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Mogaga:

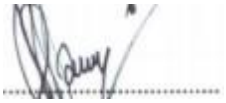
Play, Power and Purgation

Kgafela Golebane Magogodi

Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Creative Writing in the School of

Literature, Language and Media, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand March 2023

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signed: 

Date: 5 October 2023

Place: Braamfontein

Supervisor: Professor Bronwyn Law-Viljoen

Ditebogo

ba ga tabane ke a leboga.

ba ga pilane ke a le leboga.

ba ga pudumo ke a leboga.

bo matsaunyane le bo loselo ke a leboga.

bana ke a leboga.

amogelang, warona, oarena.

bo mme ba bana ba me ga ba lebalwe.

bana ba ga mme ditebogo di lo labile.

bo-kesetse, keledi, tswello, boiki, kokeletso, boitumelo le thato.

tsala, kgomotso, o ntshegeditse ke go leboga.

ditsala tsa me lefatsheng ka bophara le ke tseo ditebogo.

bana ba mmu lotlhe ke a leboga.

ba ke ba rutileng le nthutile ke leboga.

le lona ba lo ntsheletseng lookwane, mellon foundation

ke lebogile go menagane.

CONTENTS

Ditebogo 2

Abstract 5

Glossary of Key Terms 6

Preface 9

The creative project: Chilahaebolae 24

Some notes about mogaga 74

Speaking to the source (s). 80

Mogaga: Three Principles 89

Gogo Pedagogy: Thuto ya Letsele (knowledge from a mother's breast) 110

Go Gagaola: Spirits, Play and Politics 129

Spiritism or Marxism. 131

The spirits of Black Consciousness theatre 135

Spirits at play making and liberation politics. 138

Sigiya Ngengoma: drums and rituals of social purgation. 152

Towards a theatre of techno-shamanism. 159

Mogaga dramaturgy and spiritism 160

Groundings le Balepa Dilanedi 162

Rehearsal and performance: Searching for Technologies of Mogaga 174

Mawa: The Writer's Process 177

The Protagonists 179

The Agonist(s) 184

The Antagonists 186

Lefoko: The Composer's Process 188

The Songs of the Rulers 190

Songs of the Unruly 194

Malopo: The Playmaker's Process 199

Casting 202

Groundings with players 204

Bula Sekele: Fields of play 205

Spirit Embodiment 208

Thezi – More Fire 210

Open Theatres and Enclosed Spaces 213

Instincts of Play 215

Postscript 219

Bibliography 221

Interviews/Conversations 236

Plays, Videos and Audio Recordings 236

Abstract

In street parlance, or *iscamto*, *mogaga* refers to the face of confrontation. In Sekgatla, a dialect of Setswana, *mogaga* is a name for a potent plant used in rituals of "social purgation" (De Graft, 2002: 26-27). This study focuses on the element of *go gagaola* or the act of triggering *mogaga* through a fusion of poetic incantations,[1] song, dance and "spirit embodiment" (Ajumeze, 2014: 78). *Go gagaola*, the act of activating *mogaga*, hinges on agit-prop-mechanics that enable the elimination of botheration or the purging of domination. Does ritual drama have the power to alter material conditions? This and other questions about play-making as a scaffold which holds up a combination of spiritual elevation and political rebellion drive this enquiry. How do we expel botheration using the power of play? As it appears, ritual drama and guerilla theatre have the same framework as acts of "spiritual realism" (Mahone, 2002: 270). Guerilla theatre, like ritual drama, is also a system of change.

Plotting the adventures of Phokobje and Phiri, I have found great resources in spiritual traditions such as malopo/malombo of Bakgatla/Bapedi and VhaVenda as well *abaNgoma* of Ba-Nguni. Mapping the journeys of characters in *Chilahaebolae* led to unexpected forays into astronomy – *bolepa dinaledi* in Setswana. People's Experimental Theatre, Malombo Jazz Makers, Dashiki, Mihlothi, Malopoets and others who accentuated the connection between ritual and rebellion. Through this enquiry I make an offering to the decolonial project and the community of scholars, artists, astronomers and *iZangoma* who have been silenced by the settler-colonial canon through epistemic violence, massacre, and incarceration. These musings about *mogaga* play-making recasts theatre as the locus of confrontation and a tool for purging botheration. Going beyond "the banal search for exoticism" (Fanon, 1967: 221), I trace the bloodline of resistance theatre.

[1] Writing about the gift of alchemy [*go betla ka taola*] among the Batswana, Lesenyane reveals that reciting incantations [*taelo ya molomo*] is a central aspect. The word gives direction to the herbs. The herbs acquire their character through taelo ya molomo (1963: 100). The notion of taelo ya molomo is also found in ancient Kimetic mystery systems. According to Diop, "Ra is the first God, the first demiurge of history who created through the word" (311).

Glossary of Key Terms

AbaNgoma: healers who work through music.

Amadlozi/Badimo/Vadzimu: The ancestors/spiritual guides (isiZulu/Sesotho/Tshivenda).

Bolepa dinaledi: Setswana for the art of reading the stars/astronomy. Astronomers are called *Balepa dinaledi*.

Botheration: An Afro-Caribbean word for great trouble. I first encountered it in George Lamming's novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1954). In this study it applies broadly to oppressive scenarios or conditions of social injustice.

Fallism: The spirit of insurgency. A person inspired by this spirit is a fallist. These terms were created in the heat of the Rhodes Must Fall movement which blazed in 2016. Fallism weaponised song, toyi-toyi, graffiti and even human faeces to precipitate the removal of the Cecil John Rhodes statue from the University of Cape Town. It stressed the import of bringing down the symbols of oppression – cleansing the public space, removing the poison born from the concoction of colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy and sexism.

Gobela: Teacher/guru on spiritual matters.

Gogo: Grandmother/spirit medium/teacher.

Groundings: Dialogue / meetings for political exchanges and debates. I borrow from Walter Rodney's book, *The* G*roundings With My Brothers* (1969). I adopted this term to name a process usually called table reading during play rehearsals. During the grounding sessions with players, we read the script and discuss the world of the story we are telling and politics which surround the making of the play.

Imvumakufa: A spiritual principle denoting the undying sage of the mysteries, a death of the lower self and the rebirth of a higher self.

Ingoma: Song and dance.

Iscamto: Colloquial languages. Usually fashioned by underclass communities

Khepera: The law of becoming that, acting on matter through time, will actualise the archetypes, the essences, the beings who are therefore already created in potentiality, before being created in actuality (Diop, 1980: 310).

Lelopo: A spirit medium who works with music and dance. Performers working through Malopo system of inspiration are also named malopo in this study. *Lelopo* applies to the single performer.

Malopo/Malombo: A spiritual drama involving, music, dance painting and sculpture. At a deeper level it involves a process of journeying into the frontiers of interior worlds. My application is informed by Motlhabane Mashiangoako's and Lefifi Tladi's take, which stresses notions of self-creation and artistic freedom as central features.

Naga: Land.

Orature: The meeting of oral and scribal culture. A term originated by Ugandan scholar Pio Zirimu.

Sangoma: Spirit medium who works with song and dance.

Thuru: /Xam: Dance of spirit embodiment.

Uhuru: Freedom.



Figure 1. Chilahaebolae opening scene, illustration by Themba Mkhoma, June 2021.

Preface

These pages about *mogaga* play-making, result from my observations of a process that began with a creative writing project. It seems appropriate in a practice-led research venture to begin by giving the reader an experience of the playscript which developed from this undertaking. *Chilahaebolae*, a fable about the adventures of Phokobje [Jackal], Phiri [Hyena] and Mpja [Dog] remixes traditional story material to express allegorically, the neocolonial character of the post-apartheid state. The story and the style keep shapeshifting in accordance with discoveries on the rehearsal floor. The playscript has been through various iterations since the first instalment of the stage production in 2017.

At the beginning of my process, I took the challenge of staging fable characters by deploying physical storytelling techniques. While this creative project served as a laboratory, rehearsal processes and performance spaces have been the fields of my research. I am forever grateful for the generous offers by the performing artists who have played the variety of characters in this story. Watching these players embody the spirits that are contained in these characters and living inside the world of their story has been a feast for my muses.

Before you read the playscript it is necessary that I discuss my choice of the jackal as a figure of rebellion as it reflects on the ways in which questions about artistic expression as a tool for "social purgation" (De Graft, 2002: 2627) have occupied my creative universe from the start. Before delving into issues of characterisation, I will concisely address matters pertaining to the translation of dialogue in the playscript. I also find it necessary to give the reader some brief pointers into the politics of costume and the constitution of character as well as flag some ideas about the trickster figure as a tool for popular laughter and social purgation. I begin this introductory section by speaking to briefly to the challenges of translating the play.

The reader will notice that I have translated parts of *Chilahaebolae* with the aim of providing access for the English reader. Although I may have succeeded in transferring

most of the meaning, the *iscamto* phrases were especially difficult. For instance, a word like *"twak"* carries multiple meanings. When Phokobje says: *"Jy praat twaak,"* he means "You are talking shit". When Phiri says: "*Jy gaan twaak sien,"* the English equivalent is: "I will show you flames." I have been challenged by a phrase like *"Mpja ya mme,"* which translates literally to "My mother's dog". This literal translation throws away the meaning completely. In fact, *Mpja ya mme* is an expression of endearment to a close friend. "Blood of my blood" is perhaps the closest phrase that encapsulates the meaning of this expression. For a phrase such as *"O tlo rota dipekere",* which literally translates to "You will pee nails", it is probably best to say: "You will get yourself messed up". Evidently the expression loses its power and flavour when the pictures contained in the colloquial language are discarded. Translation, therefore, while it may provide some windows of explanations, does not guarantee the English reader full access to the world I am conveying through the play. I may have succeeded in transferring most of the meaning but the music which comes with Setswana and *iscamto* has been lost. Translation is even more treacherous when the Setswana is laced with *iscamto*. Mainly, translating a metaphoric language is a substantial task.

This thesis is punctuated by a gallery of illustrations and pictures from the making of *Chilahaebolae* with the purpose of giving the reader insights into my creative praxis and processes. The illustration by Themba Mkhoma (figure1) is an interpretation of the opening scene of the play. The lead characters, Phiri, Phokobje and Mpja, are plotting to raid Leburu's farm in order to steal chickens. Those in the know will notice that in Mkhoma's illustration Phokobje wears a garment known colloquially as *mathandakitchen* [one who loves the kitchen]. It acquires this name because it looks like a chef's outfit, but *mathandakitchen* is Mkhoma's choice for signifying the sartorial practices of the South African dance form, *isipantsula*, which are fashioned largely by underclass communities. In the play we dress Phokobje differently. The sporty hat is his trademark. In the choice of clothing for Phokobje and Phiri, I wanted to refer to the fact that *isipantsula* is a subculture deeply rooted in politics:

> *Isipantsula*, which evolves from Amerikanos of Kofifi or Sophiatown in the 1950s… [is]the extravagant taste in dress and the machismo carriage of the body.

