to help facilitate effective communication of the message conceived by playwrights. Malgorzate Sugiera argues:

The moot question whether the action should take priority over character or the character over the action features prominently in the poetics of drama only as a red herring that draws attention away from a much more fundamental issue. After all, in one way or another, the recounted events and the strategies of their theatrical representation in the form of a story serve only the purpose of conveying a given message in the most effective manner possible. And it is the message that plays the decisive role in determining the order of the recounted events, the theatrical shape of the story as well as the characters' features and the forms of their interpersonal communication.<sup>118</sup>

Following this line of thought, the reading of the plays performed here does not follow a narratological or textual approach, but looks at the texts as responding to social and political issues since, as indicated by Banham, Duggan, Pereira and others quoted above, Black Theatre developed as direct reaction to apartheid, and still has such an intense and referential relation to black experience in South Africa. Moreover, this way of looking at Black Theatre is particularly apt to indicate how the local public reacts and interprets the plays. However, such a reading is not exclusively referential as it takes into account that, as indicated by Martina Attille, Maureen Blackwood and Peter Brook, in naturalistic plays the person who controls the images and the dialogues is the one who creates it and, while seeming natural, images and dialogues say

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. pp.158,160

<sup>116</sup> Michael Chekov, *To the Actor on the Technique of Acting*. [1953], p.91

<sup>117</sup> Gerald Bentley, *Ben Jonson-The Alchemist*.. [1947], p.vi

<sup>118</sup> Malgorzate Sugiera, "Beyond Drama: Writing for Post-dramatic Theatre", *Theatre Research International* in association with the *International Federation for Theatre Research*, March. [2004], pp.25,6

more about the creator than about the people it is supposed to represent.<sup>119</sup> The latter issue has been tackled as far as possible in Chapters 3 and 4.

### 1.7 Selection Criteria

There are twenty-one plays to be discussed in this study. The first criteria used to select plays were whether they reached or fulfilled the intended objective by becoming published or performed to an audience, or both. The reason for text consideration accounts for earlier observation that Black Theatre is “text-based” given the persistent poor economic state of blacks, the role of other theatrical elements continue to be relatively modest even in post apartheid South Africa. Apart from that, most of the performances were not recorded due to absence of relevant equipment or culture of recording amongst blacks as a result of the country’s history. In this regard, John Willett argues that literarization of theatre entails punctuating ‘representation’ with formulation. This gives theatre the possibility of making contacts with other institutions for intellectual activities.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, Antonin Artaud points out that dialogue does not belong specifically to the stage but to books as well, which is proved by the fact that in all handbooks of literary history, a place is reserved for theatre as part of history of the spoken language.<sup>121</sup>

The second criteria is that all the plays must have been written in post-apartheid South Africa and be thematically relate or focus on issues that seem to be at the core of debate, contradictions and confrontation in post-apartheid South Africa and affecting the majority of South Africans especially the previously disadvantaged poor black masses. The beginning of this era is marked by the first multi-racial general elections of 1994, which were preceded by the official abolition of apartheid, the release of political prisoners, especially the former African National Congress (ANC) leader and South African President, Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of political parties, including the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and Pan African Congress (PAC). Nevertheless, the whole period beginning in the early 1990s marked by the founding of CODESA (Convention on Democratization of South Africa) can be regarded as such, since it was during this period that the pillars of apartheid were finally dismantled. It was a turning point in the political history of the country. This political shift had and continues to have a great impact on all aspects of life in South Africa, and Black Theatre is no exception. David Kerr remarks:

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<sup>119</sup> Martina Attille and Maureen Blackwood, “Black Women and Representation”, in Charlotte Brunson ed. *British Film Institute*. [1986], p.207; Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*. [1978], p.53

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. pp.43,44

<sup>121</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*. [1958], p.37

The radical shift in South African politics which President de Klerk initiated in 1989, in particular the release of Nelson Mandela, the legalizing of the ANC, AZAPO, SACP and PAC, the dismantling of apartheid legal machinery, and the 1994 democratic elections followed by formation of the ANC-led government of National Unity had enormous implications for popular theatre in South Africa.<sup>122</sup>

Most of the selected plays are likely to be these playwrights' first creative works in this new political dispensation, especially the "older generation" of black playwrights. Consequently, the plays might be considered as their first impression, response or creative work unfettered by any influence negative or otherwise whether from the authority in the form of suppression of freedom of speech and expression, intimidation or self-censorship due to societal pressure and expectation. The plays are ground breaking and might have lasting effect to the extent that will influence the direction and/or nature of Black Theatre in democratic South Africa.

Two plays are discussed per older generation of playwrights and one play per young playwright. The difference in the number of plays between the two groups is that given the older generation's history in Black Theatre, one would expect this group to have a lot of issues eager to deal with. Therefore, the intention is to afford them that opportunity while keeping the number of plays discussed in the two chapters almost the same. On the other hand, in the case of the young generation of South African black playwrights, the objective is to grant as much space as possible to a larger number of playwrights for the purpose of wider representation within South Africa society newly granted a voice to explore issues of concern or interest under the new political dispensation.

There are some factors that ought to be kept in mind with regard to Black Theatre whose centre appears to be Gauteng Province; first, Gauteng, especially Johannesburg, was more or less the core of resistance against apartheid as evidenced by the Rivonia trial, Sharpeville massacre and the 1976 Soweto students' riots. Consequently, the apartheid system tried in various ways to contain acts of resistance in Gauteng and prevent them from spreading to the rest of the country. In the process this conflict gave shape to Black Theatre's militant nature that saw it flourish and entice playwrights from beyond who sought exposure to relocate to Gauteng Province. Secondly, Gauteng, and Johannesburg in particular, being the economic capital of South Africa is automatically a focal point and centre of attraction to many people, and playwrights are no exception. This is evidenced by the fact that most of these playwrights whose works are to be discussed are not originally from Gauteng Province but from different provinces around the country. Lufuno Mutere is from

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<sup>122</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre; From Pre-Colonial to the Present Day*. [1995], p.236

Limpopo Province, Aubrey Sekhabi and Paul Grootboom are both from North West Province, Fatima Dike is from Cape Town-Western Cape Province while Mbongeni Ngema and Thulani Mtshali are from Kwa-Zulu Natal Province and Zakes Mda from Eastern Cape Province. These are a few examples. Hauptfleisch and Steadman remark that over a fifty-year period it is possible to trace in Johannesburg the growth of Black Theatre as a gradual evolution towards political and social consciousness. Beginning in the 1930s with a desire to create theatre relevant to the lives and needs of blacks, this theatre arrived in the 1970s at a point where socio-political and cultural nationalism converge and produce the 'theatre' of black consciousness.<sup>123</sup>

It can therefore be argued that even though some playwrights work in Johannesburg, their works are often informed by their communities of origin. For example, Mutere says his play, *Local Elections*, is based on events surrounding local elections in his home village in Limpopo.<sup>124</sup> Likewise, Nuruddin Farah, an exiled Somali novelist now based in Cape Town, said during the launch of his book, *Secrets*, in Johannesburg, that the only way he could keep in contact with Somalia, was to write about it.<sup>125</sup> Sean McDonald observes this as well that in exile Farah began what became a lifelong literary project "to keep his country alive by writing about it."<sup>126</sup>

A playwright may operate from a given space, but his or her writing is likely to be influenced, informed by and reflective of his or her origin. It is on this basis that one can argue that Black Theatre, both under and in post-apartheid South Africa, pursues mimetic representation of, among others, political and socioeconomic circumstances of the black masses. Therefore, the issues these playwrights raise and address are likely to be of concern to the majority of black South Africans regardless of what part of the country they inhabit. However, it is important to note that these playwrights might not be representative of the minority black petit-bourgeois<sup>127</sup> who have metamorphosed or transcended their blackness and suffering associated with blackness and are now preoccupied with shares at Stock Exchanges. Their glorious lives are portrayed in South African soap operas, such as *Generations* and *Isidingo*. It can be contested that some of these are mainly the minority black elite that has benefited immensely from the opportunities created by Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), which seems to have been harnessed by this elite before these opportunities reached the rest of the black masses or majority of poor blacks.

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<sup>123</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch, and Ian Steadman, *South African Black Theatre, Four Plays and an Introduction*. [1984], p.140

<sup>124</sup> Lufuno Mutere, Personal Interview

<sup>125</sup> Nuruddin Farah, *Secrets*-, Johannesburg.[2003], book launch speech

<sup>126</sup> Nurudin Farah-Sean McDonald, *Secrets* [1999], introduction

<sup>127</sup> petit-bourgeois-The newly founded black middle that have amassed fortune through opportunities such as BEE [Black Economic Empowerment.

Given the South African's young democracy, the challenges that confront it and possible hurdles ahead, one is tempted to conclude that Black Theatre still has a major role to play. McGrath observes that one of the great services theatre can perform for the people of any country, region, town or village is to be the instrument of authentic democracy, at the very least to push the community as near to authentic democracy as has yet been achieved.<sup>128</sup> McGrath's comment implies that South African black playwrights have a major role to play in democratic South Africa just like they did under apartheid. Their role is likely to cover the whole spectrum of South African life, whether in giving direction in the way the majority of South Africans want the country to go and/or to have their needs catered for, because in any democratic society, the interests of the people have to be given the first priority.

As indicated earlier, the selected plays might be the playwrights' initial impressions in a democratic South Africa. It was the first time they had freedom to express themselves without institutional censure or limited by the patriotism expected by the black masses under apartheid. The excitement is evidenced in the number of issues they try to tackle in a single play as though making up for lost time. Although plays differ, most of them employ satire and irony. This common element is possibly linked to the high expectations of the oppressed black masses that anticipated a complete change, if not a miracle, under a free South Africa. These expectations were also born and/or induced by promises made by politicians during the freedom struggle, as well as in the run-up towards the first multi-racial general elections of 1994 when political parties, especially the governing ANC, drummed up support. Although not as indignant as it was under apartheid, this satirical approach reaches a tone of righteous anger as the playwrights question whether the freedom struggle was worth it given that the majority of the previously marginalized black masses still languish in squalor like it was under apartheid, if not worse conditions in some cases. It is for this reason that the most predominant themes dealt with by these playwrights are themes of violence, especially domestic violence and that against women and children, crime, unemployment, corruption, persistent discrimination against blacks before the law, their marginalization in commerce and economy.

Almost all characters in these plays are well developed except, to some extent, those in Fatima Dike's play *AIDS: The Next Generation*. This is not surprising, since Dike appears more like a pamphleteer in her quest to disseminate information about the spread of AIDS and its impact. However, Mineke Schipper questions the lack of functionality of such characters:

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<sup>128</sup> John McGrath, "Theatre and Democracy", *New Theatre Quarterly*, May. [2002], p.139

One might wonder to what degree such characters are functional actors in the story and to what degree they are no more than agents of communication, transmitters of information. The characters constantly risk being sacrificed for the benefit of the distribution of the author's knowledge.<sup>129</sup>

Nevertheless, Dike's approach is understandable because she is more of an educator. Her direct approach might be due to resistance and denial at the highest level by the then South African President Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki's negative policies were implemented by the then Minister of Health, the late Manto Shabalala-Msimang. The two politicians championed the use of garlic, beetroot and onions to prevent HIV infection or to help make HIV patients healthy. Such a policy provoked the founding of Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), which fights for the rights of AIDS patients to free treatment. The theme of AIDS is also treated in Paul Grootboom's play, *Enigma*, but differently from Dike, as it will be seen later. Grootboom's approach is rather tactical as though to avoid controversies.

The rampant crime in the country is a topical issue to the extent that even when it is not directly engaged, it is referred to consistently whether be armed robbery, heists, house breaking or car-hijacking. The same can be said about violence much of which is against women and children. These crimes can be largely attributed to individuals' impatience, frustration and feeling of failure because of slow change in the life of the black majority, as structures established to redress the injustice of the past seem to be monopolized by the chosen few who have political connections, mainly with the ruling ANC. These chosen few have managed to accumulate unprecedented wealth through public tenders and acquiring shares in mining and other big corporations influential in commerce and industry. For this reason, in the shortest time, the spate of corruption is rampant even in places like prisons. Consequently, corruption is one of thematic issues in many plays.

Finally, almost all the plays are written in English<sup>130</sup> with exception of vernacular for emphasis. However, titles of some plays are in vernacular and serve as a summary of what the play is about. Mbongeni Ngema's *Asinamali* (We don't have money), Maishe Maponya's *uMongikazi* (The Nurse), Obed Baloyi's *Ga-Mchangan* (Shame on you Mchangani), Kere Nyawo's *Ola Majita* (Halo Guys) and Sello kaNcube's *Kuze Kuse* (Until the Morning) are all examples. This trend of vernacular titling even though the plays are written in English seems to be a common practice amongst writers for whom English is a second language yet write in English. This practice is shared by many African

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<sup>129</sup> Mineke Schipper, *Beyond the Boundaries*. [1989], p.149

<sup>130</sup> Almost all black playwrights write in English.

writers as evidenced among others by Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I will marry when I want).

### 1.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation

There are three factors that influenced the analysis and interpreting of the discussed plays and also played a role in the conceiving and breaking down of the different chapters of the thesis. The first factor is my involvement in Black Theatre. I was introduced to Black Theatre at an early age in the late 1970s during the "Putco Buses boycotts". The leadership of the struggle for freedom noted at the time that Putco Bus Company was owned by the apartheid system. It argued blacks should stop using Putco buses because it was like funding the system fueling the machinery that was oppressing them. Consequently, Black Theatre practitioners wrote plays including *Bus Boycott* (1977) to educate the black masses on socio-economic and political issues that crippled one's society. Given Black Theatre audience interactive and participatory approach employed, I was enticed into being part of Black Theatre to the extent that I finally became a player as well. Our theatre group *Maru* (Clouds) performances were divided into two; the first part was poetry recital of freedom struggle poems and this was followed by a play still geared towards liberation struggle such as *Joys of War* by Zakes Mda. The group performed both locally and internationally including at Edinburg Arts Festival in Scotland (United Kingdom). The second factor has a racial element; being classified as black, living amongst blacks and having being indoctrinated into perceiving Black Theatre as a tool to address issues pertaining to the black masses, I am compelled to analyze and interpret plays within those lines. In this manner the questions of target audience, the thematic issues of the play vis-à-vis black people's way of life, the setting, characters in the play and the tone are crucial in the analysis and interpretation of Black Theatre. Finally, my journalistic background (BBC Focus on Africa magazine and New African magazine) played a role as well. At one stage I could see Black Theatre more like an informal reporting, a sort of a community newspaper in which anybody could contribute anything one regards as of importance to the community and freedom struggle regardless of whether the person was trained or not. This resemblance or relationship between reporting and Black Theatre is evident in Maropodi Mapalaganye's play *The Harvesting Season* (1996). Mapalaganye's play seems to revolve around or based on stories which were reported in the newspapers. It is this relationship between Black Theatre and media that compelled me to refer to newspapers with regard to issues being raised and addressed in some of the plays discussed.



## 1.9 Chapter Layout

The thesis is comprised of four chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion. Chapter One is entitled “The South Africa State and Black Theatre.” As the title implies, this chapter compares the relationship between Black Theatre and the South African State in post-apartheid South Africa to what it used to be under apartheid. The objective is to establish whether there are any notable changes in attitude by the South African State towards Black Theatre in post-apartheid South Africa given the harassment of Black Theatre practitioners by the State under apartheid. This chapter starts with a discussion of the relationship between the State and Black Theatre under apartheid. This is compared with the relationship between the two in democratic South Africa.

Chapter Two is on “Institutions of Dramatic Art” that offered training to black playwrights and consequently formed the base of Black Theatre. Furthermore, it explores whether there is any change in objectives of these institutions in post-apartheid South Africa towards blacks and Black Theatre.

The Third Chapter and Fourth Chapter form the core of the thesis in the sense that they explore the issues addressed by South African black playwrights in post-apartheid South Africa. These Chapters discuss the nature of Black Theatre in this era.

Chapter Three will be on plays by the older generation of South African black playwrights. The term “older generation” of South African black playwrights refers to prominent South African black playwrights like Zakes Mda, Maishe Maponya, Mbongeni Ngema, Walter Chakela and Fatima Dike. They are referred to as “older generation” in the sense that their work featured prominently under apartheid during which they addressed issues pertaining to the oppressed black masses. The purpose of this chapter is to establish issues the older generation of South African black playwrights address in post-apartheid South Africa. Gibson Kente is omitted. Kente stated repeatedly that he no longer wrote plays for the stage after apartheid, but moved to concentrate on writing for television. As result, his work is not included in this research. Similarly, Gcina Mhlophe is left out. She pointed out that her involvement in theatre ended in 1992. As such she should be left out in favor of those still involved in Black Theatre. The other playwright left out is Matsemela Manaka who passed away not long after the democratization of South Africa. Manaka’s family refused to have his plays given to anybody until they were published for fear of the plays being stolen.

The Fourth Chapter focuses on plays written by the young generation of South African black playwrights. The term “young generation” refers to aspiring South African black playwrights, young in terms of age and experience in playwriting. The reason the two generations are dealt with separately is that there is often difference in point of view or approach to life and politics between

younger and older generations. However, this will have to be proved by the issues these playwrights address in their plays in the two chapters.

## Chapter 1. The South African State and Black Theatre

### 1.1. Apartheid and Black Theatre

One can hardly discuss Black Theatre in South Africa without making reference to the state, given the fact that it was, after all, the state and its apartheid policy that influenced and shaped Black Theatre. Consequently, the two intertwined in a complex relationship. David Kerr comments that the history of popular theatre in southern Africa is one of struggle by the people to gain control over their own culture. Kerr adds that it is a complex dialectic in which new tactics of aggression and cultural control by the forces of imperialism have been encountered by people's own types of cultural resistance.<sup>131</sup>

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to explore how the South African state as an institution influenced and continues to influence Black Theatre but in a different way in post-apartheid South Africa. The discussion will be on both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras in the South African political history.

Whereas black dramatic arts institutions for blacks, founded by black artists to cater mainly for blacks interested in the arts had a positive influence on Black Theatre in the sense that they trained black artists and consequently promoted Black Theatre, the state under apartheid South Africa did the opposite. The state did whatever possible to hamper and stifle Black Theatre because it perceived Black Theatre as cultivating and instigating opposition amongst the black majority. Martin Orkin observes that the government found itself increasingly unable to tolerate the interrogation of apartheid, which theatre practitioners undertook in different ways. Orkin continues to note that drama performance itself was to become for the state not only a site for overt repressive action but also a theatre within which it demonstrated its own power.<sup>132</sup> Black Theatre on the other hand regarded the state as the aggressor that had to be resisted by any means. Consequently, the relationship between state officers and theatre practitioners was confrontational. The South African Institute of Race Relations notes:

Black writers in this country come from an oppressed community which forms the bottom stratum of South African life. They have been at the receiving end of hundreds of laws made in an unrepresentative all-white parliament aimed at suppressing, oppressing and depriving blacks of anything of consequence. These writers' communities have been characterized by abject poverty and deprivation. Insofar as these

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<sup>131</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From pre-colonial to the present day*. [1995], p.240

<sup>132</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], p.150.

writers are members of such destitute communities, it was to be expected that most of them would rebel against the status quo and seek to expose its ills and the ravages visited on them.<sup>133</sup>

Similarly, Steve Biko notes that it was not long before blacks related their poverty and suffering to their blackness in concrete terms. Biko argues that poor people would always be black because of marginalization and exploitative foreign cultures imposed on them. For him, it was not surprising that blacks therefore wished to rid themselves of a system that locked up the wealth of the country in the hands of the white minority.<sup>134</sup> Kees Epskamp notes:

Popular theatre is often mentioned in the same breath as political liberation, social or cultural oppression, social change or economic exploitation, and is perceived as a political instrument (theatre of resistance or theatre for liberation). It sometimes seems as if the work situation of a popular theatre maker is determined by this social context of battle and resistance.<sup>135</sup>

Epskamp argues that what was generally referred to as political theatre depended, on the one hand, on the explicit attitude of the theatre maker whether he or she openly claimed to be making 'political theatre' and on the other hand, on the state and the regime, which labeled certain theatrical forms as 'politically' unacceptable.<sup>136</sup>

The nature of Black Theatre, therefore, undoubtedly made the state perceive it as a threat which had to be eliminated at all costs even though Black Theatre was what it was due to the apartheid laws. It can be argued that in its quest to glorify and privilege the white minority, the apartheid system introduced numerous laws that not only marginalized but also de-humanized blacks. Like the South African Institute of Race Relations, Orkin notes that for purpose of control, the subject was to be decisively constructed in terms of bodily colour and sexual behavior. As part of this process, a string of laws were passed to mark and categorize subjects according to bodily appearance in order to assert governmental authority and control.<sup>137</sup> The International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa and United Nations Centre Against Apartheid (IDFSAUNCAA) highlight that the entire future of a person was decided upon registration. At the point of registration, the labour bureau classified the person

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<sup>133</sup> The South African Institute of Race Relations, *Beating Apartheid and Building the Future*. [1990], p.69

<sup>134</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness" in Hendrik van der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.192

<sup>135</sup> Kees Epskamp *Learning by Performing Arts*. [1992], p.242

<sup>136</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989], p.72

<sup>137</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], p.81

into one of the several categories of employment. Once classified, workers could not change work, unless it was to change to mine or farm work.<sup>138</sup>

In response to the status quo under apartheid, black playwrights wrote plays about these oppressive laws and their effects. In most of these plays, the playwrights proposed the best measures to be taken in order to bring about change. This is evident in Mda's work. Carolyn Duggan notes that because Mda wishes to spur people on to action, he requires a reasoned response from his audience. Whatever attitude, policy or ideology he is promulgating he demands concomitant reaction. His audience must differentiate between reality and illusion. The audience must observe, think and then take agency in their lives.<sup>139</sup> Epskamp writes:

In the cultural action programs which are part of mass meetings, drama has another function. It informs the population about the injustice and the action that has to be taken. It literally activates and propagates. An active dialogue between actors and audience is stimulated by talking to people in the audience about certain reactions to the situation in the play. Frequently, the acting is stopped as someone in the audience starts a dialogue with the actors.<sup>140</sup>

The black playwrights took such an approach because no matter how discriminatory and oppressive the apartheid laws were to the black majority, the perpetrators claimed that these laws were in the best interests of the country, that is, both black and white even though blacks were clearly victims of this system. Barney Pityana quotes Hendrik F. Verwoerd as having said in relation to the system:

The policy towards the natives is not an effort to exploit the difference between the races, this is not an effort to stir them up to hostility towards one another, an effort to divide and rule! As the nations of the world each on its own territory, so also the opportunity will be given to the various native groups each to accomplish its own development in its own territory. To each of them from the tribal chief to the ordinary native, the chance is being given to accomplish a fair and reasonable development within its own national group.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa and United Nations Centre against Apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts*. [1982], p.43

<sup>139</sup> Carolyn Duggan, "Strategies in Staging, theatre techniques in the plays of Zakes Mda", in Martin Banham ed. *African Theatre in Development*. [1999], p.3

<sup>140</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989], p.149

<sup>141</sup> Pityana, Barney "Power and Social Change in South Africa" in Hendrik van Der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.177

In light of such a claim regarding apartheid despite its oppressive and discriminatory nature against blacks, black playwrights found it necessary to make people aware of the system's cunning, manipulative and deceitful tactics. The intention was to prevent the masses from deception and consequently be lured onto the side of the system resulting in the division of the masses and weaken the people's struggle. Kerr contests that ideological pressure, which had pushed Kente and other popular dramatists into a more radical stance, came largely from the Black Consciousness Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Black Consciousness was a form of cultural nationalism similar to and to a large extent inspired by the Black Power Movement in the United States. He argues that it advocated the unity of the black South Africans (coloreds, Indians as well as Africans) and the building of black self-respect through psychological decolonization and resistance to white oppression. The leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement were acutely aware of the importance of culture in building up confidence and solidarity among the black people of South Africa with theatre as a key medium to achieve that conscientisation.<sup>142</sup> Gascoipne writes:

When millions were reduced by poverty and unemployment to an animal level of existence, it was assumed that they were human and they were urged to act. 'Power is people'. This change from a theatre of inaction to one of action, and from the general to the specific was naturally accompanied by other changes. The majority of the new plays were naturalistic in style.<sup>143</sup>

Biko observes that whites were not only guilty of cunning actions, but also tried to control the response of blacks to the provocation through skilful maneuvers. He contests that whites did not only "kick" blacks but also told blacks how to react to the kick.<sup>144</sup> Likewise, Leon Louw and Frances Kendall note that prior 1948, no white government pretended that the racist laws served the interests of blacks in any way. The various governments under apartheid openly spelt out their aim to protect whites, mainly from economic competition and maintain a good supply of cheap black labour.<sup>145</sup>

It was not until the 1940s when Hendrik Verwoerd refined and systematized the policy of apartheid, that the attempt was made to

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<sup>142</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From pre-colonial to the present day*. [1995], p.221

<sup>143</sup> Scott Fitzgerald in Bamber Gascoipne ed. *Twentieth Century Drama*. [1962], pp.26,27

<sup>144</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness". in Hendrik van der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1962], p.195

<sup>145</sup> Leon Louw and Frances Kendall, *South Africa-The Solution*. [1986], pp.31,32

justify race legislation on an ideological basis and to maintain that it served the interests of blacks as well as whites.<sup>146</sup>

Similarly, Athol Fugard writes that one of the apartheid tactics was to link apartheid with the fight against communism which had, as consequence, complacency among the majority of whites in South Africa through the supposed threat of communism. Fugard says it was frightening to see the extent white South Africans had been bluffed or intimidated into accommodating the appalling policies of the apartheid Government.<sup>147</sup>

At this stage, it is important to reflect on the actions of the apartheid regime and the counteraction by the black playwrights through Black Theatre. One of the first measures that the Nationalist Party took after it came to power in 1948 was to legalise racial segregation. Consequently, it came as no surprise that one of its first laws was to prohibit association between people of different races especially marriages. This meant that being in love with a person outside one's own race (in the racial classification of apartheid) was considered immoral and punishable. Orkin notes that one of the first measures by the apartheid government was the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949). The following year the Immorality Amendment Act (1950) prohibited sexual intercourse between whites and those classified as non-white.<sup>148</sup> The Immorality Amendment Act undoubtedly contravened Articles 3 to 21 of the United Nations Human Rights Charter:

Articles 3 to 21 of the Declaration set forth the Civil and Political Rights to which all human beings are entitled, including the right to association and the right to marry and to found a family.<sup>149</sup>

The Nationalist Party's violation of human rights as stipulated by the United Nations was not something surprising since the apartheid system was based on discrimination and oppression of blacks. The Catholic Institute for International Relations notes that in South Africa, violations of human rights were not merely occasional or matters of inconvenience. The violations were related to the law of the land, the whole body of which has for generations systematically denied every basic human right recognized by the international convention. The fundamental injustice was reinforced by four years of emergency 'rule by decree', which violated the rights of millions of black South Africans to life, food, shelter, land, education, freedom of expression, movement

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid. p.31

<sup>147</sup> Athol Fugard, *Hello and Goodbye*. [1973], p.xvi

<sup>148</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1989], p.81

<sup>149</sup> United Nations, *Basic Facts about United Nations*. [1987], p.62

and employment, freedom to organize politically and in the workplace and, crucially, the right to vote for their own country's government.<sup>150</sup>

In order to ensure minimal interaction between the different races (in the racial classification of apartheid) and to fortify the Immorality Act, the Group Areas Act was introduced. This law confined people of one race to a given area as designated by the system. Orkin comments on these measures taken by the Nationalist Party government in its quest to isolate blacks that the state turned its attention to what it saw as the urgent task of formalized separation particularly in urban areas, not only where the interaction of bodies was concerned, but also in terms of the spaces which those bodies would be permitted to occupy. He believes the legislation aimed at the complete separation of the various races African, coloured and Asian from each other and from the whites in separate residential areas in all urban areas throughout the country.<sup>151</sup>

This policy of defining, redefining and compartmentalizing Africans by the apartheid regime did not go unnoticed or uncommented upon by the South African black playwrights, especially in light of Black Consciousness Movement aspirations to unite and rebuild the black family. Orkin observes that the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement in theatre and poetry and the new modes of poetry which explored it contributed to the recognition amongst other theatre practitioners that space might be recovered by the oppressed classes for their own use in political struggle.<sup>152</sup>

As a result of the atmosphere created by the apartheid system, plays were written in response and with direct reference to most of the apartheid laws passed by the white minority regime, from the Pass Laws to the Group Areas Act. Some plays were written as a result of significant incidents amongst the black masses like the Sharpsville massacre and the District Six forced removals while others were on issues of particular concern like exploitation and ill treatment of blacks in the labour market, especially on white farms. Such plays include *Asinamali* (We have no money) by Mbongeni Ngema and *Dark Voice Ring* by Zakes Mda. But there were also plays whose intention appears to have been to influence the masses to take certain measures to confront and rectify the situation under apartheid. These plays include *The Nurse* by Maishe Maponya and *Banned* by Mda. Nevertheless, most black playwrights, especially Mda, tended to encompass all these issues in a single play as he did in *Joys of War*.

Bob Hepple argues that the elimination of racial discrimination was a matter of grave urgency because discrimination aggravated inequality in terms of opportunities and wealth.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, Mthuli Shezi wrote *Shanti* (1973), which he produced in collaboration with the People Experimental Theatre (PET). The

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<sup>150</sup> Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Rule of Fear*. [1989], p.vii

<sup>151</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1989], p.62

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. p.158

<sup>153</sup> Bob Hepple, *Race, Jobs, and the Law in Britain*. [1968], p.22



play explored the problems created by the Immorality Act and the Group Areas Act. The protagonist in this play, Thabo, who is black, is in love with an Indian girl, Shanti. The play demonstrates the kind of challenges and problems couples from different racial groups encountered from both the apartheid system and their families.<sup>154</sup> Mshengu Kavanagh comments thus on the play:

As a love play *Shanti* is at bottom a variation of the Romeo and Juliet theme. Shanti, who is an Indian, and her boyfriend, Thabo, who is a black African, try to surmount the barriers that divide them through love. In the first place they are divided by the prejudice of their families. Shanti's Indian parents do not take kindly to her marrying a black African, nor do Thabo's approve of his marrying an Indian.<sup>155</sup>

With both Indians and Africans having different traditions, cultures, customs and religions, many difficulties arise. However, interracial couples often deal with these issues constructively, but there was no such possibility when it came to the apartheid laws. This meant such couples risked arrest, especially if caught at the wrong place, that is, outside their residential area as prescribed by the apartheid law. Consequently, such lovers could not visit each other as lovers do without permission from the authorities. Kavanagh writes:

In South Africa the two lovers are further divided not only by pressure from their families and communities and religions, but also by government legislation as well. There is no law forbidding marriage between an Indian and a black African in South Africa but by the law Indians, like Shanti, are forced to live in Lenasia and are not permitted to enter Soweto. Besides such a marriage would entail so many legal problems as to be virtually impossible. Thus in practice government pressure against marriages between Africans and Indians is virtually as severe as that between black and white. In the South African situation, the "Romeo and Juliet" theme is no longer private tragedy but political oppression.<sup>156</sup>

Orkin, as well, notes that all blacks throughout South Africa were required by the law, in terms of the cynically named Natives Act of 1952, to carry an identification document (Dom Pass) validating their presence mainly in white urban areas. The failure to do so was a criminal offence.<sup>157</sup> Consequently, Thabo is arrested in the play while trying to visit his Indian girlfriend in her community

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<sup>154</sup> Mshengu Kavanagh, *South African People's Plays*. [1981], p.xx

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. p.xx

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. p.xxi

<sup>157</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1989], p.63

and thrown into jail. In a way the play demonstrates how the apartheid system turned blacks and other people of colour into criminals by passing laws certain to be broken.

Louw and Kendall trace the Immorality Act which the two, Thabo and Shanti, were contravening back to the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century after the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck. The two observe that in 1681 the Vereenighde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) did not only forbid all interracial concubinage, but it was also punishable by up to three years imprisonment with hard labor on Robben Island. This was followed by prohibitions against whites attending parties with black slave women. However, it was only in 1685 that the first law prohibiting marriage between whites and blacks was introduced.<sup>158</sup>

The other law that restricted blacks' freedom of movement was the notorious Pass Law. The Pass Law ensured that people stayed within the boundaries as prescribed by the apartheid system both in space and work. The IDFSANCAA describes:

The pass law system is one of the key instruments of apartheid and of the economic exploitation of African workers. Every African outside the Bantustan areas who is over the age of 16 must carry a pass book, a booklet containing a set of documents. Pass books immediately identify their holders to any official; they show at a glance whether they have a right to be in a particular area; whether or where they are employed; whether they had paid their taxes. A list of what the pass book contains indicates its scope and power as an instrument of control.<sup>159</sup>

The observation made by the International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa regarding the Pass Law, is also commented upon with concern by Ngubane that when the first South African Republic was established, its laws discriminated very rigidly against the Africans. They were not free to move about the white man's towns since they were presumed to be criminals unless they had a pass to prove the contrary. But even if they did, they were not allowed to be out on the streets after a certain hour of the night without a piece of paper signed by a white person showing they were not vagrants.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Leon Louw and Frances Kendall, *South Africa-The Solution*. [1986], p.31

<sup>159</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa and United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts*. [1992], p.43

<sup>160</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid* [1963], p.55

### 1.2.1. Gibson Kente's *Too Late*

Given the Pass Laws and the negative effect it had on blacks and other people of colour, the response by black playwrights regarding the Pass Law was overwhelming. In his play *Too Late* (1975), Gibson Kente explores the impact the Pass Law had especially on the weak and helpless, like children.

In *Too Late* Kente is concerned to demonstrate the working and effects of racial discrimination in South Africa. The form of the play is didactic and demonstrative. Kente intends us to see apartheid and its instruments, the pass official and the police, in action. He intends us to see the pass laws at work, the effects of unemployment, the brutalization of the prison system.<sup>161</sup>

Kente's protagonist in this play, Saduva, leaves his rural home after the death of his parents to stay with his aunt Madinto, the only close relative the young boy has. Despite Saduva's plight, the apartheid laws do not permit him to move from his rural area into town unless he has proof of employment, or else he runs the risk of being arrested. Orkin notes that no black person was permitted to be in an urban area for longer than seventy-two hours unless she or he had permission stamped in her or his passbook to be available day or night for police inspection. Neglecting or forgetting to carry a pass was defined as a criminal offence.<sup>162</sup> Consequently, Saduva has to hide to avoid arrest and deportation back to his rural area where he has no one. His aunt is not in a better position either. Although she has a right to be in the urban area, she is unemployed and has to sell liquor illegally to survive. As a result, she too has to be on the lookout for police, or else bribe them to avoid imprisonment.

Kente also addresses the question of displacement caused by the apartheid laws in this play. Furthermore, the play demonstrates the criminalization of blacks, because blacks like other human beings, are bound to move from one place to another and interact with each other. Ngubane observes that the movements of natives into and out of urban areas were rigidly controlled by the security police.<sup>163</sup> Eventually, Madinto and Saduva are caught and sent to prison. Madinto is the first to be arrested and sent to jail leaving behind her disabled daughter and Saduva without anybody to look after them. Worse still, Saduva is arrested later as he struggles to find something for the two to live on and he too is sent to prison. Saduva's life changes drastically in prison due to ill-treatment including being sodomised by older inmates. By the time Saduva is released from prison at the end of his sentence, he is a changed person from the

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<sup>161</sup> Gibson Kente, *South African People's Plays*. [1981], p.xxvi

<sup>162</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1989], p.63

<sup>163</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid..* [1963], p.233

innocent rural boy to a dangerous and vengeful criminal. Mfundisi regrets this change in Saduva's character:

MFUNDISI - We all know that this young man was God loving, peace loving and lawabiding. What has changed him? What's put hatred in him? Tomorrow that poor young boy will be labeled dangerous and against the laws of the country forgetting that the politics were forced on him. It's like being thrown into the rain and expected not to get wet or food put in your hungry mouth yet still prohibited to eat. That boy will never be the same again. Can any force stop the prevalent bitterness in youth like Saduva?<sup>164</sup>

The play compels one to visualize how the apartheid system systematically destroyed blacks by making and passing laws that served as nothing but a trap for blacks.

### 1.2.2 Kani, Ntshona and Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*

Like Kente, John Kani in collaboration with Winston Ntshona and Athol Fugard dealt with issues of pass law in his play *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1974). Kani's protagonist, Styles, runs a photo studio, which to a certain extent represents South Africa with him as the authority. However, unlike the apartheid system that denies blacks and other people of colour any freedom, Styles grants his clients freedom. This is demonstrated by the fact that he takes his clients' pictures the way they want, not the way he wants as a photographer:

'Styles Photographic Studio. Reference Books; passports, Weddings; Engagements; Birthday Parties and Parties. Proprietor: Styles.' When you look at this, what do you see? Just another photographic studio? Where people come because they've lost their reference Book and need a photo for the new one? No, friend. It's more than just that. This is a strong-room of dreams. The dreamers? My people. The simple people, who you never find mentioned in the history books, who never get statues erected to them, or monuments commemorating their great deeds. People who would be forgotten, and their dreams with them, if it wasn't for Styles. That's what I do, friends. Put down, in my way, on paper the dreams and hopes of my people so that even their children's children will remember...  
'Mr Styles'

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<sup>164</sup> Gibson Kente, *Too Late South African People's Plays*. [1981], p.123

I said: 'Come in!'  
 'Mr Styles, I've come to take a snap...'  
 I said: 'Sit down! Sit down, my friend.'  
 'No, Mr Styles. I want to take the snap standing...' [barely containing his suppressed excitement and happiness]. 'Mr Styles, take the card, please!' I said: 'Certainly, friend.' Something you mustn't do is interfere with a man's dream. If he wants to do it standing, let him stand. If he wants to sit, let him sit. Do exactly what they want! Sometimes they come in here, all smart in a suit, then off comes the jacket and shoes and socks. 'Take it, Mr Styles. Take it!' And I take it. No questions.<sup>165</sup>

Styles' description of his relationship with his clients and the way he handles them symbolizes democracy. In his business, Styles clients have freedom of expression and choice. He recognizes the existence of his clients and observes their right to pursue and achieve their dreams. This is in sharp contrast to what the apartheid system is doing just outside his studio door, where blacks are not recognized as human enough to be treated as equally as whites. In the streets, they are dictated by the system on how they should live their lives.

The extent to which blacks were dehumanized is demonstrated later in the play. Kente's lead character, Sizwe Bansi, is illegal in Johannesburg because he is unemployed. Furthermore, his papers are not in order, that is, he has no stamped passbook to legitimize his presence in Johannesburg. After several escapes from the pass officials, he is arrested and ordered to return to his hometown, King William's Town. Joyce Sikakane notes that permits were needed for everything because the law stated that no one could lawfully reside in Soweto or other locations without being in possession of several appropriate permits. To make sure that this law was adhered to the search for "illegal" natives was carried out by the "blackjacks", the notorious municipal police. Failure to produce the pass meant on-the-spot arrest.<sup>166</sup>

In the play, Sizwe stumbles across a dead man, Robert Zwelinzima, as he makes his way back from the court. The dead man has a valid passbook, which Sizwe takes and later uses to find work. In a way, he assumes the name of the dead man and takes his job as well. However, it is not before a lot of persuasion from his friend Buntu:

BUNTU - Are you really worried about your children, friend, or are you just worried about yourself and your bloody name? Wake up, man!

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<sup>165</sup> John Kani, Wiston Ntshona and Athol Fugard, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead-Statements [three plays]*. [1974], pp.12,13

<sup>166</sup> Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto*. [1977], pp.25,26

Use that book and with your pay on Friday you'll have a real chance to do something for them.

MAN - I'm afraid. How do I get used to Robert. How do I live as another man's ghost?

BUNTU - Wasn't Siswe Bansi a ghost?

MAN - No!

BUNTU - No? When the white man looked at you at the Labour Bureau what did he see? A man with dignity or a bloody passbook with an N.I. Number? Isn't that a ghost when the white man sees you walk down the street and calls out, 'Hey, John! Come here' to you, Sizwe Bansi. Isn't that a ghost? Or when a little child calls you 'Boy'...you a man, circumcised with a wife and four children...Isn't that a ghost? Stop fooling yourself. All I'm saying is be a real ghost, if that is what they want, what they have turned us into. Spook them into hell, man!<sup>167</sup>

The argument of Kani, Ntshona and Fugard is that given the way blacks were dehumanized, it was tantamount to nonexistence. Blacks were like ghosts, a metaphor not only for dead people but also for the resemblance of people not in a position to consciously take action against the oppressive apartheid regime and life in general. Instead, they had to think, act and behave the way they were dictated to by the apartheid system as though they were its property. As a result, the argument of Kani and his colleagues seems to be that blacks were as good as nonexistent and therefore should pretend so as long as that will make them and their families survive. He appears to encourage his audience that if someone dies, and the dead person happens to have valid documents as required by the apartheid system, those still alive should give away their names and consequently their identity and pride, and assume the dead person's identity in order to be free to look for a job and maintain themselves and their families. Orkin observes:

Sizwe dramatises aspects of the black struggle to survive within the apartheid system. The discovery of a dead body enables Sizwe Bansi, using the dead man's pass, to find employment, support his rural dependants, and avoid endorsement out of his urban area.<sup>168</sup>

What is interesting about Kani and Orkin's observation is that it demonstrates how the system took blacks for granted to the extent that it thought whatever laws it conceived and passed would be observed accordingly. Consequently, the system failed to realize how such laws could be used against it to benefit those

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<sup>167</sup> John Kani, Wiston Ntshona and Athol Fugard, *Sizwe Bansi is dead-Statements [three plays]*. [1974], p.23

<sup>168</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1989], pp.160,1

they were meant to suppress. Biko observes, in this regard, that the wounds inflicted on the blacks and the accumulated insults of oppression over the years were bound to provoke reaction from blacks.<sup>169</sup>

Because many people were forced to violate the area restriction in order to find jobs and maintain themselves and their families, a lot of them fell victim to the pass officials and were consequently convicted and sent to prison. The IDFSANCAA notes that the figures for arrest and prosecutions of Pass Law offenders were very high. Between 1948 and 1981, at least 12.5 million people were arrested or prosecuted under the Pass Laws. People convicted under the Pass Laws constituted one third of all sentenced prisoners in 1979.<sup>170</sup> Most of these people served their sentences at white farms where they were treated no differently from slaves. White farmers jostled at courts and prisons to snatch pass law offenders as soon as they were convicted or when they arrived at the prisons. The IDFSANCAA observes that many of those given prison sentences under the Pass Laws, as well as other black prisoners, spent the term of their sentences working as labourers, mainly for white farmers. Officially they were said to be paroles but the treatment they were subjected to was worse than being in prison.

It appears that to convict blacks and leasing them to farmers was a worldwide practice. Angela Y. Davis writes the following in relation to the treatment of convicted blacks in the United States of America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Through the convict lease system, black people were forced to play the same old roles carved for them by slavery. Men and women alike were arrested and imprisoned at the slightest pretext in order to be leased out by the authorities as convict laborers. Whereas the slaveholders had recognized limits to the cruelty with which they exploited their 'valuable' human property, no such cautions were necessary for the post war planters who rented black convicts for relatively short term. In many cases sick convicts are made to toil until they drop dead in their tracks.<sup>171</sup>

As Davis observes, there seems to have been a conspiracy between the authorities and the white farmers in the United States. The same can be said about the apartheid regime and the farmers in which the regime ensured that the farmers got cheap, if not free labour through the use of convicts. This meant maximum profit for less capital invested. The former President of South Africa

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<sup>169</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness" in Hendrik van der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.170

<sup>170</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund Southern Africa and United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts*. [1982], p.44

<sup>171</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*. [1983], p.89

Nelson Mandela recalled, during the Defiance Campaign of 1952, the harsh and inhuman treatment prisoners working in white farms were subjected to:

The farm laborers are in a particularly dire plight. You will perhaps recall the investigations and exposure of the semi-slave conditions on the Bethal farms by Reverend Michael Scott and a *Guardian* newspaper correspondent; by the *Drum* and *The Advance* how human beings wearing only sacks with holes for their heads and arms, never given enough food to eat, slept on cement floors on cold nights with only their sacks to cover their shivering bodies. You will remember how they were woken up as early as 4 a.m. and taken to work on the fields with the indunas sjamboking those who tried to straighten their backs, who felt weak and dropped down because of hunger and exhaustion. You will recall the story of human beings toiling pathetically from the early hours of the morning till sunset, fed only on mealie meal served on filthy sacks spread on the ground and eating with their dirty hands. People falling ill and never once being given medical attention.<sup>172</sup>

The list of these kinds of atrocities committed against blacks, especially those serving their prison sentences on white farms, goes on. These are some of the lived experiences that South African black playwrights including Kani address in their plays. It was the attempt to tackle these issues that attracted the attention of the apartheid system.

### 1.2.3 Mda's *Dark Voices Ring*, *Banned* and *Joys of War*

The heinous acts Mandela listed, Mda dramatizes in his play *Dark Voices Ring* (1990), whereas in his other play *Banned* (1982) he draws his audience's attention to the plight of banned people under the Internal Security Act. The IDFAUNCAA notes that under the Internal Security Act, the regime had powers to act against persons by prohibiting them from any kind of gathering as well as entering and leaving specified areas during specified times. A banned person had no right to legal representation to challenge the banning order.<sup>173</sup>

Even though the IDFAUNCAA does not mention it, the banning order could also include house arrest. This meant the concerned person was not allowed to leave his or her home, be visited or be in the presence of more than one person at a time except members of his or her immediate family. This law

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<sup>172</sup> Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life*. [1978], p.37

<sup>173</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa and United Nations Centre against Apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts*. [1982], p.58



made no exception with regard to children as Mda's character, Cynthia, observes in the play:

FIRST CHILD - We have come to play with Thandi.

CYNTHIA - Go and play out in the street. She will come and play with you when she finishes washing the dishes.

SECOND CHILD - Awu, it's cold outside. We want to wait for her here.

CYNTHIA - No! Go out. It is the law that you can't be here.

FIRST CHILD - Why did you make that law?

CYNTHIA - I did not make that law.

SECOND CHILD - Who made that law?

CYNTHIA - The government...

SECOND CHILD - But this is your house.

CYNTHIA - Of course this is my house.

FIRST CHILD - Then why did the government make that law?<sup>174</sup>

Although it is not stated what the relationship is between Mda's protagonist, Cynthia, and Joyce Sikakane who was detained and later banned in 1969 by the apartheid system, there is a marked resemblance between their experiences. Mda says most of his female characters are either based or influenced by someone known or close to him.<sup>175</sup> Sikakane did social work together with Winnie Mandela, Toko Mngoma, (former ANC Women's League Executive) and Martha Dhlamini (former ANC Campaigner). Sikakane together with her colleagues were concerned with helping people find missing relatives most of whom were detained.<sup>176</sup> This kind of work meant constant clashes with the agents of the apartheid system until Sikakane was finally arrested, leaving her children behind. She says she knew that in their case what they had been doing was something that would not in any country be considered "terroristic". She argues that they were involved with the welfare of political prisoners, helping to make arrangements for families of prisoners to visit their husbands or parents. Even though they were not involved in any activity connected with violence or arms, their work was considered illegal.<sup>177</sup>

Similarly, Cynthia in the play *Banned* is a social worker and a mother as well. When she goes to work she learns of the atrocities committed by the apartheid system. Consequently, she resigns from work to free herself from the

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<sup>174</sup> Zakes Mda, *Banned* in *The Plays of Zakes Mda*. [1990], p.80

<sup>175</sup> Zakes Mda, Personal Interview

<sup>176</sup> Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto*. [1977], p.62

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p.62

restriction that involves supervision by her white boss. This gives her more time to work with the poor, especially victims of forced removals.

CYNTHIA - You know, when you apply the basic social work principles in this country you run against the law. I don't care what agency you work for, you run against the law. It can be child welfare, or rehabilitation of criminal offenders. You run against the law. I learnt that the hard way. But I wasn't going to be a mere functionary like some social workers I know. I decided that the best thing for me would be to resign from Cripple Care. Do something constructive outside the establishment that stifled me. I joined the community workers and we tried to help the squatters in various ways, such as collecting donations of blankets, fire-wood, food and clothing from those who were better off. Indeed people's hearts were touched when they learned of mothers and their babies, out in the freezing cold and rain, having their makeshift plastic shelters destroyed and the plastics confiscated by officials. Of course you know about the squatters. You have seen their shelters of plastics and cardboard. You have seen bull-dozers flattening these shelters and you have seen them rise again like a phoenix in a matter of minutes. You have seen those women and children determined to live together as families, stand up in defiance of the police and government officials who are eager to send them to their so-called homelands.<sup>178</sup>

Like Sikakane, by helping victims of the apartheid system, Cynthia, in *Banned*, found herself consistently clashing with the system until she was finally arrested and later banned. The reason for such an act by the system is contained in a statement made by one of the Nationalist Party members in parliament:

We make no apologies for the Group Areas Act, and for its application. And if 600 000 Indians and Coloreds are affected by the implementation of that Act, we do not apologize for that either. I think the world must simply accept it. The Nationalist Party came to power in 1948 and said it would implement residential segregation in South Africa, out of the chaos which prevailed when we came to power, we created order and established decent, separate residential areas for our people.<sup>179</sup>

Undoubtedly, “the decent, separate residential areas for our people” did not apply to or include blacks but meant white people.

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<sup>178</sup> Zakes Mda *Banned* in *The Plays of Zakes Mda*, [1990], p.71

<sup>179</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], pp.142,143

The forced removals themselves meant a lot of suffering to the concerned communities. This suffering is portrayed in Matsemela Manaka's *Children of Asazi* (1984). Cosmos Desmond in *The Discarded People*, which documents forced removals in South Africa, takes up this issue as well:

I have seen the bewilderment of simple rural people when they are told that they must leave their homes where they have lived for generations and go to a strange place. I have heard their cries of helplessness and resignation and their pleas for help. I have seen the sufferings of whole families living in a tent or a tiny hut. Of children sick with typhoid, or their bodies emaciated with malnutrition and even dying of plain starvation.<sup>180</sup>

In the face of this suffering and subsequent banishment, Sikakane notes that she finally concluded that the best thing to do was to sneak out of the country and to wage war against the system from outside:

By 1973 I had come to the decision that I had, after all, to leave South Africa. The government was making new threats that it was going to take firm action against what it termed "political agitators" working in the black communities. So in July 1973 in a carefully planned escape I left the country to join the national liberation movement in exile in Zambia. I was now an angry woman full of revolutionary fight directed against the apartheid state.<sup>181</sup>

Similarly, at the end of Mda's play *Banned*, Cynthia, leaves the country to join the liberation movement:

CYNTHIA - I can't help it, Bra Zet, I have something to tell you. I have decided to skip the country and join the fighters in exile.  
BRA ZET - You are out of your mind, Cynthia. You are completely out of your mind!  
You have a daughter, Cynthia. Think of your daughter.  
CYNTHIA - Listen, for the people to achieve liberation someone has to make the sacrifice, Bra Zet. Otherwise we wouldn't be having our soldiers fighting at the today or infiltrating the country with arms.<sup>182</sup>

Such a resemblance between Mda's character and Sikakane indicates that Mda's play is a representation of lived experiences of the ordinary people in South

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid. p.143

<sup>181</sup> Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto*. [1977], p.79

<sup>182</sup> Zakes Mda, *Banned* in *The Plays of Zakes Mda*. [1990], p.80

Africa under the apartheid system. However, this also indicates that most of the plays, especially by black playwrights like Mda, might have been meant to conscientize and mobilize the oppressed black masses to take appropriate measures to bring about change. In the case of Mda's *Banned*, the motive could have been to influence blacks to leave the country and to join the liberation movements to wage armed struggle against the apartheid system. Teresa Devant, who directed some of Mda's plays, comments that his work, particularly produced in years between 1979 and 1994, form a theatre of resistance, which aims to conscientize and mobilize the oppressed. In his plays one finds a scrutiny of the society in which Mda brings out the contradictions, aspirations, frustrations, and motivations of the oppressed for the struggle for liberation.<sup>183</sup> One can compare Mda's approach to that of Sembene Ousmane. Ousmane explains regarding his work:

What I want to represent is a social realism. I have no intention of creating heroes, on the contrary, I am concerned with everyday reality: the woman who struggles for the life and toils to nourish her child, her sorrows, her hopes, I work with the material of everyday life of ordinary people. They recognize themselves in my works and identify with the characters.<sup>184</sup>

Mineke Schipper states that Ousmane sees the task of writers as that of capturing reality through words as it is to give voice to the ordinary people and their problems. And as a result, he wants to show the Africa as lived by the people of Africa.<sup>185</sup> Kees Epskamp notes, like Mda, that theatre as a vehicle of change has certainly played an intervening role in effecting political change. Epskamp observes that some of the initiatives were merely intended to direct part of the population in a particular direction, so that they could assess their situation and thus change its modes in an efficient way, while others were meant to bring about complete social revolution.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, Ronald Gaskell is of the opinion that if drama is to be true to the diversity of people's lives, it must show people in society or at least suggest something of the world in which they live.<sup>187</sup>

It should be noted that *Banned* is not the only play by Mda in which his characters leave the country to join a liberation movement, *Dark Voices Ring* (1990) is another. Consequently, some of Mda's plays seem to be about a single story and he advances this story in different plays.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid. p.xxviii

<sup>184</sup> Mineke Schipper, *Beyond the Boundaries*. [1989], pp.139,140

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. p.140

<sup>186</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989], p.71

<sup>187</sup> Ronald Raskell, *Drama and Reality. The European Theatre since Ibsen*. [1972], p.10

In both *Banned* and *Dark Voices Ring*, the characters leave the country to join liberation movements, whereas in *Joys of War* (1989) the characters of Soldier 1 and Soldier 2, have received military training in a foreign country and are now back in South Africa with arms having infiltrated the country. The two soldiers await a sign from their commanders to carry out a mission of sabotage against the apartheid government's property.

In *Joys of War*, Mda also dramatizes the detention and torture of black political prisoners, an experience that in most cases compelled them to take up arms against the oppressive system. Again his protagonist's experiences are similar to those of Sikakane:

I was detained on May 12, 1969 at 2 A.M. I was taken to Pretoria Central prison. They knocked on the big door, the guard looked out and then opened the gate and let me in. As I came into the yard, the police-woman shouted to the women to shut their eyes. This was because I was a Terrorist Act detainee, to be held incommunicado, which meant no-one should know who or where I was. Under the Terrorism Act a detainee may be held until a statement to the satisfaction of the Commissioner of Police has been given, and the purpose of interrogation is to obtain such a statement which can be used against you or someone else. The interrogation lasted right through until the following day without food, without anything. They took turns, and took breaks. I was just standing there. I would be tired, I would squat down, I would jump about a bit. I was shown bricks, the torture bricks on which men detainees are made to stand.<sup>188</sup>

As Sikakane implies, male detainees were subjected to harsher interrogation than females. Apart from the torture bricks, men were also subjected to electric shocks to obtain information or force them to confess. Mda relates this through Soldier 1 in *Joys of War*:

SOLDIER 1 - They held me for six months-incommunicado. Six months! Well, five incommunicado, since the first month they locked me up with petty criminals, pickpockets and fellas who steal wheelbarrows and car batteries. I later heard from one Warder that it was their way of humiliating me. I mean, political prisoners are always locked up alone. After a month when they realized that I was getting on too well with the criminals, they took me to solitary. I mean they used to help me rehearse the part I was going to play the next day in the interrogation chambers. That was the only way to escape the pain of

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<sup>188</sup>Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto* [1977], pp. 59,60,61

torture. To act. And lie. And scream the way they want you to scream when the electric current ran through your body.<sup>189</sup>

Like Soldier 1 in this play, Sikakane was accused of being a communist. This was a label given to all those who were opposed to the apartheid system. However, in her case it appears the system tried to manipulate her, under the assumption that being a beautiful woman and educated, she could be persuaded to turn state's witness in exchange for her freedom. Sikakane writes:

They argued that people like myself, young, intelligent, pretty, etc., were being misled by communists. They, on the other hand, were offering me a chance. I found this insulting... 'What hypocrites' I said inside me 'to say communists had misled me into wanting to change the system. I didn't need any communist to tell me apartheid is evil.'<sup>190</sup>

Sikakane's comments demonstrate the manipulative tactics of the apartheid regime in its quest to divide and conquer the oppressed black masses. Ngubane argues that the apartheid government regarded all its opponents as communists to the extent that even a Roman Catholic archbishop, who attacked apartheid strictly on moral grounds, was branded an agent of the communists.<sup>191</sup>

Given the experiences blacks were subjected to by the apartheid system, Mda and other black playwrights argued that it was only in the best interests of the oppressed majority that they support the armed struggle and wage war against the system. Duggan observes the Young Man's declaration in *Joys of War* that he is "leaving the village for the north to join those men who are dying in order to save us" Mda makes his first explicit call for armed resistance against what he sees as an unjust state.<sup>192</sup> Similarly, Thabo in *Shanti* escapes from prison and goes to Mozambique to join the liberation struggle. It is in this regard that Frantz Fanon argues:

The native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people. This may be properly called a literature of combat, in the sense that it calls on the whole people to fight for their existence as a nation. It is literature of combat, because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is literature of combat because it assumes

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<sup>189</sup> Zakes Mda, *Joys of War* in *The Plays of Zakes Mda* .[1990], pp.108,111

<sup>190</sup> Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto*. [1977], pp. 52,63

<sup>191</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An Africa Explains Apartheid*. [1963], pp.151,152

<sup>192</sup> Zakes Mda, *The Plays of Zakes Md*. [1990], p. xxiii

responsibility and because it is the will of liberty expressed in terms of time and space.<sup>193</sup>

In light of these plays, Piniel Shava highlights the difference between what came to be known as “Protest Theatre” on the one hand and “Theatre for Resistance” on the other. He remarks that there are writings which merely record the various aspects of apartheid, while other works not only record the injustices of the system, but also attack the injustices. On the other hand, other writing go further records, attacks and illuminates or prescribes a solution to the problem.<sup>194</sup> Njabulo Ndebele believes this prescriptive writing stemmed from accusations against writers that they did not offer solutions to the problems they graphically dramatized.<sup>195</sup>

In calling for violent resistance, Mda and his colleagues were probably responding to leaders like Nelson Mandela, who realized as well that peaceful means had failed. However, by the time Mandela admitted in the late 1950s that peaceful means had failed and armed struggle was the solution, armed struggle is said to have already started underground. His admission is said to have been just a public acknowledgement of the change in ANC policy toward achieving freedom peacefully in South Africa.<sup>196</sup> Ngubane observes:

Nelson Mandela, who had suddenly emerged from obscurity to be recognized as national leader, announced that the days of non-violence were over. He added ominously that the oppressed would consider other ways of struggle, and nobody in the ANC movement leadership repudiated him. He was merely making public a change in attitudes that had already taken place in the underground, and the acceptance by substantial sections of the African community of violence as the instrument without which change could not be brought about marks one of the critical turning points in the history of South Africa.<sup>197</sup>

Mda’s radical stand and boldness to openly advocate armed struggle in his theatre is understandable. Unlike other South African black playwrights including Maishe Maponya, Matsemela Manaka and Mbongeni Ngema, who were writing and producing their plays within the borders of South Africa, Mda was operating from exile in Lesotho. However, as demonstrated in his plays, he had a firm grasp of what was happening to his people back home. Consequently, he used his freedom to write and present the situation experienced by his people

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<sup>193</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. [1963], p.193

<sup>194</sup> Piniel Shava *A People's Voice*.. [1989], p.3

<sup>195</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991], p.67

<sup>196</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An Africa Explains Apartheid* . [1963], p.138

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. p.138

and suggested measures to be taken to bring about change without much fear of any repercussions.

#### 1.2.4 Ngema and Maponya

However, it does not mean that black playwrights who were practicing theatre within the borders of South Africa were not revolutionary. They too addressed issues affecting the black masses caused by apartheid, which were of great concern and consequently needed immediate attention as the war for liberation continued. Maishe Maponya wrote both *The Hungry Earth* and *The Nurse*. In *The Hungry Earth*, Maponya explores and reflects the plight of black masses in the workplace. Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman remark that *The Hungry Earth* is reminiscent of early Brechtian theatre in that the actors present a lecture demonstration about the conditions of black working-class life in South Africa.<sup>198</sup> As Maponya portrays in his play, the use of labour bureau and pass law directed African workers to the lowest paid jobs and prevented them from changing their occupations, which kept their wages very low and weakened bargaining power with their employers.<sup>199</sup> Similarly, Ngubane observes that under apartheid, certain jobs were earmarked for people with white skin, regardless of their qualifications or standards of efficiency.<sup>200</sup>

In *The Nurse*, Maponya deals specifically with the plight of black nurses in South Africa under the white-run South African Nursing Association (SANA). Maponya remarks, regarding *The Nurse*, that the conditions in the health sector in South Africa were just as appalling as they were described in the play. He says he spoke with nurses who had experienced these situations and doctors (the Health Workers Association leadership) who confirmed the information. He did thorough research to inform his play because he believed that if the nurses did not confront these situations, they would continue to be pawns of the white management as represented by SANA.<sup>201</sup>

Another playwright not exiled, Mbongeni Ngema, on the other hand, was concerned with the exploitation of the black masses through rent increases. Because the black majority was denied an opportunity to own land or property under the Land Act of 1913, they were forced to rent houses constructed and administered by the municipality in the urban areas. This meant people were at the mercy of the municipality that appeared to enjoy persistently raising rent. The

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<sup>198</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South African Theatre [Four Plays and Introduction..]* [1984], p.147

<sup>199</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa and United Nations Centre against Apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts*. [1982], p.43

<sup>200</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An Africa Explains Apartheid..* [1963], p.233

<sup>201</sup> Maishe Maponya, *Doing Plays for a Change*. [1995], p.ix



houses themselves were constructed in such a way that the authorities could easily quell protest or resistance of any sort. Ngubane observes that a new factor became observable in the locations, namely the systematic crushing of individuality. He says the locations were not designed as residential areas for human beings with different temperaments and preferences but were meant to be reservoirs of labour while at the same time limiting any form of development by blacks. The houses were built according to one monotonous pattern with straight streets to facilitate troop movements.<sup>202</sup> Consequently, Ngema's *Asinamali* (We have no money) focused on the resistance of residents against the authorities' rent increase. The play drew attention in particular to the struggle of the residents of Lamontville township in Durban. Orkin observes that *Asinamali* presents five prisoners in a cell who relate their stories to one another. The most crucial of these stories involves the resistance the people of Lamontville township have given to rent increases, which were part of a larger series of rent strikes and consumer boycotts from the mid 1980s that swept throughout townships in the entire country.<sup>203</sup>

Like Mda's, Ngema's characters reflect and contest a system of control. There can be no doubt that Ngema's characters are in prison either because of their failure to pay rent or their resistance to rent exploitation they were subjected to by the municipality. The fact that they were impoverished undoubtedly led to their absolute domination, which forced them to compromise their way of life, that is, their customs, tradition and culture. In the process, this created a new community without identity that would easily be controlled by the system. Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that the real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth. What they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed, to control, in other words, the entire realm of their life. He believes that to control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others.<sup>204</sup>

Ngubane submits that blacks argued that they were very much in the same position as that of Jews in Hitler's concentration camps, from which there was no escape. Due to this suffering they were subjected to, they finally realized that if the whites wanted the lion's share of Africa, pushing the black majority to the eroded and crowded reserves, the blacks had no choice but fight until they drove the last Afrikaner out of South Africa, back to Europe.<sup>205</sup> There could have been no better way to achieve this than through attacking the economy of the Afrikaners as Ngema dramatizes.

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<sup>202</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*. [1963], p.124

<sup>203</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], p.228

<sup>204</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Languages in African Literature*. [1986], p.16

<sup>205</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*. [1963], pp.216,223

Due to the numerous incidents and issues pertaining to the black masses that arose under the apartheid system, Ngema together with Percy Mtwa and Barney Simon wrote *Woza Albert* (1983). Its episodic and comical nature made *Woza Albert* different from other Ngema's plays. The nature of the play gave Ngema and his colleagues the capacity to address several issues of concern to the black majority in a single production and in an entertaining manner. Orkin notes that the subsequent work of Ngema and Mtwa suggested a more urgent concern with material conditions in the social order and a more aggressive stance against the state, expressed in their representation of the details of township struggle in the mid-1980s.<sup>206</sup> The title implies a call to the leadership of the masses such as Albert Luthuli, the first president of the ANC. The play is an appeal by Ngema for help from Luthuli and other leaders. This notion is reinforced in the final scene, where deceased leaders are recalled in a spiritual resurrection:

The final scene takes place in a graveyard in which some of the great past fighters of liberation, oppressed, sometimes the murdered are resurrected, a metaphor for the recovery not only of a narrative of liberation to set against the denial of the role of such activists in history in the prevailing discourse, but also for the intensification of the struggle which infused the lives and actions of those recalled. The ending entails also, in the image of resurrection, again desire for the millennium in the discourse which their play often resonates, the resurrection of the body of the South African social order, in the spirit of the Christ in whom it believes.<sup>207</sup>

The possible explanation for Ngema and his colleague's turn to these great leaders is that Africans believe strongly in ancestors. They believe that the dead can pray for the living to God so that the living can be saved from their suffering. Because of the unjust laws of the apartheid system, Ngema and his colleagues seem convinced that God is on their side. There is a scene in which one of the actors plays Jesus and it is reiterated that if Jesus was to come again during apartheid South Africa he would likely identify with the oppressed masses, that is, blacks. In this sense, the title seems to refer to Jesus' words "Lazarus, come out!" in the Lazarus resurrection scene.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], p.227

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. p.226

<sup>208</sup> Gospel, John 11:43

### 1.3 Apartheid's Reaction to Black Theatre

The above-mentioned playwrights are just an example. A considerable number of other playwrights made contributions to Black Theatre including South African women playwrights like Fatima Dike and Gcina Mhlophe. There were also groups such as Workshop '71 which produced *Survival*, Theatre Council of Natal (TECON) produced *Black Images* and People's Experimental Theatre (PET) produced Shezi's *Shanti*. Orkin notes that this move of drama into political sites of contestation countered the State's own dramatisation of its power by using the army as well as the police in townships to arrest and silence as much opposition as it could.<sup>209</sup> These artists were determined to make it clear to the perpetrators of apartheid that the system was evil and unacceptable. Ngubane states:

The Afrikaner nationalist will change his mind about apartheid only when he clearly sees that it hurts him, that it threatens his survival. Apartheid has got to be pushed to such an extremity that the Afrikaner will see in it a threat to his security, for then, and then only, will he change his mind.<sup>210</sup>

It can be argued, given their plight and the harsh treatment by the apartheid system, blacks were determined to push the Afrikaners to that extent. The militancy of South African black playwrights was resonant with the oppressed masses' desire, which reflected a similar pattern with theatre in other parts of the world. Jerry Wasserman remarks in relation to minority theatre in Canada that the characters that took centre stage were frequently those of Indians, Newfoundlanders, the handicapped or homosexuals, that is, the socially marginal and disenfranchised. Wasserman says in this way, the outsiders became insiders as the revolutionary impulses of the late sixties and early seventies counterculture inverted the traditional aesthetic order.<sup>211</sup>

As one would expect, the Afrikaners were not to give up that easily given the benefits the apartheid system afforded them. It was therefore impossible for them to stand by in the face of criticism by black playwrights and watch as their dirty linen was being washed in public. The Afrikaners' response to the criticism followed the same pattern as described by Ngugi wa Thiong'o:

A critic who in real life is suspicious of people fighting for liberation will suspect characters, which, though only in a novel, are fighting for liberation. A critic who in real life is impatient with all the talk about classes, class struggle, resistance to imperialism, racism and struggle

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<sup>209</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], p.212

<sup>210</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*. [1963], p.217

<sup>211</sup> Jerry Wasserman, *Modern Canadian Plays*. [1986], p.20

against racism, of reactionary versus revolutionary violence, will be equally impatient when he or she finds the same themes dominant in a work of art.<sup>212</sup>

Thiong'o's statement is reflective of the way the apartheid system perceived Black Theatre and its practitioners. To the apartheid system, Black Theatre was not an art but a tool of resistance employed by the black artists to incite the masses to revolt against it. This is understandable since, as argued earlier, Black Theatre was one of the few means that gave blacks a voice, an opportunity to express themselves. This perception is evident in Orkin's description of what former Minister of Home Affairs, Pik Botha, said in parliament regarding Black Theatre:

In the South African Houses of Parliament the then Minister of Home Affairs turned his attention to those people who in his estimation under the banner art and literary merits wanted to bypass the Publications Act, a major instrument of censorship in South Africa. *The Star* newspaper reported his comments as follows 'This was an attack on the interests which the Act was intended to protect, namely the morality, religion and dignity of South Africa and the safety of the State. In certain communities, spontaneous theatre was used to agitate the audience'. He said: When the show ends, the audience is so emotionally charged that they will not calm down before everything in the vicinity, from buildings to cars and even other people, have been attacked. Mr Botha added: It should never be doubted that it is a matter of great importance for the State to protect the spiritual and moral welfare of the community, and to maintain the necessary equilibrium between the freedom of the individual and the interests of the community.<sup>213</sup>

What Botha meant by protecting "spiritual and moral welfare of the community" is demonstrated by a series of actions the system took against those it perceived as agitators hiding behind art. Orkin observes that the government found itself increasingly unable to tolerate the interrogation of apartheid, which theatre practitioners were in different ways undertaking. As a result, theatre practitioners in the apartheid State, especially in the last three decades (before 1994), were subjected to a variety of pressures including not only intimidation and banning but detention and death. Perhaps the most notorious and tragic example of this is through *Shanti*, whose author, Mthuli Shezi, was elected Vice President of the Black Peoples Convention in July 1972, but died in December of the same year. Shezi was pushed in front of an oncoming train at the Germiston station during a

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<sup>212</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], p.247

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. p.1

scuffle with Germiston railway policeman. The play was banned while Sadacque Variava, Solly Ismael and Nomsisi Kraai (members of PET which produced the play) were arrested and charged under the Terrorism Act in 1975. *Shanti* was appended to the charge sheet as an example of an anti-white, racist, subversive and revolutionary drama.<sup>214</sup>

Similarly, it is said that the agents of the system attempted to kill Ngema. However, Ngema's promoter was killed instead. Possibly this mistaken identity is the one that informed Ngema's play *Magic at 4AM* in which the mother of the twins is mistakenly killed as someone else. As to the apartheid system's violence against black theatre practitioners, Kerr writes:

Violence was also instigated by the authorities against the cast and production team. A mob hired by the police to intimidate the performers broke into a theatre in Natal and killed the play's local promoter under the mistaken impression that he was Ngema.<sup>215</sup>

Similar treatment of playwrights by those in power can be observed in other parts of the world. Kees Epskamp notes how local landlords in Harijan village in India kept a close watch on the actions taken by the villagers through theatre. He notes that the response to what the landlords disliked was often violent. They hired thugs to beat up leaders of the groups.<sup>216</sup>

Following the murder of Shezi, a number of artists were either arrested or detained in South Africa. Gibson Kente was arrested in 1976 and released a year later. Kente's play *Too Late* was banned by the Publications Control Board under Section 12, Act 26 of 1963. However, he made a successful appeal against the banning in the High Court, but other institutions continued to uphold the ban including the Department of Bantu Education.<sup>217</sup> Maishe Maponya went through the same ordeal due to his work. The police interrogated him regarding his play *Umongikazi* (The Nurse). Maponya recalls his experience:

The morning after these performances, the security branch called at my home and left a note telling me to report to Protea police station the next morning with my passport. It was two days before I responded and when I did, I took a lawyer with me. I was told that this was to be a 'friendly chat' and that I was not supposed to have brought my lawyer. I insisted that it was an interrogation. I was asked about why I had written the play, where I got the material, and about my relationship with Health Workers Association (HWA, now NEHAWU), its

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid. p.1

<sup>215</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From pre-colonial to the present Day*. [1995], p.232

<sup>216</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989], p.149

<sup>217</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From pre-colonial to the present day*. [1995], p.221

leadership and why we had organized performances at various hospitals and clinics. I was also asked what I hoped to achieve through the play. Shortly before the play was due to tour Europe and UK, the lead actress, Gcina Mhlophe was called to John Voster Square police station. Her passport and mine were withdrawn, making it impossible for us to go with the group. I was not only the director but one of the four performers.<sup>218</sup>

Maponya's close friend and a playwright, Matsemela Manaka, was subjected to the same treatment by the apartheid system as well. Manaka's play *Egoli* (land of gold) which explores the plight of mine workers and criticizes mining companies was banned by the Publications Control Board. His passport was later confiscated, making it impossible to go on tour with two of his plays *Pula* and *Imbumba*.<sup>219</sup>

The popular success of the production (*Egoli*) did not prevent the official Publication Control Board later banning the published script as "undesirable" in terms of Section 47[2][e] of the Publications Act of 1974, which effectively meant that the authorities deemed it to be 'prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order.' In 1984, the authorities refused Manaka a passport to travel overseas with the *Pula* and *Imbumba* tour. The reason for the decision was not stated. His situation was not rendered any easier by a Dutch production of *Egoli* under the direction of Rufus Collins, since the Holland Committee on Southern Africa had incorporated the play in its boycott campaign against the Kruger rand. Manaka's passport was only restored in 1985 after the United States Embassy invited him to visit arts centers, art educational institutions and theatres across the country.<sup>220</sup>

Even though Mda, being in Lesotho, had the liberty of writing what he wanted and the way he wished, his work was not exempted from the notorious Publication Control Board. Consequently, a collection of his plays was banned after publication by Ravan Press because of *Dark Voices Ring*, a play that condemns apartheid system collaborators and advocates armed struggle.<sup>221</sup> This list of repressive treatment of theatre practitioners by the apartheid system due to the practitioners' art and commitment to expose its evil deeds is extensive:

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid. pp.ix,x

<sup>219</sup> Matsemela Manaka, *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto*. [1981], pp.6,7

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. pp.6,7

<sup>221</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], p.151

The Theatre Council of Natal, which was founded in 1969, was aborted in 1973 with the arrest of Saths Cooper, Ms Sam Moodley and Strini Moodley, key Black Consciousness leaders active within it...Port Elizabeth playwright Khayaletu Mquayisa's *Confused Mhlaba* was banned just as its popularity began to grow in the townships. Located in the Eastern Cape, Reverend Mzwandile Maqina over the years was intimidated, detained and subjected to house arrest for extended periods, had his play *Give Us This Day* together with the *Trial*, banned by the Publications Control Board.<sup>222</sup>

One can argue that the South African black playwrights were suffering the same fate as their counterparts under colonialism or dictatorship in other parts of the world. Kerr relates that on 16 December 1977, the local district Commissioner in Kiambu, Kenya, withdrew the performance license of the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the grounds that it encouraged class conflict, and was therefore a threat to public security even though the Commissioner had not seen the play. The banning threw into sharp relief the ideological commitment the Kenyan regime had to neo-colonialism. Particularly shocking was that the production appeared to conform to the official government policy submitted to the 1976 UNESCO General Assembly encouraging integrated rural development through theatre, song and dance.<sup>223</sup> According to Kerr, the problem was that the Kenyan Government's rhetoric encouraging rural development did not envisage a vigorous, class conscious, independent movement led by peasants and workers ignoring the paternalistic controls of Kenyan leaders. This, together with Ngugi's prominence as an international literary figure and defender of Kamiriithu's achievements in Kenya, made him a particularly problematic figure for the government. As a result, unable to crash the solidarity of the whole Community Centre, they chose to retaliate against its most famous spokesperson. On 31 December 1977, Ngugi was detained at Kamiti Maximum Security prison.<sup>224</sup> There can be no doubt that Ngugi's arrest was based on the hope that in his absence the Community Centre would collapse.

Similarly, to show its determination to crash any form of criticism by artists, the apartheid system even went after white playwrights. Hauptfleisch and Steadman observe:

Inevitably a number of Afrikaans writers, following the lead of such pioneers as W.A.de Klerk, could not avoid coming to terms with the absurdities of the country's race laws. Foremost among these was once again Bartho Smit, whose 1960 play, *Die Verminktes*, was to do well

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid p.151

<sup>223</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From pre-colonial to the present day*. [1995], p.246

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. p.247

overseas as *The Maimed*, although causing some problems for the author. Smit was to follow this with a scathing, though somewhat flawed, comedy entitled *Bacchus in die Boland*, in which the god Bacchus visits a wine farm and teaches the white farm owner a lesson by having him switch roles with his non-white staff. Again Smit had problems in getting his work performed.<sup>225</sup>

However, Orkin observes that despite persistent difficulties, theatre from predominantly or exclusively oppressed class practitioners was produced more frequently. This theatre was far more militantly and aggressively positioned against the state than ever before.<sup>226</sup> An explanation for black theatre practitioners' commitment to bring change can be found in Frantz Fanon's assertion that the colonized people who write for their people ought to use the past with the intention to open the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope. However, Fanon points out that to ensure hope and to give this writing a form, they must take part in action and throw themselves completely into the national struggles.<sup>227</sup> Mineke Schipper adds that censorship, persecution or imprisonment of artists proved that the writers' realism can be effective and the verbalized reality has been recognized, even if not accepted by the authorities.<sup>228</sup> This is what one saw in the actions and writings of South African black playwrights hence the apartheid system's response.

#### 1.4 Democratically elected Government and the Arts

The release of political prisoners and detainees, the unbanning of political parties in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and finally, the first multi-racial general elections of 1994, all marked a new era in the history of both South Africa and Black Theatre. This also spelt out a different relationship between the two as compared to under apartheid.

The role Black Theatre played in the struggle for freedom in South Africa is unquestionable and its presence, along with other arts expressions, did not go unnoticed in the new government. In order to honor Black Theatre practitioners and artists who employed their art as a tool to fight for freedom, the first thing the democratically elected government did when it came to power was to set up structures. The first of these structures was the founding of the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology to cater for the interests of artists in

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<sup>225</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South African Theatre [Four Plays and Introduction]*. [1984], p.13

<sup>226</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1995], p.209

<sup>227</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. [1963], p.187

<sup>228</sup> Mineke Schipper, *Beyond the Boundaries*. [1989], p.133



South Africa, to promote and develop these disciplines. This was followed by the drafting of a White Paper/Bill. This bill was meant to help address the issues of imbalance in the country created by the apartheid system by ensuring that all artists, including Black Theatre practitioners, are catered for regardless of their race, colour and gender. Commenting on the bill, the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Lionel Mtshali said:

South African society has been undergoing fundamental transformation over the last two years. In accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, non-racism and non-sexism, every sector of our society is facing change. While this may be unsettling for some, for many it brings hope that their needs, views and aspirations will now also become part of the mainstream. South Africa's first democratically elected government has contributed to this process by creating our first Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. The Arts, culture and heritage cannot be an exception in this transformation process, since they too were overtly affected by the maldistribution of skills, resources and infrastructure during the apartheid era. In fact, given that the arts are premised on freedom of expression and critical thought, transformation in this area is crucial to empowering creative voices throughout the country, and is thus integral to the success of the democratic project.<sup>229</sup>

Likewise, in her message regarding the bill, the Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Bridgett Mabandla said that South Africans have waited many years for a democratic, post-colonial arts and culture policy. Mabandla noted that the arts community has debated and researched models to ensure that the policy creates a truly progressive and enabling dispensation. She argued that it was time for South African artists to sing, dance, paint and create. She said there was so much to look forward to and so much to be done as a united community with a common goal in mind.<sup>230</sup> As a result, to redress the past and ensure that all artists were catered for, each of the nine provinces has a department of Sports, Recreation, Arts, Culture and Heritage. The provinces were divided into regions and subdivided into wards. The objective was to ensure that there were equal opportunities for all artists irrespective of race or location, that is, whether they were from urban or rural communities. Obviously, unlike the previous apartheid government that catered for whites only, these structures are meant to serve all persons regardless of colour, race or gender. Stuart Hall recommends that one needs to know how different racial and ethnic groups were inserted historically. Furthermore, how their relationship, which tended to erode

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<sup>229</sup> Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology *White Paper/Bill*. 1994, p.1

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. p.2

and transform, should be preserved not simply as residues and traces of previous modes, but as active structuring principles of the present organisation of society, which will help develop the country uniformly.<sup>231</sup> Mabandla notes:

The prime role of the national and provincial Governments is to develop policy which ensures the survival and development of all art forms and genres, cultural diversity with mutual respect and tolerance, heritage recognition and advancement. Ensure that all persons, group and communities have the right to equal opportunities to participate in the arts and culture, to converse and develop their cultural heritage. Ensure unhindered access to the means of artistic and cultural activity, information and enjoyment in both financial and geographical senses. Ensure the correction of historical and existing imbalance through development, education, training and affirmative action with regard to race, gender, rural and urban considerations.<sup>232</sup>

Undoubtedly, the aim of the democratically elected government is to ensure that South African artists, regardless of their specialty or racial background, are competent enough to enjoy recognition like their international counterparts. There can be no other way to achieve this than through proper public encouragement, training and exposure, especially at the international level.

According to the Ministry of Arts and Culture, given the history of cultural isolation, it is the goal of the Ministry to facilitate international cultural exchange so that more South African artists, including Black Theatre practitioners, can take their place on the world stage, and that local art and artists benefit from international experience, exposure and expertise. The imperative of the Ministry's policies for international relations is to maximize opportunities for South African arts, culture and heritage practitioners and institutions to interact with the rest of the world.<sup>233</sup> The stand of the Ministry of Arts and Culture is supported by Fanon's suggestion that the need to affirm one's culture is much stronger and even vital when that culture has recently been denied. He argues that in this context, culture is clearly situated at the heart of the quest to reclaim identities and freedom.<sup>234</sup>

Commenting on the goals and effort made by the new government regarding the development of arts in the country, the Director of Arts, Culture and Heritage in the Gauteng Province, Sydney Selepe said that the main goal of

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<sup>231</sup> Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance" in Philemona Essed and David Goldberg ed. *Race Critical Theories; Text and Context*. [2002], p.60

<sup>232</sup> *Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology*, White Paper/Bill. [1994]. pp.7,18

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. p.36

<sup>234</sup> Melissa Thackway, *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspective in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film*. [2003], p.40

the government is to promote art in the country by assisting those interested through whatever means regardless of race or gender. At the same time, the government's view is to address the imbalances based on racial difference which existed under the apartheid government whereby a section of the society was catered for while the other was neglected. Consequently, it is the government's duty to identify ills of the past government and to rectify them.<sup>235</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant contest that government actions in the past and present treated people in very different ways according to their race, and as a result, could not retreat from its policy responsibility in that area and declare itself "color blind" without perpetuating the same type of differential and racist treatment.<sup>236</sup>

In order to understand how the Central Government's goal regarding development of arts is realized in the provinces, the Gauteng Province can be used as an example. The Province is divided into three regions Greater Johannesburg, Greater Pretoria, and Greater Vaal. The three regions are further divided into sub-regions. Each of the three regions now has a single cultural officer whose responsibility is to serve, develop, and promote arts. Selepe acknowledges that the Department was faced with a mammoth task given the political history of the country<sup>237</sup>

Department of Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture is faced with a huge backlog in provision of infrastructure for effective delivery of sport, recreation, arts, culture, heritage, library and information services. Informal settlements and townships hardly have basic facilities and equipment. Central to our aspiration is the need to assist communities to heal and repair polarized relationships, build a culture and identity that gives confidence and enhance productivity. Our primary goals are to contribute to social development, economic growth and the creation of opportunities.<sup>238</sup>

In the light of this situation, the first task, he says, was to ensure that the racial groups neglected under the apartheid government received immediate attention including Black Theatre practitioners.<sup>239</sup> The need to provide services and facilities equitably presented itself clearly as the new democracy dawned. The skewed allocation of facilities during the pre-democracy period required vigorous redress. Since 1994-1995, the Department has contributed to the establishment of

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<sup>235</sup> Sidney Selepe, Personal Interview, Marshalltown. 2006

<sup>236</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formation" in Philemona Essed and David Goldberg ed. *Racial critical theories: text and context*. [2002], p.126

<sup>237</sup> Sidney Selepe, *Personal Interview*, Marshalltown. 2006

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

sixty-nine facilities some of them are new, while others have been upgraded.<sup>240</sup> Apart from provision of infrastructure and other facilities, the provincial government also provides funds for training and further studies for artists. Selepe admits that by providing scholarships for further studies his department encroaches into other departments' portfolios, but he argues that this is provoked by the urgency with which the imbalance ought to be addressed.<sup>241</sup>

Although the need to provide Arts Education to many young people who have in the past been excluded as a result of a misguided education system does not fall entirely under the jurisdiction of the department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, the Directorate of Arts, Culture and Heritage has made a major contribution to this area of human development. Through a bursary scheme, we have made it possible for many young people to study Arts and Arts Administration, which is critical towards ensuring that the arts are developed.<sup>242</sup>

The other form of financial assistance given to artists is to help them organize activities such as productions and workshops. There are two categories under which funding are provided; applicants can apply either as individuals or as groups. Selepe said the Gauteng Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture by 1998 had spent more than seven million rands in the development and promotion of arts in the province.