> The black youth culture of Kofifi was re-invented thirty years later by the youth of Soweto and other black townships as *isipantsula*. (Magogodi, 2002: 244)

Characterisation in *Chilahaebolae* is informed by the idea that the *isipantsula* dress code is a form of self-creation in "response to ghetto alienation" (Magogodi, 2002, 244). *Taba di mahlong*, Basotho will tell you. It literally means the story is in the eye or the news is in the eyes. Mkhoma's portrayal reveals that Phokobje's crooked eyes tell the story of one hatching a sly plan. Mpja's squinted eyes confess his fear and puzzlement. Phiri's piercing eyes show the face of vexation – she wears *mogaga* – and her corrosive tongue conveys a harsh environment. The rebellion is written in the face. The image of the dog as a figure of greed looms large in the world of the fables that raised my conscience.

In the first draft of the playscript Phokobje was a lone wanderer and his glories were individualistic. When I realised how this narrative model challenged my search for a communalistic aesthetics, I had to revisit the story. In its current version Phokobje needs Phiri and an army of wild animals to discard the blood drinking world of Motho le Lekgoa. Having said this, my first impulse to put Phokobje as the centre of my story is explicable. Since early childhood the jackal has been a figure of interest to me. Growing up, I became increasingly uneasy with the way the jackal is portrayed in Setswana fables, which formed a part of the Bantu Education curriculum. In these prescribed books the jackal is often a dubious character who betrays friendships. Writing in *Letlhaku le Legologolo*, Leseyane explains that the jackal is the most infamous character on the tongues of storytellers:

> *Phokojwe ke sengwe sa dibatana tse tsa lefatshe leno, tse di itsegeng thata. Mo dikgannyeng tsa batho ba bogologolo ka phologolo tsa naga, ga go tse dintse tse tsa tsona tse di fithlelang leina la phokojwe le sa tlhage mo go tsona. Mo dingannye tse, re fitlhela gore selo se se neng sa dira phokojwe a itsege ke boferefere le botlhale jwa gwagwe jo bo fetang diphologolo tsa naga.* (1963:35) [The jackal is among the most famous creatures in this part of the world. In the stories of ancients about wild animals there are not too many in which the jackal's

name is not mentioned. In these stories, the jackal is usually known for trickery and cleverness which is greater than other wild animals.]

It is my view that Setswana writers whose books were prescribed in schools constructed the jackal to discourage any form of scavenging and law-breaking. That is why the jackal often ends up in misery under the farmer's sjambok when he raids farms. Although the jackal characters were thoroughly discredited in official literatures, they appealed to a side of me that wants to break the law. Growing up in the township, thug elements who operated in the white suburbs were celebrated partly because they did not fear raiding white spaces. Stories about their trickster operations reflected cracks in the edifice of Apartheid laws. The trickster with a capacity to disrupt the powerful is an interesting notion by which to revisit and critique the horrors of the neo-colony. The jackal and the hyena in *Chilahaebolae* carry the image of the underclass's capacity to revolt using unconventional strategies or trickster tactics, as it were. The part of the story where Phokobje fights to get his tail back, thus restoring his strength, finds resonance mythologies around the power of jackal's tail in southern African mystery systems. Phiri's weapon, *lechemi*, is inspired by the ways in which myth and magic hold sway in African liberation narratives.

Having conducted this research in an atmosphere highly charged with projects of African spiritual reawakening meant suspending rationalistic assumptions about the world and its ways. Incredibly, when driving back from a visit in Bangadile in Magaliesburg, where author Molefe Pheto resides, a jackal crossed our path. It was a rainy Saturday morning, at about 1.30am on 23 May 2022, when we left his farmhouse. Prince Lamla, my colleague and fellow play-maker, silenced me for a moment as he brightened the headlights as a creature with sharp-pointed ears, silver-black fur stripes on the back and a long furry tail sprinted swiftly across the road, *"Ke Jakalas!"* [It's a jackal!] Lamla exclaimed as the creature vanished into the darkness. The image of the headlights shining on a running jackal hit my nerves hard. I am still wondering about this encounter with the jackal. Why did the jackal cross my path at this point in my inquiry? My rationalistic thinking says it was a coincidence. A mystical response suggests that this experience conveys shamanic

illumination. At a basic symbolic level, catching the jackal in the headlights conveys the image of my play shining a spotlight on Phokobje. The jackal looms large in my story.

When I telephoned Pheto, reporting our encounter with the jackal, to him it was not a mystery: "Re tshela le bone bo-phokobje" [we live with jackals in those parts of the country]. Interestingly, when later that morning I read Pheto's prison memoir, *And Night Fell,* I came across the jackal. Here Pheto's Afrikaner jailer, in 1975, uses the name jackal as a derogatory term to deflate a black radical:

> Most of these [jailers] had an animalistic hate for "cheeky" Blacks. One of them called me "Jakalas", the Afrikaans Black interpreted version of jackal. In Afrikaans it is *jakal*. But the policeman preferred Jakalas, the Black pronunciation. One day I asked him why he referred to me as Jakalas. He enjoyed himself with guttural laughter, terribly sadistic. He said that the way I came out of a dark cell to collect my food reminded him of a jackal (Pheto, 1983: 117).

The wealth of insight that I catch from this mysterious encounter with a live jackal and meeting it on a page a few hours later suggests to me that rationalist approaches to research may not be equipped to handle the language of *mogaga* play-making. Having traced the genealogy of the word *mogaga* in Batswana mystery systems you have seen how the term plunges us into an inquiry that acknowledges mystical worlds. To comprehend ritual drama, it is necessary for the reader to dethrone "excessive rationalism" (De Graft, 2002: 34) and acknowledge the spiritual realities and characters who people nonconcrete realms. "Mechanistic, materialistic philosophies" are insufficient (De Graft, 2002: 21). To understand ritual drama or the making of *mogaga* dramaturgy we are required to invite a spiritual component into the arrangement of the scholarly apparatus. Drama which works with the material of soul compels us to acknowledge mythology as a site for claiming reality.

Writing in *Black World* magazine Shelby Steele explains that:

> The term ritual is used here in the modern sense, which is looser than the traditional religious view of ritual as rigidly prescribed, unvarying pattern of spiritual observance (1973: 4).

Ritual drama, from its ancient roots, has displayed the ability to adapt its mechanics to seasons of change in the political landscape and to confront contemporary maladies. The current resurgence of African spirituality in South Africa and elsewhere in the African diaspora is impressive in so far as it has produced valuable observations. Attending rituals, conferences and groundings has provided insightful experiences. Yet often my senses are unsettled by what I view as inclinations to float in an ethereal mist. Unlike in the 1970s, it seems there is a growing tendency to recast spiritual reawakening outside the politics of insurgency. By revisiting the formation of troupes like Malopoets and Malambo Jazz Messengers this inquiry taps into the debates about the meeting of ritual performance and guerilla theatre in South Africa and elsewhere.

As it will appear, the pronouncements of artists who operated through the influence of Black Consciousness philosophy reflects Sydne Mahone's notion of "spiritual realism" (Mahone, 2002: 270). In the terrain of Black Consciousness visual culture, Mothlabane Mashiangwako's pencil on paper piece titled *To be Born, To Live, To Die and to Continue Living* (1979) sounds the notion of the undying sage of the mysteries. His name, Motlhabane [warrior]echoes in the hand that wields a spear. The other hand, holding ditshela (hand-shakers) echoes the world of malopo/malombo. *Vho Maine Vha Tshele* (those who heal through rattles used as rhythm accompaniment to the chanting and dancing) played their part in Malombo ritual dramas (Dhavhula, 2015). With both hands, one wielding a spear and the other shaking ditshela, Mashiangwako's "mythopoetic" (Frankfort, 1946: 8) vision celebrates the insurrectionary power of art. With both hands issuing from the same body, *taola* (healing shell), resistance is ritualized. This impulse to effect material reality with spiritual force, I dramatized in the strategies of Phokobje and Phiri, who deploy mystical practices, *lechemi*, to "take action against oppressive elements of society" (Freire, 1972: 6).

Writing from the perspectives of the jackal and the hyena offers this playwright a view from below. It is my view that writing from the perspective of the lion-king reflects the sensibility of the ruling elite. The jackal-types and hyena-types, when they appear in the work of the ruling elite, are often treated as pathetic and parasitic creatures. In *Chilahaebolae* the lion is portrayed as a pusillanimous character who does not hunt any more. The lion models at the zoo. The roar is synthetic, made to entertain tourists. When the jackal, the hyenas, and others rebel against the system of Motho and Lekgoa, the symbol of the lion as king of the jungle collapses. The jackal's capacity to topple the lion king is also a thought which plagues my muses ceaselessly. As it appears, the ruling elite are often at ease with lion-king type of characters. The lion-king reflects them – those who get the lion's share of the national purse; those who have empires to hold up.

In a neocolonial set-up The Lion-King trope continues to normalise the notion of lording over others. I would like to draw attention to how the cyclic structure of *The Lion King* (1994) by Lebo M retains the kingdom of the lion. Various types of despots resemble the character, Scar, whose idea of the lion's share is about drinking everyone else's blood. The appetites of neocolonial presidents and their capacity to eat their own countries are expressions of different versions of The Lion-King. When Mufasa returns through Simba to restore the lion's order the story conveys a world that is sealed. The battle for the kingdom is strictly between lions. To this effect, the kingdom of the lion is normalised. There are no forces of renewal in this jungle.

Bernie Fanaroff's preface in *Karoo /xam-ka! au Cosmos* reveals that Jackal also features prominently in the /Xam mystery systems. In a story told by Dia!kwain, a source from the /Xam people, the jackal appears as a shamanic vehicle:

> When a sorcerer wants to see where his people whom he possesses, whom he dwelt with, are living seem to be, for they do not live where they used to be, he goes out when others are asleep, he walks about seeking them to see where they are, he turns

> into a jackal, he goes and looks at the people. He goes up to the people, but walks past them, and smells their scent (2021: 22).

Here, the jackal is treated with a sense of wonder. Similarly, in the fables collected by Credo Vusamazulu Mutwa (storyteller, theatre maker and healer) from Zulu folklore the jackal is also a prominent figure of mystery. It is refreshing that in his story, "The Theft of Fire", from *Zulu Shaman,* Mutwa reverses the symbols. He reveals the lion as a tyrant who raids caves, rooting out "cowering grass-eaters" or any lesser animal and devouring them. Kintu ends the tyranny of the lion by hurling "a huge stone at its blazing eyes", killing it and eating it with his wife, Mameravi. In this story the jackal is heroic: "he risks his life, enduring many dangers to obtain fire from heaven so that the first parents of the human race… can survive" (1996: 79-94). When Kintu invites Mpungushe, the jackal, to a feast he says: "There is plenty here for all of us. The lion wanted to eat you, now you must eat the lion" (1919: 82). This image of a world where the jackal eats the lion turns things upside down. This revolution in the world of quadrupeds has symbolic power.