As much as the government funding is open to everybody, Selepe made it clear that funding is determined by the need of each applicant and by the availability of funds. He also noted that all recipients of funds are required to write a report outlining how the money was spent. He pointed out that failure to furnish the government with such a report might affect applications of those concerned in future.<sup>243</sup> The Provincial Government's rules and regulations regarding funding appear to be consistent with the National Government position. Mtshali says all funding from the public purse carries certain obligations with it, and these obligations or accountability must be applied with due responsibility and creativity. He emphasised that promotion without undue promulgation is the government's ideal.<sup>244</sup>

In addition to the above, the Gauteng Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage is also involved in the organisation of activities and festivals for Freedom Day, Heritage Day and Women's Day. Furthermore, the Department in

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<sup>240</sup> *Gauteng Provincial Government Annual Report*. [1998/99] p.7

<sup>241</sup> Sidney Selepe, Personal Interview, Marshalltown. 2006

<sup>242</sup> *Gauteng Provincial Government Annual Report*. [1998/99] p.9

<sup>243</sup> Sydney Selepe, Personal Interview, Marshalltown. 2006

<sup>244</sup> Lionel Mtshali, Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, *White Paper/Bill*. [1994], p.1

collaboration with the Department of Health is engaged in AIDS awareness campaigns to educate the public, especially the youth about this epidemic. The two have embarked upon creating an awareness of the threat of HIV/AIDS that is spreading rapidly, particularly amongst the youth in the province. This is done through seminars, training programs and the support of prominent athletes and artists, especially Black Theatre practitioners, who act as goodwill ambassador to create greater awareness about the virus.<sup>245</sup>

The government's effort is a sign of hope to everybody, especially artists and Black Theatre practitioners who were not only marginalized by the previous apartheid government but also subjected to horrendous treatment because their art was critical of the oppressive regime.

### 1.5 Present Tensions

With theatre being a watchdog of the society and reflecting the good, the ills and misfortunes taking place in it, the main question today is how tolerant the democratic government is to artists. In particular, given the fact that the government contributes substantial finances to redress the past, one should ask whether it is also tolerant to those who are critical of it like Mapakalanye as reflected in his play *The Harvesting Season*. Esslin writes with regard to government funding the following:

The use made of the theatre in totalitarian societies of all types is a widely noticed and discussed phenomenon of our times, and indeed, in the past, the reluctance of British government over a very long period to subsidize something like a National Theatre was frequently buttressed with the argument that if the government of the day was the paymaster, the danger existed that drama would be censored, influenced, or used as an instrument for propagation of the ruling party's political line.<sup>246</sup>

In line with Esslin's comment, it remains to be seen how much indirect pressure will be on Black Theatre practitioners given the fact that they have to apply for funding to the government. Peter Brook concurs that there is no tribute to latent power of the theatre as telling as censorship. Brook points out that in most regimes, even when both the written word and the image are free, it is the stage that is liberated last. He notes that instinctively, governments know that live events could create dangerous electricity even if that seldom happens. But this ancient fear is recognition of an ancient potential. He argues that theatre is the arena where a living confrontation can take place. The focus of a large group of

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<sup>245</sup> *Gauteng Provincial Government Annual Report*. [1998/99], p.5

<sup>246</sup> Martin Esslin, *Anatomy of Drama*. [1976], p.95

people creates a unique intensity, and these forces that operate at all times and rule each person's daily life can be isolated and perceived more clearly.<sup>247</sup>

Contrary to the situation under the previous apartheid regime, the South African Constitution, which is the Supreme Law, encourages freedom of speech. Consequently, Selepe says South African artists are free to write and produce whatever plays they want even if they are critical of the government. Consequently there is no way the government can discourage, prevent artists or people from expressing themselves no matter how much it disagrees with them. The least the government can do is to engage in talks with those concerned. However, he says the government has never found itself in that situation.<sup>248</sup>

Based on the information given in the first half of this chapter concerning the relationship between the apartheid system and Black Theatre, and experiences of black playwrights under that system, there is no doubt that the new political dispensation in South Africa has brought a tremendous change as far as arts are concerned, especially in Black Theatre. This is clearly evidenced by the attitude of the democratically elected government towards the arts including Black Theatre. Even though the changes are not specifically to benefit Black Theatre and its practitioners, they stand to benefit almost all artists and also improve their art as compared to under apartheid.

A fundamental prerequisite for democracy is the principle of freedom of expression. Rooted in freedom of expression and creative thought, the arts, culture and heritage have a vital role to play in development, nation-building and sustaining our emerging democracy. They must be empowered to do so.<sup>249</sup>

The need for freedom of expression and creative thought is something that black artists never had under the apartheid regime, as demonstrated earlier hence the determination to fight the system. The fact that the democratically elected government observes the need for freedom of expression and creative thought, and the fact that it is aware that art can contribute to reconciliation and nation building, are both major changes. This undoubtedly spells out the stand of the new government as far as art is concerned. As a result, this is likely to compel Black Theatre to change its protest and/or militant nature to accommodate the changes taking place in the country, either politically or socially. Such changes will be commented upon later.

However, it should be noted that everything is not as perfect and promising as it seems. There is discontent from both black and white playwrights. Some black playwrights feel that the government is not doing

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<sup>247</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*.. [1978], p.99

<sup>248</sup> Sidney Selepe, Personal Interview, Marshalltown. 2006

<sup>249</sup> Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, *White Paper/Bill*. [1994], p.13

enough to redress the past and bring the previously disadvantaged artists at par with their white counterparts. This is evident in Mapakalanye's play *The Harvesting Season*. Meanwhile, some white theatre practitioners, on the other hand, feel that too much is taken away from them to the extent that most artists are forced out of the profession. Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch claim there is a feeling that creative artists and theatre practitioners are the losers in a system that has refocused budgetary commitments to overcoming the imbalance of the previous political dispensation, which favored Eurocentric cultural forms and privileged whites in all areas of the performing arts.<sup>250</sup>

As much as Bain and Hauptfleisch's observation has some elements of truth in it, the two fail to note that the "creative artists" and "theatre practitioners" they might be referring to possibly are white playwrights like themselves because theatre, like many other professions such as medicine and engineering, was meant mainly for white people. Given the fact that the apartheid government, as demonstrated earlier, never funded Black Theatre, nor Black Theatre meant for profit making, the majority of blacks did not consider it a profession. Consequently, this meant that blacks had to find other means of making a living. Orkin argues that it should always be remembered that over the decades, up to the present day, oppressed class participation in theatre has often been after-hours and only after full time non-theatrical employment. He observes that there were many challenges that drastically inhibited the growth of theatre as far as blacks were concerned. These included the question of distance between rehearsal venues and their practitioners' areas of residence, the availability of transport and their level of energy and strength, which was a challenge to their concentration and participation. For this reason, the question of the need for redistribution and the impact it would have was anticipated by most, especially the oppressed majority, in order to make for the time lost and economic benefits denied them.<sup>251</sup>

Similarly, Ngubane states that whites continue to be the 'haves' in South African society since to a large extent they own the land and its wealth. Their property, he argues, serves as an instrument by which they dominate over the Africans.<sup>252</sup> Likewise, Louw and Kendall argue that many blacks believe that because they have suffered severe historical disadvantages, any solution to South Africa's problems must begin with massive wealth redistribution.<sup>253</sup> This implies that in order to achieve equality there ought to be some sort of redistribution of wealth. Failure to do so will definitely leave Africans at the mercy of those who benefited from apartheid and vulnerable to their oppression and manipulation as

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<sup>250</sup> Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch, "Playing the Changes: Thoughts on the Restructuring of the Theatrical System and the Arts Industry in South Africa after apartheid", *SATJ*. [2001], p.9

<sup>251</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and South African State*, [1991], p.150

<sup>252</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*. [1963], p.231

<sup>253</sup> Leon Louw and Frances Kendall, *South Africa-The Solution*. [1986], p.93

before. And if such a situation prevails, it will mean that the blacks have only achieved cosmetic freedom different to what they might have been fighting for. This openly articulated need for redressing the past might have planted terror in many whites given the wealth they amassed and opportunities they enjoyed under the apartheid system. Bain and Hauptfleisch comment “For many whites post apartheid South Africa has brought uncertainty, fear, even anger. Many whites have emigrated and many who have remained do so grudgingly”.<sup>254</sup>

Bain and Hauptfleisch divide these emigrants into two groups; the first group leaves the country to seek employment in foreign countries simply as a means of earning sufficient money to establish themselves back in South Africa. The second group flecks to foreign shores in the hope of relocating permanently. They note that most of these young South African adults are whites who benefited from the legacy of economic imbalance established by apartheid but are now uncertain how to deal with the challenges of a new socio-economic dispensation which has bred fears of reverse racism.<sup>255</sup> Amy Ansell as well observes that some white South Africans acknowledge the past injustice and their anxiety thereof, but she regrets that their acknowledgement is selective since it refuses commitment to redress the socio-economic legacies of apartheid, instead trumped by rhetorical commitment to non-racialism, which leaves the majority of blacks still languishing in poverty.<sup>256</sup>

Welles le Roux and Kavin van Merle are of the same opinion as Ansell, and note that clerical and moralistic rhetoric has indeed been a major tool among white South Africans in trying to come to terms with a sense of guilt regarding the role they played in the history of apartheid given the fact that the National Party government, which institutionalized apartheid, enjoyed considerable support from the majority of the exclusively white electorate over more than four decades and to the fact that even those who were opposed to it, did little to resist it effectively.<sup>257</sup> Philomena Essed is more direct on this issue and argues that racism practiced by the authorities was substantially supported by the fact that other members of the dominant group were more likely to tolerate than challenge negative beliefs and practices against the dominated group.<sup>258</sup> This might explain why it took such a long time for apartheid to collapse. Therefore, Michael Omi and Howard Winant wonder if the allocation of employment opportunities through programs restricted to racially defined groups, so called preferential

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<sup>254</sup> Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch, “Playing the Changes: Thoughts on the Restructuring of the Theatrical System and the Arts Industry in South Africa after apartheid”, *SATJ*. [2001], p.9

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.* p.10

<sup>256</sup> Amy Ansell, *Two Nations of discourse: Mapping racial ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa*. [2004], p.9

<sup>257</sup> Wessel le Roux and Kavin van Merle, *Post-apartheid Fragments: Law, politics and Critique*. [2007], pp.14,15

<sup>258</sup> Philemona Essed, “Everyday Racism” in Philemona Essed and David Goldberg ed. *Race critical theories: text and context*. [2002], p.184



treatment or affirmative action, are racist or practice “racism in reverse”. Omi and Winant do not think it is racism, because even though such programs necessarily employ racial criteria in assessing eligibility, they do not generally essentialise race, since they seek to overcome specific socially and historically constructed inequalities based on racism.<sup>259</sup> Paul Gilroy summarizes white South Africans’ attitude simply, as that of people who benefited from apartheid and its racial hierarchy and do not want to give up their privileges let alone share their economic loot, hence the complaints and dissatisfaction.<sup>260</sup> All these arguments and observations raise the question of whether anybody can claim that too much is been taken away from whites as Bain and Hauptfleisch do instead of agreeing that little is done to redress the past.

As much as the assertion, about white South African emigrants, by Bain and Hauptfleisch may seem correct, there are two issues it raises. First, it points to the fact that whites still have a better life to the extent that they are in a position to leave the country if they find the situation unacceptable. This is in sharp contrast to blacks who had to face the wrath of apartheid with nowhere else to go and being denied freedom of movement. Second, it highlights the importance of democracy, which safeguards freedom of movement, something the apartheid system denied blacks through the Pass Law and Group Areas Act. Paulo Freire regrets this negative mentality:

Even when the contradiction is resolved authentically by a new situation established by the liberated laborers, the former oppressors do not feel liberated. On the contrary, they genuinely consider themselves to be oppressed. Conditioned by the experience of oppressing others, any situation other than their former seems to them like oppression. Formerly, they could eat, dress, wear shoes, be educated, travel and hear Beethoven while millions did not eat, had no clothes or shoes, neither studied nor travelled. Any restriction on this way of life, in the name of the rights of the community, appears to the former oppressor as a profound violation of their individual rights although they had no respect for the millions who suffered and died of hunger, pain, sorrow and despair. For the oppressors “human beings” refers only to themselves, other people are things.<sup>261</sup>

Freire’s observation is true of many white South Africans who regret the loss of privileges the apartheid system afforded them. Likewise, Hennie Lotter argues that if human rights to life, liberty and property should count in the new

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<sup>259</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, “Racial Formation” in Philemona Essed and David Goldberg’s ed. *Racial critical theories: text and context*. [2002], p.137

<sup>260</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining political culture beyond the color line*. [2001], p.12

<sup>261</sup> Paulo Freire, *Literacy and Revolution* .[1968], p.43

democracy, then the violation thereof during the unjust past should be undone or be compensated for as far as possible. Ginsberg believes it is through the acknowledgement of past wrongs and attempts to undo them, the validity and strength of the human rights embodying new values of justice can be established.<sup>262</sup>

These are the imperatives which the African National Congress led government seems keenly aware of. As a result, it is trying by all means to reach out to the previously disadvantaged majority even if it is the expense of those who benefited from the apartheid system. This is evidenced by projects such as Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which include Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) meant to improve the living standard of blacks:

Since 1994, the government has set out in line with the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) to change the society shaped by apartheid into a democratic one based on justice non-racialism and non-sexism. The RDP is at the heart of all the new policies since 1994 to improve the quality of all South Africans. The RDP aims to meet basic needs, democratize the State and society, build the economy, develop human resources and build a united nation.<sup>263</sup>

Because of the new laws with regard to the arts, the structures put in place to cater for artists, including Black Theatre practitioners, and financial assistance made available to artists to realize their goals, it can be argued that there is a change in attitude of the democratically elected Government towards the arts, including Black Theatre. Although it is apparent that the state has changed its position towards artists, and especially towards Black Theatre practitioners, how much South African black playwrights have changed their stand with regard to the State is not clear. This will be discussed in chapter three and four.

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<sup>262</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace-The Case of South Africa*. [1997], p.142

<sup>263</sup> *South African Government's Report to the Nation*. [2004] , p.1

## Chapter 2: Blacks and the Dramatic Art World

The objective of this chapter is to explore the rise and role of dramatic arts institutions for blacks such as Federal Union of Black Artists [FUBA] and Sibikwa as institutions of higher learning as opposed to universities, which catered mainly for white students. As expected, most of these were and still are situated in and around the Johannesburg area where much of the protest art activity originated and was centered before spreading out to the rest of the country. The founding of these black institutions was a direct result of the apartheid education system in place at that time. Blacks experienced a lack of high educational institutions because they were not permitted or limited by law to study certain courses including theatre.

This exercise is important in the sense that these dramatic arts institutions for blacks played a significant role in the training of black artists after which the graduates became major players in Black Theatre. However, the starting point will be a brief discussion of the effects of the two models of education under apartheid, one for white and the other for black children and those of other races, the latter which undoubtedly brought about the founding institutions of this nature. This will be followed by a discussion of the establishment of Performing Arts Councils by the Nationalist Party government to meet the needs of the white minority. Finally, the condition and position of Black Theatre in democratic South Africa in as far as education is concerned, will be explored.

The dramatic arts institutions for blacks discussed are those founded or initiated by black artists such as FUBA, Soyikwa, Market Lab and Sibikwa to cater for the needs of blacks and other people of color. Consequently, this discussion excludes theatre groups and institutions like Mmabana Arts Centre in the former homeland of Bophuthatswana founded with the help of the apartheid regime due to the relations between the apartheid regime and the Bophuthatswana Bantustan government.

As one would expect, education was never exempted from the discriminatory policies of the apartheid regime. In fact, it was used as a major weapon to ensure that blacks were confined to the lowest levels politically and socio-economically. Leon Louw and Frances Kendall note that in order to keep black and white cultures separate, the Bantu Education Act [N0 47 of 1953] and the Extension of University Education Act [N0 28 of 1959] both allowed for segregation of education.<sup>264</sup> Similarly David Welsh writes that whites were protected by legislation from competition with blacks in spheres of employment, sports and politics. Whites appropriated far more than their fair share in education, welfare and other social services and as a result maintained a wide gap

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<sup>264</sup> Leon Louw and Frances Kendall, *South Africa-The Solution*. [1986], p.41

between themselves and other races in terms of technical skills, and consequently the wealth of the land.<sup>265</sup>

Given the apartheid government policy, there were two types or models of education in South Africa. The first model was meant for the children of the white ruling minority class and their kith and kin. The second model was for black children and those of other groups. Welsh notes the following:

Education has long been a highly charged political issue in South Africa. Administrators and politicians have recognized it as a powerful instrument for molding citizens in a desired shape. Education at all levels and for all races has been harnessed to the aims of the state. Stated summarily, the political function of education in South Africa is to reinforce cleavages between the White groups and between Whites and the non-Whites, and to maintain the racial ordering of society.<sup>266</sup>

In every society education should be a fundamental right for every human being and forms the basis for success in life collectively or individually. As a result, its use or misuse by the apartheid system as a tool of oppression was not only a cause for alarm but also drew condemnation from concerned educationists and politicians in South Africa and abroad. The Catholic Institute for International Relations notes that the apartheid education conformed to a policy of separation, division and deliberate inequality. This policy resulted in the terrible impoverishment of all South African youth since it inculcated a sense of superiority in some (white), whilst denying the vast majority (black) their fundamental right to equal education.<sup>267</sup> Similarly, Njabulo Ndebele argues that for the ruling white racists, knowledge was equated with the quest for mastery over the political and economic means of maintaining dominance. As a result, the white racists built a complex structure of government and an array of other social and economic institutions all of which diversified the sources and means to acquire information and knowledge for the preservation of political and economic domination.<sup>268</sup>

The education model under apartheid for white children was designed in such a way that the recipients would occupy managerial positions in society. To achieve this goal, institutions for whites were well equipped and comparable to international institutions. The students themselves had a wide choice of subjects, fostering desired careers and professions. This kind of education undoubtedly instilled a sense of superiority in the white children. However, as

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<sup>265</sup> David Welsh, "Some Political and Social Determinants of the Academic Environment" in Hendrik Van Der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972] pp.13,14

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. p.1

<sup>267</sup> Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Rule of Fear*. [1989], p.61

<sup>268</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991], p.59

much as this kind of education offered greater opportunities for white children than black children, it was to have a negative effect in the long run. The Catholic Institute for International Relations argues that white children were also deprived and denied a fair and well grounded education, for they were indoctrinated with Nationalist Party ideology through the system of Christian National Education (CNE). This system entrenched the ideology of discrimination and the concept of racial superiority, which presented a seriously distorted view.<sup>269</sup>

Whereas the education system for the white race was meant to prepare white youths to be leaders, managers and supervisors, the notorious Bantu education for black children, on the other hand, was designed in such a way that blacks would be destined for jobs at the lowest level in the labour market. The great majority of black people were indeed restricted to menial work such as farm labour, cleaning services and manual labour in industry, whereas white people refused to do these kinds of jobs as they perceived them as inferior. Lotter notes that this attitude started at a very early age<sup>270</sup> amongst white South Africans as white people expected to occupy (and effectively did) the professions and jobs connected to high social standing and prestige such as doctors, accountants, engineers and the like.

The only explanation for the Bantu education was to guarantee that whites, who owned and ran industries and mines, had sufficient and steady supply of semi and unskilled laborers at low labour costs. This cheap labour could be pressed into utmost production under slave-like treatment in order for whites to realize maximum profit. Jordan Ngubane comments:

Let's take Bantu Education. Its content is designed to wean the African from British influence; although it makes him sufficiently informed to be an efficient servant, it does not train him sufficiently well to compete with the white man as an intellectual equal. Permanent inferiority is the end in view.<sup>271</sup>

The other explanation for the Bantu education might be located in an apartheid regime's fear, that if blacks had proper education, they would not only think better and compete with whites but also awaken to the evil of the system and that would translate into further antipathy towards the apartheid system. Angela Davis recalls that in the words of Slave Code/Law, teaching slaves to read and write tended to induce dissatisfaction in their minds and produce insurrection and rebellion.<sup>272</sup> By reading Davis, it is possible to understand how denying blacks a

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<sup>269</sup> Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Rule of Fear*. [1989], p.71

<sup>270</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace*. [1997], p.26

<sup>271</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *African Explains Apartheid*.. [1963], p.57

<sup>272</sup> Angela Davis, "Education and Liberation: Black Women's Perspective" in Philemona Essed and David Goldberg ed. [2002], p.75

proper education was a strategy of submission. Martin Lipset also maintains that there was a sense that equal distribution of power and privilege was morally wrong and would penetrate into other segments of the country's elite from the universities.<sup>273</sup>

It can be argued that the champions of apartheid were right to be paranoid over blacks receiving proper education. Ndebele remarks that for the oppressed, political knowledge came to be equated with the recognition of the blatant injustice in various forms throughout the country. As history exhibits, to have knowledge about the plight of blacks contributed significantly to the struggle for liberation.<sup>274</sup> As a result of this situation, education for black students was extremely limited. Students had a little choice or none at all when it came to the selection of subjects at schools and institutions of higher learning. This automatically meant that their choice of careers was limited as well. For example, courses like Law, Engineering, Medicine, Performing Arts and many others that lead to distinct professions were known to be almost exclusively for white people. Dr Mamphela Ramphele, in response to a white officer's surprise that a black woman was a doctor, was quoted in the film *Cry Freedom*: "Of course, I'm one of the few blacks who was lucky enough to have been allowed by your government to study medicine."<sup>275</sup> Ramphele's outburst demonstrates how much career choices for blacks under apartheid South Africa were at the mercy of the apartheid system.

White universities in South Africa under apartheid often had a department offering courses in different areas of the performing arts: music, dance ballet, film, drama and others. This included universities like University of Witwatersrand, University of Cape Town, University of Orange Free State and University of Pretoria. The three to four year courses prepared the students to fill the ever-expanding industry in the world of performing arts as professional players in their respective areas:

The kind of artistic and cultural forms and institutions supported by the public funds, determined the kinds of skills taught at the feeder educational institutions. Thus it was, for example, that universities and technikons geared their education and training towards the needs of the performing arts councils through opera, ballet, music and drama departments concentrating on the European classics.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Martin Lipset, "Preface" in Hendrik Van Der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.7

<sup>274</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991], pp.58, 129

<sup>275</sup> Written by Briley John & Directed by Richard Attenborough, *Cry Freedom*. [1988], Marble Arch Productions, Feature Film.

<sup>276</sup> Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology *White Paper/Bill*. [1994], p.16

Likewise, John Allen remarks that since the 1960s, there has been a predictable development of drama courses in other higher education establishments, especially universities in Britain. Allen notes the most striking was the increase in the opportunities to study drama in colleges indicated by the increase in number of courses from half a dozen to around 100.<sup>277</sup>

However, these universities were not only concentrating on performers, but also on those interested in becoming technicians. Consequently, those students not interested in becoming performers had other career opportunities in the industry they could pursue such as costume and set-design, make-up and property design, lighting, sound, operation, playwriting, directing, choreography, theatre management, arts administration and many others. This ensured that all the areas in the industry were well supplied with qualified personnel. Allen writes that as a result, theatre received better-educated workers.<sup>278</sup>

While the universities, technikons and colleges were busy training and preparing white youths for the performing arts industry, the white minority apartheid government created job opportunities in all the provinces throughout the country. The government established the Performing Arts Councils and Civic theatres. Kees Epskamp observes that the administrative body primarily concerned with quality control of the artistic context of culture was generally the Arts Council. Most of these councils functioned as independent or semi-independent bodies, although they were directly responsible to some governmental department such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Recreation or Social Services.<sup>279</sup> Rodney Phillips, Chief Director of Natal Performing Arts Council, in his 1983-84 Annual Report states:

Our plans to form a permanent Drama Company of about 12 artists have now been carefully formulated and hopefully we will be able to proceed with this during 1984. The benefits of professional artists working together permanently, under proper on-going artistic direction as an ensemble have now been completely proven by the success of the NPO. I am satisfied that with a similar arrangement for Drama, our ability will greatly improve, particularly to present contemporary South African works in both official languages, as well as to offer employment opportunities to talented Natalians and South Africans on which scores we Completely fall down at present.<sup>280</sup>

Similarly, Martin Orkin reflects how the Performing Arts Council of Transvaal (PACT) published a brochure at the end of its first decade in which it quoted its

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<sup>277</sup> John Allen, *Drama in School: Its Theory and Practice*. [1979], p.159

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. p.159

<sup>279</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989], p.35

<sup>280</sup> Rodney Phillips, NAPAC 1983/4 Annual Report. [1983-4 ], p.4

initial mandate from the Department of Education, Arts and Science, which reads as follows:

Give our performing artists permanent employment, present operas and ballets, provide music and produce plays-in English and Afrikaans. We want high standards. Our people should no longer have to travel abroad to see the best. The Transvaal's your domain, every corner of it. Similar organizations will cover the other provinces. Here is R121,000.00. And with this shot in the arm the performing arts should flourish.<sup>281</sup>

Based on this remark, the role of the Performing Arts Councils and the racial group they should cater for were clearly spelled out. Furthermore, the fact that it was clearly stated that theatre-goers should no longer go overseas for good productions must have compelled the Councils to strive for excellence similar to that overseas. At the same time, the fact that whites could go overseas for entertainment, demonstrates the abundance within which they lived while blacks and other people of color languished in poverty. It can be submitted, therefore, that it is natural and understandable why there is discontent and even regret that apartheid and the economic system it sustained are no more, amongst those who benefited from it.

## **2.1. Apartheid Education and its Effects**

The kind of education whites were given can explain why they are still occupying top positions in the country and to some extent continue the apartheid legacy of marginalizing blacks because of their positions and economical power. Furthermore, it may account for the exodus of whites from South Africa to other countries since the demise of apartheid, which Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch observe. However, the two imply that the main contributing factor to the exodus is the current situation in the country under black leadership, which they portray as close to anarchy.<sup>282</sup>

Crime, violence and poverty are the realities faced by millions of South Africans, while abuse of power, bureaucratic bungling, social mismanagement, corruption, government interference in media, racism, xenophobia, unemployment, lack of meaningful health programs, and the devastating threat of the impending AIDS pandemic present

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<sup>281</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and South African State*. [1995], p.244

<sup>282</sup> Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch, "Playing the Changes: Thoughts on the restructuring of the theatrical system and arts in South Africa after apartheid" *SATJ*. [2001], p.10



themselves as dramas of scandal and tragedy played out in every conceivable arena.<sup>283</sup>

As much as it cannot be denied that there is crime, violence, poverty, and other issues currently, as the two assert, much of these things existed under apartheid with blacks as the victims and the apartheid government the main perpetrator. Apart from that, this kind of reaction might be due to the overprotection of white South Africans by the apartheid system to the extent that they lived in a fantasy world the system created for them. Only now are they exposed to the reality of South Africa's situation. It is also possible the current situation stems from anger, bitterness, frustration born of the past and slow changes in democratic South Africa to improve the lives of the black majority, much of which is due to negative attitude and resistance by some whites to change (as noted in the previous chapter). Barney Pityana notes that blacks have endured humiliation and the restrictive effects of pass laws, race classification and discrimination in all walks of life.<sup>284</sup> It can be argued, therefore, that because of this suffering for such a long period of time, blacks expected total relief from their discomfort when freedom finally came. Consequently, their continuous suffering in a democratic South Africa could have induced frustration, which compels them to take matters into their own hands to relieve themselves of suffering, regardless of the means including protests. Having denied proper education, blacks are not in a position to compete with whites in the labour market and consequently expect the government to intervene and come to their rescue, hence the current protests against the government over poor service delivery. Martin Esslin writes in relation to the play *Waiting for Godot*:

It dramatizes a state of mind, the psychological reality, the 'feel' of the emotion of unfulfilled expectancy when one is waiting for something which has been promised but fails to materialize.<sup>285</sup>

It can therefore be contested that like the characters in *Waiting for Godot*, the majority of South Africans still suffering, despite the new political dispensation, are "Waiting for Godot", because little has changed for them. If there is a change, in some cases, it has been for the worse. This little change, despite more than 16 years of democracy is evidenced by a South African Press Association [SAPA] article which appeared in *The Citizen* entitled "Blacks are still battling" and was based on the Department of Labor's Commission for Employment Equity report. In this article the South African Press Association argues that the Labour Report

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid. p10

<sup>284</sup> Barney Pityana, "Power and Social Change in South Africa" in Hendrik Van Der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid..* [1972,] p.176

<sup>285</sup> Martin Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama*. [1976], p.117

shows that with only 22% of senior management positions in South Africa held by blacks, there is “limited improvement” in terms of employment practices and race.<sup>286</sup> This is somehow similar to the state of affairs that existed under apartheid as reflected in the 1980-1984 statistics by the National Manpower Commission, which shows blacks earning 24.6% of the average income of whites.<sup>287</sup>

Not much progress seems to have been made ten years after the SAPA story was published. This is even the case in those institutions that claim to be transforming like the University of Witwatersrand. According to the Employment Equity report submitted to the Department of Labour by University of Witwatersrand, there are four blacks as opposed to 222 whites, at the Core Operation Function Mid-Management, which translates to 1.8% while in Junior Management the figures stand at 190 blacks and 833 whites, about 22.8% blacks. When it comes to the semi-skilled in support functions, one sees a reverse in terms of numbers,<sup>288</sup> with 509 blacks and 12 whites, which is 2.35% whites.<sup>289</sup> Employment Equity statistics from University of Pretoria portrays almost the same picture as that of University of Witwatersrand; at mid-management level there are 24 blacks as opposed to 383 whites, which is about 6.3% black. At Junior Management is no different, there are 148 blacks compared to 712 whites, about 21% blacks. However, when it comes to Semi-skilled there is a reverse with more blacks than whites, 451 blacks to 21 whites which is about 4.7%.<sup>290</sup> Amy Ansell notes, in this regard, that the main complaint voiced by employees in the KwaZulu Natal (KZN) Department of Agriculture was lack of transformation and that whites advantaged in the past were still clinging on to their positions of power. As a result, these whites place other whites who are less experienced and uneducated in middle management positions, ignoring more qualified and experienced blacks.<sup>291</sup> Similarly, Hennie Lotter observes that white people fill many professional and top posts in companies and bureaucracies because of the deprivation of opportunities afforded to black people, which disqualify most of them when it comes to competing for such posts. Lotter argues that the past racist restrictions in filling posts should not be forgotten since they

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<sup>286</sup> South African Press Association [SAPA] “Blacks are still battling” The Citizen newspaper, July 14. [2004], p.3

<sup>287</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa*. [1997], p.33

<sup>288</sup> Core Operation Function positions are those that directly relate to the core business of an organization and may lead to revenue generation, for example, sales production. Support Function positions provide infrastructure and other enabling conditions for revenue generation, for example, human resources. Department of Labour, *University of Witwatersrand Employment Equity report*, [2010] p.4

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. p.4

<sup>290</sup> [www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za) Department of Labour- University of Pretoria Employment Equity report [2010] p.4

<sup>291</sup> Amy Ansell, “Two Nations of discourse: Mapping racial ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa”, *Politikon*. [2004], p.17

further exacerbated the imbalance of people appointed.<sup>292</sup> In the same breath, Ansell regrets that despite employment markets still hugely skewed in favor of whites as a result of more than 40 years of apartheid economics, there has never been any pronounced call from the Afrikaners to use their considerable economic power in the reconstruction of South Africa.<sup>293</sup> Instead they leave.

In light of such imbalance in the labour market, it can be argued that the cause for the current situation is in terms of, first, poor level of education of blacks, which makes majority not to qualify for jobs especially at the managerial level and consequently rely on the government. Second, the exodus of whites due to uncertainty and bitterness for being overlooked for some jobs due to Affirmative Action even though highly qualified as compared to blacks should be traced back to the architects of apartheid, Verwoerd and Malan. The apartheid system failed to prepare whites and blacks for post-apartheid South Africa. Possibly, because those who supported it could not imagine a South Africa where blacks and whites could be equal let alone South Africa being ruled by blacks. It can, therefore, be contested that it is not the current situation as such that causes the exodus of whites to foreign countries or anger and frustration on the part of blacks, but the history of apartheid and the lack of preparation for the post-apartheid South Africa by the apartheid regime and those it benefited. The Catholic Institute for International Relations observes that white children were not in any way being prepared for a post-apartheid South Africa. Instead the concept of a God-ordained superiority was reinforced, damaging the minds of all white South Africans.<sup>294</sup> It is possible these are the white children of the apartheid era now ruffled and disorientated by the current political scenario. In a way, this may explain the exodus of mainly white youth to other countries following the collapse of the apartheid system. They possibly feel vulnerable without apartheid despite the skills which the apartheid system education afforded them at the expense of blacks.

Lotter is of the opinion that white people harmed themselves by not utilizing the talents of black people. For this reason, the supporters of apartheid denied themselves (and all South Africans) opportunities to enjoy the best from African and Western cultures to contribute to a new unique cultural synthesis appropriate to South Africa.<sup>295</sup> Nevertheless, to tap blacks' talents would mean providing proper education for blacks, which the apartheid system was against. Most of the effects that this kind of education has are addressed by some black playwrights in the plays discussed.

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<sup>292</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa* . [1997], p.143

<sup>293</sup> Amy Ansell, "Two Nations of discourse: Mapping racial ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa", *Politikon*. [2004], p.17

<sup>294</sup> Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Rule of Fear*. [1989], p.71

<sup>295</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa*. [1997], p.42

## 2.2 Provincial Parameters under Apartheid

It should be noted that under the Nationalist Party government, there were only four provinces namely Cape, Natal, Free State and Transvaal as opposed to the present nine. The reason was that with only whites allowed to participate in general elections, the four provinces were big enough when it came to drawing constituencies. Each of these four provinces had its own Performing Arts Council. In the Orange Free State Province, there was the Performing Arts Council of Orange Free State known as PACOFS. In the Cape, there was the Cape Town Performing Arts Council (CAPAC). The Performing Arts Council of Transvaal (PACT) was in the Transvaal Province and the Natal Performing Arts Council, commonly known as NAPAC was in Natal. These four Performing Arts Councils were situated in major cities in their respective provinces; CAPAC in Cape Town, PACT in Pretoria, PACOFS in Bloemfontein, while NAPAC in Durban. The Civic Theatre in Braamfontein served the theatrical interests of the white elite in Johannesburg, the economic capital of South Africa. NAPAC states:

NAPAC is now working towards a much greater Integration between its arts departments as it prepares for the big challenge of the Natal Playhouse. The formation and creation of our own infrastructure to present joint artistic productions from time to time to the whole organization's benefit as, for example, our ballet dancers to perform in operas and musicals, and actors perform with orchestra.<sup>296</sup>

Orkin observes that in the late 1950s and early 1960s a number of theatres subsidized by the municipal and civic authorities as well as other authorities were built around the country. These included the opening of Bloemfontein Civic Theatre in 1959, the Ernest Oppenheimer Theatre in Welkom, the Guild Theatre, which opened in East London in 1962, the opening of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre in 1962, and others in Oudtshoorn and Pretoria. However, none of these theatres or those built over the next two decades ever provided space for emergent South African playwrights. They have been used for performances arranged by the Performing Arts Council, which came into being in 1963. Each province in the country had one of these Councils. The Councils replaced the subsidized National Theatres and were designed, according to a brochure issued by the government Department of Information in 1969 entitled "Performing Arts in South Africa." The Councils had to offer Cultural Aspirations of a "Young Country" not only to provide drama productions in two languages (Afrikaans and English) but also to pamper the tastes and cater for the interests of the

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<sup>296</sup> Rodney Phillips, *NAPAC Annual Report*, [1983-4], p.1

balletomane, the music-lover and the opera devotees.<sup>297</sup> With access available only to the white minority, it once again highlights the lavish life for whites, which was contrary to Verwoerd's claim that apartheid was also in the interests of blacks.

Apart from creating jobs, the Performing Arts Councils were also responsible for developing and promoting arts in white communities. In addition, there were also schools like the National School of the Arts, which offered a variety of courses including art, drama, dance and music from standard 6 to 10. Institutions like the Johannesburg Youth Theatre, on the other hand, provided theatrical space to promote talents amongst white youths. Orkin comments:

The National Theatre, formed within the ruling classes, again significantly, with government funding in 1947, from its inception this organization had no place for black creative participation, although reliance upon black labour for the carrying out of all menial tasks was not dispensed with. The organization also attempted to foster interest in the drama amongst the 'youth' which one of its chronicles takes to mean white pupils under the aegis of education departments for whites in the Transvaal and later the Cape and Natal.<sup>298</sup>

Orkin contests that the National Theatre in its behavior, like the Nationalist Party government, seemed to mean only white South Africans when it used the term 'South African'.<sup>299</sup> Based on this and an acknowledgement of the importance theatre plays in a society, it can be submitted that the apartheid system objective was to develop Afrikaner theatre as a cultural tool. Martin Esslin observes there can be no doubt that performance theatre, including drama, cinema and electronic mass media, is a powerful political weapon. The use of theatre in modern totalitarian societies is widely analyzed.<sup>300</sup> This may explain some opportunities and incentives made available to Afrikaner artists to encourage them to engage fully in the development of their art.

Bain and Hauptfleisch note the generously state-funded Performing Arts Council of the four provinces in pre-democratic South Africa have done what they were supposed to, that is, to cultivate and advance white elitist Eurocentric theatre.<sup>301</sup> Likewise, Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman observe that the incentive for creating a fully independent Afrikaans theatre was there right from the start. Consequently, the Afrikaner cultural leaders and creative

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<sup>297</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and South African State* .[1995]. pp.113,114

<sup>298</sup> Ibid. p.57

<sup>299</sup> Ibid. p.57

<sup>300</sup> Martin Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama* .[1976], pp.29,30

<sup>301</sup> Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch, "Playing the Changes: Thoughts on the restructuring of the theatrical system and arts in south Africa after apartheid", *SATJ*. [2001] p.11

artists were to maximize use of existing facilities to extend and improve the Afrikaans theatrical tradition.<sup>302</sup> Hauptfleisch and Steadman write:

Simply stated, the drive towards an Afrikaner identity has meant that all artists, including dramatists, have been invited or more specifically, urged to create works in a effort to establish a body of Afrikaans literature and, because of the belief in the ultimate goal, the response was gratifying.<sup>303</sup>

In fact, to demonstrate the commitment in developing Afrikaner theatre, Hauptfleisch and Steadman trace this development back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and divide it into four stages: first stage from 1880-1925, second stage from 1925-1959, third stage from 1959-1977 and the fourth from 1978 onwards. Each of these stages document major turning points in the development and history of Afrikaner theatre.<sup>304</sup> These stages indicate the systematic development of Afrikaner Theatre and the commitment on the part of both the colonial and apartheid governments to develop it. John MaGrath opines that the combined Arts Councils could clearly be seen by their actions as agents for the security forces, determined to crush all oppositional theatre and to insist on what Castoriadis called the “closure of the social imaginary” to stifle the dialectic of history. MaGrath thinks Afrikaner theatre was meant to bring about the “ultimate wet dreams” of the politician in power with dictatorial tendencies.<sup>305</sup>

Apartheid was not unique in trying to stifle Black Theatre while encouraging and developing Afrikaner theatre. In a larger frame of colonialism, this was more or less standard practice in other parts of world. Esslin asserts that “national theatres” in most modern, developed nations expose the politics of theatre; they are institutions contributing to each nation’s image of itself and define an image in relation to its neighbors.<sup>306</sup> Likewise, Kees Epskamp contests that indigenous theatre, in rural as well as urban areas, has always been entirely overruled by the western dominant theatre-branch. Indigenous village dance-Drama was either ignored or turned into a tourist attraction. Epskamp comments that white people not only developed their enclave-culture, they forced it upon the country through the educational system.<sup>307</sup> Similarly, Thiong’o observes that in the fifties, through the British Council and a government-appointed colony-wide drama and music officer, school drama was systematized into an annual Schools Drama Festival. Apart from that, many European-controlled theatre

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<sup>302</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South African Theatre*. [1984], pp.10,11

<sup>303</sup> Ibid. p.57

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. p.57

<sup>305</sup> John MaGrath, “Theatre and Democracy”, *New Theatre Quarterly*, May. [2002], p.138

<sup>306</sup> Martin Esslin, *An Anatomy of Drama*. [1976], pp.29,30

<sup>307</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Learning by Performing Arts*. [1992], p.111

buildings were erected in the major towns like Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Kisumu, Kitale and Eldoret between 1948 and 1952. These specialized in West End, London comedies and sugary musicals with the occasional Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw.<sup>308</sup> On the other hand, Jerry Wasserman writes in relation to Canadian theatre, which might have been dictated by the colonial master, Britain:

While non-Canadian works had access to lush productions, large casts and relatively highly paid actors, Canadian plays were doomed to what George Ryga called 'beggars theatre'. Concurrently, of course, Canadian playwrights were denied the financial opportunities that might allow them to actually make a living by practicing their craft.<sup>309</sup>

Like their South African counterparts, Canadian playwrights were forced to take action to remedy the situation. However, unlike South African black playwrights, Canadian playwrights had an opportunity to make recommendations and demands on their government.

All this demonstrates that theatre has in many societies been the preserve of a certain group, the elite who in most cases were white and in the minority with regard to South Africa. Slaughter writes:

Since the end of primitive society, literacy, art, culture and even leisure itself have been at the disposal of only a tiny minority, their freedom to enjoy these things maintained only by the enslavement and exclusion from culture of the people.<sup>310</sup>

Slaughter contests that as long as capitalism continues and socialism does not come into existence, art will suffer because it tends to be bought by patrons, selected according to whether it suits the comfort, peace of mind, and other prejudices of those who can pay for it.<sup>311</sup> This is the scenario that the apartheid system created in South Africa for the white minority. Unfortunately, even today, the arts as a form of entertainment in established theatre houses still remain inaccessible to the majority of South Africa because of the exorbitant prices of the tickets for the shows. This is likely to persist and force Black Theatre to follow suit for it to survive given the fact that international assistance which Black Theatre used to enjoy ceased after the demise of apartheid. The challenges Black Theatre practitioners face will be dealt with later. David Kerr writes in

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<sup>308</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the mind The politics of Languages in African Literature*. [1986], p.38

<sup>309</sup> Jerry Wasserman, *Modern Canadian Plays*. [1986], p.18

<sup>310</sup> Cliff Slaughter, *Marx and Marxism*. [1995], p.66

<sup>311</sup> Ibid. p.66

relation to Thiong'o's reaction to the fact that the majority of people is culturally marginalized:

Ngugi wa Thiong'o expressed disgust that expatriates and wealthy Kenyans were allowed expensive and often decadent imported western entertainment, but the peasants with clods of clay had no right to a theatre which correctly reflected their lives, fears, hopes, dreams and history of struggle had no right to their creative efforts even in their own backyards.<sup>312</sup>

Similarly, Orkin regrets that even the so-called liberal theatres such as Market Theatre playhouse<sup>313</sup> often failed to serve the masses even though some plays draw their stories from the people themselves. He points out that the weakness of the Market Theatre playhouse and other similar cultural organizations was that they tended to siphon creativity and talent of the masses out of the community into productions which, brilliant as they might have been, even at times quite hard-hitting in their political content and presentation, were marketed for the consumption of the petit-bourgeois audience in South Africa and various Western countries.<sup>314</sup> Unfortunately, this type of audience was often not interested in the problems of the black people and as a result, treated the plays as just a form of entertainment to be marveled or turned into a subject for discussion that by no means would advance the cause of the oppressed majority upon which the story could be based or geared towards. McGrath insists that, on the contrary, theatre must use all possible means to reach every citizen and not act as an excluding agency, whether by the price of its tickets, the manner of its box-office staff, its location or its impenetrability.<sup>315</sup>

As argued, the education system followed the policies of the apartheid regime to confine blacks to the margins of the society. To achieve this, facilities for arts and medicine that blacks were not permitted to pursue were not provided in black areas. Art was associated with the affluent white minority, and did not feature in the curriculum for black children that prepared them exclusively for lowly jobs.<sup>316</sup> Lotter notes that in apartheid society the opportunities for blacks to

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<sup>312</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From pre-colonial times to the present day*. [1995], p.247

<sup>313</sup> Market Theatre playhouse was and still is one of the leading playhouses where both black and white theatre practitioners and audiences could mix under apartheid South Africa. As a result, it created space for aspiring black playwrights and performers to get exposure and communicate with a wider audience made up of people of difference races. Nevertheless, to achieve this, blacks often had work with or be under the strong-arm of established white playwrights like Barney Simon or Athol Fugard. Credit for outstanding productions under such ventures often went to their white counterparts.

<sup>314</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and South African State*.. [1991], p.213

<sup>315</sup> John McGrath, Theatre and Democracy, *New Theatre Quarterly*, May. [2002], p.138

<sup>316</sup> Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa*. [1990], p.10



choose courses to study at educational institutions were restricted to those areas prescribed to their ethnic or race group. The corollary was that blacks had no access to such facilities, including sports, meaning that opportunities for developing talents and abilities were severely constrained and much fewer than white people had.<sup>317</sup> Ndebele writes:

The racist system of South Africa has systematically denied the oppressed majority any meaningful opportunity for creative involvement in the entire arena of cultural practice. It is not only that obstacles have been placed in their way in the fields of writing, painting, music and the other arts, but also that they have had no say whatsoever in the socially organized planning of society.<sup>318</sup>

Williamson and Ndebele reiterate what both Ngubane and the Catholic Institute for International Relations had observed, that is, the intention of the Bantu education was to confine blacks to the lowest positions in the labour market. The failure of the apartheid government to cater for artistic interests of blacks is also observed by the current government. It notes that generally, tertiary institutions designed for blacks did not have training departments for the arts so that aspiring black artists would have had to apply to traditionally white universities to acquire skills and knowledge.<sup>319</sup>

However, even though blacks could apply to these institutions, there was no guarantee they would be accepted or receive the academic assistance they needed to successfully complete studies. International Defense and Aid Fund for Southern Africa in co-operation with the United Nation Centre Against Apartheid (IDFSAUNCAA) submits that a worker seldom had many choices. Someone born in a rural community outside a Bantustan area, for example, would generally remain classified as 'Farm Labour' irrespective of educational qualifications: he or she would not be registered for work in an urban area unless the farmer agreed there was no shortage of farm labour elsewhere.<sup>320</sup> Consequently, any form of training that would not harness blacks to jobs prescribed by the system was out of question. Verwoerd stated this clearly in parliament:

What is the use of teaching the Bantu child Mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? The school must equip him (the Bantu child)] to meet

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<sup>317</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa..* [1997], p.35

<sup>318</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary.* [1991], p.120

<sup>319</sup> Lionel Mtshali, Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. White Paper/Bill [1994], p.16

<sup>320</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa in co-operation with the United Nation Centre Against apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts.* [1988], p.43

the demands which the economic life of South Africa impose on him. I just want to remind the hon. members that if the Native in South Africa today in any kind of school in existence is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake.<sup>321</sup>

Verwoerd's statement demonstrates that he could not foresee any possibility of political change in the near future. Accordingly, there was no need to prepare white and black youths to live and work together as a single nation, let alone compete for employment at the market place. However, Verwoerd's approach was no different to that of other oppressors. Jim Walker comments with regard to the Portuguese rule in Africa that its European style schools, with their "hideously deformed" curricula, had no other goal than teaching Africans how to be more useful to the Portuguese. Walker argues that while the Portuguese army invaded the land and brutalized the physical body, the schools tamed the mind and domesticated the soul.<sup>322</sup>

Poor curriculum was just one of those means through which arts for blacks were stifled, the other was through infrastructure and facilities. In order to ensure that the policy was as effective as required, the apartheid system denied blacks any form of infrastructure and facilities that would help advance their development. Orkin notes:

The state's suppression of the drama of the oppressed classes and groups worked primarily through its continuing control of and restriction in the use of township space. In the townships there was almost complete absence of performance space and attendant difficult for rehearsal and performance...Soweto, for instance, which had a population approaching one million in the early 1970s, still had, towards the end of the decade only one established night-club, one hotel, one cinema, Jabulani amphitheatre and Orlando Stadium for outdoor concerts, and a small number of community halls.<sup>323</sup>

Orkin observes that the lack of theatrical space in the townships continued until the end of the 1980s and remained a primary significant *de facto* means of limiting and containing theatrical growth.<sup>324</sup> This is in sharp contrast to white communities, which the government guaranteed were well taken care of. It can be argued that the denial of infrastructure and facilities to blacks was to ensure

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<sup>321</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and South African State..* [1991], p.150

<sup>322</sup> Jim Walker, "The End of Dialogue: Paulo Freire on Politics and Education" in Robert Mackie's ed. *Literacy and revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo Freire.* [1980], p.131

<sup>323</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and South African State..* [1991], p.150

<sup>324</sup> Ibid. p.150

that blacks would not progress in those areas not prescribed for their race by the apartheid system including arts. Joyce Sikakane writes, regarding the kind of education blacks were offered by the apartheid system, that the educational system in Soweto, like that of all African children in South Africa, was planned by the Nationalist Regime to retard the progress of blacks in general. It was designed to create barriers in their development, to humiliate blacks by producing mentally retarded graduates who could not think beyond their repressed blackness. In this manner, it was meant to make money out of blacks as a subservient labour force.<sup>325</sup>

Consequently, many students were forced to find a way out of this quagmire if they were to develop themselves in pursuit of their goals. Whereas some students left the country to study in the neighboring countries like Botswana, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, others took less drastic steps and sought bursaries to attend private or church schools that did not follow the apartheid education system syllabus. Maishe Maponya recalls how published material, including that on theatre, was inaccessible in most instances, mainly due to the fact that a lot of literature was banned under apartheid. As a result, Maponya and his colleagues had to devise means to get hold of this material. Consequently, they established networks through which books and other reading material by writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Leroi Jones, Langston Hughes, Fanon and Cabral were circulated from person to person since they knew who had what kind of books. Otherwise they had to travel to foreign countries like Swaziland and spent weekends reading this material banned or unavailable in South Africa.<sup>326</sup>

Censorship was rapidly applied not only to school curricula and materials but also to theatre practices. Dollimore observes that what began as a simple policing of the auditorium quickly extended to direct censorship of the plays themselves. He comments that this suppression was actively ideological, as one would expect, in the sense that it went far beyond simply forbidding the performance of controversial material, but was also designed to predetermine the nature of all drama. Given the apartheid system's intention, it was not surprising that censorship was considerable.<sup>327</sup> Dollimore writes:

We should remember that the dramatists were actually imprisoned and otherwise harassed by the state for staging plays thought to be seditious. These writers were looking not into their hearts but over their shoulders. There is also evidence to the effect that dramatists fell foul to the law outside and as well as inside the theatre.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Joyce Sikakane, *A Window on Soweto*. [1977], p.39

<sup>326</sup> Maishe Maponya, Department of Arts and culture, Personal Interview, Braamfontein. 2006

<sup>327</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Drama: Its Context and Emergence*. [1989], p.23

<sup>328</sup> Ibid. p.25

However, Hauptfleisch and Steadman remark that despite all this interference and obstruction by the apartheid system, Western culture, including theatre, still reached the Black population through church schools and missionaries, which influenced the founding of amateur theatrical groups. Another way was through English literature, which exposed pupils to plays written by playwrights from the West, like Shakespeare. These two methods managed to instill a sense of drama as art in certain communities, thus creating potential audiences and literary writers. Nevertheless, these methods had negative effects because it meant alienating the pupils from traditional African ways of telling stories.<sup>329</sup>

This divisive situation under apartheid South Africa compelled blacks to initiate institutions of higher learning and theatre groups, which catered for blacks and other people of color. Ngubane observes that blacks were subjected to discriminatory laws and forced to live under conditions dictated by whites who despised and hated blacks. Furthermore, they were torn away from their tribes and cultures. For this reason, blacks were compelled to create for themselves a world of their own design, and this was to become a very unique world.<sup>330</sup>

This “unique world” that Ngubane talks about included theatre groups. As a result, a lot of theatre groups were started in the townships. As much as these groups were to satisfy blacks’ interest in this field, they were also used as a means of communication to the black masses, to educate them on issues pertaining to the apartheid system. The main reason being that, as Carolyn Duggan observes, African drama depicts situations perhaps more pungently than other art forms because not only does drama draw on life for its source, but its raw materials are actual human bodies, attributes, and behavior. Duggan notes that drama always holds a mirror up to life.<sup>331</sup> Bamber Gascoigne observes:

The modern playwright feels himself inside the society he is writing about; the fears and frustration of his characters are his own, or even if he does not share them he can sympathize with them.<sup>332</sup>

It can be argued that it is through the playwrights’ identification with society that they can help awaken their people to their plight and compel them to stand up to the challenge and rebuild their lives. This may be read in line with Martin Lipset’s argument that for blacks to acquire dignity as people, as a nation, they

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<sup>329</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South African Theatre*. [1984], p.6

<sup>330</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*. [1963] p.59

<sup>331</sup> Carolyn Duggan, ‘Strategies in Staging - Theatre technique in the plays of Zakes Mda’, in Martin Banham ed. *African Theatre in Development*.. [1999], p.2

<sup>332</sup> Jimmy Potter in Bamber Gascoigne ed., *The Twentieth Century Drama*.. [1962], p.49

had to be free of servitude, of social, economic, and educational inferiority. He argues that they must be masters in their own country.<sup>333</sup>

However, given the education system for blacks under apartheid, most of the theatre groups initiated in response to blacks marginalization were run by unskilled or semi-skilled persons with little or formal training. Therefore, some of the productions were sub-standard and unconventional as Mhlankabesi Vundla, Artistic Director of FUBA, observes. Vundla notes that the stories in most of these plays were good, but the plays were poorly structured because they were written by new, young and inexperienced writers without any form of training.<sup>334</sup>

### **2.3.1 Black Theatre Practitioners Responses to the Apartheid System-FUBA**

Given that education was politicized, black artists like Sipho Sephamla and Matsemela Manaka, who had some knowledge or experience in this area, were compelled to start institutions that would specifically cater for the needs of blacks interested in arts, especially theatre. Consequently, Sephamla started FUBA in 1977, while Manaka started the Creative Youth Association with students from Madibane High School. The Creative Youth Association later became what is now the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre. Smal Ndaba started the Sibikwa Community Theatre Project in 1989. The same year, the Market Theatre playhouse, which was known as home for prosperous black artists such as John Kani, Percy Mtwa and others started the Market Laboratory, commonly known as Market Lab. The reason for the success of these black artists was their partnership with white playwrights such as Athol Fugard, Barney Simon and others. Through this partnership, these black playwrights were able to evade some of the apartheid laws and managed to receive audiences and other benefits beyond their race, which other black playwrights could not. For this reason, they became successful and recognized more than their fellow black playwrights not working in collaboration with white playwrights.

These black institutions of dramatic arts became a training ground for black artists, who, after completing their studies, did not employ their art to entertain or make a living as such, but used their professional skills to educate the black masses about the apartheid system and its repressive laws. Bell Hooks notes in this regard that the ability to “talk back” is an act of liberation that allows oppressed people to become subjects rather than remain the voiceless objects of

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<sup>333</sup> Martin Lipset, “Preface” in Hendrik Van Der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.6

<sup>334</sup> Mhlakabesi Vundla, FUBA, Personal Interview, Newton. 2006

dominant discourse whose realities and identities are perpetually defined by others.<sup>335</sup>

Due to the role Black Theatre played in the struggle for freedom in South Africa, the Nationalist Party government, already unhappy with Black Theatre, as observed in the previous chapter, regarded these institutions as a breeding area for further opposition, and consequently tried by all means to throttle them. Dollimore is of the opinion that the authorities feared theatre; for this reason, Black Theatre was accused of being a breeding ground for evil, corruption and riots.<sup>336</sup> It is important to note that the apartheid system perceived only Black Theatre as “breeding ground for irreligion, corruption and riots,” and not English or Afrikaner theatre (that is, through the racial classifications in which English theatre meant theatre by English speakers and Afrikaner theatre for Afrikaans speakers). The apartheid system was adamant to develop the latter to the fullest, as demonstrated earlier, since the National Party was predominantly Boers who referred to themselves as Afrikaners [Africans] to legitimize themselves.

Given this relationship between the apartheid system and Black Theatre practitioners, Vundla recalls how the apartheid system, through its agents, constantly harassed FUBA because of the protest nature of Black Theatre. As a result, the police raided the school frequently in search of literature that was considered offensive. Such literature was confiscated if found.<sup>337</sup> Kees Epskamp notes the suspicion of national governments towards local theatrical projects was understandable because these projects were directed towards specific groups meant to organize and mobilize them.<sup>338</sup>

With the staff being the driving force behind the success of FUBA, it was impossible for the staff to be exempted from harassment. However, the harassment of staff was selective. Vundla says the white members of the staff took more beating than their black counterparts. Philomena Essed observes that dominant group members who took a clear stand against racism or identified with the black cause became targets of harassment.<sup>339</sup> The hostile reaction by the government was due to two reasons. First, by the virtue of their color, whites were expected by the apartheid system to be on its side since the system was meant to benefit whites. Consequently, their failure not only to show support for the system, but to go to the extent of teaching at black institutions to equip black learners with skills later to be employed against the system was regarded as a betrayal. Second, the harsh treatment inflicted was meant to intimidate the white

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<sup>335</sup> Bell Hooks from Melissa Thackway's *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspective in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film*. [2003], p.42

<sup>336</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Drama: Its Context and Emergence*. [1989], p.22

<sup>337</sup> Mhlakabesi Vundla, FUBA, Personal Interview, Newtown. 2006

<sup>338</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989], p.70

<sup>339</sup> Philemona Essed, “Everyday Racism” in Philemona Essed and David Goldberg ed. *Race critical theories: text and context*. [2002], p.184

members of the staff to discontinue teaching at these black institutions with the hope that, since not many blacks possessed skills in this area, such institutions would eventually collapse. After apartheid, the new government's *White Paper/Bill* notes:

With few job opportunities for black people in the arts market-place, the education system designed for black people generally did not include arts education. Thus very few black people were formally trained as arts educators in any discipline.<sup>340</sup>

It is important to note that while some of these white theatre teachers were there for employment purposes (possibly as they awaited better opportunities elsewhere), others needed the flexible atmosphere to experiment and build a public recognition that they had "transcended their race" and "broke new ground." Furthermore, as much as their contribution is acknowledged and appreciated, some black artists criticized their involvement. Like Steve Biko, Paulo Freire has a similar reservation with regard to white liberals:

Another issue of indubitable importance arises: the fact that certain members of the oppressor class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, thus moving from one pole of the contradiction to the other. Theirs is a fundamental role, and has been so throughout the history of this struggle. It happens, however, that they cease to be exploiters or indifferent spectator or simply the heirs of exploitation and move to the side of the exploited, they almost always bring with them the marks of their origin: their prejudices and their deformations, which include a lack of confidence in the people's ability to think, to want and to know. Accordingly, these adherents to the people's cause constantly run the risk of falling into a type of generosity as malefic as that of the oppressor.<sup>341</sup>

Police harassment was just one of the many tools to paralyze the school. The other obstacle that indirectly made the school unstable was the Group Areas Act. The Group Areas Act, as noted in the previous chapter, restricted activities of individuals to where they lived in accordance with their race as defined in the apartheid system. However, without facilities to accommodate institutions of the nature of FUBA in black areas as Orkin indicates, FUBA was compelled to seek proper facilities suitable for its activities outside its designated area. In so doing, the institute violated the Group Areas Act and consequently found itself occasionally relocating once the system identified its activities. Vundla says the

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<sup>340</sup> Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology *White Paper/Bill*. [1994], p.16

<sup>341</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. [1968], p.46

school was forced to relocate four times as a result of the Group Areas Act before it settled at its current location in Newton.<sup>342</sup> It is clear from the experience of FUBA that the apartheid system's plan was to ensure that the institute would close down. Biko observes in this regard that the whites' quest for power led them to destroy with utter ruthlessness whatever stood in their way.<sup>343</sup>

Undoubtedly, FUBA helped fill that vacuum for arts institutions for blacks created and managed by the apartheid system. Vundla says the demand for such an institution was very high, and the response towards its founding proved overwhelming, indicated by the large number of applications the school received. The interest in the school of this nature, he says, was due to the fact that a lot of blacks became overnight playwrights in the quest to tell their communal stories, based on their experiences under the apartheid system. Many people realized that theatre was the simplest and most available means through which they could communicate their anger and frustration. In the process of doing so, they hoped to expose the system to both local and international audiences.<sup>344</sup> They were thus able to bring their own performances very close to reality and to comply with the emotions and opinions of the audience, out of whose midst they came.<sup>345</sup>

In regards to exposing the system, Carolyn Duggan writes that from the 1970s, black drama in South Africa became more and more useful as a tool of black liberation. It therefore had to move away from being merely entertainment since the issues of life were too vital.<sup>346</sup> Similarly, Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch recall that apartheid gave writers and artists a cause for which to fight and a social evil against which to rally. However, Bain and Hauptfleisch think that protest theatre, which was inherently political and ultimately socially relevant and "meaningful," compromised a significant portion of the work produced and/or remembered since it was not mainly for artistic purposes.<sup>347</sup> Contrary to their perception of Black Theatre, Samuel Hay maintains:

All art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not

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<sup>342</sup> Mhlakabesi Vundla FUBA, Personal Interview, Newtown. 2006

<sup>343</sup> Steve Biko, *I write what I like*. [1978], p.61

<sup>344</sup> Mhlakabesi Vundla, FUBA, Personal Interview, Newtown. 2006

<sup>345</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989], p.146

<sup>346</sup> Carolyn Duggan, "Strategies in Staging - Theatre technique in the plays of Zakes Mda", in Martin Banham ed. *African Theatre in Development*. [1999], p.2

<sup>347</sup> Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch, "Playing the Changes: Thoughts on the restructuring of the theatrical system and arts in south Africa after apartheid", *SATJ*. [2001] p.15



used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent.<sup>348</sup>

Like Hay, Boal argues all theatre is necessarily political because all the activities of people are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics, lead others into error, which by itself, is a political act. He maintains theatre is a very effective weapon, whether used by the ruling system or for liberation goals.<sup>349</sup>

The great interest in FUBA that resulted in a large enrolment did not only mean an over-crowding of students, but also meant a plethora of plays from the students as well, which they were eager to produce. Vundla says the following on these plays:

FUBA received a large number of plays from the students which they were eager to produce. As much as this showed motivation and commitment in this field, the plays were not in a position to be produced because they were poorly structured which weakened the good stories within. Consequently, the duty of FUBA as an institution of higher learning was to train and equip these future playwrights with writing skills. However, the syllabus did not focus only on play structure, but also other basic elements in play writing including plot and characterization. We wanted to put these new writers in a position to relate their stories to their audience clearly and effectively.<sup>350</sup>

In retrospect, Vundla says, FUBA managed to achieve its objectives despite the numerous obstacles the institute had to face, such as constant harassment by the police, the instability caused by the Group Areas Act, over-crowding and most of all the lack of funds for the institute to carry out its day-to-day activities. The increasing number of graduates entering the labour market every year from the Institute indicates this overcoming. Some of the Institute's graduates made their way into the television industry where they became television personalities. Others joined FUBA as members of staff. Most, however, became involved in the school's outreach programs. He says the main role of the group involved in the outreach programs is to assist in the production of plays prescribed for schools. The objective being to help high school students, especially Matric students, to understand the plays better through dramatizing them.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Samuel Hay, *African American Theatre*. [1994], p.5

<sup>349</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. [1979], p.119

<sup>350</sup> Mhlakabesi Vundla, FUBA, Personal Interview, Newtown. 2006

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

### 2.3.2 Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre

The other institute that came into existence in Johannesburg as a result of the marginalization of blacks by white institutions of higher learning is the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre. It was founded by the late Matsemela Manaka. However, unlike FUBA, Soyikwa was more a theatre company at its inception, hence the name Creative Youth Association. It was only seven years later, in 1984, that it became an institution of higher learning. As such, Soyikwa offered both training and research studies in theatre. The institute also offered other specialties like dance and children's theatre.

Like FUBA, Soyikwa was founded to develop artists to be in a position to address basic problems of the black masses. Most of the productions were focused in one way or the other on political, social and economic issues pertaining to blacks. However, the motivation was not only to reflect the black society's state of affairs under the apartheid system, but also to search for solutions to alleviate the suffering of the oppressed masses and to bring about change. The Principal of the School, Jerry Raletsebele comments on the productions:

Our productions made the public aware of the conditions under which it was living. After watching these productions, the audience could not only discuss these problems freely but also search for possible solutions.<sup>352</sup>

The responses of the public towards the school production were positive. Moreover, the Soyikwa Institute was very much concerned about the plight of black children. The absence of recreational facilities meant that black children could not develop and/or entertain themselves away from the streets. Consequently, Soyikwa introduced dance, singing and music programs in the townships to cater for black children. These programs were meant to lure children away from the street where they might have been tempted to indulge in crime, and at the same time they were also geared towards developing the children's artistic skills. Raletsebele says:

Our objective was to cultivate a positive attitude and respect for arts amongst the children and make them aware that art can be pursued as a profession just like any other profession. The reason being that theatre and other forms of art are often regarded as only a form of entertainment in black communities not something a person can make a

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<sup>352</sup> Jerry Raletsebele, Soyikwa, Personal Interview, Newtown. 2006

living out of. Consequently, we took it as our duty as an institution to encourage children to perceive theatre and art in general differently.<sup>353</sup>

Raletebele says the institute seems to have achieved the goals set at its inception since a lot of its former students have taken up arts including theatre as a profession. He says many graduates work for the government's arts departments at both provincial and national levels while others are in charge of community projects coordinated by the institute. These projects are meant to cultivate interest in the arts in black communities, which was discouraged and prevented by the apartheid system.<sup>354</sup> Allen comments that in general, the curricula of most drama schools is fairly wide as a result of the diversified nature of theatrical art, and this is possibly why their students are found in a wide variety of professions.<sup>355</sup>

### 2.3.3 The Market Theatre Playhouse Laboratory

The Market Theatre Laboratory is another school of dramatic art for black pupils that was started during the 1980s, under the auspices of the Market Theatre [playhouse]. What is interesting is that the Market Lab was started in 1989, more than ten years after both FUBA and Soyikwa, despite the fact that Market Theatre was always known as a safe haven for black artists as compared to other theatres like Civic Theatre and National Arts Theatre. The likely explanation for this is that even though black artists could work at the Market Theatre playhouse, they often had to cooperate with their white counterparts like Athol Fugard and Barney Simon. The two are well known South African white playwrights who worked with Black Theatre practitioners like John Kani. Despite the collaborations, many of the plays, including *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, were credited to the white playwrights and watered down to suit the taste of the predominantly white audience. Thus, through collaboration, it appears that Fugard and Simon were able "to tap" into abundant and viable stories within the black communities. Zakes Mda recalls that white colleagues often overshadowed South African black playwrights:

I mentioned to John Kani that I was bothered by the references that were often made to *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* as Athol Fugard's plays, without ever crediting John Kani and Winston Ntshona. This is common not only in the academy but also international theatre practitioners and commentators. Some are indeed generous enough to Kani and Ntshona, but reduce them to Fugard's appendages who

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> John Allen, *Drama in Schools: Its Theory and Practice*. [1979], p.175

happened to be present when the great master wrote the two plays. Yet these plays are a result of the creative synergy of three great creators: Fugard, Kani and Ntshona, in an alphabetic order that has unfortunately conferred on the first name, Athol Fugard, the status of the sole or that the very least supreme creator.<sup>356</sup>

As evidenced by Mda's observation, South African black playwrights' contributions were either partially or obliquely recognized and as a result had little influence in the overall planning and running of the Market Theatre playhouse. However, due to the potentiality of stories emanating from black communities, Market Lab was founded to act as a talent scout and promoter in black communities for the good of the Market Theatre playhouse and its diverse audience. This means a play by a young writer or director had to be successful at Market Lab first to be mounted at the Market Theatre playhouse. This encouraged a lot of Black Theatre enthusiasts in the township to work harder to achieve this recognition they could not get elsewhere.

According to the Education Officer, Dan Robbertse, the objective of Market Lab was, and still is, to create space where theatre practitioners, especially young and/or new, can meet and exchange ideas and to establish a platform for new writers and plays. Apart from that, Market Lab also plays an important role as an institution of higher learning. It accommodates many youths who do not qualify to enter universities and technikons due to admission requirements or financial problems. For these reasons, Robbertse says Market Lab was well received by the public like the other two institutions.<sup>357</sup> Robbertse notes:

There was a big and positive response from the public especially because of our involvement with community theatre. There were so many youths who were keen to join Market Lab that we had to expand our fieldwork programme. Fortunately, our expansion of the programme boosted our community theatre festivals since this meant that a lot of people got the necessary and needed training in different aspects of theatre. The result was a flood of new plays by new playwrights.<sup>358</sup>

Due to the success and popularity of the school, as indicated by the way its graduates were received by the industry, Robbertse said enrolment doubled in its first five years. Consequently, a lot of its graduates are found in almost every

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<sup>356</sup> John Kani, *Nothing but the truth*. [2002], pp.v,vi

<sup>357</sup> Dan Robbertse, Market Lab. Institute, Personal Interview, Newtown. 2007

<sup>358</sup> Ibid. 2007

sector of the industry as technicians, professional performers, administrators, playwrights, or actors like Sello kaNcube from both *Generations*, a South African soap opera and Walt Disney's *The Lion the King*. As with the case of the other two institutions, there are those who stayed behind at the school to participate in school programs or became field-workers. The roles of these field-workers include teaching theatre at schools in the townships.<sup>359</sup>

Even though not raided as often as FUBA, Market Theatre Lab had to overcome some challenges caused by the apartheid system laws. With the State of Emergency in place for a lengthy period especially in the 1980s, Market Lab students ran the risk of arrest if caught violating the time restriction components of the Regulations since there was a significant transportation problem. With no transport available, since taxis and bus owners were obliged to observe the State of Emergency Regulations as well, students were forced to risk arrest when walking back home.

The other problem the Market Lab had to address was the lack of qualified and willing black teachers. The reason for this shortage was that graduates were offered better paid jobs, either in government or nongovernmental organizations as compared to teaching. Although Robbertse acknowledges the teacher shortage problem remains, it is not as serious as it was in the past. He says the situation has been remedied by the increasing viability of teaching as a profession in the ever-expanding arts industry.

#### **2.3.4 Sibikwa Community Theatre Project**

The last institution on this list is the Sibikwa Community Theatre Project. It was established in the late 1980s just like Market Theatre Laboratory by Smal Ndaba, an actor and playwright. Although Ndaba conceived the idea, it was through the generous help of a local physician, Dr Wesley Mbilase, that Sibikwa became possible. The cooperation between the two men was born by the lack of educational facilities in the East Rand that, according to Ndaba, was the cause of the poor standard of living. Concerned about the future of the youth in the area, the main objective in founding the institute was to help raise the standard of living in the area with the youth being the target group, especially in the neediest areas around the East Rand.<sup>360</sup> Temba Monare reflects this sentiment, writing that "art is a very important vehicle through which we can best comprehend human life, advance it further, and create jobs for the coming generations."<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid. 2007

<sup>360</sup> Smal Ndaba, Sibikwa Institute, Personal Interview. Newtown. 2007

<sup>361</sup> Temba Monare, "Arts Alive" *East Rand Alive Magazine* [No volume reference] September. [1999], p.30

Ndaba says the institute aims to provide school dropouts with academic and theatrical skills to enable them to play a meaningful role in their communities. He says the institute achieves this by offering courses that enable graduates to get employment in different sectors of the entertainment industry or academic arena. Furthermore, the institute also caters for those students who obtained poor results in their Matric/high school final exams and are unable to pursue further studies in higher learning institutions such as training colleges, technikons and universities. He reiterates that the main objective of Sibikwa is to redress the imbalance of the past by offering young people a mediated learning experience incorporating academic subjects and vocational training in the performing arts.<sup>362</sup>

#### **2.4.1 Post-Apartheid Context**

Presently, it is apparent institutions formerly catering exclusively to the white population under the apartheid system are opening their doors to blacks and people of other races as well. Whereas this integration means a wider choice from which blacks and other people of color can choose careers, most of the black dramatic art institutions like FUBA and Soyikwa cling to their objectives, as observed earlier. The argument of these black institutions is that while apartheid may be officially abolished its effects live on in the backlog of semi-skilled laborers and illiterate blacks which will be felt for many years to come. Consequently, it is only wise that institutions of this nature continue if blacks and other people of color are to acquire the same skills or to achieve the same level of competence as their white counterparts.

Although the objectives of these institutions remain the same, there is a change in the motive behind the training of blacks. In the past the motive was to ensure that black artists acquired skills not otherwise easily obtainable and to put students in a position to educate and communicate their message effectively. However, in post-apartheid South Africa, the ultimate goal is to make certain that black artists have the skills, expertise and are as competent as their white counterparts so as to balance and enrich the predominantly white mainstream theatre and film industry. Clearly, the question now is no longer Black Theatre against the State, but artist-to-artist competition based on talent and ability to deliver in the market.

With the new political dispensation in South Africa, there seems to be a whole new thinking by South Africans and approach to life as they come to terms with and adjust to a democratic society. Nevertheless, given the fact that South African democracy is still young and there is a huge imbalance between the people of different races which was entrenched by the apartheid system,

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<sup>362</sup> Smal Ndaba, Sibikwa Institute, Personal Interview, East Rand. 2006

especially in economic terms, these black dramatic arts institutions such as FUBA, Soyikwa, Market Theatre Laboratory and Sibikwa, are determined to continue with their objectives as in the past. Consequently, Vundla says FUBA intends to continue as before to equip and empower black youths and those people of color in dramatic art for academic and professional purposes.<sup>363</sup> Vundla states:

We plan to move further, improve our syllabus and encourage our students to sit for external examinations set by international schools and colleges like Trinity College in London. Our long term goal is actually for the institute to become a university.<sup>364</sup>

Regardless of the institute's achievement, Vundla says FUBA is still faced with a financial crisis due to lack of funding. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the government's support of the school but wishes the government could be more forthcoming than it is now, especially when considering the role Black Theatre played in the struggle for freedom, and the suffering that those involved in the struggle had to endure.<sup>365</sup>

Although Raletsebele acknowledges that Soyikwa achieved most of its initial goals, Soyikwa intends to pursue, in the democratic South Africa, the same objectives it did under the apartheid system. In fact, the institute plans to go even further to introduce a new curriculum involving schools in the townships.<sup>366</sup>

Similarly, Market Laboratory's intention in post-apartheid South Africa has not changed. Robbertse says Market Lab is to maintain and pursue its objectives as before. However, he points out that there are three main goals the school intends to pursue in a democratic South Africa. First, to expand the school's program further to accommodate the ever-increasing number of people interested in enrolling. Second, to offer more specialized training in different areas of dramatic arts. Third, to enhance the school's profile and accreditation. The main reason for the last two goals is to ensure that graduates from Market Lab have a better chance of employment in the labour market.<sup>367</sup>

However, Robbertse says even though Market Lab still pursues its goals as before, its approach does not privilege any particular style of theatre. The school syllabus focuses on the creation of new work based on the experience and interest of the participants.<sup>368</sup> Robbertse notes:

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<sup>363</sup> Mhlakabesi Vundla, FUBA, Personal Interview, Newtown. 2006

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Jerry Raletsebele, Soyikwa Institute, Personal Interview, Newtown. 2006,

<sup>367</sup> Dan Robbertse, Market Lab. Institute. Personal Interview, Newtown. 2007

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

Our theatre is different from protest theatre in that while it may be socially relevant, it is not necessarily didactic in the narrow definition of protest. Protest theatre is politically motivated in ideology whereas our school does not subscribe to any particular ideology.<sup>369</sup>

Robbertse acknowledges that Black Theatre has changed in South Africa from its protest nature, which was predominant under the apartheid system to a more holistic approach that includes various styles and methods in actor training. He says that there is now a higher degree of flexibility in student skills, appreciation and understanding of different forms and media. Furthermore, there is also a greater degree of diversity in subject matter.<sup>370</sup> Similarly, Mark Fleishman observes that there has been a move away from 'theatre' towards a more inclusive concept of performance, which combines various disciplines such as dance and music,<sup>371</sup> spearheaded by The Dance Factory in Newtown, Johannesburg.

Of all the four black dramatic institutions discussed, Market Lab appears to have advanced more than FUBA, Soyikwa and Sibikwa. According to Robbertse the University of Witwatersrand recognizes the certificate awarded to students after successfully completing their studies. He says the two-year programme accounts for one year at the University of Witwatersrand if the graduates wish to pursue further studies towards a degree there.<sup>372</sup> The University of Witwatersrand is one of the leading universities in South Africa situated in Johannesburg and a stone's throw away from Market Theatre playhouse.

#### **2.4.2 Other old and new Institutes: Contradictions and Changes**

As much as these dramatic arts institutions for blacks played a major role in catering for black youth and those of color under the apartheid regime, they are just a few of the many institutions of their nature in post-apartheid South Africa. There are now numerous institutes, new and old, (including those that were formerly exclusively white) that train and develop youth in different disciplines including drama, film, music and dance regardless of race, class and gender. In the Eastern Cape provincial capital, East London, is the African Culture and Community Development Association (ACCDA). The objective of this association is first, to promote arts as a vehicle for transformation and as a means

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, *Senses of culture: South African culture studies*. [2000], Mark Fleishman, p.198

<sup>372</sup> Dan Robbertse, Market Lab. Institute. Personal Interview, Newtown. 2007



for social and human development. Second, to offer informal education and training in arts, culture and community development. A final objective is to empower those who have limited access to resources, infrastructure and facilities. The institute strives to achieve these objectives through organizing drama, music, poetry, dance and visual arts workshops. The Association also conducts weekend classes during school winter break to uplift the standard of education in the country.<sup>373</sup>

In Johannesburg is the Africa Cultural Trust, which consists of three different departments. The African Community Theatre for Youth promotes leadership, creativity and organisation amongst youth. It also sensitizes young people to a range of community issues pertinent to their growth, while providing a powerful tool for peer group teaching and learning. The second department is the Centre for Creative Child Development. As the name implies, its objective is to develop children's creativity at a very early stage, as early as age three. The target group of this department is disadvantaged communities. The third department is Art for Life, which is a unique department when compared to the other two in the sense that it is more concerned with the development of physically and mentally disabled youths. The objective is to put the disabled youths in a position to express themselves through music, theatre or dance.<sup>374</sup>

There are a handful of organizations in the Gauteng area similar in nature to the Africa Cultural Trust. They include Beauty of Nature and Amasiko Traditional Dancers, both of which are based in Soweto. There is also Moving into Dance in Braamfontein, together with Out of the Box Young People's Project, while Tsogang Theatre Education Development Association is located in Bellevue.<sup>375</sup>

Kwazulu-Natal, like Gauteng, has a couple of such organizations most of which are in and around the city of Durban. These organizations include the Culture and Working Life Project, which is concerned with unemployed youths. It also conducts different courses including music, drama, visual arts and creative writing. Kwasuka Sukela Arts Centre for Young People is located at Stamfordhill Road together with Shoestring Company for Alternative Theatre. Theatre in Education for School Children is based in Escombe while Grassroots Gallery is in Westville. Centre for Education in the Visual and Performing Arts in Port Shepstone conducts classes in aerobics and karate in addition to arts, dressmaking and curtain/bed linen manufacturing.<sup>376</sup>

The Playhouse Company, in Durban, as well is engaged in outreach programs to develop performing arts with respect to growing youth audiences in

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<sup>373</sup> "The Youth Book: A Directory of South African Youth Organisations, Services Providers and Resources Material", David Barnard ed, [www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov) [2011] p.45

<sup>374</sup> Ibid. pp.45,46

<sup>375</sup> Ibid. pp.46,54

<sup>376</sup> Ibid. pp.47,56, 53

KwaZulu-Natal. The company also assists community based artists, groups and organization especially in marketing and technical areas<sup>377</sup>. The Playhouse observes with regards to its Michaelmas holidays programme:

Approximately 130 students from 52 schools, ranging from the ages of 6 to 18, participated in the Reach-out project that was conducted during holidays. It was an extremely successful programme that featured folk dances, to promote the notion of cultural diversity and understanding, and a popular school children's story ballet. A significant feature of this year's program included the time involvement of scholars with physical disability.<sup>378</sup>

There are similar organizations and projects in Western Cape as well. There is Community Arts Project whose purpose is to provide educational programs and services. It offers a training platform for cultural work and also disseminates information on arts. It also conducts research projects in the development of appropriate education models. Furthermore, it promotes and teaches art and culture with a focus on ceramics, pottery, printmaking, theatre practice, acting, painting, drawing, mural painting, storytelling and arts administration. Finally, it offers a creative course for teachers. Still in the Western Cape, the Little Touring Company's objective is to introduce theatre to disadvantaged communities with the aim of helping people to communicate issues of concern effectively.<sup>379</sup>

In Cape Town, there is the Santam Child Art project whose objective it is to foster and encourage interest in children's art. What makes Santam different is that it enables children to participate in international exhibitions. Some of the countries where its pupils have exhibited include Belgium, Sweden, Japan, Paraguay, Canada and the United States of America.<sup>380</sup> Based on the above-mentioned institutions and organizations and what they can offer, it is clear indication that in this new political dispensation, South Africans have a wide choice of institutions and organizations from which they can choose to further studies in the arts, as well as a variety of subjects. However, it should be noted that some of these universities which catered mainly for whites under apartheid still seem to harbor animosity against black students. Take for example the former School of Dramatic Arts in one of the universities in Johannesburg. The majority of black students complete a five-year curriculum instead of four years. They are made to do one-year "bridging course" before they can start their

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<sup>377</sup> The Playhouse Company, Profile and Activities, [www.playhousecompany.com](http://www.playhousecompany.com) [2011]

<sup>378</sup> Ibid. [2011]

<sup>379</sup> "The Youth Book: A Directory of South African Youth Organisations, Services Providers and Resources Material", David

Barnard ed, [www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov) [2011] pp.48,56

<sup>380</sup> Ibid. pp.52,53

degree, as they are considered to have a lower school preparation. Their lower preparation, which in some ways still resembles the Bantu education, is a consequence of apartheid. Thus, black pupils are doubly suffering from the effects of apartheid: first as they still considered as of lower education, and second because they need an extra year, which is a heavy toll on their finances.

Black students continue to suffer from targeted discrimination. This situation causes discontent for two reasons. First, even though blacks are often thought by most whites to be naïve, black students are aware that it is mainly black students at the School for Dramatic Arts who do a five-year curriculum. Consequently, they regard this as discrimination wasting both their time and money. With the staff predominantly white, these students do not know how to address the issue without being victimized by the department. Second, considering the fact that blacks under apartheid and even in post-apartheid South Africa still occupy the lowest positions in the labour market, this puts strain on their limited resources to the extent that some are forced to drop out due to financial problems. This department or the university as a whole the only one that has such a practice, which might explain why recently at many institutions students have previously gone on strike because of a cut in financial aid. Floyd Shivambu comments in relation to students funding:

In the previous years, government subsidies have constituted between 75% and 90% of tertiary institutions' budget. For this year, more than 65% of the overall Wits University budget was from government, ostensibly meant for operational costs and financial aid. Instead of prioritizing students' financial aid, Wits University management shifted a preponderant part of the budget to areas such as staff salaries [65%], operational costs, and as a result financial aid acquired less than 15% of the share.<sup>381</sup>

Another significant aspect is that most of these institutions admit as many black students as possible, not because they are truly transforming, but to qualify for government subsidies. As a result, a lot of black students, given their township schools' educational background, get frustrated, fail or are subsequently forced to drop out. The dropping out is often either because of their lack of financial aid or because they are unable to cope due to lack of academic assistance or support from these institutions. Nomboniso Gasa recalls her experience at the University of Cape Town [UCT]:

I recall the day, in 1987, when I wept on the steps of Jameson Hall at UCT and finally decided that no matter how prestigious the university

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<sup>381</sup> *Nyiko Floyd Shivambu*, "Wits University a Racist and Patriarchal Institution," June. [2004], p.9

and how fortunate I was to be admitted there with a bursary, the place was alienating not only the grand architecture, but the culture of the institution. I had just come out of detention and had set foot in the big city for the first time. As I sat on those steps, I realized that this was not the place for me.<sup>382</sup>

Whereas some decide to drop out, others take drastic steps and retaliate. A student shot a lecturer at one of these universities in Johannesburg after allegedly being harassed over a lengthy period by the same lecturer without any action taken by the institute. The lecturer was also alleged to have threatened that he would ensure that the student was banished from theatre circles in South Africa while, ironically, the lecturer was stealing the student's theatrical ideas.

There is also a challenge to black students when it comes to the question of languages used during lectures. There are some of the formerly white universities that still use both English and Afrikaans as media of instruction including University of Free State and University of Pretoria. Lecturers can switch from English to Afrikaans during lectures regardless of the presence of students who do not know Afrikaans. However, such a switch from English to vernacular, whether to Zulu or Sotho, by black lecturers caused complaints because white students felt excluded and the concerned lecturers were cautioned by their departments.

These are some of the treatments black students are subjected to in some of these previously white institutions of higher learning instead of students being given the support they need, which might explain why the institutions are often marred by strikes, frustration and racial confrontation. The fact that the involved student who shot the lecturer and was later charged with attempted murder was never convicted, and is now free, is possibly a testimony that some white academics within these institutions resist integration and employ their positions to weed out black students from these institutions. Floyd Shivambu notes:

After an overabundance of inconsistencies, prejudices, intolerance mentioned in the report, an overall conclusion was drawn from the phrase that read, 'Wits is an institution comprising many cultures, but the dominant culture still carries the burden of apartheid history which is visible in the demographics of the institution, and the tradition of whiteness [and patriarchy] which emerges in the discourses of difference and discrimination prevalent on the campus.'<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Nomboniso Gasa, "Keeping their Wits about them" *The Star*, Wednesday 19, January. [2003], p.12

<sup>383</sup> Floyd Shivambu, "Shortage of [Students] Funds: Whose Fault is it Anyway", *Wits Student [SRC newspaper]*. [2004], p.9

Shivambu is of the opinion that the report on the student strike at University of Witwatersrand (Wits) over financial aid, may well be attributed to the current intolerant behavioral and institutional culture the University management employ to discriminate against blacks (Africans in particular) from mainstream academic progress either as students, administrative or academic employees.<sup>384</sup> He observes:

It has become a generally accepted view that the University harbors the most racist of academics and administrators, who along racist thinking draft and implement the discriminatory policies and budgets of the University. Blacks at the University of the Witwatersrand are still thought of as inferior, and there is a subsistent culture amongst whites in the institution, to treat the African poor student populace and workers with utmost contempt and disregard.<sup>385</sup>

The current situation regarding the treatment of blacks, and black students in particular, at these institutions can be interpreted as just another way of maintaining the apartheid system of marginalizing blacks, while simultaneously using black students to attain subsidies from the government. This explains the government's change of stance with regard to subsidies to institutions of higher learning. Subsidies to institutions of higher learning are no longer determined by the number of black students admitted but by the number of black students who graduate. According to Prof. Mary Scholes at the University of Witwatersrand, the government gives a certain percentage of subsidies to universities in South Africa per black student registered and the remaining balance is released after the student has graduated. This compels universities to put structures in place to ensure that a considerable number of black students finish their degree.<sup>386</sup>

However, with the apartheid network deeply entrenched in South Africa, including the labour market, and with the arts industry predominantly white, it is a mammoth task for most black students to get jobs after completing their studies. In most cases they need connections within the industry, which are prevalently white people. On the contrary, white students often have part-time jobs during their study breaks. This makes it easier for them to walk straight into jobs when they complete their studies, since they have both the experience and connections within industries. This may explain the following call to the government from the broadcasting industry to create an "enabling environment" to "develop capacity" in order to increase empowerment of the previously

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid. p.9

<sup>385</sup> Ibid. p.9

<sup>386</sup> Mary Scholes "Proposals writing" presentation, University of Witwatersrand, 2010.

disadvantaged and thus promote diversity.<sup>387</sup> Njabulo Ndebele points out that what is of real importance today is the actual provision of physical facilities, film-showing arenas, social centers and mobile libraries to create job opportunities.<sup>388</sup> The latter, mobile libraries are being introduced and are well-received in mainly black communities of South Africa, but at a snail's pace.

Despite all these problems for black students, the new environment created by the birth of democracy has brought about new opportunities that blacks never had under the apartheid system. The choice is made even wider by the fact that some formerly white Performing Arts Councils and universities have changed their attitude towards blacks, and consequently cater for the needs of all South Africans regardless of race. These Councils and universities are now involved in school projects in townships and other surrounding areas. This change is clear in the Cape Town Administration Arts Board (CAPAB) Mission Statement, which strives:

To be an equal opportunity organization committed to the advancement of the performing arts, free of prejudice, expressing the creative spirit of a nation striving for unity and promoting harmony among all cultures.<sup>389</sup>

As much as the CAPAB Mission Statement demonstrates its intention to accommodate people of all races, it gives an impression that things were different before the democratization of South Africa. However, it has since changed from its discriminatory nature and it is now reaching out to all people regardless of race or colour. Similarly, the Performing Arts Council of Orange Free State (PACOFs) is involved in promoting arts in the Free State Province. The Council is engaged in developing youth drama, music and dance groups both artistically and technically. It also runs programs for nursery schools in both the Mangaung and Botshabelo areas.

### 2.4.3 Funds for Theatre and State Responsibility

Even though the abolition of apartheid and the opening up of formerly white institutions is good news, especially to those marginalized in the past, it appears as though this new political dispensation is a challenge to the black dramatic institutions. In the past, most of these black institutions, including Soyikwa and

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<sup>387</sup> *Dept. of Communication White Paper on Broadcasting Policy, Recommendations*. [2004], p.36

<sup>388</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991], p.128

<sup>389</sup> "The Youth Book: A Directory of South African Youth Organisations, Services Providers and Resources Material", David Barnard ed., [www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov) [2011] p.47

Market Lab, survived on funds from overseas. These funds were a gesture of goodwill to the oppressed black majority and other people of colour, but with apartheid abolished, some donors find no reason to continue offering financial assistance and these institutions face a financial crisis. Already Soyikwa was forced to close for some months due to financial problems. As a result of decline in foreign financial assistance, these institutions have to rely on government subsidies for their day-to-day functioning, which are insufficient as Vundla notes previously.

Nevertheless, it is not only black dramatic arts institutions that feel the pinch from the political change in South Africa, the Performing Arts Councils and civic theatres, which used to be heavily subsidized by the apartheid regime, are affected as well. Bain and Hauptfleisch observe that the major theatres (or playhouses, as they are now called) built and maintained by the apartheid government are battling to remain viable. They also note that during the apartheid era, state support of the Performing Arts Councils effectively meant that financing was provided for white Eurocentric performing arts entertainment in the four provinces. These included the Nico Malan Theatre Complex in Cape Town, the State Theatre in Pretoria, the Civic Theatre in Johannesburg, the Sand du Plessis Theatre in Bloemfontein and the Playhouse Theatre in Durban. Bain and Hauptfleisch observe that today these apartheid-sponsored theatres are in dire straits, crippled not only by increasingly limited funding, but by a change in status to “Playhouses” or “receiving houses”<sup>390</sup> which has severely strained their viability as venues for companies that cannot afford heavy rentals and production costs.<sup>391</sup> They write:

Whereas generous apartheid-era subsidies ensured the survival of national and regional ballet, opera, theatre and orchestra companies, the contemporary scene is very different. Most of these companies have folded because of budgetary constraints.<sup>392</sup>

Similarly, McGrath observes that the subsidized theatre, towards which one could once look for adventure, is now taught to embrace the values of the commercial theatre.<sup>393</sup> In the 1997/8 annual Report, Edmund Radebe, Chairman of the Board of The Playhouse, laments:

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<sup>390</sup> Playhouses have to be commercial and self-sustaining, and this can be achieved through increasing the price of tickets for shows and rentals to companies wishing to mount production at these venues. These price increases whether of tickets or rentals is a big challenge to theatre goers and production companies.

<sup>391</sup> Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch, “Playing the Changes: Thoughts on the restructuring of the theatrical system and arts in south Africa after apartheid”, *SATJ*. [2001], p.16

<sup>392</sup> Ibid. pp.11,12

<sup>393</sup> John McGrath, “Theatre and Democracy”, *New Theatre Quarterly*. [2002], p.138

We reported last year about our projected deficit, and the concern about our ability to continue. We stated that unless significant additional funding was forthcoming, we would not be able to sustain our levels of staffing and activities.<sup>394</sup>

Radebe's report and concern is in sharp contrast to Rodney Phillip's report in 1984, as cited earlier, when the apartheid government still heavily subsidized NAPAC and other institutions of its kind. This points to the fact that as Bain and Hauptfleisch asserted earlier there might be new unemployment, especially of white theatre practitioners, in this field due to political change in the country.

It is worth noting again that the monetary abundance with which the Performing Arts Councils operated was at the expense of black artists who were not subsidized by the apartheid regime. The Ministry acknowledges that like every sector of the society, arts, culture and heritage have been fundamentally affected by the apartheid system. It notes that the distribution of public funds in support of these activities, the geographical location of physical infrastructure, the dissemination of skills, the staffing, management and governance of institutions, all reflect significant bias in favor of a highly selective slice of artistic expression. Furthermore, the provision and maintenance of arts infrastructure heavily favored the urban cities of the previous four provinces Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State. Black urban and rural areas are thus still lacking in even the most basic arts infrastructures.<sup>395</sup> Given this situation created by the apartheid system, the Performing Arts Councils became the main target of financial cuts and restructuring in order for the government to cater for the needs of blacks neglected over the years. Dale McKinley, Welfare Department, confirms: "We have a redirection of expenditure, taking money from some areas and putting it into welfare"<sup>396</sup>

Jordan Ngubane predicted, long before the dawn of democracy in South Africa, that this radical move was needed in order to redress the imbalance created by the apartheid system.

Ngubane argued:

Where the gulf between poverty and wealth has followed racial lines for a long time and where political security has been denied on racial grounds, the safest precaution, for some time to come, is to start by filling the economic and political sides of the vacuum.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> *The Playhouse Company*, Annual Report. [1997-98], p.1

<sup>395</sup> *Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology White Paper/Bill*. [1994], p.15

<sup>396</sup> Christelle Terreblanche, "President's 100 Promises put his officials on the line" *The Sunday Independent* newspaper, May 23. [2004], p.2

<sup>397</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid* .[1991], p.140



Ngubane says “for some time to come” but refrains from stating exactly how long that time should or would be before a new and democratic government could fill the gap between those who have and those who have not. However, the redistribution is currently a contentious matter in South Africa to the extent that it has been labeled “reverse racism.” Bain and Hauptfleisch observe that there has been a great deal of dissent against the government from various organizations and ruling bodies responsible for effecting change and establishing order for those theatre groups subsidized by taxation .<sup>398</sup> They write:

It is with specific respect that the decline in serious indigenous work, that there is some perception in South African theatre circles that apartheid was, ultimately, good for theatre.<sup>399</sup>

Given the discomfort and suffering that blacks were subject to under apartheid, it can be argued that the “South African theatre circles” to which Bain and Hauptfleisch refer are probably the white people apartheid benefited. Otherwise, the majority of South Africans, those who were oppressed and marginalized by the system, can be said to be grateful that apartheid is no more. Ironically, while criticizing the state’s present artistic policy, Bain and Hauptfleisch admit that today there is an urgent need to balance the interests of what is an essentially an elitist social activity with the need to contribute to the cultural development of the nation as a whole.<sup>400</sup> Similarly, Ginsberg argues that it is imperative opportunities available to children today must be equalized as far as possible. This implies there should be provisions for education, sports facilities and infrastructure of towns for blacks, as these things all affect the development of children. He adds that children should be enabled to compete on an equal basis and not be disqualified because of a background of poverty.<sup>401</sup> It is worth pointing out that the redress and restructuring processes are not the only challenges the new government faces. It also has to ensure that blacks have access to proper training different from that of apartheid:

Education is part of culture, and culture is itself transmitted through education. Indeed, the curriculum has been described as ‘a selection from culture’. Previously education was used to deny the value of other

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<sup>398</sup> Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch, “Playing the Changes: Thoughts on the restructuring of the theatrical system and arts in South Africa after apartheid”, *SATJ*. [2001], p.9

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.p.16

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.p11

<sup>401</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa..* [1997], p.35

cultures. This must not happen again. It is a national tragedy that we have to admit the need for a project to restore the culture of learning.<sup>402</sup>

It can be argued that it is only through this kind of comprehensive and integrated form of education that blacks can become competent in their respective professions. However, given the legacy of apartheid, the areas that need educational infrastructure and facilities most are the rural areas most disadvantaged in the past and close to where people live.<sup>403</sup> The democratically elected government notes with regret:

The establishment of urban and peri-urban townships as dormitories, without proper facilities for recreation and leisure, is a feature of apartheid. This deprivation cannot be continued in the dispensation which is concerned with improving the quality of people's lives at the local level. Such improvement must include the development of facilities to educate, nurture, promote and enable the enjoyment of the arts, film, music, visual art, theatre and literature.<sup>404</sup>

Given the legacy of apartheid, the Ministry observes that crucial to the growth and sustainability of the arts is the development of skilled human resources which would include educating and training educators to educate and train children, youths and adults in the arts. It argues that until now, the formal educational system, when it has included arts education, has largely served the needs of the cultural institutions developed during, and which came to reflect, the apartheid era.<sup>405</sup>

In developing new markets and potential audiences, the Ministry is committed to four-pronged strategy: entering into discussion with the Ministry of Education with the aim of introducing arts education at school level for all children, to cultivate a long term interest in arts.<sup>406</sup>

As a result of the existing challenges, since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the government's goals have been threefold. First, to guarantee that all persons, groups and communities had the right to equal opportunity to participate in arts and culture, to conserve and develop their cultural heritage. Second, to ensure unhindered access to the means of artistic and cultural activity, information and enjoyment in both a financial and geographical sense. Finally, to

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<sup>402</sup> *Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology White Paper/Bill*. [1994], p.14

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.* p.27

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.* p.27

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.* p.28

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.* p.28

make certain the correction of historical and existing imbalances through development, education, training and affirmative action with regard to race, gender, rural and urban considerations.<sup>407</sup> The Ministry promised:

Arts, culture and heritage education which redressed past cultural biases and stereotype, as well as the imbalance in the provision of resources shall be addressed by encouraging its location in educational structures at all levels of learning. To this end the Ministry will be represented in all appropriate national Arts, culture and heritage education policy, curriculum and accreditation education structure. Where relevant, the Ministry will also establish inter-ministerial arts educational advisory bodies to ensure communication in line with this policy.<sup>408</sup>

As much as the government expresses all these good intentions, it still has to help create jobs to ensure that previously disadvantaged people are employed. This is a continuous challenge. To meet these challenges the government has set up Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) to equip the previously disadvantaged groups with skills prerequisite for employment.

Government is widening access to ABET centres where communities can Access programmes to Extend Skills that are critical for economic opportunities. Through SETAs, communities can increasingly improve their economic knowledge and access training networks.<sup>409</sup>

It can be concluded that the changes brought about by the abolition of the apartheid system included the opening up of previously white institutions to blacks and other people of colour and the new government's change of attitude towards institutions of dramatic arts for blacks like FUBA and Soyikwa. Given the new political dispensation, the parties concerned were compelled to review the situation. Consequently, the new political atmosphere can be said to have urged all parties to change their approach. However, in some cases, like the Black Dramatic Institutes, there has not been a full turn-around but just a shift in both motivation and direction. To understand this approach, one is compelled to refer back to Fanon's observation:

The colonial world is a world divided into compartments. It is probably unnecessary to recall the existence of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans: in the same

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid. p.18

<sup>408</sup> Ibid. p.25

<sup>409</sup> *Government Report to the Nation*. [2004], p.1

way we need not recall apartheid in South Africa. Yet, if we examine closely this system of compartments, we will at least be able to reveal the lines of force it implies. This approach to the colonial world, its ordering and its geographical lay-out will allow us to mark out the lines on which a decolonized society will be reorganized.<sup>410</sup>

Ironically, it seems as though these dramatic arts institutions for blacks are reorganizing the society within those tribal lines set by the colonial and apartheid world. Some perceive this move as reverse racism. Fanon argues that the violence that has ruled the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the system of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the natives at the moment the natives decide to embody history in their own persons as they surge into the forbidden quarters.<sup>411</sup> And as a result, it appears as if blacks are reorganizing and reasserting themselves within the same lines the colonial and apartheid systems tried to exploit in oppressors' quest for domineering and discriminating them. After all, these tribal lines were there for good purpose prior to the arrival of the white settlers, that is, as means through which one tribe can be distinguished from another.

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<sup>410</sup> Frantz Fanon translated by C. Carrington, *The Wretched of the Earth*.. [1963], p.29

<sup>411</sup> Ibid. p.31

### Chapter 3: Older Generation of South Africa Black Playwrights

The objective of this chapter is to explore the issues addressed by the “older generation” of South African black playwrights in post-apartheid South Africa. The term, here, refers to playwrights such as Zakes Mda, Mbongeni Ngema, Maishe Maponya, Fatima Dike, and Walter Chakela, who were prominent players in Black Theatre under apartheid voicing their opposition to the oppression of black masses and people of colour. The reason for such an exercise is to see how their plays in the new era show continuity and change from their previous work, which was political and centrally critical of the discriminatory apartheid policy.

Ten plays are discussed in this chapter, two from each of the five playwrights listed above. These are *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* and *Love Letters* both by Zakes Mda; Maishe Maponya's *Letta* and *A Song for Biko*; *So What's New?* and *AIDS: The New Generation* both by Fatima Dike; Mbongeni Ngema's *Maria Maria* and *Magic at 4AM*, and finally *Wrath of the gods* and *Isithukuthuku* by Walter Chakela,

#### 3.1 Zakes Mda

Zakes Mda's plays written during apartheid, most, if not all, were political. *The Road* (1983), focuses on the displacement and exploitation of black workers; *Dark Voices Ring* (1990) deals with the ill treatment of black prisoners; *Dead End* (1979) interrogates the abuse of black women; *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* (1978) projects possible ways blacks in the government would behave in post-apartheid South Africa. Finally, *Banned* (1982) and *Joys of War* (1989) protest the injustices perpetrated by the system against the black majority and other people of colour. The characters in all these plays are therefore accordingly created as vehicles for that purpose of protesting.

The political content that consistently dominates Mda's work under apartheid appears to wane in the new period. In fact, two of his recent plays written in post-apartheid South Africa have a different take on social reality in South Africa. *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* is a political play, but interrogates the current democratically elected government led by blacks rather than focusing on the apartheid system. *Love Letters*, on the other hand, addresses human relations amongst the Zulus prior to the arrival of the white settlers in South Africa as well as the repercussions of that intercultural contact.

*Love Letters* was first performed at Windybrow Theatre in 1997. It was directed by Mda and featured Doreen Mphethwane, Pertunia Tsabo and Zandile Tlale. *You Fool, How Can The Sky Fall?* was first performed at Windybrow Theatre in 1995, directed by Peter Se Puma. It featured Anton Dekker,

Gamakhulu Diniso, Ernest Ndlovu, Theresa Iglich, Themba Ndaba and Darrell Rosen.

***You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?***

Mda tells the abrasive story of a Cabinet in democratic South Africa. All members of the Cabinet were involved in the country's freedom struggle. Nevertheless, they practise the same oppressive policies to which they were subjected against their own people. As a result, there is a discontent amongst the people who were hoping for a change.

Similarities in characterisation in this play compared with Mda's previous plays under apartheid are apparent. There are still traitors and heroes fighting for the good of the people, like those typified by Soldier 2 and Soldier 1 in *Joys of War*. In *You Fool, How Can The Sky Fall?* the character of President is supposed to lead and serve his country, but is instead concerned with his own personal interests. Consequently, he is presented as manipulative, corrupt and evil. He stops at nothing to achieve his goals, even if it is at the expense of his own people. The other two characters, the Ministers of Justice and of Agriculture, do not differ from the President. They act as selfishly as the President, but to achieve their goals they need a head of state with whom the masses can identify. For this reason, they pretend to love and worship the President.

The hero in the play is the character Young Man, who is only introduced later in the play. He is the opposite of the former three characters in the sense that he strives for justice for all. Young Man is typical of Mda's heroes written under apartheid. He is militant, but very wise and sensitive to the interests of his people. Consequently, he is determined to achieve his goals without any fear of repercussions since he shares the same goals and aspirations as his people, which makes him a true representative of the black masses.

The remaining two characters, the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Health, are caught in the middle. Their actions in the play are neither good nor evil. Even though they are critical of the President and the Ministers of Justice and of Agriculture, they are afraid to come out openly or take a decisive stand concerning the proper running of their country for fear of reprisal. The character of the General is just above the status of a prop. Although there is bitterness in his silence, which comes out at the end of the play, he is angry that he was never made a Minister: he too is just inclined towards his personal interest.

In this play, Mda depicts a democratic society that has just acquired freedom after a long struggle against a racist and oppressive regime. The play has a rather complex structure. It is set in two different periods (in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa) linked by the place of the play, in a cell that ironically serves as both a prison and a Cabinet. As a prison, the cell represents the old apartheid South Africa with the characters as prisoners, while as a

Cabinet, it represents the new democratic South Africa with the characters as the members of the government.

The shift from one period to another is marked by dialogue complemented by sound effects, like the opening and closing of the heavy metal prison door and the screaming as the prisoners are taken away or returned from interrogation. The structure of the play enables Mda to critique and interrogate the democratically elected government and compare it to the previous apartheid regime. Mda depicts the democratically elected government as no different from the previous racist and oppressive government. In fact, the drama shows that the new government has inherited the same oppressive laws as the previous racist regime. This is revealed in the President's comment in relation to the revolt against his government:

PRESIDENT - You have the army behind you, General. Don't be timid to use it. The police need to do their work as they have done before. They need to suppress uprisings unhindered.<sup>412</sup>

The critics the President wants to suppress are not just nonentities but the very groups that were at the forefront in the struggle for freedom such as the women's group-Daughters of the Revolution. The group's criticism is born of their dissatisfaction over the elected government's failure to deliver democracy and its betrayal of the liberation cause. However, the government is not prepared to listen to or address their grievances; instead, it resorts to force to crush its critics just like its racist predecessor.

PRESIDENT - It means theirs was the truth yesterday when they stood in the line of fire and fought in the revolution. Today, we the inheritors of that revolution, must be resolved to crush them to smithereens. The Daughters of the Revolution are yesterday's news. We are today's.<sup>413</sup>

This President's statement is rather controversial. The public is forced to wonder whether he has either forgotten or betrayed the cause of the freedom struggle, the very cause for which the oppressed masses sacrificed their lives. The play seems to suggest that the President feels threatened by groups previously at the forefront of the struggle for freedom in order to maintain his own power. Mda's play seems to follow Paulo Freire's argument that a person who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation and yet is unable to enter into communion with the people is grievously self-deceived because s/he continues to regard the people as totally ignorant. Such a person feels alarmed at each step taken, doubts about what

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<sup>412</sup> Zakes Mda, *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* unpublished play. [1995], p.59

<sup>413</sup> Ibid. p.60

people express and the suggestions they make, and attempts to impose his/her power on them.<sup>414</sup> Similarly, Franz Fanon argues that no leader, however valuable, can substitute himself or herself for the popular will. The government as well, before concerning itself with international prestige, should first give back their dignity to all citizens, fill their minds, feast their eyes with human things and create a prospect that is human because conscious and sovereign men dwell there.<sup>415</sup> Likewise, Lawrence Schlemmer comments:

If social behaviour underlying political action has not changed, old patterns will reappear. Liberators will become the dictators they replaced. Plans imposed on people before the change will reappear with new labels.<sup>416</sup>

This implies that there is now a need for a social struggle to liberate the masses from lust for power, nepotism, greed and deceit, as observed by the Daughters of the Revolution.

The President's corruption is reflected in the way he appointed his Cabinet. Each Minister in his Cabinet was appointed to control people of a group that was active during the struggle for freedom.

The Minister of Culture was appointed not to promote culture but to contain it, because of the Cabinet's fear that artists will employ their art to conscientize the masses against the President's corrupt government, the same way artists did under apartheid. This explains the parameters to redefine art according to the Cabinet. Mda exhibits this in the play:

GENERAL - Art is only valid, all art is valid only if it serves the interests of the people. And in what way can the interests of the people be served, if not by creating master-pieces of their venerable leaders?<sup>417</sup>

Through such a false and manipulative syllogism, the new government tries to impose the idea that art should be used to benefit those in power. It is no longer a useful tool as it was during the struggle, but a threat if not contained or dictated by the political power. This is contrary to another view of art, well known in the anti-apartheid movement and expressed by Young Man, that art embodies the freedom to express oneself and the world around:

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<sup>414</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the oppressed*. [1968], p.47

<sup>415</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. [1963], translated by C.Carrington, p.165

<sup>416</sup> Lawrence Schlemmer, "What Next?" in South African Institute of Race Relations ed., *Beating Apartheid and Building the Future*. [1990], p.77

<sup>417</sup> Zakes Mda, *You Fool How Can the Sky Fall?*, unpublished play .[1995], p.83



YOUNG MAN - I tell you, Honourable Members of this foolish Cabinet, governments shall come and go. Empires shall rise and fall. Even civilizations shall come to pass. But art is forever. It lives beyond politicians, beyond governments, beyond empires, even beyond civilizations.<sup>418</sup>

The Minister of Agriculture was appointed to control his former arsonists, who used to set fire to everything valuable as part of the struggle to weaken the apartheid system. However, after liberation, he employs the same arson tactics because he is angry he was not appointed Minister. As a result, the only way to stop him continuing his destruction was to give him a cabinet portfolio.<sup>419</sup> Similarly, the Minister of Health, a woman, was appointed to keep women in check, especially the Daughters of the Revolution. This group makes allusion to women's groups like the African National Congress's Women's League that played a major role during the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

The Minister of Health is not successful and as a result the Minister of Agriculture is bitter with her because of the trouble the Daughters of the Revolution cause the government.<sup>420</sup> Her failure to control the Daughters of the Revolution is not due to her weakness or incompetence, but due to the militancy of the Daughters of the Revolution, who are determined to bring about true change for all people. Young Man speaks courageously about them:

YOUNG MAN - The Daughters of the Revolution are still there, more powerful than ever. They are closing in, and they are going to cut your balls. They were holding a beauty contest, where one of the categories that were being judged was the number and extent of shrapnel scars on their naked bodies.<sup>421</sup>

The beauty contest, as Young Man explains, is not the prototypical kind. It is a form of protest in which women reveal their suffering in the name of freedom and the marginalisation they received once that freedom was achieved. However, instead of addressing their grievances, the government is irritated by the protests just like its predecessor. Consequently, the President bellows:

PRESIDENT - There is no satisfying these Daughters of the Revolution. We gave them symbols. Still they complain. Great symbols! Flags! Anthems! Street names! All changed to reflect the new order of freedom. But are they happy? No! They want more. What do

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid. p.84

<sup>419</sup> Ibid. p.58

<sup>420</sup> Ibid. pp.30,31

<sup>421</sup> Ibid. p.77

they want? I will tell you what they want. They want our blood. They want our heads on the platter.<sup>422</sup>

“Head on the platter” comes from a translation of a scene in the Bible where Matthew relates how Herod’s mistress asked for and literally obtained the head of John the Baptist on a platter. She wanted John killed because of his criticism of their immoral and promiscuous relationship, as she was the wife of Herod’s brother.<sup>423</sup> By making such reference, the President draws a parallel wherein his Cabinet is as Holy as John the Baptist, and the Daughters of the Revolution are whores and as evil as Herod’s mistress. Mda appears to have the President abuse the Bible, echoing the way some whites abused it under apartheid to justify racial discrimination, claiming to have been created by God as a superior race.

The tendency to marginalize women once political freedom has been achieved widely occurs, but women do not accept it easily. Graca Machel, the widow of Mozambique’s first President, Samora Machel, and now wife of former South African President Nelson Mandela, comments in relation to the contribution of women in the struggle for freedom:

About 1968/69, Frelimo made a historic decision to include young women in military training and make them soldiers. In the culture of this country, women had not been allowed to bear arms. Frelimo’s philosophy was that everyone must liberate themselves; no one would be liberated by someone else. At independence [from Portugal in 1975] it would have been difficult to go back and tell women to take a secondary role. [Today] 26 percent of the country’s politicians are women. Most NGOs are headed by women. In the upper levels you have a real visibility of women that comes from those struggle days.<sup>424</sup>

Jim Walker also recalls that during the Algerian uprising, Arab women were pressed into service to carry arms. As the French clamped down on more Algerian men, militant responsibility shifted more on to women and as result their sphere of activities increased. Walker notes that this was against the desires of men, but the historical necessities forced women out of ordinary spaces like kitchens and bedrooms into public space, meetings and battlegrounds.<sup>425</sup> Just like Machel remarks, the Daughters of the Revolution do not seem to be prepared to revert to that stereotypical role of women in traditional Africa. They instead demand a fair share of the spoils equally for the masses because of its

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid. p.71

<sup>423</sup> Mathew 14:3-12

<sup>424</sup> Marcus Maabry, “An activist First Lady” *Newsweek Magazine*, June .[1997], p.52

<sup>425</sup> Jim Walker, *The end of Dialogue: Paulo Freire on Politics and Education* in Robert Mackie’s ed. *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of Paulo freire* .[1980], p.84

contribution in the struggle or else they will continue to demonstrate their discontent.

YOUNG MAN - After the success of their beauty contest they now plan to perform the whole pitiki theatre of rebirth, including ditolobonya dance, in public, at the Market Square, in full view of everyone, of men and children.<sup>426</sup>

Both 'Pitiki' and 'Ditolobonya' are sacred Sotho rituals performed in private and attended only by women mothers. Public performance of such rituals is believed to cause disaster to the given community. Therefore, performing this sacred ritual in public demonstrates their determination to fight against the new oppressive system led by blacks. It is a reminder that women are a source of life and demonstrates the power and control they have in determining the existence of the two different sexes, if women would like the entire world to be inhabited by women only, all they needed to do was to kill every baby boy at birth. Mda's play entertains this:

PRESIDENT - Catastrophe! That's what it means. The pitiki theatre of rebirth, with its ditolobonya dance, is a very secret performance that is done by women only for a woman audience. A public performance will bring catastrophe to the land. We've got to stop them at all costs.<sup>427</sup>

However, as much as the President and his Cabinet are aware of the catastrophe facing the nation should that performance be held, they are neither prepared to listen to the Daughters of the Revolution nor to find a peaceful solution, instead, they want to use force to suppress the protest. This aggressive approach is not different from the apartheid regime, which used force to suppress blacks protesting against its racist policy.

Mda demonstrates the Cabinet's fear of the Daughters of the Revolution with the help of a female spider, which the Minister of Health keeps as a pet. The Minister of Justice kills the spider, accusing it of eating its male partner after making love. This act exposes the male-dominated Cabinet's fear of being toppled by the Daughters of the Revolution. It is possible that the Minister of Health, as a woman and unable to contain the Daughters of the Revolution, is aware that her Cabinet will eventually lose power but she is not sympathetic to the Cabinet:

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<sup>426</sup> Zakes Mda, *You Fool How Can the Sky Fall?* Unpublished play. [1995], p.89

<sup>427</sup> Ibid. p.89

MINISTER OF HEALTH - The age of the disposable male is coming, my friend. It is surely coming. It's going to happen one day when the human species has evolved to the great levels of the black widow.<sup>428</sup>

The spider to which Mda refers is a *Portia*. Nicknamed "The Mistress of Deception," it is found in Africa, Asia and Australia. It is one of the species said to have baffled researchers by the tactics it employs in hunting. As Robert Jackson writes:

How does *Portia* match signals with different types of spiders? The answer defies the conventional wisdom that spiders are simply instinct-driven automatons. *Portia* can find a signal for just about any spider by trial and error. It makes different signals until the victim spider finally responds appropriately then keeps making the signal that works. Researchers wonder; Is *Portia* running on instinct or is it just plain smart?<sup>429</sup>

Like the *Portia*, the Daughters of the Revolution employ different tactics to get their freedom from the male-dominated Cabinet and are determined to continue until they get it. However, as powerful and determined as they are, Mda denies them a voice in this play by having Young Man speak on their behalf. Why might Mda chose to choreograph the group in this manner? It can be seen as an indication of how weak the position of women in society is or that even though the Daughters of the Revolution may be strong, powerful and determined, they are not taken seriously, as it is often the case in many patriarchal black societies (this might as well imply that they will eventually lose the battle against the government). At the same time Mda's choice seems to both privilege and conflate the solidarity and voices between women, youth, artists, and other minority groups.

Another theme in the play is the exploitation of people. Under apartheid law, blacks worked for low wages, but with maximum production expected. It can be argued that in this play, Mda illustrates how under the new and democratically elected government that situation persists. Young Man, an artist, is expected to paint pictures of the members of the Cabinet for no pay or suffer punishment. Like the Daughters of the Revolution, Young Man remarks bitterly:

YOUNG MAN - These are the slips with which you paid me. They don't mean a damn thing. Was I supposed to eat these pieces of paper? I spend hours, days, months painting your stupid grins. And what do I get

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid. pp.73,74

<sup>429</sup> Robert Jackson, "Mistress of Deception" *National Geographic*, Nov. [1996], p.111

for it, eh? When I began to bother you demanding that the pieces of paper be converted into cash since I couldn't eat them, you set your guards on me.<sup>430</sup>

Mda indicates how those in power often abuse power to suppress and exploit the masses. The consequences of greed play out as Mda moves on in this play to address the question of betrayal. Throughout the play, members of the Cabinet (except the President and the General) are taken away for interrogation in the same way detainees were under apartheid. The Cabinet is offended, but Young Man argues that the interrogators need someone with power and who is beyond suspicion, and the President is the only such person. The President fails to defend himself when confronted by Young Man and the Cabinet to clear his name. Instead, he mocks the Cabinet:

PRESIDENT - You spit at me now. But I am your own creation. What you enjoy is to build gods, put them on a pedestal, worship them for a day, and then throw stones at them and knock them down. You have a very short attention span in the admiration of the gods that you create.<sup>431</sup>

By making a traitor out of the President, Mda cautions his audience not to put too much faith in those who lead or to follow them blindly. At this stage, the climax of the play, Mda takes on political manipulations that mar most African countries, when individual government members use each other and the opportunities they have to their personal aggrandisement. Even though the Cabinet is angry with the President for his betrayal, the President is also bitter with the Cabinet because they used him to cling to power as evidenced by statements several Ministers earlier:

JUSTICE - I know what we can do to offset the impact of the beauty contest. Let's enhance the image of the Wise One.

HEALTH - Let us call him Doctor.

CULTURE - Yes, indeed! Whoever heard of such a great man being called plain Mister.<sup>432</sup>

The Cabinet manipulates the public and uses the President as their scarecrow to stay in power. However, the President is silent throughout this discussion of how he will be created and recreated to ward off the danger posed to the Cabinet's hold on power. His silence is not because he is satisfied, but instead because he is

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<sup>430</sup> Zakes Mda, *You Fool How Can the Sky Fall?* unpublished play .[1995], p.84

<sup>431</sup> Ibid. p.106

<sup>432</sup> Ibid. pp.79,80

aware that they becoming more dependent on him, the more they conspire. This makes him more powerful and ensures his security as the Cabinet cannot exist or survive without him. To demonstrate how dependent both President and Cabinet are on each other, Mda uses the metaphor of a cockroach. As a detainee, the Minister of Culture keeps a cockroach as a pet, but it is decapitated by the Minister of Justice. The cockroach lives for a couple of days but finally dies. A possible interpretation is that without the President, who in this case represents the cockroach's head, the Cabinet cannot survive long.

As it appears in this play, the creating and recreating of leaders is something common in most dictatorial countries. Leaders in such countries enjoy giving themselves titles, which make them appear honourable, respectable and powerful. The late Idi Amin was one of them. He had both titles and medals. The late Mobutu Sese Seko, former President of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), was another. Alan Zarembo and Marcus Mabry write in relation to Mobutu and his titles:

He accumulated titles as fast as he did loot; President-founder of the party, President of the Republic, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. A personality cult flourished around him. His head descended from the heavens on television, and newscasters called him the Father of the Nation, the Helmsman and the Messiah. Newscasters capitalized all pronouns referring to Mobutu. In many ways his own invention, he even chose his own name. Born plain "Joseph Mobutu," he changed it to "Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku wa za Banga," which means "the all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, will go from conquest to conquest leaving fire in his wake."<sup>433</sup>

However, just like the President in this play, Mobutu got entangled in his own web and burned in the "fire" he left behind as implied in his name:

Mobutu once explained Zaire's network of graft like this: When he would ask for \$1 million, the finance Minister requested \$2 million, the treasury director put in for \$4 million and the bank director withdrew \$8 million. Mobutism finally caught up with Mobutu.<sup>434</sup>

Similarly, in *You Fool, How can the Sky Fall?*, greed is more paramount than national issues as implied in Mabry and Zarembo's statements on Mobutu. Even the President is part of it:

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<sup>433</sup> Alan Zarembo and Marcus Maabry, "Mobutu's legacy" *NewsWeek Magazine*, May. [1997], p.4

<sup>434</sup> Ibid. p.95

PRESIDENT - And all the time I thought it was a new housing project. The flats and apartments and stores. I was wondering how I was left out when a percentage was being negotiated with the contractors, and why I didn't see my bank account unexpectedly bulging. You would never even dream of leaving the man who created him out of any bribes and contracts deals.<sup>435</sup>

Greed causes discontent and clashes amongst the Ministers themselves, with each eager to get something from his or her department more than what he or she deserves or earns at the end of the month. As a result, the Minister of Culture sulks over his department's lack of kickbacks compared to the Department of Health.<sup>436</sup> This is not the only time the Minister of Health comes under attack. She experiences the same from the Minister of Agriculture when she calls for the Cabinet to stick to the procedures when discussing issues in the Cabinet:

HEALTH - Obviously we don't form a quorum. A lot of other Honourable Ministers are absent.

AGRICULTURE - Has that ever stopped us?

HEALTH - It is high time that we followed proper procedure.

AGRICULTURE - Procedure, eh? Only because you know that the Father of the Nation will be discussing my daughter's wedding, you don't want the meeting to go on, eh?<sup>437</sup>

The statement by the Minister of Agriculture again shows the lack of commitment as far as national issues are concerned. What can be noted at this stage is that the Minister of Health, as a woman, is discriminated against, even though she appears to be the only one who is serious about national matters. She is not only humiliated, but is also subjected to sexual harassment by the male-dominated Cabinet because she cannot bring the Daughters of the Revolution under control. Nevertheless, she cannot distance herself from her colleagues and identify with the Daughters of Revolution and their action, because by not having children of her own, she cannot participate in activities closely identified with childbearing, which is a marker of identity in the male dominated society at play. The Minister of Health laments:

HEALTH - I do not know anything about pitiki. I never had children. Only women who have experience giving birth are allowed into the room where the performances are held.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Zakes Mda, *You Fool How Can the Sky Fall?* Unpublished play. [1995], p.15

<sup>436</sup> Ibid. p.61

<sup>437</sup> Ibid. p.7

<sup>438</sup> Ibid. p.95

Mda presents a common situation in African societies where an individual's 'womanhood' is closely associated with childbearing within marriage. A woman who has never married or given birth is often excluded from women's circles since childlessness is regarded as a curse or deviation from the cultural norms. Married women are supposed to respect and listen to their husbands as Thulani Mtshali demonstrates in his play *Weemen* (discussed in the next chapter). Such social and cultural practices can be seen as a basis for domination perpetrated by women over other women.

Young Man, on the other hand, represents the South African youth, especially with regard to the 1976 student riots against the Bantu education imposed under apartheid. He also may represent artists who played a major role in the struggle. As the only opposing voice in this play, Young Man speaks for all the different groups. The fact that his language is crude and direct, if not vulgar, makes it possible for the average person to easily identify with him. His anger does not prevent him from differentiating good and evil, which is common amongst Mda's characters. No matter how oppressed or bitter, they retain clear and ethical thinking.

Finally, there has been widespread purging within some political parties in the country. These killings were often the result of differences or arguments arising between political party leaders. In this play, Young Man argues that political leaders are deceitful. They often give an impression that their respective parties are more than rivals; they are enemies that ought to be eliminated, yet fail to make it known to their supporters that, at a personal level, as individuals and leaders, they are not enemies as such. This often results in clashes and senseless killing between their supporters while they remain unaffected. Young Man comments:

YOUNG MAN - That's exactly what I am going to tell them. When the ruling classes disagree they don't kill one another. They joke about their disagreements at cocktail parties, while we murder each other about those very disagreements. This is a war that is fought in boardrooms, and the common men and women are the foot-soldiers who must make the ultimate sacrifice.<sup>439</sup>

The narrative structure of this play enables Mda to present to his audience two different eras in the history of South African politics, that is, apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. By juxtaposing the two eras, and constantly shifting back and forth from one era to the other, Mda enables his audience to evaluate the performance of the democratically elected government led by blacks vis-à-vis the apartheid regime. This is probably due to the fact that politicians often behave

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid.p.91



and speak a different language once in power. As Freire argues, the very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men, but for them to be men is to be oppressors of others because at a certain stage of their existential experience, they adopted an attitude of adhesion to the oppressor.<sup>440</sup> Lawrence Schlemmer comments:

Complexity in society should be respected by politicians. In fact, one must go even further and question the assumption that politicians make about their role. Politicians and the governments they lead, all over the world, have slipped into a framework of thinking in which they control and indeed even “own” society. It is akin to them seeing themselves as the owner-managers of giant corporations. It is not only a dangerous delusion but it does not work. The proper role of politicians is to allow society to pursue its own untidy momentum in which people seek, create and exploit their opportunities.<sup>441</sup>

Schlemmer argues that a government’s role is to arbitrate and keep people from deliberately harming each other in pursuing their goals. It has to try and help people to do what they want to do. He says that governments should be good housekeepers, not grand architects. And if they exist for the good of the people, as they claim, then people must not be allowed a freedom that will prevent others from enjoying the same freedom.<sup>442</sup>

Similarly, it can be submitted that Mda’s argument in this play is that the different groups that were engaged in the struggle for the liberation of South Africa (women, youth, and artists) should be given an opportunity in the democratic South Africa to contribute to its reconstruction and in the running of its affairs. The play is a challenge to these groups to continue to fight against any form of oppression or discrimination, regardless of the race of the perpetrators. These groups should not take for granted the freedom achieved because those who are in power may abuse it. Manning Marable submits that there is a direct relationship between activists’ ability to mobilize people in communities to protest and the pressure they can exert on elected officials to protect, enforce and observe civil rights.<sup>443</sup> Sindiwe Magona, a playwright, comments:

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<sup>440</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the oppressed*. [1968], p.30

<sup>441</sup> Lawrence Schlemmer, “What Next?” in South African Institute of Race Relations ed., *Beating Apartheid and Building the Future* . [1990], p.79

<sup>442</sup> Ibid. pp.79,80

<sup>443</sup> Manning Marable Affirmative Action and Politics of Race in Philemona Essed and David Goldberg ed. *Race critical theories: text and context* .[2002], p.353

Things promised haven't happened. Black people really need to start thinking about what we were denied in the old South Africa and how can that be ours. If our children were going hungry in the old South Africa and are still hungry, if our children had poor education in the old South Africa and are still receiving a poor education, if people lived in shacks and are still living in shacks, something is not right.<sup>444</sup>

There is no doubt the society Mda depicts in *You Fool How Can The Sky Fall?* is an allegory of South Africa, nevertheless some elements derive from the political situation in Lesotho.

As for South Africa, the character of the President, who was once a political prisoner and is now the head of his country, seems to be an allusion to former President Mandela. The Minister of Health in the play is a woman; similarly, the first democratically elected South African Cabinet had a woman as its Minister of Health, Dr. Zuma. Other similarities are found in the Ministers of Sports and of Law. However, the characters in the play cannot be said to directly resemble the members of the South African Cabinet. There is a sharp contrast between the President in the play and former President Mandela. The only similarity between the two is that both have been to prison. Otherwise, former President Mandela is known and admired worldwide as a true statesman and not as corrupt and manipulative as the President in the play. Another difference is between the character of Minister of Health and Dr. Zuma. Whereas Dr. Zuma has children, the character in the play has none. Mda might have opted for this to demonstrate how women's achievements are often overshadowed by traditional expectations.

As much as this play can be identified with South Africa, it can be associated with Lesotho as well, as the two countries share some similarities. Lesotho had the first free elections in 1993 (the first democratically elected government in 23 years) and South Africa in 1994. Moreover, the Health Minister in Lesotho was also a woman, Dr. Ralitapole. In addition, the reference in the play to the 'Papal Visit' and the 'Road to the Race Course,' named after Pope John Paul II, makes the story applicable to Lesotho as well.

When Pope John Paul II visited Lesotho in 1988, the road between the centre of the capital Maseru and the racecourse was reconditioned but never tarred. Instead the road was painted black to make it look as though it was tarred, the same way as it is depicted in the play. This road was named "Pope Road" after Pope John Paul II. However, the potholes, which were filled with earth during the reconditioning, became visible even before the Pope left the country due to heavy rains.

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<sup>444</sup> Sindiwe Magona, "House Hunting Unlike in Soweto" in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.49

The other part that ties the play to Lesotho is Young Man's narration of his childhood, when schools were closed and pupils were made to line the streets each time the President visited their area. This was a common practice during the rule of the late Lesotho Prime Minister, Dr. Leabua Jonathan.

It is not surprising that so much about Lesotho is sprinkled in this play. Mda was in exile in Lesotho for several years during which he taught at the National University of Lesotho, and only returned to South Africa following democratization of the country. He is thus familiar with the politics of both countries.

However, *You Fool, How Can The Sky Fall?* is a play about South Africa and to some extent depicts South African politics under both the apartheid regime and in democratic South Africa. Mda lists issues that were paramount to the apartheid system. He observes with regret that they still exist even under a democratically elected government led by blacks. The question to his audience is whether the goal of the freedom struggle has been achieved or not. He shows that corruption, greed and oppression cause discontent amongst the groups that were at the forefront of the struggle, like the women's group, Daughters of the Revolution.

Mda's critique of the way blacks in power handle affairs in *You Fool, How Can The Sky Fall?* does not come as a surprise, as he warned his audience in other plays long before the day that freedom dawned. In his play, *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*, written during the dark days of apartheid, he cautions his audience of such mishaps:

JANABARI - Serge, I have been trying to tell you that ours was not merely to replace a white face with a black one, but to change a system which exploits us, to replace it with one which will give us a share in the wealth of this country. What we need is another war of freedom, Serge-a war which will put this land into the hands of the people.<sup>445</sup>

Similarly, Freire notes that the moment the new regime hardens into a dominating bureaucracy, the humanist dimension of the struggle is lost and it is no longer possible to speak of liberation. He insists that the authentic solution of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction does not lie in a mere reversal of position, in moving from one pole to the other nor does it lie in the replacement of former oppressor with new ones who continue to subjugate the oppressed in the name of their liberation.<sup>446</sup> This is what President Mugabe seems to be doing in Zimbabwe and many other African leaders do. The need and call for the South African people's determination and commitment to safeguard their democracy

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<sup>445</sup> Zakes Mda *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*. 1990], pp.43,44

<sup>446</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.43

and to avoid the ills that were seen under apartheid, was echoed by former president Mandela:

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. Be it, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die for.<sup>447</sup>

Both Mda's play and Mandela's comment might be a call for South Africans to be vigilant in the democratic South Africa.

### ***Love Letters***

The theme of black patriarchy becomes central in Mda's *Love Letters*, especially its survival from generation to generation by black women themselves. *Love Letters*, like *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?*, has a rather complex structure wherein one story is narrated within another story, a literary device called "frame narrative."<sup>448</sup> The first two characters, Mother and Daughter, introduce and conclude the main story. The main characters in the story are Simphiwe and Thabisile.

In both stories a problem of communication threatens the feelings of two lovers. The encapsulated story is set in pre-colonial Africa, while the frame narrative is set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the frame narrative, the character of Mother is oppressive, manipulative and selfish. She uses her position as a parent to persuade her daughter to marry despite her daughter doubting the fiancée. She takes advantage of her culture, in the sense that she knows it is rather uncommon for a child to argue with his or her parents, especially if it is a girl. As a result, children like the character Daughter are forced to submit to parental wishes. Mother also exploits tradition and myth to convince her daughter to marry her fiancée. It is not that she likes or thinks he is good for her, but more so that she has ulterior motives for marrying off her daughter.

Mother's character is informed by African cultures. It is an honour to a family, especially to parents, to have their daughter marry. Some parents, as evidenced by the character of Mother, interfere with their daughter's relationships in a quest to fulfill a prospective marriage. Sometimes they even push their daughters into marriages for the sake of basking in the glory of having

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<sup>447</sup> Nelson Mandela, *No Easy Way to Freedom*, [1973], p.189

<sup>448</sup> When the encapsulated story summarizes or allegorically represents the frame narrative, it is called by the French term *mise en abyme*.

their daughters getting married, so that other women in their village can envy them.

Daughter, on the other hand, interprets love through the material gains she receives from her lover. As far as she is concerned, the fewer presents she gets indicates a lack of love from him. Furthermore, Daughter is indecisive and easily influenced, which may contradict stereotypes about the 'independent and open-minded' contemporary woman.

Like Daughter, Simphiwe and Thabisile are vulnerable, in the sense that they cannot make decisions by themselves and are consequently easily influenced and deceived. However, their love glows once they learn the truth about their friends who they trusted, but who turn out to be traitors.

In the story set in pre-colonial Africa, Mda explores methods of communication such as bead weaving, which people used (especially lovers) to communicate with each other. Since Simphiwe is a boy, he cannot weave beads himself and needs to rely on his sister to communicate with his lover Thabisile, which has an unfortunate result.

Two other characters in the story are Sibongile and Lindiwe. Sibongile is jealous and deceitful, because she does not have someone who loves her the same way Simphiwe and Thabisile do, though she is the one who acts as a link between them. Sibongile is the opposite of her friend, Lindiwe. Lindiwe is honest and detests evil.

*Love Letters* opens with a conflict between generations (Mother and Daughter) linked to cultures amongst African, especially Zulu culture, and Western cultures. Daughter sulks over the fact that she only gets beads and not flowers and chocolates from her fiancée. As flowers and chocolates are associated with the West, especially Switzerland, her desire for such items shows that she somehow identifies with the Western world and holds its commodities in high esteem. On the other hand, her rejection of the beads from her fiancée symbolises her distance from her own Zulu culture. Steve Biko discouraged this Western encroachment, which Africans seem to be adopting:

We must seek to restore to the Black people a sense of the great stress we used to lay on the value of human relationships; to highlight the fact that in the pre-van Riebeeck days we had a high regard for people, their property and for life in general; to reduce the hold of technology over man.<sup>449</sup>

The character of Mother represents the old generation that to some extent still believes in observing and protecting traditional cultural values for future generations. Culturally, marriage has always been an honour to the family of the

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<sup>449</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness" in Hendrik van Der Merwe ed., *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.200

bride. Marriage means security for their daughter and most of all wealth to the family since there was and still is payment of lobola, a certain number of cattle, to the girl's family. Mda dramatizes Mother's excitement over her daughter's marriage:

MOTHER - Six months? Only six months! You know how time flies. My only daughter getting married. I don't want anything to be out of place. Nothing must go wrong.<sup>450</sup>

Often in a setup such as this, the question of how much the two love each other was not that much of an issue. Parents would even choose a partner in marriage for their children. It was taken for granted that once the two lived together they would get to know and love each other better. To a certain extent this reveals the selfishness of the parents because they never bothered about what their children wanted, only with their personal gains. Nevertheless, interestingly, most of those arranged marriages endured the challenges of partnership compared with modern marriages where individuals choose partners. This raises questions on the social and individual functioning of both arranged and self-chosen marriages. It can be assumed that in the play Mother bursts out when there is the slightest indication that there might be no marriage after all because of social prestige and economic selfishness.

MOTHER - Don't tell me that stupid boy is changing his mind about marrying you.<sup>451</sup>

It is important to note that Mother operates within the mindset that only the man may decide whether there is marriage or not, as it is common in her culture. She does not expect her daughter to call off the marriage because that would be a cultural deviation. However, love affairs and marriages in the 21st century are different from the past. It can be argued that love and money, especially the latter, often determine the fate of relationships because material things seem to mean more than in the past. Apart from that, women wield more power than they did in the past. This explains Daughter's hesitance over whether she should marry her fiancée or not:

DAUGHTER - You think I want to marry a "cheapskate" who can't even afford to buy me a decent present? Other girls get flowers from their fiancées, or at least a box of chocolates. But what does he buy me? A nickel of beads!<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>450</sup> Zakes Mda, *Love Letters* unpublished play. [1997], p.2

<sup>451</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.pp.1,2

At this point the play links generational clash to the conflict of cultures, as Daughter's uncertainty over whether to marry her fiancée or not causes a conflict with her mother. Her mother's tone changes as she tries to sweet-talk her into marrying her fiancée. She tells her the importance of beads and their historical background in relation to the Zulu culture. She even goes to the extent of telling a story about two Zulu lovers, Thabisile and Simphiwe, who used to communicate through beads.

Here, Mda's audience meets the two young Zulu lovers, Thabisile and Simphiwe, in the frame narrative. As their love grows, the frequency of exchanging beads grows as well. It is worth noting the "letters" implied in the title of the play actually refers to the beads, not as one would expect in the Western context. In this historical context it means the beads were woven to communicate specific messages to the intended person and were not just craft. However, the problem is that Simphiwe is not good when it comes to weaving or reading complicated beads, while Thabisile is an expert in both. As a result, Simphiwe has to rely on his sister, Sibongile, to read and respond to Thabisile's beads. At first Sibongile is helpful, knowing that men are not good when it comes to making or reading beads. However, with time she gets tired and angry from the frequency with which the messages are exchanged. Apart from that, she is jealous of the way her brother loves Thabisile because she does not have someone who loves her the same way.

SIBONGILE - They are in love! I am the one who has to make beads for Simphiwe in order to respond to hers. I am going to tell him now, if he wants to continue to write to this Thabisile he must make his own beads. I cannot spend all my life making beads for him. I too need to write my beads to the one I love.

LINDIWE - You are just jealous.<sup>453</sup>

Eventually Sibongile's jealousy drives her over the edge and sends both Thabisile and Simphiwe beads of rejection as though they were coming from the other. As much as this is caused by jealousy, it gives her a break from acting as a link between the two and making and reading beads. Meanwhile, the two lovers are shocked and disappointed by the sudden and uncalled rejection by the other:

THABISILE - How can he say this about me? What did I do to him? Not long ago he was sending me letters expressing his undying love. He says I am a woman of immoral character.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid. p.138

<sup>454</sup> Ibid. p.141

Based on the experience of the two lovers, Mda seems to stress the saying that “three is a crowd,” which implies love is better shared between two people and no more. Furthermore, he emphasises the need for self-reliance as a prerequisite for self-fulfillment and progress in life, failing this, one would need to take radical measures to rectify the mistakes. These radical measures are portrayed in the play when other girls advise Thabisile to purify herself with them before going home in accordance with their culture, to be in a position to love again.

As outlined in the play, the purification ritual starts with throwing black beads at the rejecting boy’s home. This symbolises giving back to the boy the misfortune brought on the girl by the rejection. The second step is to steal the fattest goat from the rejecting boy’s kraal, slaughter it by the river and then cleanse themselves with whatever is in the stomach. Finally, they feast on the goat.<sup>455</sup> This ritual and its consequences terrify Sibongile and force her to confess to Lindiwe so she can prevent the girls from performing the cleansing ritual.

Mother’s tale ends with the two lovers, Thabisile and Simphiwe, finally getting married. Thabisile’s mother congratulates her daughter for having behaved well to the extent that she got herself a husband and made her proud.

In the frame narrative, even though Mother pretends to be telling Daughter a story, she sees Daughter in Thabisile and wishes she can overcome all the challenges, get married and make her as proud and happy as Thabisile did her mother. This joy will be cushioned with lobola, meaning wealth for her. In this regard, Elaine Showalter comments that patriarchal societies do not readily sell their sons, but their daughters are for sale sooner or later.<sup>456</sup>

As one would expect from a person of her character, Mother ends her bead story by stressing the importance of youth learning about cultural heritage. She is grateful there are museums where people can learn about their culture. However, she regrets a lot of things within her culture are losing meaning, like the beads. These cultural artworks, which were used in the past more for communication amongst people and tribes have been commercialised woven for profit to sell to tourists rather than communicating intimate messages.<sup>457</sup>

The society Mda depicts in the encapsulated story is a closed one where members support each other. Obviously evil and jealousy are not tolerated. This unity brings harmony and prosperity to the society. It is in sharp contrast to what people are made to believe that life was nothing but suffering before the arrival of white settlers in Africa with their modern communication and civilisation. This can be taken as Mda’s encouragement to his audience to cherish their ways of life as their ancestors used to in the past. It is what both Biko and Chakela

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid. pp.18,19

<sup>456</sup> Elaine Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics: Women Writing about Women” in Philip Rice and Patricie Wangh ed. *Modern Literary Theory*. [1989], p.94

<sup>457</sup> Zakes Mda, *Love Letters* unpublished play. [1997], p.25



observe in their writings as well. Mother remarks on this at the beginning of the play:

MOTHER - Not all was war and death, as we are led to believe by historians of the West. There was life too. And there was love.<sup>458</sup>

In this respect Mda revisits the past and gives voice to the silenced majority whose cultures have been overridden by the colonial and Western cultures. Likewise, the playwright Lueen Conning observes that the whole perception of Africans as inferior with nothing to aspire to in African cultures, no beauty, no pride, nothing to revere, is an apartheid ideology, an apartheid illusion. These ideas are still prevalent and passed down by the apartheid system supporters.<sup>459</sup>

It is important to note that the way Mother tells Daughter the story demonstrates how information, especially cultural, passes from generation to generation. It also exposes how dependent black culture is on women for its survival and existence. Throughout the play Mda shows how much men were dependent on women to the extent that women were the ones who controlled the communication of courtship via the beads. To some extent women controlled men's fate, as Mother in *Love Letters* explains:

MOTHER - Girls. All girls. As a result boys were not very good at reading beads. When they received beads from their girls, and the message was rather complicated, they asked their sisters and cousins to read the beads for them.

DAUGHTER. - Then to reply? How did boys reply since they did not make the beads themselves?

MOTHER - The same sisters and cousins would make beads on behalf of the boys, responding to the beads that the boys received from their lovers.<sup>460</sup>

However, looking at the manner in which Mother tries to convince Daughter to marry her fiancée, it appears as if she encourages submission to black patriarchy or that Mda dramatizes the contemporary struggle of allegiances. It also gives the impression that it is only through this submission and/or allegiance that culture can be protected.

Apart from this notion of culture being protected through submission and/or allegiance, even though Mother is supposed to be a symbol of African culture and heritage, she is oppressive. She undermines the feelings of her

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<sup>458</sup> Zakes Mda, *Love Letters* unpublished play. [1997], p.4

<sup>459</sup> Conning, Lueen "A Coloured Place" in Kathy Perkins ed., *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.7

<sup>460</sup> Zakes Mda, *Love Letters* unpublished play. [1997], p.13

daughter. As a result, in this modern time whereby there is a big emphasis and advocacy for women's rights, her character might work against Mda's goal of persuading his audience to love and protect their cultures. Nevertheless, through the characters of Mother and Daughter, he demonstrates the modern day contradictions of power relationships especially between two different generations. Furthermore, Mother has little regard for men. Men are reasonable only if they live up to her expectations, which may explain the materialistic nature of her daughter. Her attitude towards men may alienate men in the auditorium and make her appear as a gold-digger.

There is also the possibility to read the play as promoting the oppression of women. Daughter has her own reasons of being doubtful about marrying her fiancée. Materialistic as she may be, she refrains from confronting her mother. The possible explanation to her behaviour is that culturally, it is regarded as disrespectful for a child to confront and/or argue with an older person, especially parents no matter how wrong that person is. It can be argued that this encourages submissiveness, contrary to self-assertion, young adults are expected to aspire to. Consequently, instead of confronting Mother, Daughter asks questions demonstrating an interest in her culture, which might imply that Mda wishes his audience to be interested in the protection and promotion of African cultures regardless of how that is achieved. The other explanation to Daughter's submission could be her gender. Girls are known to identify very closely with their mothers and often avoid getting into arguments with them possibly for future support and guidance. In addition, they are taught and encouraged to be more feminine, humble and respectful. But still this also implies manipulation and exploitation of both cultures and children.

As much as Daughter may be an example of the 21<sup>st</sup> century women, her failure to defend her standpoint leaves much to be desired about the women of her times and their competence as individuals. The other problem is whether Daughter will be able to stand up for herself when time calls or whether she will continue to be submissive as taught at home. Mary Washington comments:

The fear of one's own inferiority in the face of a powerful racist white world, the inability to summon rage, the need to find a voice to maintain one's sanity and one's identity...are part of the legacy left to me by my valiant foremothers.<sup>461</sup>

Because Mda does not explicitly state how far one has to go to respect and observe customs and cultures, and since the audience does not come to see how his character handles the situation at the work place to differentiate between the two spaces, he runs a risk of sending a wrong message that his audience do the

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<sup>461</sup> Mary Washington in Glenda Dickerson's *The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward A Womanist Attitude in African-American Theatre*, *Theatre Journal*, May '92, p179

same. One would expect Mda, as someone who “spurs his audience into action”, to give directions. But at the same time, like Brecht, he might be leaving that to his audience to decide, especially given the new political dispensation in South Africa. This might explain why there is no clear closure in as far as whether Daughter marries her fiancé or not.

It can be contested that the play also reveals how much in control and how generous some women in the past were, while most in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are often snobs who do not give yet expect to receive.

Although the two plays discussed above are rather different in terms of plot, there is one common element: role-playing. Characters in both plays are not fixed, either they assume different roles (in *You Fool, How can the Sky Fall?*) or they take the roles of a narrator (*Love Letters*). Mda’s unique dramatic mode is similar to that employed by Ntozake Shange in *Spell #7*. Commenting on this role-playing, Karen Cronacher contends that it deconstructs the common assumption that characters have stable and fixed identities, by so doing the playwrights break down the constraints of the hegemonic system of representation.<sup>462</sup>

Based on the two plays, it can be concluded that there is a significant change in content and tone in Mda’s work as compared to under apartheid South Africa. Nevertheless, he still focuses on the performance of authority and its effects on the masses in what appears to be comparing and contrasting present to the past and cautioning his audience to be on the look out whether in terms of politics or culture. But the aggressive tone, synonymous with most of his characters under the apartheid system, still exists as evidenced by Young Man in *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?*

### 3.2 Maishe Maponya

Like most black playwrights in apartheid South Africa, Maishe Maponya dealt with issues of great concern to the black masses in his plays. This is reflected in two of his earlier plays, *Umgongikazi* (The Nurse) (1983) and *The Hungry Earth* (1979). In the two plays Maponya deals with the plight of blacks in the labour market. In *Umgongikazi*, he addresses the treatment of black nurses in the white-dominated South African Nurses Association, while in *The Hungry Earth* he focuses on the plight of black mineworkers.

However, there are notable changes in his latest plays written in post-apartheid South Africa. These plays are not protesting against any system, but they honour certain individuals for their self-sacrifice in the name of freedom. In two of his latest plays, *Letta* and *A Song For Biko*, he revisits the past in honour

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<sup>462</sup> Karen Cronacher, Unmasking the Minstrel Mask’s Black Magic in Ntozake Shange’s *Spell #7*. *Theatre Journal*, May. [1992], p.184

of both Letta Mbuli and Steve Biko. Even though his work remains political, it is of a different kind.

*A Song for Biko* was first performed in 1996 at Carfax featuring Maishe Maponya. Maponya directed the play while the late Matsemela Manaka played drums. *Letta* is work-in-progress with Letta Mbuli portraying herself and directed by Maponya.

### ***Letta***

This play is more a documentary of Letta Mbuli than a fictitious story. As a result the characters in this play are not that different from the real persons in terms of profession and experience.

Maponya characterises Letta as an ambitious black youth growing up in apartheid South Africa. She is keen to become a singer and an actress. However, this is threatened by the fact that she is black, and professional opportunities for blacks in this field are limited. This makes her take risks that might put her in trouble with the apartheid laws. Even though she takes these risks, Letta tries to ensure that nothing happens to hurt her mother who is already mourning the death of her brother Vusimusi, killed by the security forces. Consequently, she is torn between her love for her mother and her personal interest. Letta finally realises that the fact that she is black mitigates her chance of success as a musician in South Africa. Consequently she decides to leave the country.

*Letta* is politically conscious and understands that freedom for blacks in South Africa is in the hands of all South Africans. Upon her arrival in the United States she continues to be the voice of her people back in South Africa. Glenda Dickerson writes:

I learned that liberation is not accomplished by the heroes who flash like lightening or the royalty who sit upon the throne. It is achieved by the drylongso folk, the ordinary people.<sup>463</sup>

Similarly, the character of Miriam is politically conscious. Being older than Letta, she becomes Letta's guiding hand on her arrival in the United States. Like Letta, Miriam is aware that South African artists have a role to play in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Consequently, she encourages South African artists abroad to be voices of the voiceless South Africans back home.

Even though the character of James appears briefly, he seems committed to identifying and developing black youth talent in the township, especially through music.

The play is set in Orlando, Soweto. The year is 1957. This is rather unusual for playwrights to set their plays so far in the past, because Black

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<sup>463</sup> Glenda Dickerson, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward a Womanist Attitude in African-American Theatre,' *Theatre Journal* May 1992, p.181

Theatre tends to accent the political and social urgency of the contemporary. This characteristic may be related to material production constraints including lighting, set design, and costume, since epic theatre undoubtedly requires appropriate atmosphere to match periods. The significance of 1957 is that it was the height of political activism, culminating in the Rivonia Trial that resulted in the sentencing of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki to life on Robben Island.

Maponya starts his play by recreating the atmosphere and scenery of life of ordinary people in the townships and villages of South Africa. There is heavy smoke hanging in the air from numerous fires whether in the form of stoves or open fires as people prepare their evening meals. He observes that often these fires are made by older children since parents leave early in the morning to go to work and return late in the evening. As a result, older children are left to take care of the domestic work. This makes things easier for their parents, on their arrival home, to finish off what the children had started while the children go and play.

Something that catches the eye with this exposition is a direct violation of the so called child-labour according to the Western standards. However, Maponya seems to argue that it is the way of life for many Africans and South Africans are no exception to have older children taking charge whether been in looking after the households, their siblings or chores.

The first thing that Maponya engages is the rivalry between boys and girls before the courting stage. Letta and her friends listen to a group of boys as they sing. The girls pick up the same song as soon as the boys stop, but sing it better, which makes the boys jealous. In real life, the defeated boys often disrupt the girls' singing and chase them around, with each boy chasing after the girl he likes. Most of the time this ends with each couple hiding in their little secret place. These kinds of games usually take place after sunset once the children are free to go and play after their parents took over on their return from work. However, in this play the boys walk away defeated leaving behind the beautiful melody from the girls.

In this scene Maponya captures the harmony and peace for which blacks strived, despite the oppressive system that governed their daily lives. But it is the artistic talent amongst young black South Africans and the need to identify and develop it that he pursues further. In the next scene one of Maponya's characters, James, mesmerised by the talent of the girls and especially Letta, takes the matter further. However, as though to reinforce African traditions and customs, since traditionally children cannot engage in any activity without the consent of parents nor can any person engage in an activity with a minor without consulting parents first, James first approaches Letta directly and tries to persuade her to join his music group. This is a normal practice amongst music talent scouts, but she declines. Consequently, James is

forced to approach Letta's parents for permission to have Letta in his music group.

There are two issues here Maponya attempts to instill in his audience, especially the youth and talent scouts. First, that youth should avoid engaging in activities without the approval of their parents, as has become the norm contemporarily. The possible reason is that youth are likely to be tricked and trapped in things without being aware that they are taken advantage.

Second, according to African cultures, children are answerable to their parents and anything that concerns them should be dealt with through their parents. Despite the respect James shows by approaching Mambuli to ask her consent regarding her daughter, Letta, Mambuli is furious to have a male with whom she is not acquainted asking to take her daughter away. This is probably due to the sexual abuse of girls, which is rife in the townships.

MAMBULI - My daughter? I'm sorry, let us stop this. I don't know you, whose child are you? I cannot let you near my daughter. In fact, no one in this street will let you take any child to your place. I just don't think this discussion will take us anywhere.<sup>464</sup>

This kind of reaction by a mother is common in many African societies. It is a form of protection of their daughters from being abused by males and strangers. However, Mambuli becomes less hostile as soon as she learns James is the son of Reverend Mabena, who is known to her. But, she does not permit her daughter to join James's music group until his father approaches her personally. Even then, she agrees on condition:

MAMBULI - Ngoya vuma Mfundisi, kodwa Mfundisi you can't take just one child. All those children are my children. These children belong to every mother in the street. Every mother is every child's mother.<sup>465</sup>

Maponya appears to be looking back to and espousing the old communal Africa in which every old person was considered to be a parent to all children in the village. He also seems to emphasize the 'chain of command' to ensure that everything is done legally, since in most cases there are only witnesses if things turn sour. However, even though Mambuli holds on to this old tradition she is still aware that Letta is her only child and fears that, should anything happen to her, she will be left with no child. Consequently, she is concerned about her safety, especially following the arrest and death of her son Vusimusi in police custody.

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<sup>464</sup> Maishe Maponya, *Letta*, unpublished play-1999, p.5

<sup>465</sup> Ibid. p.6

MAMBULI - Letta is very fragile at the moment. ULetta has lost her brother.

REV. MABENA - Kanjani mama? [How Mama?]

MAMBULI - Letta's brother was arrested last month. The police did not say what they were arresting him for, except ukuthi yisuspicion.

REV. MANBENA - What suspicion?

MAMBULI - They don't say those things when they are up to their nonsense about every black man being a communist. The house was ransacked before they decided to take him away.<sup>466</sup>

Apart from the question of mixing of languages for emphasis, which is common in many black communities, there are two interesting issues Maponya raises through the two characters. First, it is clear that the apartheid system considered blacks, especially males, as a potential threat regardless of whether they had any criminal record or not. As a result, they could be arrested without any concrete proof of wrongdoing because they were regarded as undesirable elements. A typical excuse for arrest was suspicion of communism. The apartheid system considered every person against the system, regardless of race and color, as a communist in order to demonize them. Eastern Block or Communist countries, including the Soviet Union and Cuba, both sympathised with and assisted freedom movements (including the African National Congress [ANC], which made this type of apartheid reaction convenient. Suspects were dealt harshly by the apartheid system. Given the regularity of black deaths at the hands of police, Mambuli has no hope of seeing her son alive. Indeed, two police officers arrive shortly thereafter at her house to tell her that her son is dead:

POLICEMAN - Your son, yes the prisoner, U-Vusumuzi has died. U-Vusumuzi was trying to run away. The prison wardens caught up with Vusumuzi and shot him.<sup>467</sup>

Maponya, like his fellow playwrights Mda, Ngema and Kente, criticised the arrest and murder of blacks in cold blood by the apartheid system. It was alleged under apartheid that if the police could not find the kind of information they wanted from detainees despite torture, the detainees were killed by the frustrated interrogators, either by throwing them out of windows of tall buildings (such as John Foster Square), shooting them dead, or hanging them. Often the detainees were blamed for their own deaths, that they had hanged themselves, jumped out of a window, or shot while trying to escape. The International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, in collaboration with the United Nations Against Apartheid remarks with regard to treatment of detainees:

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid. p.6

<sup>467</sup> Maishe Maponya, *Letta*, unpublished play, p.13

There is extensive evidence of torture of detainees, given by former detainees themselves. It is known that by 3 May 1983 at least 57 people had died while in the Police custody of security police since 1963, the year in which detention for 90 days without trial was introduced.<sup>468</sup>

It can be argued that Maponya recalls how the system would then take some time before the members of their family could have the body, when probably they had allowed the body to decompose in order to destroy the evidence. However, there were times when the truth came out and the victims' families learned that the detainees were killed in cold blood. Maponya has Letta comment on the death of her brother, Vusumuzi in this play:

LETTA - The next three months were hell for the family. The police repeated what they said, that my brother was running away. They would not allow us to see his body. They would not let us get his body. For three months we could do nothing but mourn the body we had not seen. They said he was POQO. They said he kept saying UPOQO akabethwa. Now he's dead and we can't get his body. When they finally brought back his body, he was shot in the front. How do you shoot a running man in the front? Only this system yamabhunu can come up with utter rubbish... How do I over-come the experience at the age of thirteen?<sup>469</sup>

Even with clear evidence as indicated by Letta's angry remark, it was not easy for blacks to take the matter to court. With almost all the professions staffed by whites, including the legal system, it was definite that the complainant would lose the case against the system. This may explain why Maponya's character in this play rejects the suggestion to get a lawyer to sue the apartheid system over his death:

LETTA - Why don't you get a lawyer to get him out?

MAMBULI - It is not that easy, my child...I don't have the money to pay the lawyer. What kind of a lawyer-eyolungu ("white man")? Not in my house.<sup>470</sup>

Apart from the fact that Mambuli does not have money to get a lawyer, since the majority of blacks were unemployed or poorly paid, it is clear that she does not have faith in lawyers or the courts. The possible reason is that law as a profession

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<sup>468</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa and United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts*, p.61

<sup>469</sup> Maishe Maponya, *Letta*, unpublished play p.14

<sup>470</sup> Ibid. p8



was predominantly white. Consequently, Mapony's text shows that Mabuli feels a white lawyer might handle the case with a white magistrate or judge presiding. This means she would be represented in court and judged by white people who arrested and murdered her son, which warrants her pessimistic conviction that she would not win the case. Apart from losing, there was a possibility of repercussion, as The Catholic Institute for International Relations comments:

The law courts consistently interpret the law and the emergency regulations in favour of the state rather than the individual, particularly in the case of blacks. This comes as no surprise since the legislature represents the white minority, whilst the courts are turned into organs of the apartheid system to punish those who resist it.<sup>471</sup>

Like Chakela, who argues that South African women suffered dearly as mothers, it can be contested that Maponya revisits the suffering blacks, especially women, endured under apartheid. Apart from the fact that Mabuli and her family are mourning the death of a member of their family, they too have to put up with the system which appeared reluctant to hand over the deceased body and prolonging their suffering in the process.

Nevertheless, despite the suffering and looming death that detainees were made to go through, Maponya portrays their determination to attain freedom. This is evidenced by Vusumuzi's shouting of the Pan African Congress slogan "Poqo" which is similar to "viva."

Apart from demonstrating the suffering of blacks under apartheid, like other black playwrights, Maponya is also concerned about the age at which black youths are exposed to pain and suffering both psychologically and physically. This is reflected in Letta's self pity and her doubts on her ability to overcome the loss of her brother at an early age.

The spirit of courage and hope for freedom was not only to be found in the dying detainees, but also in those who were left behind, as portrayed in this play. Instead of being discouraged by the death of their loved ones, Letta and her colleagues employ their artistic skills to educate the black masses and to expose the evils of apartheid to the international community. They compose songs and produce plays about the experiences of blacks. Letta encourages her colleagues during a meeting to play an active role in the struggle:

LETTA - As a Union of South African Artists our role can be bigger. If at the same time when the march against the passes takes place and we compose songs, the people will always remember us for making the songs. The songs will remain in the minds of the people forever.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Rule of Fear*, p.1

<sup>472</sup> Maishe Maponya, *Letta*, unpublished play, p.17

Letta's comment shows the commitment and contribution of black artists in the struggle for freedom in South Africa through their art. Furthermore, her comment demonstrates how apartheid redefined black art in South Africa and consequently how art became a weapon for freedom, not just a form of entertainment. In the face of all this, a sense of striving for unity, forged by different black groups, emerged with political activists within different groups consulting each other for support prior to taking action to ensure effectiveness. However, as one would expect, the artists' involvement in political activities invited harassment from the system and this raised great concern amongst the performers' families. Mambuli, who tries to talk Letta out of singing, worried that she too might end up in jail and possibly never come back, indicates this:

MAMBULI - What about your constant harassment by the police because you often travel without permits. One day ayonivalela amapoyisa and you will never come out. Has this family not suffered enough with the loss of my son uVusuzi? I think it's now time you gave this singing of yours a break. The police are keeping a watchful eye on everyone-they have planted spies all over.<sup>473</sup>

It is this type of artist harassment, as portrayed in this play, which forced some artists like Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masikela to go into exile rather than have their talent and freedom of speech stifled by the system. Similarly, even though at first Letta is reluctant to go into exile in this play, uncomfortable with leaving her mother all by herself, she finally joins Caiphus Semenya and other South African artists in the United States. Maponya argues that even while in exile, the artists continued to use their art to tell the world about the evils of apartheid and the suffering of blacks under the system. In this play, Miriam urges her colleagues to employ their art to bring about change in South Africa:

MIRIAM - Yes, even here there is a revolution. There is a revolution in the arts and our responsibility is to ask ourselves, "what is the artist's responsibility towards the audience of the world. The liberation movements alone in South Africa cannot change that country. The arts and artists are very much part of that struggle. We are in an advantageous position and I urge you my sister to always remember where you come from."<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid. p.21

<sup>474</sup> Ibid. p.32

Glenda Dickerson argues similarly, that the more one reads and travels, the more one realises that the language of oppression is the same.<sup>475</sup> Likewise, Maponya observes through these characters that even though the South African artists left the country with a hope of escaping discrimination, harassment and suffering, when they got to United States they learned blacks there were also at war against white racist elements. And like in South Africa, those white racists killed blacks the same way as the Boers. It is possible this hostility towards blacks in America which makes Mambuli reluctant to allow Letta to join her boyfriend in America, fearing that she might get killed as well:

MAMBULI - A few months ago I read something that black people there, were marching and boycotting, and that they were lynched by white people. I heard that in other places black people are often found hanging like strange fruits on trees.<sup>476</sup>

Maponya draws his audience's attention to the similarity of inhuman treatment towards blacks in America and South Africa in those days. The discrimination and dehumanisation of blacks was and is widespread and calls for unity amongst blacks. Maponya referencing Malcolm X's speech before he was assassinated in the play emphasises this need for unity:

MALCOM X - There can be no workers solidarity until there's first some black solidarity. There can be no white-black solidarity until there's first black solidarity. The narrowness of sectarianism among black people must be curtailed by black people towards the organisation of the millions of non-Muslim blacks!<sup>477</sup>

This need for unity amongst blacks is reiterated by Letta in the wake of the bus boycott that coincided with a crucial meeting regarding the London tour of the play *King Kong* in which they were to perform. The performers are asked by the organisers to observe the boycott. There is a clash of interests between the bus boycott organisers and the artists, with some artists keen to go to London with the play. However, this is resolved by Letta's proposal:

LETTA - Listen friends, "King Kong" is nothing against the wishes of our people! Those who live far and have got long distances to walk had rather stay home. Let us not betray the wishes of our own people

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<sup>475</sup> Glenda Dickerson, *The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward a Womanist Attitude in African-American Theatre*, *Theatre Journal* May 1992, p.184

<sup>476</sup> Maishe Maponya, *Letta*, unpublished play, p.22

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.* p.32

because of "King Kong". For that matter I will not come in tomorrow.<sup>478</sup>

Through Letta, Maponya can be said to encourage both self-sacrifices and patriotism, but at the same time emphasizes that personal goals and development should not be abandoned or sacrificed. However, given the fact that freedom is their long term goal, the struggle must continue side by side with their personal goals and interests.

It can be contested that, like Malcolm X, Letta does not only preach to others but becomes a living example in striving for unity amongst her people. The other similarity between the freedom struggle in South Africa and the American Civil Rights Movement is in the treatment of black leaders. Even though Maponya does not mention the arrest, trial and imprisonment of black leaders in South Africa, including Nelson Mandela, it occurred around the same period as the protest in America and assassination of both Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X in the 1960s. Miriam sees this similarity in the ill treatment of blacks in both America and South Africa as a call for blacks in both countries to join forces in their battle for their freedom:

MIRIAM - What did they do a few months ago? Kill Martin Luther. I guess as we sit. As South Africans, we cannot just be spectators. The scourge of the white race is upon the people even here in America.<sup>479</sup>

In America, especially in the South, blacks were made to toil in cotton fields with little rights even after the abolishing of slavery, in South Africa prisoners in white farms were treated not differently. Like their counterparts in America, white farmers in South Africa hired prisoners from prison authorities to work in their farms. This was an easy and cheap source of labour that helped cut labour costs and so maximized production especially when these prisoners were pushed just like slaves in America. This is reflected in this play by the treatment of prisoners in Modderbee and Leeuwkop:

CHORUS - The newspapers carry these reports. Black people know about it. The world knows about it. Those who refuse to dig amazambane ngezandla get whipped. Those who tire-up quickly get lashes, get buried in the potato farms. The story cannot go untold. The story of Modderbee and Leeuwkop. Until the authorities stop burying black prisoners in the potato farms. Until the authorities stop making black prisoners dig up potatoes with their bare hands.<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid. p.17

<sup>479</sup> Ibid. p.31

<sup>480</sup> Ibid. p.9

The inhuman treatment of prisoners and farm workers was so widespread under apartheid it provoked a harsh reaction from black leaders like Nelson Mandela. In his address that appears in his book, *The Struggle is my Life*, Mandela observes bitterly that the farm labourers were in a particular dire plight:

You will perhaps recall the investigation and exposure of the same slave conditions on the Bethal farms made in 1948. You will also recall how human beings wearing only sacks with holes for their heads and arms, never given enough food to eat, slept on cement floors on cold nights with only their sacks to cover their shivering bodies. You will remember how they were woken up as early as 4.AM and taken to work on the fields with indunas sjamboking those who tried to straighten their backs, who felt weak and dropped down because of hunger and sheer exhaustion.<sup>481</sup>

He remarks that one cannot help but recall the story of human beings toiling pathetically from early hours of the morning till sunset, fed only on mealie meal and eating with their dirty hands.

These people, treated as sub-humans, often fell ill, but never given medical attention.<sup>482</sup> Mandela continues:

You also recall the revolting story of a farmer who was convicted for tying a labourer by the feet from a tree and had him flogged to death, pouring boiling water into his mouth whenever he cried for water. These things which have long vanished from many parts of the world still flourish in South Africa.<sup>483</sup>

Given this similarity in the ill treatment of blacks both in America and South Africa, Maponya perceives the ill treatment of blacks as not against individual blacks in specific countries, but against the black race as a whole in the whole world. As a result, he calls for unity amongst blacks irrespective of their country of origin. Like Malcolm X, he sees this unity as the only way blacks could free their race from oppression and discrimination.

Like Ngema in *Magic at 4 AM*, Maponya goes on to observe in this play that apartheid, like cancer, regrettably has spread into almost every sphere in South African society including sports. Achievements in sports by black athletes were not only ignored by both white sports management and the media, but also ridiculed. Maponya dramatizes in *Letta*:

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<sup>481</sup> Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle is my Life*, p.62

<sup>482</sup> Ibid. p.62

<sup>483</sup> Ibid. p.62

JACK - King was champ remember. Yes, not so long ago and there wasn't a fighter in this whole country black or white who would stand six rounds with him. But what did it mean? Nothing! Oh yes he was a big shot around the townships, but did you see a white reporter at one of his fights? No. Did you ever see his name when they made up the ratings?

POP - No!

JACK - No. He was a non-European champ fighting for peanuts and who pays attention to that? Here, it's "push my car boy." It's "shut up Jim." "Take off your hat when you talk to me." "Where's your pass".<sup>484</sup>

It is clear from the conversation between the two characters that under apartheid blacks did not exist except when working in kitchens or toiling in gardens and farms of their white masters. However, he observes that this treatment did not dissuade the black masses from the struggle, instead it made them more resolved than ever to fight the system.

Finally, like Ngema and other black playwrights who addressed the question of spies planted within black communities by the system, Maponya notes in this play that despite numerous laws and Acts devised and passed by the system to crush any form of revolt, it had black spies within the black communities. The duty of these spies was to inform agents of the system on everything taking place within these communities.

It can be argued that this frequent address of spies within black communities caused a lot of damage to the freedom struggle hence why so much was written about it to awaken the black masses. However, Maponya does not suggest measures to be taken to address some of these things, probably to give his audience to reflect and reach its own decision.

### ***A Song for Biko***

This is a one man-play with two characters, Major Whitehead and Mr. Frank Talk, played by a single performer. It takes the audience through the process of interrogation, to which almost all political prisoners under apartheid were subjected. At first, the interrogator, Major Whitehead, is gentle with Mr. Frank Talk. Nevertheless, Major Whitehead gradually loses patience due to Mr. Frank Talk's refusal to accept that his poetry is instigating violence. Finally, Major Whitehead orders that he be subjected to electric shocks to force him to surrender, but Mr. Frank Talk does not.

The interrogating officer, Major Whitehead, is a manipulative white racist. He strongly believes and supports the apartheid system because he perceives it as a means of his survival for himself and his family. Consequently,

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<sup>484</sup> Maishe Maponya, *Letta*, unpublished play p.18

he is prepared to defend it by whatever means. As much as he is a skilled persuader and manipulator, Major Whitehead gets frustrated when things do not work out his way. This makes him reveal his true abusive and cruel nature, which he tries to hide to deceive his victims.

Even though the audience never comes to see or hear the voice of Maponya's protagonist, Mr. Frank Talk, he believes in the fight for freedom of blacks in South Africa regardless of his own life. He speaks his mind despite the consequences. However, given the fact that, like other blacks in South Africa, he is poor and has no other means to free his people, he is prepared to use his art to educate and influence the black masses against the apartheid system. It is important to note that 'Frank Talk' is a name that appears at the end of many of Steve Biko's speeches.

What is interesting about Maponya's characterisation in this play is the fact that it is a one-man play, or more of a monologue. As Major Whitehead is the only speaking character, Mr. Frank Talk is dramatically denied a voice, even though he is representative of his people. In a way, Maponya's character depiction and theatrical realisation is a clear representation of how blacks were denied a voice under apartheid. Furthermore, since the play is something of a tribute to Steve Biko, Maponya's plot can be seen as reliving Biko's experience at the hands of the police prior to his death.

*A Song for Biko* is divided into movements, which are more like acts or episodes. Unlike Chakela's play, in which each movement deals with a different issue, Maponya's play has a linear structure. The movements mark turning points in the interrogation of Mr. Frank Talk. Each movement begins with four poems to set the tone of the scenes that follow. They give the impression Mr. Frank Talk wrote them, since he is an artist advancing the struggle. The scenes themselves are called 'encounters'.

The fact that Maponya calls his scenes encounters, draws attention to the fact that this is not going to be a play like any other, but a racial, political, and economic confrontation between two opposing sides. Although a one-man play, the play requires several costumes for the four movements. However, in terms of lighting, sound and other technical effects, nothing special is required or specified.

It is worth noting that like Ngema's play, *Maria Maria*, *A Song for Biko* is a tribute to Steve Biko as the title implies. However, it focuses exclusively on his days as a detainee, to highlight the treatment of blacks in detention under apartheid South Africa. Consequently, when the curtain goes up the first thing that Maponya interrogates is the plight of blacks under the apartheid system, which is understandable given the maltreatment they were subjected to including Maponya himself.

With the help of his poems, the audience is exposed to the psychological state of Mr. Frank Talk. He appears to be tormented by both the

incarceration and everything to which blacks have been subjected. However, Maponya's protagonist observes that blacks have lost so much that they have got used to it. Consequently, instead of bemoaning, they have turned their defeat into victory and commemorate each of them. He notes how the system, disappointed by its failure to humiliate them and annoyed by the commemorations, banned such commemorations to silence them. Due to the silence brought about by the banning, he perceives the lives of blacks as being no different from the dead. Despite all these, the poems opening *A Song for Biko* believe blacks will never lose their sense of identity and once freedom is achieved, they will regain and revitalise it.