Mutwa's jackal plays against images that were established in mainstream accounts where storytellers, especially of Afrikaner folklore, while treating the lion with awe, scorn the jackal. Jacomien van Niekerk's paper, *Afrikaans Stories of Jackal and Hyena: Oral and Written Traditions* reveals how Afrikaans children's literature is replete with stories of *Jakkals en Wolf*. Van Niekerk argues that "white Afrikaans children grew up on a culture of oral stories told them by black farm labourers and/or nannies" (2018: 91). She adds that "a trope of Jackal and Hyena became so well established in the realm of Afrikaans children's literature that parents and grandparents freely created their own *Jakkals en Wolf* stories at bedtime" (2018: 92). Roger Hewitt in his book *Structure, Meaning and Ritual in the Narratives of the Southern San* pays tribute to Gideon Retief von Wielligh (1859- 1932) for collecting /Xam fables in the late 19th Century. Hewitt points out that:

> Von Wielligh was a popular writer who sought to encourage poor Afrikaners to read. His simplified stories, published in Afrikaans, were remodelled by him to

> these didactic ends, and unfortunately, cannot be taken as reliable /Xam narratives (2001:9).

The re-issue of Von Wielligh's work and its subsequent retellings by other authors has meant that the /Xam voices retained their presense in history, although thay have been appropriated and reaccentuated in line with Afrikaner ideology. Writing the introduction to his collection of fables, *Animal Tales*, Von Wielligh unwittingly reveals the exploitative relationship between the Afrikaner audience (masters) and their Khoi storytellers (slaves):

> Fifty years ago, when we were still small, our Khoikhoi uncles entertained us with endless tales about Jackal, Wolf, and other animals... So, you can see that Jackal's fun-and-games and Wolf trials-and- tribulations have been passed down to us for generations.
> Occasionally, one of the uncles might not be in the mood to tell a tale, but we knew what he was after: a plug of tobacco or slice of raisin bread would bring a friendly gleam to his eyes and a tale to his lips.
> No one could quite tell an animal tale like a Khoikhoi storyteller (2011: 11).

Although Von Wielligh acknowledges the influence of Khoi storytelling practices on the foundation of Afrikaner literature, the gesture of feigning familial relations with the farmworkers by naming them "uncles" is unsettling. The patronising gestures of offering "a plug of tobacco" and "slice of raisin bread" is indexical of the slave-master relations that governed the production of these "kitchen" performances. In the main, reading through the Khoi stories that Von Wielligh, collected, Jackal features prominently. Using his rascally pranks, Jackal survives "the battle between the walking and flying animals". Through this series of interweaving fables, beside a complicated friendship with Wolf, Jackal tricks his way into favourable dealings with Lion, king of the land, Vulture, king of the Sky, and Crocodile, king of the Water. Jackal's arsenal of trickster antics sees him through a harsh environment that is riddled with battles for sovereignty in the animal's universe. The clashes between fellow travellers motivated by greed and the lust for power

cause disunity among the animals. Jackal's journey at the crossroads of conflicting social forces and his multiple trials through these interlinking fables reflect the turbulent politics of power in a changing word. Although the /Xam storytellers invested Jackal with the ability to play the powerful, his capacity for rebellion is confined by a selfish streak. In my play, *Chilahaebolae* it is this sense of self-interest that Phokobje and Phiri must overcome.

A cursory look will suggest that the laughter in African storytelling has the function of deconstructing power. Often, the trickster figures and cartoon-like stylisation provide an experiment with the weapon of *gwaring*[2] [satire] or serio-comical laughter as a means to confront botheration. Achille Mbembe has raised "the question of whether humour in the post-colony an expression of "resistance" is or not" (2015:108). When addressing the question Mbembe indicates how individuals, by their laughter, kidnap power and "force it to examine its own vulgarity" (2015:109). Writing the preface for a collection of South African plays, Woza *Afrika!,* Amiri Baraka notes how the plays mimic

> facts that are infinitely more terrifying, expose the tragic hell of white supremacist colonialism… these plays carry a contemporary style, spare, symbolic, ironic, sharp and bitterly funny… a hatchet-edged satire, the development of characters out of the regime, apartheid specimens (black and white) whose humour is painful only because it is true (Baraka, 1986: xiv).

Baraka and Mbembe's observations about the politics of laughter is visible in Wole Soyinka's series of guerilla plays such as *Poll Booth,* about the chaos of elections in the post-colony, *Home Roost,* which parodies the politician's love for grand gestures, and *Population Control,* in which people's genitals vanish and they suspect the government. These plays formed part of the arsenal of Soyinka's combat theatre with the University of Ife Theatre Guerilla unit. The story of guerilla theatre in South Africa reveals that laugher has been a powerful weapon for confronting the powerful. In *Imfuduso,* by Women of

[2] The term *gwarin*g comes from a word-battle game, go gwara or go gwarana in which you deflate the opponent's power with laughter or ridicule.

Crossroads, the players caricature the apartheid police by wearing wigs, putting on Afrikaaner accents and imitating their abrasive mannerisms. Through their songs and stories "ordinary people locate the fetish of state power in the realm of ridicule" (Mbembe, 2015: 109).

Ngũgĩ's work in Kamirĩĩthũ and the work done by Women of Crossroads through their play *Imfuduso* provide interesting models which I wish to explore further in forthcoming activations of the play, *Chilahaebolae*. My aim is to explore different spaces - and there are precursors to learn from. A good example is the work of Soyinka about Unife Guerilla theatre troupes. They performed "on your street corner, in the marketplace, shopping centre, parking lot etc" (Banbunn et al, 2005: 88). Speaking about the guerilla strategies of the People's Experimental Theatre, Sadeque Variava (theatre activist) explains that performances were not limited to theatre spaces. The repressive situation of the 1970s demanded a mobile theatre where scripts were embodied and the players could perform anywhere, including inside a moving bus. When testifying during the trial of Black Consciousness artists in the 1970s Steve Bantu Biko, a prominent leader of the Black Consciousness movement, called this type of play- making "open theatre".

Although *Chilahaebolae* began its production life in the confines of performance buildings and Box Office entries at the Market Theatre, the ethics of guerilla theatre and aesthetics of ritual drama dictated a path towards an open theatre. When we staged the play in an open courtyard at Funda Centre in Soweto in June 2021, we were deliberately observing a key element of open/guerilla theatre – the element of activating spaces. During the week of 24 September 2023 to 1 October 2023 we staged *Chilahaebolae* on Bertha Street, Braamfontein. The play attracted a lot of foot traffic from a mix of university students, car guards, security personnel and theatre enthusiasts who had travelled from various parts of the city. Family members of past and current cast and band members from other provinces such as the North West, KwaZulu-Natal also attended. Among the audience were those with their hubbly-bubblies, pot smokers, and beer drinkers for whom the open provided a relief from the containment of enclosed spaces. The overwhelming audience responses and conversations that ensued indicate that people appreciated this move to "break away from

the confines of closed walls" (Ngũgĩ,1986:42) and curtains calls of formal theatre buildings. By reconnecting with methods of open theatre the staging of *Chilahaebolae* in the street reinforces Ngũgĩ's assertion that "[t]heatre is not a building. People make theatre" (Ngũgĩ,1986:41). A retrospective look suggests that these experiments form the primordial waters that have nourished and shaped my experiments with the tools of *go gagaola*. Staging the play created the necessary "chaotic matter" that contains all the essences for mogaga playmaking (Diop, 1981: 310).

I must close this preface by offering synoptic previews of the chapters that build this study of *mogaga* play-making. Discussions in the study take off with two short interlinking chapters; "Some note about mogaga" and "Speaking to the source(s)." The first chapter traces the author's musings about nomenclature that artists and scholars apply to their artistic practices. The story of my rediscovery of the name *mogaga* connects the idioms of street culture with the vocabularies of African spiritual traditions. In the chapter that follows the reader previews the intellectual resources that inform my impulse to review theories of play and its making, particularly forms in which performance is a carrier of social power.

"Mogaga: Three Principles" is a chapter that seeks to tease out the mechanics of *mogaga* dramaturgy through exploration of a trinity of principles: *imvumakufa, huru* and *khepera*. I explore these principles through the prism of Black Consciousness Theatre practices that emerged from the 1970s and filtered into contemporary South Africa. I proffer that *imvumakufa, huru* and *khepera* provide the key cornerstones for building *mogaga* play-making. *Huru*, a word reminiscent of the Pan-African term for freedom, is a life force by which *malopo* fetch their animal spirits through interpretative dance drama (Kgobokoe, 2022:np). The embodiment of spirit animals also implies *imvumakufa*, a form of "dying" which is not death. Significantly, *khepera* is about the mechanics of becoming. We will trace the three principles of *imvumakufa, huru* and *khepera* by observing a pattern that starts with Miriam Makeba's collaboration with spirits of rebellion and moves into the

trickster chronicles of Lefifi Tladi, finally trickling through to Gha-Makhulu Diniso's Spiritism.

"Gogo Pedagogy: Thuto ya letsele [knowledge from a mother's breast]" is a chapter that invokes grandmothers or abo-Gogo, the quintessential custodians of culture. Gogo, a name which ordinarily refers to grandmother, has gained currency in contemporary southern African spiritual practices. Those who are spiritually gifted, regardless of gender orientation, can be called abo-gogo. In line with the impulse to name my artistic practice I coin a term for my process of gathering information. "Gogo Pedagogy" is the name that will explain my process of gathering data. It is a method grounded in womanist discourses that invest in the science of swapping stories.

> Storytelling is the grandmother of the church, the school and the theatre. Our ancestors defined the sacred, explained our origins and recounted the history of our lineages through vibrant story-sharing (Teish,2023:np).

As a consumer of story and practitioner in the arts of storytelling I am drawn to the notion of circulating stories as a tool for inquiry and means of social provocation. Drawing from a heritage of *dinaane/inganekwane/intsomi* [storytelling] and ritual performances on the continent and the African diaspora, my endeavour, like Luckett et al "posits an African origin to theatre and theatre making that broadens the theatrical canon and provides a culturally specific contribution to performance pedagogy." (2017:1).

In the chapter titled "Go Gagaolla: Spirits, Play and Politics", I delve further into ancient mystery systems that ground my proposition that making play is a practice in which magic and social revolution may cohabit. The geography of my inquiry stretches from the "Grimaldi Negroids" (Diop, 1981:13) through the mystics of Makgakgadi into malopo and other contemporary public performances of dissidence on and off-stage. The central question this chapter speaks to is the political relationship between spiritual realities and

the material world. Ritual drama as a theatre of "spirit embodiment" (Ajumeze, 2014:78) allows for bridges between corporeal beings and spiritual forces.

"Groundings le Balepa Dinaledi" discusses links between ritual performance and communication with interstellar entities. I drive commentary from the thoughts I collected from The International Indigenous Astronomy Experts Society at the Royal Marang Hotel, Phokeng, 27-29 July 2022. I had numerous insightful encounters with astronomers and healers, particularly regarding questions about transcending Eurocentric conceptual terminology and frameworks. Inspecting the conference theme, "Facing the Reality, Value and Relevance of Indigenous Astronomy in the 21st Century", this chapter dialogues retrospectively with astronomers and *iZangoma*. My key interest here is to explore possible links between theatrical activism and astronomy.

The chapter titled "Rehearsal and Performance: Search for Technologies of Mogaga" documents my creative process and my experiments with the principles of *mogaga* playmaking. Explorations in this chapter assess the development of the script and the mounting of the production in the last seven years of my inquiry. I reflect critically on the journey of writing the playscript and on lessons learned through mounting the theatre production.