- We commemorated every loss into a victory until one day "they" outlawed every commemoration.
- Created a world of silence monumental facades in the likeness of the suckers before them.
- Thus a continent was lost to the children of the soil as home became a far cry.
- But if the clouds cleared we knew we would know the colour of the sky.<sup>485</sup>

Maponya can be seen as mocking the insecurity of the apartheid system, that even though the system had the power and means to silence and destroy the masses, blacks managed to cope with each of the attempts made against them. He can also be seen as demonstrating how powerful artists were despite the fact that they had nothing except "the word" with which to fight the system, they managed to voice their frustration and revealed the injustice perpetrated by the system against the black majority. It is this kind of poetry, designed to educate the masses, Mr. Frank Talk is brought before Major Whitehead to answer for.

Having had a brush, probably on numerous occasions with the agents of the apartheid system, Maponya appears conversant with the interrogation procedure from the beginning to the end, hence why he is able to bring that to the stage. In their first Encounter Major Whitehead is friendly and diplomatic with Mr. Frank Talk with regard to his poetry:

WHITEHEAD - Regulations, I'm afraid. That's why I got rid of Jonathan. I wanted to have an off-record chat with you. I didn't want him to report me upstairs for breaking the rules....Mr Frank Talk, we in the Branch are a little worried about your poetry. We feel it's inflammatory.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Maishe Maponya, *A Song For Biko*, p.4

<sup>486</sup> Ibid. p.6



Major Whitehead's dismissal of his assistant to talk in private with Mr. Frank Talk and his expression "A little worried," demonstrates how the system employed different tactics to woo individuals considered intelligent (and consequently a threat) to its side. In this case, Major Whitehead wants to appear modest and win over Mr. Frank Talk to the side of the system, and possibly to use him later to spread its propaganda amongst his people. This was a familiar divide-and-rule tactic meant to weaken the freedom struggle. However, Mr. Frank Talk is aware of this and consequently refuses to play along with Major Whitehead.

As implied in the play, the strength of interrogation technique lies in its ability to extract as much information as possible from a detainee regardless of the means employed. This means techniques become harsher over time if the interrogators do not get what they are looking for. Although there were many methods applied, including torture, the length of incarceration without outside communication was the main breaking point of some of those subjected to this inhuman exercise. However, Maponya suggests it often the frustrated and tired interrogators themselves who break if they were not getting the desired results. Consequently, in the second Encounter, Major Whitehead is no longer as gentle as he was previously. He tries to contain his temper hoping to convince Mr. Frank Talk to abandon his offensive poetry. Nevertheless, the two fail to agree that poetry has a negative impact on the black masses.<sup>487</sup>

It is important to mark how Maponya presents his story; to Major Whitehead, this is a game and he can wait and watches as his victim wears down, but to Mr. Frank Talk, it is a question of life and death. Given the different racial backgrounds of the two, they have different interests individually and racially. By the virtue of his colour and convictions as a white man, Major Whitehead has the government and its apartheid system to protect because it forms the basis of his life and that of his children. He makes this clear later in the play as the two lock horns:

WHITEHEAD - Do you see these hands? They are clean, unsoiled and they look friendly. Every-day when these hands get home, they lift up a one year bundle called David and they throw him into the air and they catch him - they tickle him and hold him steady as he threatens to fall over with pure enjoyment. But, Mr Frank Talk, in order to protect that little boy from you and your Marxist friends, in order to stop your violence and terror from changing that little boy's joy to tears, these hands will do anything- and blood will wash off very easily.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid. p.21

<sup>488</sup> Ibid. p.21

Even though Major Whitehead appears as if he is talking about his son, it is possible he is talking metaphorically about the apartheid system and himself. The hands he is referring to could be the apartheid system itself and the boy tickled may very well be himself. After all, the system was meant to provide him and other whites advantages, which undoubtedly would ensure their comfort at the expense of blacks and people of other races. As a result, he is prepared to do whatever possible to protect this system, which provides and forms the basis of his life, the same way a child would look after the interests of his father. Jordan Ngubane comments:

Racial fears constitute an important ingredient in the average white South African's approach to the race problem. He supports apartheid in one form or another because it gives him security in employment, in politics, and in every other field of activity, because it guarantees that despite the paucity of his numbers he is in control of the country.<sup>489</sup>

Ngubane argues that if the white South African was to share political power with the black or coloured African, they fear becoming swamped at the polls. Consequently, many other things would spiral out of control and chaos would follow, like black men marrying white women or plunging standards of performance at work, which would force the whites to abandon the comfort and the high standard of living enjoyed. Ngubane writes:<sup>490</sup>

If he lost these, the next thing for him to do would be to quit. And that would be the end of him. To prevent this happening, he must concentrate all political power and economic initiative in his hands. This, he believes, is his only guarantee of security.<sup>491</sup>

It is important to note that the question of the white man deciding to leave if he loses power as Ngubane predicted, might explain why so many white South Africans fled the country following the collapse of apartheid. And this is contrary to Bain and Hauptfleisch's assertion that they leave because of the intolerable situation that rose under democratic South Africa.<sup>492</sup> As noted earlier, it is possible their lack of preparation for a democratic South Africa, because they could not foresee or imagine competing on equal basis with blacks and people of other races, contributed to this evacuation.

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<sup>489</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*, p.233

<sup>490</sup> Ibid. p.233

<sup>491</sup> Ibid. p.233

<sup>492</sup> Keith Bain and Temple Hauptfleisch, *Playing the changes: Thoughts on the restructuring of the theatrical system and the arts industry in South Africa after apartheid*, *SATJ*, 2001, p.10

Reverting to the play, Maponya's use of Major Whitehead reflects the white fear that Marxism advocated equality, whereas apartheid was the opposite. As a result, Mr Whitehead fears should the country be taken over by people with Marxist ideologies, as the African National Congress and its allies like Black Conscious Movement and South African communist Party did, his people would lose the privileges the system offered. Ngubane observes the Afrikaner's obsession with apartheid:

The situation is complicated by the fact that the Afrikaner nationalist, who is the most determined advocate of race oppression, regards apartheid as something higher than a mere political formula. He sees it as a way of life, a world outlook by which to create for himself the social order after his design. He accepts apartheid as a vindication of himself, a guarantee of physical, cultural, and economic security and survival. It is the creation of his history, the concrete achievement that marks his moment of fulfillment.<sup>493</sup>

Given this situation, it can be contested Major Whitehead's belief and support of the system explains why he perceives Mr. Frank Talk's poetry that denounces the system as inflammatory and instigating violence. He is afraid should the black masses continue to be exposed to that kind of poetry, they are likely to awaken and revolt against the system.

WHITEHEAD - Can't you see that you are inciting people to violence with your poetry? When you use lines like "the barbed wire mentality of a good looking Afrikaner" you are insulting the Afrikaner people. When you write about the "trigger-happy finger" it shouldn't surprise you when the people respond by raising their fists into the air and shout "Amandla Ngawethu!"<sup>494</sup>

Through this character, Maponya exposes the link between artists and the freedom struggle and the influence artists had on it. He also indicates the psychological approach they used, knowing that in order for the freedom struggle to continue both the hearts and minds of the black masses must be won. Similarly, Steve Biko contests that for African to be free, they have to be freed from the shackles of mental slavery.<sup>495</sup> This explains why Major Whitehead tries to win Mr. Frank Talk to the side of the system, arguing that talent and intelligent blacks like him should abandon the freedom struggle and join the *petit bourgeois*,

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<sup>493</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*, p.3

<sup>494</sup> Maishe Maponya, *A Song for Biko*, unpublished play-1996, p.21

<sup>495</sup> Steve Biko, *I write what I like*. [1978], p.62

who are often seen as either neutral or envious of the white people's way of life. Norman Fairclough notes:

Ideological power, the power to project one's practices as universal and 'common sense', is a significant complement to economic and political power. There are in gross terms two ways in which those who have power can exercise it and keep it: through coercing others to go along with them, with the ultimate sanctions of physical violence or death; or through winning others' consent to, or at least acquiescence in, their possession and exercise of power. In short, through coercion or consent. In practice, coercion and consent occur in all sorts of combination.<sup>496</sup>

Clearly, Maponya's assertion is that the system made black activists feel as though the freedom struggle was a cause for poor and frustrated blacks. Considering the influence Mr. Frank Talk has as a poet, it would be a major victory for the system to have him on its side. Because the system could use him to spread its message, he is likely to convince the black masses that apartheid is after all not as evil as it is portrayed or perceived. Maponya implies this in their second Encounter:

WHITEHEAD - Okay, Mr. Frank Talk, for the purposes of this discussion I will agree that things are not perfect with you people, and this government is doing everything within realistic terms to improve their situation. But you as a poet have a responsibility to your people. I don't know why you choose to depress them by concentrating on the negative aspects of life. Why don't you cheer them up by talking about the good things that surround them. I'm not an expert of course but I had to learn one poem at school, which has stuck in my mind now that sort of poem Mr. Frank Talk has a beautiful melody to it and it makes me feel good inside not violent and angry.<sup>497</sup>

Maponya portrays a situation whereby the system tried to paint the freedom struggle as an obsession of the poor for material gains. However, being part of the oppressed black majority, Mr. Frank Talk has a different view of the freedom struggle and of apartheid itself. His goal and that of his people is to see themselves free from the shackles of apartheid. Joyce Sikakane observes this misconception or distortion of the freedom struggle by some whites under apartheid:

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<sup>496</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and power*, p.33

<sup>497</sup> Maishe Maponya, *A Song for Biko*, unpublished play-1996, p.11

They argued that people like myself, young, pretty intelligent, etc., were being misled by communists. They, on the other hand, were offering me a chance. I found this insulting. “What hypocrites...” I said inside me “...to say communists had misled me into wanting to change the system. I didn't need any communist to tell me that apartheid was evil”.<sup>498</sup>

Having failed to convince Sikakane, the system jailed and later banned her. Similarly, aware that he cannot change Mr. Frank Talk's mind, Major Whitehead orders his man, Jonathan, to torture him in order to force him to change his mind:

WHITEHEAD - Jonathan will you deal with Mr. Frank Talk as it seems fit and if you have to teach him that electricity has other uses than providing light you must do it. Do I have to start wondering where your loyalties lie Jonathan?<sup>499</sup>

Maponya characterizes the major as a cynical man who uses irony against his prisoner. Through this character, Maponya revisits the horrors of torture in which different methods were employed by the agents of the system to break down black political leaders and activists having failed to convince them otherwise. The International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa in co-operation with the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid remarks that the torture of detainees, sometimes so severe as to lead to death, was an integral part of the apartheid regime's practice of detaining people without trial for interrogation. There were powerful incentives to torture detainees in order to extract statements, “confessions,” or evidence. In addition, the conditions of secrecy under which people were detained allowed the police to subject them to torture without fear of punishment or retribution.<sup>500</sup>

Maponya makes his audience aware it was not every white officer who enjoyed torturing blacks, as evidenced by Jonathan's hesitation to torture Mr. Frank Talk. There were officers who opposed it but were forced by the system to carry out the evil deeds. Khosi Mbatha relates his ordeal while in detention:

You just heard someone interfering with your neck, they came with a wire. He says ‘I’m going to strangle you because you don’t want to tell the truth or tell me about the people. I will tell the whole world that you’ve committed suicide. Then he’d walk out. Some days I’d feel cold steel on my temple. He would say “I’m going to shoot you and nobody

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<sup>498</sup> Joyce Sikakane, *A window on Soweto*, pp.62,63

<sup>499</sup> Maishe Maponya, *A Song for Biko*, unpublished play-1996, p.21

<sup>500</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa and United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts*, p.63

will ever know because I've got the power, the privilege, and the protection, as a policeman." Then would walk out just like that.<sup>501</sup>

It is important to note that by denying Mr. Frank Talk a voice, Maponya demonstrates how blacks were silenced under apartheid. He also indicates the system did not just feed words into the mouths of blacks, but felt it knew what was good for them.

Despite the sufferings blacks in South Africa and the rest of the continent endured under colonialism and dictatorship, Maponya observes that giant international companies like Coca-Cola supported the oppressors together with groups such as RENAMO and UNITA, which were against the African unity. This intensified and prolonged the suffering of Africans. Mr. Frank Talk's poems lament toward the end of the play:

But what can we do?  
You see - Coca-Cola's been calling the shots.  
To create a new world order.  
Pretending like they never bolstered Savimbi.  
Lent a hand to Renamo.  
Ferried Contras into Nicaragua.  
Buttressed Sese Seko.  
Cushioned Hastings Banda.  
Until order became a far cry on the continent.<sup>502</sup>

Despite his observation, Maponya does not offer any suggestions to his audience regarding what should be done to remedy the situation, like he used to under apartheid. This by itself testifies a shift in his theatrical work as opposed to under apartheid. Although both plays have something to do with apartheid, they are just documenting lives of South African who suffered in the name of freedom. Clearly, this change is due to political change in the country.

### 3.3 Fatima Dike

Women playwrights are comparatively rare in most societies but in black societies, and South Africa is not an exception. Of those in South Africa, Fatima Dike is one of the most prominent. Like her male colleagues, much of her work during apartheid focused on tackling the injustices of the system experienced by black people. Some of her plays of that time include *The Sacrifice of Kreli*

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<sup>501</sup> Ibid. p.63

<sup>502</sup> Maishe Maponya, *A Song for Biko*, p.18

(1972), which deals with African resistance to colonialism, *The First South Africa* (1977), explores racial identity, and *Glass House* (1979), inspired by the 1976 student uprising.

However, in post-apartheid South Africa there is a sharp and interesting change in the issues Dike addresses. Her latest play *So, What's New?* focuses exclusively on issues pertaining to women, such as mother-daughter relationships and unemployment. Furthermore, it deals with the issues of drug trafficking, with women being perpetrators. All her characters are women, and are created in such a way that they represent women in the townships of South Africa.

The *So What's New?* was published in 1999 by University of Cape Town Press in Kathy Perkins's anthology *South African Black Women Playwrights*. Dike's *AIDS: The New Generation* was first performed in 1999 in Khayelitsha. It was directed by Dumile Magodla, featuring Pumla Stamper, Ncumbisa Buwa, Anita Ndevu and Abie Xakwe.

### ***So, What's New?***

The play is about an unmarried black woman, Dee, who lives in Soweto, the largest black township or residential area outside Johannesburg. Dee's life is influenced by four factors; first, her work as a businesswoman, a shebeen<sup>503</sup> owner. Second, her relationship with her male partner. Third, her relationship with her friends, who happen to be her customers as well. Finally her relationship with her daughter. The audience sees Dee manoeuvring her way through these roles, changing hats as she struggles to maintain her relationship with different people, including her daughter.

Like a lot of uneducated and/or unemployed black South African women, Dee earns her living by running a shebeen. Consequently, her house serves as both her domestic and work space. This has an influence on her relationship with her daughter, Mercedes. She wants to instill a sense of responsibility in her daughter, but the coming and going of her customers and the informality existing between her customers and herself, makes this impossible. Her daughter wants to adopt a similar attitude of informality towards her. As a result, Dee is both strict and protective of her daughter in order to keep her in line. Thus, she oscillates between being a businesswoman and a mother.

The same oscillation applies to Dee's friends. She constantly has to shift between being a friend to a businessperson in her friends' presence to ensure the success of her business. Consequently, this irritates her friends because it denies them an opportunity to do as they please in her business. Finally, her boyfriend, Willie, whom the audience never sees, but is only referred to throughout the play, also has influence on Dee's life. Although the two are not officially married, they live together at Dee's place. However, Willie still sleeps around with other women. It appears as though he does not love Dee but only

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<sup>503</sup> Informal place for selling alcohol, often illegal or unlicensed.

uses her to provide for his basic needs. This infuriates Dee but she never brings herself to break their relationship because she feels that she needs a man in her life.

Mercedes is Dee's teenage daughter and her only child. She is in high school and plays sports, including netball. She stays after school to practice and returns home late, which puts her in trouble with her mother. Mercedes is excited about life, love, clothes, boys, cars and fun like most teenagers. However, she is also politically minded, which causes a problem for her mother.

Pat is Dee's friend and a customer. She makes her living as a hawker, selling clothes from door to door. At the end of each day she calls at Dee's place for a beer in time for the two to watch the soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* on television. Pat does not make much money from her business and consequently owes Dee for her daily beer. This makes the two clash each time Pat asks for a beer. However, she always manages to convince Dee she will pay her and ends up having a couple of beers on credit. Once the dispute over beer is settled, they quarrel over the soap.

Dee's second customer is Thandi, Pat's sister. The difference between the two sisters is that Pat sells clothes, whereas Thandi sells drugs. As a result, the two sisters do not see eye-to-eye, especially when their mother is asking Pat all the time about Thandi's whereabouts, since Thandi does not spend much time at home but runs after her drug suppliers and clients.

Dike says that this play is based on personal experiences. However, it does not dramatize her own life but that of the people she met and whose lives fascinated her. The play was also influenced by the status quo in the democratic South Africa. She comments on the writing of the play:

I was living in Johannesburg with Nomhle Nkonyeni and she had brought a woman from Port Elizabeth to look after her grand-child. And the other lady who lived in the building, Gertrude, ran a shebeen on the top floor of the building. And every day, religiously at 4:00 p.m. Gertrude used to go out with four cases of beer bottles and would return with the bottles filled and leave them in Nomhle's kitchen. By 5:30 she had finished buying all the booze she needed for the evening.<sup>504</sup>

Dike relates how Gertrude, once done with her errands, would then sit in front of the television with Nomhle, the caretaker, to watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The interesting thing was that Gertrude hated sex, but she enjoyed watching it on television while the caretaker loved sex. This made the two argue every time they watched the soap.<sup>505</sup> In terms of violence, Dike recalls:

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<sup>504</sup> Fatima Dike, in Kathy Perkins's ed., *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.25

<sup>505</sup> Ibid. p.25



I went to stay with another woman in Albertina, at the height of the violence, when they were killing people in what was then Eastern Transvaal. So the violence that we hear outside the window in the play is real.<sup>506</sup>

Dike's statement shows that her play is based on lived experiences and consequently represents the lives of ordinary people in South Africa, their way of life, problems, interests, fears and frustrations. She observes that, "theatre always has to be an educator. It should reflect the society in which people live in."<sup>507</sup> However, her explanation regarding the writing of the play also indicates that it is exclusively about women, and as a result, all her characters are women. Her argument is that little has been said or is known about women's lives, achievements and experiences because in the past the attention was on the fight against the apartheid system. Consequently, other challenges like women's issues were not regarded as important compared to the struggle against apartheid.<sup>508</sup> Glenda Dickerson writes:

The problem is that women of color have been silenced for so long that when we finally get a forum, we can't shut up. So I'm not going to talk too long, but I'm going to talk for a minute. And I want to talk today about the silenced voice of the women of color.<sup>509</sup>

However, Dike admits that anti-apartheid solidarity did not mean women were not aware of the contribution they were making in all walks of life, hence the writing of this play as soon as the struggle was over. As a result, the play is dedicated to the women of South Africa. She argues that South African women do great things, but very little is known about them. Even during the era of protest theatre, most plays produced were by men and about men in the struggle. She says one of her pains that she had to live with was the fact that a lot of these women were the ones left behind by men who went into exile, to prison at Robben Island or were killed. As a result, women were the ones who kept the country and the struggle going.<sup>510</sup>

Interestingly, even though Dike is concerned about the way women in South Africa have been ignored, she does not appear bitter when dealing with gender issues in this play. Her characters deal with issues in the same way as

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid. p.24

<sup>507</sup> Ibid. p.25

<sup>508</sup> Ibid. p.1

<sup>509</sup> Glenda Dickerson, "The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward a Womanist Attitude in African-American Theatre", *Theatre Journal* May [2002], p. 197

<sup>510</sup> Fatima Dike, in Kathy Perkins's ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], pp.28,30

ordinary people do. However, the fact that the boyfriend of Dike's lead character, Willie, does not work and depends on Dee for everything including food, clothes and shelter, demonstrates that in the democratic South Africa women are still the ones keeping the country going.

DEE - I want to go somewhere, Willie took my car. Tomorrow I'm throwing all his clothes out on the street, whoever wants them can have them, they can have a jumble sale.

THANDI - Polo, Pierre Cardin, Yves Saint Laurent. Yoo Big Dee! I can imagine him running around in his under-pants. I can also see war on this street, people fighting over Willie's clothes. In fact that's a sight I wouldn't miss seeing.

DEE - In fact if you want them, you can have them. You can start a flea market at the gate, you will make a fortune, I know how much I paid for those clothes.<sup>511</sup>

The discussion between the two characters indicates that even though Dee is a woman, she is the breadwinner and maintains both her family and boyfriend. This is a reversal of the normal situation in black patriarchal society whereby men are often breadwinners while women are entrusted with looking after the home and children. However, given the political history of South Africa whereby men were in the centre of detention without trial, long imprisonment, exile, armed struggle or killed, women were compelled to take the lead in their families. They had to replace fathers, brothers and husbands as breadwinners. Unfortunately, as Dike's play highlights, some of the men who were left behind, like Willie, took advantage of the situation regarding the shortage of men, to sleep with as many women as possible instead of engaging in constructive ventures. The other important aspect with regard to the discussion between the two is the design of the clothes that Willie wears. This shows that Dee does not only take care of his basic needs but also ensures that he wears quality clothes. There can be only one explanation to this: given the shortage of men she wants to make sure that she outshines other women to keep him.

Another woman who has to maintain a male relative is Dee's customer, Thandi, who supports her brother. She lives with him and his friends. Ironically, all these men do not work, and as a result, depend on her.

THANDI - Dee, do you know that on top of everything, my brother has moved back the house. As if that is not enough, his friends have moved back in with him. I have just had a big fight with him. I told him, "That food you're eating, that bed you're sleeping on, the blankets you sleep

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid. p.31

under and that couch your friends spill booze on are mine, I paid for them.”<sup>512</sup>

It is important to note that all these men are portrayed as irresponsible: Dee's boyfriend spends his time having sex with other women, while Thandi's brother and his friends spend their time consuming alcohol. Given the fact that this play is based on lived experience, and considering that this is common in many townships, it seems that Dike's concern is to show that some men are a burden to women more than housewives are to husbands without receiving the same treatment wives are subjected to. This is reflected in the joke between the two:

PAT - Picture this: Bra Willie is on his knees polishing the floor, with a baby on his back. You come home from work, throw your briefcase on the sofa in the lounge, throw yourself over to grab the remote control and watch the news on TV while you kick your shoes off one by one. Bra Willie comes, and ever so gently peels your socks off while he makes sure that he is not standing in front of the screen. A hot cup of tea makes its way into your eager hands, you sip and swallow, no sugar. You tell Bra Willie rudely that the tea has no sugar, he apologizes profusely as he makes his way into the kitchen to get the sugar, saying "Mama, I am so sorry, but I went to the clinic today and the doctor told me that I was pregnant again.

DEE - Oooo, I'd love to finish this off. "Willie", I'd say, "besides being a bad housekeeper, you're a bad cook and now you want to be a breeding machine. Unfortunately, I can't let you do that here. Pack your bags and go home, tell your father I'll be coming to demand my lobola [dowry] back. I'm sure there are many men out there who could do what you have failed to do, better".

PAT - Right on!

DEE - Hey, that's reverse sexism.<sup>513</sup>

Even though the two women make a joke about Willie's behaviour, their dialogue points to the idea that if it was a woman behaving in this manner she would be in trouble with her man. Consequently, it sheds light on the double standard of black patriarchy. It is at this stage that one would expect Dike to press harder and drive the message home to help root out this kind of stereotype but she does not. A lot of hints on malpractice, common in many patriarchal societies on major issues are scattered throughout this play but left without a

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid. pp.27,28

<sup>513</sup> Ibid. p.28

definite conclusion regarding what step ought to be taken to rectify them. Maybe, like Brecht, she leaves this to her audience to decide.

Although it can be interpreted as ironic, the reflection on reverse sexism also indicates why Dike restrained herself from writing a play of this nature during the struggle. Undoubtedly, she would be perceived as a sellout, or worse, as a tool of the oppressor to divide 'the black family because the tone was likely to be associated with feminism and viewed as just another way the apartheid system was trying to divide the black masses by inciting division and violence within black families. Barbara Smith comments:

A community which has not confronted sexism, because a widespread Black feminist movement has not required it to, has likewise not been challenged to examine the heterosexism. Even at this moment I am not convinced that one can write explicitly as a Black lesbian and live to tell about it.<sup>514</sup>

However, in this new political dispensation the issues that Dike raises in this play can given the current democracy be discussed without been seen as unpatriotic.

The oppressive and discriminatory nature of black patriarchy is one of Dike's main concerns, based on the discussion she dramatises between Dee and Pat. First, the question of women not being well treated by their husbands has been mentioned repeatedly, especially through feminisms. The main social problem to overcome is that women have to do housework, look after children and also serve their husbands. Furthermore, some are made to bear children continuously without any physical or psychological break. As a result, women are subjected to both physical and mental pressure throughout their married lives. This makes them appear like slaves rather than equal partners in a marriage. Glenda Dickerson comments that when one starts reading ancient myths, feminist literature and travelling to countries where the people look like her, she gained global perspective. She regrets that not only is the language of oppression the same the world over; the anguish of women is echoed around the world and resonates from continent to continent.<sup>515</sup>

Dike then revisits the question of uncontrolled and endless childbearing, a rather sensitive issue in many black communities. A person who is not conversant with African traditions may wonder why these women do not consult their clinics or pursue better communication with their partners to prevent themselves from frequently falling pregnant. Family planning or child prevention in traditional Africa is taboo if is without the family, especially, the husband consent. A woman who engages in such measures is regarded as immoral. It is

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<sup>514</sup> Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", *The New Feminism Criticism*. [1985], p.182

<sup>515</sup> Glenda Dickerson, "The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward a Womanist Attitude" in African-American Theatre, *Theatre Journal* May [2002], p.184

often suspected that she is preventing herself from falling pregnant because she is involved in extra-marital affairs. Consequently, such marriages are likely to collapse under the pressure of both their society and the in-laws, especially mothers-in-law. Traditional marriages are centred on childbearing and a woman's respect is earned through the number of children she has. If a woman does not bear children, she is a curse to a family she has married into. As a result, a woman is held hostage by these traditional values imposed by society. Smith laments:

Black women's existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex system of oppression which shape these are in the real world of white and/or male consciousness beneath consideration, invisible, unknown. The invisibility, which goes beyond anything that either black men or white women experience and tell about in their writing, is one reason it is so difficult for me to know where to start. It seems overwhelming to break such a massive silence.<sup>516</sup>

As indicated in the exchange between the two characters, the other thing that holds women hostage is lobola (dowry), which is paid to the woman's parents when a woman marries. As Dee and Pat state, lobola is the first thing a man's parents demand back if they are not satisfied with the woman for whom the lobola was paid. This means that the woman has to do whatever possible, even wash her husband's feet to be seen as humble. The removal of socks in this play indicates this. All this is done to please both her husband and his family, so that she can be praised for her hard work, humility and obedience.

Related to questions of exploitation and oppression is the issue of labour. In the joke Pat and Dee share, both the woman and the man have been working; the woman takes care of both the house and children while the man is at work. However, the woman's work is not recognised because it involves housework including looking after children with no financial reward. The man's work on the other hand includes an official paycheck. This makes him feel superior to the extent that when he arrives home he has to be treated like a king, as though he was not the only one who has been involved in significant work.

Even though Pat and Dee do not mention it, in modern days both men and women work outside the house. The problem raised repeatedly is that men still expect women to take over all housework chores when they arrive at home. Furthermore, women are expected to be willing to engage in sex before they go to bed. This is one hot issue that women complain about, that whether tired or not, they are expected by their husbands to have sex and should appear to enjoy it. Despite the change in time and responsibilities, this stereotype persists and is

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<sup>516</sup> Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", *The New Feminism Criticism*. [1985], p.168

something that one would expect Dike to address not unless she leaves it for her audience to reach its own conclusion.

Dike's shortcoming in this regard is that even though she acknowledges the fact that both men and women work, men still continue to pay lobola today. Social friction ensues when it comes to equal rights in a democratic society that perceives women and men as equal and yet men have to pay a substantial amount of money to a woman's family before they can marry. However, Dike's staying clear from this question and not challenging the practice of lobola is possibly due to the fact that the amount of money or number of cattle paid for marriage makes the parents of the woman to be envied by others. Apart from that, lobola benefits the family of the woman so much so that immediately after birth when the people are told the newly born baby is a girl the usual comment is "Likhomo ke tseo," which means "there comes cattle."

Dike's play raises questions about self-censure of authors. It seems that in her play *So, What's New?* Dike is trying to avoid direct confrontation with women and men who still subscribe to the necessity of lobola. As noted earlier, had these gender issues, pressing as they are, been raised during apartheid, it could have been misinterpreted and resulted in severe criticism. Black playwrights were expected to unify the black masses in the fight against the apartheid system instead of advancing their own agenda. Chiekh Hamidou Kane explains African literature and expectation on its writers:

Our literature avoids anything that will exalt the individual who remains in harmonious union with the group: neither selfishness nor self-centredness is conceivable. This literature constitutes a mine of information, a repertory of precepts and crystal-clear evidence of what is permanent in African values. Its main objective is to help man find his real place in the world and not further any kind of minority entertainment.<sup>517</sup>

Kane's comments can therefore explain the harshness with which communities responded to what it regarded as dissenting voice among its members. This is demonstrated by the way Soweto community reacted to one of the artists, Credo Mutwa, in 1976 with regard to his letter to the then Minister of Justice, Jimmy Kruger:

In an unsolicited letter to the Minister of Justice, Jimmy Kruger, Credo Mutwa, the author of *uNosilimela*, compared Black Consciousness to Nazism and urged the government to suppress the June uprising by

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<sup>517</sup> Cheikh Hamidou Kane, "The African writer and his Public" in G.D. Killam *African Writer on African Writing*. [1973] p.69

sending in the army. In retaliation the people of Soweto burnt his house down and his family's cars.<sup>518</sup>

However, even in post-apartheid South Africa, Dike is not as forceful as one would expect when addressing such pressing issues as though she is careful not to offend black patriarchy. This is indicated by the fact that her characters joke about such serious matters. Even the issue of unfaithfulness and exploitation that is prevalent and raised by many black playwrights is dealt with lightly. In this play, Dee knows that her boyfriend, Willie, is a playboy, but she does not deal with the matter seriously. Instead she waits and dreams about the day the two will get married. This is different from Thulani Mtshali's character, Tsoarelo, in *Weemen* (1998), as will become clear in the next chapter. It appears Dike is making a statement that women should be tolerant so that they can be rewarded with marriage, a sentiment consonant with black patriarchy propaganda. Dike's handling of serious issues such as this in a comical manner might be explained in the same breath as the success of plays such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Although the play tackles serious issues, it was more of a comedy of Kani's and Fugard's avoidance of direct confrontation with the apartheid system, which could have been the case had they adopted a different tone. Consequently, comedy has proved to be the way forward in dealing with issues of serious concern in situations where there might be repercussions, and Dike seems to be adopting the same approach. Another possible interpretation for the playwright to choose for a lighter narrative strategy is that a direct 'feminist' approach, often criticised as a white ideology and a means to divide black communities, could have a counterproductive effect, making the public refuse to listen to such questions.

The fact that the play is set against the backdrop of *The Bold and the Beautiful* may indicate that Dike, like kaNcube, sees a negative effect Western films and television have on locals. However, the public could interpret it as an encouragement of unfaithfulness, manipulation and promiscuity as portrayed in this soap opera. In fact, there is a similarity between the characters in this soap and her play. Dee resembles Sally Spectra while Willie is similar to Clark. Sally in *The Bold and the Beautiful* has money and is in a position to maintain Clark. Similarly Dee in this play has the means as well, although not as wealthy as Sally, does maintain her boyfriend. Despite this good treatment, both men are not faithful to their women. Dee observes this similarity:

DEE - Sally has a brain in her head like me, not between her legs like some people

I know. Clark will not get away with his bullshit.

PAT - I hope for your sake.

DEE - What do you mean?

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<sup>518</sup> Gibson Kente, *South African People's Plays*. [1981], p.xviii

PAT - I'm thinking about you and Willie.

DEE - Clark is slut, he'll sleep with anything on two legs if it wears a skirt. If Willie tries anything like that, I will cut his b...e...e...e...s off.<sup>519</sup>

Even though Dee swears to retaliate if she finds out that her boyfriend is betraying her, she fails to take appropriate measures when that time comes later in the play. On the contrary, even though the storyline here does not go that far, given Sally Spectra's status in the soap opera's society, she would have kicked Clark out. In this case one sees tolerance on the side of Dee probably due to her societal pressures and norms for her to be accepted.

DEE - I know he is with that bloody Thoko again. That woman, I swear I will kill them both if I catch them together. Look at this, look at this! Have you ever seen me in a red bikini for that matter? To make matter worse the keys were hanging there for anyone to take.<sup>520</sup>

The fact that Dee found a "red bikini" in her car, which was used by Willie, indicates that Willie and his lover were having sex in Dee's car. Furthermore, the fact that Dike's character does not take action demonstrates how entrenched, powerful and influential black patriarchy is. Dee's defense is to boast "I've got someone to keep me warm, what about you?"<sup>521</sup> It is clear Dee and Willie stay together for convenience. It is a question of pride on the side of Dee and survival on Willie's.

Most of these issues regarding marriage, women, abuse and exploitation Thulani Mtshali addresses in his play *Weemen*, and reiterates the plight of black women in traditional marriages. However Mtshali goes further to suggest measures that women should take, but Dike refrains from doing so even though she acknowledges that the role of theatre is to bring about change. "Sometimes we try to write plays to change the society's view of things."<sup>522</sup> This might imply that she wants her audience to be aware of these things and reach its own decision instead of being told what to do.

The issue that Dike seems to focus largely on is the struggle of single and unemployed women raising children in a democratic, but violent and dangerous South Africa. Although Dike's lead character, Dee, stays with her boyfriend, she can be regarded as a single parent since her boyfriend does not offer any support in any way including bringing up her daughter. This makes her a good example of a single and self-employed woman struggling to bring up children in a township. The first major challenge to these women is the safety of

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<sup>519</sup> Fatima Dike, in Kathy Perkins's ed., *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.27

<sup>520</sup> Ibid. p.30

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.p.28

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.p.24



their children, especially if they are girls. This can be attributed to the high rate of rape and strangling of women and girls. As a result, mothers often get alarmed if their daughters fail to arrive home at the usual time and such is Dee's reaction:

DEE - Hey, it's seven o'clock. Where is that child of mine? Mercedes, what time is it?

MERCEDES - ...Today is Wednesday, we have netball practise.

DEE. - ...If netball is going to keep you out this late, you will have to give it up.<sup>523</sup>

Dee's statement indicates how crime and violence in the country restricts women's freedom. It is worth observing not only mothers with young girls are concerned about the safety of their daughters, but those with adult daughters as well:

PAT - Hey, did you say Thandi? Is Thandi back in town? Uyazi Dee, I could kill that little sister of mine. My mother is for-ever asking about her, "Where's Thandi, where's Thandi?" as if I don't exist. She nearly went crazy, she almost drove me crazy too. I had to take her to every bloody police station, mortuary, your dagga friends and mandrax dealers.<sup>524</sup>

The problem of girls falling pregnant is another challenge that worries mothers. This is probably due to the high rate of teenage pregnancy in the country, which ruins most of these teenagers' lives. Dee observes this:

DEE - Today your excuse is netball practice, tomorrow it will be netball practice. You are still a baby. I don't want you dropping another baby on my lap. Your father died, mtwanami (my child), without leaving us a cent. I want you to learn and make your own future. I want you to bring me a degree, not a birth certificate, siyavana (we understand each other)?

PAT - Kodwa, I think you are a bit hard on her.

DEE - Pat, what do you expect me to do? Hee? Times have changed. If I don't tell her now what's right and what's wrong, tomorrow will be too late.<sup>525</sup>

Undoubtedly, from Dee's outburst it is clear that when it comes to the discipline of girls, Dike encourages mothers to take a firm stand and ensure that their

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid. p.29

<sup>524</sup> Ibid. pp.29, 30

<sup>525</sup> Ibid. p.29

children, especially girls, do not engage in any misconduct which will eventually put their future in jeopardy. This is understandable given the fact that if girls fall pregnant, they are often expelled from school or forced by circumstances to drop out to give birth and look after their babies. The issue of girls being expelled from school after falling pregnant has been at the centre of debate given the fact that boys who have caused the problem are left to continue with their studies. The critics of these measures taken by schools perceive this as another way black patriarchy discriminates and subjects women to men's domination. This situation makes women powerless, dominated and probably abused by their husbands or madams, if they are maids. One way or the other they stand to be dominated for the rest of their lives.

Dike argues that as much as shebeen queens like Dee try to be strict with their daughters, the situation these children are raised under is not conducive for the proper upbringing of children. Mercedes observes the sexual harassment she is subjected to by her mother's customers:

MERCEDES - I know she loves me. But when is she going to understand me the way I understand her? Do you know how many men propose to me every night in this shebeen? Yet she worries about who walks me home from school.<sup>526</sup>

The other issue Dike addresses in this play is the challenge black women face as business-persons. It is rather common in black communities, especially among friends and relatives to tend to think that they are entitled to take goods or use business facilities without paying for them just because they are known by or are related to the owner. Such people are often offended if prevented from doing so. This is the case in this play. As a friend, Pat expects Dee to allow her to take beer without paying for it, disregarding the fact that Dee has to pay before she can get the beer from the bottle store. Pat responds to Dee, "You're a miser. What is your money beside my friendship?"<sup>527</sup> If permitted, this attitude often leads to the collapse of many small black businesses, especially if the concerned person wants to be in good relationship with their friends and relatives. In order to keep both her business and friends, Dee strives to keep the line between friendship and business clear. As a result, she constantly shifts from being Pat's friend to being a businessperson by updating Pat's debt, "You now owe me R178...now you owe R180."<sup>528</sup>

The fact that people have drinking accounts at their favourite shebeens, and a woman in particular, shows the extent of alcohol abuse in the townships. The

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid. p.37

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.p.28

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.pp.27,28

reason why certain activities if done by women exaggerate activities get exaggerated will be discussed later in relation to drugs.

Still on the question of shebeens as business, one would expect Dike to demonstrate that very few blacks, if any at all own breweries. However, in almost every street in most townships one can find an outlet of a sort shebeen, tavern or liquor business. Although it is understandable it may be one of the few business ventures blacks can undertake, it is destroying black communities given that alcohol leads to all sorts of negative effects such as crime and domestic violence, which in turn leads to the breaking up of families. In a fairly recent sociological study, the authors establish that:

Alcohol availability is measured by alcohol outlet rates. We examine total alcohol outlet rates, which include both on-site [e.g. bars] and off-site ([e.g. liquor stores) outlets per 1000 track population. We do so as both types of out-lets could contribute to violence through their disorganising effects for communities.<sup>529</sup>

However, it can also make one wonder how blacks can sustain such a massive business when the majority is classified as poor or unemployed. There can be only one possible answer: alcoholics are not reluctant to spend even their last penny on liquor, hence why poverty is rife in many black communities. However, it is not only alcohol abuse that plagues many townships; drug abuse is another and with terrible consequences, especially among youth:

THANDI - Oh, that is disgusting! Mercedes, I can't be held responsible for all the Fools in the world. Besides, if your mother felt she was cheating some women out of food or money for her children every time she sold a nip, she wouldn't be where she is today.

MERCEDES - My mother doesn't sell liquor to children. You sell drugs. Do you know where yours end up?

THANDI - An adult can walk in here now, buy liquor and give it to a kid outside, it's the same thing.

MERCEDES - Oh no it's not! My mother does not sell take-away, period.

THANDI - If I don't sell them somebody else will.

MERCEDES - That is no answer, Sis Thandi.<sup>530</sup>

It can be contended that through these two characters Dike implies that there are some people, like the character of Thandi, who think selling drugs is a business

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<sup>529</sup> Arnie Nielsen, Ramiro Martinez jr and Matthew Lee, "Alcohol, Ethnicity and Violence", *The Sociology Quarterly*, Summer [2005], p.6

<sup>530</sup> Fatima Dike, in Kathy Perkins's ed., *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.37

no different from selling alcohol, failing to realise that there is age restriction when it comes to the sale of alcohol meant to protect children against alcohol abuse to safeguard their future. Furthermore, although alcohol might be intoxicating, the consequences are serious enough, as alcoholism has dramatic effects on family and social life and even leads to the death of the users as indicated in many play but it takes much more time and more drinking than using drugs, as Mercedes observes:

MERCEDES - My friend Billy was very clever in school! The other night I saw him sitting outside his house, I waved and called out to him. He was so bombed that he couldn't lift his arm to wave. All he talks about nowadays is mandrax.<sup>531</sup>

As much as Thandi understands the effect of drugs on society, especially amongst the youth and feels sorry for it, she perceives herself as just a drop in the ocean. Consequently, she believes that her stopping selling drugs will not make any difference. Apart from that she does not regard drug dealers as the only culprit, but big companies and manufacturers as well.

THANDI - Do you think cigarette companies feel guilty every time a younger person lights up? No! They know that they have a potential customer for life. They are worse hypocrites than me, they put signs on their packs about the surgeon general warning people about the dangers of smoking. So, you see, it's everybody for him-and God for us all.<sup>532</sup>

It appears Dike's argument is that both the authorities and the public operate double standards: condemning the little dealers but not the major culprits. Instead of blaming dealers out in the streets or hard drugs alone, they should also accuse giant companies producing alcohol and tobacco because they cause a lot of damage in the society with their products. Consequently, if drastic measures are to be taken, they should be directed to all sources of the problem.

THANDI - I really don't know what to say. I can say to you I'll stop, but I can't because I have a spare wheel full of tablets which is going to help me pay my bills and buy me a house maybe.<sup>533</sup>

The fact that Dike has a female character as a drug-trafficker emphasizes the availability of drugs and the level of drug trafficking in the country.

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid.p.37

<sup>532</sup> Ibid. p.37

<sup>533</sup> Ibid. p.45

As indicated earlier, in most black communities women are regarded as minors. For this reason, there are certain things, especially those associated with masculinity like drinking, smoking and drugs, which women are not expected to do. Consequently, the fact that these things are done by women in this play indicates that either they have lost meaning or the situation is out of control to the extent that even women are doing them. Obviously, Dike considers drug trafficking in the country totally out of control, hence women like Thandi are dealing in drugs and have access to large quantities.

In a way, Dike's appeal to the culprits, either shebeen queens like Dee or drug dealers like Thandi, implies that they should give up this kind of life and reconsider other professions or their former careers and make a decent living.

MERCEDES - Seriously why don't you guys get back together and revive the Chattanooga Sisters? You'd be great, I can see mum charming those guys off their pants, Sis' Thandi will have them eating out of her hands with chocolate tenor, and Sis' Pat will be such a slut they won't be able to keep their hands off her.

PAT - Dee, the music business is different today. Look at Mahotella Queens; they have made a come back, they are making money. If we find a good producer what is there to stop us? We can make a name for ourselves and cosy nest to line our pockets at the same time.

THANDI - You know Pat, some of the young musicians today can't sing to save their lives. They are either monotonous or they try to be American. If we got together, we could show these kids the real music of this country. Mbanqanga will take the world by storm.

PAT - We could go to the SABC archives and dig out songs of the fifties.<sup>534</sup>

Through these characters, Dike seems to see big opportunities in the music industry which were not there in the past despite the abundance of talent. On the contrary, the younger generation is uncreative regardless of the amount of money it makes and opportunities it has. Consequently, their music is not as entertaining as music used to be in the past. This leaves the door wide open for old musicians to make a comeback which will help them make a fortune

Finally, Dike acknowledges the contribution South African youth has made to the freedom struggle. However, she encourages the youth to concentrate on their studies to be in a position to play a meaningful role in their societies.

MERCEDES - I know what I want. So does Victor. I don't run in front, I don't wave, I go to school. I'll go to university and I'll work with my people.<sup>535</sup>

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid. p.37

Given the number of issues that Dike addresses in this play, it can be said that the silence which Glenda Dickerson referred to earlier which women have been subjected to has been shattered by the birth of democracy.

### ***AIDS: The Next Generation***

In this play Dike tackles the spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Her two lead characters Khayaletu and Palesa are AIDS activists, but both of them end up HIV positive due to Khayaletu's irresponsibility and sexual adventures. He gets infected with HIV during one of his one-night stands after which he infects Palesa. *AIDS: The Next Generation* is community theatre, theatre-in-education type meant to educate the audience on a given subject. The thrust of this drama is to overcome naivety and promote sexual and social awareness about HIV in South Africa.

Dike's characters in this play are not that well developed as compared to her other plays. As a result, the play can be read as Dike's voice to demonstrate how AIDS can be spread from one person to another and the alarming speed with which it can be spread.

Khayaletu and Palesa cannot be considered immoral people. However, Khayaletu is naive to what AIDS is or the way it is transmitted. In real life, some people in many communities are involved in campaigns like "Fight against women abuse," "moral regeneration," and "Fight against HIV/AIDS" to be seen as "politically correct." They consequently benefit from the funding that goes with such campaigns even though they may not believe in or be committed to the cause. Likewise Khayaletu might not be committed to the AIDS campaign but is involved because his girlfriend is. It also affords him an opportunity to meet a lot of young women he can deceive as committed to fighting against AIDS. This is evidenced by the fact that he refuses to use condoms and has unprotected sex even with strangers. Khayaletu's friend, Meulelo, on the other hand, is well informed about AIDS, and he guides other people like Khayaletu who are still ignorant about the pandemic.

Helen Jackson writes, about the pandemic and its origin, that Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) emerged in the 1980s as the most terrifying epidemic of modern times, similar to the 'black death' or bubonic plague of the Middle Ages in Europe that killed millions. It was initially called GRID or Gay-Related Immune Deficiency Syndrome, since it was identified in gay men in the US in 1980-81.<sup>535</sup> Bunmi Makinwa observes despite decades since the world came to know about HIV/AIDS, there still no cure or vaccine for

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid. p.37

<sup>536</sup> Helen Jackson, *AIDS Africa: Continent in Crisis*. [1980], pp.1,2

HIV/AIDS. Consequently, the epidemic continues to spread, with African countries at all levels of society bearing the heaviest burden of the scourge.<sup>537</sup>

It is time we get our priorities right. No terrorist attack, no war, has ever threatened the lives of more than 40 million people world wide. AIDS does, the great majority of these people live in Africa. Indeed, Africa is a continent in crisis. We bear responsibility to address it for what it is, with the maximum conviction and clearest understanding we can command.<sup>538</sup>

It can be argued, therefore, that this threat of AIDS to humanity, especially to the poor, is the one that compelled Dike to perceive HIV/AIDS differently as evidenced by this play. The way Dike approaches the threat of AIDS in South Africa is rather interesting, in the sense that she perceives AIDS as dangerous as the apartheid system. As a result, in Dike's play, World AIDS Day sounds like a political meeting during the days of apartheid in South Africa:

FIRST PERSON - Phantsi nge AIDS, phantsi! Down with AIDS, down!

GROUP - Phantsi! (down)

FOURTH PERSON - Viva International AIDS Day, viva!<sup>539</sup>

Undoubtedly, this is the kind of chanting that one would expect at political meetings, rallies or protest gatherings. Nobantu Rasebotsa, Meg Samuelson and Kylie Thomas support this approach to the threat of HIV/AIDS. They argue that, as most of the countries in southern Africa have fought protracted battles against foreign oppression, white rule and post-independence dictatorships, HIV/AIDS should be perceived as a similar major threat to the independence and prosperity. They note that writers in the region have long applied their art to struggles for freedom and many of them rightly perceive HIV/AIDS to be a threat to the rights for which they and their predecessors fought in previous decades. Consequently, they have returned to the language of struggle to confront both the pandemic and the inadequate response of local governments and the international community.<sup>540</sup>

Having induced a mood in her audience and the manner it should fight the spread of AIDS in the country, Dike outlines to her audience how different people can prevent the spread of this epidemic regardless of whether a person has the virus or not. Her first target group is that of people who have not been

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<sup>537</sup> Bunmi Makinwa, in Helen Jackson: *AIDS Africa: Continent in Crisis*. [2002], p.vii

<sup>538</sup> Ibid. p.vii

<sup>539</sup> Fatima Dike, *AIDS: The Next Generation*, unpublished play. [1999], p.1

<sup>540</sup> Nobantu Rasebotsa, Meg Samuelson & Kylie Thomas, *Nobody ever said AIDS*. [2004], p.13

infected with the virus. Her message to this group is clear: people ought to be careful and act responsibly, because given the numerous ways it spreads, this incurable disease has drastically narrowed the line between life and death. Jackson gives nine main contributing factors to the spread of the pandemic, some of which Dike covers in her play. These include poverty and unequal distribution of wealth, a broad sexual mixing pattern and multiple partnerships including commercial sex, a high level of untreated sexually transmitted infections and reproductive tract infections and poor use of condoms.<sup>541</sup>

Given the fact that AIDS activists from different organizations bombard people with AIDS information, Dike acknowledges in the play that there is often repetition in terms of information that makes people lose interest. However, she argues that this is important since there are many people who are still ignorant about the epidemic as indicated by the increase the number of people getting infected with the virus.

SPEAKER 2 - I know that you say we talk about the same thing every year; use a condom, stick to one partner and so on. You are right. We can't say these things enough because they make the difference between life and death. If you act responsibly, you can be sure that you won't pick up anything that's life threatening, you won't have AIDS instead you will be HIV positive. Virgins are not extinct, they are just keeping a low profile from peer pressure.

SPEAKER 3 - Make a decision about sex before hand whether it is wrong or right for you. Only have sex when you believe that the time is right for you. If you have doubts, don't.<sup>542</sup>

The main point in the argument presented by the two speakers appears to be sex, smoking, alcohol abuse, peer pressure and its effects amongst youths as the main challenges that youth is faced with. Most of the time youths engage in these habits due to peer pressure in order to be accepted by their friends. It can be argued that Dike believes time has come for each person to make a clear decision based on what is good for her or him. She is aware of what peer pressure does to youths, therefore, she encourages those who are not involved in such activities not to despair, feel threatened or inferior, because there are other people just like them.

As much as Dike's assertion is true that most youths are misled by peer pressure, there is one thing she omits: many youths claim to indulge in alcohol, drugs and the like because there is nothing else to do in the townships. There are no sporting facilities, career training centers or otherwise to provide better opportunities. This is what one would expect Dike to mention as a contributing

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<sup>541</sup> Helen Jackson, *AIDS Africa: Continent in Crisis*. [2002], p.8

<sup>542</sup> Fatima Dike, *AIDS: The New Generation*, unpublished play. [1999], p.13



factor to awaken the authorities to these truths. One can argue that a crisis of the nature of AIDS, is an enormous and complex problem and requires combined effort to combat it. To focus only on the public while those entrusted with public funds to serve and assist the communities are left out is not likely to suffice as Rasebotsa, Samuelson and Thomas argue.<sup>543</sup> Having addressed that part of the audience which has not been infected with the HIV virus, Dike's focus then shifts to those who are already infected. Given the way people with HIV/AIDS are treated, she starts by reminding HIV positive people that they might be sick but are still human and are entitled to all human rights like any other human being:

SPEAKER 4 - We've been talking about prevention, what about those who already live with AIDS? Who are HIV positive? People with AIDS/HIV have rights like everyone else. They have a right to schooling, medical care, employment, to terminate their pregnancies. No one has the right to give out information about their status without their permission.<sup>544</sup>

The reason for such a move is to encourage people with AIDS or those who are HIV positive to resist any discrimination. Helen Jackson argues that the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS should be based on internationally agreed human rights, including the right to life itself, non-discrimination and equality before the law. Jackson says these rights should be upheld in the context of all human rights except where solid reason exists to prevent endangering others.<sup>545</sup>

Similarly, Celile Mather points out that the South African Constitution states that no one may be treated differently based on the person's colour, sex, language or religion. As a result, someone with HIV or AIDS has the same rights as anyone else.<sup>546</sup> Nkosi Johnson, one of the first young AIDS victims, who became a prominent activist due to the treatment he was subjected to as a child, relates his experience as follows:

When I was seven years old, Mommy Gail said I should go to school. She filled in forms at Melpark Primary School. The form said "Does your child suffer from anything?" So she said "Yes. AIDS" My Mommy Gail and I have always been open about having AIDS. The teachers and parents had a meeting at the school because I have AIDS,

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<sup>543</sup> Nobantu Rasebotsa, Meg Samuelson & Kylie Thomas, *Nobody ever said AIDS*. [2004], p.13

<sup>544</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>545</sup> Helen Jackson, *AIDS*. [2002], p.34

<sup>546</sup> Cecile Mather, *Rights and AIDS*, [2002], p.5

and they did not know what to do. Half the parents and teachers said I should not be allowed to go to school and the other said I should.<sup>547</sup>

Likewise, Jackson admits that HIV/AIDS is a highly stigmatised condition leading to discrimination and violation of human rights of those infected. This occurs because HIV/AIDS is associated with sex, blood, death, disease and behaviour that may be illegal or perceived as immoral such as pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, sex work, homosexuality and injecting drugs.<sup>548</sup>

One of the most crucial aspects with regard to HIV/AIDS is the need to support people living with it. As a result, Jackson believes that most people in sub-Saharan Africa with HIV will rely on care from their families, friends and communities, but they will also need to know how to help themselves.<sup>549</sup> Unfortunately, a lot of people are often rejected and isolated by their communities and even their own families once it is known they are HIV positive or have developed AIDS. This is problematic, since the number of people infected is rising and hospitals and clinics can no longer accommodate patients for a lengthy period. Consequently, family and friends are expected to play a major role in ensuring that the patient lives longer. The audience recognizes this in Dike's play:

SISTER - People living with AIDS want love, tolerance and respect. They do not want to be pitied nor do they want to be discriminated against. They are people just like us. Therefore, let us give them love and respect.<sup>550</sup>

Even though Dike acknowledges that pregnant HIV positive women have a right to terminate their pregnancy, she furnishes those who want to bear children, regardless of their status, with information regarding the protection of their unborn babies.

SPEAKER 5 - Nowadays it may not be necessary for women who test HIV positive to terminate their pregnancies because of the new pill AZT that is being tested in our areas. Mothers can carry their unborn babies for the full term and still give birth to a healthy baby. Unfortunately, I was born before this miracle drug was discovered as a result I am HIV positive. I may not live to be 20, but I will live in the

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<sup>547</sup> Celile Mather, *Rights and AIDS*. [2002], p.13

<sup>548</sup> Helen Jackson, *AIDS Africa: Continent in Crisis*. [2002], pp.45,6

<sup>549</sup> Ibid. p.212

<sup>550</sup> Fatima Dike, *AIDS: The next generation*. unpublished play. [1999], p.31

constant hope that one day before my short life is over a cure will be found.<sup>551</sup>

By having one of her characters, Speaker 5, HIV positive, Dike encourages people living with AIDS or who are HIV positive to educate the public about the epidemic, share their experiences and the measures that should be taken and where to go for help. She also encourages them to have hope that there might be a cure discovered in the near future. Furthermore, she persuades those who have discovered that they are HIV positive to inform their partners so that they too can go to clinics for blood tests to avoid spreading the virus.

MEULELO - What about Phumla? Maybe she doesn't even know that she's got AIDS and that she is spreading it around.

KHAYALETHU - Do you think she doesn't know?

MEULELO - Of course! Why should she sleep around if she knows she's HIV positive?

KHAYALETHU - Maybe she's just doing it for spite.

MEULELO - Even so we have to let her know that we know.

KHAYALETHU - I have to find her and tell her.

MEULELO - Of course, but we can do that later. First you must go to the clinic.<sup>552</sup>

It is important to note that in the discussion between the two, Dike implies that there is a possibility that some people intentionally sleep around to spread the AIDS virus due to anger and frustration. She warns her audience to be on the lookout for such people.

To dramatize the speed with which people get infected and the ease they contract the virus, Dike's lead character, Khayaletu, gets infected with the virus at a party after the celebration of International AIDS Day. Instead of a gathering of this nature being a deterrent to people, it facilitates the spread of the virus:

KHAYALETHU - Mbu you are not going to believe what I'm going to tell you now.

MEULELO - Try me, I'm your friend.

KHAYALETHU - Palesa is HIV positive.

MEULELO - What...What...This can't be...no...no. Are you sure?

KHAYALETHU - Yes!

MEULELO - Ingab'u yi fumenephi?

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<sup>551</sup> Ibid. p.3

<sup>552</sup> Ibid. p.15

KHAYALETHU - December the 1st. Remember the AIDS rally and the party afterwards? I have sex with that girl, Phumla, without using a condom. I gave Palesa the virus. Damn!<sup>553</sup>

The fact that Dike's lead character got infected at a party meant to promote safe sex and reduce the spread of AIDS, demonstrates that it is likely that people get infected in almost each and every gathering of people of different and same sexes. She observes that these unfaithful persons pass the virus on to their partners making innocent people suffer as a result.

KHAYALETHU - What hurts me most is that this thing is going to affect the people I care about most, Palesa and the baby.<sup>554</sup>

It can be contested that Dike's argument is that even well behaved persons can get infected with the virus due to their unfaithful partners. She cautions her audience that all it takes is a single mistake of engaging in unprotected sex like her character, Khayalethu, did.

Dike's two plays discussed above clearly demonstrate a shift in her writing, from a conformist writing dictated by the freedom struggle under apartheid to a more vibrant one. Nevertheless, her work is still more or less directed towards educating the black majority about issues of concern, just like under apartheid. However, the fact that she appears rather reluctant to attack issues such as black patriarchy and sexism directly, which have been at the centre of attention of feminist writers, makes one wonder if her cultural background is not going to be another limiting factor that eventually forces her to engage in self-censoring. She seems to be cautious, if not gentle, when dealing with gender-related issues. This goes back to the question of tradition whereby there are some issues which "women" are not expected to tackle, especially in public, lest they be seen as immoral. As a result, she can be seen as conforming, instead of breaking new ground or challenging patriarchy.

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<sup>553</sup>Ibid. p.14

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.15

<sup>555</sup>Tribal wars without borders over territory South of the Limpopo river of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3.4 Mbongeni Ngema

Mbongeni Ngema is known both as a performer and playwright. The major artistic influence upon his theatrical approach can be said to have come from Gibson Kente. Most of Ngema's work as a playwright was a protest against injustice under apartheid. He wrote and performed *Woza Albert* (1983), one of his best known plays, with Percy Mtwa. The episodic form of the play, many self-contained stories within a single play, enabled the two writers to address numerous issues that affected the black masses under apartheid including religion, poverty and exploitation of blacks in the labour market. *Asinamali* (1985) is another play, which explores the issue of rent in townships, but it was *Sarafina* (1992) that brought Ngema to fame. This musical was later adapted and produced as a film. The play explores the determination of South African youth, especially high school pupils, to fight against the apartheid system in their quest to determine their destiny.

Ngema's plays in post-apartheid South Africa still have a political note to them, but of a different kind. They acknowledge the suffering blacks in South Africa went through to achieve freedom. However, they also call for forgiveness, repentance and belief in God, to achieve reconciliation in the country. One of these plays, *Maria Maria*, is a tribute to Steve Biko, the founder and leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, who was murdered by the apartheid system police. *Magic at 4Am* is another work through which he pays tribute to great leaders like Shaka Zulu, the king of the Zulus, who built the Zulu nation fearlessly during the Lifaqane<sup>555</sup>. Steve Biko, already in the 1970s, encouraged such honoring of the "people's" leaders and heroes rather than writers idealizing those of other groups, particularly the European colonizers.<sup>556</sup> The two plays discussed, *Maria Maria* and *Magic at 4Am*, were published by Skotaville Publishers in 1995.

#### ***Maria Maria***

Even though there are characters like No-Name, Priest and Deacon, to some extent the play is a monologue, with Maria as the protagonist. It is worth noting Maria is characterised as a religious young woman, so much so that her church leaders use her as the epitome of a "true Christian." Given Maria's commitment to the church in this play, she is invited to play a bigger role in the church, including preaching. However, her preaching is linked to day-to-day life, as she evokes names of people known by the community at the pulpit. Maria's approach to religion is practical in the sense that she compares the events in the Bible with what happens in real life. Consequently, in her preaching Maria gives examples of people the congregation knows and with whom they can identify.

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<sup>556</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness" in Hendrik van der Merwe ed. *Students Perspective of Apartheid..* [1972], p.200

This helps the congregation understand and realize the relationship between life and religion and how the two complement each other. Furthermore, it helps the congregation realize that even in their time there are individuals doing great deeds in the interests of their people. Such individuals, she preaches, should be considered heroes and they include Moses and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Unfortunately, due to the fragmentation of South Africa along tribes and political affiliations by both the colonialists and the apartheid system, some of her examples are not appreciated by everyone in the congregation, as those individuals are from different tribes or political parties. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Maria dwells too much on politics, which can have a negative impact at two different levels, the fictitious congregation on the one hand and the real life of Ngema's audience on the other. It can also alienate, at both levels, those attendees who go to church to escape the realities of life, who occasionally want to have peace of mind and dream about Heaven and its possible wonders. Furthermore, as said before, Maria also risks dividing the congregation, with those who support the people she glorifies on one side, and those who do not support them on the other.

No-Name can be considered the antagonist, since her character appears to be against both Maria's preaching and her personality. To some extent it can be said that No-Name's goal is to destroy Maria's image before the congregation and the society as a whole. Nevertheless, Priest and Deacon regard Maria as an exemplary member of their congregation in terms of her life style and deportment. As a result, the two would love to see members of their congregation adopting Maria's way of life as an example of the way a true Christian should live. However, the two seem to be blinded by their own favouritism and idealising of Maria to the extent that any criticism against her is dismissed without question. In a way Maria seems to be their creation, which they want the congregation to emulate.

Like most of Ngema's plays, *Maria Maria* is a musical. It is set in or around the church because of its religious tone. The play gives one a sense of most African-American Evangelist churches, which revolve around the word or gospel and song to praise the Lord. Regarding the writing of the play, Ngema says, "This musical was first scripted in India (Trivandrum) facing the Arabic Sea"<sup>557</sup> which seems to imply that Ngema wrote it with some distance from the facts narrated. The play does not require special theatrical requirements such as sound, lighting, or set design. However, being a musical, it requires live music:

The band enters the stage and immediately begins to play a heart-throbbing overture named Mangema (the Ngema clan). As the song

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<sup>557</sup> Mbongeni Ngema *Maria Maria*, [1995], p.1

reaches its climax, the cast enters and begins to sing their introductory song.<sup>558</sup>

It is worth noting that Maria is an Africanised name given to baby girls after Holy Mary, the mother of Jesus. Christian scripture explains God chose Holy Maria to bear his only son, Jesus Christ, because of her dedication to serve and love God. According to this account, Holy Mary spent most of her time in church either serving the church or praying and praising the Lord.<sup>559</sup> Similarly, Maria performs these in the musical while also helping others to convert or to rejuvenate their spirits. She inspires those who had lost faith in God:

NINI - Nkosi sicela ube no Maria ngokusiletha e sontweni.  
(Lord please be with Maria for she brought us to church).<sup>560</sup>

As much as Maria is inspirational, it can be argued that the effect is just like a drop in the ocean given the pain, suffering and dispirited souls of people around her. She is like a church set in the midst of a township marred by poverty and other misfortunes. This is evidenced by Super and his friends:

NOMPUNDO - I grew up in the streets. Look at these street, what do you see? Us.

SUPER - Look at the township women without husbands. My father was killed during the war in Mozambique.

JACKY - My mother died in Lesotho. Umfowethu wafela Tanzania wayeku Mkhonto wesizwe. (My friend died in Tanzania with Mkhonto wesizwe)

KHAYELIHLE - Salilwela lelizwe (We fought for this land)

PHILILE - Silale emkhukhwini sidlana asinamali (We slept in shacks busy smoking grass having no money) but Maria brought us to church today.

NHLANHLA - We are poor. My sister ran away to Point and sometimes she's in Hillbrow selling her beautiful body to the tourists and the white men who have money.<sup>561</sup>

Through these characters, Ngema seems to point to both psychological and material effects of the apartheid system. He appears to be of the opinion that there are a lot of children in South Africa suffering from the effects of their relatives' murder by the apartheid system. Consequently, they might need

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid. p3

<sup>559</sup> Gospel, Luke 1:26-37

<sup>560</sup> Mbongeni Ngema *Maria Maria*. [1995], p.1

<sup>561</sup> Ibid. p.4

psychological help. Even the Bantu Education the apartheid system confined blacks to become jeopardized when children were orphaned. This compounded squalor further impacted negatively on their lives.

As evidenced by the discussion, each one of the characters above has a sad story to tell about living under the apartheid system. The characters either have lost a relative or someone close during the struggle. Moreover, they are very poor, which can be attributed to the racist policy meant to keep blacks at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. In the light of all this suffering, these children have become disillusioned and do not believe that going to church or praying can make any difference in their lives. However, despite their bitterness with God for not delivering them from their suffering, Maria manages to convince them to come to church, and she tries to share with them the spiritual joy she gets from going to church.

Clearly, Maria is different from other girls. Although young and beautiful, as indicated in the opening song, she does not use her beauty for material gain, as most girls do especially in the townships, nor does she shun the poor. Instead she identifies with the poor and brings hope to them the same way Jesus brought hope and joy to the hopeless, sick and dying. Her character makes others have confidence in her, hence the Priest's decision to give her an opportunity to preach in church. The Priest probably believes that her teaching in church will influence weak members of the congregation to truly believe in God and live an exemplary life like her.

As much as Ngema's characters are inspirational, in real life people like Maria are often not taken seriously. In most townships, they are turned into a laughing stock and given names. Maropodi Mapalaganye, for example, discusses this kind of attitude prevalent in the townships in his play *The Harvesting Season*. No-Name does this in the play to discredit Maria.

NO-NAME - Vele leukholwa lisanda kungithatheli nododa yam  
ngiyaxolisa ebandleni. (I'm sorry, but she stole my husband recently)  
Sorry in the name of the Lord. Pastor, I caught her red-handed with my  
husband.<sup>562</sup>

No-Name's accusation against Maria causes commotion in the congregation, but both the Priest and Deacon are quick to intervene on Maria's behalf. By having No-Name dismissed by the congregation, it appears as though Ngema hopes or believes that people of Maria's nature will finally triumph. For Ngema, perhaps that may only be achieved through perseverance as evidenced by Maria who humbles herself to be a true servant of the Lord. However, Ngema does not clear his protagonist completely. The public is left wondering whether both the Priest and the Deacon act in good faith and whether the church tolerates misconduct,

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid. p.6



especially adultery, given that it is one of the sins the Ten Commandments forbids. However, the two characters' intervention seems to be based on the information given earlier by other characters, Jacky and his friends, about Maria. This information makes Maria appear incapable of engaging in such misconduct. Her accuser seems to lack understanding of what Maria stands for. Earlier, for example, No-Name accuses her of turning the church into a political rally by her continual reference to Biko. On the contrary, in her preaching, Maria is not using the church for political purposes, but is only comparing Steve Biko with other great leaders of the past who sacrificed their lives for their own people.

It is possible that through these constant and continuous attacks against Maria, Ngema warns his audience that, like Jesus, it is likely to go through pain and suffering in its pursue of the truth and reconciliation in South Africa.

It can be contested that even though No-Name goes to church, she is no different from Super and his friends who do not go to church at all. Like them, she perceives church and/or religion and her personal life as two different entities, whereas Maria sees them as one. Maria demonstrates the relationship by constantly drawing a parallel between religious historical events and the present.<sup>563</sup> By so doing, it can be said that Ngema encourages his audience not to separate their daily life from their religion, but perceive both as one.

One of the main issues that Ngema celebrates in this play is leadership. In her preaching, Maria compares Steve Biko's leadership to that of Moses. Moses' leadership was not an easy one. According to the Bible, Moses born at the time when Pharaoh had given orders that all baby boys born of Israelites be killed, fearing that these children would grow up to revolt against their enslavement in Egypt. Even as he aged and with the power given to him by God, Moses had to wrestle the freedom of the Israelites out of Pharaoh's iron grip. His journey to the promised land was not easy either. There were tests along the way, which made the Israelites wish they had never left the slavery of Egypt. The troubles, suffering and hardships they encountered made them turn against Moses. However, Moses overcame all these obstacles and challenges with the help of God, although he died on the way and never saw the promised land.<sup>564</sup>

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land. Then the Lord said 'This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, when I said, I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Mbongeni Ngema *Maria Maria*. [1995], p.7

<sup>564</sup> Gospel, Deuteronomy 34:5

<sup>565</sup> Ibid. 19:1-4

Maria also compares Biko to Martin Luther King Jr., who led blacks in America in the fight for civil rights. Like Moses, King's leadership was at a time when blacks in America were still regarded as sub-humans and as no more than animals by racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Such groups were determined to keep whites as a superior race and segregated from blacks. Despite his dream and the effort with which he pursued it, King was killed before he could see it.

Given the history of both Moses and Martin Luther King and the hardships they went through, Ngema seems to argue that considering the hardship Steve Biko faced that ended in his death, his leadership was as difficult as that of both Moses and King. Biko and his Black Consciousness Movement faced stiff resistance from the apartheid system in the 1960s and 1970s since Biko was determined to instill pride amongst the oppressed black masses as opposed to the apartheid system which made them feel worthless so they can surrender to white domination. The supporters of the system used any means, as observed in earlier chapters, to intimidate and dissuade blacks from rising against it. In light of the severity with which the opponents of the system were treated, a lot of blacks were intimidated hence the need to conscientize and mobilize the black masses. Maria observes, in this regard, in this play:

MARIA - Everyone was afraid, afraid of the power of the white man. The black people went quiet, afraid of even calling themselves black. White people were rejoicing, going to parties and going to church praying to the God of Malan and Verwoerd who separated them from black people and delivered them to Bloemfontein and Pretoria.<sup>566</sup>

Through this utterance, Ngema interrogates the very creators, founders and pillars of apartheid, Malan and Verwoerd. Both are perceived by the black masses as the creators and architects of apartheid in South Africa, while Bloemfontein and Pretoria were seen as the fortresses of that system. Bloemfontein is where the Appeal Court is located, the highest court and the most powerful institution in the country. Pretoria is the administrative capitol and the seat of the government, which championed segregation of people in South Africa on the basis of color and race. As a result, both the creators of and these institutions were then regarded as determinants factors of the fate of blacks under apartheid South Africa.

As much as Ngema encourages his audience to be religious, he also attacks the church as an institution. This follows from the fact that some whites

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<sup>566</sup> Mbongeni Ngema *Maria Maria*. [1995], p.7

claimed that segregation was made by God, otherwise He could have made all the people of the same color and race. This argument was meant to justify the white minority's treatment of blacks and their clinging to power. As a result, this abuse of religion by some whites made some blacks resent God and church, which might explain the resentment cauterizing Super and his friends of the church. However, even though bitter with the perpetrators, Maria distances God from the evils perpetrated by the system in her preaching. By comparing Biko with both Moses and Jesus, Ngema seems to argue that God is God for all humankind, regardless of color or race.

Like Moses and Martin Luther King, Steve Biko did not live to see the freedom he was fighting for, and like Martin Luther King, Biko was murdered for his cause. Brian Lapping writes of Steve Biko:

Death number forty-six was different. The dead man was Steve Biko. Only thirty years old, Biko had already established an extraordinary standing as a leader of Black Consciousness and as an intellectual. He was known and respected among white liberals and had met United States Senators and Embassy Officials. Donald Woods, a South African newspaper editor, wrote of Biko: "In the three years that I grew to know him, my conviction never wavered that this was the most important political leader in the entire country, and quite simply the greatest man it had ever been my privilege to know."<sup>567</sup>

Considering Biko's work, his dedication to free his people from the apartheid system and the suffering he went through, it can be argued that Ngema can think of no other person who laid down his life in the name of humankind other than Jesus. Similarly, Maria perceives Biko's Black Conscious Movement as a way of bringing to life the black masses the same way Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead, which brought great joy to Lazarus' grieving family.<sup>568</sup>

The event Ngema employs to demonstrate similarity between Jesus and Biko is Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. Jesus knew that the Pharisees were not happy with his teaching. However, in the name of God, He went to Jerusalem without any fear of what might happen to Him and He was well received by the common man in the street. On the other hand, the authorities (Pharisees) never thought Jesus would actually come to Jerusalem to preach.<sup>569</sup> Similarly, when Biko challenged the apartheid system, he was not worried about what would happen to him, and like Jesus, his Black Consciousness Movement's teaching were well received in almost every township. This was one of the challenges the system never anticipated. Maria observes:

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<sup>567</sup> Lapping, Brian *Apartheid History*. [1986], p.160

<sup>568</sup> John 11:1-44

<sup>569</sup> Luke 19:28-44

MARIA - Soweto 1976. Biko restored pride and faith in black people and ignited a flame inside them. A desire to be free that no one could stop. Jesus said "I have lit up a fire" and he challenged "Who can put it out?" June the 16th 1976 that was Biko's greatest entry to Soweto. When no one ever thought black people could throw away their fear of the white man. They began to say I'm black and I'm proud.<sup>570</sup>

There can be no doubt that the 1976 uprising is one of the most significant events in the political history of South Africa. Ngema finds no other event of its magnitude with which to compare it other than Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. However, it is the betrayal and suffering the two men endure that catches Ngema's eye, both Jesus and Biko died and both of them were said to have been betrayed by people close to them in exchange for money. The two also suffered terribly at the hands of their enemies including being stripped naked and subjected to all sorts of humiliation and punishment until death. Maria recalls in this play:

MARIA - They stripped Biko naked, tied his hands and feet to a grill like a wild animal. Biko asked, 'Is it compulsory for me to be naked? Since I came here I have been naked.' He sat there naked on a urine, soaked mat. The police had reduced that proud man to a urine-stinking animal. 'He was shamming' that's what the police said 'uzichamele' (he urinated on himself).<sup>571</sup>

Given the suffering Biko went through, Maria seems to believe that he would go straight to heaven and be received by all the great leaders who had gone before him like Moses, Abraham, David, Shaka and Mancinza.<sup>572</sup>

For comparison, in *Woza Albert*, Ngema and Mtwla explored the reaction and expectation of the black masses if Jesus were to come to apartheid South Africa. They wonder what colour Jesus would be and whose side He would take, that of the oppressor or the oppressed. The play takes place in the streets with the characters giving their views on the matter. *Maria Maria*, on the other hand, takes place in a church and it is named after the mother of Jesus. Ngema's progression, from *Woza Albert* set in the streets to *Maria Maria* inside a church after the end of the apartheid, can be seen as encouraging his audience to convert and embrace the teachings of the church. This implies that Ngema is convinced God is for all people, regardless of colour, race or status. It is

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<sup>570</sup> Ngema, Mbongeni *Maria Maria*. [1995], p.8

<sup>571</sup> Ibid. p.16

<sup>572</sup> Ibid. p.16

important to note how that element of doubt, Jesus' colour, in *Woza Albert* has been erased in *Maria Maria*.

Finally, even though Ngema demonstrates in *Maria Maria* that God is for all, regardless of color or race, he advises his audience to be awake at all times so that they can seize the moment in life when the time comes like the five wise maidens in the Bible<sup>573</sup>. He also emphasizes that even among the people whom the audience lives with, there are heroes just as there were heroes in the past in other parts of the world.

### ***Magic at 4 AM***

The play is about twins, Sweetie and Sweetheart, whose father left their rural home in Natal to find work in Johannesburg. But once in Johannesburg he forgot about his family and as a result his wife is forced to embark on a similar journey in search of him together with the twins. Unfortunately, she falls in the hands of criminals and is killed, leaving the twins behind with no one to take care of them. Even after their father is reunited with the twins, he still has little time for them.

The characterization in this play is implied in each character's name. The two lead characters, Sweetie and Sweetheart, are almost angelic so much so that even though both their parents are murdered in cold blood, they are not angry with the perpetrators. Instead they forgive them and call for their repentance and to believe in God.

As much as the two are forgiving and good-hearted, there is a sense of helplessness in their characters. They seem to be indoctrinated into accepting things as if they were pre-determined by fate and hence unchangeable. Their helplessness may be due to the fact that they are small girls and not in a position to take revenge. But it can also be due to the influences of their guardian, Mr Value. Though Mr Value preaches morality and family values, he is powerless to put his own family in order. His daughter, Lunga, is spoiled and immoral and she throws herself at any man she fancies even if she hardly knows him. However, her behavior is possibly influenced by that of her aunt, Antie Mavis, who runs after all men in a desperate attempt to find someone to marry her.

Compared to his daughters, Shaka (the father) is no angel. In fact, he is the cause of the misery and destruction of his family. Despite the pain he brings to his family, he shows neither much affection towards his twins after their mother's death, or any appreciation for the trouble they had taken to search for him. Undoubtedly, he is self-centred. This selfishness becomes apparent when he buys his young girls boxing gloves and shorts as presents instead of something that reflects their femininity. It appears that the presents are meant to ensure that his legacy as a boxer lives on, disregarding his children's interests in the process. Shaka seems to be weak like his twins. He fails to take a clear stand against his murderer-to-be, Shisa Boy, during their confrontation. He both mocks and

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<sup>573</sup> Gospel: Mathew 25: 1-12

sympathises with him, despite the fact that Shisa Boy is threatening his life with a gun. One would expect Shaka to be more concerned about his own safety and that of his children and to defend himself and his children accordingly.

Shisa Boy, on the other hand, is nothing other than a tool used by his white boss, Mr Van Vuuren, to carry out his evil deeds. But as much as Shisa Boy is a tool of evil, he is helpless as well, just like the other characters. This is indicated by the fact that he continues to be used to eliminate opponents of the white management even though he is aware of being just a tool in his hands. Furthermore, there is the possibility that at the end of the day, the white people using him will eliminate him as well. As much as he is aware of that, he is unable to free himself from this web.

*Magic at 4AM* was born of Mbongeni Ngema's desire to write a play in honour of Muhammad Ali.<sup>574</sup> Using boxing as his stem, Ngema goes on to raise and address issues that affect black communities, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. Through the two main characters, Sweetie and Sweetheart, Ngema demonstrates the impact of poverty and its relationship to violence and crime in South Africa. However, the main issue in this play is the plight of migrant workers and their families, which Chakela also deals with in brief in his play *Isithuthuku* (1996).

As the curtain goes up the twins, Sweetie and Sweetheart are together reviewing the events which led to their plight. From this exposition, the audience learns that the twins' mother, Veronica, was murdered while they were waiting at Randfontein Train Station. The five year-old girls were then left with nowhere to go and nobody to turn to for help. They were vulnerable to rape and/or being murdered like their mother. It is this misery that Ngema seems to highlight. Furthermore, Ngema notes with regret the age at which black children are exposed to violence and crime in South Africa. He seems to argue that this has a long-lasting effect on those affected, as the twins comment:

SWEETIE - He stabbed her right in her chest. Oh, she got mad, was screaming and kicking and fighting like a wild beast. After a long fight these men began to say something that I will never, ever forget:

SWEETHEART - Wrong person...and then they ran away.<sup>575</sup>

Ngema dramatises the inhuman and brutal acts that plague the South African society. He highlights the senseless murders and the beginning of misery for those left behind. Though the murderers do realize that Veronica is the wrong person they are killing, it is too late. This shows how cheap and worthless black people's lives have become. But what is worth noting is that from the murderers' remark prior to fleeing, it is clear that they do not kill on their own

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<sup>574</sup> Ngema, Mbongeni *Magic at 4Am*. [1995], p.I

<sup>575</sup> Ibid. p.217

accord but because they have been ordered to do so by someone else, hence their mistaking the identity of their victim. Though the three murderers do not say who gave them instruction to kill, Shisa Boy states it clearly in his confrontation with Shaka before shooting him to death:

SHISHA BOY - I hate myself. I hate those Afrikaners who made me do dirty jobs for them. Fuck them, fuck Meneer Van Vuuren.<sup>576</sup>

Based on Shisa's statement, Ngema seems to note, regrettably, that even in a democratic South Africa, there are still blacks used by some white elements to kill other blacks. In the process, innocent people fall victim. He seems to argue that the goal of these white elements is nothing other than to portray blacks as cold-blooded thugs with no goals in life, which will undoubtedly discredit them before the public and world, especially the black led government. Shaka observes this:

SHAKA - See, even in this new South Africa people like you are still holding on to the past. That's the kind of language a white man wants to hear, to kill a black person, to fight with your own brother. The white man enjoys that, when he reads in the newspaper twenty-five killed in Johannesburg, six died in Cape Town, blood-bath in Natal. The white man enjoys that. It's entertainment to him. They send people like you, Shisa Boy. They pay you money to murder innocent men, women and children.<sup>577</sup>

This can be said to be Shaka's most powerful statement in the play, which demonstrates how observant he is of the situation in his country that reflects negatively on blacks. But this can also be seen as Ngema's voice because Shaka is not a responsible father and husband who can say something as incisive and constructive as this. He left his home, like any other black man in the rural areas, to seek employment in the gold mines of Johannesburg to be in a position to take good care of his family. However, he seems to have forgotten about his family once he arrives in Johannesburg. This raises the question of his capability to observe and care about events that unfold around him and what happens to other people.

Even though there is no mention of his having a mistress, working as a supervisor, which ensured a better salary compared to other workers like Shisa Boy, and the fact that he is a boxing champion, both of these elements must have put him in a position to have a lot of admirers, especially women, as indicated by Antie Mavis who throws herself at him after he won his boxing match against

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid. p.229

<sup>577</sup> Ibid. p.229

Shisa Boy. Here, Ngema tackles common mishaps in many black communities which defeat the purposes for those who left their homes in rural areas in search of jobs in the cities to help their families, but end up being the cause of pain in the family.

SWEETHEART - One day in Zululand, Mama packed her bags. She told us we should go with her to look for our father somewhere in the gold mines of Johannesburg. She died before she could see our father. He left her in Zululand. He was somewhere in this huge gold mine.<sup>578</sup>

The notion of some of these migrant workers neglecting their families is reiterated not only in Sweetheart's comment but throughout the play. First, the fact that they did not even have Shaka's address demonstrates that he deserted his family. Second, even after all the trouble Shaka has caused his family he does not seem to show any remorse. As a result, his children have to compete with his boxing. They either have to go to his training or be by his corner during boxing matches in order to share some time with him. His presents as well are not meant to please his twin daughters but to further his interest in boxing.

SWEETIE - What kind of presents are these? Other girls are going to laugh at us.<sup>579</sup>

The first thing any parent would be concerned about regarding his or her children would be the basic needs such as clothing, food and shelter. However, in this case Ngema's character does not make an effort to ensure that his children have a place to stay; instead they have to go and live with a preacher, Mr Value. This by any standards demonstrates how irresponsible Shaka is. This lack of regard for other people is reflected in Shaka's description of his father. The two appear to be no different in the sense that Shaka's father too was more concerned with his own interests than his family:

SHAKA - My father was a very tough man. He was a warrior. One day when I was young, I was a little toddler, I found myself running after him in the middle of the little town of Mtubatuba in Zululand. He was shouting and cursing at my mother because she was walking slowly and he was rushing home to milk his cows.<sup>580</sup>

Although Shaka does not say what his mother was carrying, one can assume that she was carrying things that hindered her movement. Based on the common

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid. p.119

<sup>579</sup> Ibid. p.228

<sup>580</sup> Ibid. p.218



practice in most African societies, a woman carries almost everything from luggage in her hands, balancing something on her head and a baby on her back just as Mchangani boasts in Obed Baloyi's play, *Ga Mchangani* (1997). The husband on the other hand would walk proudly ahead, like Shaka's father, with only his stick in hand, but unashamedly yell and mock the woman for walking too slowly. The argument is that the man's hands should be free to ward off attackers during the journey. Shaka does not say whether his father at one stage or another deserted his family, but from Shaka's negligence of his family and his father's yelling at his mother, it is not far fetched to say that Shaka's father too was inconsiderate. Paulo Freire observes that the colonized man manifests his aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people because his last resort is to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother (and sister).<sup>581</sup>

Even though both Shaka and his father are proud, strong and known warriors, they both fall victim to humiliation at the hands of white racists. In the case of Shaka's father, the white racist elements openly utilize the racist system of the day to humiliate him, to make the point that he might be prominent and respected by his people but he is still a 'kaffir'<sup>582</sup> and consequently nothing as Shaka observes:

SHAKA - My mother could not answer back. In fact, not even one man in the village could answer back. He was a feared man in the village. As he was walking proud and tall with his big hat, shouting at my mother, a police van stopped next to him. Two young white policemen came out and demanded to see his passbook. For the first time I saw my father in absolute panic, searching all over his body for a dompas. In no time this young white boy came to him. He smacked him across the face and my father went down on his knees with his hat in his big, old hands, begging the two young white boys to forgive him, but they did not want to forgive him. They kept on beating him. My father was like a piece of dirt lying on the street. He never uttered a word to my mother.<sup>583</sup>

Shaka's shift from "young white police men" to "young white boys" can be taken to emphasize the difference in age between his father and the police officers. This implies that Shaka perceived their act as racially motivated. Furthermore, the fact that his father never said a word to his mother whom he used to mock and curse, shows how humiliated he was to the extent that he would not even lift a finger to her out of shame.

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<sup>581</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.48

<sup>582</sup> Derogatory term used under apartheid referring to blacks.

<sup>583</sup> Ngema, Mbongeni *Magic at 4Am*. [1995], p.218

Like his father, Shaka is finally destroyed at the end of the play and in front of his children. However, unlike his father, the white racists employ blacks to do the dirty job because of the change in the political set up. The fact that the character is named after two great persons, Muhammad Ali and Shaka Zulu, symbolizes the character's importance in his community. Therefore, his death in a white and black conspiracy draws attention to the target of white racist elements within black communities. Ngema's argument seems to be that the desire to humiliate and destroy prominent blacks continues even in post-apartheid South Africa as it was the norm under apartheid. Hennie Lotter argues, in this regard, that healing in South Africa will come if former supporters of apartheid unambiguously show their moral transformation through two things; one is to treat all persons, regardless of personal characteristics, with respect. This will indicate open mindedness on the part of white people and willingness to get to know and learn from black people. Two, white people must become vigorously involved in the undoing of some of the disastrous and minor effects of the apartheid system.<sup>584</sup> Wessel le Roux and Kavin van Merle regret the emigration or withdrawal of white South Africans from the political arena into materialist privacy that has little or nothing to do with restoring regular sociality in all walks of life. Le Roux and van Merle are concerned that this polarity might cause hostility or even civil war, as seen in Zimbabwe. The two encourage both parties to be grateful that they have been spared this thus far.<sup>585</sup>

However, the way Ngema created his characters leaves much to be desired. His characters are weak in the face of challenges, some of which are life-threatening. This implies submission. To have a character with such a name and be both weak and irresponsible may highlight the fact that even though there is still conspiracy against blacks in democratic South Africa, blacks are also to blame for their plight. They fail to stand up and defend themselves accordingly.

Ngema also cautions his audience against the policy of mining companies. Furthermore, he makes his audience aware of how unsafe South Africa can be to extent that even sport, which is supposed to be a form of entertainment and recreation, can be used by perpetrators to eliminate their opponents. It can, therefore, be argued that the white mining officials in this play are intimidated by the influence and power Shaka has in the mine as a supervisor and a boxing champion. Consequently, they recruit Shisa Boy to neutralize or stop him:

SHISA BOY - Shaka talks too much. I'm gonna shut up his mouth.  
You want to know what my job description is? One, to drill and blast dynamite in the sites underground. Two, to beat Shaka Zulu. He thinks

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<sup>584</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa..* [1997], p.147

<sup>585</sup> Wessel le Roux and Kavin van Merle, *Post-Apartheid Fragments: Law, Politics and Critique..* [2007], pp.13,14

he is a Nelson Mandela in this mine. He must behave himself and listen to the white people. Kuphela. [That's it]<sup>586</sup>

Shisa Boy's job description explains the motive for which this mining company hired him. It is understandable, then, why he drills and blasts dynamite underground, probably to be in a position to destroy the mining company's opponents while working underground through engineered explosions to that effect. Such explosions are framed as accidents. There is one such explosion that happens in this play while Shaka and other men are working. However, none of the men are injured or killed. But the fact that Shaka is livid and wants to fight Shisa Boy may indicate that it was the white officials' attempt to eliminate him using Shisa Boy.

MUBI - Shaka is angry.

SHAKA - Yes, I am angry, I want to beat up Shisa Boy, now.<sup>587</sup>

Shaka's reaction shows that he is aware that Shisa Boy is being used by white officials against the black mine workers, both at work and in sport. It is possible that if Shisa Boy fails to eliminate his bosses' enemies in boxing, he can utilize explosives. This explains the reason Shaka perceives his boxing fights against Shisa Boy as a racial battle, no different from any other racial confrontation in the political history of South Africa:

SHAKA - Veronica my darling, I'm preparing for a big fight, just one more time. This is one fight of many fights. We've been fighting for three hundred years and we've been badly beaten. Veronica, when King Cetshwayo lost the fight to the British, we thought we would never fight again. When they killed Steve Biko, I thought we would never challenge them again. When they killed Griffiths and Victoria Mxenge, that was the end of round ten. When Goniwe was permanently removed from society, that was round twelve. Round fourteen was when they took Chris Hani's life. Round fifteen is very tough; too many people are dying every day. But we will stand and fight for it; we will fight to the end. We've been fighting for 300 years.<sup>588</sup>

Shaka's appeal to his wife's memory for help shows how politicized South Africa is, to the extent that everything is seen and done through a racial eye. By recalling these events and names which are prominent in the political history of South Africa, Shaka emphasizes that his boxing should not be taken as a mere

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<sup>586</sup> Ngema, Mbongeni *Magic at 4 AM*. [1995], p.202

<sup>587</sup> Ibid. p.203

<sup>588</sup> Ibid. p.227

sport but as a continuation of the freedom struggle. The politicization of sports under apartheid, especially boxing, was apparent during the 1980 Heavy Weight title fight between by Gerrie Coetzee and John Tate. With South Africa under apartheid, Gerrie Coetzee, an Afrikaner and a police officer, and John Tate, an African-American, to majority of blacks watching the fight, John Tate's pounding on Gerrie Coetzee, a symbol of apartheid, until blood streamed down his face was a psychological victory to many blacks. It was something that they would love to do themselves to white people, especially the police. This politicizing of things in apartheid South Africa is also implied in the white officials' motive to recruit Shisa Boy. Sbusiso comments with regard to Shisa Boy's recruitment:

S'BUSISO - People like you come here and live in this hostel; the next thing some of us die.

ALL MEN - Hey, we know you - we know you.<sup>589</sup>

In real life, there were cases in which people were recruited by whites, especially in the late 1980s and earlier 1990s, in what became known as the "Third Force" in South African politics. While these people were hired to eliminate opponents of the apartheid system, the larger task was to disrupt the political negotiations behind closed doors and the Convention on Democratization of South Africa (CODESA), which formed the basis of the transition process. Fortunately, the white elements behind this conspiracy were contained and the democratization process was not derailed, which saved the country from the eminent civil war. However, in this play, even though Shaka and his team are aware of Shisa Boy's motive, they do not take appropriate measures to ensure that he does not continue or succeed in his mission. Shisa Boy fails to destroy Shaka both at work and in boxing. Nevertheless, he finally manages to shoot and kill Shaka. Given the name of Ngema's lead character, Shaka, one would expect a strong, determined and decisive person. The question, therefore, is whether Ngema encourages this lack of leadership in his audience. Apart from that, Shaka thinks of his dead wife when he is in trouble, just like Mchangani in Obed Baloyi's *Ga-Mchangain*, who thinks of his mother only when he is suffering. Consequently, it seems as if males only remember African women when men are in trouble.

The death of Shaka leaves Sweetie and Sweetheart orphans, but like their father, they take his death as part of the freedom struggle, possibly in light of racially motivated killings sweeping across South Africa. It is after his death that they understand that boxing was not just a sport to him but part of the struggle. However, instead of adopting a confrontational stance, they forgive the perpetrators, especially their father's murderer, Shisa Boy, and then go on to appeal for reconciliation. They believe that it is through self-sacrifice and

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid. p.213

forgiveness that true reconciliation can be achieved. This will in return make people repent and believe in God. One can recollect here the important role of the church, in particular by the archbishop Desmond Tutu, in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that operated from 1995 to 1998 as the restorative justice commission that investigated human right violations and could grant amnesty. One of the conditions for amnesty was that the person requesting it fully disclosed his or her crimes. The play by Ngema clearly refers to such an approach to such crimes when political changes occur.

As much this play can be seen as Ngema's move to embrace the spirit of reconciliation, given the violent struggle and sacrifices that South Africans had to endure to achieve freedom, it makes one wonder if his audience would identify with such weak characters, especially when he argues that there are still some white elements creeping around hoping for an opportunity to harm or destroy prominent blacks.

Just like *Maria Maria*, Ngema's *Magic at 4AM* is a call to forgive, repent and believe in God, which will finally lead to true reconciliation. In order to achieve all this, the victims of evil perpetrated by white racist elements should not seek revenge but bear their suffering and forgive their tormentors. He demonstrates this kind of sacrifice through the twins, Sweetie and Sweetheart. The two lose both their parents in separate yet similar incidents of senseless murders at the hands of thugs operating under orders of racist whites. Despite their bereavement the twins do not appear to be angry with the murderers, but instead call for their repentance and give themselves to God. In their last words to their father they promise to continue this struggle, that is, to fight evil and bring about peace in South Africa.

What is interesting about Ngema's characterization in these two plays is that his characters appear humble, even in the face of death. They are created in such a way that they behave the way Jesus did before his tormentors and killers. His characters are different to what they used to be under apartheid, that is, militant and aggressive. He does not encourage or suggest solutions to his audience.

Ngema's plays in post-apartheid South Africa are a bit different from his previous works. Nevertheless, they have something to do with the past; they are more concerned with contemporary South Africa and celebrate the sacrifice of those who lost their lives in the fight for freedom.

### 3.5 Walter Chakela

Walter Chakela is another black playwright whose work expressed the quest for justice under the apartheid system. His plays include *Crisis of Conscience* (1983), which deals with the pressure exerted by the system determining how individuals should associate with one another based on skin color. *Let This Be a Lesson* (1975) focuses on the Black Conscious Movement in the 1970s, while *Gathering of the Birds* (1990) explores the political negotiations of the late 1980s.

However, after the change in the South African political landscape, there is a notable shift of issues in Chakela's plays. Some plays are still political, and focus on issues under the democratically elected government led by the black majority. Others focus more on social issues. This change in subject matter in Chakela's work is demonstrated in two of his latest plays written in post-apartheid South Africa, namely *Wrath of the Gods* (1991) and *Isithukuthuku* (Sweat) (1997).

*Isithukuthuku* was first performed at Windybrow Theatre in 1997. It was directed by Chakela and featured the following actors: Nomsa Xaba, Moagi Moboee, Brenda Seleke, Betty Marelebe and Moagi Modise. *Wrath of the Gods* was first performed at Mmabana Cultural Centre in Mafikeng in 1991. It was also directed by Chakela and featured Leslie Leseiyane, Ephraim Magagane, Sbhongile Nogile and Tebogo Maboja.

#### ***Wrath of the Gods***

Just like Ola Rotimi, who adapted *Oedipus Rex* to a Nigerian setting in *The Gods are not to Blame*, there can be no doubt Chakela's *Wrath of the Gods* is another African version of *Oedipus Rex*, but adapted to a South African setting. The fact that Sophocles' play can be adapted to different settings in different parts of the world shows that even though Sophocles wrote the plays more than two thousand years ago and for a Greek audience, it is still viable and applicable to different societies. Michael Warton and Judith Still write in relation to intertextuality:

Aristotle holds that we learn [with great pleasure] through imitating others and that our instinct to enjoy works of imitation is an in born instinct.<sup>590</sup>

However, Warton and Still warn that those who adapt others' works run a risk of exposing themselves to criticism since the audience familiar with such works, will realize their shortcomings or alterations.<sup>591</sup> In the case of the African playwrights, the alterations underline the cultural specificities of family and

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<sup>590</sup> Michael Warton and Judith Still, *Intertextuality: Theories by Practices*. [1990], p.6

<sup>591</sup> Ibid. p.6

power relationships. The Publisher notes with regard to Rotimi's play, *The Gods are not to Blame*, that the theme of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is skillfully transplanted to African soil. King Odelawe's progress towards knowledge of the murder and incest that must be expiated before his kingdom can be restored to health is unfolded with a dramatic intensity heightened by the richness of the play's Nigerian setting.<sup>592</sup>

In *Wrath of the Gods* a first central difference is that, unlike Oedipus' father, King Tau is grateful to have a son, but is forced to give him away to be sacrificed after being ill advised by the tribe's traditional doctor. The other difference is that Oedipus, after discovering the truth, plucks out his eyes, so that he cannot see his deeds and banishes himself. These actions can be seen as indicating that Oedipus accepts his guilt and punishes himself. Kgame, on the other hand, commits suicide when he discovers the truth, a reaction that in his cultural and social context implies that he cannot stand his deeds and makes him appear as a coward. However, this can also indicate that Chakela takes a harsh stance toward those who fail to uphold their customs. Moreover, the presence of the white cattle riders contextualizes the play in the conflict between European colonizers and Africans. Nevertheless, the storyline of *Wrath of the Gods* almost replicates that of *Oedipus*.

For years King Tau yearned for a son, an heir to the throne of the Batlhaping tribe. However, when he does get a son, Kgame, the tribe's traditional doctor, Segatlammitlwa, says that the Kgame is cursed and has to be sacrificed to the gods. However, the man who is to sacrifice the child does not proceed with the sacrifice; instead he feels sorry for the child and gives it away to a passerby. The child grows up to be a wanderer, but skilled on the battlefield. He ends up with the Batlhaping tribe at the time when the tribe is under attack from white cattle raiders, and worse, it is still without a king following the killing of King Tau. Kgame helps the Batlhaping to defeat the white cattle raiders and he is subsequently made Batlhaping regent king, inheriting everything including King Tau's wife in accordance with the Batlhaping custom. Only later, like Oedipus, he learns the person he killed in battle was indeed King Tau, his biological father, and that the Batlhaping queen he married is his biological mother.

Chakela's characters in this play can be divided into three camps, two of which are opposing each other while the third hangs in the middle. The first camp is that of traditionalists and hard-liners which consists of Segatlammitlwa, a Traditional Doctor and "Prophet," and Pudumo. The second camp is made up of Rrathata and other advisors to the king. The third comprises King Tau and Kgame, father and son destined to be rivals according to Segatlammitlwa's prophecy. Consequently, the two fall victim to his prophecy.

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<sup>592</sup> Ola Rotimi, *The Gods are not to Blame*. [1971], p.231

Segatlammitlwa is selfish and evil, but also helpless. He is selfish in the sense that even though he claims to foresee that his tribe teeters on the brink of disaster he does not take appropriate measures to save it. Furthermore, he does not appear before disaster strikes but only afterwards to explain why such a thing happened, and often puts the blame on someone else. If he comes up with suggestions, they are so radical and evil that someone must be killed as a solution, as evidenced by his advice to the king to kill his only son at the beginning of the play.

However, Segatlammitlwa seems to be as helpless as any other ordinary villager despite the powers people are made to believe he has. He fails to advise his people accordingly to avoid any misfortunes that might befall them, or suggest solutions in times of crisis.

Segatlammitlwa's colleague, Pudumo, though in the same camp as Segatlammitlwa, at one stage appears to be more sensitive than selfish. This is demonstrated in his first encounter with Kgame, where he is suspicious of Kgame because of his foreignness and arrival at a time of war. However, even after Kgame has helped his people defeat the white cattle raiders, Pudumo still does not accept him, which implies that he is jealous of Kgame's achievements and his popularity amongst the Batlhaping people.

Rrathata and his colleagues, on the other hand, appear to be more concerned about moral issues, success and survival of the tribe. Like Jocasta's servant in *Oedipus*, Rrathata is considerate, kind and humane in the sense that he gives the newly born boy away even though he is entrusted to sacrifice child, who is branded a curse to the tribe. The tragedy, of course, is that his act of kindness becomes a threat to the existence of the tribe.

King Tau and his son Kgame are like feathers in the wind blown in all directions by their people. Both men act in the interests of their people except towards the end of the play, when Kgame decides to investigate his origins despite his advisors discouraging him. His persistence ends with his tribe in a disastrous situation. The two characters seem to be caught in a quagmire.

It is worth noting that for a family to have a baby boy has special significance in patrilineal societies, as with many African societies, as well as elsewhere, and this is one of the central themes of the play. Failure to have a baby boy becomes a serious threat to leadership, land, and family unity. Successfully bearing a son ensures survival of the family name, which is carried by the male offspring. Failure to have a male offspring by the royal family is of a larger social concern, because this means that the tribe will be left without a King when the father dies. Chakela, therefore, centers his play's plot around this custom, possibly to interrogate it, and points out that some of the African customs can lead to destruction of the people they are meant to serve if followed blindly.



Chakela's play starts with natural sound effects a Batlhaping chorus celebrating the birth of King Tau's son. As stated earlier, the birth of the baby boy brings joy not only to King Tau, but also the tribe as a whole because the boy means a future king for them. As a result, a whole series of rituals follow; the thanks-giving to the gods, the naming of the child, and so on, as tradition dictates. Among these rituals, the most important can be said to be that in which tribe's traditional doctor or prophet consults with the gods to find what the child holds for the tribe. With the King's son being so important, not only to him but the entire tribe as a whole, it can be stated that the fate of the tribe lies in knowing what the child holds:

KGOSI - My people, this is a very happy day for me and my wife, and I have no doubt that it is a happy moment for you too. I am presenting to you, cuddled in the arms of my lovely wife, your prince and future ruler of Batlhaping. As is customary, we have to give this child a name, but before we do that, we have to know what the future holds for the child. We need to know what role the creator has designed for the little boy.<sup>593</sup>

It is at this stage that one wonders whether the alterations become narrative shortcomings in the adaptation by Chakela, as it looks like Chakela is dictating the story and not allowing it to unfold naturally as it should. Given what is at stake, it is obvious that the King and the tribe look intensely at Segatlammitlwa to observe even the slightest change on his facial expression as he communicates with the gods. However, when he finally speaks and claims that the child would kill his father and marry his mother<sup>594</sup>, nobody questions him as one would expect. Segatlammitlwa's prophecy becomes even more absurd when he orders the child be sacrificed to the gods. One would expect a sacrifice to be made from an unblemished offering for it to be acceptable<sup>595</sup>. The question is whether making sacrifice with a cursed child would appease the gods. What is also amazing about the prophecy is that babies are often regarded as innocent, but in this case the baby is said to be a curse on the tribe instead of being a gift and blessing from the gods, especially when King Tau has been yearning for an heir to the throne of the Batlhaping.

In most societies, Segatlammitlwa would be severely punished for such allegations against a prince unless he provides proof. It can therefore be contested then that King Tau's failure to take charge and act appropriately shows the weakness and poor leadership of Chakela's character. In fact, if he was a wise leader, he would have consulted with Segatlammitlwa in private, assessed the implications and only afterward disclosed to the tribe their best interests.

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<sup>593</sup> Walter Chakela, *Wrath of the Gods*. unpublished play. [1991], p.3

<sup>594</sup> Ibid. p.6

<sup>595</sup> Abel and Cain sacrifice Bible story.

Chakela leaves this psychological wrangling open, without much comment or proposed solutions. King Tau does not question all these prophecies but orders one of his men, Rrathaga, to take the child from its crying mother and sacrifice it to the gods. It is worth noting King Tau does not consult his wife nor does he have any sympathy for her helpless and innocent baby. The King's concern is not for the living but for the gods' interests based on his tribe's beliefs and superstitions. This makes one wonder if the myopic way with that his characters follow their tradition is the way in which Chakela wants his audiences to follow their traditions as well.

The Batlhaping return to their normal life with the tribe still without an heir. However, this peace is short-lived as the tribe is rocked by a series of misfortunes. First, King Tau is killed while out hunting with his men. Consequently, the tribe is left without a king or a suitable person from the royal family to succeed him. It is important to note that if King Tau had dismissed the prophecy to save his only son, his tribe would have a prospective leader, which would save it from plunging deeper into crisis. It is at this stage that the wisdom of blindly observing customs without questions is challenged by plight of the tribe. However, Chakela offers no explanation why people should strictly follow their cultures if they are to lead them to misery.

The tribe sinks even deeper when it is attacked and robbed of cattle by white cattle raiders. They are helpless to defend themselves, since the raiders use guns while the Batlhaping rely on their traditional spears. Although helpless, the Batlhaping continue to guard their village continuously against the raiders. The tribe is finally rescued by the arrival of a stranger, Kgame Lethogile, a Motswana from the Barolong tribe. Kgame is well received by the Batlhaping warriors guarding the village except for Pudumo. Pudumo suspects Kgame is either a spy working for the white cattle raiders or he is a thief. This causes tension among the guards:

PUDUMO - Segeri, you people are entrusted with the security of our land and you receive strangers without even bothering to check them over. And you have the nerve to call my vigilance shameful.<sup>596</sup>

Despite Pudumo's resistance Kgame is well received and attended. This is something common amongst the Africans to receive strangers, especially if they are also from the same or related tribes. The warriors' openness makes them relate their problems to Kgame. In return, to show appreciation for their hospitality, Kgame shares with them his knowledge about the white cattle raiders, their tactics, strengths and weaknesses. Although the Batlhaping are helpless against these raiders, Kgame encourages them to fight on and win, like the Xhosas, who once defeated the white cattle raiders. This information and the

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<sup>596</sup> Walter Chakela, *Wrath of the Gods*. unpublished play. [1991], p.15

knowledge Kgame has about their enemy makes Pudumo even more suspicious. Despite Pudumo's suspicion the Batlhaping appeal to Kgame to stay with them for a while and teach them the Xhosas' tactics they employed. Being a wanderer, Kgame agrees to stay and help them defeat their enemy.

Although Chakela does not dwell much on the issue of blacks being attacked and robbed of their cattle by white raiders, he demonstrates that the aggression by settlers against blacks dates far back and is likely to continue. However, the fact that both tribes managed to defeat the enemy demonstrates that despite being poorly armed, blacks were intelligent and courageous enough to defend themselves. Furthermore, the co-operation between Kgame and the Batlhaping and the victory that follows, indicates the importance of hospitality, especially to strangers.

The Batlhaping victory over their enemy brings back peace and stability. Nevertheless, the fact that they are still without a king remains a problem especially when the late king's brothers are deemed unfit for succession because of their immoral behavior and alcoholism. As a result, the tribe approaches Kgame, who has become their Messiah and asks him to be their regent king. They believe having a strong and wise person like Kgame as their king will unify the tribe and deter their enemies from attacking, while a weaker king will achieve the contrary. The Batlhaping theory on strong leadership is in line with Norman Fairclough's assertion on leaders:

At all times, the efficiency of the truly national leader consists primarily in preventing the division of attention of a people, and always concentrating it on a single enemy. The more uniformly the fighting will of a people is put into action, the greater will be the magnetic force of the movement and the more powerful the impetus of the blow. It is part of genius of a great leader to make adversaries of different fields appear as always belonging to one category only, because to be weak and unstable characters the knowledge that there are various enemies which will lead only too easily to incipient doubts as to their own cause.<sup>597</sup>

The Batlhaping theory on leadership together with Fairclough's assertion can be seen as Chakela's argument that contrary to what philosophers like Hegel thought of African mental capability, Africans were intelligent enough to employ such psychological tactics to win battles long before the arrival of the white settlers.<sup>598</sup>

Given the situation and the Batlhaping hospitality, Kgame accedes and becomes the Batlhaping regent king despite Pudumo's opposition. As a king,

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<sup>597</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. [1989], p.86

<sup>598</sup> D.A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*. [1994] , p.5

Kgame inherits everything that belongs to the royal family. He even takes the late King's wife as his own wife in accordance with the common custom even amongst ordinary people known as "kenelo". It is worth noting the Batlhaping's victory over their enemy made them so blind that they even failed to question who Kgame was.

Everything remains normal with Kgame as a king until the tribe is attacked by a plague, which kills many people in the village. This raises discontent amongst the people and Kgame becomes the target of their anger and frustration, accusing him of not caring. He responds:

KGAME - My people, you wrong me very much if you think I am indifferent to your suffering. You wrong me greatly if you believe that whilst you suffer, I am relaxing cosily at home. When Gatlhaping<sup>599</sup> is enveloped in cold, and everybody is freezing to the bone, I freeze to the marrow because not only do I feel the cold myself, but for each one of you who might be struggling to keep warm.<sup>600</sup>

There are two things that can be observed from Kgame's statement. First, he understands that as a leader the well being of his people is his responsibility. Whatever the problems they encounter, he has to be there for them. Second, the Batlhaping have become so dependent on him that they can no longer think for themselves. However, instead of scolding them, he makes them aware that they are not doing anything to alleviate their suffering. This compels him to call a search for a remedy by the entire tribe instead of blaming each other. In the meantime, he sends for Segatlammitlwa to find out what caused the plague.

The measures that Kgame takes show that he is committed to the well-being of the people who made him their regent king. Furthermore, it demonstrates his respect to the gods. As much as that is the case, these measures also expose Segatlammitlwa's irresponsibility. As a traditional doctor and a prophet, one would expect him to rush to the king with suggestions and also appeal to the gods for help. However, he does not only fail to do anything, but even refuses to show up at the king's kraal when asked to. As a result, Kgame has to send Maruping to fetch him. This shows lack of interest in the affairs and problems of the tribe he is supposed to guide spiritually. On his return, Maruping is reluctant to relate the message to Kgame in the presence of the Council, which clearly indicates there is something wrong. Therefore, he asks for the king's private audience. Maruping's action demonstrates the respect the Batlhaping have for their leaders. It also gives Kgame an opportunity to look into the matter and deal with it before the public knows about it. However, Kgame declines,

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<sup>599</sup> Batlhaping – Tribe of the fish. Gatlhaping/Motlhaping – One who belongs to the fish [individual]

<sup>600</sup> Walter Chakela, *Wrath of the Gods*. unpublished play. [1991], p.36

arguing that the report should be given in public since the matter involves the entire tribe. It is worth noting that this is the same mistake King Tau made earlier in the play with regard to his newly born baby, that is, dealing with sensitive matters in public without first hearing them in private to find out what repercussions or impact they may have on the tribe. Consequently, Maruping is forced to divulge the news in public:

MARUPING - Well, Rre Segatlammitlwa says that the plague engulfing the village is a result of a curse... 'Somebody has committed a gruesome murder in this village but has never been punished for it, this has angered the gods.'<sup>601</sup>

It is also worth noting that every time something bad befalls the Batlhaping, Segatlammitlwa claims the gods have cursed the tribe. Furthermore, Maruping does not state who Segatlammitlwa says was murdered and by whom. Thus far in the play, two deaths have been recorded, that of King Tau and that of his baby son who was sacrificed to the gods.

The play reaches its climax with the arrival of Segatlammitlwa. However, instead of giving the answers to Kgame's questions, Segatlammitlwa asks questions himself that implicate Kgame. The first question is his relationship with the late King's wife, Kgosigadi, whom Kgame took as his wife after becoming the tribe's regent King. Second, he questions the scars on Kgame's wrists and ankles. Kgame is puzzled by both questions and so is the Council, but no one has any explanation.

It is not clear in the play why Kgame sends for the queen to give information regarding the place and time her late husband was killed and what its relevance is. However, from the way Kgame handles the situation it appears as if he feels guilty and he is eager to clear his name. Kgame learns from the queen's explanation that the incident occurred at the same place where he fought a group of men and killed one of them. This incident, together with the scars around his wrists and ankles make him anxious. Once again it is not clear whether Kgame was told that he would kill his father and marry his mother, but from the way he reacts to the situation it seems plausible. Both the queen and Council are quick to quieting him down, as they foresee trouble possibly based on the prophecy. The council even pleads with him to leave the matter alone while the queen tries to console him, explaining that whoever he killed at that place, it was in self-defense.

It is important to note how both the queen and the Council try to prevent Kgame from pursuing the matter further, which only makes him wonder what it is that they know that he does not. This is natural and the kind of reaction that could be expected from a man of his caliber, given his experience and

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid. p.42

intelligence. Consequently, Kgame sends for Rrapitse, the man who was present on the day of the fight in which King Tau was killed. He also asks for Rrathaga, the man who was entrusted with carrying out the sacrificial ritual at the beginning of the play. Rrapitse reluctantly states before Kgame and the council that Kgame is the man whom they fought the day King Tau was killed, while Rrathaga confesses that he never sacrificed the child as he was ordered because he felt sorry for the child and as a result gave it away to a passerby.

In the meantime, Mothibakgomo, from the Barolong-Batswana sub-tribe, arrives searching for Kgame. Mothibakgomo explains to Kgame that the people who brought him up were not his biological parents. He reveals that somebody else gave Kgame to them and they raised him as their child. This latest information together with that provided by both Rrapitse and Rrathaga points to Kgame as the child who was supposed to have been sacrificed as evidenced by the scars on his wrists and ankles. The fact that he killed King Tau, later became king of Batlhaping and married the late King's wife, fulfills Segatlamitlwa's prophecy. The revelation shatters the Batlhaping world in the process. Kgosisigadi, who has been watching the story unfold rushes out and commits suicide. So does Kgame, unable to face the situation.

Although *Wrath of the Gods* is an adaptation of the *Oedipus* tragedy, this story corresponds to many African societies, where beliefs of gods are widespread. In fact, it is believed that when a person dies that person joins the gods, and after some time becomes one as well. The gods are respected because it is believed that they have supernatural powers to help the living mainly by praying on behalf of the living to save them from suffering or help them get what they need. Consequently, Chakela seems to be calling for the upholding of African customs and emphasizes the importance of gods in people's lives. However, unlike Mda in *Love Letters*, who gently persuades his audience through his characters to observe their culture, Chakela cautions, if not threatens, his audience that failure to keep and observe customs may result in serious consequences.

Somehow, the characterizations of King Tau and Kgame are coherent with Sophocles' play, fate is predestined by the gods, but is still the (con)sequence of human decisions gives it tragic appeal. Under this aspect, as in the case of Rotimi's play *The Gods are not to Blame*, the play by Chakela could also be interpreted as a call to interpret tradition in an intelligent way without giving sway to one's flaws.

However, even though Chakela's objective in this play might have been to promote and protect African heritage, it also exposes the oppressive, ruthless and myopic nature of some customs. There is only one person in this play who is entrusted to communicate with the gods, which is Segatlamitlwa, not even king himself. This defeats logic and leaves many people at the mercy of one person who might manipulate things in his favor. This is evident throughout the play,

Segatlammitlwa fails to explain his prophecies and claims, which makes one think that his desire is to see the royal family perish. He is the only one who is not happy that the King has been blessed with a baby boy. It is also worth noting that when questioned further after claiming that the child is cursed and ought to be sacrificed to the gods, he says that he knew of the curse even before he left his home:

SEGATLAMMITLWA - Even before arriving here this morning, I already possessed knowledge of this curse by the gods on this child. I kept on hoping that I was wrong, but, by the gods of Motlhaping, this was the prophecy, and nothing is going to change.<sup>602</sup>

This makes one wonder if his prophecy was not a premeditated one. Supposing Segatlammitlwa did not make his claim public, the attempt to sacrifice the child to the gods would not have been made and consequently there would have been no reason for Kgame to have been given to Lethlogile to raise. This means that the child would grow up in his family. Consequently, if the child had to run away from home to avoid the prophecy coming true as he ran away from Lethlogile's family, he would not have accidentally killed his father and married his mother but other people. Furthermore, one would expect Segatlammitlwa to object to Kgame's installation if he loved the royal family and the tribe as a whole, since he possessed the knowledge about Kgame already. That could have saved the tribe from the plague and later the misfortune, but he remains silent and only speaks to accuse Kgame. Here one recalls the equivocal prophecies of the Three Weird Sisters/Witches in *Macbeth* "When the battle's lost and won" without telling Macbeth who will win and who will lose. They also utter "For none of woman born shall harm Macbeth"<sup>603</sup> without telling him that the man who will kill him, Macduff, was delivered by caesarean section. Both Segatlammitlwa and the Three Witches in *Macbeth*, as people who are said to have supernatural powers, seem to communicate in parables which have ambiguous meanings that lead others to disaster. The ambiguity of the prophecy again seems to refer to the above-mentioned relationship between destiny and free human action, and to the way in which people may be or not able to fill in their own fate.

The characterization of Segatlammitlwa, even though he is meant to be the pillar of tradition, is such that he casts a heavy shadow over tradition and makes it appear evil. Every time he appears, there is either a curse or somebody has done something evil. Even though he is said to be the tribe's traditional doctor and prophet he does not appear to safeguard the tribe from misfortunes, but mocks it if any happens. This is contradictory to his name that means "one

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<sup>602</sup> Ibid. p.7

<sup>603</sup> Kenneth Muir ed., *Macbeth*. [1962], pp.3,112

who cuts thorns” which probably means saving if not preventing his tribe from any pain, suffering or misfortunes. He does not cut any thorns but lets his people suffer from them. Rrapitse is no different, if he loves his people he should have joined Pudumo in opposing Kgame’s being made regent King since he knew that Kgame was the man who killed their king. By so doing, Rrapitse could have saved his tribe from a lot of trouble.

The play also exposes how oppressive customs can be on women. At the beginning of the play Tau orders that the child be taken away for a sacrificial ritual without consulting his wife. This shows that women are not considered at all. In fact, throughout the play, women are not expected to participate in the running of their tribe; instead they are scolded and jeered at:

PUDUMO - Where have you ever seen women making sense, except when cooking at home. You better get out before something unpleasant happens to you.<sup>604</sup>

This is typical of many African societies where women are often marginalized to the extent that they are regarded as minors. The question is whether this is the kind of custom Chakela advocates. If it is, it will be rather difficult in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for such customs to survive or to enjoy the same respect and popularity they did in the past, especially given the power and roles women have acquired at different levels of society.

The positive element in the play that symbolizes unity and perseverance is the manner in which the Batlhaping manage to withstand attack and defend their tribe against the white cattle raiders, even though they have nothing except spears with which to accomplish this. This implies that self-determination is important for survival and achieving goals. Consequently, looking at the play in the South African political context under apartheid, it can be submitted that just like the Batlhaping tribe armed with spears against the white settlers with guns, blacks were at disadvantage compared to the apartheid government in terms of its strength of the police, the army and its laws. However, through determination, persistence and endurance the oppressed employed whatever means including bus boycotts, stay-aways, strikes, armed struggle and theatre to bring about change. And finally, they managed to get the freedom they were fighting for despite the odds.

The play can be seen as Chakela’s way of compelling Africans to love and observe their origins, that is, customs, cultures and traditions. However, he is not as gentle and persuasive as Mda in *Love Letters*, but instructive. For him, a failure to observe these traditions ends in suffering and even death.

### ***Isithukuthuku [Sweat]***

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid. p.40



This play does not have a linear structure but is instead episodic, each of the three Movements deal with a specific theme. For this reason, each Movement has a different storyline with different characters and as a result characterizations differ from Movement to Movement.

The characterization in the First Movement is very much influenced by the power struggle in it. The two characters Woman and Man are selfish dictators concerned with their own interests, which they pursue and protect regardless of the consequences. The Laborers, on the other hand, are determined characters adamant to get a fair share for their labor. This creates a situation similar to that under apartheid, with laborers struggling against unjust treatment. The only difference is that in post-apartheid South Africa the perpetrators (Management) are not white but black.

A politically and racially motivated power struggle occurs in the Second Movement. Since this Movement is based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, it functions as a flashback of the events that took place under apartheid, with victims relating to the Commission their stories under the apartheid system. Naturally, the oppressor is the apartheid system, as represented by the white police officers, while the oppressed are blacks as represented by black women.

The main focus in this Second Movement is on women and their reaction to atrocities they are subjected to by the apartheid system. The character of Woman remains defiant despite the ill treatment she is subjected to, possibly because she believes that the apartheid system shall be defeated. The character of Woman 1, on the other hand, collapses under pressure and becomes insane. The perpetrators, Officers, are not that strong either. Although they have unlimited powers to crush any opposition no matter how, this also affects them psychologically, possibly because of the heinous crimes they commit in the name of the system.

The Third Movement also has something to do with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and deals with the question of land restitution. As a result, characterization is almost the same as in the previous Movement, except that in this case the focus is on men.

Chakela opens his play with what seems to be a criticism of stereotypes regarding traditional ways of life in Africa where labor is divided along gender lines, work such as hoeing, wood-gathering, fetching water and cooking are perceived as women's work while hunting, looking after cattle and ploughing are handled by men. Critics regard this as discrimination and oppression of women. However, through a narrator, Chakela seems to argue in this play that this gendered division of labor is the African way of life based on one's physical strength and capability. He contests that it is in line with the way man and woman lived when they were first created. Kees Epskamp argues that in Africa the context of indigenous education is life itself. As a child grows older, this 'life'

and the child become socialized. In this sense, there is educational potential in almost every human action. Epskamp points out that a taut differentiation of training exists for boys and girls in different age groups. For both boys and girls, education at home and in school is profession-orientated; boys are trained to be farmers, hunters, fishers, warriors, dancers and/or craftsmen, such as smiths. Girls, on the other hand, are educated in farming, gardening, household activities and mothers-to-be.<sup>605</sup>

Chakela begins the First Movement with a voice, which functions as a narrator to dramatize the creation of the universe according to the Bible. By so doing he mimics the creation stories wherein God spoke things into creation one after the other. The use of narrator seems to be a prevalent practice in the work of some of these playwrights. Karen Cronacher writes regarding this theatrical device in Ntozake Shange's play *Spell #7*:

In *Spell #7*, Shange deconstructs the humanistic assumption of character as a stable identity by foregrounding the role of narrative in the construction of a subject. The plot of the play consists of actors and actresses taking up the position of narrator as the remaining cast enact the story, so that the actors and actresses do not retain fixed identities, but are subjects-in-progress confronting the constraints of a hegemonic system of representation.<sup>606</sup>

The same can be said about Chakela's theatrical approach in this play. The narrator relates how man and woman lived, their gendered roles and responsibilities. A scene in which African men and women are engaged in different tasks based on their gender follows the narration. Both groups sing as they work, perhaps symbolizing unity and appreciation of what they are doing. This staging may be read as confronting the way some critics perceive this division of labor as sexist and discriminatory. Epskamp remarks that in Africa, dance, drama, elocution, poetry and music cannot be disconnected. In a theatrical as well as ritual context, music derives its full meaning from the social world of which it is part, and is, as such, also able to explain the aspects from that world. The sharing of life-experience and the mutual assistance in life-crises is an important social aspect in music and dance.<sup>607</sup>

However, although Chakela can be seen as defending the African life style against the intrusive western culture, he seems to advocate feminism at one stage. In the Bible it is stated that in the beginning God first put man into a deep

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<sup>605</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Learning through Performing Arts*. [1992], p.13

<sup>606</sup> Karen Cronacher, "Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic" in Ntozake Shange's *Spell #7*. *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 44, No2, May. [1992], p.184

<sup>607</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Learning by Performing Arts*. [1992], p.3

sleep before taking out his rib from which He created woman.<sup>608</sup> But in this play, the Voice presents woman as having been created independently from man:

VOICE - Modimo [God] created man from a particle of dry earth. But Sodume [God] noticed a hollowness in the demeanor of man. An imperfection that marred his creation. A lack of balance in the stature of his master stroke. Returning to the shade of the Mokgalo tree and taking another particle from The same patch of earth, He created woman and stood her face to face with man.<sup>609</sup>

Chakela's inconsistency with the Bible's version may cause confusion amongst his audience as it seems that he supports equality that is a paramount issue in feminist movements that voice against the replication of traditional customs that they see as oppressive towards women and consequently primitive and outdated.

Melissa Thackway notes that traditionalists in Africa have been widely criticized for their excessively romantic treatment of Africanity and for their uncritical celebration of even the most oppressive aspects of African tradition. Furthermore, feminists challenge the use of the pronoun "He" when referring to God because it implies that God is male. They criticize such a use and consider it an expression of the construction of 'gendered' power through religious narratives. Similarly, Judith Butler argues that gender is constructed, in the beginning is sexuality but without power, then power arrives to create both culturally relevant sexual distinction [gender] and, along with that, gender hierarchy and dominance.<sup>610</sup> By rewriting the Bible on the creation of the first man and the first woman, Chakela is tripping over feminists' steps although he is trying to protect and promote African traditions.

It is also fascinating how Chakela exploits and reinterprets the Bible with regard to environment/nature. On one hand, the play re-states conventional labour division as it is fixed in a 'sacred' (Biblical) space, while on the other hand, it interprets and changes the Biblical text in favour of preserving the environment/nature. But the challenge to environment/nature remains. The Voice observes:

VOICE - The fruits of labour brought about wealth to man and woman. Large tracts of land were brought under the hoe. Trees that once swayed in the air with carefree abandon came under the axe. The earth once vast and wide and life-sustaining came under the mortar machine.<sup>611</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Gospel: Genesis 2: 21-22

<sup>609</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*, unpublished play. [1997], p.3

<sup>610</sup> Butler, Judith "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory and Psychoanalytic Discourse" in Linda Nicholson ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism*. [1990], p.328

<sup>611</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*, unpublished play. [1997], p.3

Just like it was argued during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, it seems as if this lustful development reflected in this play was not only hurting and endangering other living things but people as well. With population increasing and resources dwindling, those in power keep whatever they can for themselves leaving others with nothing and causing suffering and discontent among many. This is demonstrated by the confrontation between the management and the laborers.<sup>612</sup> Norman Fairclough says it is a sad fact that power is often exercised through depriving people of their jobs, their homes, and their lives, as events under apartheid South Africa, for example, have shown.<sup>613</sup>

The story is taken over from the Voice by dissatisfied workers who are unhappy with the management. The management, on the other hand, feels threatened by the laborers' demands. However, instead of addressing the grievances of the laborers, the management resorts to the use of force to suppress the laborers and to protect its interests:

MAN - We have to protect our property. We have to protect the stock exchange, the stock market.

WOMAN - We need thousands of guns, bayonets and boots. Let's build a force of uniformed persons to guard the property market.<sup>614</sup>

At this stage Chakela seems to be of the opinion that there is no difference in terms of jobs and personal interest protection between whites under apartheid and the black elite currently in power. As indicated in a previous chapter, Jordan Ngubane observes that the job reservation by whites under apartheid was another useful technique to reserve certain jobs for whites. The primary purpose was to prevent Africans from infiltrating the higher paid grades of employment. Because if blacks were to amass enough wealth they would augment the numbers of the middle class, which already owns property and seeks fulfillment for its children in professional work and business, and, on the whole, increases the threat to the white man's authority.<sup>615</sup>

One also sees the same apartheid mentality in the characters of Man and Woman that feel threatened by the laborers. Their discussion exposes how myopic management can be when it comes to dealing with its labour force. It will probably cost more to hire guards and purchase guns to protect oneself against the laborers than addressing the grievances of the laborers outright. There can be a couple of reasons for the management to resort to the use of force. What is apparent is that the management seems to have enriched itself at the expense of

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<sup>612</sup> Ibid. p.3

<sup>613</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. [1989], p.3

<sup>614</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*, unpublished play. [1997]p.7

<sup>615</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African s Explain Apartheid..* [1963] , p.60

the laborers and continues to do so. Augusto Boal notes that the capitalist does not ask workers if they agree the capital should belong to one and the labour to another. Boal argues that the capitalist simply places an armed police officer at the factory door without consulting anybody because it is private property.<sup>616</sup> This is what one sees in the play's First Movement.

It can be argued that in light of the rise of the black middle class, which seems to get richer as the masses get even poorer, Chakela appears to warn against the economic divergence of South African society, which leads to a society at odds with itself. This is evidenced by the management in this play which is no longer able to sit and discuss the grievances of the laborers because of the differences in lifestyle. This difference between the two groups is manifested through music and food:

MAN - I want to have a drink. May I fix you one too?

WOMAN - Whisky on the rocks.

MAN - I am having mine neat. What must I play you? Hugh Masekela?

WOMAN - No. Mozart. Play me some Mozart.<sup>617</sup>

The management's dislike of local music, as represented by the contrast between Hugh Masekela's local music and the appreciation of Mozart and whisky, indicates that the management no longer identifies with anything local hence its failure to communicate effectively with the laborers.<sup>618</sup> Paulo Freire comments, in this regard, that the dominant elites think without the people, although they do not permit themselves the luxury of failing to think about the people in order to know them better so that they can dominate them efficiently.<sup>619</sup>

It is important to note that Africans are known to sing whenever doing something to boost their morale, as observed earlier. In this play, the Security Force sings to boost morale in their confrontation against the workers, while the workers sing as a sign of defiance against the management. Though both groups are singing, the singing of the workers irritates the management, while that of the Security Force is acceptable. This may indicate how much the management has been removed from the masses. It may also explain management's dislike of the workers' music<sup>620</sup> because they threaten the management's interest, which might lead to losing their monopoly. Slaughter commends that capitalists become bankrupted if they fail to invest capital in raw material, tools and labour power at a sufficiently high rate of profit in order to increase their capital.<sup>621</sup> Fear of

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<sup>616</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*. [1979] p.149

<sup>617</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*, unpublished play. [1997], p.8

<sup>618</sup> Ibid. p.8

<sup>619</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.126

<sup>620</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*, unpublished play. [1997], p.8

<sup>621</sup> Cliff Slaughter, *Marx and Marxism*. [1995], p.23

'bankruptcy' seems to fuel the management to do whatever it can to maintain status. However, in the process they appear no different from politicians, as portrayed in Mda's *You Fool How can the Sky Fall?*, and whites under apartheid. In this Movement the management uses the Security Force to quell the laborers' uprising to protect its interests. Freire argues, in this regard, that the oppressors do not perceive their monopoly as a privilege, which dehumanizes others and themselves. For the oppressors, having more is an inalienable right they acquired through their own effort due to their courage to take risks. As a result, if others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent, lazy, and are potential enemies that ought to be watched because of their envy and jealousy.<sup>622</sup>

The First Movement ends with the presentation of a petition to the management in which the workers outline their demands with a strict deadline:

WORKER 1 - We have a petition here. We want to hand it to you.  
MAN - Is that all? Why didn't you hand it over to him? That's what I pay him for!  
WORKER 1 - We want to hand it over to you ourselves.  
MAN - O.K! Hand it over.  
WORKER 1 - No.  
MAN - No?  
WORKER 1 - I have to read it first.  
MAN - Read it first? You wrote it, didn't you?  
WORKER 1 - Read it to you I mean.  
MAN - Read it to me? Man, you must be joking. Are you impugning my literacy or something? I graduated cum laude with Bachelor of Commerce from Wits University, and MBA from Harvard in the USA.<sup>623</sup>

Given the numerous strikes that plague South Africa since the dawn of democracy, in this exchange, Chakela seems to advise his audience to follow proper channels to present a petition, that is, it should be presented to the correct person and be read in the presence of both parties so that they are familiar with its contents. This is either to avoid management's denial of receiving such a petition, if presented to someone else to pass it to the management, or management altering its contents of the petition, should it not be read in the presence of both parties to familiarize themselves with the contents.

It is also worth noting that the petition presented in this play sounds like one presented by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) on behalf of its members. Although the petition in this play means well, it would have a negative impact on female workers while benefiting male workers. The

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<sup>622</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.45

<sup>623</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*, unpublished play. [1997], p.10

demand for “The extension of the period of maternity leave to six months” is likely to affect some female workers. In a production-orientated company, management may be reluctant to hire women for the fear they may become pregnant and go on paid maternity leave for six months. With more and more people competing over fewer jobs, this will have a negative impact on the lives of women and their families. At the end of the day it will be the female workers who will suffer. This is a contradiction Chakela seems to leave for his audience to decide upon.

The Second Movement is entitled “The Killing Fields.” It revisits the treatment of blacks, especially women, under the apartheid system. Of all the groups that have suffered during the struggle, Chakela considers women to have suffered the most. It can be argued that women’s experience in countries which are in a struggle for freedom is almost the same. This is reflected in Irene Staunton writing about the experience of women in the Zimbabwean struggle for freedom, which is almost similar to that of women in South Africa as portrayed by Chakela and women in Mozambique, as observed by Graca Machel in the previous chapter. Staunton argues:

The war visited different areas of the country at different times and with varying degrees of intensity. For some women, the war was with them for a year or two: for others it lasted much longer. The time was something not measured in weeks or months, but by impact of violence or grief or need and by the rhythms of the season or of motherhood.<sup>624</sup>

Staunton goes on to argue that stories based on the experience of Zimbabwean women during the war are stories of fear; First, fear for the lives of their children who had joined the struggle. Second, fear for the survival of their homes and their children who had remained behind. Third, fear of contacts between the freedom fighters and the Rhodesian Security Forces. Finally, fear of the soldiers and fear of sell-outs. However, she notes that at the same time there was that persistence and acceptance of the war. And like the character of Woman in the Third Movement, these women believed that the war would bring freedom and better life at the end.<sup>625</sup> Similarly, Glenda Dickerson observes that the suffering of mothers who lose their daughters to rape, war, drugs and poverty; the suffering of women who are tortured and die in Latin American prisons are like women fixed on the fangs of the two-headed serpent. Dickerson believes the same can be said about the untimely death of young women who are killed by drunken drivers or yuppie lovers in New York’s Central Park and twice victimized by the courts and press. She notes that their silenced voices, their stilled tongues are

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<sup>624</sup> Irene Staunton, *Mothers of the Revolution* [1990], p.xi

<sup>625</sup> Ibid. p.xi

symbolized in the illegal banning of South Africa's Nomzamo Winnie Mandela.<sup>626</sup>

Even without Dickerson's mention of Winnie Mandela, the same can be said about South African women under apartheid. However, the mere mention of Winnie's name together with Staunton's assertion makes Chakela's portrayal of South African women's experience even more pertinent. In fact, Chakela is of the thinking that the South African women suffered double burden, as mothers and as individuals drawn into the fray because of their resistance to injustices of the apartheid system. As evidenced by the 1976 riots, South African youth were at the forefront of the freedom struggle. Like any other group or individuals opposed to the apartheid system, resisting the system incited the maiming, imprisonment, or murder of scores of children, which had a negative impact on the mothers. It is this negative impact and its psychological effects, especially on the mothers, that Chakela focuses on in this play. He argues that many women were seriously affected mentally, to the extent that some completely lost their sanity:

WOMAN 1 - Isn't he a lovely child, sir? His name is Buntu. He is going to be a very important man in this country. You watch.

FORCE MEMBER 1 - What is that? I have just killed her baby? Whose baby is that now? That's lamb. That's not a baby.

WOMAN 1 - Oh! Is that you again, sir. You have come to visit us again. Buntu look who is here, look who has come to visit us again. Look, Malome [uncle].

FORCE MEMBER 1 - I said stop that! I am not an uncle to any lamb. You are trying to drive me crazy. I will kill you if you don't stop this shit.<sup>627</sup>

There are a couple of issues raised in this exchange; first, the maternal bond between mother and child as a physical and emotional bond. A sudden and unexpected death of the baby leaves a void in the mother that is difficult to fill, especially if the cause of death is not natural. This is evidenced by the exchange between Woman 1 and Force Member 1, which reveals the emotional suffering Woman 1 goes through due to the murder of her baby by the police and the emptiness it left. This may explain why Woman 1 uses a lamb as a substitute.

It is important to note that like every mother, Woman 1 perceived her baby as harmless as a lamb, which further questions the motive of the killing. The second point worth noting in the exchange is with regard to Woman 1's expectation concerning her child; most mothers believe their children will be

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<sup>626</sup> Glenda Dickerson, "The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward a Womanist Attitude in African-American Theatre," *Theatre Journal*, May [1992], p.184

<sup>627</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*. unpublished play. [1997], pp.13,14



important when they grow up. In this case, it is reinforced by the child's name "Buntu" which means, "Humanity". However, such names meant trouble under apartheid because they were seen as politically motivated. Given such a name, the system might have thought the child would grow up to be an activist or a terrorist, influenced to by one or both the parents who had given the child that name. The parents would be seen as activists or terrorists themselves. This explains why Force Member 1 killed the child in the first place. Force Member 2 remarks:

FORCE MEMBER 2 - All your children are activists, aren't they? This one will grow to be one too.<sup>628</sup>

Both the attitude and heinous crimes these fictitious characters display resembles those of the South African Security Force under apartheid as Martin Orkin observes that the police behaved like an occupying army, since they were free to enter any house and search it without a warrant. Orkin notes that they were the most heavily armed police force this side of the Iron Curtain and outside of the dictatorship. The main task was not to protect the citizen and uphold the law, but to ensure that "proper relations" were maintained between blacks and whites.<sup>629</sup>

As much as the killings of South African youth psychologically impacted mothers, Chakela submits that the arrest and disappearance of children was another contributing factor to the suffering of South African mothers since they were left wondering what could have happened to them. The pain that this caused was evident at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission where even the Chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, broke down and wept.

The other point that Chakela puts forward, apart from psychological torture that black women were subjected to, is physical abuse. He argues that their tormentors raped a lot of women, apart from other forms of torture to which political detainees were subjected. This continuous inhuman treatment had a terrible effect, as the character of Woman observes:

WOMAN - Either they have driven you right out of your feet of the Lord. They have invaded my body and squirted their filth into me but they have torn and ate your insides. They mowed your youth like they were mowing down a cactus field. Oh! That we have to endure so much pain before the dawn of our day which will come as surely as tomorrow will come.<sup>630</sup>

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<sup>628</sup> Ibid. p.13

<sup>629</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*. [1991], p.133

<sup>630</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*. unpublished play. [1997], p.15

The character of Woman reveals the extent of humiliation and dehumanizing women were subjected to. Van Niekerk observes that the raping of women has been used as a weapon in many conflict situations. She notes that such atrocities have been witnessed in countries such as Rwanda, Burundi and most recently, Sudan where women's bodies have become the battleground.<sup>631</sup> Similarly, Angela Davis notes how female slaves were inherently vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion. Davis observes that if the punishment for men consisted of flogging and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped.<sup>632</sup>

However, Chakela argues that as much as women were subjected to this horrendous treatment, some were strong enough to take their suffering and remained hopeful for freedom. Likewise, Lotter notes that some of the oppressed people might have suffered from double consciousness in which they got a strong self-image and self-respect resulting from both suffering and the negative images projected by oppressors.<sup>633</sup> This is what one observes between Woman and Woman 1 in this play.

From dramatizing the past, Chakela takes his audience to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the second part of this Movement. Victims relate their experiences under the apartheid system, as if to give those who never attended any session first-hand experience of what transpired:

VOICE - Nobody knew where they took my son to. Nobody said where they were taking my son to, not the local charge Office, not the Regional Office, not the National Office. Hours turned to days, days turned to weeks, weeks turned to months and now it has been years since my son was taken away.<sup>634</sup>

The disappearance of the loved ones and the pain it caused has been addressed. At this stage what can be said is that, not surprising, the authority denied any knowledge of the whereabouts of the victims since most of the victims were taken away at night, probably to cover up the perpetrators' tracks and leave the victim's disappearance a mystery. Often, there was no specific charge laid against the victims for as long as they were said to be communists or terrorists, their arrest and subsequent ill treatment was justified. The International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, in co-operation with the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid (IDFSAUNCAA), comment, on the South African Security Force under apartheid, that the power the government, police and military possessed to act against opponents of the regime was used extensively

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<sup>631</sup> Heather van Niekerk, "Women's bodies have become the battle ground in Sudan" *Mail&Guardian*, July 23-29,[2004], p.34

<sup>632</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*. [1983], p.7

<sup>633</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa..* [1997], p.31

<sup>634</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*. unpublished play .[1997], p.21

and concertedly. As the liberation struggle went underground in 1960 and became an armed struggle, the regime pursued still more extreme methods of repression<sup>635</sup> such as detentions without trial, banning, house arrest and death sentences.

Given this scenario, Annelies Verdoolaage believes that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was seen as a bridge-building exercise between a past of injustice, discrimination, intolerance and a future recognition of human rights, democracy and equality. Therefore, one of the main tasks of the Commission was to uncover as far as possible the truth about past gross violations of human rights, since it was believed that this was necessary for the promotion of reconciliation and national unity.<sup>636</sup> Surprisingly, despite this inhuman treatment, in this play the request of the relatives of the victims to the TRC is simple; all they want is to know what happened to their loved ones. If they are dead, they should be exhumed from their secret graves and be handed over for a proper burial in accordance with their tradition. Some people wanted their relatives exonerated after being wrongfully branded as collaborators or spies of the apartheid regime while others expected financial compensation.<sup>637</sup> Hennie Lotter notes that many people still want answers about how their loved ones died and who were responsible for their deaths. Because many political murders and assassinations remain unsolved, anger, bitterness and resentment are still pervasive.<sup>638</sup> Amy Ansell contests that true healing cannot take place when resentment, bitterness, guilt and fear remain buried.<sup>639</sup> The play powerfully expresses the desire of knowing 'the truth:

VOICE - All I want to know is where they have taken my son. If he is alive, please bring him back to me. If he is dead, dig his remains for his bones cannot rest unless buried by me.<sup>640</sup>

The fact that at one stage Chakela observes that this inhuman treatment of blacks by the system continued despite the restraint blacks showed makes one wonder if his audience would accept the notion of reconciliation. He gives an example of people like Plaatje, who believed in peaceful means to bring about change, but whose efforts foundered. It can be contested that the system's failure to make a

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<sup>635</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa and United Nation Centre Against apartheid, *Apartheid-The Facts*. [1982], p.60

<sup>636</sup> Annelies Verdoolaage, *Reconciliation Discourse: The Case of Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. [2008], p.9

<sup>637</sup> Ibid. p.16

<sup>638</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa* .[1997], p.157

<sup>639</sup> Amy Ansell, "Two nations of discourse: mapping racial ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa". [2004], p.10

<sup>640</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*. unpublished play. [ 1997], p.21

note of these efforts, regardless of how peaceful they were, led to the violent change amongst many blacks. A possible question that can be put forward then is what if the perpetrators show no remorse, would Chakela advocate a violent reaction from the victims?

Nevertheless, Chakela seems to perceive the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a pillar of judgment, whereby every person should be judged according to his or her deeds. He expects the perpetrators of evil under apartheid to be brought to justice. However, he seems to regret that even though apartheid was officially abolished, blacks continue to suffer, largely at the hands of other blacks in positions of power. He urges his audience to stand up and continue to fight for their rights. However, he insists that they should follow proper channels in their search for justice, as indicated by the steps taken by the laborers in the First Movement.

In the Third Movement Chakela first traces the impact the displacement had on blacks, then connects it to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the sense that characters in this Moment battle to regain their land that was lost during the notorious forced removals by the apartheid system. They expect the Commission to return the land to them.

Most Africans, especially in rural areas, were subsistence farmers. However, with their land taken away from them by the system they were left with no option but to work for whites either as farm workers or miners. As farm workers, blacks had little problem with their families, since they stayed on the farm with the entire household, often working on the farm as well. However, as migrant workers, black males had to leave their families behind because they were not allowed to live with their families on the mining compounds. Lotter reiterates that when blacks became migrant workers they lived apart from their families for almost eleven months because their families were not welcomed in the white areas since they had no economic function to fulfill.<sup>641</sup>

WORKER 1 - After that day of song and dance and gaiety, will follow the day you have to come back to work. Your wife will be alone and her heart will be heavy with loneliness.

WORKER 3 - Why can't he bring his wife here? Why can't they be together here?

WORKER 2 - Where will they live? Here with us?<sup>642</sup>

The situation of migrant workers being away from their families for a long period is a threat to the stability to their families. Apart from that, they are tested, tempted to engage in extra-marital affairs when separated from their wives for

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<sup>641</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa* .[1997], p.26

<sup>642</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*, unpublished play. [1997], p.33

lengthy periods, threatening their marriages. In the process they risk being infected with HIV/AIDS, as one of the characters states in the play.

The plight of mine workers in South Africa, as portrayed in the play, explains the serious measures taken by both the government and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to compel mining companies to provide living quarters for miners and their families on the compounds. Given this challenge facing mine workers, which still exists today and the bleak future the migrant workers face, Chakela's advice is that miners should consider other alternatives:

WORKER 4 - My wife will stay at home in Taung. We might not have bright and glittering neon lights there, but at least we live in dignity. No, I will work for a while, save enough money to work the land back home. Yes, I will be my own boss very soon. Thoko will be sad when I leave her after our wedding. My heart will be ripped apart by the separation too, but when my plans fall into place, her face will wear a smile that will last forever.<sup>643</sup>

As much as Worker 4 acknowledges the situation, migrant workers are faced with and consider farming as a solution, the change is that most of the arable land was taken away from blacks during forced removals and given to white farmers. As a result, Worker 4 has to get the land back first before he can engage in any form of farming.

At this stage Chakela interrogates the complications surrounding land restitution. One of the characters, Mabalane, writes a letter to the Land Commissioner appealing for the return of the land taken away from his parents when he was young. However, his colleagues argue that it will not be easy to get it back, especially when the present owner has already developed it. Besides, taking the land back from the present owner will not be in the spirit of national reconciliation.<sup>644</sup> However, Frantz Fanon points out that for a colonized people the most essential value is the land able to bring them bread and the dignity of being masters of their own lives and fate.<sup>645</sup>

The understanding behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was that all the parties concerned would reveal everything before the Commission. The second step would be to forgive the perpetrators and compensate the victims accordingly. This explains why in this play Mabalane has to write a letter to the Commission to present his case. It was believed after the bare facts were presented that both parties could reconcile and show remorse to each other. Only then could people, regardless of race, gender, or religion, join hands to rebuild a new South Africa.

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid. p.33

<sup>644</sup> Ibid. p.33

<sup>645</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. [1963], translated by C. Carrington, p.34

In the last two Movements Chakela exposes the expectations of the people concerning the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the complex situation the Commission found itself in. In order to achieve its goal, the Commission has to satisfy both sides; victims and perpetrators alike.

Earlier in the play there was mention of Plaatje, a poet, and of his peaceful means to bring about change. At the end of the play a poet dies and the Workers greatly regret his death. They argue that in light of the challenges the country faces, it needs people with strong leadership for the country to develop and improve the lives of the masses.

WORKER 1 - Why now, poet? Why now and not earlier. Now was not the right time for your departure. Earlier would have been more tolerable, for those were times of death. Later would have been better, for then, surely you would have finished your task. Now is too late and too soon.<sup>646</sup>

Worker 1 reveals the hardships artists, especially poets, had to endure under apartheid. He is very much convinced that the society still needs people like him. Similarly, Kaizer Nyatumba reiterates the self-sacrifice of poets in the name of freedom. Nyatumba argues that those with a special gift for writing protest poetry, like the late Ingoapela Madingoane and the executed Benjamin Moloise, wrote movingly about the suffering of South Africa's black majority at the hands of a white minority, and inspired blacks to look forward eagerly to the long-awaited dawn of freedom.<sup>647</sup>

In conclusion, *Isithukuthuku* exposes the suffering of the black majority and the price they paid in the name of freedom while revealing the brutality of the apartheid system to eliminate its opponents. It can be argued that women are one of the groups that suffered most in this struggle for freedom. This contradicts the way women are often perceived in black communities, that is, timid. Their contribution, as portrayed in this play, might be a challenge to their prevalent marginalisation in many African communities. Despite all these, Chakela seems to be of the opinion that some of the black elite post-apartheid practice the same oppressive measures against the masses.

Finally, Chakela reminds his audience that while the battle for freedom might have been won, the big challenge still lies ahead. The major challenge is to restore the lives and heal the wounds of apartheid's victims, which might appear as difficult as the struggle for freedom itself. Complicating it more is the need for reconciliation without victimizing those who benefited from the system. As a result, both the victims and perpetrators of apartheid ought to sacrifice in the

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<sup>646</sup> Walter Chakela, *Isithukuthuku*, unpublished play. [1997], p.37

<sup>647</sup> Kaizer Nyatumba, "Rights Mean Little to the Poor", *Sunday Times*. [1998], p.17

name of reconciliation, especially the victims. Chakela's argument seems to be that the journey to true reconciliation is a painful one, as painful as the freedom struggle itself.

Although there is a notable change in subject matter and tone, especially in relation to the state, in Chakela's plays there is that sense of interrogation of the current situation vis-à-vis the experiences of the black masses under apartheid. Like Mda, he seems to question if blacks are getting what they expected in a democratic South Africa. Nevertheless, he is aware of the challenges facing South Africa if reconciliation and coexistence are to be achieved.

#### Chapter 4: Young Generation of South African Black Playwrights

The freedom black youth in South Africa and the country as a whole fought for was finally achieved in the 1994 multi-racial general elections. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, South Africa's acquiring of freedom poses a challenge of focus to black playwrights whose time and energy had been spent dismantling the apartheid system. The post-independence question now is, "what next?"

The discussion in this chapter will be about plays written by young South African black playwrights in a democratic South Africa. The objective is to identify issues of major concern to this generation of black playwrights in this new political dispensation. The discussion will follow a similar pattern to the previous chapter, that is, a brief narrative structure of each playwright, characterization, followed by in-depth discussion and analysis of the plays. There are eleven plays discussed in this chapter. This is to maintain a balance in the number of plays between this chapter and the previous one. These are not the only plays written in post-apartheid South Africa, but were selected due to the subject matter the playwrights address. Undoubtedly, there are many plays by new writers written in this era.

In order to understand the importance of young dramatists in South African, it is worth considering how the relationships between old and new generations changed shape in the course of the fight against apartheid.

One of the groups that found itself at the forefront of the freedom struggle was the youth, after years of patience waiting for their elders to take appropriate measures and bring about change in the country. The youth's tolerance was born out of their respect for the elders, who pleaded with them for patience to avoid direct confrontation with the brutal apartheid system to avoid a catastrophe. Their patience was also due to the African cultures that emphasizes respect for elders. Steve Biko observed the strictness of African cultures, writing that a "lack of respect for the elders is, in the African tradition, an unforgivable and cardinal sin".<sup>648</sup> Similarly, Joy Hendry notes that respect for elders is a much more profound part of the way of thinking of many peoples of the world. Hendry says to disrespect and devalue elders is a characteristic of the so-called modern English-speaking worlds where rushing about to earn a lot of money and make progress are seen as more important than learning directly from the forebears about times that have been classified as old-fashioned and outdated.<sup>649</sup> Biko goes on to note the difference between the old generation as opposed to the militant young generation when it comes to the question of attaining freedom, that the

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<sup>648</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Theatre" in Hendrik Van Der Merwe ed., *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p. 199,

<sup>649</sup> Joy Hendry, *Reclaiming Culture: Indigenous People and Self-Representation*. [2005], p.206



older generation was optimistic that there was a chance to achieve a political solution through peaceful means.<sup>650</sup>

For a long time, in fact, it became the occupation of the leadership to calm the masses down, while they engaged in fruitless negotiation with the status quo. Their whole political action, in fact, was a programmed course in the art of gentle persuasion through protests and limited boycotts and they hoped the rest could be safely left to the troubled conscience of the fair-minded English folks.<sup>651</sup>

It can be contested that the approach of the old generation to freedom was not different from that of the Women's Emancipation Movement in its earlier days during which some women argued that if women showed that they were sensible and responsible human beings, definitely men would take them seriously and grant them the vote. As a result, women worked hard to ensure that no behavior of theirs tarnished their suffrage societies. They also guarded against any activity that could be considered "unlady"-like which would ruin their image and be used against them.<sup>652</sup> Unfortunately, despite all this effort to prove themselves, they were still not granted the right to vote by their male folks. Similarly, the old generation's soft approach to the question of equality in South Africa did not bear the desired fruits. This fruitless negotiation that Biko says the old generation was engaged in with a hope that the system would change with time, finally eroded the tolerance of black youth as blacks continued to suffer under the yoke of the apartheid system.

As indicated in the introduction, the resistance against apartheid took shape at the end

of the 1940's and in the 1950's with a huge series of protest, passive resistance and boycott actions backed by international demands against apartheid at the United Nations. The pivotal change in the African National Congress (ANC) strategy, which in the mean time had developed as the main opposition party, came with the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 when hundreds of black people who were peacefully demonstrating against the segregation laws (so-called pass laws) were shot by the police and 69 died. After the massacre, the supporters of organized violent rebellion, previously marginalized as too radical, gained influence within the ANC. Nelson Mandela, who was previously committed to non-violent resistance, started a sabotage group against military and government targets as 'last resort' against

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<sup>650</sup> Steve Biko, *I Write what I like*. [1978], p.63

<sup>651</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Theatre" in Hendrik Van Der Merwe ed., *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.193

<sup>652</sup> Cecily Hamilton & Christabel Marshall, *How the Vote was Won*, [1910] p.7

the unrelenting apartheid system and the Afrikaner nationalists. This saw the birth of the ANC military wing uMkhondo weSizwe (MK) (The Spear of the People)<sup>653</sup>

Biko notes that in the 1970's a group of disgruntled angry youth emerged and took over the direction imposed by the African National Congress old guard. These youths, beginning to grasp the notion of (their) peculiar uniqueness were eager to define who they were, questioned a number of things, among which was the 'go slow' attitude adopted by the leadership, and the ease with which the leadership accepted coalitions with organizations other than those run by blacks.<sup>654</sup> Similarly, Njabulo Ndebele observes that a clash of generations emerged between parents and children during the struggle, as a result of the perception by the youth that their elders were not doing enough to combat their oppression. Ndebele states that this situation catapulted the youth into the forefront of the liberation struggle but with some agonizing consequences.<sup>655</sup>

Steven Bantu Biko was one of these disillusioned youths and consequently founded the Black Conscious Movement (BCM). Biko believed that the blacks' struggle for freedom should be exclusive to avoid infiltration by white elements pretending to be sympathetic to blacks while actually serving the interests of the apartheid system. He argued that the exclusiveness of struggle would guarantee unity that would lead to liberation much faster as compared to the old generation's soft approach.<sup>656</sup> This was a turning point in the history of youth's involvement in the political struggle in South Africa. The climax of their involvement was the 1976 school boycott and riots which left many youth dead just like the old generation feared.

Dickson Mungazi points out that one of the most important conclusions of Freire's theory is that conflict becomes the only form of relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed when dialogue has not become a factor in their interaction. Mungazi argues that Freire suggests that this conflict comes about as a result of a contradictory situation that forces both the oppressor and the oppressed to take diametrically opposing positions on important issues. By the very nature of their positions, the oppressed interpret any action by the oppressor whether be political, legislative or social as intended to reinforce the oppressive conditions and to strengthen the position of the oppressor.<sup>657</sup> The same can be said about apartheid system in South Africa and the way blacks perceived it.

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<sup>653</sup> Nelson Mandela, *The Struggle is my Life*, [1978], p. 153, 163

<sup>654</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Theatre", in Hendrik Van Der Merwe ed., *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972] p. 196,

<sup>655</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991], p.70

<sup>656</sup> Steve Biko, *I Write what I like*. [1978] , p.64

<sup>657</sup> Dickson Mungazi, *Colonial Policy and Conflict in Zimbabwe: A study of Cultures in Collision, 1870-1979*. [1992], p.59

Over the years, children have actively participated in the many protests and demonstrations organized by the people against the apartheid system. They have been junior supporters of the liberation movement, particularly in opposing legislation which directly affects children. The most notable contribution by children to the struggle against apartheid were the protests organized by school students against segregated education which developed into a nationwide uprising of 1976. Black children had never accepted their inferior education or the racial subjugation imposed by the South African state.<sup>658</sup>

Since the 1976 student riots, the youth in South Africa have played and continued to play a major role, especially in the political arena. Whereas the majority of young black South Africans took to the streets or joined UMKhondo we Sizwe (MK), others such as Mda, Ngema, and Dike turned to theatre and employed it as a tool of resistance to voice their anger and frustration against the apartheid system. They told their stories and those of their neighbors, friends, communities and the country as a whole under the apartheid system. One of the reasons for this up-surge of new writers was due to disgruntled youth perceiving the work of some of the older generation of black playwrights, such as Mutwa and Kente, as part of the old generation of political leaders. Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman recall:

During the 1970s and especially after 1976, Kente's brand of musical theatre proved to be inadequate to a younger generation looking for more radical connections between expression and political aspiration. A new type of theatre began to emerge which signified the first radical departure from the influence of Europeans. This was part of the general struggle for cultural identity and political conscientization known as Black Consciousness. Black Consciousness aimed to create a direct link between cultural and political liberation.<sup>659</sup>

The new generation of the seventies has now become the 'older generation' and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, their works in new democratic South Africa try to adapt to and express the contemporary world and socio-political challenges. But there are other important new voices and plays that have characterized the present theatre scene in South Africa. This chapter will discuss themes and directions of the works by young South African playwrights. A number of young playwrights' plays discussed below were presented at the new writers and directors' festivals of the Market Theatre Laboratory. Through its annual festival, the Market Theatre Laboratory can be considered a microcosm of

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<sup>658</sup> Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South Africa Theatre*. [1984], p.145

<sup>659</sup> Ibid. p.3

what is likely to be current thematic writing trends in the macrocosm of black African dramaturgy nationally.

#### 4.1 *K'uze Kuse* – Sello kaNcube

Sello kaNcube is a Market Lab Institute graduate. He is a playwright, director and actor. He played the lead role in *The Lion King* and currently acts on the television soap opera, *Scandal* on etv (private television station).

The play *K'uze Kuse* was first performed at Market theatre, Johannesburg, in 1996 featuring Leleti Khumalo among others. It was directed by Sello kaNcube. It is a story about disgraced ex-gang leader, G-Man. Following his arrest and imprisonment he now has to scavenge to survive. His fall is juxtaposed against that of Scratch, a young man growing up in a township with the same mentality, since criminals are often idealized in some of such places. Scratch leads a fast and reckless life of booze, girls and drugs, which all required money but he does not work.

In this play, Sello kaNcube portrays the lives of blacks in South African townships and vividly describes their lives in a social environment in which the high rate of unemployment and lack of social services still offer little hope for social and economic improvement creating a breeding area for 'gangsterdom' and prostitution. The township audience can identify characteristics of the various characters through their names. Where necessary, the names can also imply a certain lifestyle and occupation. In short, the occupation and personalities of his characters are implied and encoded in their names and also reinforced by the characters' language.

The occupation of Sis Joyce is not mentioned in the play, but characters with such names are often shebeen queens (female informal bar owner). Both her language, which is rather vulgar, and her way of life as an alcoholic, imply this. However, it can also be assumed that Sis Joyce is not married, hence the address "Sis," which stands for "Sister." It is a common practice amongst blacks to put a noun before a name of person being addressed to indicate seniority. In this case, even though the character's real name is "Joyce," she cannot simply be called by her first name, especially by her juniors, as is the case in most white cultures, because it is considered disrespectful. To show respect, it should be prefixed by "sister" in the case of an unmarried black woman; "brother" in the case of an unmarried black male and "mother" and "father" in the cases of a married black women and men respectively. This is applicable even to people one is not related to. A good example is that of Ma-Punky.

Even though Ma-Punky is a widow, the fact that she was once married and has a son, gives her the title "Ma," which means "the mother of." It is a mark of respect from the society. This is contrary to single or unmarried women, both

of whom are not respected. They may actually be ridiculed, especially the latter. Her shopping on Saturdays in the company of a male at shopping malls like East Gate, associated with a certain class in a society, especially in the townships where a lot of people “live from hand to mouth” all signify Ma-Punky’s status.

However, there is a big difference between the “Ma” in Ma-Punky’s name to “Mama,” which appears in the name of another character, Di-Mamas. “Di” means many and in the case of Di-Mamas, it means “mother to many” in the literal sense. In this case, it implies that she dates men younger than herself, hence she is considered their “mother”. Di-Mamas dates men indiscriminately as long as they have money and are in a position to satisfy her material needs.

Nevertheless, even “Sis” can also refer to marital status, as persons concerned often use it to bridge the age gap between themselves and younger men so that they are not intimidated by their age. This is necessary, because it is often a taboo in black communities for a woman to date younger men than herself. It is usually referred to as “chicken murder”. At one stage, in the play *Scratch* brings Sis Joyce a six-pack of cider to appease her so that she can allow him to take her daughter with him to a “bash”, which is a township term for a party. The fact that *Scratch*, a young man, knows Sis Joyce’s brand of beer somehow implies that they know each other to the extent that they might be drinking together.

The names of kaNcube’s male characters are allegorical like that of his female characters. They tend to signify their occupations, which, to a great extent, dictate their personalities. It is rather rare to have parents giving their children names such as G-Man and *Scratch*. Individuals often assume such names, especially after proving themselves in certain circles like gangs. This makes them respected by other members. G-Man, which possibly stands for Gun-Man, probably assumed this name after establishing himself as a sharpshooter. *Scratch*, on the other hand, might have received this name because of scratches on his face, possibly as a result of knife fights. Since there is no mention of *Scratch* being at school or doing any kind of job, it is possible that he too is a gangster.

As implied by their names, kaNcube’s female characters are not employed but make their living through their association with men. However, his male characters do not work either in the literal sense, but make their living from robbery or by other covert means. Apart from that, none of kaNcube’s characters seem to have goals in life, except to acquire money and enjoyment themselves. This is implied by the name of Sis Joyce’s teenage daughter Zozo, which means “Fun.” Zozo does not seem to attend school. She is preoccupied with hanging around men with money to meet her needs.

Through these characters, kaNcube portrays the lives of the township dwellers through snapshot scenes with neither a clear beginning nor end. Peter Brook states that popular theatre, freed of unity of style, actually speaks a very

sophisticated and stylish language. The audience has no difficulty in accepting inconsistencies in accent, dress, darting between mime and dialogue, realism and suggestion. Brook espouses stylized and/or experimental theatre, which breaks the conventions of mainstream theatre limiting the imagination and freedom of expression, such as a play's linear structure with beginning, middle and a conclusive end. He argues that this captures or is close to portraying "real life" and its challenges, hence why playwrights such as Brecht, Chekov, Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, and Artaud favoured popular theatre.<sup>660</sup> Similarly, Edward Braun argues:

The stylized theatre liberates the actor from all scenery, creating a three-dimensional area in which he can employ natural, sculptural plasticity. Thanks to stylization, we can do away with complicated stage machinery, and mount simple production in which the actor can interpret his role free from all scenery and specifically theatrical properties free from all purely incidental trappings.<sup>661</sup>

One sees this kind of freedom to experiment in kaNcube's play. He advances different storylines at the same time just like in a television soap without any conclusive end. Consequently, the play is open-ended. In this way the audience is left to decide in as far as the issues are been raised.

There are no specific theatrical requirements for the play. Sello kaNcube rushes straight into the subject matter. His opening scene sends a clear message to his audience that crime does not pay; instead the criminal life is short-lived with dire consequences. When the curtain goes up his lead character, Bushy, is moping over the ill treatment he receives in his lover's house, Ma-Punky- It is from this exposition that the audience learns about Bushy and his past life:

BUSHY - I'm a fallen tiger. I can't believe that it is me who is treated like this. Is it me, hey? I'm a tiger. But tigers don't cry. You will remember me you people. I'm going to fuck off this house.

MA-PUNKY - What are you waiting for? I have your little bag ready with all your humble belongings you came with when you walked into my house.<sup>662</sup>

The exchange between the two insinuates Bushy is not only a fallen gangster, but also a disgraced one to the extent that even women ridicule him. What is significant about Ma-Punky scolding Bushy is that in most parts of rural Africa

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<sup>660</sup> Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, [1968], pp. 67,68

<sup>661</sup> Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*. [1969], p.62

<sup>662</sup> Sello kaNcube, *Kuze Kose*, unpublished play. [1996], p.5

women are positioned lower than men. As a result, if a woman challenges something proposed by a man, it implies that the man commands little or no respect. Therefore, there is no better way for kaNcube to demonstrate Bushy has lost the power and respect he commanded when he was still a gang leader. This is reinforced by the fact that he does not challenge her but continues to take the abuse for the sake of staying in her house.

Coincidentally, kaNcube revisits African practices using his former gangster character. Even though Bushy does not state what his relationship with Ma-Punky is, it appears as though he moved in with Ma-Punky soon after the death of Ma-Punky's husband, Mri, who happened to be Bushy's close friend. It is important to note that it used to be a common practice with many African tribes, and continues to be with some depending on how much they eluded Western influence, for a man to take over another man's wife and/or family after death, especially if the two men concerned were brothers. Chakela also deals with that in *Wrath of the Gods* in the previous chapter. Bushy and Mri were close due to their criminal activities, to the extent that they considered each other brothers as gangsters often do. This is evidenced by Bushy's outburst:

BUSHY - Don't talk like that about Mri, you don't know who Mri is, even your mother doesn't know who Mri really is. If you want to know about him ask Jake just down the road. Mri was my very, very close buddy even your mother was not as close as I was to him, in fact, if it wasn't for me both of you wouldn't have had any connection with him. Hey, my laaitie, don't talk like that, Mri died in these hands man, in these very hands.<sup>663</sup>

It is self-evident from Bushy's outburst that the two were very close. As a result, Bushy might have taken it as a duty to move in with Mri's wife after Mri's death in accordance with the custom. Nevertheless, it is worth questioning kaNcube's motive, whether he equates gangsterism with African cultural practices or he is demonstrating that gangsters have become so sophisticated that their bonding is as strong as these practices. Either way it still leaves one wondering what message the description of such a practice communicates to his audience and what impact it will have. But then he turns and seems to argue that even though some people like Bushy have a criminal record, they can still retain their sound judgment:

BUSHY- Where have you seen a trolley full of vegetables for a household of three as if you are buying for a funeral? We literally buy everything that madam lays her hands on.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>664</sup> Ibid. p.1

Bushy's observation of the way Ma-Punky is wasteful indicates that he is conscious of his surroundings. But it is this soundness of his state of mind that questions his involvement in criminal activities. It is also because of being observant that he saw an opportunity to live in abundance if he moved in with his late friend's wife. Moving in with Ma-Punky might have also been provoked by jealousy to prevent another man doing the same, especially when he was responsible for Ma-Punky and Mri meeting, which led to their marriage. In fact, Bushy might have thought Ma-Punky owed him a favour and as a result would not mind if he moved in with her. This might explain why he still sees other women:

MA-PUNKY- Of course, you have no right to be complaining, the food you eat. The clothes you wear, your washing, where you sleep, it's all because of me, on top of your cheating. How dare you?<sup>665</sup>

Bushy's cheating on Ma-Punky might indicate that he did not move in with her because he loves her or wants to protect his late friend's wealth. Instead he might have seen his friend's death as an opportunity, from which he could benefit, only to have his plan exposed and shattered. kaNcube presents exploitations of African practices and also demonstrates how this wife-exchange ritual can go awry. kaNcube dramatises the complex township life, which combines both the modern and traditional life styles as the inhabitants battle to survive. Bushy's parasitic nature is similar to that of Willie in Dike's *So, What's New?* in the previous chapter. This might signify the prevalence of promiscuity in South African communities.

Lack of discipline amongst teenagers is another issue kaNcube tackles in this play. The youth are often regarded as the future of any country but in this play neither of the two teenagers, Zozo and Scratch, appears as though they would grow up to be responsible citizens that the country can rely on. They do not seem to be at school; instead they appear to be interested in meaningless enjoyment even though it has dire consequences:

BUSHY- I won't give him the keys. All he wants to do is go to these bashes of theirs. Where is the GTI you bought him? Bash! The Cambry you bought me? And I want to thank you for that, you always show your love for me in a big way. Bash! Pajero baby, a whole Pajero and you looked so beautiful in it baby, Tilly was even jealous of you. But where is it now? Bash!!!<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> Ibid. p.3

<sup>666</sup> Ibid. p.2



However, kaNcube argues that despite the hopelessness of the situation, as far as the youth and the future are concerned, there are some families that are trying to instill some sense of responsibility into their children. But, other families that do not make an effort to discipline their children undermine this. kaNcube demonstrates this through the families of Ma-Punky and Sis Joyce. Even though Ma-Punky treats Bushy harshly, she has no control over her son, Scratch, nor does she appear to be trying to instill any sense of discipline in him. Consequently, Scratch is a destructive young man as Bushy observes. Sis Joyce, on the other hand, is trying to instill some discipline in her teenage daughter, Zozo:

SIS JOYCE- Futhi you must stop calling me Sis Joyce, I'm not your sister, I'm your mother. From now on forward you must call me, maa! Sis Joyce se gat.

ZOZO- Haa. Sis Joyce from my childhood I've been calling you Sis Joyce. Why must I change now?<sup>667</sup>

It appears as though Sis Joyce's goal is to change Zozo's way of life so that Zozo can be like her sister, Thabile, who works hard to have a better future different from that her mother. However, Sis Joyce's attempt is faced with a couple of challenges. Her effort to discipline Zozo comes too late as evidenced by Zozo's remarks. Her attitude and approach is problematic in the sense that she is rude and aggressive towards Zozo, inviting resistance from Zozo. The other problem is Ma-Punky's son, Scratch. Just as Sis Joyce is confronting her daughter trying to make her change her ways, Scratch arrives and disrupts the whole process and takes Zozo with him to a bash/party. Even though Scratch brings cider to appease Sis Joyce, she has little chance to stop him from taking her daughter with him, as evidenced by the exchange between them:

SIS JOYCE- Heyi wena Scratch who said I drink Hunters Gold? And wena Scratch don't think you'll have it easy all the way. Some mothers are not like me, you won't have their daughters for six pack of Hunters Gold.

SCRATCH - It's that or I get them for free with a gun in my hand.<sup>668</sup>

There are critical issues raised in this exchange. As much as it shows that Scratch is a potential criminal and threat to society, it also exposes Sis Joyce's weakness. Her act of accepting the cider shows that she is an alcoholic that cannot resist temptation, even if it means undermining herself. It also has connotations of pimping, the fact that she accepts something in return for letting her daughter go

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<sup>667</sup> Ibid. p.6

<sup>668</sup> Ibid. p.8

with a male partner, appears as if she is prostituting her daughter for material gains. This is something prevalent in many places in South Africa whereby mothers ignore their daughters' activities as long as they translate into material gains to their daughters or themselves, even if the activities are immoral.

In terms of community building, it seems kaNcube encourages parental self-reflection before any expectation of proper behavior from their children. He demonstrates that community building is teamwork, and if one family fails to discipline its children, those children are likely to become a nuisance to other families or the entire community, as evidenced by Scratch. Furthermore, he appears to blame rich families who often tend to spoil their children, disregarding how they utilize what they are given and the impact it has on children from poor families. Finally, he highlights the plight of single mothers who are battling to raise their children in the townships. Often, peer pressure is too much and creates clash between parents and their children. Even though he seems to be sympathetic to women, kaNcube argues that women often play a role in domestic violence. He details through a long monologue by one of his characters, G-Man, a former gangster who murdered his girlfriend in a love triangle:

G-MAN - We started at Wimpy, ate amawhat you may call it, then went to a movie baby to see my main man, Tony Montana, in Scarface. The following day I took her to MaBongs International Hair salon. We set an appointment for two O'clock, when I got to her house she's not there, and then I thought let me go check her at her friends' place, still dololo gazi lami. I felt my stomach getting cold and ended up at Bra Ben's. Now I was going to get drunk unintentionally. When I was drunk I decided to go and look for her again, I went home to get my jungle knife.<sup>669</sup>

kaNcube, located within his community, is probably aware of the dynamics that exist within black communities which often precipitate unfortunate results. As expected, these results are often blamed on the perpetrators without first investigating the underlying cause. Probably he has seen a lot of men sent to jail under such circumstances. kaNcube's argument is grounded in what Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor observe regarding Thomas Middleton's characters. Loughrey and Taylor note that Middleton's Calvinism is informed by a secular knowledge of how the human mind behaves under the influence of historical and institutional forces. The individuals Middleton portrays are held morally responsible for their actions but are determined, nevertheless, by the nature of the society in which they live.<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> Ibid. p.11

<sup>670</sup> Bryan Loughrey & Neil Taylor, *Five Plays: Thomas Middleton*. [1988], p.xix

Although a former gangster like Bushy, it appears as though G-Man is also in a position to draw lines and as a result is faithful to his girlfriend. As such, it can be assumed that even the robbery that he was involved in at Potchstroom, as much as it was his way of life, was also meant to cater for the needs of his girlfriend to appease her. This is demonstrated by his taking her to places she likes and finally to the salon where he spends the money he got from the robbery. Unfortunately, it appears as if Ntombzi, on the other hand, is using him to enhance her image to attract other men who are richer and of higher status than G-Man. This is indicated by the mini-bus, which comes to pick her up with her friends. kaNcube seems to argue that her unfaithfulness might have affected G-Man and awoken his violent side especially given his love for her and the risks that he takes to please her. As G-Man explains what made matters worse was that even when caught red-handed, she was not prepared to apologize for her dishonesty.<sup>671</sup> This might explain his rage.