The reader will find it useful to first take a plunge into my playscript. The version of *Chilahaebolae* that is documented in the next chapter reflects developments between my muses and the rehearsal floor when we prepared to stage the play on Bertha Street. During the run of the play there are scenes that changed, and I have brought these alterations to the playscript. The most recent adjustment that I made is to re-write the scene where Phiri leads a ritual of war, putting the substance of *mogaga* into militant usage. In fact, Phiri and Phokobje's journeys in which they must overcome self-interest for collective ventures emphasises the meeting between spiritual elevation and political rebellion. They perform ritual acts to alter their material conditions.

During the process of writing the play, I have come to understand that the performance aspects of the play cannot be fully apprehended in written form. Bheki Peterson shares a similar experience that pertains to "the difficulty of the specific performance that shaped the physical enactment of plays" (2000:4). Through the experience of writing and directing *Chilahaebolae* over a seven-year period I must agree with his conclusion that "all theatre practitioners know so well [that] there is a world of difference between a script and its performance, the more so in cultures where improvisation is a valued skill" (2000:4).

The creative project: Chilahaebolae

CHARACTERS

PHOKOBJE – Jackal**.** Die grootste manocha in die chandies. umJekeke ongaphel'umoya. [The biggest trickster on the scene. His fire is unquenchable] Rebellions spirit who values his freedom highly**.** But he must first overcome his own kwaal [negativity]

MPJA – Dog. Dipapa di mo phazamisa over [He is overtaken by greed]. The love for ntofo-lifestyle [easy-lifestyle] lifestyle]and the fear of freedom are his undoing.

PHIRI – Hyena. Strong ka lechemi. Always turning her hustle on. She is fuelled by the spirit of geen-surrender [no-surrender]. Gonyonyo [greed] is her enemy.

KATSE - Cat. Free spirited and agile. She wants out of domestication. She is riddled by the spirit of imvumakufa – to die for an idea that will live.

MGODOYI – Stray dog. *A moegoe met a clever se gesieg* [A fool who wears a wise look]. Leader of outcast gangsters who prefer a parasitic lifestyle.

BOVA –Spineless stray dog. Gwababa e reng mo ngwaneng? [fear riddles his spirit] Brave in a group situation. Prone to secret adventures.

MOTHO – Human. Mgijimi wa system a tyrannical 'master' who thrives on controlling other creatures.

VAN SLAGHUIZEN – Butcher**.** Bossy and all about business. He enjoys wielding his large panga.

MASLAMOS - Circus master – Mashaya[liar]- a charismatic trickster and strong miser who does not part easily with money.

MZOOLISTO - Zookeeper. Moriski wa mampela -a broke gambler who thinks highly of himself.

MAFESHINI - Fashion Designer. Vibrant and bold. Big spender. Good-looking-ness is her thing**.**

LEBURU – Chicken farmer. His hand is his tjambok. He loves to punish creatures who raid his stock.

LEKGOA – the dog trainer**.** Smooth talker salesman and inventor of the chain, the dog-collar, and the leash within. Can sell you terena e sena sporo (can sell you a train but no rails for the train to run on)

Setting

Time: ageless
Place: fictitious

Set

Open stage/play sand.

Props

Chains and dog-collars, tails, knobkerrie, *zorro*, large butchers' knife, wig, hats/hoodies, walking stick…

Playmakers Note

Building on a trinity of song, incantation and physical storytelling, the production is conceived as *mogaga* play-making or an anticipatory dance drama. Various skills, from vocal agility, acrobatic dexterity to physical elasticity, are required of players who must morph into different animals and features of the landscape.

Mantra

"Show the chains… let them see the chains falling" Amiri Baraka, 1967

SYNOPSIS

CHILAHAEBOALAE is an action-packed musical satire fashioned from the wealth of African fable. Phokobje, Hunguhwe or Mpungushe is a trickster figure we recognise from folklore. In *Chilahaebolae, o vaya le di saambenche* [he travels with friends on the same path] whose stories are also known, Phiri, the parasitic companion and Mpja, the docile figure. Drawing scenes with the language of anticipatory dance drama, the play tells the story of PHOKOBJE, PHIRI and MPJA. They face the harsh realities of a world interrupted by MOTHO. Water reserves are dry[3] and food is scarce *ko Nageng* [in the wilderness]. The trio band together to scrape for *dipapa le mavati* [food and water]. Temperamental journeys toss them into Chilahaebolae, a place of plenty. *Fede* [however], fortune locates them differently. Mpja accepts the life of the leash, while PHIRI is plotting. PHOKOBJE's refusal to comply with the ways of a world run by MOTHO le Lekgoa complicates matters. Cracks on the edifice of their trinity grow wider and deeper with the rise of self-interest. When, ultimately, they recognise the limits of the game of scraping for *dipapa*, and rumbles of rebellion awake, PHOKOBJE and PHIRI must reawaken *Dilo Tsa Nageng* [creatures of the wild].

Production Credits

Written and Directed by Kgafela oa Magogodi.

Assistant Director, Sinenhlanhla Zwane

Music composed by Kgafela oa Magogodi.

[3] *Lords of Water*, a documentary flighted on Aljazeera on Sunday, 12 March 2023 at 8.30am, establishes that water scarcity is part of the future, and that abundance is part of the past. Australia has implemented a water market. Through the manoeuvres of bankers and insurers water is increasingly financialised. Water is said to be the new gold. Farmers are now renting water.

Music Director Sibusiso Mkhize

Choreography by Sinenhlanhla Mgeyi

Stage Management by Lebogang Chirwa

Costume and Set Designed by Sinenhlanhla Zwane

STAGE HISTORY

- Market Theatre, May 2017.
- Olive Tree Theatre, November 2017.
- Wits Theatre, October 2018.
- Soweto Theatre, October 2018.
- Funda Centre, Soweto June 2021.
- Braamfontein, Point of Order, Bertha Street, September -October 2023.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE SAMBENCH

PHIRI wa thlabeletsa [starts a song]

PHIRI: In the beginning ko nageng
Phokobje le Mpja nageng
disambenche nageng
le botse le Phiri ‘na le teng
[Jackal and Dog in the wilderness
They were close friends in the wilderness
Ask Phiri she was around]

Singing along, Dilo tsa Naga di itatlhela mo space-ing. The wild animals dancing, making shrieking sounds and forming circles around PHIRI and MPJA

MPJA: Fede tuka ko nageng
Go ne go sa re robalwe mo beteng.
[back then in the wilderness
We did not sleep on beds]

PHIRI: Vele re ne re le teng
Rona bo Phiri diganana re le teng.
[It is true that we were there
We the Hyena rebels were there]

MPJA: Re sama mafika rona mpja tsa teng
Le botse le Phiri na le teng.
[We used stones as our pillows
As Hyena she was there]

PHIRI: Vele re ne re le teng
Fede re gana ka rona dilo tsa nageng
[It is true that we were there
We refused to sell our soul, we creature of the wilderness]

A piercing howl cuts sharply through the music, scattering the circle. PHOKOBJE wa rotha. He saunters forward as the circle of bodies reforms around him.

PHOKOBJE: *(flowing over the sound)*

Ga dipholologolo le ditlhare di bua

matlapa a tobetsega ke ne ke le teng

Go belegwa dilo tsa naga rona bo Phokobje re le teng.

Senonnori le ketlele e le skimi se bofile go tabalatsiwa mo nageng.

Mmutle le lekanyane ba tshela molapo ba pagame tlou mokwatleng

Peba le katse ba botsana maphelo Phiri a suna phage mo phathleng

O le kae wena go thuntsa lerole re thula thulana le bo dimo dikgageng

Diganka bo kgodumodumo ba thubega dimpa dithoteng

Tengnyanateng dinokeng 'thlapi di tlhabeletsa digwagwa di opela ka kodu tse boteng

Selo sa go gana go palangwa pitse ya naga se katakata dithabaneng

Dikoko ga di fologa rona bo-Phokobje re tshwere di-cypher le dibatana tsa mawatleng *(howling*)

[When animals and trees could speak.

When stones were soft I was there

When creatures of the wilderness were born I was there

Bear and Kettle were close friends turning on their hustle in the wilderness

Hair and Wild-dog crossing the river riding Elephant's back

Mouse and cat exchanging pleasantries Hyena kissing Wildcat on the forehead.

Where were you when the dust rose while we wrestled with ogres in the caves

Giants like kgodumodumo's stomach bursting

Out there in the rivers fish starting a song frogs singing in deep voices

The thing that refuses to be ridden wild horse gallops over the hills

When cocks crow we the jackals a holding cyphers with creatures of the sea.

PIKI-PIKI

PHOKOBJE, MPJA and PHIRI tiptoe into a chicken farm. They huddle together in a crouching position, plotting.

TOGETHER: *(chanting)* Piki piki siya ba ngena
sala sala magwala.
ke mang mpja ya game?
ke re ke mang mpja ya game?
ich ich ich.
is one is two.
ag' nix machecha sis tog.
phuma wena.
sala wena.

PHIRI o khomba MPJA.

PHIRI: Ha e ye! [Get going!]

PHOKOBJE: (*pushing a limping MPJA forward*) Jy kom met twak.Wa itlhotsisa hierso. [You are starting your shit. You are acting like you are limping.]

PHIRI: (*yanking MPJA out of the way*) Los hom. Die ding ke lephyega! [Leave him. This thing is a coward!]

PHOKOBJE: Jy gaan? [You are going in?]

PHIRI: Ja! (*Jerking PHOKOBJE violently*) Maar ek kry 'n lion's share. Verstaan jy? [Yes! But I get the biggest share. You understand?]

PHOKOBJE: (*grudgingly*) Is waar. [It is true.]

PHIRI looks around and picks up a plant of lechemi chewing it and spitting it on the ground.

MPJA: Eh eh eh…

PHOKOBJE: E phusha lechemi mpja ya game? [She is mixing up a magic portion]

PHIRI **(***Pumped up*) Haueng! [Let's go]

PHOKOBJE: (*Winding PHIRI with praise*) Hao Phiri Mapetla Mpja ya game.

PHOKOBJE and MPJA lift PHIRI. Eyes bulging in anticipation, she scales over the high wall
landing on her feet. The music of chickens scattering and squeaking in terror fills the air as
PHIRI gives chase. Catching the chickens one by one, she rings their necks, tossing them over
the wall for PHOKOBJE and MPJA to collect. Jiki-jiki PHOKOBJE pees on PHIRI's lechemi.
Skierlik LEBURU o wela PHIRI ka sjambok.

LEBURU: Jou bokorr! [You bugger]

CHORUS: Jou bokorr!

LEBURU: Jou vuil pop! [You filthy doll]

CHORUS: Jou vuil pop!

LEBURU: Jou duiwel se spoeg! [You devil's spit]

CHORUS: Jou duivel se spoeg!

LEBURU: (*joyfully*) Vandaag is donderdag [Today is a day for beatings].

PHIRI wa scream-a. PHOKOBJE le MPJA ba ja fatshe. After running for a while, they pause. PHOKOBJE lays down the sack with the loot, o khokha moya.

MPJA: Maar why o rotela lechemi la Phiri? [why do you pee on Phiri's muti?]

PHOKOBJE: Let her get a taste of the farmer's sjambok. O tla ba strong. (*Lifting the sack to his shoulder takes off triumphantly*). Kom laat ons tlhere Mpja ya mme. [come let's go]

MPJA: (*follows reluctantly)* Maar why o le slege so? [Why are you so cruel?]

PHOKOBJE: Jy praat twak, And wena o skoon pampier neh? E ile kae daai injury van jou? [You are talking shit. And you are innocent? Where is that injury you faked?]

MPJA: (*Starting to limp again*) Maar s'true ke na le krempe. [It is true, my foot is cramping.]

PHOKOBJE: Krempe ya ma-ada! Kort-kort wena o feika di-injury. [Nonsense! You always fake injuries] Eintlik, go back and share the taste of Leburu's sjambok le Phiri. Ek! Ek tlhere! [I am going!]

MPJA: Maar Phiri ke skimi sa rona. [But Phiri is our friend.]

PHOKOBJE: We don't need her anymore. You don't know Phiri wena. Daai ding is baie sleg. E nale gonyonyo daai ding. [That thing is cruel. She is greedy.]

MPJA: Gonyonyo?

PHOKOBJE: Akere jy het ge hoor are ene sy kry a lion's share. [Did you not hear that she said she was going to get the biggest share.]

PHOKOBJE tosses a piece of chicken at MPJA.

MPJA: Maar piece e nnyane so? [But such a small piece?]

PHOKOBJE: That's your share. Akere wena o feika di-injury. [For faking injuries.]

MPJA: (*Reaching for the sack)* Maar lenna ke spanile. [But I also worked.]

PHOKOBJE: *(drawing a line on the ground)* Ke eng? Wa phakama? [What? Do you want to fight?] Ka Mpungushe! You will never cross this line!

MPJA wa gwaja. He eats sulkily while PHOKOBJE enjoys his feast, ignoring MPJA's dark mood. After taking a few chunky bites he chokes. PHOKOBJE goes behind the tree to dig out a

bucket lifting it up to drink.

PHOKOBJE: He monna? You finished all the water?

MPJA: I was very thirsty!

PHOKOBJE: (*Jumping at MPJA, squeezing his throat*) Who is not very thirsty?

MPJA: Sorry.

PHOKOBJE: Sorry ya ma-ada! [nonsense!]

MPJA: But how long will this last?

PHOKOBJE: (*jerking him violently)* What?

MPJA: This life ya mo Nageng.

PHOKOBJE: He monna! Don't ask me twak.

MPJA: We kill each other for food. We must steal to eat. We must steal to drink water.

PHOKOBJE: (*o kgwa mathe)* Before my spit dries from the ground, this bucket must be full.

MPJA: Nna ke tla thola kae metsi? [From where will I get water?]

PHOKOBJE: I am tired of your twak. You will bring my water nakanjane. Today, you turn your hustle on.

MPJA: Maar mfowethu rivers are acid… wells are dry.

PHOKOBJE: (*handing him the empty bucket*) If this saliva dries from the ground before I drink water o tlo rota dipekere. [I will deal with you.]

BLACKIE THE BONE CATCHER

MOTHO: (*Singing)* Prepare ye the way of the master!

SERVANTS: Long live master.

MOTHO in the bathroom getting his teeth brushed by a servant. He slides into a morning gown attended by another servant. He steps forward again getting his ears waxed and his nose cleaned by yet another servant. He steps into another room where two servants attend him, one shinning his shoes and the other spraying and polishing his head. He steps forward and the servants sandwich him, one feeding him and the other paging his morning newspaper. The last servant sweeps the path where MOTHO walks.

MOTHO: Come Blackie!

MPJA jumps into view throwing himself at MOTHO. Avoiding the terrible stink, MOTHO jumps out of the way,

MOTHO: Shower time!

Dilo di a itobetsa- A hose pipe appears. MOTHO takes it and sprays. MPJA trembles delightfully, enjoying the cool water. Tla! A towel appears. MOTHO takes the towel and throws it.

MOTHO: (*Demonstrating*) Vaaslap!

Catching the flying towel and wiping himself, MPJA barks joyfully. Then MOTHO tosses a jacket. MPJA catches the airborne jacket putting it on.

MOTHO: *(Demonstrating)* Cotton!

CHORUS: Cotton kwedini!

MOTHO flings a pair of trousers at MPJA.

MOTHO: (*Demonstrating*) Pants Blackie. Pants.

MOTHO assists MPJA to slip into the pants. He snaps his fingers and a pair of shoes flies into view. Catching the shoes placing them at MPJA's feet.

MOTHO: Rashushu!

CHORUS: Shoooooes!

MPJA struts about flattered by the tapping sound which the heels make when he walks. He is jiving and feeling the music at soles of his shoes.

MOTHO*: (taking out chicken bones from his bag and tossing them up in the air)* Sssa!

MPJA steps and fetches the bones. Skierlik a mirror appears. A wave of horror sweeps over MPJA when he catches his own reflection.

MOTHO: (*amused*) Look at you Blackie. A true picture of progress.

MPJA wa relax-a. He starts to play joyfully with his image. While he is admiring himself, a plate of food is placed at his feet.

MOTHO: Sit Blackie sit!

MPJA eats voraciously. Then he turns searching MOTHO's pockets.

MOTHO: (*wielding a knobkerrie*) You want to eat. Now Sit Blackie!

MPJA throws himself at MOTHO's feet.

(*continued***)**: That's right!?

MOTHO pats MPJA on the head handing him a bone and watching him eat.

MOTHO: (*holding a bone up in the air and raising his hand higher*) Now Jump Blackie jump! Blackie jump!

MPJA leaps up into the air, but he misses the target. Highly pleased with his own tricks, MOTHO now holds the bone low, letting MPJA catch it. He digs out another bone from his pocket casting it away.

MOTHO: Step and fetch Blackie!

MPJA runs for the bone popping it in his mouth. He soon turns back kneeling before MOTHO. MOTHO trembles cheerfully when MPJA licks his boots.

MOTHO: Clever dog!

He empties his pockets and disappears into the house. MPJA breaks into a dance picking up bones, stuffing his mouth and loading his pockets. Meanwhile MOTHO wa nyonyoba. He grabs MPJA ka patrek-e, clamping a dog-collar around his neck. A scuffle breaks out while MOTHO fastens a dog collar around MPJA's neck.

MOTHO: *(showing the gold chain around his neck)* Look Blackie. Necklace! Amabling bling!

CHORUS: Amabling bling!

MPJA is now exited, parading with the chain and dancing with MOTHO. As they dance together MOTHO hands the long metal chain to the pole at the corner of the yard.

MOTHO*:* Hold him tight.

THE POLE nods. MPJA looks at the dog collar with blank astonishment as MOTHO vanishes into the house laughing scornfully. Riddled with confusion, MPJA wants to rip-off the dog-collar. He wants to rip the chain off THE POLE but power fails him. He tries uprooting THE POLE, but he gets electrocuted, jumping away quivering with horror. THE POLE trembles with laughter.

THE ROAD TO CHILAHAEBOLAE

PHOKOBJE is crossing the road when the sound of a roaring engine grows louder in his ears. Twisting sharply to one side and jumping out of the way he lands awkwardly, falling flat ka marago. Fumbling up, he points in the direction of the passing truck.

PHOKOBJE: Voetsek!

After walking a few paces, he steps on a thorn.

PHOKOBJE: Etchuuuuu!

Raising the foot, he bends over to pull out the thorn, casting it away with exaggerated contempt. Peeing on the ground he scoops up mud, plastering the sore under his foot. He carries on with his journey. Jiki-Jiki PHOKOBJE stops abruptly, sniffing the air around him. A familiar smell brings life to his eyes. He changes direction, trotting faster, following the scent. He comes to a dead halt when he meets a high fence.

PHOKOBJE: Ek se Mpja mme! Mpja mme ke nna!

MPJA wa idaftisa [ignores him]. PHOKOBJE grabs the fence trying to scale over. He is tossed back, staggering out of balance as though hit by a mighty fist. Howling with anger he ploughs into the fence trying to rip it with his claws. Fence ya mo chouka [the fence electrocutes him]. He leaps away, looking at the electric fence with great confusion and fury.

PHOKOBJE: Ek se Mpja mme. Mpja ya mme ke nna! Ek se Mpja ya mme, ke nna! Is ou'Phokobje my authi! Son of Mpugushe. Your brada from anada mada!

PHOKOBJE is pacing up and down scratching his head. His eyes light up suddenly. He takes to the ground, digging a hole. Slithering his slender body through the whole under the electric fence, he pops into the yard.

PHOKOBJE: Ek se, fede?

MPJA: *(Springs to his feet, barking tamely)* Chief, who are you? And how did you get in chief?

PHOKOBJE: (*Strutting about victoriously*) Hau Mpja ya mme! What is an electric fence to me? Jy ken my; Gazi la Mpungushe. Phokobje! The jackal. Die grootste clever in die Wereld. Umjekejeke o u'ngaphel'u moya. (*Reaches his hand out*) Fede zikhipa ma what?

MPJA stands stiffly giving him dirty looks.

(Continued, singing) Fede tuka ko Nageng Phokobje le Mpja Nageng. Le botse le Phiri na le teng…

MPJA turns his eyes away from PHOKOBJE's scrutiny.

(C*ontinued*) Have you forgotten Mpja ya mme?

PHOKOBJE sniffing at MPJA, giving him a closer look.

(*continued*) Maar you've put on some weight. Jy is nou baie ne! (*Pointing at MPJA's big belly*). Kyk hoe groot is jou khabaraitha! Ha ha ha… Mr Khabaranks. [Look how big is your stomach… Mr potbelly]

MPJA: Come on chief! I don't know you. You can't be seen to be interrupting my dinner!

MPJA continues eating, giving PHOKOBJE his back.

PHOKOBJE: Come on Mpja ya mme! O sa dlala so my authi. He monna, wa idaftisa? [Don't play like that. Hey man are you ignoring me?] Man What`s that you are eating there? Digwaile Mpja mme! O sa nkwalla kantle. [I am hungry! Don't shut me out.]

MPJA: Chief! Order chief! You are out of order!

PHOKOBJE: Eng? [What?]

MPJA: This is not how we do things here chief.

PHOKOBJE: Why nkare se o spita so? [Why are you being so arrogant?]

MPJA: This is Chilahaebolae Chief! Dinner is strictly by invitation!

PHOKOBJE: (*getting closer*) O sa nkwalla kantle my authi. Re family Mpja ya mme! [Don't close me out my brother. We are family.]

MPJA: *(holding the plate tightly*) Order Chief! Don't call me Mpja ya mme, especially if you want to eat chief?

PHOKOBJE: (*wrestling the plate away*) Eintlik, voetsek wena! Jou fokkon hond! O batla ke go rapele! [Infact, To hell with you! You bloody dog. You want me to grovel]

MPJA wa gwaja. PHOKOBJE swallows up chunks, laughing riotously. He spits out suddenly.

PHOKOBJE: Eintlik, wat se twak is die? [Infact. What kind of shit is this?]

MPJA: Eh chief. I see your palate needs education.