By listing all these events that lead to the murder of Ntombi, kaNcube might be explaining that some women push their men too far using the knowledge that the law is likely to take sides with them as women. His argument seems to be that women should be honest and keep to one man instead of having a man for material gain as is a common practice in the townships. In fact, some women date as many men as possible, despite the threat of HIV/AIDS, with the hope of making a fortune since men are expected to shower their girlfriends with gifts and money. This dangerous game is reflected in the gossip between Di-Mamas and Zozo about Zozo's adventure with Nina:

ZOZO- Last week Scratch said to me we must go and spend some money at Sandton. I waited for him for two hours, I decided to take a walk, do window-shopping and who appears? Joe Nina. Then he said I was on my way to have something to eat. When we are in there zithi seafood platter, ama prawns. I said to myself Scratch never bought me prawns and he looked right into my eyes and said "You look tired" and I said "just a bit". He said look baby, I'm going to perform at Sandton Towers and they've booked me a suite. We got there, our bodies touched, I felt the warmth of his body. I moved my hand up his thigh and he did the same.<sup>672</sup>

Even though Zozo relates her personal adventure, it can be assumed that Ntombzi was going to do the same thing wherever she was going with her friends in that minibus. But unlike Zozo, she got caught in the act. By presenting the two stories, that of G-Man murdering his girlfriend and Zozo's adventure with Nina, kaNcube seems to defend G-Man's actions and argues that if Scratch

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<sup>671</sup> Sello kaNcube, *Kuze Kose*, unpublished play. [1996], pp. 19,20

<sup>672</sup> Ibid. pp.16,17

had bumped into Nina and Zozo he too could have done the same as G-Man. kaNcube seems to warn women of the consequences of being unfaithful especially in a relationship in which the partner is a criminal.

The behavior of women in this play seems complementary to that of men becoming gangsters. Women too are searching for a better life and they use sex while men use violence. Indeed, Zozo's gossip shows that dating many men is not only usual, but also it indicates that in such relationships women are more concerned with material gains than love. This is reiterated through the character of Di-Mamas who boasts about her way of choosing her boyfriends:

DI-MAMAS - When I meet a man I don't listen to his words, I listen to the sound of his pocket and when it sounds right, I bring him closer. I undo his belt and when the pants hit the ground, the cash falls in my account. With Khadi I had reached the end of the road. There's no single counter he hasn't jumped. You name it he has been there Standard Bank, Nedbank, FNB, ABSA jikelele. They all know him, they once raised their hands in respect of him.<sup>673</sup>

It can be argued that through the characters of Ntombzi and Zozo, kaNcube warns girls; first, that they should be honest not only to their boyfriends but also to themselves because their dishonesty might cost them their lives. Second, that their wild life with their criminal boyfriends can be enjoyable but does not last long and they are likely to suffer in the end. This can be seen in many communities in South Africa. Through G-Man and Bushy, kaNcube points to the youth, like Scratch, to listen and take advice given to them to prevent ending up like gangsters, broken up and hopeless.

Alcohol abuse is one of the major problems in black communities in South Africa, which has terrible consequences as reflected in this play. As much as kaNcube tries to defend his character's deeds, it is worth noting that it is only after G-Man gets drunk that he decides to hunt down his girlfriend with a jungle knife. This implies that alcohol played a role.

Finally, kaNcube looks at the problem of violence in films. G-Man states that the gangster film, *Scarface* (1983), is his favorite film. There is the possibility that G-Man might have been influenced by films such as *Scarface* to become a gangster. Apart from that, he might be watching such a film, not as a form of entertainment, but to copy how criminals in the West go about committing crime and getting away with it. Ben Okri observes the impact that stories have on society:

To poison a nation, poison its stories. A demoralised nation tells demoralised stories to itself. Beware of the storytellers who are not fully

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<sup>673</sup> Ibid. p.19

conscious of the importance of their gifts, and who are irresponsible of their application of their art: they would unwittingly help along the psychic destruction of their people.<sup>674</sup>

kaNcube does not solely blame the authority and its policies for the current situation, especially in the black townships, but the public itself as well. Even when the characters of this play have 'good intentions' (educating their children or being faithful) they cannot live according to it because of they cannot escape the limits posed on them by the environment. In this, one recognizes a harsh social criticism. However, he also calls on the public's participation in the rebuilding of a sound and responsible society through self-reflection, commitment and determination. This is probably because a lot of people, especially amongst the black majority, complain a lot about slow change and reconstruction without being actively involved to bring about change.

#### **4.2 *Ola Majita* - Kere Nyawo**

Kere Nyawo is also a Market Lab institute graduate. He is a playwright and an actor. He is involved in community theatre in the townships. His *Ola Majita* was first performed at the Market Theatre in 1998. The play was directed by Thulani Didi featuring the following actors: Mncebisi Ngema, Sipho Thabethe, Kere Nyawo, Vusi Nhlapho, Ronnie Ngakale, Nomhlanhla Konga, Arthur Msibi, Phundile Ntuli and Zakhile Mjuni.

The play follows a journey of Stanza, a family man, charged with illegal diamond dealing. As a first time offender, Stanza stands a better chance of getting a light sentence, which will give him an opportunity to be reunited with his family and rebuild his life. His life changes drastically while awaiting trial when he is forced by Dr. Grey and his gang to kill a fellow inmate, which diminishes his chance of receiving a lenient sentence.

Stanza is not a criminal as such, but a family man who ends up on the wrong side of the law due to his illegal diamond dealing. Even while in prison, he tries to retain his sense of sanity hoping to be set free and go back to his family. However, his morality is corrupted by the ill treatment he is subjected to by the gangsters he shares a cell with.

The antagonist, Dr. Grey, is a gang leader and crime is his way of life. To expand his gang, he recruits new members, often by force, and especially new inmates and members of other gangs who happen to be in the same cell with him. This gives him some power over other cellmates. As a result, he enjoys some respect even from the guards, as implied by his name, Dr. Grey. Van Tonder, as a

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<sup>674</sup> Ben Okri, *A Way of being Free*. [1989], p.109

guard, is supposed to be a symbol of the law. On the contrary, he is corrupt and abuses his power for personal gain.

In the previous play kaNcube explores the dirty and immoral ways of living in the townships which ends up with the perpetrators behind bars. In this play, Kere Nyawo exposes the South African Prison Services's inability to reform offenders, turning them into hardcore criminals. He achieves this by setting his play in a cell with his protagonist, Stanza, and some of his cellmates, including a priest as first-time offenders.

Like kaNcube, Nyawo omits theatrical requirements such as set design, lighting and the like and goes straight into the subject matter:

STANZA - I want you to tell your children, your grand children and  
your great grand children  
and teach the whole world about the agony of life in prison.  
SINDI - I promise you Mkulu [grandfather], I will teach my children, I  
will educate the world, that prison is a bad place to be.<sup>675</sup>

Like his counterpart, Nyawo also seems to persuade ex-convicts and the elderly to warn the youth, based on their experiences, about the consequences of getting involved in criminal activities, which might land them in jail. He indicates through the character of Stanza that it is not only the convicts who suffer the consequences but their families as well, especially if they are breadwinners. Stanza relates:

STANZA - You remind me of your mother, Nokuzola, my only child.  
Her death with your grand-ma left a wound in my heart. They died  
lonely, I was not there for them. Even you grand-child, I heard about  
your birth while I was in prison. I didn't do anything for you that will  
make you remember me and make me proud. Oh! my child, prison.<sup>676</sup>

The debate over who is to blame for the wave of crime and violence in South Africa has been raging for a long time since the dawn of democracy but without any concrete answers. Nevertheless, in this play the prosecution, as the protector of the law, holds the suspect responsible for their deeds. On the other hand, the defense council considers its black clients innocent victims forced into crime by the apartheid system.<sup>677</sup> As a result, blacks were either left jobless or forced to do manual jobs with poor pay, which forced them to remain at the bottom of the economic ladder. Jordan Ngubane observes, in this regard, that poverty was a lever used to force the tribe's people into white people's towns and farms where

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<sup>675</sup> Kere Nyawo, *Ola Majita*. unpublished play. [1998], p.42

<sup>676</sup> Ibid. p.9

<sup>677</sup> Ibid. p.9

their poverty compelled them to accept whatever wage they were offered. In such situations, blacks were not in a position to do much about their fate since the influx-control regulations were such that if they made a nuisance of themselves, they could be thrown out of the towns and forbidden to enter any urban area at all.<sup>678</sup> Similarly, Cliff Slaughter points out that the means of production are owned and controlled by a minority, which constitutes a separate class of exploiters with a common interest against the producers. This ownership and control distinguished them from the majority, the exploited. Slaughter argues as follows:<sup>679</sup>

The members of the exploited class, deprived of any ownership or control of means of production of their needs, are thereby forced into a relationship with the ruling class. This is true of the slave in ancient Greece, the Serf in Medieval Europe, the share-cropper, the Peon or the small peasant farmer in Latin America or Africa and the wage-worker in modern Europe, Japan and United States.<sup>680</sup>

Similarly, Nyawo argues that it is poverty that forces blacks to commit crime in large numbers. Like Ngema's characters in *Maria Maria*, both Mazaka and Dr. Grey recall the hardships of their youth that forced them into crime:

MAZ - Evil and evil deeds, is all we like doing. We grew up the hard way.

DR. GREY - Sometimes with no meal. Yes! He is right. We grew up the hard way. We were neighbors, very, very poor neighbors.

MAZ - Poverty and starvation created greed, and greed turned us into criminals. We did everything for money.<sup>681</sup>

The question of poverty and its persistence in democratic South Africa is acknowledged by almost everybody. Commenting on President Mbeki's State of the Nation address, which demonstrated the government's ambition to rid the nation of poverty and crime, Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) analyst, Judith February, says that such a big vision by President Mbeki covering housing, education, unemployment, and retirement was needed in a country where 21.9 million people live below the poverty line and 40 percent are unemployed.<sup>682</sup> As a result, among other things, the President intended to build a

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<sup>678</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*. [1963] p.123

<sup>679</sup> Cliff Slaughter, *Marx and Marxism*. [1995], p.22

<sup>680</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>681</sup> Kere Nyawo, *Ola Majita*. unpublished play. [1998], pp. 32,38

<sup>682</sup> Christelle Terreblanche, "President's 100 promises put his Officials on the Line", *The Sunday Independent*, May 23 [2004], p.2

social security network to meet the objectives of poverty alleviation.<sup>683</sup> Consequently, Nyawo argues that people who are forced into crime by poverty can be rehabilitated and become responsible citizens again.

However, the government, through its corrupt and incompetent justice system and correctional services fails to do that. For this reason, first-time offenders become real criminals due to the hardship they are made to undergo by gangs who run the prisons. Dr. Grey relates how he was forced into becoming a gang member the first time he came to prison to justify his ill-treatment of the new inmates including Stanza:

DR GREY - Nobody ever joined any prison gang voluntarily. We were all forced. I was bloodie fucking young when I joined them. I had no alternative. I was supposed to choose between life and death. I chose life and became a slave of a life that shattered all my dreams, all my aspiration, all my bloody fucking wishes. And ended up a slave of all prisons and laws of the 28.<sup>684</sup>

Nyawo goes on to demonstrate that even bail money requested by the courts is so high that very few people can afford it. This forces some of the first time offenders to stay in overcrowded cells with hardened criminals while awaiting trial, where they are abused.<sup>685</sup>

The question of over-crowding in South African prisons has been such a major concern especially for the Department of Prisons and Correctional Services, that prisoners serving short sentences for minor offences like house breaking, pick-pocketing and theft have been released before time to ease the situation. According to the Director of the Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons, Gideon Morris, at times the population of people awaiting trial in South African prisons exceeds 25 000 with some having waited for more than five years.<sup>686</sup>

South Africa has the highest incarceration in Africa. With a population of 44 million, it has 187 000 people incarcerated. By contrast, Nigeria, with a population of 115 million people, has a prison population of just 70 000.<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>683</sup> Jeremy Michaels, "Deadlines set on Crime and Poverty", *Saturday Star*, May 22 [2004], p.2

<sup>684</sup> Kere Nyawo, *Ola Majita* . unpublished play. [1998], p.17

<sup>685</sup> Ibid. p.23

<sup>686</sup> South African Press Association, "Unsentenced Prisoners clog our Jails", *ThisDay*, Thursday August 5. [2004], p.4

<sup>687</sup> Ibid. p.4



It is in these congested cells, Nyawo argues, that suspects awaiting trial meet hardened criminals who subject them to such treatment that it would be difficult for them to be rehabilitated and live a normal life again after their release:

CARLOS - God help me, all the way from home you have been with me. Please Baba Nkulu-Nkulu. This place is no good, too much suffering. Please help the young ones, Mapikinini, to stop killing, raping, robbing and all the things against the law because this place is no good. Amen!<sup>688</sup>

Carlos's prayer clearly shows that he is not that much of a criminal but an ordinary citizen who unfortunately broke the law and ended up in jail. This feeling of not being a real criminal yet being in prison is reiterated in Stanza's prayer as well:

STANZA - Hallelujah! Mighty Lord, I regret, yes I regret. Help me out. Help me out, Lord. This place is for people with bad reputation, I have a good reputation Lord, help me out, help me out Lord!<sup>689</sup>

Even though gangsters are imprisoned to remove them from the society to which they pose danger, Nyawo is of the opinion that criminals have even more power in prison hence why they can even change other's lives for the worse. Dr. Grey comments boastfully:

Dr. GREY - When the judges are bloodie fucking passing death sentences there in courts, we pass death sentences here in this "goddamn" cell. We practice our own kind of justice.<sup>690</sup>

To demonstrate the power gangsters have in prison, Nyawo has his antagonist Dr. Grey play a judge in which one of the new inmates, Tarrazah, is accused of attempting to murder Dr. Grey in revenge for ill-treatment, especially nightly rapes. Dr. Grey and his gang find Tarrazah guilty and sentence him to death just as Dr. Grey states that "they practise their own law in the cells."

However, neither Dr. Grey nor his gang members do the killing, instead, it is the new inmates who are forced to carry out the evil deeds exploiting each new inmates' profession. Rev. Sibanibani, as a priest, is entrusted with saying the last prayer before the sentence is carried out:

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<sup>688</sup> Kere Nyawo, *Ola Majita*. unpublished play. [1998], p.37

<sup>689</sup> Ibid. p.37

<sup>690</sup> Ibid. p.17

REV - Father God, and the Holy Spirit. Yes, I know my Lord this place is no good. It is a place of dirty people. We are killing this boy now. We are killing Tarrazah now. Please send your angels to come and take his soul. Wash my hands Mighty Lord...Hallelujah.<sup>691</sup>

The killing itself is left in the hands of another new inmate, Stanza. In this way, Dr. Grey and his gang achieve the goal of eliminating his enemy. Nevertheless, he remains 'innocent' of the deed because he neither did the killing nor his gang. Meanwhile, it is the first time offender, Stanza, who sinks deeper into the world of crime.

It can be argued that through the murder of Tarrazah, Nyawo highlights corruption within the prison system, whose guards, instead of ensuring order and protecting prisoners from gangs are in fact facilitating their harassment. In this case, the prison guards can be held accountable for the murder of Tarrazah, especially Van Tonder. First, the prison guards fail to take action when Carlos complains about the ill-treatment they receive from the gangsters:

GAM - Hau! Carlos, where are your clothes? Did they arrest you like this?

CARLOS - Basitatile zonke zimpahla. ("They have taken all my clothes")

GAM - Why don't you fight back?

CARLOS - ...They beat you if you resist.

GAM - So, why don't you report to the police?

CARLOS - It is no use to report. No one cares about us here.<sup>692</sup>

Second, Van Tonder takes the knife from Tarrazah's sister and agrees to smuggle it into the prison to Tarrazah after Tarrazah's sister promises to spend a night with him. Unfortunately, the knife is used to kill Tarrazah instead. The argument seems to be that if Van Tonder turned down Tarrazah's sister's sexual offer in exchange for smuggling the knife into prison, this tragedy could have been avoided. In fact, had the guards taken action when the new inmates first complained of abuse by the gang, there would have been no reason for Tarrazah's sister to ask Van Tonder to smuggle the knife into the prison. According to Molliele Painter-Morland's report based on a research on both Pollsmoor and Durban-Westville prisons, inmates indicated that there is a high chance of prisoners leaving prisons more corrupt than they were before, because prisoners find it impossible not to be part of corruption in prisons given the environment.<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> Ibid. p.39

<sup>692</sup> Ibid. p.23

<sup>693</sup> Mollie Painter-Morland, "Corruption Services?", *ThisDay*, Thursday July 20, [2004], p.11

There is no doubt that Nyawo seems to believe that the killings, which go on in prisons are more or less facilitated by the prison guards themselves. In fact, it appears as if officers enjoy torturing prisoners as indicated by Van Tonder's comment:

VAN TONDER - Khumalo, I have fifteen years doing this fuckin' job. In the fuckin' fifteen years, I have enjoyed kicking their arses. That relieves the tension in the body and I never have stress, never! And as long as I am here, I will keep on kicking their fuckin' arses.

KHUMALO - But, are we not supposed to rehabilitate?

VAN TONDER - That is rehabilitation. They must feel the pain of their deeds. They will not come here again. Kick their arses Khumalo, let us kick their fuckin' arses Khumalo.

KHUMALO - Ja! I see now, let us kick them more.<sup>694</sup>

In this discussion between the two guards, Khumalo and van Tonder, Nyawo draws attention to the officers' brutality and infringement of prisoners' rights. Furthermore, he points out the lack of proper rehabilitation measures in prisons to the extent that prisoners are ill-treated so that they will never commit crime for the fear of going back to prison. It is worth noting that, according to Nyawo, some ex-convicts restrain from committing crime not because they are reformed, but due to fear of the inhuman treatment both the gangs and guards subject them to in prison. Mazaka reiterates Van Tonder's intention with the ill-treatment of prisoners:

MAZAKA - I have to make sure that you get a severe punishment Tsotsi, so that you can hate this place.<sup>695</sup>

Mazaka's motive to ill-treat inmates is similar to that of Van Tonder, implying that there might be conniving between the guards and the gang, so much so that their approach to reducing over-crowding in prisons in South Africa is the same.

Nyawo's appeal to both the police and prison guards seems to be that they should be strong and resist any temptation they are put to by both criminals and their relatives, as indicated by Van Tonder's refusal to smuggle dagga into prison on request by Dr. Grey:

Dr. GREY - But, Sajeni, when I beg you to bring me dagga from outside so that we can sell and make money, you behave like a gondamend priest. Come on dibaba, bring the stuff here, I will be your merchant inside and you will pay me some little bit commission so that

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<sup>694</sup> Kere Nyawo, *Ola Majita*. unpublished play. [1998], p.22

<sup>695</sup> Ibid. pp. 19, 33

I can support my wife and you know Van Tonder you will make a good living. I've seen police making fortune out of selling dagga in prison, today they are rich and have now retired. Just tell me when is your next pay day?

VAN TONDER - How can I trust you? How can anyone trust a prisoner? Maybe you are setting a trap for me. You want me to go inside so that you brothers can squeeze me.

DR. GREY- I was trying to teach you how to make money, iguncence, chin.

VAN TONDER - You can't teach me anything, let me teach you something that will take you far when you come out of prison, polish my shoes, and I will give you an honorary degree.<sup>696</sup>

The fact that Dr Grey, a criminal, is aware that prison guards and police are involved in drug trafficking, can be taken as Nyawo's argument that drug trafficking is so rife in the country that those who are supposed to enforce the law facilitate breaking it. This may explain the video, which was made by inmates in one of the prisons in Bloemfontein, South Africa, which exposed the guards' misconduct.

Nyawo's ending of this play shifts from social awareness to a more politically charged racial tolerance with special reference to the killing of whites. This is probably due to the killings going on around the country, especially of white farmers, which is contradictory to the new political dispensation and spirit of reconciliation. In the past, especially under apartheid, it was somehow considered an act of bravery for one to kill a white person, but in this play Nyawo condemns it:

MAZAKA - You know, you are proud to say "I killed two white people." Those are human beings as well. I want you to think about a Zebra and it's description. A Zebra is described as a black and white animal, you shoot a Zebra on a white spot or a black spot, what is going to happen?

CARLOS - The whole Zebra is dead.<sup>697</sup>

The fact that Mazaka can differentiate between right and wrong shows that he can be rehabilitated if a proper rehabilitation programme is provided. Through the character of Mazaka, Nyawo seems to acknowledge the Afrikaners' argument in relation to sanctions imposed by the international community under apartheid, that even though the sanctions were meant to bring down the apartheid system, sanctions would hurt both whites and blacks. In this case,

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<sup>696</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>697</sup> Ibid. p.33

Nyawo argues that there is a need for co-existence between whites and blacks in the democratic South Africa and the killing of people of either race will definitely affect the other, as well as the whole country. That people, regardless of race, need each other is an awakening to reality.

It is fascinating for an argument of this nature to come from a black playwright and may indicate the effect the new political dispensation has on Black Theatre. This kind of call to protect or safeguard whites by a black person was unimaginable under apartheid. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael recall that in South Africa, especially in the 1980s, which was the height of resistance to the apartheid system, community was marked as a legitimate site for resistance; as a result, focus on an individual self came to be read narrowly as alienation from the community.<sup>698</sup> A lot of people were killed as a result of this assumption, some accused of being apartheid system informers and or sell-outs. This change possibly explains why there was groaning and disbelief when William Kekana, who was sentenced to six life sentences for rape and murder of a white family, said apartheid was to blame for his deeds, since it made him hate whites.<sup>699</sup>

#### 4.3 *Ga-Mchangani* - Obed Baloyi

Obed Baloyi is a Market Lab institute graduate as well. Like Nyawo, he is an actor, writer and involved in community theatre. Baloyi's *Ga-Mchangani* was first performed at the Market Theatre in 1997, directed by Arthur Molapo and featuring among others Obed Baloyi. It is a story about Mchangani, an ex-convict, who has just been released from prison. For this reason, Mchangani cannot find a job and blames politicians for failing to create the jobs which they promised during the public during election campaigns. He believes life for the majority of blacks is worse in democratic South Africa than it was under apartheid. However, he does not see oppression and discrimination against women perpetrated by his tradition in the sense that they seem to benefit men at the expense of men. Throughout the play he gives examples of what a true black woman should be like, at all times she must be submissive and more of a servant to her man.

Mchangani is politically minded and seems to have been involved in the struggle for freedom. However, he appears disillusioned about the future in the new South Africa, which makes him commit petty crimes. As a result, he spends his time in and out of prison. Unfortunately, some of his victims are the weak and

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<sup>698</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*. [2000], p.10

<sup>699</sup> ThisDay reporter, "Devil incarnate gets six Life Terms", *ThisDay*, Friday July 28, [2004], p.1

defenseless, like women and children, especially young girls. Mchangani is the opposite of his friend, Bafana, who is optimistic that things will change for the better in South Africa over time. Furthermore, Bafana is protective of both women and children. The antagonist, Smoko is directionless as well. He is a small time drug trafficker who fights over small amounts of money.

Baloyi's play reflects on the promises that politicians made to the people during the struggle for freedom and in the run-up to the multi-party general elections in 1994. One of the major promises to the black masses was that things would change and life would be better if the masses voted for black political parties like the African National Congress (ANC). Baloyi observes that politicians have failed to live up to their promises and as a result the black masses, especially the youth, are bitter and frustrated. It is this disillusionment that compels some to turn to crime to survive and end up in jail. As in Nyawo's *Ola Majita*, Baloyi argues a government that does not provide the necessary services to rehabilitate them while in prison further fails these people. He achieves this by setting the play in two spaces, that is, inside and outside prison. In this way his character experiences what it is like being in a South African jail and life thereafter. Consequently, Mchangani relates his prison ordeal on to those outside, as a warning to them. However, unlike Stanza in Nyawo's *Ola Majita*, Baloyi's main character does not spend much time in prison to deal in-depth with the harsh realities of prison life. He just highlights the plight of prisoners, especially new inmates, then moves on to focus on the bleak life of ex-convicts.

Baloyi starts his play like Chakela in *Wrath of the Gods*, with a traditional feast in which people are jubilant, singing and dancing. The scene demonstrates the peacefulness and joy of life in the townships. This scene is then juxtaposed with that of the arrival of Mchangani in prison and the harsh treatment he receives from the Cicilian gang led by Smoko. By presenting the two scenes one after the other yet so different in both space and atmosphere, Baloyi seems to give his audience a chance to observe the sharp contrast between life in and outside prison, which might compel the audience to reflect and avoid being caught up in the same situation as Mchangani.

Even though Baloyi acknowledges the harsh treatment of new inmates in prison, he encourages them to resist intimidation and ill-treatment by gangs, as demonstrated by his protagonist. Despite the fact that Mchangani takes the drugs that the gang gave him, he refuses to be a member of the Cicilian gang once he learns that by accepting and taking a puff of the drugs given to him by the gang it means that he has joined them. The reason Baloyi dissuades new inmates from being intimidated into joining gangs is that they are likely to be enslaved by the laws that govern its members which will make it impossible to rehabilitate and lead a normal life thereafter. Dr. Grey similarly observes this in Nyawo's *Ola Majita*. Even though resistance to gangs in prison is a bold move, it often results in further torture because it is perceived as an insult to the gangs. It is at this stage

that Baloyi calls for the authorities to step in to help those who resist gang intimidation and separate them from their tormentors as is done with Mchangani in this play. His refusal to join the Cicilian gang comes as an insult, and consequently, the gang calls for a kangaroo court in which Mchangani is found guilty and beaten up. However, the guards rescue him. Unlike Stanza and his colleagues in *Ola Majita*, who have to endure Dr. Grey and his gang's harassment, Mchangani is immediately moved to the next cell away from the Cicilian gang.<sup>700</sup> Here, one sees a sharp contrast between the scripting of guards in Baloyi's play and that of Nyawo's in terms of professionalism and humanity.

Mchangani's resistance to the gang and his subsequent removal from the cell run by the gang can be seen as Baloyi's appeal to the prison service that inmates who resist gangs in prisons should be helped as it is a sign that they are capable of being rehabilitated. Nevertheless, he believes it is not easy to achieve that due to corrupt prison warders. Like Nyawo, he thinks that prison guards connive with gangs for material gain instead of dismantling gangs in prisons. The leader of the Cicilian gang, Smoko, asks one of the wardens, Ngubane, to fix something for him. Even though it is not clear what it is that is to be fixed, Ngubane uses the arrival of Mchangani as an opportunity to smuggle drugs to the gang.<sup>701</sup> Baloyi contests that these drugs smuggled into prisons have a far-reaching effect beyond the prison walls. In this play, Smoko and his gang chase Mchangani in the streets after their release demanding money for the drugs they forced him to take while in prison:

JULUKA - Ee! Boss, u funani ku Mchangani?

SMOKO - He owes us, no one owes the Cicilians and enjoys free movement.

ROLLER - We are the Cicilians, we kill the living and only pray for the dead. If he thinks he is playing hide and seek with us.

SPOKES - He is a dead man.<sup>702</sup>

Through these characters, Baloyi reiterates the importance of new inmates dissociating themselves from gangs in prison as joining will entrap them the same way Mchangani is. Furthermore, he demonstrates how drugs enslave people to the extent that they can jeopardise their chances of starting a new life once they are released creating a vicious circle and consequently find themselves back in prison.

Like Stanza in *Ola Majita*, Mchangani relates his prison experience to his friend, Bafana. Baloyi, like Nyawo, seems to encourage ex-convicts to relate

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<sup>700</sup> Obed Baloyi, *Ga-Mchangani*, unpublished play. [1997], p.6

<sup>701</sup> Ibid. p.4

<sup>702</sup> Ibid. p.27

their prison experiences to others who have not been to prison especially the inhuman treatment prisoners are subjected to:

MCHANGANI - The conditions in our jails must change. Jails of our country are not rehabilitating, they are revenging. That is wrong. I was mixed with professional criminals. You had to join a gang to survive.<sup>703</sup>

Even though the courts of law regarded Muchangani as a criminal, hence his being sent to jail, it is obvious that he does not regard himself as a criminal. He expects the Prison Services to protect him from criminals like Smoko and rehabilitate him. Through this character, Baloyi reiterates Nyawo's observation in *Ola Majita* that offenders who are first time offenders are locked up with hardened criminals who are beyond rehabilitation. Consequently, these criminals destroy the new inmates' chances of being rehabilitated by ill treating and forcing them to join their gangs.

Baloyi blames the situation on the politicians who failed to live up to the promises they made to the people prior to the 1994 multi-racial General Elections. He argues that politicians promised that they would improve the way things were prior to the democratization of South Africa. He observes with concern that the public is desperate for a better life after decades of oppression. Amy Ansell notes that those previously disadvantaged during apartheid express disfavor that the pace of transformation is too slow and the changes too superficial or tokenistic as a result of the obstructionist practices of the beneficiaries of the old order.<sup>704</sup> The desire for better life was demonstrated by the fact that people voted in massive numbers in 1994 hoping to get jobs and see their lives change for the better. He argues that for most people, casting their vote meant an end to their misery, but that has not happened.<sup>705</sup> However, even though he acknowledges the suffering the black masses are still going through in democratic South Africa, Baloyi seems to think that something is being done to alleviate the situation as evidenced by projects like the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), MASAKHANE and others:

BAFANA - No Mchangani things will come right. Our leaders are trying all they can. Look we have got RDP, MASAKHANE and other projects.<sup>706</sup>

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<sup>703</sup> Ibid. p.14

<sup>704</sup> Amy Ansell, "Two Nations of Discourse: mapping Racial Ideologies in Post-Apartheid South Africa". [2004], p.19

<sup>705</sup> Obed Baloyi, *Ga-Mchangani*, unpublished play. [1997], p.10

<sup>706</sup> Ibid. p.12 [RDP-Reconstruction and Development Projects & Masakhane are small Projects meant to benefit the Poor Masses whether be through low cost housing or starting their own income generating Projects.]



The hope expressed by Mchangani can be interpreted as the expectation that the government do everything with little input from the public itself. Conversely, Lueen Conning, a black playwright, discourages this thinking. Conning argues that South Africans should not expect the government to be solely responsible for the improvement of their lives and collective healing. Instead they have to participate with confidence in the reconstruction process. She argues that South Africans have a lot at stake and cannot take the risk of leaving their future in the hands of the powers that be.<sup>707</sup> Similarly, Fatima Dike, a black playwright as well, is of the same view:

People think government makes things happen overnight and there'll be abundance. It's never going to happen like that. We are the citizens of this country. When we were fighting for freedom, we knew that in the end this freedom would bring responsibility. We should not just wait for the government but do things on our own. No country has ever been prosperous in three years. It takes a long time. If we're expecting fruit now, it will be unripe and then we'll have stomach cramps.<sup>708</sup>

Baloyi moves on in this play to examine cultural clashes that exist between the West and Africa, which has been a centre of debate for some time. According to most African cultures a man has a right to have sex with his wife at any time he wants, without considering whether the wife is willing or not. For a woman to refuse to have sex with her husband was and still is in some societies something unacceptable, unless the woman wants to break the marriage, which is a taboo in many communities. This is contradictory to most Western cultures, in which even if two people are married both parties should consent to have sex otherwise it is regarded as rape. However, in modern times and with Western culture having proliferated through many societies including those in Africa, this means such an act is regarded as an offence. As a result, some men have been charged with raping their wives by forcibly having sex with them without their consent. This comes as a shock to Baloyi's characters, who still hold on to their African culture:

BAFANA - A 34 year old has beaten his wife badly after she refused to have sex with him, yeses, hi rape.

MCHANGANI - Yeses, u right. What does she think her husband must do? Boy, we need to maintain our culture. A woman is a woman, no change.<sup>709</sup>

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<sup>707</sup> Lueen Conning, in Perkins Kathy ed., *South African Black Women Playwrights..* [1998] ,p.5

<sup>708</sup> Fatima Dike, in Perkins Kathy ed., *South African Black Women Playwrights..* [1998] p.25

<sup>709</sup> Obed Baloyi, *Ga-Mchangani*, unpublished play. [1997], p.17

Though it is not stated why the woman refused to have sex with her husband, there can be many reasons, even though Mchangani jumps to a cultural one. The woman could have been too tired after a long hard day since women work these days as well, unlike in the past when most women were housewives. Despite this, Mchangani blames this violent act on the victim. Furthermore, he regards her refusing to have sex with her husband as a violation of African culture. It is not clear what Baloyi's intention in the exchange between these two characters. Nevertheless, much as his character tries to defend the man's deed and calls for the upholding of African cultures, he exposes the exploitative nature of African cultures whereby women are treated unfairly, if not enslaved. This is something that Dike notes in her play *So, What's New?* According to Mchangani, for a woman to be a true African woman, she should be submissive:

MCHANGANI - Boy I want an African woman, you know, u thole umfaze ethwele i suitcase, a bambe na mabhakete, a thathe nomtwana, we khanda e likhulu. Bese uthola no baas a zimachela a loku athi he, he, darling. That is an African woman. (Boy, I want an African woman, you know, with a suitcase on her head, a bucket in hand, carrying a baby. While baas [husband] walks by her side smiling saying "darling.")<sup>710</sup>

Apart from being exploitative and oppressive, Mchangani shows how inconsiderate and selfish some African men can be. In this boastful description of an African woman, Mchangani refers to the man as "baas." This is an Afrikaner word from the English word "boss", and was enforced under the apartheid system that blacks use it to refer to and/or address any white male regardless of age. By making Mchangani using this word, might imply that black patriarchy can be as oppressive as apartheid itself.

Whether this oppressive culture is the one that Baloyi wants his audience to maintain makes one to wonder, or whether he is criticizing it. However, even though his character appears to enjoy the benefits that come with the oppression of black women by his culture, women appear to be his source of comfort during hard times. This is demonstrated by the fact that he regrets the death of his mother and he indicates that his mother's presence would have made a difference and prevented his suffering.<sup>711</sup> Melancholy drives Mchangani to take refuge in alcohol, which is something prevalent in most black communities. In fact, some people believe that being drunk minimizes their problems, but little do they realize that their problems are only shelved temporarily by the state of their being drunk and they will still be there when they get sober and will have to deal

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<sup>710</sup> Ibid. p.18

<sup>711</sup> Ibid. p.17

with them. It is a false escape and of course there are times when the state of being drunk creates even more problems.

It does not take long before the audience comes to see that Mchangani really does enjoy the abuse of women. Towards the end of the play Mchangani seduces and rapes an eight year-old girl, Gugu. Through this act, Baloyi highlights the rate of child abuse and rape in the country, which has reached alarming proportion. Yazeed Kamaldien reports that Mmamolefe Mothudi, a social worker at the Child Welfare branch in Midrand and her colleagues deal with 110 new cases a month which involve sexual and physical abuse, abandonment, neglect and orphaned children. According to the South African Police Service in 2002-2003 children were the victims in 41 percent of the 52,000 rapes reported.<sup>712</sup>

Therefore, Baloyi's argument can be that acts of this nature are contradictory to what is expected from people who champion culture. According to African cultures, children are the most important in society because the future depends on them. Consequently, this calls for their protection, and to rape a child is unacceptable. In the past, perpetrators of such crimes were often banished from a village. Gcina Mhlophe, a playwright, observes this widespread abuse and rape of women and children:

Some things have changed for the worse, like the escalation of child abuse. It is terrifying. I'm amazed by the kindness of the law towards rapists. They get bail easily and are out on the streets raping again. The victims can be one year old, women, and even young boys. Some of these people [rapists] are respected members of the community.<sup>713</sup>

Mchangani's act exposes how evil, corrupt and manipulative he can be. He observes that aspect of culture that benefits him even if it is at the expense of others. Actually, he is not different from the politicians he accuses of being dishonest and corrupt. He is neither different from the members of the Cicilian gang who ill-treated him in prison since they too were in pursuit of their personal interest regardless of who got hurt. By having Mchagani rearrested, it can be argued that Baloyi encourages that there should be tough measures taken against perpetrators of acts of this nature and that the way Mchagani portrays and interprets African traditions, to his own exclusive benefit, it is not the correct way to engage with cultural heritage.

Mchangani's friend, Bafana, on the other hand, although is a small character that appears briefly at the end of the play, is different in what can be said to be Baloyi's move to cultivate a new mindset. Bafana understands that women are no different from men and should enjoy the same rights hence why

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<sup>712</sup> Yazeed Kamaldien, "Children the Victims in 41% of rapes", *ThisDay*. Friday May 28. [2004], p.28

<sup>713</sup> Mhlophe, Gcina in Perkins Kathy ed., *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.82

there is even an annual public holiday known as National Women's day, on August 9.<sup>714</sup>

The criticism often leveled against African cultures is that they appear to have been founded on the exploitation of women, as seen in the character of Mchangani, while glorifying men. This makes one think of the apartheid system, which glorified whites on the one hand while oppressing and exploiting blacks on the other. Consequently, it can be argued that Baloyi is calling for self-reflection in this new political dispensation.

Although the subject matter is different as compared to what one would expect under apartheid, Baloyi's main target audience can be said to be the government, and he outlines to the government the concerns of the masses and their expectations. Consequently, he calls upon it to take necessary measures to fulfill the promises made. However, he also calls on the public to reflect on itself and weed out any prejudice and discrimination, especially purported through cultures.

#### **4.4 *Enigma* - Paul Grootboom**

Paul Grootboom is a University of the Witwatersrand graduate in Johannesburg. He is a playwright and director. He often works in collaboration with Aubrey Sekhabi. His play *Enigma* was first performed in Grahamstown in 1997, was directed by Kgomotso Ntswlane, and featured the following actors: Seipati Montsho, Regina Ndlovu, Silindile Nodangana and Wendy Sebukwe. The play tells a story of Khanyi, a rape victim who contracted HIV from her rapist father who was also a priest. Khanyi is also bitter with her mother for turning a blind eye while being raped by her father. Grootboom tackles a shocking theme and points to the rampant rate of rape in South Africa.

The lives of Paul Grootboom's two main female characters, Doctor and Khanyi, are in one way or the other influenced by their family background. Doctor's father despised Christianity because he regarded it as the means through which white people exploited native Africans. Consequently, Doctor resents Christianity as well, and this can be seen as a contributing factor to her belief in science. The other contributing factor in her life is the death of her mother, whom as a child she had to watch her dying without a doctor to save her. For this reason she took up medicine as a profession because she believes strongly in saving life regardless of circumstances.

Khanyi's experience with men, especially her father, has a negative impact on her. Her father raped her repeatedly until she became infected with HIV/AIDS. This finally forced her to run away from home. Somehow, her

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<sup>714</sup> Obed Baloyi, *Ga-Mchangani unpublished play*. [1997], p.18

choice of social work as a profession can be seen as a way of reaching out to the public, especially those going through the same ordeal as her. Despite the treatment she received from her priest father she still believes in God.

The difference in experiences of the two main characters cause a constant clash between them, mainly on issues, often at the centre of debates, like creation and euthanasia. However, they have to work together because of their doctor and patient relationship.

In this play, Grootboom explores the plight of AIDS patients with particular emphasis on both their physical and mental states. Khanyi's mental state is revealed through her nightmares. Based on these dreams, it can be concluded that her mental state is a world of terror, hopelessness and an entrapment from which she does not seem to have any chance to escape or survive. Both her physical and mental states affect her emotions and compel her to constantly review her life, which results in depression.

Without wasting much time in his opening scene, Grootboom presents his audience with a great deal of information with regard to AIDS patients through lighting effects and later through dialogue. The information incorporates, first, the AIDS patients' mental and physical states; second, the age group which seems more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. Third, other opportunistic diseases to which HIV people fall victim. In order to dramatize the mental state of his protagonist, Grootboom employs a specific design concept, which is carried through into the lighting and other scenic elements.

The walls of the room are designed in grotesque satanic images. It is a truly appalling sight. The stage is completely dark. After a minute of silence and darkness, a cold reddish light falls upon the bed.<sup>715</sup>

Satanic images are self-explanatory and so is darkness, which is often associated with evil while the red light is always associated with danger. With the help of these colors, Grootboom masterfully portrays that his first scene is based on his protagonist's mental state and the danger that she is in. This is demonstrated by the shift from Darkness, which is equal to black to another color red, and with the latter directed at the bed on which the protagonist lies:

A female in her early twenties, Khanyi, is sleeping on the bed. She keeps on turning around as though having a nightmare, occasionally moaning. The moaning gradually grows into screaming. Ultimately, she is frantically screaming and kicking.<sup>716</sup>

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<sup>715</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*. unpublished play. [1998], p.1

<sup>716</sup> Ibid. p.1

The way Grootboom guides his audience minimizes chances of misinterpreting the scene. The age of the protagonist, early twenties, is of great importance, as it shows the age group in the society most susceptible to HIV. Helen Jackson quotes G. Williams, L. Ng'ang'a and J. Ngugi that every day about 15,000 people throughout the world become infected with HIV 60% of which are aged 15-24. Jackson adds that children and young people, especially in developing countries, are the most critical age group to reach for HIV prevention. About half the population in developing countries is aged 15 and under, which demonstrates an enormous number of sexually active people.<sup>717</sup> There can be no doubt that this is the age group which every country relies heavily on for future labour by losing it, there will be serious consequences. Jackson notes the labour sector becomes vulnerable to the impact of AIDS through labour shortages from increased deaths or when employers must pay for sick-leave entitlements. The former leads to lower production while the latter to increased costs of production and reduced profit.<sup>718</sup>

To emphasize the seriousness of the situation, Grootboom's protagonist is a social worker. In anticipation of Khanyi's eventual illness, Khanyi's doctor encourages her to dedicate her life to educate the public about HIV:

DOCTOR - You have some experience as a social worker. You can help a lot of people from misconception by informing them about this ailment you have. An' it's much better now, coz you'll be telling them about what you know. What you've experienced. You can teach a lot of people that the victims of this plague, should not be feared but should in fact be embraced. In short, what I'm saying is...why kill yourself with all the help you could be giving, when you can gracefully disperse it to the society. At least when you die, die having made sure that you've made a difference in the world.<sup>719</sup>

What is interesting is the way Grootboom artfully withholds the cause of this unbearable suffering of his main character from his audience. However, the fact that Khanyi refers to the cause of her suffering as a "syndrome" rather than a "disease," and that everyone including herself knows there is no cure, implies her HIV has developed into AIDS. Her friend's comment to Doctor regarding Khanyi's physical state also reinforces this:

NOMBEKO - Her situation is worse. It's like hell. When I went in there today, I almost didn't recognize her. I've know her since we were kids,

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<sup>717</sup> Helen Jackson, *AIDS Africa: a Continent in Crisis*. [2002], p.122

<sup>718</sup> Ibid. p.199

<sup>719</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*. unpublished play. [1997], p.38

but that woman, I don't know any more. She's a walking corpse. All she needs is a peaceful burial.<sup>720</sup>

It is important to note that Grootboom exposes the plight of HIV/AIDS patients without mentioning the disease. It is probably to avoid a negative attitude of “another HIV/AIDS play” people have developed, which might make them miss the message of the emotional and physical suffering victims endure.

The reason Doctor proposes to Khanyi to educate the public is possibly that despite the fact that it is more than four decades since the first case of AIDS was reported and with millions of people having died from diseases related to it, there is still a wide-spread misconception about it. This explains why more people continue to get infected and are often neglected and discriminated against. Even though it is a regrettable tragedy for a person to have HIV/AIDS, Doctor sees a positive role AIDS patients can play in society as educators.

It is clear that AIDS patients suffer physical pain as evidenced by Khanyi's suffering. AIDS paralyzes its victim's immunity. This enables many diseases to invade the body without the body being able to resist. From the constant and painful coughing of blood, it can be assumed that Khanyi is suffering from tuberculosis, a disease known to take advantage of the body's state of defenselessness. This explains why she has lost weight in a short time, as Nombeko observes. Jackson notes that in Malawi, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe between 45% and 65% of TB patients are said to be HIV-positive.<sup>721</sup> Apart from losing weight, the victim seems to lose control over the normal functioning of the body. In this play, Khanyi wets herself without even being aware of it. It is only after she feels the warmth of the urine that she realises what has happened.<sup>722</sup> This condition can be humiliating to any person, but more so for a woman her age. This might be the cause of her self-rejection, which induces the feeling that her life is not worth living and this is exasperated by lack of support from those close to her.

KHANYI - Before you came here, no one has even bothered to come an' visit me! To come an' see how I'm getting on. The people I've spent half my life helping have now turned their backs on me.<sup>723</sup>

Grootboom seems to argue that AIDS sufferers need support and care from those close to them. Similarly, Jackson notes that when it comes to caring for people with HIV and AIDS, the richest resource a country has, without question, is the compassion of its people. She observes that as the HIV/AIDS epidemic spreads,

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<sup>720</sup> Ibid. p.25

<sup>721</sup> Helen Jackson, *AIDS Africa: a Continent in Crisis*. [2002], p.232

<sup>722</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*.. unpublished play. [1997], p.19

<sup>723</sup> Ibid. p.6

caring for patients with HIV related diseases is increasingly taking place in the home and community.<sup>724</sup>

Khanyi's plight raises a chain of questions; if people like her in a hospital and under a doctor's care still suffer and are neglected by those close to them, what about those at home, especially in the rural areas? How much do they suffer? Do they have anyone to take care of them? How miserable are they? These factors are likely to contribute to the victim's life deterioration as evidenced by the physical state of Khanyi. As a result, the situation can make sufferers disillusioned:

KHANYI - It's lonely in here! It's like pris...It's like Death row! It "is" deathrow, actually. And the saddest thing is...death doesn't come quick on deathrow. It's slow...very-very slow! The slowness increases the pain! The pain goes from pain to torture! The torture goes to eternal hell. You feel you can't handle any more, all you want is death. That's all you think about. It's no longer a scary thought. It's a beautiful thought! You wish for it, but it doesn't come. You know there was a time in my life when I was afraid of death, now it's not death that scares me, it's life.<sup>725</sup>

It is worth noting that ordinary people fear death due to its mystery and the uncertainty about what follows thereafter. Furthermore, people love to hold on to their material possessions, friends, life and what it offers. Through this character, Grootboom demonstrates that on the contrary, some AIDS patients wish for death. Nevertheless, her fantasizing about death gives an impression she is mentally disturbed. Ronald Gaskell observes, with regard to Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*, that the play is a dynamic exploration of the self, of the split between man as he is, or as he dreams, and man as he is called to become.<sup>726</sup> The same can be said about Grootboom's play, the two characters close to Khanyi, Doctor and Nombeko, are familiar with her illness. They also know that there is no hope that she can recover and live a normal life like any other ordinary person but they still find it disturbing that a human being can impatiently look forward to her death. They possibly judge her decision based on how much they value life and their dreams about the future. The two fail to understand that prolonging life means more pain and suffering to Khanyi. As a result, she finds it more appropriate to make peace with death than dream of life when there is no hope for the future and each day means unbearable pain. Grootboom makes use of nightmares through Khanyi's character to expand on this theme:

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<sup>724</sup> Helen Jackson, *AIDS Africa: a Continent in Crisis*. [2002], p.232

<sup>725</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*. unpublished play. [1997], p.12

<sup>726</sup> Ronald Gaskell, *Drama and Reality*, [1972], p.75



KHANYI - You know, juz before you came in I had this nightmare and eh...I was in a field of rotten cabbages. A huge field millions an' millions of hecta-kilometres in every direction. I tried to run out of the field but I couldn't. It was as if my legs were tied up.<sup>727</sup>

Even though Khanyi is puzzled by the dream, it is not just another nightmare, it is an interpretation of her (fictitious) life situation. It is known that AIDS patients have no chance to recover and lead a normal life, the same way a person who is sick from ordinary disease can.

Consequently, this monstrous field of rotten cabbage can be interpreted as an allegory of AIDS itself and her attempt to run out of this field is her unconscious attempt to recover. She expresses this desire to get well to her friend Nombeko.

KHANYI - I wish...I wish I wasn't sick. I wish I had kids. I wish I was married, living boring life. Playing with my kids. I wish I had hope for the future.<sup>728</sup>

Despite her desire, the fact that her legs could not move in her dream, preventing her escape from this field, can be seen as an unconscious sign that she does not have a chance to recover from her ailment. Angela Richards writes, in relation to Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, that by a detailed investigation of this universal phenomena, Freud discovered a way of exploring the unconscious. Freud recognized that dreams, like neurotic symptoms, are products of a conflict and compromise between conscious and unconscious impulses and was able to classify the difference between the primary and secondary processes of thought between the modes of functioning in the unconscious and conscious regions of the mind.<sup>729</sup>

Khanyi's dream can be compared to the life of an old destitute woman living outside her hospital room in the street. From Khanyi's comment to the doctor, it appears as though ever since she occupied the room, she has been keeping an eye on this old woman and feels sorry for her possibly because Khanyi is a social worker. She possibly sees herself in the old woman's state of loneliness and desertion.<sup>730</sup> It is worth noting that the woman Khanyi observes is disabled and falls under that minority group which is often discriminated against in society. By observing the similarity between the old woman and herself, it can be argued that Grootboom draws attention to the selfishness of the society in neglecting the sick and the disabled. It is also important to note that Doctor does acknowledge that people wish for death at a certain stage of their lives. However,

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<sup>727</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*. unpublished play. [1997], p.11

<sup>728</sup> Ibid. p.41

<sup>729</sup> Angela Richards, *Sigmund Freud*. [1975], p.485

<sup>730</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*, unpublished play. [1997], p.2

she does not accept the fact that Khanyi, too, has accepted her fate and wants to die. This is rather selfish on Doctor's part because she seems to be more interested in using Khanyi for her professional goals. Nobantu Rasebotsa, Meg Samuelson and Kylie Thomas remark that a denial runs through all social strata across the region, and perhaps more infamously in South Africa, where the number of people living with HIV and dying with AIDS, the link between HIV and AIDS and even the existence of the pandemic itself have been insistently contested. One of the terrible consequences of this state of denial is the erasure of the lived experience of the people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.<sup>731</sup>

Unlike Doctor, Nombeko finally brings herself to accept Khanyi's situation and her decision to terminate her life. She even offers to convince Doctor that death is the only way to save Khanyi from her suffering. However, Doctor declines to terminate Khanyi's life. There are a couple of reasons for her refusal; the first one is professional. Doctor fears the act would put her profession in jeopardy since euthanasia is illegal in most countries including South Africa. The second reason is moral, she perceives terminating another human being, regardless of circumstance, is morally wrong and unjustifiable. This makes her fear that she cannot have peace of mind after carrying out such an act.<sup>732</sup> The request made to Doctor demonstrates how thin the line is doctors walk on and the dilemmas they face in their profession. Given the expertise doctors have, they are expected to do some things, which, even though in good faith, are illegal before the law. Those concerned, on the other hand, regard their refusal as cruel and inhuman. However, Doctor's obsession with saving lives can be seen as an unconscious act, with Khanyi representing Doctor's mother who died because there was no doctor to help her.

Grootboom here deals with an issue that has caused a lot of controversy in real life. Relatives have been forced to watch their loved ones suffer terribly, pleading to have their lives terminated to end their suffering, but the relatives are barred by the law from doing so. In such cases, relatives often avoid directly doing as the patient asks but assist the person concerned to commit suicide to avoid being held responsible. Andrew London and Gordon Rayner write in relation to Reginald Crew, who was forced to fly from England to Zurich, Switzerland, to terminate his life:

With his wife and daughter at his side, Reginald Crew this week became Britain's first known 'suicide tourist'. He flew to Switzerland, where doctors helped him take his own life with an over dose of

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<sup>731</sup> Kylie Thomas, Nobantu Rasebotsa & Meg Samuelson, *Nobody ever said AIDS*. [2004], p.12

<sup>732</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*., unpublished play. [1997], p.25

barbiturates. Crew 74 was forced to fly Zurich for his last wish because assisted suicide is illegal in Britain.<sup>733</sup>

Deborah Annetts, Chief Executive of Voluntary Euthanasia Society, states that it is of immense public concern that people with terminal illnesses are forced to travel to a foreign country to end their lives, in unfamiliar surroundings, and without proper safeguards in place. Furthermore, if friends and families accompany them, they are confronted with the added burden of not knowing if they will face prosecution on their return.<sup>734</sup> Similarly, Khanyi is aware of this dilemma and does not want to implicate Nombeko.

KHANYI - Wait! I'm not finished. I juz need your support, I'm not saying you should kill me. All I want is you to be there when I do this.<sup>735</sup>

Although Grootboom acknowledges the suffering of AIDS victims, he seems to be of the opinion that it is not advisable for a doctor to terminate a patient's life. He seems to find it more appropriate for doctors to play a counselor's role and encourage their patients to hold on even though it is certain that they are destined to die. Furthermore, given the negative attitude people have towards educational material on AIDS to the extent that some no longer read it, he finds it more beneficial for AIDS patients to dedicate their lives to educating other people who have not yet contracted the disease.

The second person to visit Khanyi in the hospital after Nombeko is her mother, Nosisa, whom Khanyi does not want to see. A confrontation ensues between the two. From the bitter argument that follows, the audience comes to learn of Khanyi's background and how she contracted HIV:

KHANYI- I've helped ungrateful fuckin' people since I ran away from home. I've never had a chance to be selfish for a while to think about myself even only for a second. I always sacrificed myself for others, an' no one even cares that I'm dying in hospital now. So my father is dead, so fuckin' what? It's good that he finally died. I have wished for his death from ever since he started forcing himself on me. Taking away my innocence, my purity. Every night I tried to fight him off, telling him to stop hurting me, but all he kept saying was how fighting it would only make it worse. "Juz lie down, you might start enjoy it in the long run". Fuck him! All this happened right under your nose, but you did

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<sup>733</sup> Andrew London & Gordon Rayner, "Dying for a little Dignity", *The Star*. Wednesday January 22. [2003], p.13

<sup>734</sup> Ibid. p.13

<sup>735</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*. unpublished play. [1997], p.14

nothing even when I told you what was going on, all you could say was,  
"Khanyisile don't say such a thing about your Father."<sup>736</sup>

Apart from the bitterness, Khanyi brings forward several contributing factors to her current state. In real life, it casts a light on the molestation and sexual abuse of girls by their fathers and step-fathers, which seems to be rife in South Africa. Often girls confer their secrets and disappointments to their mothers and failure to get sympathy and support from them results in the girls being desperate. They either commit suicide or run away from home. The audience learns that the main character ran away from home after failing to get support and protection from her mother against her father's brutal and continuous rape. This cruel act not only robbed her of her virginity, but led to her contracting the HIV virus.

Grootboom's method of communication to his audience is very forceful. However, it is not meant to horrify, but to show the extent of widespread evil in communities that even a priest, someone usually regarded as servants of God and supposed to lead others to righteousness, is the one who commits heinous crimes, even against his own child. He also draws attention to the fact that some mothers often tend to believe their husbands over their children, even when children are wronged. Furthermore, some mothers are inclined to value their family image before the public more than the happiness of their children. Nosisa regrets this in her apology to Khanyi:

NOSISA - When you told me about your...your rape, it was not that I didn't believe you...some part of me did, but also, some part of me was afraid of the scandal that would come out. How would I have faced people after such a scandal was known?<sup>737</sup>

Nosisa's comment demonstrates her selfishness. It is obvious that she thought less of how much her husband wronged her daughter, and more what people would think of her and her family. It is also worth noting that she had doubts about the truth of the matter, hence only "part" of her believed.

Apart from drawing attention to the plight of AIDS patients, Grootboom explores the confusion and clash that exists between science and the *Bible*. Based on the *Bible*, God created the world and everything in it. However, according to Grootboom's play, scientists believe that the earth took shape due to changes brought about by both time and super natural powers, but his characters do not associate these super-natural powers with God:

KHANYI - I understand what you're saying, but what I wanted to know is who you think created the world.

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<sup>736</sup> Ibid. p.29

<sup>737</sup> Ibid. p.30

DOCTOR - The big bang, of course.

KHANYI - I didn't say "what", I said "who" You see, one thing confuses me. Who exactly was it that caused it? I mean, someone like God for example, must've caused the bang. It can't just happen!

DOCTOR - Well, it's not necessarily "someone" who caused the bang but more accurately, "some forces" ...forces of nature...cosmic forces.

KHANYI - Would I be wrong if I eh...If I call those Forces "God"?

DOCTOR - You can call them what you like. You can call them God, or anything. I don't care what you call them. You can even call them Satan. But the thing is, when those forces created the world, they didn't do it as consciously as the Bible leads us to believe. To me everything in the universe is random.<sup>738</sup>

Earlier, Doctor tells Khanyi that she does not read the *Bible* because she does not believe in it. She says the *Bible* and God are just there for moral purposes so that people do not become immoral.<sup>739</sup> Although she has a reason and explanation for everything, it appears as though her dislike of the *Bible* and disbelief in God are politically or racially motivated and rooted in her family. She explains:

DOCTOR - My father was too black to be a priest. He believed in Jomo Kenyatta's famous quote...

KHANYI - Which is?

DOCTOR - "When the white man came to Africa, he had the Bible and we had the land. Suddenly, he had the land we had the bible." I think his lack of belief in "the white man's God" also accounts for my lack of belief in it.<sup>740</sup>

Through the character of Doctor, Grootboom addresses the abuse of the *Bible* and the name of God, an issue many black playwrights have raised in their plays. A lot of writers and commentators have noted with regret how the white settlers abused the Bible by preaching about God, love, peace and life after death, only to have the natives losing their power over what they had, including their land. Jordan Ngubane observes:

In the Manifesto he issued when he and his followers left the Cape, Piet Retief had proclaimed that the Trekkers would establish communities where they would be free to establish "just" laws. The first cardinal principle in the Boer notion of justice was that there would be no equality between black and white, either in the church or the state.

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<sup>738</sup> Ibid. p.7

<sup>739</sup> Ibid. p.5

<sup>740</sup> Ibid. p.4

There had to be one code of law for white people and another for the men of color. They saw nothing wrong with that, since God Himself, they believed, had created men with different skins and temperaments. If the laws expressed this diversity, they were perfect in accord with the divine intention.<sup>741</sup>

Failure to observe these laws called for punishment. Blacks, who had previously lived their lives without such restrictions, were bound to violate them and were consequently punished. As a result, blacks saw this as oppression and called for revolt against the white settlers. It is through this regrettable history that some blacks started to hate or resent both the *Bible* and God. As Grootboom notes in this play, this hatred or resentment continues even today. This emphasises the negative effect the *Bible* and religion have had on some blacks based on their ancestors' experience in the hands of missionaries and colonial masters. Grootboom incorporates how this act of abusing the *Bible* continues even today with blacks as perpetrators. He demonstrates this effectively through the main character being raped and infected with HIV by her father, a priest:

KHANYI - Look at me! Look at me for christsake! Take a good look at me if you have eyes. I am in hell. Don't you see? I'm in hell down here. I was in hell even when I was in my father's house. An' he was a devil disguised in a priest's frock. A fuckin' devil he was. Always tricking people into believing he was a good priest.<sup>742</sup>

Grootboom can also be seen as revealing the role and manner in which evil destroys lives, targeting the very people and families that are supposed to lead others. Through Khanyi's father, a priest, evil destroys her entire family; she is lying in bed dying of AIDS, which she contracted from being raped by him. Her mother kills her father when she learns of Khanyi's situation and later commits suicide. This means that no member of this family will be left alive after Khanyi's death, which is certain to come. And no doubt this will be a tragic story from a family that was supposed to be religious and exemplary to others.

Paul Grootboom's play is a testimony to a new thinking divorced from any political orientation. Like a journalist presenting a balanced story, he dramatises AIDS in such a manner that he draws his audience's attention into lives of HIV/AIDS victims and gives his audience a feeling not only of what it is to live with HIV/AIDS, but also the horror through which some victims contracted it.

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<sup>741</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African explains Apartheid*. [1963], p.55

<sup>742</sup> Paul Grootboom, *Enigma*. unpublished play. [1997], p.27

#### 4.5 *Not with my Gun* - Aubrey Sekhabi and Paul Grootboom

Aubrey Sekhabi is also a University of Witwatersrand graduate. He is a playwright and Artistic Director of National Theatre in Pretoria. Their play *Not with my Gun* was first performed at the Market Theatre in 1998. It was directed by Aubrey Sekhabi featuring the following actors: Vusi Kunene, Baby Cele, Tshallo Chokwe, Peter Mashigo, Shondile Nodangala and Kholofelo Kola. It is a story of four friends struggling to make a living in post-apartheid South Africa. However, their lives are somehow centered around King, who is a film producer battling to secure funding because he is black and the film industry is predominantly white. For this reason he is not in a position to make the kind of films he would love to make.

Grootboom and Sekhabi's characters are typical of many township males, that is, they have criminal records or have been to jail for one reason or another. Even though they have managed to put their past behind and rebuild their lives, it seems as though they cannot shake off the past. As a result, it keeps coming back to hound and/or disrupt their lives.

King is not only an ambitious person but also a hard worker. Consequently, he does not have patience with people who are not serious about their professions. Due to professional pressure, he has limited time with his family.

The other two main characters, Jake and Brains, have criminal records, and are inconsistent and violent if they do not get their way. Whereas Jake fails to prioritize goals, Brains is a persistent manipulator. Their friend Khala, on the other hand, is the opposite. He is considerate, focused and has the ability to foresee trouble. Although the four men are in the film industry, they are all politically minded. The fifth man is Kobus, a poor white man, who earns his living by hawking door-to-door in return for commission for the goods sold. Like any other man, he wants to provide for his family and make it feel special. Both his race and status are a burden on him, especially when whites are often thought to be wealthy by most blacks. 'Classic' roles of whites in black theatre under apartheid are thus changed and even challenged in this play.

Sekhabi and Grootboom start the play by shedding light on the plight of film producers in post-apartheid South Africa. They argue that South African film productions are under-funded. This compels producers and directors to improvise, which often compromises the quality of their productions. For this reason, local productions appear mediocre as compared to their Hollywood counterparts with big budgets.

KING - There's no way he's getting a crane. He's dreaming, what does he think this is, Titanic? Jesus, we're in South Africa, let him get on top of a roof or isn't that aerial enough for him? No, he can do those scenes

without a crane, he's just being too fussy. What can I do if we have a tight budget?<sup>743</sup>

Sekhabi and Grootboom portray a nerve-wracking situation whereby South African artists are caught between a low budget and huge expenses to have a good production. However, it is not only money that causes a headache but actors as well. The two writers also show how inconsiderate black South African actors can be by their lack of commitment to their profession:

BRAINS - You can't juz fire me for missing two rehearsals I've missed rehearsals before, I've missed more days of rehearsals before, why didn't you fire me then?

KING - That was stage Brains, it was stage! This is tv, and tv is money, you can't juz choose to do what you want when there's so much money involved. And besides, the fuck ups that you did when we were doing stage work, had a great influence on my present decision.<sup>744</sup>

Brains' attempt to get his job back exposes his lack of commitment to acting as a profession and justifies his dismissal. Given the lack of funding for local productions, one would expect local actors to take their profession seriously and use every opportunity they have. Their lack of commitment is likely to contribute to the poor local productions as well. It can be argued that the two writers blame this lack of commitment on the abuse of personal relationships within the local film industry. This is revealed as Brains tries to convince King to reinstate him:

BRAINS - But King, we're friends, man and friends iron their problems out. I mean, how many times must I kneel before you like a hobo? We grew up together, man! We went through shit together, serious shit! Remember seven years back? When you were still small time, when we had no money for food and we'd eat dry bread with starch water! When you couldn't pay the rent and you stayed at my place.<sup>745</sup>

It is this personal relationship, the two writers seems to believe, should be done away with for the South African film industry to develop and be competitive with the rest of the world. This is indicated by Kings's determination to dismiss Brains:

KING - Even if I can re-employ you, it still couldn't make any difference, coz you haven't changed, you'll still be as irresponsible as

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<sup>743</sup> Paul Grootboom, and Aubrey Sekhabi, *Not with my Gun*, unpublished play. [1998], p.2

<sup>744</sup> Ibid. p.12

<sup>745</sup> Ibid. p.12



you are. You'll never change, that's my problem with you and as far as I'm concerned, I'm saving our friendship by not working with you. There is money involved here, big money. It'll fuck up our friendship.<sup>746</sup>

Here, what the two writers seem to be driving at in this play is to encourage South African film-makers and artists to draw a clear line between personal relationships and professional interests and to deal with each without jeopardizing the other. Furthermore, artists are encouraged to be strict regardless of how close they are to culprits.

From the challenges in the labour market, the two playwrights shift their focus to domestic space, one of the contentious spaces due to rising domestic violence in the country. The playwrights indicate why relationships of some professionals often fail and appear to be of the opinion that wives play a part by not offering the needed support to their husbands to cope with their demanding professions or try to understand what they are going through.

BETTY - You get up early and disappear, and you come back late when I'm sleeping. We don't even talk anymore.

KING - Betty where do I get the time? I have a new production to oversee, which is now in pre-production. On the other hand, I have a bozo for a production manager, a director who thinks he's in Hollywood...plus I haven't got a fuckin' lead.<sup>747</sup>

Although it is Betty's right to demand time from King, she gives the impression that King is irresponsible, as if all that he does is to stay away without good reason. But from King's outburst it appears as if he is stressed, yet determined to achieve his goals. It is likely that his outburst is a call for help and support than a confrontation. As much as Sekhlabi and Grootboom encourage black artists to be committed to their profession, they insist that artists should have time for their families. Nevertheless, they note that some wives bring into their families issues that are of no concern to their families and this causes tension.

BETTY - You have got Brains. What about him? You've always said you're writing the role for him. I don't understand King. I mean, I don't understand why did you fire him?

KING - What're you, his lawyer?

BETTY - No, I'm juz asking. I mean, you and Brains have been friends since, I don't know when you both come a long way, I juz don't

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<sup>746</sup> Ibid. p.13

<sup>747</sup> Ibid. p.13

understand why all of a sudden you choose to make such an abrupt decision.

KING - Abrupt? Who says it's abrupt? And why're you on his case all of a sudden? Since when do you have interest with people I relate with?

BETTY - You're joking! I'm asking you a simple question and you're getting all heated up, what's the matter with you King? What is eating you?

KING - Betty, believe me, you don't want us to start yelling at each other.<sup>748</sup>

The exchange between the two makes King's family appear as another battleground away from the hassles of his work. There are a couple of interesting issues raised in King and Betty's confrontation that reveal Betty's real character. She seems to care more about other people than her husband. From what the audience has learned, Brains is irresponsible. Betty's confronting King regarding Brains' dismissal raises questions about her own character. Her smoking in the house might also indicate her irresponsibility with King always reminding her to smoke outside all the time for health reasons.

The fact that Betty, being a black woman, smokes, in addition to what has been discussed, raises questions about her habits and capability to run a family from an African perspective. Smoking is often regarded as a deviation from black culture and such women are often regarded by society as irresponsible and not in a position to manage their affairs. Many in black communities associate smoking and drinking by black women with feminism or immorality, unless they are grandmothers. The argument is that grandmothers have already passed the childbearing stage and consequently pose no danger in future should they fall pregnant. The equation of 'feminism' with 'immorality' is a very real one in black culture. Western commentators have heavily criticized this, but the truth of the matter is that it does exist even in black urban culture and the playwrights are writing for a predominantly black urban audience.

Earlier in the play Betty complains to King about the lack of time he spends with his family. However, from what the audience sees, it appears that the little time she spends with King she does not address issues concerning their family, but tries to solve other people's problems like Brains'. It is also worth noting the difference in the manner with which both Betty and Khala handle the dismissal of Brains from the production. Even though Khala agrees to talk to King, he is cautious and does not believe that King can dismiss Brains for no reason while Betty on the other hand seems to believe every word that Brains says and is convinced that King is guilty. Therefore, Betty's taking sides with another man can be seen as a lack of concern for her husband, even though she

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<sup>748</sup> Ibid. p.3

asks for her husband's commitment when she complains of being neglected. Later in the play she complains to Mpho about King and suspects that he is seeing other women hence her question to him, "What's eating you?" But her concern about other men raises questions of her loyalty to her husband as well.

To some extent, Betty's dissatisfaction in this marriage may be attributed to her experiences with men from childhood, and has nothing to do with King. She seems to have encountered irresponsible men starting with her grandfather and her father:

BETTY - Well, maybe Khala is an angel, as you say, but I've met only devils in my life. My father was a devil, my grandfather was a devil, my brother-in-law is a devil. And you know the funny thing, when I was growing up I thought my father to be the most honest and faithful man, juz like you think of yours. But later, we kept on finding out that he has children here, children there, you know what I mean? You can never know coz one minute he's an angel and the next, you find out he's a devil incarnate.<sup>749</sup>

Betty's experience with regard to her male relatives is experienced by many families in South Africa since it is common for people, both male and female, to have multiple partners even if they are married. It can therefore be contested that Betty's experience made her grow up with a negative attitude towards men. This might not come as a surprise as it is argued that children are often affected by the situation in which they are brought up and most of the times react in a given way to such situations. Freire submits that the parent-child relationship at home usually reflects the objective cultural conditions of the surrounding social structure. He argues that if such children, reared in an atmosphere of lovelessness, oppression and their potency frustrated, do not manage to take the path of authentic rebellion during their youth, they are likely to either drift into total indifference, alienate themselves from reality or engage in forms of destructive action,<sup>750</sup> as demonstrated by Betty in this play. In this regard, Sue Williamson observes the effect the 1976 events had on the minds of the young:

Sibanda was born in Soweto, and started drawing on his school slate at the age of 5. He was 11 years old at the time of the uprising in 1976, a period that remains deeply imprinted on his mind. His evocative and vigorous painting depict the news images the world associates with Soweto of that year, the year the township children took on the might of the heavily armed South African state, and Soweto caught fire.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>749</sup> Ibid. p.7

<sup>750</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.152

<sup>751</sup> Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa*. [1990], p.7

Likewise, Mmamolefe Mothudi, a Child Welfare Social Worker, admits that child abuse affects children badly; often abused children prefer to be alone. Consequently, they do not perform well at school.<sup>752</sup> Mpho, on the other hand, has a different attitude towards men because she had a good relationship with her father. This makes her have a positive attitude towards her boyfriend:

MPHO - My father had R20 in the bank when he died. Can you believe that, twenty ands? And you know why? He had too much of a generous spirit, just like Khala. He believed that generosity is in his nature. Maybe that's why I loved him so much, coz he made sure that I had everything. He was kind, generous in spirit, I mean, loving, faithful he was everything you can want in a father or a husband. He's exactly like Khala, Maybe that's why Khala is so compatible for me.<sup>753</sup>

Sekhabi and Grootboom show the impact different parenting has on children, and consequently how children perceive and react differently to life based on their experiences. However, the fact that Mpho is pregnant and is worshipped by her boyfriend while Betty smokes, with no indication of having a child and likely to be divorced, may be seen as Sekhabi and Grootboom's advocating black culture, that black men love and care for maternal women like Mpho and resent feminists like Betty's character. This chauvinism is prevalent in many black communities. Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka observes that African women on the continent and in diaspora become subjected to what she terms "double patriarchy. Ajayi-Soyinka submits that double patriarchy is a system under which sexism, the weapon of patriarchal power and its various manifestations, politically, socially and economically oppresses women twice over."<sup>754</sup>

Whereas women often talk about their relationships whenever they meet, men appear to be preoccupied with their professions and power. From the woman talk, the two writers examine black men's concerns in post-apartheid South Africa. King is together with his friends, Khala, Jake and Brains, and from their discussion it is clear that crime is one of their major concerns:

JAKE - Nine millimetre parabellum, "Daewoo"? How can you buy a gun called "Daewoo"? Eleven shooter! You must buy a "Vector", sixteen shooter. It's light and powerful Better still, buy a revolver 44

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<sup>752</sup> Yazeem Kamaldien, "Children the Victims in 41% of rapes" *This Day*, Friday, May 28. [2004], p.28

<sup>753</sup> Paul Grootboom, & Aubrey Sekhabi, *Not with my Gun*. unpublished play. [1998], p.6

<sup>754</sup> Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, "Black Feminist Criticism and Drama: Thoughts on Double Patriarchy", *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Spring [1992], p.173

Magnum. You need a powerful gun, otherwise you'll kiss your BM good-bye.

KING - 44 Magnum? Do I look like Dirty Harry?

JAKE - It's a war out there, young boys carry Ak-47s nowadays.<sup>755</sup>

Jake knows a lot about guns, probably from his experience as a criminal. However, this also exposes the level of insecurity in South Africa and the danger people live in. Sekhlabi and Grootboom can be said to advising their audience to be well armed for their own security and to protect their property. There is also the issue of the easy availability of guns to the extent that even youths are in possession of dangerous weapons like AK-47s. Even though safety and security is a problem for the whole country, King and his friends observe with regret that blacks lose their lives more than people of other races in South Africa. They are of the opinion that the killing of blacks has reached such a proportion that the South African society has accepted it as a way of life:

KHALA - D'you know how many black people are stabbed to death, shot and maimed in the townships, just in one weekend? Lots! But it's just common occurrence, even the investigations are slow, but when one white person dies in a week, not a week-end, but "a week", there is an uproar, a huge fuckin' uproar and the arrest, quick...quick... quick.<sup>756</sup>

Nevertheless the two writers criticize the double standard of the South African society, which attaches different importance to blacks' lives in comparison to that of whites. Undoubtedly police reaction to the death of a black person and to that of a white person gives the impression that a black person's life is not as valuable as that of a white person. Haki Madhubuti notes how the police are a contributing factor in the devaluing of black life instead of ensuring that all people are equal before the law:

At that moment, the Black woman cop pulled her 38 special, and proceeded with surgeon's accuracy to blow the right side of Bigfoot's head off [big black male]. The black woman cop was congratulated, promoted, decorated by her superiors and detailed to another Black community.<sup>757</sup>

On the contrary, the highly publicized abduction and killing of a white university student in Sandton may serve as an example of how some deaths receive special attention as compared to others, especially if a victim is white. The incident was

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<sup>755</sup> Paul Grootboom, & Aubrey Sekhlabi, *Not with my Gun*. unpublished play. [1998], p.11

<sup>756</sup> Ibid. p.19

<sup>757</sup> Haki Madhubuti, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single and Dangerous*. [1990], p.59

so publicized that the leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Tony Leon, strongly denounced the killing. Consequently, the then-President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, felt it necessary to issue a statement condemning the incident. Sekhabi and Grootboom go on to note that even the judiciary system still has no regard to a black person's life when it comes to sentencing culprits:

KING - Ag, that's even nothing, his brother Bobo was charged and convicted of rape, something like fourteen assaults, and four murders, one of the murder victims was white, a white woman. He got 69 years.  
KHALA - 59 for murdering a white woman and 10 for the darkies collectively. You kill a black person in this country, you are just a mere criminal, you kill a white person, you're a barbaric murderer.<sup>758</sup>

The two playwrights regret that even under this new political dispensation, it looks as if black people are still not equal before the courts of law. One is reminded of the terms such as "devil incarnate" and "pathological liar" which were directed at William Kekana for the rape and murder of three white people.<sup>759</sup> However, no such labels were affixed to Wybrand Du Toit or Gideon Nieuwoudt, accused of the killing of the 'Motherwell Four' (four political activists killed in Motherwell) and the implicated in the killing of Steve biko in 1977.<sup>760</sup> Neither was Jack Mogale, the serial killer, who raped and murdered a score of black women and sentenced to 16 life sentences.<sup>761</sup> This raises the question of what determines the use of such terms and harsh prison sentences; is it the color of a perpetrator vis-à-vis that of the victim or is it the crime? Similarly, the son of former British Prime Minister Margret Thatcher, Mark Thatcher, who was implicated in a coup plot in West Africa, was treated with dignity compared to the way suspects often are. Naïve as they are often perceived, most of these incidents do not go unnoticed by the blacks and they might develop into a time bomb which would put to test the notion of a "rainbow nation" in the post-Mandela era. Paul Gilroy observes that racism's effects are often dismissed until the next tragic death or inflammatory eruption makes it newsworthy again.<sup>762</sup> Most of the times, it is only then that those in power take action not to remedy the situation but to clear their consciences. These discrepancies often provoke bitterness amongst blacks and possibly compel playwrights such as Grootboom and Sekhabi to compose dialogue of this nature:

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<sup>758</sup> Paul Grootboom, & Aubrey Sekhabi, *Not with my Gun*, unpublished play. [1998], p.19

<sup>759</sup> Citizen Reporter and SAPA, "The brutal killer of family awaits fate," *The Citizen*, Tuesday 27, July [2004], p.1

<sup>760</sup> Alameen Templeton, "Motherwell man's son still waiting for justice" *ThisDay*, July 15, [2004], p.3

<sup>761</sup> SABC News, March 18, 2011 [accessed May 01, 2011]

<sup>762</sup> Paul Gilroy, "Multiculture in times of War: an inaugural lecture given at the London School of Economics", *Critical Quarterly*. [2006], p.29

KHALA - The point is, white supremacy is still rife in this country. We're still too fuckin' far from the so-called "New South Africa" I have no fuckin' respect for white people, becoz according to them, the words "black" and "respect" should never be in the same sentence.<sup>763</sup>

The playwrights feel that racism is still rife in South Africa in spite of the demise of apartheid, and whites continue to be afforded better treatment as compared to blacks. This maintains a sense of superiority of whites over blacks as it was under apartheid. Nevertheless, it is the tone of the dialogue, which is worth noting because it compels one to reflect on Hauptfleisch and Steadman's assertion that Black Theatre has nothing to do with blackness, makes one wonder if a white playwright can write a play with such a dialogue and mount it?

Khala's anger is understandable, since the persons killed are black and not only belong to his race but might be known or related to him. To some extent, one sees a situation whereby both the Security Forces and Judiciary System send a message to criminals and murderers through quick arrests and heavy sentences that crimes committed against white people will not be tolerated. However, by being lenient on crimes committed against blacks no matter how heinous, is a clear sign to the criminals and murderers that crime against blacks is understandable and the society has to live with it. In a way, it is still the same double standard that blacks were subjected to under apartheid. Amy Ansell observes that many people feel that they are still suffering under the yoke of apartheid even though many do not say it loud.<sup>764</sup> Similarly, Johan Geertsema argues that South Africans are still a long way from moving beyond race because the legacy of apartheid, unsurprisingly, continues and with it the debilitating binaries of that system and its order.<sup>765</sup>

As much as Sekhabi and Grootboom criticize the partiality of both the Security Forces and Judiciary Systems, they do not point out that many blacks lose their lives in the hands of other blacks. By so doing, Sekhabi and Grootboom fail to expose how senseless and disrespectful some blacks can be to black lives themselves. This notion of disrespect of life becomes apparent towards the end of the play. King and Jake fight over King's gun that Jake wants to shoot Kobus with, after Kobus fails to give back the suits he stole. As the two fight over the gun, a shot is fired and Khala is accidentally killed.

The squabble between the two, which ends with Khala dead, follows a lengthy confrontation during which Khala initially pleads with King, Jake and

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<sup>763</sup> Paul Grootboom, & Aubrey Sekhabi, *Not with my Gun*, unpublished play. [1998], p.18

<sup>764</sup> Amy Ansell, "Two Nations of Discourse: mapping racial ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa", *Politikon*. [2004], p.8

<sup>765</sup> Johan Geertsema, "Ndebele, Fanon, Agency and Irony", *Journal of South African Studies*. [2004], p.753

Brains not to take the law into their hands and torture Kobus for the theft, but call the police and hand him to them. Both Kobus and Khala even offer to buy Jake a new suit to replace Jake's stolen wedding suit because of its importance to his wedding. But Jake rejects the offer and insists that Kobus returns his wedding suit since the bride's dress was made to match it:<sup>766</sup>

JAKE - Buy new suits? How do you think my mother is going to feel like tomorrow? What do I say to Dineo? "Sorry darling some stupid fuck stole my suit". Man, we went to great lengths to get the bride's dress made to match my suit. Imagine Dineo in her dress and me in some black suit. There won't be any uniformity. Come on Khala, she's gonna look stupid. Juz give me time with this white fuck, he'll talk. If he doesn't talk, we'll fuck him up until he talks.<sup>767</sup>

Jake is blinded by his rage and desire to please his mother and bride, but he is not aware that should anything happen to Kobus he stands to lose everything and this would affect those close to him. Being a teacher, his profession will be jeopardised. In fact, as a teacher, he is supposed to live an exemplary life from which his students can copy. Khala comments on this to King over Jake's insistence to torture Kobus:

KHALA - Jake for that matter, he's supposed to be teaching our kids, I mean this whole thing is purely unnecessary.<sup>768</sup>

The argument of the two writers seems to be that teachers should be aware of their moral and personal responsibility. Apart from his profession, Jake's life and wedding too will be doomed. This will in turn disappoint the very people he wants to please by fighting over the stolen suit. At this stage the suit is not more important than his profession, his wedding to Dineo and most of all his life and freedom. Sekhabi and Grootboom drive this point home in Khala comment to King:

KHALA - We'll be screwing ourselves. Think man, think. There is a lot at stake here. Think about your career. It's gonna be all over the papers. It's going to look like another black failure. And they're going to want to set an example, especially when it involves important people like you.<sup>769</sup>

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<sup>766</sup> Paul Grootboom, & Aubrey Sekhabi, *Not with my Gun*, unpublished play. [1998], p.32

<sup>767</sup> Ibid. p.32

<sup>768</sup> Ibid. p.39

<sup>769</sup> Ibid. p.39



The accidental fatal shooting of Khala is a tragedy, which Khala predicted and was trying to prevent. Consequently, almost everybody is doomed; King, who is already having problems with his production, has a murder case committed in his house with his gun. His television production will have to be shelved for a while or stopped altogether as he deals with the case. Brains, who was trying to get his lead role back, will have no job at all. Furthermore, Brains stands to be arrested together with Jake for having willingly assisted Jake in torturing Kobus. Jake, as the one who pulled the trigger, now has a murder case against him, not a wedding and life with Dineo or an opportunity to please his mother by getting married. His teaching profession is over. This will come as a heavy blow to both women he was trying to impress. Dineo's wedding is doomed only twenty-four hours before taking place because of his senselessness. Jake's mother, who was hoping that he was a changed man with a profession and was looking forward to his wedding and starting a family, is reminded that Jake is a criminal beyond redemption.

Through these characters, especially Jake, Sekhabi and Grootboom, somehow show how some blacks can risk or jeopardize matters of great importance in their lives and their professions over insignificant issues. This might indicate how some blacks fail to prioritise things in their lives.

It is often believed, especially in the rural areas, that white people are all rich. However, by having a character of thief as a white man, Sekhabi and Grootboom show that it is not only blacks who suffer financially but people of all races. The two writers could not have dramatized this better than to have Kobus, a white person, stealing suits, from blacks. This probably shows, likewise, some blacks steal and engage in crime because they are forced by circumstance:

KOBUS - I work for this company, we sell cutlery and kitchen ware, like dinner sets an' stuff, that's why I'm here. I came on a sales pitch. We do house to house calls.

KHALA - Okay, I know what you mean, do you get paid?

KOBUS - I wouldn't be working if I didn't get paid, the thing is, y'know, it's very little and it depends on what I've sold. I work on commission. My wife, she's unemployed and things are hard. We got three kids and one, the youngest, has polio and we can't afford the medical bills. Y'know, we're down in the pits, life hasn't treated us nicely and my wife, Annette, she's trying, despite everything, she's trying hard...I don't know where I would be without her. So I thought on our anniversary I should give her a treat, y'know, boost her morale.

JAKE - Boost her morale with my suit?<sup>770</sup>

It is clear from Kobus' explanation that, given his situation, he was tempted to

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<sup>770</sup> Ibid. p.35

steal the suit hoping to get something for his wife on their anniversary. It is not that he is a thief but he was driven by the desire to provide for his family. Similarly, some blacks are forced into criminal acts not because they enjoy it but are forced by poverty. However, this should not be confused with criminal acts like murder, armed robbery and car hijacking, which are driven by greed.

In this rather ambitious attempt, Grootboom and Sekhabi, bring to the stage some of the topical issues in post apartheid South Africa, that is, crime and violence. They note that most blacks are still struggling just as they were under apartheid. However, it is their acknowledging that even some whites are caught up in this struggle for survival that is striking and signals a change in Black Theatre.

#### **4.6 *The Pain* - Emily Tseu**

Emily Tseu is a playwright and actress working with Windybrow Theatre playhouse in Doorfontein. Tseu's play *The Pain* was first performed at Windybrow Theatre in Johannesburg in 1998. It was directed by Percy Mtwa and featured the following actors: Emily Tseu, Betty Maretele and Nthabiseng Pulumo. It is a story about three women, Beauty, Kate and Dorothy, of different marital statuses who go through almost similar experiences in the hands of their male partners in what seems to be Tseu's argument that men are insensitive. Of the three characters, Beauty is the one who goes through a notable change from her denial to revelation of betrayal towards the end of the play.