PHOKOBJE: It tastes funny.

MPJA: Chief. Here we don't steal chickens or chase lizards for food.

PHOKOBJE*:* *(sniffing*) I will eat because I am hungry.

PHOKOBJE eats slowly at first and then faster.

PHOKOBJE: Eintlik die ding is nie so bad! (*Flinging the empty plate away)* Mmmmmmh! Ke eng die ding? [What is this thing?]

MPJA: Husky, tender lamb flavour and Bob Martin steak flavour spliced with coconut chips.

PHOKOBJE*:* Coconut Chips? And this? *(Taking a big gulp)*

MPJA: Flavoured water?

PHOKOBJE: (*He burps, loudly)* Mnanderrr. [Tasty].

MPJA: Cranberry flavour!

PHOKOBJE: (K*icking the plastic bottle away*)So, things are good mo Chilahaebolae neh! Look at you (*pointing at MPJA's buttocks and raising his voice).* Daai is a moerse se reverse O ja soft neh! Di a boa mo Chilahaebolae. Or ba go pompile? [That is quite a big behind! Things a good in Chilahaebolae. Did they pump you up?]

MPJA: (*Irritated*) Order chief! Speak softly. It's my master's yard chief.

PHOKOBJE laughs rowdily.

(*continued*) Order chief! Order. You'll wake the master.

PHOKOBJE: What? Master?

MPJA: Motho is my master.

PHOKOBJE: Motho? Your master?

MPJA: Nna ke Mpja. Ha ba re ssa ke a ya!

PHOKOBJE: He wena Motho ke enemy. [Hey you Motho is the enermy]

MPJA: Please speak softly chief. Don't mess with my tender.

PHOKOBJE rolls over the lawn enjoying the softness. Running and tumbling, he stops to inhale the sweet air among the garden flowers. Then he raises his leg to pee.

PHOKOBJE*:* Monate mpolae! [Kill me with joy!]

CHORUS: Heyi Monate mpolae!

MPJA: Order chief! You can't be seen to be peeing on the flowers, chief. Don't mess with my tender!

PHOKOBJE: *(getting rowdier*) The grass here is so soft.

MPJA: Chief don't come here with those Nageng tendencies. Wa rasa! Please. Can you be seen to be orderly? Order chief! Don't mess with my tender!

PHOKOBJE: Monate mpolaye! [Kill me with joy!]. So, you eat coconut chips every day?

MPJA: The master knows that we dogs must eat well. Barking is not an easy gig!

PHOKOBJE: And that?

MPJA: The doghouse, where I sleep. My master sleeps in the big house.

PHOKOBJE: But you were supposed to come back to Nageng Mpja ya mme. You said you will bring my water?

MPJA: Your water? Look chief. Stop this Mpja ya mme thing! You confuse me with someone else.

PHOKOBJE: Fede never mind the water. Ne re le skimi. O le six ke le nine. Re le ntho e i-one, Mpja ya mme. Ka hiesro re tswere mpintji ya rona Phiri. Re phusha smogolo- [We had a strong bond. We were one you, Phiri and me. We used to hustle together]

MPJA*:* (*Turning away from PHOKOBJE's harsh gaze*) Chief! I gave you food chief. Now please go!

PHOKOBJE: Is orite. Ek sal tlhere. Ek sien gore Motho o go jesitse. Eintlik bona hierso Mpja ya mme. [It's alright. I will leave. I can see that Motho has poisoned you]. It's a long walk back to Nageng. At least organiz-a dipapa tsa tsela. [Organise some provisions for my journey]

MPJA: Dipapa tsa tsela? Chief, in Chilahaebolae if you want to eat well, you must join the branch chief.

PHOKOBJE: The branch? Kante ke eng branch? [What is the branch]

MPJA: The local branch of Domestic Animals. Easy way to get good food in Chilahaebolae.

PHOKOBJE: Are branches cues for food?

MPJA: Not like that chief.

PHOKOBJE: How?

MPJA: From the branch you get Union T-shirt, Union Kanga, Union card. And if you wear the right colours i-tender ivuthiwe! [the tender is ripe and ready]

CHORUS: (*song*) Seek ye first the kingdom of the union.
And its branches-e
Ask what you wish it shall be added unto you cadre.
Ha hallelujah the union.
Hallelujah
Ha hallelujah the union.

PHOKOBJE: O bua ka eng? [What are you talking about]

MPJA: *(Tapping his belly and buttocks boastfully)*. Seek ye first the kingdom of the union all these shall be added unto you chief!

PHOKOBJE: Very long shoes. Ha ha ha? Kante since when do dogs wear shoes Mpja ya mme?

MPJA: Order chief-

PHOKOBJE: O lahla sight Mpja ya mme. [You are losing your bearings]

MPJA: Chief, this is Chilahaebolae. You can boast about walking around ka diteki tse nkgang ko Nageng. Not here chief. No room for backward tendencies in Chilahaebolae. Humans will never give us freedom if we don't show them that we are civilized.

PHOKOBJE: (*raising his voice*) Kyk hierso [look here] I never asked to be civilized.

Jiki-jiki MPJA is thrown into total panic. PHOKOBJE slips into the shadows when the door cracks open. MOTHO bursts in with a knobkierie in hand, eyes sweeping around the yard.

MOTHO: Blackie what is this noise I hear?

MPJA: Nothing my master. I …. I…. I was barking in my sleep. I mean I was sleep-barking.

MOTHO: Are your sleeping on your gig Blackie?

PHOKOBJE: No. No. No... not sleeping. I was barking sleep away from my eyes.

MOTHO: Come here Blackie!'

MPJA trots gingerly towards MOTHO. MOTHO strokes MPJA's fur while, inspecting the scene. He brings out the dog collar.

MPJA: (*Retreating*) Master! Master! Why are you tying me?

MOTHO: Come on Blackie! Being tied up is part of your gig.

PHOKOBJE is watching and chuckling from the shadows.

MOTHO*:* (*turning to look*) Blackie what's that sound? (*Silence).*

MPJA: (*singing*) Master! Master! Don't tie me please.

MOTHO: Come Blackie. Sit Blackie.

MPJA: Master, Master! Don't tie me please!

MASTER: Don't cry Blackie. This chain is good for you.

MPJA: Master! Master! I beg you please!

MOTHO: (*Ties him up*) Your eyes are restless and wild tonight.

MOTHO retreats into the house. PHOKOBJE o cheka coast. After a while he steps in, grabbing MPJA's chain pulling it violently.

PHOKOBJE: Is this the fokon branch? Ha ha ha! So, this is how you get your coconut chips?

MPJA: Shhhhhh eish man chief! You will wake my master again.

PHOKOBJE: Your master can wake up and can kiss my entire jackal ass. (*Imitating MPJA's timidity)* Master! Master! Why are you tying me? Aaag sies. Ha o sa loma na? O kgaba ka meno? [You do no bite anymore? Are your teeth for decoration?]

MPJA: Take it easy chief?

PHOKOBJE: I am not your chief. Jou fokon hond! Do I look like I own a village?

MPJE: Don't get excited chief?

PHOKOBJE: What? (*Pulling the chain violently)*. Vandaag o tla e bua nnete! [You will tell the truth]

MPJA: You want me to talk? And you are choking me? Don`t be foolish chief.

PHOKOBJE: Wa re Foolish? (*Squeezes MPJA's throat.)* And wena you are so wise ne? Is it wise to grow fat with a chain around your neck?

Jiki-jiki PHOKOBJE feels the force of a knobkerrie against the ribs. He spins around, trying to catch MOTHO with his claws. MOTHO sends another blow to PHOKOBJE's skull. He tumbles backwards, crushing to the ground.

MOTHO: Ja jou Bokorrrr! [Yes, you bugger!]

Another blow of a knobkerrie against his ribs sends him reeling and fumbling up trying to flee. MOTHO hits him hard with a knobkerrie behind the skull. PHOKOBJE sags to the ground. MOTHO clamps the dog-collar around PHOKOBJE's neck, securing it tightly. He struts about triumphantly. PHOKOBJE recovers from a spell of dizziness plunging forward but the chain is holding him.

MOTHO: (*laughing*) Sporty Meet Blackie (*To MPJA*) Blackie meet Sporty!

MOTHO withdraws into the house. PHOKOBJE wrestles with the chain. He tries uprooting the pole, but he is electrocuted.

MPJA: (*amused*) I told you not to mess with Motho.

PHOKOBJE: Bloody human vermin. Hy kom ka patrek [he caught me off-guard].

MPJA: Motho takes no nonsense chief.

PHOKOBJE: I would have torn him to pieces.

MPJA: Don't worry chief! You will get used to the chain.

PHOKOBJE: Wa reng? Nna! Gazi la Mpungushe, get used to the chain? Wa hlanya! [You are mad].

MPJA: But chief... That is exactly how I felt the first time they put a chain around my neck. Never mind the bump on your head. Motho is not so bad. Look on the bright side. Soon you'll have your own doghouse, and food everyday chief. Congratulations chief. The days of chasing lizards for food are over. And if you join the Union...

PHOKOBJE: (*He attacks)* Union of Domestic Animals me! Wa ntlwaela! [You are crossing the line]

MPJA steps back swiftly, strutting about victoriously as *the chain holds back PHOKOBJE.*

MPJA: Relax Chief! That thing will choke you… Who knows… if you are lucky, you don't stay long in chains, barking like me. Because of your long and furry tail, my master will sell you to the zoo.

PHOKOBJE: Zoo?

MPJA: You have a lot to learn chief. The Zoo is a place where they keep wild animals like you! At the zoo they feed you and let you run around in a cage. All you have to do is model chief. I love visiting the zoo with my master when he takes his children. Hey Chief? You must see Bo-Tshwene strut their stuff, swigging from tree to tree, when humans come to the zoo. Ba sampola Bo-Tshwene Chief! Ba opela. Ba sa tshwarege. Ba jaevela baeng. E le Bo. [The monkeys were swanking and dancing and showing off].

(*Breaking into a song*).

Zoolicious! Zoolicious!

We live it up!! We live it up we do.

(*continued*) They do the monkey-jiving with great energy because they must eat. Chief. This is a world where everyone must jive for their supper Chief. Claws and teeth are weapons of yesterday. Humans rule the forest with gunpowder. Even the lion has stopped believing the lie that he is the king of the forest.

PHOKOBJE: Wa jiya, [You lie]

MPJA: I am telling you chief! Ke a re le Bo-Tau ba bo-Tau are modelling at the zoo chief.

PHOKOBJE: Tau? [The Lion?]

MPJA: They don't have to hunt chief. They don't eat their meat raw. Not anymore. Have you heard of cheese?

PHOKOBJE: Cheese?

MPJA: I see you know nothing about cheese neh! Look here Chief. There is eating. And there is eating. (*gesturing*) Levels mchana! Chief, the day you taste cheese you will forget about Nageng will be a thing of yesterday. Chief, I am told that in the Zoo they don't even drink much water. Have you heard of whisky?

PHOKOBJE: Whisky?

MPJA: Whisky is the nectar of the Gods. I tasted that thing once chief. Chief, until you taste cheese and whisky, you have not arrived in Chilahaebolae. Just a sip and you forget Nageng chief.

PHOKOBJE: Forget Nageng? Wa spita neh! You see that bird, circling in the sky wandering to nowhere. It will get tired and land. Nawe soon uzolanda. Stru' ka Mpungushe. [You too will land]

MPJA: Chief, this wisdom of Nageng will not assist in Chilahaebolae. If you must survive, learn to arrest your Nageng tendencies quickly chief. Especially that thing of Mpugushe -

PHOKOBJE jumps forward, trying again to catch MPJA, but the chain holds him back.

PHOKOBJE: Ha nka gore dluv, o tla rota dipekere. [If I can catch you, I will mess you up.]

MPJA: (*Highly amused)* Come on chief. Cheer up. Soon you will get your tender in the zoo and you will start to appreciate your beautiful tail. Sing with me chief. Let's celebrate your bright future.

Zoolicious! Zoolicious!
We live it up!! We live it up we do.
So, give us some cheese-nyana!
If the oceans were whisky
And I was a duck.
I'd swim to the bottom and never come up.
But the oceans aren't whisky.
And I am not a duck.
So come to the zoo let's have a good time.

ZOOLICIOUS

MPJA is snoring next to the doghouse while PHOKOBJE battles fiercely with the chain trying to free himself. After a fruitless struggle, he sits down, moping. For a while,

PHOKOBJE wa ngunanguna. He starts tapping the ground with the chain, slowly forming a rhythm to the song which is forming on his lips.

PHOKOBJE: Konje ereng daai ngoma? [By the way, how does that song go?]

POLE: Zoolicious, Zoolicious.

We live it up.

We live it up.

We live it up, we do.

TOGETHER: Zoolicious, Zoolicious.

We live it up.

We live it up.

We live it up, we do.

So, give us some cheese-nyana.

The song carries PHOKOBJE into a blissful dream. He is floating in a bubble of song and dance. Zoo animals free him from the chain around his neck.

Zoolicious. Zooliciuos

We live it up.

We live it up.

We live it up, we do.

So give us some cheese-nyana

LION: Zoolicous the new moonlight.

ELEPHANT: Zoolicious the new sunshine

GIRAFFE: Open your eyes and see a new day

MONKEY: Foolish the creature who closes his eyes to a new dawn

Zoolicious! Zoolicious!
We live it up.
We live it up.
We live it up we do.
So, give us some cheese-nyana!
If the oceans were whisky
And I was a duck,
I'd swim to the bottom and never come up.
But the oceans aren't whisky,
And I am not a duck.
So come to the zoo let's have good time.

PHOKOBJE's fantasy dissolves. He is still chained but the song lingers.

MPJA: Heh chief!

MPJA chuckles as PHOKOBJE tries to stifle the song bursting from his lips.

(*continued*) So, are dreaming about the zoo?

PHOKOBJE: Jy praat twak. Nna? Di-zoo? [You are talking nonsense]

MPJA: So why sing that song chief?

PHOKOBJE: What song? Wa ntlwaela! [You are crossing the line]

MPJA: Don't be shy chief. Let's sing together. Zoolicious. Zoolic-

PHOKOBJE: Fokof wena [fuck off!].

MPJA: Come on chief. Things are not so bad in Chilahaebolae.

PHOKOBJE: Jy praat twak [You are talking shit]

MPJA: Look! MOTHO has been good to me. I like it when he pats my head so fondly. He kicks me sometimes, but it is because he is trying to correct me. When I am sick, he takes me to the doctor of dogs. I don't have to hunt for food. He hunts for me. (*Patting his belly proudly*).

PHOKOBJE: Heh heh Motho… You don't know this thing called Motho. One-day o tla phinya mollo.

MPJA: Be good to the master and soon you will be living it up in the zoo. Just wear the jacket and the shoes chief and-

KATSE: (*tumbling into the scene)* Refuse the Jacket and the shoes.

MPJA: He wena Katse!

KATSE: They stick to your skin.

MPJA: Katse. Matters of the dog family don't concern you.

PHOKOBJE: O reng? So nou re family? [What? So now we are family]

KATSE: *(She somersaults and landing with a split she turns towards PHOKOBJE)* I heard a lot about you. I thought you were a clever creature. See me. I'm agile, wild and free. Chilahaebolae can't tame me.

PHOKOBJE: Wie is jy? [Who are you]

KATSE: If you were a cat, you would know what to do to break free.

PHOKOBYE: Waat meen jy? [What do you mean]

KATSE: There is a price to pay if tell you.

PHOKOBYE: Is waar. [True].

KATSE is initially apprehensive. After scrutinizing his eyes, she leans into PHOKOBJE whispering.

MPJA: Hae wena Katse!

Katse disappears when the door cracks open. MOTHO strolls into the view with a tune:

MOTHO: (*tossing up a bone*) Prepare ye the way of the master.

Catching the flying bone, MPJA sings along, shuffling and encouraging PHOKOBJE to join.

MPJA: Long live master. Long Live master.

MOTHO tosses a bone in PHOKOBJE's general direction. PHOKOBJE lets the bone fall on the ground, stabbing MOTHO with vicious eyes.

MOTHO: Come Sporty. Be a sport-

He strides around PHOKOBJE keeping a safe distance.

(*continued*) So, Blackie, can this stinking scavenger talk?

PHOKOBJE: Untie me and we can talk.

MOTHO: (*stunned*) Who taught you language?

PHOKOBJE: Untie me-

MOTHO: Untie you? Did I catch you to untie you?

PHOKOBJE: I will tear you to pieces as soon as I am free from this chain.

MOTHO: No stinking thing is going to tear me to pieces.

PHOKOBJE: Jy gaan twak sien!

MOTHO: *(turning towards MPJA)* What did he say?

MPJA*:* He says he will show you flames master.

MOTHO*:* A stubborn savage.

MOTHO steps forward wielding his knobkerrie.

PHOKOBJE: Kom nader ke o bontshe mmao!

MOTHO turns around sharply gesturing to MPJA.

MPJA: He says he will show you your mother.

MOTHO: (*bemused)* What? He knows mother! How wonderful?

MPJA: Not like that master. It means he is going to destroy you.

MOTHO: Destroy me? Ok (*turning towards PHOKOBJE)* I will show you your mother!

He storms out.

PHOKOBJE FOR SALE

PHOKOBJE stands on the auction block with a dog-collar around his neck. He looks drowsy. MPJA stands next to the auction block.

MOTHO: (*Conducting*) Sing Blackie. Sing!

MPJA: (*Singing to the people going by*) Jackal, Jackal for sale!

CHORUS: Ha la la hmmm…

MPJA: He is going for fokol! [Going for nothing]

CHORUS: Fokol. Fokol. Fokol. Hmmm

MPJA: For only five stena. [Five Thousand]

CHORUS: Stena. Stena. Stena. Hmmm.

MPJA: Five stena!

CHORUS: Stena. Stena!

MOTHO jives furiously, lathering PHOKOBJE's coat with oil and fixing his clothing, the knobkerrie within reach. PHOKOBJE catches MZOOLISTO's attention.

MZOOLISTO: (*Inspecting closely*) Rotten teeth. I want a discount. I must take him to the dentist.

MOTHO: Are you swindling me Mr MZOOLISTO? I am giving you a fair deal. This is the original Phokobje fresh from Nageng. He will bring some life to your zoo.

MZOOLISTO: You know that it's illegal to keep him here this long without a license. He needs to be in the care of a licensed caretaker of such

creatures, an expert zookeeper like me. I am helping you to get rid of him. I will take him for three stena. You can't feed this brute I assure you; and a knobkerrie to fight a jackal? Ja ne. Three stena-

MASLAMOS: (*bursting in*) Iyo yo yo! Three for a live jackal? E latlhile mos. I hear the jackal can talk. The Circus could use a clever creature like that. He'll be a hit all over the land (*rubbing hands together in anticipation*.) Gentlemen, *(getting between them*) excuse my rude interruption; I saw the advert on Gumtree (*offering a handshake to MOTHO*) Mr Motho, (*swirls cane, takes a bow and flips his long coat tails arrogantly.*) I'm MASLAMOS, the circus master, and I can make the talking jackal famous. Hmm, I can see it already, 'umJekeke we Scamto'

MZOOLISTO: (*Pushing him out of the way*) Hey wena Maslamos, this is not the circus. We are talking serious business here. Leave this to the scientists like us bo-MZOOLISTO. *(Dusting the epaulettes on his khaki uniform)* I'm not just a caretaker you know; I went to school to do the zookeeper's gig-

Ignoring MZOOLISTO, MASLAMOS *struts around the auction block inspecting PHOKOBJE closely.*

MASLAMOS: But why does he look so lifeless? Did you drug him?

MOTHO: I had to. He refuses the jacket and the shoes.

MASLAMOS: Leave that to me. They don't call me MASLAMOS for nothing. I have tamed many like him before. Simple stuff. After I castrate him, he will give no more trouble. I will take him for five stena? It's a fair price-

Enter VAN SLAGHUIZEN swinging his large knife, brushing past MASLAMOS and MZOOLISTO, he reaches his hand out to MOTHO.

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: Good try my good man! (*Looking scornfully at the MASLAMOS and then turning with a smile at MOTHO).* I will buy him at seven

stena. I have an emergency. The Carnivore Restaurant is hosting a big party tonight. I have an order for jackal meat. Thanks, God, for Gumtree, there'll be a nice spit braai tonight.

MZOOLISTO: You can't sell him to a butcher!

MASLAMOS: (*pointing accusingly at VAN SLAGHUIZEN*) Cruelty to animals.

MZOOLISTO: Wena Maslamos. You're one to talk, you keep the animals in tiny cages, mixing species and what not.

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: Are you preachers or businessmen? (*Turning towards MOTHO handing out a stack of cash)* Seven Stena!

MOTHO trembles with excitement while MZOOLISTO and MASLAMOS mumble curses.

MOTHO: Thank you, Mr-

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: (*slashing the air with his large knife)* They don't call me Van Slaguizen for nothing.

A wind of music blows in MAFESHINI, accompanying her rhythmic footsteps.

CHORUS: *Pa Ba bi beba. Paba Ba Bhaba. Dada dide dideda. Daa daa daa.*

Heads turn sharply when she swaggers into the scene, clutching a handbag and flicking her 'hair' incessantly.

MAFESHINI: Thobela! [Greetings]

They gather around her, pushing each other out of the way, fighting to be first to touch her hand.

MOTHO: (*Reaching his hand out, eyes drooling*) How can I assist Ma'am?

MAFESHINI: I am here about the jackal. Are you?

MOTHO: Motho.

MASLAMOS: (*Sliding between them with arms outstretched*) I will be your jackal! You can call me Jakes.

MAFESHINI: (*Firmly*) I am not here to play; especially with a clown like you. This is a matter of national importance. I am-

MASLAMOS: (*Getting too close*) MAFESHINI. Who does not know you? Phela you are the Fashion Designer of the Nation!

MAFESHINI: (*Brushing him off*)**.** The honourable first lady is hosting dignitaries from overseas. She wants something rare. I must make a fur coat for her. I must cut the jackal tonight and send the leather to be treated before I work on the garment.

MASLAMOS: What? You are just another butcher?