It is important to observe that the play resembles P.J. Gibson's *Long Time Since Yesterday* in many respects. Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka remarks that Gibson's objective in that play seems to be to get together a group of middle-aged women to review their lives. The play offers no clear comfortable answers; there are some gains and regressions, some stereotypes jettisoned, while some have merely changed form.<sup>771</sup> This comment is also valid for Tseu's play. Beauty is a single woman who works as a bartender. Consequently, she meets a lot of men who admire her. She enjoys flirting because her admirers shower her with presents. However, she does not fall in love. It seems as if in every man she sees her ex-lover who betrayed her. Consequently, taking presents from men is a form of revenge for what her ex-lover did to her. Beauty is like Alisa in *Long Time Since Yesterday*:

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<sup>771</sup> Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, "Black Feminist Criticism and Drama: Thoughts on Double Patriarchy." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* [1993], p.173

A product of foster homes, her parents having walked out on her and her brother and sister, intimidated by what they saw as a hopeless life. Her childhood is the driving force behind her success.<sup>772</sup>

Kate, on the other hand, is successful, an executive officer, divorced and appears as though she is frustrated by her love life and consequently frequents Beauty's bar. Kate's frustration is due to men's attitude towards women. Most of the men are interested in a sexual rather than emotional relationship. Kate is similar to Laveer and Babbs in Gibson's play:

Laveer is non-conformist, who at an early age rebels against the upper middle-class style of her parents. She shuns marriage as an institution that will compromise her ambitions and repress her style. Babbs on the other hand is a divorcee; she is beset with self doubts under the ambiguous role in which her skin color casts her in American society, a convenient non-threatening minority quota for corporate white America, and safe sexual outlet for both white and black men wanting a woman from the other race. Almost alcoholic, she vacillates between despair and defiance.<sup>773</sup>

The third character, Dorothy, is a housewife. Like Kate, Dorothy is frustrated by men's lack of affection, but unlike Kate, she is not prepared to divorce her husband. As a result, Dorothy shares commonalities with Gibson's Janeen:

Janeen was a product of a stultifying pretentious upper-middle class background, but unlike her friend Laveer, Janeen was too insecure to leave the safety of the familiar and instead she got into a marriage of convenience to please her family.<sup>774</sup>

Different as they may be in terms of background, the experiences of the three women with men are almost similar, their men disappointed them all. The only difference is their reaction to their frustration and disappointments. Beauty takes revenge under the pretence of being caring and loving to men in exchange for material gains. Kate divorced her husband rather than stay in a loveless marriage. Dorothy, on the other hand, prefers staying in her unromantic marriage than divorcing.

Emily Tseu's stage directions do not specify requirements needed for the production of this play, such as set design, lighting and/or sound. She goes straight into the issues she considers of concern including the question of

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<sup>772</sup> Ibid. p.172

<sup>773</sup> Ibid. p.172

<sup>774</sup> Ibid. p.172

material goods and love. There is often a general feeling, especially amongst men, that as long as one has money or is in a position to provide material things to a girlfriend or wife, a marriage or relationship is bound to succeed. However, Tseu argues in this play that some women are more interested in love than in a relationship with material possessions but without love. To demonstrate this, Tseu's characters are all women but of differing marital status. Nevertheless, they all had almost the same experience in their relationship with men; insensitivity, deceit, lack of romance, misinterpretation of love and wrong assumptions of what women want in a relationship.

The first thing that Tseu does in this play is to observe that the romance that couples enjoyed while dating often cools down or fizzles out once a couple is married. She attributes this to reasons such as stress, the fact that the two are now living together all the time, and above all the challenges that go or come with marriages. She acknowledges that most of the time the two lovers are aware that their romance is fading out, but they seek no explanation nor make an effort to revitalize it, instead they blame each other. Nevertheless, Kate still puts the blame solely on men. She is of the opinion that men are insensitive, unromantic and sometimes bullies.

KATE - You know when I first met my husband, I thought he was everything I wanted from a man. I was completing my studies at Stellenbosch and he was here in Jo'burg. We used to see each other once a month but we used to enjoy each and every moment we spent together. I could feel I was special in his life. And he wanted nothing else than to see me happy. After marriage everything stopped. No more cards. No more kisses. No more touching. The only time he kissed or touched me was when he wanted sex. That sweet, loving caring, attentive and active John I knew was now a passive, boring, ignorant, inattentive and stubborn man who became worse after we got our daughter.<sup>775</sup>

Note that Kate's concern in the relationship has nothing to do with material things, but emotions. A possible explanation is that being an educated and successful woman, she is in a position to satisfy her material needs. This means that she does not need a man to provide, as is often the case in a African traditional setting. For this reason, a man's role in her life is wholly to satisfy her emotional needs. The other point worth noting is her concern over her husband's approach to her, that he shows interest only when he wants sex. This makes her feel used in a similar manner as men use prostitutes, in which there is no romance or love but sex. The way Kate is self-conscious and possessive of her

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<sup>775</sup> Emily Tseu, *The Pain*. unpublished play. [1998], p.17

body might explain why she divorced her husband as soon as the love she married him for died:

KATE - He was cold. You know, he was not emotionally involved. I could not feel his love, passion and his presence. It was boring. He wasn't giving me the real thing. I could feel there was something missing.<sup>776</sup>

Beauty, on the other hand, is the opposite of Kate. She is at the bottom of the echelon, an uneducated bartender. Her social status gives her a different perception of the world, men and love.

BEAUTY - Your husband bought you a big house and gave you a beautiful daughter. He just gave everything, but because you can't appreciate, you divorced him.<sup>777</sup>

It can be argued that the difference between the two women is not just a question of love and men, but of their different social and economic backgrounds. Beauty represents rural and/or uneducated women who were raised in a traditional society. Often such women are made to perceive men as their protectors. Therefore, they have to get married to have men to take care of them. It is a psychological manipulation that leads to permanent domination because a woman's role in such a setting is a passive one, often taking a subservient status in relation to her husband and her in-laws. The role of a man, on the other hand, is mainly to provide for the woman. Romance and love in such cases are not paramount, what is important is that one is married and lives according to the norms dictated by the society. In a way, they are being subjected to the rule of men. Barbara Smith notes that heterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege that black women have. Smith argues that none of them have racial or sexual privilege, almost none of them have class privilege; maintaining 'straightness' is their last resort. The fact that they receive limited publishing is the final renunciation of any claim to the crumbs of "tolerance" that non-threatening "ladylike" black women are sometimes fed.<sup>778</sup>

The notion of women being "ladylike," as Smith indicates, is more apparent in the discussion between Beauty and Kate regarding their hobbies. Given Beauty's background and the fact that she is a bartender and spends most of her time in the company of men, she is well informed about football. This is in sharp contrast to Kate, who likes music, which makes her more feminine than Beauty, although she appears more hostile to men. Kate explains:

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<sup>776</sup> Ibid. pp.18,19

<sup>777</sup> Ibid. p.24

<sup>778</sup> Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", *The New Feminist Criticism*. [1985], p.182

KATE - Look. I I'm not a football fan. Ok! I love music. And not just any music, but jazz, fusion, classic and African music. You know, people like...<sup>779</sup>

Kate's choice of music is a testimony of her sophistication, which comes as no surprise given her background and status. However, it is possible that her status and sophistication are the ones scaring men away. On the other hand, Beauty's simplicity and association with men might explain why men shower her with presents. *True Love* magazine emphasizes in relation to men:

Your mother was right. Secretly, men want a whore in the bedroom, a world-class chef in the kitchen, a Madonna to raise their children and a bitch in the boardroom as long as you're not his boss.<sup>780</sup>

It is possible the presents Beauty is showered with are the "crumbs of tolerance" that "ladylike black women are sometimes fed" which Smith talks about, as a reward from men she spends time with. Philip Morobi reports that Beauty and Kate are strong-willed women at opposite ends, because Beauty wants to make men to obtain material goods, while Kate looks to men to make her happy.<sup>781</sup>

Even though not a family person, Beauty's personality reflects the indoctrination from her traditional background, often women raised in such a setting are encouraged, if not ordered, to endure whatever hardship they encounter in their marriages to appease others with a hope of being rewarded with marriage. Such endurance is reflected in the character of Dorothy. Unlike the first two characters, Dorothy is married, but is not happy due to lack of romance in her marriage.

DORTHY - My Michael is not that type of person. He doesn't like kissing, touching and those other kind of things. He says the fact that he doesn't do those things doesn't mean he does not love me. It kills me so much. Maybe I was to blame, because he was never romantic from the start. But I loved him and thought he would change. I was wrong, terribly wrong. I'm aware he won't change.<sup>782</sup>

The interesting aspect about Dorothy is that she acknowledges that even when she first met her husband, he was not romantic. However, this goes back to the question of some marriages which are not based on love but convenience. It

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<sup>779</sup> Emily Tseu, *The Pain*, unpublished play. [1998], p.22

<sup>780</sup> *True Love Magazine*, May 7. [2002], p.99

<sup>781</sup> Philip Morobi, "Theatre Review", *Alex Times Newspaper*, July 10. [1998], p.13

<sup>782</sup> Emily Tseu, *The Pain*, unpublished play. [1998], p.22

explains perhaps why she is tolerating her unromantic husband and consequently stays in such a marriage even though there is no romantic love and appears as if there will never. Dorothy's explanation draws a sharp contrast between Kate and herself. Whereas Kate married her husband for love and divorced him for the lack of it, Dorothy married for convenience and is staying in her marriage for it. The possible explanation is that she lives according to the expectations of her society in order to be accepted by it. Because unmarried or divorced women are often ridiculed in such societies just like Janeen in P.J. Gibson's *Long Time Since Yesterday*.

These three women, with different backgrounds but similar experiences meet in a bar, and become friends. They open up to each other to discuss their experiences and problems with their men. Ajiya-Soyinka writes in relation to *Long Time Since Yesterday* that the interaction among the women takes place largely in an atmosphere of good-natured teasing, gentle admonition and supportive criticism, all geared at helping each other grow and cope with problems.<sup>783</sup>

It is important to note that Kate and Dorothy come to the bar for a drink for different reasons. Being her favorite bar, Kate goes to the bar to relax, especially on Saturday. This by itself indicates that she is a professional and independent woman.

KATE - You don't get it, do you? You sound like those Guys who think life can only go on if they're around. And they think love is sex. Well, I'll tell you something, men are nothing but problems. You have a man in your life, then your life is shit.<sup>784</sup>

It is a common practice for men to go to a bar to relax. This explains the type of men she encounters since bars are often frequented by men. Furthermore, even though it is understandable that one needs to reduce stress, her turning to alcohol due to her professional pressure raises the question of whether women's behaviour stands to change once in the work place to become like some men who head straight to the bar after work. Cornia Pretorius comments:

Once women enter the metaphorical boardroom they appear to shun the gender agenda, either because they choose the politically safer option of buying golf clubs and joining the boys' clubs or because they never really gave a damn about the placard-waving sisters outside the door. It seems that, after breaking down the doors to the boardroom, women

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<sup>783</sup> Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, "Black Feminist Criticism and Drama: Thoughts on Double Patriarchy", *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. [1993], p.173

<sup>784</sup> Emily Tseu, *The Pain*, unpublished play. [1998], p.22

somehow forgot what they wanted to say and what they wanted to do once they were inside.<sup>785</sup>

On the contrary, Norman Fairclough observes that the few women who achieve positions of prominence in industry, politics or generally anywhere outside the home are faced with a double-bind, a “damned if they behave like men and dammed if they do not”. Fairclough argues that they are damned if they behave like men in the sense that masculine behavior opens women to the slur, highly damaging in their society, of being “unfeminine.” Nevertheless, he regrets that they are also damned if they do not behave in that manner in the sense that those in positions of prominence are accepted only if they conduct themselves in the way in which people in such positions always have. Since positions of prominence have traditionally gone to men, meaning they have to behave in a masculine way.<sup>786</sup>

Dorothy’s presence in the bar, on the other hand, is to cheer herself up from her depression caused by her family life, especially the husband’s passiveness and insensitivity. As much as she understands his personality, as stated earlier, it seems as though she has reached a point of breaking down hence her turning to alcohol. In both cases, it seems Tseu’s argument is that women turn to drinking due to frustration caused by men, and drinking undoubtedly stands to have a negative effect on the women’s lives. However, the question is whether Tseu perceives drinking as a solution since she does not suggest any solutions.

Whereas from the beginning of the play Kate and Dorothy acknowledge that they have problems with their men, Beauty makes her friends believe that she has none. She boasts of being admired by men and showered with presents. However, she too finally acknowledges that she was once betrayed by a man she loved.

BEAUTY - He looked into my eyes, teased me and said ‘when are we going to make our first baby?’ I was overwhelmed. And before I could say a word he took me in his arms and kissed me again. Then we made wonderful, wonderful love. Quietly, in his arms afterwards, I was filled with joy and smiling into his eyes I said ‘I’m pregnant’. I said perhaps we must get married before the baby is born. I was gloriously happy. He said impossible. He said he had already impregnated a woman he loves, and that he is going to marry her.<sup>787</sup>

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<sup>785</sup> Cornia Pretorius, “State Feminism on the Rise”, *This Day*, Tuesday, June 1. [2004], p.11

<sup>786</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. [1989], p.182

<sup>787</sup> Emily Tseu, *The Pain*. Unpublished play. [1998], p.22



Based on Beauty's statement, there is no doubt that of the three women, she is the one who had the worst experience in a relationship. It might explain why after this disappointment she became as deceitful as her ex-lover and use men for material gain.

BEAUTY - Since then I've changed my attitude. Like you, I know pain. I pretend I love men, but it's a fake. From then I told myself that I'm going to revenge by using every man I find. And I'm proud because I'm doing it.<sup>788</sup>

With the question of equality at the centre of debate, Tseu seems to encourage women to take a lead and talk to their men about the problems they experience in their relationship. Furthermore, women should spell out the kind of relationships they would like to be involved in:

KATE - I don't hate men, but yet I do have problems with them. And they are the ones who can solve those problems.

BEAUTY - Solve those problems? How do you expect them to solve those problems? They don't even know about those problems.<sup>789</sup>

From the discussion between these two characters, it seems that Tseu suggests that even though women are wronged, it is through discussion and honesty that problems in relationships can be solved. Women need to initiate the discussion with their men more than spend endless time sulking over a failing relationship. Furthermore, she encourages women to share their fantasies with their men so that their men can know what they want in a relationship instead of complaining or discussing this amongst themselves. She sees this openness as the only way that romance can be brought back in their lives:

KATE - I wanted to feel that magic you find between lovers, that warmth, that feeling of wanting to go on and on.

DORTHY - You're right. When a man is on top of you, you must feel him. You must hear his heart beating. You must hear his breathing, fast and slowly. His sweet voice should whisper in your ears. He must make you feel like someone is calling from far away. His tongue must roll in your mouth. His warm lips on your lips. His chest should refuse to be apart from your breasts. His body must be yours, and yours his. And you must feel it inside you. And he must feel yours covering his. And it must be warm, just warm.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>789</sup> Ibid. p.6

<sup>790</sup> Ibid. p.36

Through Dorothy's statement, Tseu reveals fantasies that some women have, which if fulfilled, can complete their world. However, even though Tseu is optimistic that women can make their relationships work by talking to their men and taking the initiative or bring back romance into their lives, she regrets that some men do not cooperate or respond positively, instead reject or ridicule the effort their women make. The reason is that in most African cultures such forthcoming from a woman is often perceived negatively. Such women are slurred and given names. This reaction makes such women feel as though they are nagging:

DORTHY - Actually I planned a romantic night with champagne, candle light. 'I want to have a talk, a discussion about our life and love.'

MIKE - There you go again complaining. I told you to stop imitating what is happening in the "Bold and the Beautiful", "Days of our Lives" and "The Young and..." you name them. Just stop it, if you want to argue with me I won't listen. I'm going to sleep. Drink your champagne.<sup>791</sup>

Tseu's argument is that both parties should make an effort for a relationship to work. It does not help for one party to make the effort while the other is not only passive but rejects or ridicules whatever efforts are made by the other party. She goes on to argue that men do not behave this way because they do not know what love is, some men tend to share their love, enjoy romance and realize fantasies with their mistresses, especially young girls instead of with than their wives:

KATE - All they think about is themselves, their friends and the bitches they spend time with.

DORTHY - That's true. It's very rare you find a man spending time with his wife. You will find them with young girls, not even worried about who is there and what he's saying.<sup>792</sup>

Even though Tseu demonstrates how boring some men can be, she indirectly exposes the fact that the kind of men that women regard as "supermen" or "super lovers", are often playboys whose goal is just to have fun. Unfortunately, this fun is often at the expense of women in the sense that whereas women think the relationship is genuine, to these "supermen" or "super lovers" it is just one of their relationships meant for fun. This is apparent in both Beauty and Kate's experiences. Earlier, Kate relates how she often used to catch her ex-lover with different women but still took him back because she loved him. Beauty was also

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<sup>791</sup> Ibid. p.24

<sup>792</sup> Ibid. p.37

dating a man who appeared to enjoy making every woman he met pregnant. Although this reinforces the insensitivity of men, which the three women protest, it also raises the question of whether Beauty knew about her lover's womanizing and ignored it just like Kate and only complained when the affair was over. If that is the case, their behavior undermines Tseu's argument that men are dishonest, passive, insensitive and boring. Instead, it demonstrates that each person is after his or her own interests, but unfortunately, this often happens to be at the expense of others. Furthermore, the fact that Tseu has no male characters, fails to encourage direct communication between the two sexes, a problem which she regards as the main contributing factor in the breaking up of relationships.

Ajiya-Soyinka notes that P.J. Gibson's *Long Time Since Yesterday* explores life after the radical sixties that liberated women from sexism and African-Americans from racism.<sup>793</sup> The same can be said about Tseu's *The Pain*. It interrogates the plight of women in South Africa following the demise of apartheid. Like Gibson, Tseu dramatizes that there are numerous issues pertaining to women that ought to be addressed in the new South Africa.

#### 4.7 *Weemen* - Thulani Mtshali

Thulani Mtshali was a poet, playwright, director and producer working with Windybrown Theatre playhouse in Doorfontein. He was doing his Master's degree in London when he died in 2002. Mtshali's play *Weemen* was published in 1998 in *South African Black Women Playwrights*, edited by Kathy Perkins. This is a collection of plays addressing issues pertaining to black women in South Africa. *Weemen* is a story of Ts'oarelo whom at the beginning of the play is an obedient and submissive wife. The audience follows Ts'oarelo on her journey from an obedient and submissive wife who survives by begging for money from her abusive husband, to becoming a self-employed and self-sufficient woman with her own Spaza shop (small informal and often unlicensed shop), defying all attempts by her husband to dominate her.

Ts'oarelo loves her family. Despite being poor, she ensures that her family's basic needs are met. She is humble and obedient, especially to her husband for two reasons; first, her culture demands that women be polite and obedient to their husbands. Second, she is scared of him because of his constant physical abuse if she fails him. However, this does not impair her wisdom, strength and determination to become self-sufficient and educate her children. This determination eventually helps her stand up to her abusive husband.

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<sup>793</sup> Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka, "Black Feminist Criticism and Drama: Thoughts on Double Patriarchy", *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. [1993], p.173

Ts'oarelo's husband, Mlishe, on the other hand is an irresponsible drunkard and an abusive person who enjoys having a woman at his mercy. He is manipulative and capable of misleading those near him, especially when at the receiving end. He is also a womanizer, which explains his distrust of women. However, his behavior is born of his insecurity.

*Weemen* is set in a shack, which is undoubtedly located in a township (black residential area). This is probably to capture the lives of ordinary South Africans especially the poor masses. It comes as no surprise then that Thulani Mtshali disregards lavish theatrical production requirements such as expensive set design, lighting, costume and the like associated with *petit-bourgeois* theatre or the mainstream theatre.

In this play, Mtshali exposes the plight of married black women, especially poor women in South Africa. He interrogates the oppressive nature of black patriarchy and its culture towards women whereby women are regarded as men's property due to the fact that men have to pay *lobola* (dowry) to the bride's family upon marriage. Consequently, at the beginning of the play, Mtshali outlines the status of women in a traditional society through his antagonist, Mlishe, which explains Mlishe's behavior towards his wife.

MLISHE - [Throwing things at her] Woman...I say one, you say two.  
[Takes an axe wanting to Chop her] Is that what they taught you when I married you? I am the only man here. This mouth says the final word here. You are just like this furniture! Bloody damn shit.<sup>794</sup>

Before one discusses Mlishe's behavior and attitude towards his wife, it is important to revisit black culture in relation to marriage since it can explain this kind of attitude some men have towards women and their wives. According to most African cultures, women are regarded as minors that ought to be taken care of by others, especially their male counterparts. This explains why even when it comes to marriages, some of which are forced,<sup>795</sup> a bride is often not consulted or given a say with regard to the amount of money is to be paid for her *lobola*. This reminds one of the ways black women were treated in slavery where they were bred like animals and their children sold to other slave masters. Angela Davis observes this inhuman treatment:

Since slave women were classified as 'breeders' as opposed to 'mothers', their infant could be sold away from them like calves from cows. One year after the importation of African slaves was halted, a

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<sup>794</sup> Thulani Mtshali, "Weemen" in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.104

<sup>795</sup> If a woman refused to marry a man chosen for her, Lesika, a thin wire like string, was tied around a girl's finger and tightened until she succumbed and married a man chosen for her.

South Carolina court ruled that female slaves had no legal claims whatever on their children. Consequently, according to this ruling, children could be sold away from their mothers at any age because ‘the young of slaves stand on the same footing as other animals.’<sup>796</sup>

Given the traditional marriage setup, when an agreement has been reached between the two families concerned, the mother of the bride together with other women from the village, meet with the bride and order her to behave well in her marriage. She is told to love and respect her husband, no matter what happens. The women constantly remind the girl that they, her parents, have received *lobola* from her in-laws, and her family would be shamed if she misbehaves or runs away from her husband and the *lobola* has to be returned, which might have been consumed already. In such cases whereby *lobola* has to be returned but has been consumed, the comment from the groom’s family is often that “they were fast to consume the *lobola* but failed when it came to disciplining their daughter” and this often spreads throughout village to shame the bride’s family. It is clear that Mlishe knows the process and what it entails, hence his outburst. Ts’oarelo bemoans this:

TS’OARELO - I am married to Mlitshe, what is it that I get from him? Constant abuse, harassment, insults and beatings. But why? Will this curse over women ever end? Maybe I should pack my bags and leave this man. And then he will go to harass my mother demanding his *lobola* [dowry] back.<sup>797</sup>

Ts’oarelo’s statement indicates how much of a prisoner she is. Furthermore, it exposes the fact that some African cultures and traditions compel brides to serve the interests of others before theirs. In this case, Ts’oarelo’s happiness is of no importance compared to that of her abusive husband and her parents. Consequently, Ts’oarelo has to endure the suffering she is subjected to by her husband in silence. Given this situation, it is clear why Mlitshe mistreats her. It is his deep-seated conviction that a woman is not equal to a man, but is his property. His throwing things at her and even attempting to hack her with an axe demonstrate this. Similarly, Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor comment regarding Bianca a character from *Women Beware Women*:

Having broken free from parental tyranny, Bianca finds herself imprisoned by her husband’s conception of her as his prize possession.

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<sup>796</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*. [1983] p.89

<sup>797</sup> Mtshali, Thulani “Weemen”. in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.107

Indeed, he sets his mother to keep her locked up at home while he is away on business.<sup>798</sup>

However, Mlishe's irresponsible and inhuman behaviour does not come as a surprise for the public. There is that belief in many African societies that being kind and protective of a wife spoils her. For a woman to be respectful and behave well, she ought to be beaten and consequently live in constant fear. The argument is that by being unsettled, the wife will not have a chance to think of any mischief, including having extra-marital affairs. In fact, a woman is often regarded as stupid and stubborn as a donkey that knows no other language than a stick on its back to ensure that it works. This might be an explanation why in real life there are cases in which wives are found with their bodies covered in scars from beatings by their husbands.

Lesedi FM, a South African Broadcasting Corporation radio station catering for Sesotho speakers in South Africa, highlighted the plight and abuse of women in South Africa on broadcast. On Friday 27 August 2010, as part of celebrating August as women's month, the program invited a married woman, Amelia, to tell her harrowing experience at the hands of her husband. Amelia told the listeners how her husband ordered her to leave nursing because he did not want her doing night shifts. After she abandoned her nursing profession, he ordered her not to go to the shops because other men would see her. Ironically, he was seeing other women and had no time for Amelia. He later attacked her with an axe, severed her arms, used a butcher's knife to make holes in her thighs and finally speared her spinal cord with an iron rod, which remained lodged in and left her paralyzed.<sup>799</sup>

Mtshali dramatizes this type of heinous crimes committed against women. It can be noted that he offers a perspective different from that of kaNcube, who in his play *K'uze Kuse* seems to justify men's violence and murder against women. Mtshali explains in relation to the play:

This was an experience of someone close to the family, an aunt who was in that kind of a situation. The play is basically based on her experience, although I have taken experiences of other people that I know and have seen; but mainly her because the husband used to be ruthless to her. He would hack her with an axe and she would have all sorts of scars and blue-eyes.<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>798</sup> Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor, *Five Plays-Thomas Middleton*. [1988], p.xix

<sup>799</sup> Lesedi FM, South African Broadcasting Corporation, Friday 27<sup>th</sup> August. [2010], radio programme

<sup>800</sup> Thulani Mtshali, "Weemen" in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights..* [1998], p.102

It can be deduced from this behavior that wives are made to fear their husbands rather than love them. This fear is demonstrated in Ts'oarelo's behavior, she fears her husband so much that his arrival makes her shiver with fear. Even her *spaza* shop has to be kept a secret to avoid her being beaten for being involved in ventures without her husband's approval. Ts'oarelo's life is like that of a prisoner with little or no freedom one would expect in a marriage. David Kerr notes that women suffered what Ngugi terms a "double oppression" as suppliers of labour in colonies and neo-colonies. Ngugi argues that women are exploited in addition to the weight of male prejudices in both feudalism and imperialism.<sup>801</sup>

Family maintenance is one of the strong weapons some black men have used to ensure control over their wives. Traditionally, men are breadwinners, while women stay at home and look after the family and children. This made women dependent on their husbands and consequently gave and continues to give men power over their wives, and a chance to treat their wives in whatever manner they find fit. Some husbands even go to the extent of asking or ordering their wives to stop working and stay at home for no reason except to ensure that their wives are dependent on them as evidenced by Amelia. Cliff Slaughter argues that no woman should be disadvantaged financially or in any other way by confinement, childbearing and care of young children. Once free provisions are made for all those things, with no loss of income or threat of losing her job, there will cease to be factors which can be used to increase a woman's dependence on her husband.<sup>802</sup>

To have Ts'oarelo at his mercy, Mlitshe orders her to stop working. As a result, Ts'oarelo has to beg for money from him for almost everything, including food and clothes. This makes Mlitshe feel important and powerful. It is worth noting that his act, to stop his wife to work, is not out of love and caring that she should not suffer or struggle while he can provide, but it is out of selfishness. However, it also indicates his insecurity in the sense that Mlitshe fears that she will meet other people or even get involved in extra-marital affairs just like him. Mlitshe makes this clear in their confrontation:

MLITSHE - No wife of mine is going to work, because one; I support you, two; next time you will be having a lot of friends and many lunch boyfriends.

T'SOARELO - How could you not trust me? I am your wife.

MLITSHE - Listen here, I know you women. Don't forget that we are working with women. We see what they do. How they flirt around behind their husbands. So don't pretend to be better, you women are all bitches, man!<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>801</sup> David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial to the present Day*. [1995], p.244

<sup>802</sup> Cliff Slaughter, *Marx and Marxism*. [1995], p.69

<sup>803</sup> Thulani Mtshali, "Weemen". in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*.

From what the audience has seen so far, Mlitshe's claim that he supports his wife is a lie. She is likely to be the one supporting him with the money she makes from her secret *spaza* shop for his drinking once the money he gives her at the end of the month runs out. The reason why Mlitshe gives money to Ts'oarelo is probably to have somebody to blame once his money is finished. This is evident in the confrontation between the two:

MLITSHE - Last week I gave you R100, where is all that money gone to? You think I am Barclays Bank neh?

TS'OARELO - On Saturday you demanded R20, on Sunday you demanded another R20. I mean you nearly killed me for trying to refuse.

MLITSHE - Votsek! Shut up! You are lying, you are supporting your family with my money pretending to be supporting my children. You think I'm a fool, neh?<sup>804</sup>

As Mlitshe states, the main reason for not allowing Ts'oarelo to work is to isolate her so that she does not meet other people, men or women. The possible explanation is that he is afraid that she will make friends to whom she might reveal her family life and her plight. Given the way he treats her, her friends are likely to give her ideas on how to deal with the situation or advise her to leave him. Here, one sees the same divide and rule mentality as that of white oppressors. Freire argues that it is indispensable for the oppressors to keep peasants isolated from the urban workers, just as it is indispensable to keep both groups isolated from the students. The testimony of rebellion of the latter makes them dangerous in case they join the people.<sup>805</sup> Apart from that, Mlitshe has a guilty conscience borne of his promiscuity:

MLITSHE - Oh! You're not crying blood but just salty water. I don't know what I saw in you, you're so ugly. Mina, I have beautiful girlfriends, so beautiful you could mistake them for white women and they love me, and you, I don't know what I saw in you really, all you want is my money.<sup>806</sup>

Mtshali demonstrates how stupid and unrealistic some men can be to think that their wives are after their money, and their mistresses are the ones who really

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[1998], p.105

<sup>804</sup> Ibid. p.104

<sup>805</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.142

<sup>806</sup> Thulani Mtshali, "Weemen". in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.105



love them. It is the other way around; women who engage in a relationship with married men are after money and enjoyment. However, they convince the men concerned that they love them. This becomes apparent once Mlitshe is fired. He does not mention any of his beautiful girlfriends who can be “mistaken for white women”; instead, he pretends to be a changed man and clings to his wife to survive. Despite the abuse Ts’oarelo stands by him and takes the trouble to ensure that his family survives with the little money she makes from her *spaza* shop. Her act clearly shows how strong and committed some black women can be to their families while their husbands philander and waste their money on alcohol and women.

Mtshali goes further to explore the abuse of alcohol in this play. Alcohol abuse is very common in many black societies, especially poor communities. What makes matters worse is that it is prevalent amongst men, who are mostly breadwinners. Consequently, this causes a lot of suffering to the families concerned, as indicated in this play by Ts’oarelo’s suffering. Most of the time such drunkards act irresponsibly to the extent that they often fail to go to work especially at the end of the month and they subsequently get fired:

MRS JOHNSON - You’re a blatant liar Mlitshe, I’m tired of your lies, of your lateness and ever absenteeism. I have been counting for you all this time; you come to work on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. On Saturday, Mondays and Tuesdays you don’t come to work. ‘My child is sick, my wife is sick, my father’s sister is dead and yet you are always drunk.’<sup>807</sup>

People often make these kinds of excuses in real. What is ironic is that Mlitshe uses the very people whom he does not care about as an excuse for his absenteeism. From what the audience has seen, it is not likely that Mlitshe cannot go to work because of his wife’s illness. Like Sekhabi and Grootboom in *Not with my Gun*, Mtshali demonstrates how irresponsible and unprofessional some black men can be to the extent that they can sacrifice everything, including their jobs and family happiness, because of minor things as long as they serve their interests.

From alcohol abuse, Mtshali turns to the abuse of religion. Many black playwrights have addressed the abuse of religion by the white oppressors, especially under colonialism and apartheid. However, Mtshali demonstrates how black men abuse religion to manipulate and deceive other people. The audience sees a big change in the behavior of Mlitshe after being fired. First, he claims to be a “born again” Christian. He carries a *Bible* around and preaches the gospel:

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<sup>807</sup> Ibid. p.106

MLITSHE - But now I am...guess what? I...born again! Glory to Jesus.  
 TS'OARELO - You born again...come on!  
 MLITSHE - He needs all of us, the rich, the poor, the happy, the sad, sinner, do good, the ugly, the beautiful, the educated, the illiterate...All of us...Hallelujah!<sup>808</sup>

Secondly, Mlitshe stops abusing his wife. Finally, he does not only discover and accept the fact that Ts'oarelo has been running a *spaza* shop secretly but offers to help her in the day-to-day running of it. There is only one way to explain his behavior, that he wants to convince Ts'oarelo that he is truly a "born Again" Christian so that she can forgive him for all the ill-treatment he subjected her to. He fears that Ts'oarelo might treat him the same way he did when she was dependent on him. This is evidenced by his change of character as soon as he gets another job. Getting a new job does not only bring back confidence in Mlitshe but also rejuvenates the devil in him. Consequently, he sheds off the disguise and becomes that old Mlitshe he was before and starts abusing his wife again. His behavior implies that Ts'oarelo is of importance only when she serves his interests. Helene Cixous comments with regard to abuse of women:

She does not exist, she can not be, but there has to be something of her. He keeps, then, of the woman on whom he is no longer dependent, only this space, always virginal, as matter to be subjected to the desire he wishes to impart.<sup>809</sup>

Mtshali demonstrates to his audience how some people can abuse religion, either to avoid accounting for their evil deeds or to get what they want. What is interesting is that Mlitshe's deceit compels Ts'oarelo stand up to him to the extent that she even chases him out of the house. As a result, Mlitshe is forced to go down on his knees and beg for mercy.

Mtshali appears to be encouraging his audience to strive to be financially independent. He considers financial independence as an important factor that will free women and help them stand up against oppression and abuse. Furthermore, he demonstrates to his audience that some conventional marriages are like bondage without peace or joy. He is of the opinion that women in such marriages have little chance of leaving because of the *lobola* paid. However, he argues that the *lobola* that ties women down in these dysfunctional marriages is like a yoke on men as well, as evidenced by Mlitshe.

Even though Mlitshe is interested in other women he sees as more beautiful than his wife, he cannot divorce her because he paid *lobola*. If he

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<sup>808</sup> Ibid. p.108

<sup>809</sup> Helene Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays", in Dan Latimer ed., *Contemporary Critical Theory*. [1989], p.561

divorces her, which is taboo in many African cultures, he will not get his *lobola* back. According to Sotho culture, “Mosali ke oa khomo,” that is, “a wife belongs to the cattle that she is married with, not the man she is married to.” This means that even if Mlitshe divorces his wife she will still stay in his family, but he will have to leave and raise money to marry again. From what the audience has seen, it is not possible for Mlitshe to raise enough money to remarry. Consequently, he is forced to stay with his wife no matter how much he dislikes her. This explains why she is a target of his frustration. He possibly sees her as an obstacle to his freedom and joy. Talea Miller reports that an estimated one in every four women in South Africa is abused and one woman is killed by her husband every six days.<sup>810</sup> Freire argues that a peasant suffers before he discovers his dependence and as a result he lets off steam at home, where he shouts at his children, beats them and despairs. He complains about his wife and thinks everything is dreadful.<sup>811</sup> This behavior is demonstrated in this play and also in Bangala’s play, *Brothers in Arts*.

It is a common practice in black communities that when people fail to progress in life, like Mlitshe, they go and consult a sangoma or traditional doctor. What is interesting is that most of them are poor, and probably get even poorer given the huge fees they have to pay. Mtshali dispels the mystery and powers with which sangoma are associated. He argues that a sangoma does not say extraordinary things but the obvious, which are often ignored when said by people known to those concerned. Even though Mlitshe is unemployed and struggling to get a job, he goes out to see a sangoma who asks him to pay R250 consultation fee. The interesting thing is that what the sangoma tells him is the obvious, something that anybody who uses his or her common sense could give such an advice.

SANGOMA - The bones say you drink to your brains and not to your belly. I see your wife’s heart is bleeding from inside, your ancestors will turn against you for that.<sup>812</sup>

It is worth analyzing how the character Sangoma works to understand how they work in real life. First, Sangoma tells Mlitshe the bare facts that he drinks too much. A person who drinks heavily like Mlitshe can be easily recognised from facial appearance, commonly known as a *phuza* (drinking) face. Mrs Johnson observes this early on. Sangoma goes on to tell him that he abuses his wife, something that is common amongst men who drink too much. The final stage is to compel him to change, and the Sangoma uses ancestors to induce fear in him,

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<sup>810</sup> Talea Miller, “Reform sessions change abusive men”, *Saturday Star*, May 22. [2004], p.8

<sup>811</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* .[1968], p.51

<sup>812</sup> Mtshali, Thulani “Weemen” in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.107

claiming that ill-treating his wife angers the ancestors. The latter is the one that forces Mlitshe to change because Africans respect ancestors very much since they regard them as having powers to protect the good and punish the evil. However, instead of telling his wife that he has changed because of what Sangoma told him, Mlitshe claims to have changed because he is a born-again Christian. The reason is that it is possible that people can take revenge if the culprit asks for forgiveness and claims to have changed because of what a sangoma told them, while the mere mention of the *Bible* and God makes a big difference due to the respect given to God. If Mlitshe had listened to his wife he would not have lost his job and that could have saved him the money he paid Sangoma. This is just another indication of how myopic some people can be to trust strangers rather than those close to them.

Finally, Mtshali deals with the issue of the “beauty” stereotype whereby beauty is often associated with “whiteness.” Mlitshe’s boasting about the beauty of his girlfriends, whose skins are so light they can be “mistaken for white,” indicates the deep-rooted belief in many African societies that one has to be white to be beautiful. Over the years, this belief made black women flock to pharmacies to buy skin-lightening creams to lighten their skins. These women often ended up with skin problems forcing them to go back to the pharmacies to buy creams to repair their damaged skins. These women failed to realize that the producers set the standards and influence the public through advertising in order to sell their products, and they win either way. Freire cautions that it is important not to confuse modernization with development; the former, even though it affects certain groups in the “satellite society,” is always induced and it is the metropolitan society that derives the true benefits.<sup>813</sup> Similarly, Glenda Dickerson remarks that the ideals set up for “true woman” were in actuality a fanatical method of sexual repression by white men to oppress and control women. However, women were made to believe that unless they aspired to and, in fact, achieved these impossible ideals, they were less than moral, unnatural, unfeminine.<sup>814</sup>

Mtshali does not only openly and remarkably tackle African cultures and traditional double standards, but also draws attention to the suffering of some women at the hands of men. Like his colleagues, he calls women to stand up against abuse. He is of the opinion that it is through self-sufficiency that they can be liberated from oppression, discrimination and abuse. By openly advocating women’s rights, Mtshali follows in the footsteps of other prominent playwrights like Ibsen. Peter Watts comments:

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<sup>813</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.160

<sup>814</sup> Glenda Dickerson, “The Cult of True Womanhood: Toward A Womanist Attitude in African American Theatre”, *Theatre Journal*, May. [1992], p.179

He [Ibsen] had become interested in women's independence, and already in *The Pillars of Society* he had drawn Lona Hessel and Dina Dorf, both of whom had minds of their own. He had also been much impressed by a book by his friend Camilla Collett on the status of women, and at the Scandinavian Club in Rome he had sponsored a proposal that its women members should be allowed to vote at the club meetings. When this motion was soundly defeated he stamped out of the Club in a rage.<sup>815</sup>

The fact that playwrights from different racial backgrounds, origins and times share the same commonality in advocating women's rights, might indicate that despite the changes in time, attitudes and perception of women in many societies have not changed. Consequently, this calls for a concerted effort to ensure that women enjoy the same rights as everybody else.

#### **4.8 Kwa-Landlady - Magi Williams**

Magi Williams is a playwright, actress, director and producer. Williams's play *Kwa-Landlady* was published in 1998 in Kathy Perkins's edition, *South African Black Women Playwrights*. This play tackles a new theme; the presence of many legal or illegal immigrants in South Africa.

It is the story of two women with different backgrounds and professions; Linda is a South African, a university graduate and an actress, which makes her financially independent and stable. Both her education and class make her conscious of her rights. She stops at nothing when it comes to protecting them. Despite her education and status she is helpful, considerate and caring to others that are not fortunate. On the other hand, Nozizwe is an uneducated casual Municipal worker from Swaziland. As an illegal refugee, she is insecure and vulnerable to emotional and/or physical exploitation. Her main concern is to make money to maintain herself and her family back in Swaziland.

The landlady, Ma-Cummings, is greedy, oppressive and exploitative of the weak and defenseless. However, she is quick to retreat whenever confronted.

These women rent rooms at Ma-Cummings's place. There is a clash of interest between these women; Linda wants Ma-Cummings stopped from exploiting her tenants, but Nozizwe is not willing to be part of anything that will risk her presence in South Africa.

South Africa, being the economic power of Africa, especially Southern Africa, attracts many people from different parts of the continent; some of them are legal immigrants while most are not. Even though they live a better life as

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<sup>815</sup> Peter Watts, *Henrik Ibsen: A Doll's House*..[1965], p.16

compared to their home countries, these people, especially the illegal immigrants, are often exploited if their status becomes known. Women are often the main targets of exploitation since they are more vulnerable.

Rhoda Kadalie marks that with the opening of the borders after 1994, South Africa has had an influx of Africans from other countries. Kadalie observes that many South Africans have reacted negatively to this influx, labeling them outsiders, aliens or foreigners that are robbing them of opportunities and resources that should be prioritized for local people.<sup>816</sup> However, Zakes Mda argues that South Africans' problem is racism rather than xenophobia. Mda says on the surface it may look as though South Africans are xenophobic but they are not: the fear or hatred of foreigners is directed only towards foreigners who are black not white, although some of the white foreigners have been exposed as being involved in international crime like those from Eastern Europe.<sup>817</sup> Martin Barker thinks that the South Africans' reaction to external influx is a universal thing as demonstrated by the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who said Britain was being swamped by immigrants with alien cultures making the streets of Britain quite different from what they used to be.<sup>818</sup>

In this play, Magi Williams explores the hardships, abuse and exploitation to which illegal immigrants are subjected. First, they struggle to get work because they are not citizens of South Africa. As a result, they are forced to do manual and often shady work that the majority of ordinary South Africans resent. Second, they are poorly paid, often far less than what is stipulated to be the minimal wage by the law, but they are silent because they live a better life in South Africa as compared to their countries of origin. Apart from that, their silence is born of fear, that their exploiters will expose them if they complain and be subsequently deported. On the contrary, ordinary South Africans do not tolerate exploitation. Consequently, there is often a clash between South Africans and foreigners whenever there is a call for strike in demand of wage increase with South Africans being in favor and foreigners against it:

NOZI - Yo! Sis Linda thina kwa Masipala si thola R640 a month.

LINDA - Oh shit! I mean, do you think i-R640 per month is a living wage-ke wena?<sup>819</sup>

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<sup>816</sup> Sarah Nuttal and Cheryl-Ann Michael, *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*. [2000], Rhoda Kadalie, p.110

<sup>817</sup> Ibid. Zakes Mda-pp.111,112

<sup>818</sup> Philemona Essed and David Goldberg, *Race Critical Theories: Text and Context*. [2002], p.6

<sup>819</sup> Magi Williams, "Kwa-Landlady" in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.164.

Nozizwe's exclamation regarding her salary makes one assume that she is paid a huge amount of money and she is more than content with it. In reality, the stipulated minimum wage is R1200 per month regardless of what work one does. A possible explanation is that she compares her wage in South Africa to what she used to get back in Swaziland. Linda, on the other hand, disregarding the fact that she is an actress and probably gets a considerable amount of money, is alarmed that the municipality pays its employees that little amount. Therefore, Linda is in support of the strike while Nozizwe is against it. Whereas Linda is concerned with justice, Nozizwe is worried about meeting her basic needs like food and shelter:

NOZI - I mean Sis Linda what will I eat? How will I pay my rent?

LINDA - Sikhona, we'll see what to do, we'll share.<sup>820</sup>

Through this character, Linda, Williams encourages women to work towards unity. It is important to note that Linda does not rebuke Nozizwe nor accuse her of being a sell-out. On the contrary, she understands Nozizwe's situation and she is not happy with the way the Municipality exploits its employees either, hence her support for the strike. However, she does not want to see Nozizwe suffer either at the hands of other workers for her failure to support the strike or lack of money due to the strike. Consequently, she offers to help Nozizwe meet her basic needs so that she too can join the strike since it will make it more effective if all the employees do. Linda argues as follows:

LINDA - You cannot betray your fellow workers. You've to support them and then they'll enjoy the fruits nawe, afterwards. If you unite and do this together those whites will be forced to give in.<sup>821</sup>

Linda's approach to the situation demonstrates her commitment to justice and unity, but she does not want the weak and the helpless to suffer or fall victim to the powers being in the process.

Williams also explores the issue of accommodation in towns and cities of South Africa, which are known to have a shortage of accommodation due to the influx of people. The landlords often take advantage of this shortage and the fact that there are no regulations regarding how much a tenant can pay for what space and under what condition. This means that landlords can squeeze as many tenants as possible in a given space and charge them as much as they want.

In light of this, Williams encourages her audience to unite and to stand up against this practice. She advises her audience to appeal to unions concerned with helpless people like ZUPRA for help. By giving names like ZUPRA,

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<sup>820</sup> Ibid. p.164

<sup>821</sup> Ibid. p.164

Williams is aware that some people are silent because they do not know whom to talk to or where to go for help:

LINDA - Listen Ma-Cummings, I am not prepared to pay that kind of money in a bloody one room. That's it, case closed.

MA-CUMMINGS - But Linda this...

LINDA - Right now, my mattress is rotting because of your leaking roofs. I had to paint the wall myself, and I've been asking you since I lived in this yard to please fix my window, I freeze to death in winter. This is crazy.<sup>822</sup>

From Linda's outburst, it is clear that Ma-Cummings does not maintain her facilities, neither does she check regularly whether her tenants are comfortable as one would expect landlord to. What she does is to increase her rent in order to make more money:

LINDA - This Ma-Cummings.

NOZI - Oh! Uma-Cummings. What's her story this time?

LINDA - Phela, she has put rent up again...You know this Makes me so mad. This is a complete rip-off, I Mean manginangena-the rent was R80 per month, after six months it was R120, then R160 and now ama-R250 a zowa-collecta end of this month. I mean this is ridiculous.<sup>823</sup>

Although Linda is bitter over Ma-Cummings's constant increase of rent, she is aware that she cannot go on a rent boycott alone because she will be singled out and summarily evicted. In order to send a clear message to Ma-Cummings, all tenants ought to stand together, hence her appeal to Nozizwe for support. However, once again Nozizwe is intimidated given her status.<sup>824</sup> Williams persuades women to stand together in order to be in a position to defend themselves against any form of abuse. However, it is not only financial exploitation of tenants that William is concerned about.

MA-CUMMINGS - Nozizwe can you bake. Before the prayer meeting please come and bake some scones for me. Ma-Cummings must eat cakes after the prayer, because I get so thirsty and weak afterwards.<sup>825</sup>

Clearly, the relationship between Ma-Cummings and her tenants shifts from that of a landlord and tenants to that of madams and servants based on what suits her

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid. p.172

<sup>823</sup> Ibid. p.163

<sup>824</sup> Ibid. p.163

<sup>825</sup> Ibid. p.167



at the given time. This may explain why she accommodates mainly people in the lowest strata in any given society, like street cleaners, Nozizwe, and the unemployed Rahaba, an uneducated, manipulative, jealous and greedy woman who, like Ma-Cummings, is always looking for possible victims, especially the weak and vulnerable. Ma-Cummings knows that these kinds of people are defenseless and often naive when it comes to the law and their rights. Consequently, they are vulnerable to any form of exploitation.<sup>826</sup> To some extent Ma-Cummings' relationship and exploitative nature creates an atmosphere similar to that of a white madam (white woman employer in domestic space) and black maid dynamic. Most of the time in such settings, the employer has considerable power over her maid, which means the maid can be ordered around as much as the employer wants because working hours are not clearly defined especially if the maid stays in the back room. This hierarchical scenario is implied by Ma-Cummings's mispronunciation of Nozizwe's name, which is a common practice amongst madams, especially if the maid uses her African or native name. Often, madams tend to either forget or mispronounce the names of their maids or garden-boys. In order to make things easier for themselves, they often give their maids and garden-boys English names which are convenient to them, such as Mary for a maid and Jim or John for a garden-boy. Although Ma-Cummings does not give Nozizwe a new name, she has a problem with pronouncing her name:

LINDA - May I enquire who is Nomazizi?

MA-CUMMINGS - That one who always puts on tshalis. Poor girl, she's still so backward.

LINDA - She is Nozizwe and you better leave her out of this.<sup>827</sup>

The changing of names throughout history has been known as a landmark of dehumanization and exploitation, from slavery through colonialism to apartheid. As an educated person, Linda is probably aware of this legacy hence her hostile reaction. Furthermore, Linda's reaction can be seen as an indication of the importance she attaches to personal identity. Martin Orkin points out that detail suggest that the process of dehumanizing together with influx control were designed to facilitate a steady supply of cheap labor, and the perpetuation, in consequence, of the master or mistress-servant relationship. In such cases, the master or mistress can dictate all because the laborer she or he dealt with had no rights of domicile, no home ownership, no right to live with her family, and was therefore totally vulnerable and insecure.<sup>828</sup>

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<sup>826</sup> Ibid. p.163

<sup>827</sup> Ibid. p.172

<sup>828</sup> Martin Orkin, *Drama and South African State*, [1991], pp.143,144

Because of widespread poverty in most black communities, anybody who seems to achieve something in life is envied by some while to others the person becomes a target of their frustration. Williams demonstrates how far jealous people can go to discredit others who are more successful than they are. This is something prevalent in many black communities and had terrible consequences under apartheid. During that time, some people were killed by neck-lacing (killing a person with a burning tyre around the neck) or hacked to death accused of being informers. Even today there are some people who are killed and their property destroyed or set on fire because of being accused as witches. In most cases the victims are innocent but happened to be 'successful,' which makes their not-so-successful neighbors jealous. At times the perpetrators are a failure in life and want to find something or someone to blame for their failure and therefore claim that they were bewitched. In this play, Rahaba, having acquired no education whatsoever and unemployed, is clearly jealous of Linda's success:

RAHABA- Ha! Why is she always working at night? She's a prostitute sy's 'n hoermyt man. Kelehure. She is a whore.

MA-CUMMINGS- Mind your language Rahaba. The girl keeps to herself, she doesn't talk too much, she begs for nobody's food. You can't really complain, really, you can't. Bua nete, Rebs. I think you're jealous of Linda.<sup>829</sup>

Ma-Cummings' comment on Linda is puzzling, because a person who does not run around, gossip or beg for anything from anybody is often scolded and ridiculed by many accused of thinking he or she is self-centre and selfish for not interacting with other people. In order for a person to be accepted and well spoken of, that person either buys everybody beers or gossips a lot, but pays little or attention to his or her own family. It is a situation whereby one could say that black communities encourage irresponsibility amongst their members. Magi Williams relates her experience, as follows:

This is from my experience living in a back room [I left home quite early]; experiences that I went through such as being abused by men who were land-lords. Because I'm an actress, I was looked upon as odd. I was very strange to them. I dressed differently and I'm a free spirit. I work strange hours as an actress, and I go to work when most people are returning. So for them "She's not working, we don't see her on TV, she says she's working but where? She must be lying, she's not working,

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<sup>829</sup> Magi Williams, "Kwa-Landlady" in Kathy Perkins ed., *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.168

she has lots of strange friends that visit, she's not married, so she must be a prostitute in the Hillbrow District.<sup>830</sup>

Williams also addresses the question of sexual abuse and rape of children by their fathers or their mothers' lovers, which has been reported repeatedly in the South African media. She sheds light on the seriousness and the negative impact it has on the victims. To dramatise the situation, she has this as a climax of her play. Like Khanyi in Paul Grootboom's *Enigma*, Williams' protagonist, Linda, was raped by the man who was supposed to protect her and as a result she was forced to run away from home:

LINDA- Nozi, there is no way that I'm going to go back home. I can't stand my stepfather, you know. I can't stand the way he looks at me, undressing me with his eyes. I hate it! I cannot stand that man, strue's God. He is...so...yeeh! So I am as homeless as you are.<sup>831</sup>

In a way, it is understandable why Linda is protective of Nozizwe, possibly, because Nozizwe reminds her of her experiences. The sexual harassment that Linda was subjected to which forced her to run away from home, Williams dramatises it through Nozizwe and Daddy, Ma-Cummings' boyfriend. Daddy takes advantage of the strike that the Municipality workers embarked on, which Nozizwe is part of, and entices her with money with the knowledge that she has no money since they are not paid while on strike. By accepting his money, Nozizwe puts Daddy in a position of power, which Daddy exploits by raping her repeatedly before others including Ma-Cummings herself come to know of it. Karen Cronacher remarks, with regard to sexual exploitation of black women through the use of material things like Daddy is doing in this play, that white male slave owners and overseers found that slave women could best be manipulated by promises of a new dress, a hair ribbon<sup>832</sup> to do whatever they wanted with them.

Nozizwe's sexual harassment and exploitation compels the other three women, Rahaba, Ma-Cummings and Linda, to resolve their differences and join forces in support of Nozizwe. Consequently, Linda finally achieves the unity that she has been encouraging throughout the play. However, the raping of Nozizwe not only brings the three women together, but also awakens Ma-Cummings to the fact that her boyfriend is untrustworthy. He cannot be trusted with her

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<sup>830</sup> Ibid. p.160

<sup>831</sup> Ibid. p.163

<sup>832</sup> Karen Cronacher, "Unmasking the Minstrel Mask's Black Magic" in Ntozake Shange's *Spell #7*, *Theatre Journal*. [1992], p.182

daughters, especially when there are cases whereby women's boyfriends rape their stepdaughters, as demonstrated by Linda's case.

As much as these women finally manage to put the pieces together regarding Nozizwe's ordeal and come to her rescue, Williams argues that it is important for a victim to speak out and call for help right at the beginning. If a victim keeps quiet, hoping that the perpetrator will stop, it only prolongs the suffering since perpetrators often do not stop and instead regard the silence as consent. Consequently, by the time a victim speaks out, a lot of damage might have been done, especially psychologically. Apart from that, by having the act committed by a person known to the four women, Williams shows that women are often raped by men close or known to them. In most cases, the victims never suspect anything. This explains Ma-Cummings' alarm. Catherine Mackinnon comments with regard to the plight of women:

Perhaps this reflects men's experience that women they know meaningfully consent to sex with them. That cannot be rape; rape must be by someone else, someone unknown. But women experience rape most often by men we know. Men believe that it is less awful to be raped by someone one is close to.<sup>833</sup>

Mackinnon argues that the law itself aggravates the situation. She contests that the point of defining rape as 'violence, not sex' or 'violence against women' has been to separate sexuality from gender in order to affirm sex (heterosexuality) while rejecting violence (rape). She notes that the problem remains what it has always been: telling the difference. The convergence of sexuality with violence, long used in law to deny the reality of women's violation, is recognized by rape survivors. However, with a difference; where the legal system has seen intercourse in rape, victims have experienced rape in intercourse.<sup>834</sup>

Finally, through the character of Linda, Williams demonstrates that there is much to be done in order for women to enjoy the same rights as men. Consequently, she appeals to her audience, especially women, to stand together and to fight against oppression, exploitation, and abuse of women. Furthermore, she encourages her audience to work with women's organizations such as People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) to bring about change. She observes with regret that even in this democratic South Africa women are still a target of ridicule by men in all walks of life.

MA - CUMMINGS- Women are being battered by their husbands.

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<sup>833</sup> Catherine Mackinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence", *Contemporary Critical Theory*. [1989], p.621

<sup>834</sup> Ibid. p.621

LINDA - Women are abused bodily and verbally and assaulted by men in the streets, in taxis and in trains...Let's fight against oppression. Let's demand fair treatment at work and with the law, and let's fight for equal pay.<sup>835</sup>

POWA's Executive Director, Delhine Serumaga, argues that the abuse of women has nothing to do with relationships, instead it is about the character, upbringing, communication and the way a perpetrator perceives the world around him. Consequently, without rehabilitation, the perpetrator will continue to abuse women even after serving a sentence.<sup>836</sup>

Williams' play starts with many voices with each voice fighting for its own selfish interests, but ends with one voice calling for protection and justice for women regardless of their origin and nationality. This is in sharp contrast to the xenophobic attacks some South Africans accuse people from other countries, mainly African countries of stealing their jobs.

#### **4.9 *Brothers in Arts* - Boy Bangala**

Boy Bangala is a playwright and director. He is an Outreach Programme Coordinator of the Civic Theatre in Braamfontein. Bangala's play *Brothers in Arts* was first performed at the Civic Theatre in 1995. It was directed by Bangala featuring the following actors: Dumisane Nhlapho, Nkosinathi Mehethwa, Molisa Shushu, Mduduzi Malahleka and Vusumuzi Radebe. It is a story about two siblings, Mike and Carol, whose passions are to be artists but face stiff resistance from their family, especially their father, since the arts in most black communities are never regarded as a profession. However, the two manage to overcome their challenges and achieve their goal.

The character of Father can be said to be an example of a man brought up in an oppressive and traditional society. As a result, he himself is oppressive. Being a traditionalist, he expects his children to live according to the tradition. He does not seem to be prepared to change his perception of life, regardless of the times. However, he has an inferiority complex, and, as a result, still believes that certain professions are exclusively for white people. His children, Mike and Carol, on the other hand, are aware of the change in times and the need for individual rights and freedom. Nevertheless, they respect their parents, the way African children are expected to. This puts them in a dilemma of how to pursue

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<sup>835</sup> Magi Williams, "Kwa-Landlady" in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*, [1998], p.163

<sup>836</sup> Talea Miller, "Reform sessions change abusive men", *Saturday Star*, May 22. [2004], p.8

their goals without offending their parents, especially their father, who has different plans for them.

Like both Chakela and Baloyi, Bangala starts his play with an improvisation of a traditional gathering, a feast, whereby people talk in loud voices amid music from traditional instruments. The next scene takes place in the auditorium with the performers indirectly introducing each other to the audience. The performers' introduction is followed by a discussion regarding what story they are going to tell the audience:

GONDO - My dear friend, what shall we play tonight?

FATHER - We shall play a story of our lives.

GONDO - Yes, our lives in South Africa. We shall celebrate our independence with dance and music. Let's begin.<sup>837</sup>

Bangala explicitly states what kind of a play the audience should expect. The fact that the two characters are in the auditorium indicates that this is not going to be a story about both the performers and the audience. By using the auditorium, Bangala appears to invite the audience to be part of the performance. The involvement of the audience is done from time to time throughout the play since the play appears to be meant to educate the audience about arts. This seems to relate to the traditional African context in which, as Kees Epskamp writes, there must be reactions from the audience if the narrator is to give the best performance. Epskamp observes that the narrator relies on playing with his listeners and sometimes even demands their active participation.<sup>838</sup> The notion of exploring lives and experience is carried on into the next scene in which two characters, Chief and Sangoma, talk about the search and need for sincerity and truth, which they agree are very important if there is to be progress in their community. Chief and Sangoma engage in a discussion, because in a rural community a chief, as authority, is expected to lead his people to righteousness and prosperity. However, in order to achieve that, he often needs guidance from ancestors since the ancestors are said to be in a position to pray to God on behalf of the living. On the other hand, traditional doctor or sangoma is involved because they are believed to possess powers to communicate with ancestors as stated in Chakela's *Wrath of the Gods*. For this reason, there is a need for cooperation between Chief and Sangoma for their community to prosper, with the Chief being the authority over the living and Sangoma, the link between the

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<sup>837</sup> Boy Bangala, *Brothers in Arts*. unpublished play. [1996], p.2

<sup>838</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Learning by Performing Arts*. [1992], p.95.

living and dead. Chief will give orders or messages to the people during mass gathering as related to him by the ancestors through Sangoma.

In most communities, a family is regarded as a smaller nation or village with its head or leader often being the man. In this play, the character of Father assumes that role as the head of his family. However, there is a sharp contrast between the Chief, whom the audience saw at the beginning of the play, and Father. Whereas Chief is kind and considerate, Father is oppressive, selfish and naïve. His selfishness becomes clear at the beginning of the play, he enjoys being welcomed home with music played by his wife. Music is part of arts, but Father does not want his children to pursue arts as a profession because he cannot foresee any possibility of making a living from it. Samuel Hay observes that although rejection has been the most prevalent problem faced by African American theatre people, the most debilitating is the fourth trouble, the family pressure to stay out of the theatrical profession. Hay believes religion, along with community standards, usually has prompted such coercion. More prevalent from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, these constraints were experienced in common by such performers as James Earl Jones, Billy Ewing and Zakes Mokae. He believes the root of the tension was the adolescent's typical need for parental approval and the parent's desire for spiritual and societal conformity.<sup>839</sup> Father's assumption is based on his belief that only white people can make a living as a musician:

MIKE - Given time and support I can be a good artist too.

FATHER - Nonsense, that can only be done by Muzungu. (white person)

MIKE - You really believe in white supremacy.

NADGI - You don't have to be white to be a good artist.<sup>840</sup>

Father reflects the colonial mentality instilled in him by the society of his times.

As noted earlier, in the past, blacks were made to believe that nothing good could come out of them. As a result, blacks were not permitted to pursue most professions except, among others, teaching and or nursing, while others such as arts and engineering were associated with white people and therefore only whites could pursue them. This cultivated an inferiority complex in some blacks. Hennie Lotter points out that the stereotype of an inferior humanity was strongly projected through media and everyday interaction towards black South Africans. For this reason, some blacks internalized this stereotype and believed that white people were superior to them.<sup>841</sup> Similarly, Paulo Freire states that the oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted the

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<sup>839</sup> Samuel Hay, *African-American Theatre*. [1994], p.151

<sup>840</sup> Boy Bangala, *Brothers in Arts*. unpublished play. [1996], p.1

<sup>841</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and Peace: The Case of South Africa..* [1997], p.33

oppressor's guidelines are fearful of freedom because it will require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility.<sup>842</sup> This will challenge their abilities, capabilities and most of all leadership skills, which they might not have. Michael Matthews adds that people who are brought up to devalue themselves and their culture to internalize a slave mentality are going to lack the sense of being capable and in control.<sup>843</sup> Bangala regrets that this hunger for control, born of an inferiority complex, leads to oppression should others challenge it, especially children of parents who are its victims. Having lost their dignity, pride, power and influence in the public domain, the parents see their power over their families as the last frontier to be defended at all cost hence the heavy handedness of Father.

One sees in the character of Father the desire to be in control as well as the fear of not being able to exercise it. However, the exchange amongst the three indicates a shift in the way the younger generation perceives life as opposed to the older generation. Obviously, the youth, as represented by Mike and Nadgi, know that to be successful, one has to persevere and also get support in what one does especially from one's family. Furthermore, they are aware that unlike under apartheid, there is no profession that can be identified with a given race. This difference in perception explains why Father differs from his children, especially Mike, and as a result the two constantly clash.

FATHER - This art school you keep talking about, I don't understand, please help if I'm wrong. But I thought that you were at the university studying to be a teacher.

MIKE - Yes, I know, but I have discovered other talents in me. I like painting. So I have come to the conclusion that I want to be a painter.

FATHER - You can't make an honest living as a painter. It is important to have degrees and titles. It is time to show the world that we can have degrees as well.<sup>844</sup>

It is clear that Father is obsessed with teaching as a profession, probably because in the era under which he was brought up teaching was the ultimate career which blacks were made to believe they could attain. In fact, in the past when a person was a teacher, that person was envied by almost the entire community because blacks were made to believe that it was the best thing that a black person could achieve or become. Sindiwe Magona, a playwright, observes that when she finished her two-year teacher's certificate, she was considered highly

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<sup>842</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.31

<sup>843</sup> Michael Matthews, "Knowledge, Action and Power" in Robert Mackie's ed. *Literacy and Revolution: The Pedagogy of the Paulo Freire*. [1980], p.84

<sup>844</sup> Boy Bangala, *Brothers in Arts*. Unpublished play. [1995], p.14



educated.<sup>845</sup> It is important to note that this was only a certificate and not a diploma let alone a degree.

However, Father fails to realize that times have changed. Apart from that, youths are no longer like those in the past when parents could dictate their career, youths want to determine their own future as observed by Mike.<sup>846</sup> Similarly, Joromi Mandlane, a sculptor and dancer from Mozambique, recalls how he encountered almost the same problem with his father just like Mike:

I remember when I was a little boy, my father would not allow me to draw or paint and if he ever found me doing this, I would be scolded. He would say to me “don't you have anything important to do, you should be doing something else, instead of playing around with a pencil.” I had to stop immediately. My father would always end his scolding on ‘Do you want to be like Malangatana, who was a great African artist.’<sup>847</sup>

The question one would raise is whether there was anything wrong with Joromi wanting to be a “great African artist like Malangatana” or was his father jealous that he was going to be famous or get recognized more than him? Nevertheless, often if the situation reaches this stage, some parents use their power to compel their children to comply by refusing to pay fees. However, Bangala argues that it is not only a question of difference in views over careers, but it is often a desire of such parents to have total control over their children as noted earlier. This is evidenced by Father who dictates his son what he should do and not to outside his studies.

FATHER - n't pretend that you don't know. I mean this demonstrates business! I don't want you out in the streets demonstrating! I pay a lot of money for your university and all you can do is demonstrate.  
MIKE- You are blind Dad. Don't you see all this corruption?  
FATHER - Do your work and study. I don't want to hear this word corruption anymore.<sup>848</sup>

There are interesting issues that arise from the discussion between the two; first, from what the audience has seen, it is likely that Father does not like the word “corruption.” One can wonder whether Father is represented as being ‘matter-of-fact’ (asking his child just to work and to study without going into politics) or whether it is because “corruption” reminds him of his own personality given the

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<sup>845</sup> Ibid. pp.48,49

<sup>846</sup> Ibid. p.48

<sup>847</sup> Budja Moort Djurah-Kutuanana *Cultural Survival and Reconciliation Magazine*. [1999], p.18

<sup>848</sup> Boy Bangala, *Brothers in Arts*. unpublished play .[1995], p.14

way he treats his family especially his children. Second, Bangala shows how some parents send their children to institutions of higher learning only to contradict the role those institutions should play in their children's lives.

It can be argued that university students are encouraged to think independently so that they can be in a position to make sound decisions as this will make them worthy citizens of their countries and/or sound leaders. However, if these institutions fail that goal or try to channel students in a given direction contradictory to what they are supposed to, this often leads to confrontations and protests as demonstrated by the Soweto riots of 1976. Paulo Freire notes that rigid oppressive social structures necessarily influence the institutions of child rearing and education within that structure. These institutions pattern their action after the style of the structure and transmit the myths of the latter.<sup>849</sup> Possibly this is the scenario that Mike and his fellow students are caught up in and hence the strike. Zakes Mda argues that universities, as major centers for the production and distribution of knowledge, have a major role to play. As a result, each known renaissance manifested itself in a university led by the arts.<sup>850</sup>

By denying Mike that opportunity to make decisions himself, Father prevents him from developing into an independent individual. For this reason, he defeats the purpose of what universities are for, that is, to nurture future leaders. Martin Lipset comments on this role of universities as follows:

Universities are, of course, primary centers of intellectual life in modern society. They are, therefore, a key center of criticism-criticism of the society, of the dominant trends in it, especially in politics, by sections of both the faculty and the student bodies. This critical role of university, as the place where critical ideas are born and where support for criticism is found among students, who form the mass for many protest movements, has been true for a long time, in many countries.<sup>851</sup>

Furthermore, Father's insistence that Mike should disregard what is going on around him indicates the kind of era he grew up under, expected to live and/or carry out duties without questioning or commenting on anything. This is an unfortunate legacy he wants to pass on to his children despite the change in times. Freire notes that self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion of the oppressors' hold of them. He argues that because the oppressed are so often told that they are good for nothing, lazy, unproductive, know nothing and are

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<sup>849</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.152

<sup>850</sup> Sarah Nuttal and Cheryl-Ann Michael, *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*. [2000], Rhoda Kadalie-p.110

<sup>851</sup> Martin Lipset, "Preface" Hendrik Van Der Merwe's ed., *Students' Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], pp.3,4

incapable of learning anything, they finally become convinced of their uselessness.<sup>852</sup>

This lack of freedom and experience of authoritarian rule that some black children are subjected to by their parents is demonstrated earlier in the play. Mike and his sister Carol are seen playing “hide and seek” and the two are scolded by their parents for making noise and told they are too old to play such games.<sup>853</sup> However, later in the play the children are refused that right of being old enough to make decisions regarding their future. The parents seem to be confused and in the process confuse the children as well. This is often the case in most black communities; offspring are regarded as children by their parents no matter their age. This situation can endure for as long as their parents are still alive. As a result, the offspring are expected to listen and obey their parents. However, if the same offspring was to behave like a child, the parents would be the first to scold them for behaving as such. Bangala exposes the confusion and dilemma in which black children are often brought up, whereby they are neither expected to behave like children or adults. He presents a suffocating situation such children are subjected to, which often has a negative impact on them:

MIKE - Carol, look how red the moon is. It frightens me sometimes when the moon is so red. I get this strange and peculiar feeling. It gets tight, no air, you can't breathe. Sometimes is going to happen.

CAROL - I know what you mean, that feeling of no air. You open a window to get some air, all you think of is getting some oxygen, you want to fill your lungs with it until you explode, then you explode...you become quiet. Peace and harmony is in you and the universe.<sup>854</sup>

The discussion between Mike and Carol reveals the claustrophobic environment under which children in the same situation live, whereby their parents disregard their desires, wishes and dreams. In fact, metaphorically, it can be argued that the cry for oxygen is not for them as individuals but for their dreams. Their dictatorial father is suffocating their dreams. The only way they can save their dreams is to realize them, hence Carol's “fill your lungs with it until you explode, you become quiet.” It is only after they have achieved their dreams that they can have peace of mind. Lotter submits that Biko urges people to become free at heart because no human chains can bind such a person since dignity and freedom implied the courage for people to think and decide themselves. This means that black people decide what the best option is for their lives hence the motto of the Black Consciousness Movement: “Black man, you are on your own.”<sup>855</sup>

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<sup>852</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.49

<sup>853</sup> Boy Bangala, *Brothers in Arts*. unpublished play. [1995], p.8

<sup>854</sup> Ibid. pp.15,16

<sup>855</sup> Hennie Lotter, *Injustice, Violence and peace: The Case of South Africa*. [1997], p.33

Given the financial and psychological challenges one can be subjected to in order to achieve one's goals as an artist, Bangala calls for financial support to artists and emphasizes its importance. He does this through the character of Mr Gondo, a businessman. Mr Gondo does not only take the trouble to visit and encourage Mike on his work as an artist but also guides him until he holds an art exhibition. Furthermore, by virtue of his status, he ensures that Mike's exhibition receives the widest possible coverage in the media in order to promote Mike's work. In a way, Bangala is indirectly appealing to the South African business sector to support and promote artists in the country. But it is the parents of the artists whom Bangala believes should take the lead in supporting their children, as observed earlier:

It's all about 'real jobs' and the perception that show-business, art and culture as a whole, is not real work. The sentiments, however, are expressed forcefully, even aggressively and in a nutshell, demand that the public perception of the arts as being work for dilettantes undergoes dramatic change.<sup>856</sup>

Whereas Mike manages to hold his own art exhibition at the end of the play, which indicates that he finally achieves his goal, his sister is still struggling to find a publisher for her poems. This compels Mike to promise his sister to help her find a publisher. Mike's promise to help Carol cannot be interpreted only as cooperation between siblings, but as a call for cooperation between artists, despite their areas of expertise. This is something that Bangala reiterates throughout the play which is why he has different artists: Mike-painter, Carol-poet and Nadgi-musician, all working together. An example is Carol writing songs for Nadgi:

NADGI - Have you written the lyrics to my song?  
CAROL - Not finished yet, but listen to this. "West with the wind. East with the sun. What can one build in the desert where there is no water to nourish. I've seen jealousy and insecurity. If only I could make you feel secure. If one could believe in God, one could see love."<sup>857</sup>

Although Carol's song is written for Nadgi, it is about Carol's family, especially Mike, their father and herself. From the lyrics of the song, it is clear she believes their father's actions are born of insecurity, something that is common with some parents. It does happen occasionally that some parents feel threatened by the fact that their children are growing up and consequently feel they are losing control over them. In order to retain that control, some parents tend to be harsh on their

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<sup>856</sup> *The Star Tonight*, Theatre Review, Tuesday September 5. [1995], p.21

<sup>857</sup> Boy Bangala, *Brothers in Arts*. Unpublished play. [1995], p.10

children. However, Bangala argues that such conditions are not conducive for the children's career development; hence Carol's comparing her situation to a 'desert' where it is impossible for one to cultivate anything. However, as much as Bangala acknowledges the hardship black children are subjected to, he appeals to them to have patience with their families:

STRANGER - Ah! To be honest with you, Mike, your problems are experienced by almost every child in this world. Parents always have great expectations. They slave for prestige, no matter what the cost of sacrifice. But they are concerned about their children. Make them realize that you have dreams, we all have dreams but our dreams differ. Every face has its own story to tell. The best situation at your young age is tolerance, tolerate whatever the circumstances are until you have grown independent.<sup>858</sup>

Bangala's appeal to the youth to be patient with their parents is probably to reduce the tension, which exists within many families as a result of clash of interests. Mike's mother, who is obedient and tolerant to his father's oppressive nature, demonstrates this patience. However, by having such a character, Bangala can be seen as encouraging women's submission and tolerance of abuse. Slaughter explains:

In capitalism, a woman is, normally, economically dependent on her husband and on the stability of the family with unit with him as head. The children are similarly dependant. Consequently, the wife and children relate to society at large only through the family head, the husband and father.<sup>859</sup>

Slaughter observes that along with the beginning of private property and manufacturing went patriarchal authority and inheritance through the male line. The ancient law of inheritance through mothers, which can still be found amongst other mammals such as elephants and hyenas, was broken. He is of the view the overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also, and as a result, the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude. As a result, she became the slave of his dust and a mere instrument for the production of children.<sup>860</sup> Similarly, Helene Cixous argues:

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<sup>858</sup> Ibid. p.17

<sup>859</sup> Cliff Slaughter, *Marx and Marxism*. [1995], p.69

<sup>860</sup> Ibid. p.70

Woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy. Whenever it is a question of woman, when one examines kinship structures, when a family model is brought into play. In fact, as soon as the question of ontology raises its head, as soon as there is intended meaning, intention: Desire, authority examine them and you are led right back to the father. It is even possible not to notice that there is no place whatsoever for woman in the calculation.<sup>861</sup>

It is worth noting that whereas some of his colleagues focus mainly on interrogating black patriarchy, Bangala goes further to bring in the question of children in such a setting. By so doing, he double attacks the institution, which so many artists and especially feminists have criticized vehemently. This is probably in line with the constitution, which guarantees individuals' rights for all citizens. Bangala therefore calls for parents to respect their children's right to choose and pursue careers of their choice.

#### **4.10 Local elections - Lufuno Mutele**

Lufuno Mutele is a University of Witwatersrand graduate. He is a playwright and a sub-editor of *Sunday Times* newspaper, an independent weekly newspaper based in Rosebank. Mutele's play *Local Elections* was first performed at Wits Downstairs Theatre in 1996, directed by Mfunangi Magalasi and featured Mandla Sello and Lufuno Mutele among others. It is a play on party power struggle, between the young generation of politicians represented by Kwindu and the old generation represented by Gundula, in South Africa. The young generation perceives the old generation's power hunger as a stumbling block to development. For this reason, there is constant clash between the two groups with Gundula and his camp determined to stay in power at all cost, but his attempts fail and Kwindu finally wins. Although the public can realize that the dichotomies between good/evil and young/old as personified by Kwindu and Gundula is a simplification, this is an effective narrative strategy to highlight the current malaise in South African political life.

Kwindu is a young, honest politician. He does not permit his personal interests to dictate his life and prevent him from serving the public. This makes him a true representative and servant of the public. Gundula, on the other hand, is a corrupt, manipulative, and evil old man. Like most politicians, he stops at nothing to achieve his political goals. As a public figure, his morals are questionable; he is separated from his legal wife and dates a Mozambican

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<sup>861</sup> Helene Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays", in Dan Latimer ed. *Contemporary Critical Theory*, [1989], p.561

refugee who is also his storekeeper. Gundula's men, Maleté and bodyguards, share similar characteristics with him.

The private life of politicians is one of the major concerns in most countries in the West, especially in the American political system. Politicians are expected to be men or women of good morals in order to hold public office. Consequently, if discovered that they have a dubious background not worthy of holding a public office, they are often forced to resign or are never elected.

Lufuno Mutele seems to wish for a similar Western political environment in South Africa. His play can be seen as questioning the sincerity and reputation of politicians in democratic South Africa. He argues that politicians are often leading double lives but they manage to deceive the public with the way they portray themselves and strings of empty promises while keeping their private lives and agendas a secret. This deceitful way of life led by some politicians makes Ronald Gaskell question:

Why do we weaken ourselves by living on the surface and not in the depth of our being? From vanity, perhaps; from politeness, laziness, willingness to make the communal life possible. And as we yield more smoothly, as our lying grows more graceful and agreeable, so the split between the face and our mask widens.<sup>862</sup>

Mutele's antagonist, Gundula, is a leader of his party in his Ward, a post won narrowly over his arch rival fellow party member, Kwindá. Though a political leader, Gundula does not live with his legal wife, instead he sleeps at his girlfriend Gracia's shack. Given Gracia's status, a refugee and Gundula's storekeeper, their relationship has to be kept secret, or else Gundula's political career will be in jeopardy.<sup>863</sup> As argued in Bangala's play *Brothers in Arts*, a nation is considered a big family with its political leader as a head, and for it to prosper it needs strong leadership. Consequently, the failure of Mutele's antagonist to have a stable family raises questions regarding his ability to lead his people. Apart from that, the fact that Gundula has a relationship and employs an illegal refugee leaves much to be desired because refugees are vulnerable to exploitation as Magi Williams demonstrates in *Kwa-Landlady* since they have limited rights or none at all.

Mutele also explores the manipulative tactics old politicians like Gundula employ. He is of the opinion that by virtue of being in positions of power, some of the promises these politicians make are pivotal to their victims' lives like getting them South African Identification Documents (ID). The ID would not only put the refugees in a position to apply for jobs but also enjoy all

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<sup>862</sup> Ronald Gaskell, *Drama and Reality-the European Theatre since Ibsen*. [1972], p.123

<sup>863</sup> Lufuno Mutele, *Local Elections*. unpublished play [1996], pp.1,2

the rights like South Africans. However, in order to have their victims in their mercy, politicians are often slow to fulfill the promises:

GRACIA - You said my I.D. would be ready by now.

GUNDULA - I am working on that. I have always kept my promises.

GRACIA - If you do, what is keeping my I.D. so long then?<sup>864</sup>

The delay in Gundula's processing of Gracia's ID is possibly one of his tricks to keep her under his control so that he can continue to exploit her sexually and economically. He is probably afraid that if Gracia gets her ID, she will leave him and search for a better paying job, especially when she is aware that she is been exploited. Her discontent and anger is obvious in their confrontation:

GRACIA - Lies! Understand lies?

GRUNDULA - Have I not done what I promised..The rise in pay as a storekeeper, I pay you R100 more than your colleagues.

GRACIA - You think that's a bonus to me? You sleep with me here.<sup>865</sup>

Like Williams, Mutele addresses the plight of refugees in South Africa and their anger over their exploitation. He too encourages refugees to confront their abusers as portrayed by Gracia. It is also worth noting that even though Gundula claims to have raised Gracia's wage, he does not state how much she is earning at present as compared to before the raise. A possible explanation might be that he is ashamed to mention her wage knowing that it is less than ordinary South Africans would get. If both the raise and her wage were reasonable Gracia would be grateful for what he is doing for her instead of being bitter. Apart from that, she might be using the money to provide for his nightly visits. Based on her experience, Williams observes this exploitation that people who are in power will abuse others, and even black people abuse each other when they have power.<sup>866</sup>

Despite the power and manipulative tactics, Mutele argues that politicians often end up entangled in their own web of lies and deceit as their deeds make their way to the surface. This happens with his antagonist as the play builds towards its climax. Gundula struggles to cover up his tracks so that he can present an acceptable picture before the public to win votes and retain his position.<sup>867</sup>

GUNDULA - No Gracia, our relationship is not public yet.

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<sup>864</sup> Ibid. p.2

<sup>865</sup> Ibid. p.9

<sup>866</sup> Kathy Williams, in Perkins Kathy ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.160

<sup>867</sup> Lufuno Mutele, *Local Elections*, unpublished play. [1996], p.4



GRACIA - I know. I am this stranded refugee worker whom you sweat over to discharge your desires. Why should the world be told about that shameful act? Gundula, deep down inside me I have always known that I will be good so long as I don't come in your way. You need the position and a pregnant refugee will spoil it.<sup>868</sup>

Mutele considers politicians to be self-centered to the extent that they can do anything to get what they want irrespective of who gets hurt in the process. In this play, Gundula tries to chase Gracia back to Mozambique to avoid not only the already rumored relationship from becoming public but also the fact that Gracia is pregnant with his child. He disregards the fact that Gracia is eight months pregnant, which might put both mother and child in danger. As a result, she refuses to return to Mozambique. Freire is of the opinion that since dehumanizing is a distortion of being fully human, eventually this state will make the victims rebel against those who made them so,<sup>869</sup> as demonstrated by Gracia who is exploited by Gundula sexually and economically. Given what is at stake, Gundula takes drastic measures:

GUNDULA - Do you know the woman, storekeeper? [They nod] She has to go back home. Now, this is because she has a tough soldier husband in Mozambique, who wants her back, or he will come here and declare war on the whole of Venda. Yes, I have spoken to her, and she does not want to go. But because her refusal can mean disaster for us, we have to force her.<sup>870</sup>

Mutele demonstrates how evil and manipulative some politicians can be in pursuit of their political goals. Gundula paints the situation in such a way that it appears as though Gracia's departure is in the interests of the Venda people. It is fairly common for politicians to claim that they do things for "their people" whereas it is, in fact, for their own interests. There is only one way of interpreting his action, Gundula makes the allegation because he knows that the bodyguards will act quickly, thinking that their people will be in danger if nothing is done: First, they fail to ask themselves why Gundula does not want them to talk about the matter at the party meetings. This could have made them aware that chasing Gracia away was not in the best interest of the party or of the Venda people, but Gundula himself. Second, this is not the Stone Age during which a warrior could attack another tribe to rescue his lover, as Gundula implies. If Gracia's fictitious soldier husband attacks Venda as he claims, it would be regarded as Mozambique's attack on South Africa, which would result in a war between the

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<sup>868</sup> Ibid. pp.7, 8

<sup>869</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. [1968], p.28

<sup>870</sup> Lufuno Mutele, *Local Elections*, unpublished play. [1996], p.12

two countries. Their failure to observe the manipulative nature of Gundula makes them appear as mere tools to carry out Gundula's evil deeds. This desire to get rid of Gracia becomes apparent later when Gundula spells out what ought to be done:

GUNDULA - My request is that you should deal with her the way you did with those who did not want to contribute to the growth of the party. But keep it a total secret nobody including Kwindu should know.<sup>871</sup>

Gundula's statement reflects the main characteristics of dictators, that is, a tendency to kill to achieve a politically motivated goal and robbing the public by forcing them to contribute money to political parties. From what the audience has seen, it is doubtful that the money which people were forced to contribute went to the party not Gundula himself.

Just as Mutele has argued that the more politicians try to free themselves from their corrupt deeds, the more they get entangled in them, Gundula's attempts do not only fail but make him sink even deeper:

GRACIA - Gundula, why do you want to kill me? You sent your thugs to kill me? Are you this hard. I am standing in your way, and you want to get rid of me, to be a Councillor with a clean record. I did not know that you're such an animal.

GUNDULA - Don't accuse me of things. I was just advising you in the evening, Venda people don't like foreigners.<sup>872</sup>

It is interesting to note that when Gundula ordered his bodyguards to chase Gracia away it was in the interests of the Venda, but now that the attempt has failed he blames the Venda people. Obviously, he refuses to take any responsibility to appear as a decent person before the public.

From the beginning of the play the audience sees only Gundula and his evil deeds. On the contrary, his rival, Kwindu, who is portrayed as an honest person, is only referred to. In a way, Mutele can be seen as giving his audience enough time to observe and reflect on the old, corrupt and evil generation of politicians before he introduces his protagonist, an ideal politician, young and honest. At this stage the audience is likely to be eager to meet with the protagonist to see what kind of person he is, and the measures he will take to rectify the situation. An interesting aspect is the age difference between the protagonist and the antagonist, even though no age is mentioned; Kwindu is younger, smarter and wiser than Gundula. Gundula, on the other hand, is old and

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<sup>871</sup> Ibid., p.12

<sup>872</sup> Ibid. p.16

experienced, especially in manipulating situations to make them work in his favour. This is evidenced by Gundula's advisor recommendation:

MALETE - At one time when he spoke about clean water in this ward, people seemed excited. I thought the vote would go to him.

GUNDULA - That was a strong point, but you see the trick that you told me worked.

MALETE - Oh yes, to win a case well, let the other speak first, then in your talk twist the things around.<sup>873</sup>

The discussion between the two men exposes the sharp contrast between the two generations of politicians. Whereas the younger generation deals with facts and genuinely addresses issues of concern pertaining to their people, the older generation is interested in winning elections. Duma Ndlovu, a playwright, comments on this type of politician, that there is still a problem with some of the old guard of politicians who operate within the current structures. Ndlovu argues that there is no doubt that these individuals, with their Eurocentric mindset, still find themselves with other vested interests and are usually quick to try and sabotage any effort that seeks to empower black people.<sup>874</sup>

In a way, Mutele can be seen as dissuading young politicians from being as corrupt, deceitful and evil as the older generation. Furthermore, the fact that Gundula's own daughter rescues Gracia from his thugs, can be seen as Mutele's appeal to his audience to fight corrupt politicians regardless of how closely related they are to them. Sembene Ousmane notes that post-colonial Africa is faced with the reality of evils perpetrated by its own bourgeoisie in power, which wants to be exactly like the white bourgeoisie that it replaced. Ousmane regards the perpetrators as accomplices of imperialism in Africa that people should have the courage to denounce their practice.<sup>875</sup>

Mutele proceeds to the question of promises so often made by politicians. He warns his audience to be cautious of politicians' promises because most of the time they are lies meant to persuade the public to vote for them. Norman Fairclough notes that any political party or political tendency needs to have a social base, some section or sections of a population it can claim to represent and can look to for support; it is commonplace for parties to project this social base onto the whole population, claiming that 'the people' have the properties of their own supporters.<sup>876</sup>

Having set the stage for his protagonist, Mutele finally introduces him in a dramatic manner. Kwindu's first appearance is at a critical moment when

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<sup>873</sup> Ibid. p.3

<sup>874</sup> Duma Ndlovu, in Perkins Kathy ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.144

<sup>875</sup> Mineke Schipper, *Beyond the Boundaries*, [1989], p.140

<sup>876</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. [1989], p.183

Gundula's men have just set Gracia's shack on fire in an attempt to kill her after failing to persuade her to leave Venda. This reinforces the evil nature of Gundula and his men, that he can order the death of a woman who is carrying his own child because she stands in his way of becoming a Councillor. However, this also sheds light on the character of Kwinda, his goodness and quest for justice by coming to the rescue of Gracia.

In light of the older generation's experience and cunning tactics, Mutele advises younger politicians to have evidence to support whatever argument they have against such people in order to hold them accountable for their deeds. As a result, the audience sees Kwinda capturing one of the men Gundula sent to kill Gracia as proof that Gundula is indeed an evil and unfit to lead or represent the people. Such evidence is important since Gundula made it clear earlier that without proof nobody can hold him responsible for anything. However, even with proof Gundula still tries to deny his involvement:

GUNDULA- Why are you accusing me as if you have a 'proof' that it's me.

KWINDA- This man here said it all. I have all the evidence.<sup>877</sup>

The other burning issue Mutele explores is the use of witchcraft and the role of sangomas in society. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael admit that these phenomenon, witchcraft and sangomas, have not been dealt with adequately in class analyses.<sup>878</sup> Witchcraft and sangomas are often relied on, mainly in rural areas, especially if one wants to succeed in whatever one is doing. Mtshali also addresses this issue in *Weemen*. Those who come for consultation are often given a handful of herbs and/or dried flesh (whether be that of a bird, animal and at extreme circumstances of a human being) to bathe either every morning and/or evening, or to chew while talking to other people whom the person wants to convince or influence, especially if the person concerned is looking for something, for example work. However, in this play Mutele draws attention to the evil perpetrated by sangomas:

MALETE - Did you go to that old woman we talked about last week?

GUNDULA - Oh yes, she has strong herbs. I kept squeezing what she gave me in my pocket as Kwinda spoke.

MALETE - I was wondering why your hands were in the pockets all the time as he was talking.<sup>879</sup>

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<sup>877</sup> Lufuno Mutele, *Local Elections*, unpublished play. [1996], p.18

<sup>878</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann, *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*. [2000], p.12

<sup>879</sup> Ibid. p.4

As much as the discussion exposes how much the two are obsessed with power to the extent that they even use witchcraft to retain it, it also reveals how witchcraft works. Metaphorically, Gundula's squeezing of the muti given to him by the old woman/sangoma symbolizes the crashing of Kwindu's points as he communicates them to the gathering, thereby rendering them meaningless. It is believed that no matter how important the opponent's argument can be, the muti will make it sound senseless to the crowd. There is a belief that the muti deafens the listeners to the points made by the perpetrator's rival, while at the same time makes the crowd be excited by almost everything the perpetrator says, no matter how meaningless it can be.

Although Gundula does not say what words he was told to chant as he squeezes the muti, the perpetrator is often told to repeat certain words during the process. This method is also used when a perpetrator wants to kill an opponent. In the death ritual a perpetrator either crashes the muti or stabs a puppet continuously with a knife or a sharp object as a sign of killing, reciting the words he or she was told to recite and or calling the name of their intended victim. The same process applies when a perpetrator wants a rival to leave a given place or area which is known as "phephethela" in Sotho languages, which means drive or chase away. The latter is the method that Gundula could have been advised to employ had he approached the old woman regarding his desire to see his reluctant mistress, Gracia, leave Venda and return to Mozambique. However, often this process takes a considerable time, which, in this case, Gundula does not have.

It is clear from the kind of advice Malete gives to Gundula, that Gundula is not the only one who is deceitful, corrupt and evil but the entire old generation of politicians. In fact, most of the evil deeds done by Gundula seem to have been conceived by his advisor, Malete, and communicated to Gundula. However, towards the end of the play the audience finally comes to see Malete engaged in these evil deeds himself, following the arrest of Gundula. In order to avoid Kwindu giving evidence against Gundula that might result in Gundula implicating him, Malete orders Gundula's bodyguards to ambush and kill Kwindu. However, just like Gundula failed in his attempts to cover up his tracks, Malete fails to kill Kwindu and gets him into more trouble.

KWINDU - Things have not been well as you can see. Had it not been for those people whom you sent, I could have been dead by now.

BQ1 - Ntate Malete, we are not finished.

MALETE - I am coming back.

BQ1 - Stop him. He is running away. He sent us on behalf of Gundula to delay Kwindu.

Finally, Mutele questions the possibility of peace and harmony between different political parties in South Africa, when there is none within the individual political parties themselves. It is clear that there is a power struggle within individual political parties with members vying for top positions. Considering the extent to which these politicians can go, as indicated in this play through the character of Gundula, it is possible that politicians can even bribe or hire members of a rival party to murder their opponents within their own parties. Unfortunately, this can bring about tension between the concerned parties or even result in conflicts especially if it is found that another party is involved. This conniving and conspiring between members of political parties and different parties themselves might imply that it will take time before the country can stand united and therefore develop. Ronald Gaskell observes that the transitional moment points to the fact that where men and women must labor to get enough to eat, where the world, in fact, has still to be fought over, they have little opportunity to develop as individuals.<sup>881</sup>

Mutele's advocacy for a clean and responsible political engagement is understandable given the negative impact the unscrupulous activities of some politicians have in society. Mutele openly criticizes the misconduct of politicians. He exploits that freedom of expression which the Director of Arts and Culture, Selepe, says artists have to express themselves freely.

#### **4.11 *The Harvesting Season* - Maropodi Mapalakanye**

Maropodi Mapalakanye was an Administrator of Windybrow Theatre playhouse, playwright, poet and Master's student at the University of Witwatersrand. He died in 2003. Mapalakanye's play *The Harvesting Season* was first performed in 1998 in San Francisco in the United States America. The San Francisco International Exchange Programme, the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre and the Black Irish Club jointly organized this event. Mapalakanye directed the play. It is a story of a former political activist, Ntabeni, an exile returnee following the democratization of South Africa, who is faced with challenges of unemployment, exploitation and corruption.

Even though Ntabeni was involved in the freedom struggle, he gave himself time to study until he obtained a Teacher's diploma. On his return he is faced with many problems which influence his character. First, he cannot find a job because he obtained his education in foreign countries, especially in the

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<sup>880</sup> Ibid. p.20

<sup>881</sup> Ronald Gaskell, *Drama and Reality-the European Theatre since Ibsen*. [1972], p.27

former Eastern Block, whose education is considered inferior. Second, he finds that the democratically elected government led by blacks is not different from the apartheid system that he fought against. As a result, he finds his freedom is curtailed off to the extent that he cannot write and produce the kind of plays he would like to. Third, he is under pressure from both the government and the opposition to promote their propaganda to win them public support.

Mantwa is Ntabeni's wife. She too is unemployed and makes a living by running a *spaza* shop. Unlike some women who are impatient with their husbands if they are unemployed, she is proud and supportive of him.

Ntabeni's friend, Ace, is also a former political activist but he never went into exile. He was employed by a white company, despite his hard work and 22 years of service, including being sent to Switzerland for further training, he was never promoted. Instead, he was fired when it was finally discovered that he was on the executive committee of a workers' union. He has not found work since then due to his involvement with unions. This compelled him to make a living by scrambling for whatever he finds useful at dumping areas.

Tsoke is a former party colleague of Ntabeni. His party is now an official opposition in the free South Africa. He is both bitter and disappointed that his party did not win the general elections. He is manipulative. The other two characters, Poony and Mokibela, are members of the Cabinet. They too are manipulative in their quest to stay in power.

As implied by the title, Maropodi Mapalakanye perceives the democratization of South Africa as a "harvesting" period following the decades of freedom struggle. He is of the opinion that the black majority and other people of color, without excluding those whites who were on the same side with them, expect to benefit for their efforts and sacrifices to bring about democracy in South Africa. On the contrary, he observes that there is widespread dissatisfaction and disappointment amongst many, especially former freedom fighters with regard to what they get in return for their effort. To show the seriousness of the situation, Mapalakanye's first scene, which undoubtedly sets the tone of the entire play, is of a child:

A shabbily dressed teenage girl is at play...putting a stone into a circle and naming it Mme-Mologadi, some in another circle naming them Donatella and Mme-Mpundulu. She gets hold of the stone that she named Mme-Mologadi and...then begins tapping the stone lightly on the ground, singing Mologadi's song. The stone representing Donatella interrupts the song. Later on the one representing Mme-Mpundulu will join in the conflict that ensues.<sup>882</sup>

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<sup>882</sup> Maropodi Mapalakanye, *The Harvesting Season*, unpublished play. [1998], pp.1,2

Like theatre, children's games are often reflective of their experiences and their community. Therefore, there is a possibility that the three stones represent people the girl knows and the scene that is to follow involving the three women is something that she witnessed. The other aspect worth noting is that the song that Mologadi sings is a mockery to the husbands of the other two women, Donatella and Mpundulu. This is something common in black communities, especially in rural areas to find someone singing songs indirectly insulting others yet denying the concerned evidence, but because the concerned know they are targets. This often results in confrontation:

DONATELLA - Mme-Mologadi, Mme-Mologadi, don't insult our husbands with your filthy songs...

MPUNDULU - "Ja, man," Don' tell this Mologadi savage that we're tired of her savage songs.

MOLOGADI - Ah, oh! Mme-Mpundulu, you call me a savage?

MPUNDULU - Of course you are Mologadi, you're jealous.

MOLOGADI - Now this is going far. Jealous of what, you swine?

MPUNDULU - Jealous of the progress our husbands are making in the government. You're jealous of Donatella because her husband is a Mayor...and you're jealous of me because mine is a Councillor.

MOLOGADI - "Ag, sies", Puu! [spits] You lie Mme-Mpundulu.

DONATELLA - Of course you're jealous. Your husband is a dismal failure.

MPUNDULU - "Huu, shame", your husband was left behind because he is a fool.<sup>883</sup>

Based on the confrontation between his characters, it can be contested that Mapakalanye believes that a lot of people had high expectations after freedom was achieved. Undoubtedly, many were expecting to get high positions in the government given their contribution to the liberation struggle. However, it appears as though not everybody got what they wanted or expected and others got nothing. As a result, there is widespread discontent and bitterness amongst many to the extent that even children are aware of it.

The rate of crime and violence in the country is another issue Mapalakanye addresses in this play. He regrets that the chosen few who are enjoying the fruits of democracy in South Africa abandoned the townships and ran to the suburbs as soon as they got their share (accumulate wealth from political connections) to escape from violence and crime which as government they are supposed to fight. Like Sekhabi and Grootboom in *Not with my Gun*, he observes that the contributing factor is the availability of weapons. However, he

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<sup>883</sup> Ibid. pp. 2,3



acknowledges the call made by the government to former freedom fighters to surrender their weapons and be incorporated into the South African Army. Furthermore, the government's effort to buy guns, especially illegal ones, from the public to reduce the availability of weapons. As much as this was meant to reduce crime and violence, Mapalakyane regrets that the disarmed former freedom fighters have become targets of thieves and hooligans from whom they cannot defend themselves, their families and/or neighbors against.<sup>884</sup> He is of the opinion that many communities have lost trust in the police so much that they turn to the former freedom fighters to protect them from criminals the same way freedom fighters liberated them from the apartheid system. However, with the former freedom fighters having surrendered their weapons, they are helpless. Consequently, some communities are disappointed and angry with them because the government fails to protect them. In addition, despite the obedience and patience, which the former freedom fighters and activists had shown, Mapalakyane observes that the government has neglected them:

NTABENI - Okay about that, Bra Ace. I mean how do you survive?

ACE - How do I survive? I'm a scavenger bird. Go to any rubbish dump, you'll see it written "Ace Company Property Limited". That's Black empowerment for me. Black Power.

NTABENI - You're joking again.

ACE - I'm not joking, I collect and sell used up cans of beer and soft drinks. I collect unwanted bath tubs and water urns, patch them and sell them around the slums. My wife scavenges scrap plastic materials from the dumps, to make carrier bags and sell them to shoppers in town. She also sells bread quarters to kids. On Sundays I go to the train station and ask for tickets ending on the day, then sell them to those who want to buy return tickets. Call it some kind of syndicate or my type of corruption, because I have some arrangement with the ticket seller to refer those wanting tickets to me. In the mornings I sell newspapers. That way my children cannot go hungry.<sup>885</sup>

Through these characters, Mapalakyane appears to be mocking Black Empowerment Equity (BEE), which has come under sharp criticism with many claiming that it seems to be empowering black middle class and neglecting the poor masses. Consequently, BEE is widening the gap between the poor masses and the *petit-bourgeois*. Cliff Slaughter argues, in this regard, that however great the political rights won by the working class under capitalism, the power of

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<sup>884</sup> Ibid. p.6

<sup>885</sup> Ibid. p.12

private property and the capitalist state meant that capitalism always remained a dictatorship of the bourgeois.<sup>886</sup>

Whereas some former freedom fighters and political activists like Ace have been permanently pushed out of the labour market, others like Ntabeni who are returning from exile seem to have a problem when it comes to being integrated back into post-apartheid South African society. Mapalakanye seems to be of the opinion that there is resistance when it comes to accepting the returning exiles especially if they obtained their qualification overseas.<sup>887</sup> The question of South African exiles being discriminated against, because they obtained their certificates in Eastern Block countries is probably raised due to the treatment of South Africans who studied medicine in countries like Cuba. Most of these doctors were subjected to rigorous tests while those from Western countries were not. This caused an outcry from both doctors and the countries they studied in because it was seen as discrimination not based on facts.

Mapalakanye also explores the retrenchment of teachers on the basis that there are too many of them. He argues that on the contrary there are few teachers as compared to the number of pupils:

MANTWA - But, aren't we a special nation in Africa? Too many teachers, they say.

ACE - Really? Lies. It's all lies. Over supply of teachers, lies. How can it be when our children are overcrowded in classrooms. Go to the rural areas right now, you'll find up to a hundred children spilling out of a classroom, straining their necks to catch at least a word from the struggling teacher in front of them. Teachers are overworked. Many have to teach up to three subjects at a time. In most cases they are forced to teach even subjects that they did not do in their training. Ous Mantwa, I'm telling you, many of our children have to go for up to a year without teachers for certain subjects.<sup>888</sup>

Mapalakanye sees a direct relationship between shortage of teachers and poor results, especially at the Matric (final year in high school) level. He observes that even though those in authority are responsible for this chaos in schools, they refuse to take the blame when students perform poorly in exams.<sup>889</sup> For this reason, he thinks that the situation makes teachers lose interest in the profession. It even discourages those who were hoping to pursue teaching as a profession. He observes that even people in other professions are aware of the plight of

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<sup>886</sup> Cliff Slaughter, *Marx and Marxism*, [1995], p.72

<sup>887</sup> Maropodi Mapalakanye, *The Harvesting Season*, unpublished play. [1998], p.18

<sup>888</sup> Ibid. pp.13,14

<sup>889</sup> Ibid. p.16

teachers to the extent that they lure the stranded teachers into their respective professions:

ACE - Attention! Teachers! Teachers! Three thousand teachers wanted. A chance to make a half a million a month or more. Unqualified success. All our teachers strike it rich. Be an instant success. No experience necessary. Become a happy life insurance agent. Sell the best policies ever. If you're one of the many unemployed teachers, stop brooding and snatch a chance to life. Join the insurance world. Get a chance of life. Phone now.

NTABENI - Well?

ACE - What's this?

NTABENI - It means change your profession. Sell policies from door to door. In essence, depend on luck, because you earn on commission.

ACE - Is this all that's on for teachers daily?

MANTWA - For African teachers, yes.

ACE - But aren't we supposed to be a free country? Equal opportunities and all that rigmarole stuff? What is this government doing about it?

NTABENI - Condemnation and threat for the "Kaffir" teacher.<sup>890</sup>

It is apparent from the exchange between the two that people in other professions are not trying to win over the stranded teachers to ease the situation, nor is it a remedy for the unemployed teachers. Instead these people see an opportunity to boost their professions at the expense of teaching as a profession and the teachers themselves. In other words, it is further exploitation of black teachers. This makes Mapalakanye regret that this profession, which was idealized as an ultimate goal for blacks over the years under the apartheid system, is now being ridiculed. He argues that even though it is claimed that there are no posts available for teachers, it is simply to discourage people, especially blacks from the profession, while creating opportunities for white teachers.<sup>891</sup> He portrays a situation whereby the majority of blacks are still marginalized in the same way as they were under apartheid. He thinks that nothing has changed as far as blacks are concerned except the leadership. In an interview with, Vicki Robison, Poopy Buthelezi, veteran of the June 1976 uprising, laments:

Our leaders in exile used to send us messages. They told us that when they come back they would do one, two and three for us. But when they did come back, they jumped on gravy train and forgot about us. They

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<sup>890</sup> Ibid. p.16

<sup>891</sup> Ibid. p.17

never bother to meet us. We were no longer brothers and sisters who fought hand-in-hand.<sup>892</sup>

Similarly, Janine Stephen reports that many ex-combatants who fought in liberation armies such as Umkhondo we Sizwe (MK) and Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) are unemployed, some suffer from psychological problems, and they feel left out of the new South Africa. "We were living under terrible situations during the apartheid regime, but now this is a new regime (and) yet our people are regarded as useless," said a former MK cadre.<sup>893</sup> Likewise, Frank Nxumalo, a journalist, argues:

The question that refuses to go away, the question that should have redeemed the BEE process and restored its credibility in the eyes of millions of blacks, is the very question that is now surely causing much discomfort to the nation's economic stewards. The BEE process now is one in which Saki Macozoma, Cyril Ramaphosa, Patrice Matsepe and politician-turned millionaire Tokyo Sexwale, among others, practically week-in and week-out are unveiled as the black business partners in multibillion-rands deals with large, listed South African companies and allocated shares worth millions of rands to add to their personal fortunes.<sup>894</sup>

Nxumalo wonders why it has never crossed the minds of white executives at major institutions such as Standard Bank, ABSA Bank, Sanlam, Harmony and Anglo American that their money would be better spent if invested in poor schools and feeding schemes in Soweto, Langa, Cape Flats, KwaMashu, Eastern Cape, Seshogo and other poor black areas.<sup>895</sup> Similarly, John McGrath argues that the most vaunted attribute of democracy is that it means equality for all. Yet everywhere one sees inequalities; not only before the law, but inequalities of gender, age, influence, access to power, opportunity, even of life expectancy. Then there are the major inequalities between rich and poor, within the society and globally bolstered by birth, education and social contacts.<sup>896</sup> Likewise, Richard Lapper notes that South Africa is able to offer jobs to only about 40 percent of its population. Lapper argues that although apartheid with its bizarre and dysfunctional Pass Laws and terrible education policies bears a heavy responsibility, things have actually got worse over the 16 years since it ended.<sup>897</sup>

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<sup>892</sup> Vicki Robison, "Our Leaders forgot us". *Mail & Guardian*, October 10-16. [2003], p.12

<sup>893</sup> Janine Stephen, "Bill might turn Liberators' luck". *ThisDay* Monday August 9. [2004], p.5

<sup>894</sup> Frank Nxumalo, "BEE isn't working". *ThisDay* Thursday August 12. [2004], p.16

<sup>895</sup> *Ibid.* p.16

<sup>896</sup> John McGrath, "Theatre and Democracy". *New Theatre Quarterly*, May. [2002], p.136

<sup>897</sup> Richard Lapper, "South Africa wakes up to reality after euphoria of World Cup", *Financial Times*, Thursday July 22. [2010], p.2

This probably explains the numerous service delivery protests by blacks across the country.

Having addressed the plight of both former freedom fighters, political activists and teachers, Mapalakyane turns to the abundance within which the chosen few blacks live in just like whites especially under apartheid:

POONY - Yes, it's Minister of Arts and Culture speaking. Yes, my darling daughter, It's your dad, the minister...you'll get your teddy bear. Where's Mommy? Yes darling. Oh come on. Don't worry yourself about grilled lamp chops, fillet steaks and some such fancy stuff. Just make it goulash with porridge. Ha, ha, ha, of course I wanna be African today. But the stuff goes well with Jack Daniels though.<sup>898</sup>

Apart from the comfort and luxury that the chosen few live in as evidenced by Poony's phone conversation, Mapalakyane demonstrates how some blacks can be obsessed with their titles. In fact, it seems as though they are more interested in showing off their titles and/or being admired rather than serving the public they are supposed to. Even though the notion of obsession with titles is apparent, one sees a sharp contrast between the two Ministers, whereas Poony uses his title and position to impress his family, Mokibela, on the other hand employs his position mischievously:

MOKIBELA - What do you mean I must come home early, woman? Can't you see I'm with important people here? What? It's the Honourable Minister of Arts and Culture and a "skepsel" from the bush...What? I don't care whether you are begging me or not girls friends? Hey, look here whether I'm with girls now or I go to them from here it's none of your business. What do you think I am? A skepsel warming his feet with cow dung out in the bundus? Look, I'm now the Minister Forests, Parks, Museums and Tourism. If I can afford it, I don't hesitate to get it. What? You're running mad. My secretaries are sexy and taste far better than you, crocodile. Sometimes I regret why you're my wife. Get that straight in your head. Wha...hello, hello, no more outings for you country sheep, I'm telling you.<sup>899</sup>

Of the many issues raised, those which stand out in Mokibela's phone exchange with his wife is the way former freedom fighters are insulted and ridiculed by those in power possibly because they are poor, and as a result lack economical muscle either to influence or make their voices heard. There is also the question of women abuse, Mapalakyane shows that the abuse of women is so rife that

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<sup>898</sup> Maropodi Mapalakyane, *The Harvesting Season*. unpublished play. [1998], p.21

<sup>899</sup> Ibid. p.22

even members of the Cabinet are perpetrators, the very people who are supposed to observe and protect the rights of public. Furthermore, like Mutele in *Local Elections*, he demonstrates how immoral and abusive people in influential positions can be and fail to live exemplary life expected of them as members of Cabinet.

From the abuse of women, Mapalakyane shifts to the abuse of artists. The audience sees members of the government, Poony and Mokibela, and that of the opposition, Tsoke, approach Ntabeni. This hassle is caused by the fact that Ntabeni is a well-known artist, playwright and poet, which could make him their good mouthpiece. As a result, the two Ministers want to use him to spread government propaganda in order to win the public support and continue to cling to power:

NTABENI - In essence I become head of your propaganda unit?

POONY - Not exactly, but people need to be taught to appreciate. You have a role, comrade. You can help us in many ways.

MOKIBELA - Of course, my brother, like singing freedom songs and reciting poems in the president's tribal language when the presidential plane touches the ground from overseas. In fact, in the long run you'll train our poets to do the same for each of our ministers at the airport, using the honorable Minister's tribal language. We want the world to feel the real African heat. Help us, brother.<sup>900</sup>

There are a couple of issues raised in this dialogue; first, it is worth noting that the two Ministers are not concerned about the public and its interests but building their own image, which will help them stay in power. This is an issue that Mutele addresses in his play *Local Elections*. Second, the fact that Ntabeni refuses the offer from the two Ministers can be seen as Mapalakyane's appeal to artists to resist any temptation that they may be put through in order to retain their independence:

As oppression increased, reactions tended to one extreme or the other: to be silent or to make clear statement. Those in power have always realized this, of course. As a result, there have often been two forms of a single theatrical tradition: one for the elite, the other for the common people. Even then, the elite cunningly managed to absorb the popular version within its own system and thus silence or put it under the threat of censorship. The effects were the same: either the theatre went underground or new form came in being. Resistance did not die, and the theatre continued to voice genuinely popular indignation.<sup>901</sup>

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<sup>900</sup> Ibid. pp. 22,23,36

<sup>901</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989] ,p.165

The fact that Poony and Mokibela are members of the Cabinet means they have access to the coffers of the government, which they can use do whatever they want and even including bribe people. As a result, in order to win Ntabeni to their side, Poony and Mokibela entice him with money in what appears as Mapakalanye's tackling of the question of corruption, which is rife in South Africa:

POONY - By the way, forget about this teaching thing. It'll only pay you peanuts. You deserve better. It's high time you get your own car...Hey, it's money we're talking about here.

NTABENI - It doesn't matter.

POONY - 14.7 million bucks?

ACE AND MANTWA - What? For just a play?

POONY - Exactly...It's all yours, comrade. All you have to do is sign.<sup>902</sup>

Just like the issue of the retrenchment of teachers in South Africa being a fact, the R14.7 million figure is likely to refer to the money which Mbongeni Ngema allegedly received from the Department of Health Minister, Dr. Nkosatsana Zuma, for the production of *Sarafina 2*, a play about AIDS. By making this direct reference to real events, Mapakalanye shows how wasteful the government can be while the people who put it power still languish in poverty. Apart from that, the fact that Poony says that teachers are paid "peanuts" indicates that the government is aware of the plight of teachers but ignores it deliberately. This implies that it is not by accident that teachers are unemployed or poorly paid, it is intentional since they are not regarded as of no importance.

Whereas members of the government want to abuse Ntabeni to cling to power, Tsoke and his opposition party tries to win Ntabeni over to use him to win elections:

TSOKE - Yes, robbed and this and that. In fact, comrade Ntabeni, the politburo have sent me to talk to you about your role in the coming local election campaign.

NTABENI - How about helping me get a job before making me sing praises to you?

TSOKE - What job?

NTABENI - Any. Like cleaning your desk or doing your garden. So that I can be a man like you and look after my family.

TSOKE - That is noted, comrade. We must put this party right. The burning issue at the moment is the local elections. Comrade Ntabeni,

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<sup>902</sup> Maropodi Mapakalanye, *The Harvesting Season*. unpublished play. [1998], p.36

praise poems. The politburo will give me the list of all our candidates and I'll deliver them to you very shortly. Poems, comrade, poems. The ruling clowns must feel the heat.<sup>903</sup>

Tsoke is obviously not concerned about the well being of Ntabeni just like the two Ministers. All Tsoke wants is to use Ntabeni's artistic talent to boost his party's image in the run up to the local elections, especially after losing the general elections. From Mantwa's exclamation and Tsoke's response, it is clear that Tsoke has been to Ntabeni's house many times trying to convince Ntabeni to rejoin the party, but disregarding his interests such as finding a job. However, from Ntabeni's response his concern is to rebuild his own life and to be in a position to look after his family like any other man.

The interesting element in this scene is that whereas the previous government tried to silence artists, Mapakalanye is of the opinion that there are some politicians in the democratic South Africa who too abuse artists for their own interests. This is what Mda also addresses in his play *You Fool How can the Sky Fall?* Despite all the temptations he is put through by both the government and the opposition, Ntabeni does not join either of the two parties. Instead, he retains his independence to be in a position to employ his art to dramatize his society in a democratic South Africa as he did under apartheid. This means tackling whatever issues of concern to the public whether exposing the evils committed by the government or the opposition:

NTABENI - Poony, for centuries this continent, Africa, has seen patience become the convenience of theft, nepotism, tyranny and mass murder. The root of all these things is embedded in our blind praise for inept and despotic cliques and their masters. Each time we celebrate the lie called freedom, the root spreads and digs deep in. And you ask me to be patient at the time fraud and slavery are wreaking havoc in my continent. At the time I'm a victim of famine, epidemic and strife. My friend, hunger and disease know no reason nor postponement. If they are not dealt with, they kill their victim. And you say I must be patient? When will the nepotism, despot and plunderer stop their trades in Africa? Why can't they be patient as well and watch humanity thrives without hindrance?

POONY - So you are still stubborn. You're not going to write even one play in the Government's favour?<sup>904</sup>

It is clear from Ntabeni's outburst that he has seen too much evil perpetrated in the name of political parties and freedom. Furthermore, governments and

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<sup>903</sup> Ibid. pp.24,31

<sup>904</sup> Ibid. pp.47,48



oppositions are often thought to be archrivals, but he is of the opinion that there is no difference between the two, both are deceitful, interested only in power and their personal gains. Consequently, he is determined to fight this through his art. However, just like under the apartheid system, his persistence annoys the government:

POONY - Bloody fool! Frightening our investors off.

NTABENI - It's a good job you're doing for your investors. You know, sometimes I wonder why is it that we, the Africans, defend these friends of ours with such passion. At times to a level of literally exterminating the whole people. Our own people for that matter.

POONY - The thing is beyond redemption. Take him in, we have had more than enough of your lectures.

TSOKE - Had he tried anything, I would have blown his head to pieces with this rifle. I had it on his forehead all the time.<sup>905</sup>

Ntabeni's experience at the hands of both the government and the opposition seems to be similar to that of Jesus after his arrest. Herod and Pilate were not known to be friends but Jesus was of common interest to both due to his teachings and miracles he performed which affected the status quo of the time. Consequently Herod and Pilate overlooked their differences in the face of this common threat.<sup>906</sup> Similarly, Ntabeni's criticising of both the government and opposition turns him into a common enemy to both. In a way, Mapalakyane shows that even the worst enemies can resolve their difference if they need to protect their interests. He also demonstrates that even though politicians often make their followers believe that their different parties are rivals, they do not make their parties know that as individuals they are not.

To demonstrate the silencing of artists, Mapalakyane's protagonist is locked up in a glass box where he can be seen but not heard. It can be concluded that through this silencing, Mapalakyane argues that the reason why those in positions of power dislike artists is due to the fact that they are afraid artists will expose their misconduct including their corruption. This reminds one of the hotly debated Media Tribunal proposed by the government, which is seen by many as a tool to cover up corrupt activities by those in position of power.

PRESENTER - From the capital city, Dr Freedom Nkwana, our Minister of Defence has issued a strong warning to those who think they are special just because they fought in the war for freedom.

MINISTER - If money is stolen what do they expect us to do? They are used by the agents of the Dead white regime to bring back oppression

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<sup>905</sup> Ibid. p.47

<sup>906</sup> Luke 23:6-12

by insulting government. My last word is “Continue making noise with cries, and we will meet you with full might of the state. We cannot tolerate people crying about things that they must forget.”<sup>907</sup>

The exchange between the two shows that former freedom fighters and political activists continue to suffer because of their demanding what they deserve yet denied them by those in positions of power. If they ask questions they are likely to be victimized or accused of being elements of the past apartheid regime to discredit black led democratic government. However, Mapalakyane observes that even though some governments can be ruthless with their people, they behave like puppets before the countries of the West to the extent that they would do anything to please them:

PRESENTER - On a lighter note, our president, the honourable Dr Setlapedi Gwedini, will visit the British Queen at the Great Royal Palace in England to stimulate investment for our new democracy. He will also meet businessmen who intend investing in his family's gold mine but need to be assured of their profits. Fifty of our best musicians and poets will be accompanying the president with their bands. Whilst there, the troupe will play their latest music and poetry for the British people to see for themselves what a happy European democracy we have become right inside the African jungle. As for now, Cable News Network brings us the President jiving live for the Queen in the royal palace.<sup>908</sup>

Most of the issues Mapalakyane deals with in *The Harvesting Season* are things that happened and were reported in the media in South Africa provoking hostile reaction from the public and the opposition parties. As a result the play can be seen as bits and pieces of real events on which he is commenting upon as a playwright, hence why it is important to have his character interpreting his views. John McGrath holds in this regard that the role of a public theatre in the process of socialization is clearly vital. McGrath believes theatre dedicated to a critical challenge to its society can play a much important role in the creation of a genuine theatre.<sup>909</sup>

Mapalakyane is of the opinion that people who struggled and sacrificed both their time and lives for freedom in South Africa are not getting either the respect or reward which they deserve instead they are humiliated and subjected to further oppression to silence them. Meanwhile, those who did little or nothing to bring about democracy appear to have inherited almost everything and are

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<sup>907</sup> Maropodi Mapalakyane, *The Harvesting Season*, unpublished play. [1998], p.27

<sup>908</sup> Ibid. pp.27,28

<sup>909</sup> John McGrath, “Theatre and Democracy”. *New Theatre Quarterly*, May. [2002], p.136

using their positions to enrich themselves. He believes that these chosen few are ready to use force whenever threatened, as the previous apartheid regime did. Lawrence Schlemmer comments on the new democracy in South Africa:

The quality of our democracy in the future will depend as much on the intellectual independence and objectivity we maintain in the transition as on the success in overcoming the dying tradition of minority control. From now on the critical challenge will be to resist attempts to use the rhetoric of democracy to protect the power interests of some of the parties in the struggle. Black South Africans were never fooled by the rhetoric of separate freedoms and apartheid. They should be equally vigilant as regards the rhetoric of democratic solidarity.<sup>910</sup>

Maropodi's play with its hard-hitting tone, tackles some of the issues that plague the South African. This is made even so by the fact that most of these issues that he addresses in the play are based on real incidents in South Africa. As a result, he appears as though commenting upon them to remind the public of what is happening. Kees Espkamp states that this implies that popular theatre has never ceased to be a means to increase awareness and that popular resistance has stimulated new forms of theatre. He notes that popular theatre also gives a notion that the only historical context in which the theatre can be considered is one of conjecture and not structural one. Dependent on the times and on the degree of oppression, popular theatre can assume its role as a mouthpiece of resistance.<sup>911</sup> The same can be said about Black Theatre in South Africa, especially in light of the discussed plays, which indicate that despite the fact there is now democracy in South Africa, there are numerous issues affecting the black majority that need to be tackled.

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<sup>910</sup> Schlemmer, Lawrence "What Next" in South Africa Institute of Race Relations ed., *Beating Apartheid and Building the Future*. [1990], p.85

<sup>911</sup> Kees Espkamp, *Theatre in search of Social Change*. [1989], p.165

## Conclusion

The democratization of South Africa has brought about a dramatic change not only in the subject matter that South African black playwrights address but also in attitude towards Black Theatre. This change in attitude is evident in various sectors of society including the two institutions that had an enormous influence on it; the state and the institutions of dramatic art. Whereas the apartheid system tried by all means to thwart Black Theatre, the new and democratically elected government seems to be committed to the development not only of Black Theatre but arts in general. Above all, the state provides financial assistance to promote arts including scholarships to people who want to pursue further studies in this area, regardless of their color, race or gender. Furthermore, the state makes funding available for infrastructure, especially in the black communities marginalized under apartheid. It also supports arts festivals and productions without dictating the nature of projects.

Similarly, there is a significant change in attitude from institutions of higher learning, especially those that used to be exclusively white. These institutions are now opening doors to all South Africans and empower blacks to become competent in arts related fields including theatre. However, black institutions of dramatic art appear determined to continue with their objectives as they were under apartheid. The argument of these institutions is that the sudden political change does not mean that blacks are all of a sudden equal to whites in terms of education, competence and economy. As a result, they perceive this challenge as a call for intensive training of blacks to be as competent as their white counterparts. Nevertheless, this by itself is a change, since the main objective is for these artists to be competent in the labour market, rather than to put them in a position to tackle politically related issues, as it was common in the past. David Kerr notes that the major change is the end of the polarized cultural field that had existed before 1990 between government backed apartheid culture on the one hand and popular nationalist culture of resistance on the other. Kerr argues that the legalization of banned organizations marked the virtual end of exile theatre as well as the cultural boycott. According to him, the objective is primarily to reduce the need for a theatre of strident radical rhetoric, which had been initiated in the early 1970s and renewed after the State of Emergency in 1985.<sup>912</sup>

The impact of the dramatic change due to the democratization of South Africa is apparent in the issues addressed by South African black playwrights in their plays. The plays are no longer homogenous, that is, they no longer focus solely on politically related issues pertaining to the oppression and heartbreaking life conditions of the black majority as it was often the case under apartheid.

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<sup>912</sup> David Kerr, *Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial to the Present Day*. [1995], p.236

There is a new wide range of topics addressed as reflected in the plays discussed in both Chapter Three and Chapter Four. This thematic change in the issues black playwrights address has an influence on the nature of Black Theatre. Piniel Shava writes how Mongane Serote stated such an inescapable link between black theatre and political context:

When asked what direction black South African poets would take in the 1980s, Mongane Serote answered "What direction does the liberation struggle take in the 1980s? That is the direction of the black South African poet."<sup>913</sup>

Piniel Shava argues that besides demonstrating that black writing is seen as part of the struggle for freedom, Serote's response implies that protest in black writing varies from period to period depending on the shift in the political landscape. Shava believes that Serote's committed attitude may also be applicable to prose writers and playwrights.<sup>914</sup> It can be argued that Serote's assertion has been proven by the plays discussed in this dissertation.

As much as there is notable change in the issues tackled by Black Theatre practitioners, the issues vary from playwright to playwright. Nevertheless, some similarities based on age and gender of the playwrights can be detected. Based on the plays discussed above, it seems as though young South African black playwrights are more concerned with economic and social issues that affect the majority of black South Africans. At the top of this list of concerns are unemployment, crime and violence that have become synonymous with the South African life, if they have not become the way of life. However, they indicate how these issues are linked with or brought about by the apartheid system to demonstrate the manner in which the past is related to and affects the present. As much as some of these playwrights take the trouble to acknowledge the fact that the apartheid system is to blame for the current situation, they are of the opinion that the democratically elected government should do more to alleviate the suffering of blacks as it promised and continue to. The older generation, on the other hand, tends to review the past with reference to the present as though to question if there is any change as the oppressed black masses expected in a democratic South Africa.

With regard to theatrical presentation, most of these plays do not have complex requirements, leaving them open for interpretation by directors. This is understandable given the economical position of black theatre practitioners in South Africa. Edward Braun remarks in this regard:

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<sup>913</sup> Piniel Shava, *A People's Voice*. [1989], p.146

<sup>914</sup> *Ibid.* p.146

The author's stage directions are determined by the technical limitation of the theatre of the period when the play was written. Once the director has grasped the play's inner dialogue, he can interpret freely, using the rhythm of the dialogue and the placidity of the actor, and heeding only those stage directions which were not dictated by technical expediency.<sup>915</sup>

The reason for this tendency of excluding theatrical is that most South African black playwrights write and direct their plays. Furthermore, since most of these playwrights are not professionals, they are never sure whether they will secure any funding to produce their plays. As a result, they avoid dictating theatrical presentation which might be a challenge to the majority of black theatre practitioners.

### 5.1 Older generation

Chinua Achebe argues that owing to the situation Africans found themselves in, it would be futile for Africans to try to start a new life without first having repaired their damaged foundation. Achebe explains that this is what Aimé Césaire means when he says that the short cut to the future is via the past.<sup>916</sup> This is what one observes in the discussed plays by the older generation of black playwrights. David Kerr observes what unfolded within Black Theatre circles following the abolishment of apartheid:

As the exile returned to South Africa, and the machinery of apartheid became dismantled, the opportunity for such strategic community theatre increased. It was no longer a time for generalized consciousness-raising, but for grappling with a host of complex, localized political, economical, social and psychological problems, and to link those to the broader strategic struggle to replace the authoritarian structures of control with those of democracy.<sup>917</sup>

The older generation's linking the present with the past is clearly demonstrated in Zakes Mda's play *You Fool How Can the Sky Fall?* The play is set in both eras of South African political history, that is, under apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Moreover, the older generation also refers to the history and social

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<sup>915</sup> Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*. [1969], p.63

<sup>916</sup> Melissa Thackway, *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspectives in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film*. [2003], p.38

<sup>917</sup> David Kerr, *Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial to the Present Day*. [1995], pp.236,237

life of different ethnic groups before or during the arrival and invasion of Europeans. The narrative structure of this play enables Mad's audience to review the past in order to judge or evaluate the present government under black leadership. His other play, *Love Letters*, is not that different either. Even though it is more about the Zulu culture, Mda revisits the past based on how it is known by blacks as compared to the way it is claimed to be by some white people in their writings.

Like Mda, Walter Chakela deals with the importance of upholding one's culture in his play *The Wrath of the Gods*. As though to discourage Africans romanticizing western values, Chakela dramatizes the aggression of the white settlers against natives and subsequent victimization in the early days after the settlers' arrival. However, he seems to argue that despite the natives being poorly armed as opposed to the white settlers' modern weapons, the natives managed to defend themselves. In a way he appears to be of the opinion that what is important is conviction, not power per se. His other play, *Isithukuthuku*, has some scenes set under apartheid which are juxtaposed with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission sessions. This enables him to demonstrate the hardship blacks went through and the sacrifice they made in the name of reconciliation in what appears a questioning of the treatment of the black masses by blacks in positions of power in a democratic South Africa.

Maishe Maponya's plays, *Letta* and *A Song for Biko*, are a tribute to two individuals, namely Letta Mbulu and Steve Biko, and are set under apartheid. Maponya takes his audience through the experiences the two went through to demonstrate how much they had sacrificed in the name of freedom. Similarly, Mbongeni Ngema's *Maria Maria* and *Magic at 4AM* are a tribute to both Steve Biko and another great leader of the past, Shaka. Even though Ngema calls for forgiveness in the name of reconciliation, he seems to warn his audience of what he sees as conspiracy against blacks perpetrated by white extremists using other blacks.

Fatima Dike's work in post-apartheid South Africa is different from the four male playwrights. Even though her play, *So, What's New?* is set under apartheid, it deals with women's issues such as unemployment, exploitation and the role women played during the struggle for freedom, especially keeping the black family going. Consequently, all her characters are women, as though denying men voice. Despite the fact that she has male characters in her other play, *AIDS: The New Generation*, the play focuses on women and HIV/AIDS. She gives advice to women who are HIV positive or those living with AIDS regarding measures to take, especially if they are pregnant or still wish to have children.

The interesting thing about this older generation of black South African playwrights is that there is no advocacy for militancy as they used to under apartheid, but a restrained protest and critical approach to current issues and

teachings from the past. What these playwrights seem to do is to acknowledge the past in relation to the present. Furthermore, they either pay tribute to those who sacrificed their time and lives in the name of freedom or warn the audience to be on the look out lest South Africa slips back into the situation it was during the apartheid era, but this time with blacks as the perpetrators. The plays of the older generation as well as the way they are received stand in sharp contrast to Kaizer Nyantsumba's view: "

What does the future hold for South African artists? In so far as writers are concerned, my view is that unless they radically change direction and outgrow their obsession with apartheid as the content of their writing, their works face the risk of being forgotten in future.<sup>918</sup>

Nyantsumba argues that with the changing political situation in the country, those black South

African playwrights who thrived on apartheid-based plays are not likely to find a ready audience abroad anymore, especially Europe. He believes that the West in the future will cease to be generous with its awards simply to make a statement against apartheid and express solidarity with the victims of the system. He argues that only the die-hard anti-apartheid activists will not let go of an opportunity to demonstrate their solidarity with the victims of apartheid.<sup>919</sup> Nyantsumba writes:

For too long South African art, ranging from literature and drama through music, has thrived on apartheid for its recognition and relevance.<sup>920</sup>

Nevertheless, when it come to the question of drying up of funds from overseas due to the end of apartheid in South Africa, the effect is already taking its toll. This is evidenced by financial problems faced by dramatic institutions such as FUBA as Vundla observed earlier.

## 5.2 Younger generation

The radical change that Nyantsumba refers to can be seen in the works of the young generation of South African black playwrights. Although there is reference to apartheid, its effect and influence on the current state of affairs in South Africa, most of the plays focus mainly on contemporary issues. Again, the

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<sup>918</sup> Kaizer Nyantsumba, "Art Against Apartheid" in South African Institute of Race Relations ed., *Beating Apartheid and Building the Future*. [1990], p.74

<sup>919</sup> Ibid. p.75

<sup>920</sup> Ibid. p.73



issues vary from playwright to playwright, and to some extent they are influenced by the individual playwright's background and gender. However, what is clear is that politics are no longer the main theme in the way it used to be under apartheid. Apartheid politics are replaced by social and economic issues, which appear to be of more concern to the majority of the people. Nonetheless, there is some similarity in the characters of some of the plays as those written in the past such as gangsters and shebeen queens. This is understandable since the focus is on the black masses and mainly reflects life in South African townships.

However, just like it is the case for the older generation, the young generation of South African black playwrights is divided into two categories based on issues they find to be of major concern. The issues that South African black female playwrights address tend to be more intimate and centered around relationships; love, romance, marriage and the like. However, they also deal with issues concerning women's rights, abuse and a need for women's emancipation. Emly Tseu's play, *The Pain*, focuses on relationships amongst blacks. Although it stresses that much of the time men are at fault, Tseu also blames women for failing to communicate effectively and make their needs and desires clear to their partners. Even though Tseu has no male character as such, she indirectly tries to make her male audience aware of its mistakes in the hope that they will rectify them. However, by having no male characters, Tseu refuses or fails to encourage face-to-face dialogue between men and women on this issue. This is rather ironic since she seems to consider lack of communication between both sexes as the root of the problem in many relationships.

Whereas Tseu deals with relationships, Magi Williams is more concerned about the rights of women. In her play, *Kwa-Landlady*, Williams confronts the abuse and exploitation of women by almost everybody men, employers and even other women. What is interesting is that whereas most people in South Africa call for repatriation of illegal immigrants, Williams does not only defend them but also calls for their protection against exploitation and abuse. She discourages discrimination against women regardless of their origin. In fact, she calls for unity amongst women so that they can be in a position to fight the evils perpetrated against them, be they physical abuse, sexual or labour exploitation. She sees a need for universal cooperation to help and liberate women.

Interestingly, not only black women playwrights address women's issues in their plays. Men like Thulani Mtshali share a similar view with Williams. In his play, *Weemen*, he focuses exclusively on the abuse of black women by their husbands. However, unlike Tseu who has one of her characters divorce her husband due to discontent or an unhappy marriage, Mtshali's protagonist endures her suffering, but finally takes measures to end her predicament without ending her marriage. As much as Mtshali exposes the abuse

of women, he encourages women to respond appropriately to bring about change without terminating their marriages.

It is important to note that even though advocating for women's rights, Mtshali might be perceived to be supporting black patriarchy by encouraging women to fight for their rights, but within the black patriarchy's norms, values, and limitations. On the other hand, he can be seen as a champion of the black family hence the need to uphold and strengthen it.

Paul Grootboom is another black male playwright who addresses the plight of women in the new South Africa. In his play, *Enigma*, Grootboom focuses on the problem of child abuse, especially girls by their fathers. Williams mentions this issue in her play as well, but only in passing. As much as Grootboom deals with the impact child abuse has on its victims, he also criticizes the silence of mothers in the face of the abuse their daughters are subjected to by their husbands and fathers. Nevertheless, it is the plight of AIDS patients that Grootboom draws his audience's attention to. He highlights the unbearable physical and psychological suffering, including the neglect patients face by almost everybody in their communities, friends and even relatives. Despite their horrendous situation, Grootboom is of the opinion that AIDS patients can play a major role in their societies by educating the public about the disease instead of being preoccupied with thoughts about death or even committing suicide.

By advocating women's rights, both Grootboom and Mtshali follow in the footsteps of other great playwrights like Henrik Ibsen, who championed the rights of women at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the fight for women's vote.

Whereas Tseu is of the view that most men are either introverts or playboys and consequently fail to express their love for women, Sello kaNcube argues that most women, especially in the townships, are more concerned with material things than love or romance. In his play, *K'oze Kuze*, kaNcube demonstrates how women use love to gain material things. He observes that the situation is so prevalent that women run after any man as long as he has money and is in a position to meet their needs. He argues that in the quest to satisfy their greed, these women even date criminals putting their lives in danger in the process. However, he observes men are after money too. He is of the opinion that some men would do anything to get money, even engaging in illegal activities such as dealing in drugs and robberies.

Crime and violence are another central issue tackled by the new generation. While kaNcube presents the cause of crime and violence in South Africa, Kere Nyawo in *Ola Majita* explores the experience the perpetrators of crime and violence are made to go through in South African prisons. Nyawo argues that the South African Prison Services does not help criminals to reform; instead it makes them come out of prison worse than before. He blames corrupt guards, over-crowding in prisons, but most of all the ill treatment of inmates, especially new inmates, by gangs who operate in prisons. Obed Baloyi touches

on this issue as well in his play, *Ga Mchangani*. However, he goes even further to suggest measures to be taken by the South African Prison and Correctional Services. Baloyi's attention then shifts to politicians and accuses them of failing to honor promises they made during both the struggle and prior to the first multiracial general elections of 1994. He demonstrates the disappointment, anger and frustration amongst the people over the politicians' deceitfulness. Even though he acknowledges that something is done, he thinks that it is too little. As a result, he believes that people will be sceptical in the future when it comes to elections. Baloyi's argument is evidenced by lack of interest amongst many blacks when it comes to going to the polls, because they see elections as legitimising the leadership of parties to enrich themselves. Finally, he interrogates African cultures, which appear to be based on the exploitation of women. He contests that there are some people who abuse their culture to exploit women yet complain when they too are exploited.

The deceitfulness of some politicians, make Lufuno Mutele dwell on this subject at length in his play, *Local Elections*. Mutele questions both the sincerity and morality of politicians in light of the democracy which the black masses fought for. He insists that the older generation of politicians is corrupt, evil, exploits, and deceives the public to achieve its personal goals. Consequently, he urges the younger generation of politicians and the public as well to resist this kind of politics even if close relatives perpetrate it. Like Williams, Mutele also addresses the question of rights of foreigners especially women. He too calls for the protection of women who are being exploited by those in positions of power.

Another new topic, developed in the discussion of violence and crime in Nyawo's *Ola Majita* and Sekhabi and Grootboom's *Not with my Gun*, is the appeal to a new racial reconciliation and the awareness that in new South Africa the line of division between rich and poor increasingly goes beyond the construction of race under apartheid. As indicated in Chapter 4, the call to safeguard whites by black writers was unthinkable under apartheid and can only be understood in the new socio-historical context.

Boy Bangala's concern is none of the above. He is more concerned about parents' lack of support for their children, especially if the children are interested in pursuing arts as a profession. In his play, *Brothers in Arts*, Bangala does not only expose the reluctance of some parents to support their children when it comes to arts but criticizes them for using their power to dictate to their children what profession or career they should pursue. He argues that this causes a lot of frustration amongst young artists, especially when arts require dedication and a lot of capital for one to be successful. In light of this resistance, he encourages artists to work together and help each other. Finally, he appeals to the South African business community to lend a helping hand to develop young artists.

Whereas Bangala laments lack of support for those interested in the field of the arts, Aubrey Sekhabi and Paul Grootboom are concerned about the lack of professionalism among black artists. In their play, *Not with my gun*, Sekhabi and Grootboom demonstrate how some black artists fail to take their work seriously. They argue that while some lack commitment, others abuse their relationship with producers. These artists tend to act irresponsibly banking on the fact that they are known or related to producers concerned. The two also emphasize that crime is not synonymous with blacks; every person who is poor at one stage or another is tempted to steal or to commit a crime to satisfy his or her basic needs. Whites are included in this, though they are often thought to all be wealthy, possibly due to the opportunities apartheid afforded them at the expense of blacks.

While Maishe Maponya and Mbongei Ngema pay tribute to those who sacrificed their time and lives for freedom, in his play *The Harvesting Season*, Maropodi Mapalakyane is more concerned about whether these people get the honor and respect they deserve. He is of the opinion that some of these heroes are ridiculed instead. Consequently, he calls upon artists to address the matter in the same way they dealt with issues of concern under apartheid.

### 5.3 Gendered Continuity

Even though there is this generalization about older and young generations of black South African playwrights, there is a sharp contrast between male and female writers in both categories. As stated earlier, black women playwrights discussed in this dissertation are now concentrating on women's issues, which they feel have been neglected over the years due to the emphasis on solidarity during freedom struggle. This is evidenced by Emly Tseu's *The Pain*, Magi Williams' *Kwa-Landlady* and Fatima Dike's *So What's New?* and *AIDS: The New Generation*, which deal exclusively with issues pertaining to women. Lueen Conning, a playwright, comments:

Although black female writers in South Africa have been active for a long time, they have been fairly invisible to the public. Black women are faced with the enormous challenge of stepping into new territory in terms of what we have to say, what we believe needs to be addressed, and in defining and expanding our role in South African theatre. At the very foundation of the local theatre industry, we have old South African traditions to break, but we also have a wealth of talent, powerful voices

that will not stop until they are heard. We are often natural storytellers and, now more than ever, we have tons of indigenous stories to tell.<sup>921</sup>

Based on the above, there is no doubt that the democratization of South Africa has fragmented Black Theatre into three categories of playwrights; first, the older generation, second, the young generation, and finally, black women playwrights. Fatima Dike explains this fragmentation as follows:

You see, what governed us before was the struggle. I couldn't have written *So, What's New?* in the 70s, as much as I would have loved to. The whole idea was that we had to harness our power together to fight the struggle through theatre.<sup>922</sup>

Like Lueen Conning, Fatima Dike is of the opinion that issues concerning women in South Africa have been shelved for a long time due to the freedom struggle, but now that the struggle is over and freedom has been achieved, it is time to address them. This somehow explains why she has few male characters or none at all in her latest plays. Dike says that what she managed to do after the protest period was over and blacks got freedom in this country, was to start writing specifically for women. And that is what she is doing, she is not writing plays about men anymore.<sup>923</sup> Similarly, Barbara Smith submits that black women writers manifest common approaches to the act of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social, and economic experience they have shared.<sup>924</sup> Likewise, Mary Washington contests that black women are searching for a specific language, symbols and images with which to claim a rightful place. Washington says that for the purpose of liberation, black women writers will first insist on their own name, their own space.<sup>925</sup> Judith Butler comments:

We tend to agree that women have been written out of histories of cultures and literature that men have written, that women have been silenced or distorted in the texts of philosophy, biology, physics, and there is a group of embodied beings socially positioned as "women"

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<sup>921</sup> Lueen Conning, "A Coloured Place" in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.8

<sup>922</sup> Fatima Dike, "So What's New", in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.25

<sup>923</sup> Ibid. p.23

<sup>924</sup> Barbara Smith, "Toward A Black Feminism Criticism" *The New Feminism Criticism*, [1985], p.174

<sup>925</sup> Mary Washington in Deborah McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism", *The New Feminism Criticism*. [1988], p.195

who now, under the name of feminism, have something quite different to say.<sup>926</sup>

Smith admits that it is difficult to imagine a more evocative metaphor for what women can be to each other, the “priceless-ness” they can achieve in refusing to sell themselves for male approval, the worth that they can only find in each other’s eyes.<sup>927</sup> Philip Rice and Patricia Wangh note, as well, that history, psychology, sociology, anthropology and gynocritics have developed a hypothesis of a female subculture including not only the ascribed status, and the internalized constructs of femininity, but also the occupations, interactions and consciousness of women. Consequently, by winning the vote, women were historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood.<sup>928</sup> Alike, Elaine Showalter points out that women writers have a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic coherence, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate their culture.<sup>929</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael also observe that cultural theorists of the last few decades in South Africa have imagined the production of culture as a form of cultural work that has had an explicit moral and political agenda and was intimately concerned with the struggle against apartheid. Consequently, cultural workers were to replace the notion of the individual artist that was treated, in a context of social crisis, with suspicion which may explain why almost all black artists had to toe the line.<sup>930</sup>

#### 5.4 Stylized Theatre

In retrospect, it is important to note that as much as South African black playwrights adopted theatrical approaches such as naturalism and realism from their European counterparts, they never practised these to the letter except when it came to dialogue and to a certain extent costume. Instead they blended these with local practices to suit their South African setting. It can be argued that the final result was a stylized theatre unique to the South African setting. Edward Braun comments:

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<sup>926</sup> Judith Butler, “Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse”, in Linda Nicholson ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism*, [1990 ], p.324

<sup>927</sup> Barbara Smith, “Toward A Black Feminism Criticism”, *The New Feminism Criticism*. [1985], p.181

<sup>928</sup> Philip Rice and Patricia Wangh, *Modern Literary Theory*., [1989], pp.94,101

<sup>929</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The New Feminism Criticism*. [1988], p.6

<sup>930</sup> Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann, *Senses of culture: South African Culture Studies*. [2000], p.10

The stylized theatre liberates the actor from all scenery, creating a three-dimensional area in which he can employ natural, sculptural plasticity. Thanks to stylization, we can do away with complicated stage machinery, and mount simple production in which the actor can interpret his role free from all scenery and specifically theatrical properties free from all purely incidental trappings.<sup>931</sup>

There are many factors that forced stylization of Black Theatre. First, with Black Theatre under constant threat from the apartheid regime, trying to be realistic and/or naturalistic was a risky business because it meant that the apartheid police could move in at any time and demolish everything, which would be a terrible setback. Second, with blacks being at the bottom of the ladder in the labour market and with limited or no resources for production, it was not possible to strive towards naturalistic and realistic theatre, given the requirements, in terms of set designing, costume and so on. Braun explains that in naturalistic theatre everything on stage must be as nearly as possible to being real; ceilings, fireplaces, wallpaper, stove-doors, a real waterfall flow on stage and rain falling, is real water. The director and designer must attempt to fix as accurately as possible the year, the month and the day of the action.<sup>932</sup> Similarly, Bamber Gascoigne argues that the meaning of naturalism is beyond dispute, it represents a style of theatre in which the stage-setting, the dialogue of the characters and the performance of the actors seem life-like. Gascoigne is of the opinion that naturalism reflects accurately the surface of life, whereas realism is concerned with the truth of the experience which it conveys.<sup>933</sup>

In light of all these requirements, for South African black playwrights to try to adhere to naturalistic and realistic theatre would have been impractical. However, as evidenced by most of the plays discussed above, even in post apartheid South Africa most playwrights still avoid including or dictating technical theatrical requirements needed to mount their plays. To strive for lavish sets, lighting and/or sound is still a big challenge when it comes to financing productions, as Sekhabi and Grootboom observed in their play *Not With My Gun*. This is exacerbated by the fact that most of the foreign funding has declined, if not ceased altogether, following the demise of apartheid.

### 5.5 Present Challenges and Future Directions

With Black Theatre having reached the end of the road as far as politically motivated, resistant or militant theatre is concerned, it is important to look back

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<sup>931</sup> Edward Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*. [1969], p.62

<sup>932</sup> Ibid. p.25

<sup>933</sup> Bamber Gascoigne, *Twentieth Century Drama*. [1962], p.7

and also ponder about the future. It is clear that the fragmentation of South African black playwrights based on age and gender has drastically changed the face of Black Theatre from its formerly political or militant nature to a more vibrant one. This is evidenced by the numerous and diverse issues addressed by the black playwrights discussed. Ndlovu explains this opening up of Black Theatre:

Theatre in South Africa has had to meet several challenges, challenges that most changing societies have to deal with. The transformation from apartheid to democracy has meant that the theatre has had to find a new voice, a new language, has had to move from protest theatre back to its original role of entertaining. But because every experience is a learning curve, our theatre will be more vibrant and more informed. Our theatre will triumph and move onto the next millennium. Our theatre will find new voices and new meaning. Theatre always finds a way to examine a society and comment on that society. So theatre in South Africa will comment on the transformation, will set trends and lead a way to a future.<sup>934</sup>

Ndlovu's explanation demonstrates that Black Theatre's transformation in South Africa is reflective of the black majority's ways of life and experiences which is in turn influenced by the political atmosphere of the time. Peter Larlham comments that the content of much Black Theatre, especially theatre committed to social and political change deals with everyday life in the townships or the plight of men fighting for survival, dignity, individuality and for freedom of expression.<sup>935</sup>

The changing of Black Theatre in light of the new political dispensation in South Africa is in sharp contrast to what its critics thought. As noted earlier, given its militant nature, some critics thought Black Theatre would vanish with the apartheid system. However, Black Theatre's existence even in this new era demonstrates its importance and relevance. Maponya comments:

It is important that theatre continues to exist, to be a catalyst in some sense to raise the level of consciousness, to be able to challenge, to be able to resist certain impositions on communities either by government or the corporate world and even challenge practices in their own communities. Theatre should address the issue of whether there is moral

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<sup>934</sup> Duma Ndlovu, "Sheila's Day", in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], pp.25, 143, 144

<sup>935</sup> Peter Larlham, *Black Theatre, Dance and Ritual in South Africa*. [1982], p.90



decline within the community, and the plays need to be sensitive to these issues.<sup>936</sup>

Maponya argues that theatre needs to assume more responsibility to address the imbalance that exists between urban life and the privileged class, rural life and the unprivileged majority. He believes theatre still has a major role to play and needs to continue to be the eye of the people and challenge the ills of the community. However, he thinks it should delve into aspects of life, not only politics as was the case under apartheid South Africa.<sup>937</sup>

Bamber Gascoigne is of the same opinion, in relation to theatre and changing times, that it will have to turn away from the behaviorist extreme. Gascoigne suspects and hopes that the direction it will take will be towards something crisper, something more intelligent, more concerned with moral question. In fact, more like the work of Eric Bentley's ideal-the playwright as thinker.<sup>938</sup> Similarly, Kees Epskamp contests that the objective of this activists' theatre is to confront people with the reality of their situation or with the real nature of power in society and their relationship to it, by involving them in a "dramatic" situation. Epskamp observes that this is a drama which opposes the dominant norms and values and supports social reform which often makes politicians and officials feel uneasy.<sup>939</sup>

In a way, Maponya's explanation and expectations demonstrate that the fact that Black Theatre revolved around politics under apartheid did not mean that there was nothing else that South African black playwrights could write about. However, issues related to apartheid were so paramount that anything else appeared to be of less significance, but with apartheid abolished, Black Theatre can or has to accommodate other issues as other playwrights, as Dike and Conning argued. Ronald Keswa, director and actor, argues that because there has been a shift in politics, playwrights need to explore changes brought about by the new political order, but without ignoring issues that still grip the South African society.<sup>940</sup> Similarly, Ndebele comments:

If it is a new society we seek to bring about in South Africa, then that newness will be based on a direct concern with the way people actually live. That means a range of complex ethical issues involving man-man, man-woman, woman-woman, man-society relationship. These kinds of

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<sup>936</sup> Maishe Maponya, "Umongikazi/The Nurse" in Kathy Perkins ed. *South African Black Women Playwrights*. [1998], p.66

<sup>937</sup> Ibid. p.66

<sup>938</sup> Jimmy Porter in Bamber Gascoigne ed., *Twentieth Century Drama*. [1962], p.55

<sup>939</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Theatre in Search of Social Change*. [1989], p.61

<sup>940</sup> Eddie Mokoena, "Changing the Face of Theatre", *Sowetan Newspaper* February 26. [1999], p.17

concerns are destined to find their way into our literature, making it more complex and richer.<sup>941</sup>

Ndebele submits that the challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that have characterized apartheid society. For writers, this means freeing the creative process itself.<sup>942</sup> There can be no doubt that Black Theatre has changed and continues to change due to new political dispensation in South Africa which implies the “freeing of the creative process” as suggested by Ndebele. This demonstrates the influence politics had and continues to have on Black Theatre. As in the cases of the Women’s Franchise Movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, it helped break barriers established on the basis of race and gender.

John Kani believes scholars are to decide what kind of theatre lies in store given the end of apartheid.<sup>943</sup> However, based on the above discussed plays, it is apparent that the future of Black Theatre in South Africa is to be determined by the experiences of blacks in South Africans as it was under apartheid. This is in line with Zakes Mda’s assertion that theatre in post apartheid South Africa will continue to do what it does best, that is, to entertain, educate and protest if necessary.<sup>944</sup> This can, therefore, be seen as a challenge to playwrights. After all, there are many pressing issues that ought to be addressed in order to ensure development that will lead to true freedom of the black masses. Jordan Ngubane comments that this flexibility (of approach) is of vital importance to South Africa and, probably, to the rest of the continent. Ngubane believes this opens wide the doors to all the peoples of Africa to work together for the liberation of continent, and after victory, for the pooling of their resources to raise their standards of living with the minimum of delay. He notes that in this gigantic task of reconstruction, there will be need for all the reserves of power owned by the peoples who have made Africa their home.<sup>945</sup>

The discussed plays can, therefore, be taken as a testimony of what might be in store for Black Theatre’s audience in the future. They demonstrate that there are numerous issues that ought to be tackled. It should be noted that the issues mentioned below are some of the pressing matters that South African black playwrights might be compelled to address in their work if the black majority and South Africa as a whole is to develop and achieve better life for all. Some of these issues can have far reaching consequences if not addressed

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<sup>941</sup> Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. [1991], p.55

<sup>942</sup> Ibid. p.65

<sup>943</sup> John Kani, Personal interview

<sup>944</sup> Zakes Mda, Personal interview

<sup>945</sup> Jordan Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid*. [1963], pp.132,133

especially given South Africa's hard earned democracy. As a result, this calls for a vigorous educating of the masses by playwrights. Adam Smal recommends:

What else can a South African artist be? Every problem that moves him deeply, that inspires him to work, will be a problem of this place and this time. But he is intelligible culturally to the extent that he makes his time and his place speak universally. He cannot let them speak universally if he does not understand them, if he is not particular to the core.<sup>946</sup>

However, it is important that when South African black playwrights do engage in the debate and write about themselves and their people, that they should consider the kind of language to employ which will not alienate the masses but instead engage the entire black masses. Elred Jones and Magorie Jones observe that in writing simply, the writers are able to achieve specificity and make their description vivid. In fact, they find it easier to achieve these effects through this simple writing, neither difficult nor laborious for the reader.<sup>947</sup> Lawrence Senelick too argues that just like theatre, which must have a sensuous appeal, so writing about the theatre must seduce the reader. Senelick submits that one must make one's arguments as persuasively as Clarence Darrow and as alluringly as Phryne, even if it is not well-wrought, he should be at least clear.<sup>948</sup> The reason to encourage clear writing is that given the widespread poverty amongst black masses, which means a challenge for the masses to go to theatre, good playwriting will enable masses to enjoy the plays as much as those watching any live performance. Under this aspect, one can note that black playwrights, women in particular, make large reference to TV series and use them as a model, and sometimes as a contrastive frame, for what they present in their plays, which is also an attempt to bridge the gap with their public, largely accustomed to international popular soap operas. Eric Bentley comments:

Which human beings choose to employ to raise joy to ecstasy, to get as close as possible to another person, and to remind themselves of the sacredness of life itself. If I use enthusiastic language, it is because I feel the enthusiasm, not that I wish to sell anything to anyone, nor would I elevate the body above the mind, the nonverbal above verbal.<sup>949</sup>

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<sup>946</sup> Adam Smal, "Towards Cultural Understanding" in Henrik van der Merwe ed., *Students Perspective of Apartheid*. [1972], p.212

<sup>947</sup> Elred Jones and Magorie Jones, *Childhood in African Literature*. [1998], p.62

<sup>948</sup> Lawrence Senelick, "The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive", *Theatre Journal*. [2004], p.348

<sup>949</sup> Eric Bentley, *Theatre of War*. [1947], p.328.

At the moment, one of the most pressing issues that need immediate attention from the South African black playwrights is the question of focus and prioritization of things in life. Given the hard-earned political freedom, the fall of the African National Congress (ANC) Chief Whip, Tony Yengeni, over fraud charges and conviction involving a vehicle should raise concern. This is what Sekhabi and Grootboom contest in *Not with My Gun*, namely that some blacks fail to prioritize things in life. Ilse De Lane reports:

Yengeni was in March last year sentenced to four years imprisonment of which he has to serve at least eight months for defrauding parliament over a 47% discount he had received on a luxury Mercedes Benz 4X4 from an arms company.<sup>950</sup>

As a Chief Whip of a ruling party and a Chairman of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Defense, one would expect Yengeni not only to be protective of his position, but the party as a whole. After all, he was in a position to purchase such a vehicle and or even more. This cannot only be seen as a betrayal of the cause, but also questions the possibility of strong leadership in the future once the generation of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo, Desmond Tutu, and Govan Mbeki is gone. It can be argued that at present South Africa is still on “honeymoon” spared from the challenges that plague the rest of Africa because of these leaders and respect given to them. Therefore, a “true” South Africa is likely to emerge in their post-leadership era and whether it will survive the challenges that mar many African countries and led to the collapse of their democratic system, remains to be seen.

Artaud argues in this respect that a civilized man judges and is judged according to his behavior, but even the term “civilized” leads to confusion. A cultivated “civilized” man is regarded as a person instructed in systems, a person who thinks in forms, signs, representations, a monster whose faculty of deriving thoughts from acts, instead of identifying acts with thoughts, is developed to an absurdity.<sup>951</sup> In the wake of Yengeni’s scandal, together with the charges of corruption and rape against the former Deputy President and now the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, fraud allegations against Members of Parliament and even the Speaker<sup>952</sup>, it can be argued that sometimes formal or Western education fails to cultivate true leaders, but it supports a capitalistic mentality that enslaves its recipients in materialism. It turns the recipients into consuming machines and in the process, if their desires are not met, they bend the rules.

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<sup>950</sup> Ilse de Lange, “Yengeni appeal delayed”, *The Citizen*, Tuesday July 27. [2004], p.1

<sup>951</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Theatre and its Double*. [1958], p.8

<sup>952</sup> Ranjeni Munusamy, “Travelgate: Full List of MPs-we publish what Parliament tried to suppress” *ThisDay*, Thursday, September 2, [2004], p.1

Tony Parr warns that one of the real dangers for Africa is that a modernizing rhetoric is forcing many countries further down the road of conformity to Western consumerist norms undermining indigenous cultures, devastating the environment and creating new forms of dependency.<sup>953</sup> Sikhumbuzo Mngadi believes that former President Mbeki's African Renaissance is meant to tackle this attitude, especially the rapid ascendance of high middle class values of consumption, accumulation and the concomitant personality cult by both foul and fair methods such as criminality.<sup>954</sup> This greed is possibly demonstrated by the above mentioned allegations, charges, convictions and many more spread across pages of the media on a daily basis. This individualistic and materialistic tendency is in sharp contrast to traditional Africa's way of life. Kees Epskamp notes that indigenous education in Africa is, for a large part, inextricably linked with other sectors in community life, and in their sense, it is "undifferentiated." It is extremely pragmatic and socially relevant. It is very functional and directly usable. Furthermore, it is geared towards the needs of the community rather than the needs of the individual.<sup>955</sup> One is tempted to submit that poverty and suffering could have been contained or at least alleviated had Africans retained and/or stuck to this sharing and communal way of life as opposed to the Western individualistic approach.

Unfortunately, this materialistic attitude is slowly creeping into the African character despite black leaders like Biko having discouraged it. Biko wondered whether it was possible that Africans could take advantage of whatever technology there is without being spiritually consumed by the material goals and losing the spiritual dimension from their lives.<sup>956</sup> It can be argued that this is what is holding back Africa and preventing it from developing. Fanon's violent attack of this mentality is still valid nowadays:

Spoilt children of yesterday's colonialism and of today's national governments, they organize the loot of whatever national resources exist. Without pity, they use today's national distress as a means of getting on through scheming and legal robbery by import-export combines, limited liability companies gambling on the stock-exchange or unfair promotion.<sup>957</sup>

As stated earlier, apartheid may have been abolished, but the struggle for better life for and by blacks seems to continue unabated. What poor masses see is the

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<sup>953</sup> Tony Parr in Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*. [2000], p.115

<sup>954</sup> Ibid. Sikhumbuzo Mngadi-p.116

<sup>955</sup> Kees Epskamp, *Learning by Performing Arts*. [1992], p.12.

<sup>956</sup> Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness", in Henrik van der Merwe ed., *Students Perspective of Apartheid..* [1972], p.200

<sup>957</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. [1963], p.37

corruption pointed out by Fanon, and that is reported daily by the media. As a result, it can be contested that the real freedom will only be achieved if blacks were both economically and mentally free. Furthermore, they are able to find a new approach to govern and manage power and common wealth. Also it is the duty of the South African black playwrights to make the public aware of this. Just like during the struggle for (political) freedom, South African black playwrights will have to play a major role in educating the public about the opportunities that exist which ought to be exploited for the good of all. McGrath proposes:

I would propose that theatre today would regain its role, dignity, and audience if it were to take as its project the responsible drive towards what Castoriadis calls 'authentic' democracy, if it once again saw its role as setting in motion the major forces, the conflicting ideologies, the central realities of our time, as finding the theatrical images and character, style, and language for such setting in motion, as the fearless pursuit of the consequences of such setting in motion, as struggling to extend the limits of our thinking about our society; as breaking out of the closure and complacency of much western civilization, as risking the hubris [arrogance and transgression] of the personal and political, as becoming an excellent part of the socializing process, the paedia [education] of our demos [people], and as making its work available to the whole of our society, not to the few.<sup>958</sup>

The discussed plays indicate that Black Theatre in post apartheid South Africa is likely to be heading in the direction of rebuilding as McGrath proposes. Nevertheless, for this rebuilding to be realized, all the parties concerned will have to engage in self-reflection to eliminate the impediments these playwrights address. These impediments hamper the process and subsequently arrest efforts made to redeem the majority of blacks still languishing in squalor; as a result, they render meaningless the freedom for which they fought for.

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<sup>958</sup> John McGrath, "Theatre and Democracy", *New Theatre Quarterly*, May. [2002], p.139

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## Samenvatting

De gemeenschappelijke levensstijl in het Zuid-Afrika van voor de kolonisatie kreeg gestalte in culturele praktijken. Feesten, begrafenissen, ploegen en oogsten, bijna alle leden van een gemeenschap namen er aan deel en werd het van jongst af aan bijgebracht. Bij veel van deze activiteiten speelde theater, muziek en dans een grote rol. De verhalen die belangrijk waren voor de gemeenschap werden aan de hand hiervan verteld. Vaak werden verhalen 's avonds bij het vuur verteld, waarbij de verteller tegelijk performer was, terwijl de luisteraars - voornamelijk kinderen - het publiek vormden.

Het is belangrijk op te merken dat dit orale praktijken waren. Alle vormen van kennis werden mondeling doorgegeven van generatie op generatie. Hieruit trokken sommige westerse wetenschappers de conclusie dat Afrika geen hoogstaande cultuur had, simpelweg omdat de culturele praktijken niet in schrift waren vastgelegd.

Traditionele narratieve en dramatische praktijken werden onderdrukt door de blanke kolonisten, die ze als primitief beschouwden. In plaats daarvan werden de westerse praktijken aan de bevolking opgelegd. Dit had tot gevolg dat de traditionele culturele praktijken óf een bestaan in de marge leidden, óf werden aangepast aan de westerse praktijken, die hierbij tot op zeker hoogte werden nagebootst. In het geval van de theatertraditie heeft dit geleid tot een hybride vorm van theater, met zowel kenmerken van Afrikaans als westerse theater. Deze hybride praktijk is nu bekend als 'Black theatre'. De term wordt gedefinieerd als theater dat door zwarten is ontwikkeld op basis van traditionele Afrikaanse en geïntroduceerde westerse theatervormen. Het wordt geproduceerd en uitgevoerd door zwarte acteurs en heeft de zwarte bevolking als belangrijkste doelgroep. Inhoudelijk draait het om kwesties die betrekking hebben op het leven van de zwarte meerderheid in Afrika.

De aard en inhoud van Black Theater veranderen met de tijd, al naar gelang het leven van de zwarte meerderheid, die van kolonialisme tot aan de Apartheid onder verschillende onderdrukkende regimes heeft geleefd, veranderde. De ervaringen van de zwarte meerderheid werden, met name tijdens de Apartheid, door de zwarte toneelschrijvers gestalte gegeven: Black Theater richtte zich op de Apartheidswetten waarmee de zwarte meerderheid onderdrukt, gediscrimineerd en uitgebuit werd. Daarnaast werden toneelstukken geschreven naar aanleiding van specifieke gebeurtenissen gedurende die periode, zoals het bloedbad van Sharpeville, District 9, gedwongen verhuizingen en bus- en huurboycots.

Fatima Dike is een van de toneelschrijvers die de onderdrukkende wetten van het Apartheidsysteem veroordeelt. Zij schreef *The Sacrifice of Kreli* (1972) over het Afrikaanse verzet tegen het kolonialisme, *The First South-Africa*

(1977), dat raciale identiteit verkent, en *Glas House* (1979), geïnspireerd door de studentenopstand van 1976.

De toneelschrijver Mbongeni Ngema schreef samen met Percy Mtwa en Barney Simon een van zijn bekendste toneelstukken *WOZA Albert* (1983). Met de episodische vorm en meerdere losse verhalen binnen een enkel stuk snijden de schrijvers tal van misstanden aan waarmee de zwarte massa onder de Apartheid te maken had. Ngema werd beroemd met zijn latere stukken *Asinamali* (1985) en *Sarafina* (1992).

Walter Chakela's *Crisis of Conscience* (1983) beschrijft hoe het Apartheidssysteem op basis van huidskleur de omgang van mensen met elkaar bepaalt. *Let this be a Lesson* (1975) richt zich op de zwarte bewustwordingsbeweging in de jaren zeventig, terwijl *Gathering of the Birds* (1990) de politieke onderhandelingen van de late jaren tachtig verkent. Zakes Mda's *The Road* (1983) ondervraagt de verplaatsing en uitbuiting van de zwarte arbeiders; *Dark Voices Ring* (1990) de slechte behandeling van zwarte gevangenen; *Dead End* (1979) stelt het misbruik van zwarte vrouwen aan de orde. *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* (1978) onderzoekt mogelijke manieren van participatie van zwarten in de regering van Zuid-Afrika na de Apartheid. Tot slot protesteren *Banned* (1982) en *Joys of War* (1989) tegen onrechtvaardigheden van het Apartheidsysteem voor de zwarte meerderheid en andere mensen van kleur. Tijdgenoot Maishe Maponya houdt zich in *Umongikazi* (The Nurse) (1983) en *The Hungry Earth* (1979) bezig met het lot van de zwarten op de arbeidsmarkt.

Enkele toneelschrijvers worden in dit onderzoek minder belicht. Mthuli Shezi schreef *Shanti* (1973), dat hij in samenwerking met de People Experimental Theatre (PET) opvoerde. Het stelt de problemen die ontstonden door de Immorality Act en de Groups Areas Act aan de orde. Gibson Kente schreef onder andere *Too Late* (1975) over de impact van de Pass Law op de zwakkere deel van de bevolking, zoals kinderen. Ook John Kani behandelt in samenwerking met Winston Ntshona en Athol Fugard deze Pass Law in het toneelstuk *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1974). Net als Maponya richt Matsemela Manaka zich met zijn stuk *Egoli* (Land van goud) op de exploitatie van de zwarten op de arbeidsmarkt.

Andere beoefenaars van Black Theatre gingen verder. Na kennis genomen te hebben van de marginalisering van zwarten in instellingen voor hoger onderwijs, waar de keuze voor onderwerpen van cursussen was ingegeven door het Apartheidssysteem, besloten ze om zelf instellingen voor zwarten op te richten op het gebied van de kunsten, waaronder ook theater. Sipho Sephamla richtte in 1977 de Federal Union of Black Artists (FUBA) op, terwijl Manaka de Creative Youth Association begon met studenten van de Madibane High School. Deze Creative Youth Association groeide later uit tot het huidige Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre. In 1989 begon Smal Ndaba,

acteur en toneelschrijver, de Sibikwa Community Theatre Project, financieel gesteund door een plaatselijke arts, dr. Wesley Mbilase. In hetzelfde jaar startte het Market Theatre Playhouse, dat bekend stond als thuisbasis voor succesvolle zwarte artiesten zoals John Kani, Percy Mtwa, en de Market Laboratory, beter bekend als Market Lab.

Zoals viel te verwachten nam het Apartheidsregime aanstoot aan de kritische stukken van het Black Theatre en het antwoord was hard. Gibson Kente werd gevangengezet, Maponya en Manaka verloren hun paspoorten. Een aantal toneelstukken van Mda werd verboden, een aanslag werd gepleegd op Ngema, die echter zijn productiemanager doodde. De zwarte instellingen voor dramatische kunst bleven als vermeende broeinesten van verzet tegen het Apartheidsstelsel niet gevrijwaard van vervolging.

Terwijl het Apartheidsstelsel zich tegen het Black Theatre en de zwarte theaterinstellingen keerde, streefde het tegelijkertijd naar een verbetering van het mainstream theater, bedoeld voor de blanke minderheid. Het moedigde universiteiten die uitsluitend voor blanken waren aan cursussen in film, theater en podiumkunsten aan te bieden. Tegelijkertijd bouwde het tussen 1959 en 1962 theaters van wereldklasse in de grote steden in het land om ervoor te zorgen dat de afgestudeerden ook werk hadden. Zo openden het Bloemfontein Civic Theatre, het Ernest Oppenheimer Theatre in Welkom, het Guild Theatre in Oost-Londen, het Johannesburg Civic Theatre en het Nationaal Theater in Pretoria in die periode hun deuren. Hoewel door theatermakers als Athol Fugard en Barney Simon pogingen werden ondernomen om te komen tot multi-rationale voorstellingen, bood geen van deze theaters ruimte aan de opkomende Zuid-Afrikaanse zwarte toneelschrijvers. Ze werden louter gebruikt voor voorstellingen van de Performing Arts Council, die in elke provincie een afdeling had.

Met de afschaffing van de apartheid en de invoering van de democratie is de kunstpolitiek in Zuid-Afrika aanmerkelijk veranderd. Een van de eerste wapenfeiten van de democratisch gekozen regering was het aannemen van een wet die de kunsten voor iedereen bereikbaar moest maken, ongeacht ras, geslacht of religie. Zo moesten de voorheen witte universiteiten de deuren openen voor alle studenten, zonder hun studiekeuze te dicteren. De zwarte podiumkunsten blijven echter volharden in hun streven de positie van met name zwarten te versterken, zoals tijdens de Apartheid. Hun argument hiervoor is de ongelijkheid die ondanks de politieke veranderingen in Zuid-Afrika nog steeds bestaat. De achterstand in vaardigheden en onderwijs is een erfenis van de Apartheid, die moet worden ingehaald om te kunnen concurreren op de arbeidsmarkt.

De politieke veranderingen hebben een impact gehad op de toneelstukken die door de genoemde Black Theatre-toneelschrijvers na de Apartheid zijn geschreven. Men kan al generaliserend de werken in drie categorieën

onderscheiden: die van de oudere generatie, die van de jongere generatie en die van de zwarte vrouwelijke toneelschrijvers. Elke categorie richt zich op wat naar haar oordeel van het grootste belang is. Zakes Mda en de rest van de oudere generatie hebben niet langer de Apartheid als belangrijkste thema in hun toneelstukken. Toch verwijzen ze er voortdurend naar, alsof de problemen van de zwarte meerderheid voortbestaan in het democratische Zuid-Afrika, zoals blijkt uit Mda's *You Fool how can the Sky Fall?*. Maropodi Mapakalanye en zijn collega's uit de jongere generatie zwarte toneelschrijvers lijken zich meer bezig te houden met meer recente problemen in het democratische Zuid-Afrika, zoals corruptie, criminaliteit, armoede en werkeloosheid, zaken waarvan men hoopte dat ze zouden worden opgelost in het democratische Zuid-Afrika. Voorbeeld hiervan is Mapakalanye's *The Harvesting Season*. Tot slot hebben we Fatima Dike en andere zwarte vrouwelijke toneelschrijvers die zich richten op kwesties specifiek met betrekking tot vrouwen, kwesties die tijdens de Apartheid geen specifieke thema's vormden in de toneelstukken. Die waren gericht op de effecten van de Apartheid op de zwarte meerderheid als zodanig. Dike's toneelstuk *So, What's New?* is een voorbeeld van een werk uit dit derde kamp.

Men kan constateren dat de aanhoudende aanwezigheid van Black Theatre in het Zuid-Afrika van na de Apartheid het tegengestelde heeft opgeleverd van wat de critici erover betoogden. Ze waren van mening dat met het verdwijnen van Apartheid het Black Theatre haar bestaansrecht, wat hoofdzakelijk gebaseerd was op de kritiek op het Apartheidsysteem, zou verliezen. De besproken toneelstukken laten zien dat Black Theatre niet alleen nog bestaat, maar dat het nog steeds een cruciale rol speelt in het Zuid-Afrika van na de Apartheid.

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## **Curriculum vitae**

Francis Rangoajane was born on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1963, in Bloemfontein, in the Free State Province, South Africa. Intrigued by the power of pen and paper he studied journalism [1989-92] at the University of Fribourg. During the academic year 1993-1994 he did an MA in Film and Drama at the University of Reading, England, during which he worked part-time at the BBC in London. He also wrote for BBC Focus in the Africa Magazine and New African Magazine, both based in London. In 1995 he received Honourable Mention in Brazil for his work as a journalist. In 1998, he won a Media Award in France, presented at the United Nations Headquarters in Paris.

On his return to South Africa in 1998 he joined Wits University as a part-time lecturer in Film and Drama. In 1999, he became film and television scripts evaluator for the South African Broadcasting Corporation [SABC]. Due to the poor standard of script writing especially amongst blacks outside big cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, he initiated and ran film and television script writing workshops for SABC to improve script writing for both film and television in the provinces [1999-2005].

He is a member of the International Catholic Union of the Press [UCIP] now known as International Catholics Organisation of the Media (ICOM), and the Commonwealth Journalists Association [CJA]. He is also a member of the South Africa Writers Association [SASWA, 2004].

He is currently working part-time as Consultant at Wits Writing Centre