MAFESHINI: Please do not insult me. I am top designer. I was trained overseas darling!

VAN SLAGHUIZEN steps between MOTHO and MAFESHINI. Stretching out his hand, he gives the notes to MOTHO.

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: Seven stena. Bring the jackal. I must go.

MAFESHINI: (*Tugging at MOTHO's sleeve*) I will give you ten stena?

MZOOLISTO: Ijo! ten stena?

MOTHO puts the cash back on VAN SLAGHUIZEN hand MOTHO and turns sharply towards MAFESHINI.

VAN SLAGHUIZEN*:* (*Cutting between them and facing MAFESHINI)* I want the meat; you want the leather. Let's cut a deal. We can take him to my butchery, and I skin him nicely for you. No charge. How about that?

MAFESHINI: Ok! Five stena each?

MZOOLISTO and MASLAMOS storm out, while VAN SLAGHUIZEN and MAFESHINI put the money together and pay MOTHO. They make circles around the auction block, inspecting PHOKOBJE while MOTHO stuffs his pockets with money. He claps his hands together shuffling gleefully towards the auction block.

MOTHO: He is still drowsy from the injection I gave him.

MOTHO unbuckles the dog-collar and PHOKOBJE wastes no time. He launches himself causing pandemonium. Screams of rage ring around PHOKOBJE.

MAFESHINI: Please don't ruin his leather! Don't you have sedative?

VAN SLAGHUIZEN's long knife whistles past PHOKOBJE's head. PHOKOBJE wa kutsa, o dripa VAN SLAGHUIZEN.

MOTHO: (*shouting instructions at the MPJA*) Ssa! Ssa!

MPJA is paralyzed and barks feebly.

MOTHO*:* Ssa! *(to MPJA)*! This is your gig! Get him! Ssa! (*Picking up his knobkerrie charging towards PHOKOBJE)* Get him, you, useless dog!

They all attack simultaneously. PHOKOBJE ducks their blows jumping out of way, slithering out through the hole under the fence. MPJA catches PHOKOBJE's tail with his teeth while PHOKOBJE struggles through the hole under the fence. PHOKOBJE breaks away, leaving his tail behind. MPJA is left with a piece of PHOKOBJE's tail in his mouth. MOTHO pats MPJA on the head.

MOTHO: (*Grabbing the tail and turning towards the customer*) At least–

MAFESHINI: What?

MALUNDE.

PHOKOBJE urinates on the ground, mixing soil with urine he rubs the wound on his stump. Feeling the pangs of hunger, he sniffs the air around him. The buzzing flies guide him towards the rubbish bin. He tilts the rubbish bin spilling its contents. He rummages through the garbage for a while picking up a bone with piece of rotten meat. Raising his eyes, he finds himself surrounded by a gang of wild dogs. PHOKOBJE is surprised to see PHIRI. She snaps a commanding finger, and the dogs freeze around PHOKOBJE.

PHIRI: Ja! Jou fokon Jakalas. Jy het gedink ek is oorla. [You thought I was dead] At last, I catch up with you.

PHOKOBJE casts the bone away. PHIRI catches the bone mid-air and commits it into her mouth, crushing it with deliberate slowness.

PHIRI: You think you can bribe me ka lesapo? [with a bone?]

PHOKOBJE: (*in a teary voice)* Aah my ma se kind. Hao Phiri Mapetla. I have tears of joy in my eyes. I am so grateful to see you alive. That bastard MPJA caused us twak. I had to run for my life.

PHIRI: He monna o sa bua maaka. Vandaag jy gaan twak sien! [He man do not lie. Today you are going to see flames]

PHOKOBJE: My maar hoor me. [My mother hears me].

MGODOYI: Heh Phiri o sa latlha. Never trust anything with the blood of Mpugushe-

PHOKOBJE: (*badly shaken*) He wena. Wat ken jy ka Mpungushe wena? [What do you know about Mpungushe]

MGODOYI: (*jabbing PHOKOBJE's ribs harshly*) He monna, ke nna ke botsang dipotso hierso. Verstaan jy? [Hey man, I am the one who asks questions here. Do you understand]

PHOKOBJE: Is waar. Nou wena Phiri daai tyd? [True! And you Phiri, what happened that time?]

PHIRI: **(***Getting exited***)** Ha! Three days in the zoo and then ka escape-a.Ne eng-crowd-a daai plek. [I escape. That place was crowding me]

PHOKOBJE: (*Winding PHIRI with more praise*) O skhokho wena Phiri [You are the real deal]. Phiri mapetla Zola Mdeni. Mpja ya game! (*Breaking into song*) Fede tuka ko nageng

PHIRI: (*sings along*) Re gana ka rona dilo tsa nageng.

MGODOYI: Leadership. Kante what is this thing? Re-union ya maada? Let's eat this thing.

PHOKOBJE turns around quickly showing them his stump.

PHOKOBJE: Look bafowethu I left my tail at the bottom of the lake.

PHIRI: So, what? Today you are not going to trick me Phokobje.

MGODOYI: Why are we wasting time? Let's eat this thing. (*To PHOKOBJE*) Wena saan! Ek gaan daai mooi vel van joune dra! [I am going to wear that beautiful hide of yours!]

PHOKOBJE*:* *(talking fast*) Bafowethu! There is a large ball of cheese growing at the bottom of the lake where I left my tail. If you must feast on my flesh have me with cheese. (*PHIRI and the gang are confused.)*. You see the white strip on my hide and my bushy tail, they are the source of this wonder.

MGODOYI: He monna… o satla ka bo-klever ba ko nageng. Die is Chilahaebolae! [Hey man… Your tricks from the bush will not work here. This is Chilahaebolae!].

PHOKOBJE: My ma hoor my! My tail grows cheese Every time I put it at the bottom of the lake cheese grows. If you don't believe me, I can show you.

PHIRI: I will tear your throat if you are lying.

MGODOYI: Die ou wa jiya [He is lying]. Let's eat him.

PHOKOBJE: Look. Bafowethu. A re dlaleng fast [Guys let's move fast] Motho is chasing after me. He knows about the secret of the tail and the cheese. We must collect the cheese and the tail before the bloody humans come (*feigning anger*). I'd rather have my kind eat my cheese. S'true! We are family. And after you eat me you can have my tail forever. Whenever you need cheese you can soak it at the bottom of the lake. It is all yours. At the end of the day, o mpintji ya ka Phiri. [you are my friend Phiri] Nna le wena kgale re kgoboga sam. Re family or kanjani nja yami? [We have been through a lot together. We are family is it not my friend?]

MGODOYI: (*Turning towards PHIRI*) Nja ya yami se voet. Die ding ya re shaya-shaya. [This thing is lying]

PHOKOBJE: Ka mmao! [I am telling the truth]

PHIRI: (*turning to MGODOYI)* I have heard about this thing called cheese.

BOVA: (*stuttering*) I have tasted cheese once.

They all swing around fixing BOVA a look of surprise.

MGODOYI: Wena Bova? Wa spita san? O tsebela kae cheese wena? [You are too forward boy? What do you know about cheese?]

BOVA: S'tru. Mgodoyi! [It is true]

PHIRI: Is cheese as good as they say it is?

BOVA: Aah Leadership. Daai ding is lekker. O tla ithola o thwantsa menwana ya maoto. [That thing is very tasty]

MGODOYI: Eh! Eh! Eh! If Bova can speak without stuttering this thing of cheese must be very good.

PHOKOBJE*:* Bafowethu we are talking a big ball fresh cheese.

PHIRI: Show us the cheese.

MGODOYI: Ok. Tie him up.

PHIRI: You're right wena Mgodoyi. (*To others*) Tie him up.

The wild dogs flank PHOKOBJE.

PHOKOBJE: You tie me up you slow us down. Ons moet tlhere fast re thole daai cheese. [We must move fast so that we get that cheese]

MGODOYI pulls PHIRI aside.

MGODOYI: He has a point. Let's move fast and we can eat him fast.

PHIRI: Hauweng! [Let's go] Keep him close.

MGODOYI: He wena san. O tle ka mathathai, o tla bona spoko. [If ever you try any tricks, you will get yourself messed up badly].

NKWANKWARASHE YA CHEESE.

PHOKOBJE walking down the path that leads to the dam, with PHIRI and his gang of stray dogs close behind him. MGODOYI keeps prodding PHOKOBJE's ribs menacingly.

MGODOYI: If we don't find the cheese, I will be the first to bite you, san. Ke tlo go loma di-spareribs. Jy hoor my? [I am going to bite your ribs]

PHOKOBJE*:* Sho kleva. Ek hoor … [I hear you] So Phiri. Why did you escape the Zoo? Mpja told me the Zoo is paradise.

PHIRI: Mpja is a liar The Zoo is twak. You must see how they walk. They sing a strange zombie song every morning and night, conducted by the zookeeper.

PHOKOBJE: Hau, you know about Zoolicious?

MGODOYI: The lake *(Pointing in the distance)*

They trot faster with MGODOYI watching PHOKOBJE with great mistrust. The full moon is high in the sky. Mischief is dancing in PHOKOBJE's eyes. They stop by the lakeside.

PHOKOBJE: (*Pointing at the bottom of the lake)* Look, the Cheese!

They crackle with excitement. MGODOYI motions for the group to slow down.

MGODOYI: Ho ho ho magenge. Let's inspect the thing first.

BOVA: Ke yona magenge so big, and so yellow!

VOICE 1: Nkwankwarashe ya cheese! [Large round of cheese]

VOICE 2: Fede re popile! [We hit the jackpot]

VOICE 3*:* Re tlo raga cheese! [We are going to spoil ourselves]

VOICE 4: Cheese ya makoya! [Real cheese]

VOICE 5: Re tshwere lotto.! [We have won the lotto]

PHOKOBJE: (*Raising his voice*) Bafowethu! I forgot to mention… The first one to touch the cheese will get eternal life.

CHORUS: Heh?

The dogs jump into the lake causing wild splashes. They wrestle, each in the race swim to the bottom and catch the cheese. PHOKOBJE pulls back PHIRI up before she jumps into the lake.

PHIRI: Los my uit. Le nna ke batla cheese [Don't touch me. I also want the cheese.]

PHOKOBJE: (*Tightening his grip*) Don't jump in. You will die.

PHIRI: Wat? Wa hlanya! Ek soek die cheese. [You are mad! I want the cheese]

PHOKOBJE: (*Pulling her back*) The lake is poisoned. Will jy sat? [Do you want to die]

PHIRI: Wat?

PHOKOBJE: (*To PHIRI*) The water has acid from the mines (*looking down into the lake*) You almost had it. Dlala fast [make a quick move] *(back to PHIRI).* O mpintji ya ka Phiri mapetla. Ek sal jou nie coward [You are my friend Phiri. I will not mess you up] (*back to the lake*.) Ke ele cheese. Sharpa unders. [There is the cheese. Dive under]

PHIRI: Kante wat gaan aan hierso? [What is going on here?]

PHOKOBJE: I said the lake is full of acid from the mines.

PHIRI: Wat?

MGODOYI: (*loosing strength*) He man! Daar is nie cheese hierso! [Hey man! There is no cheese here]

PHOKOBYE: Of course, it's the moon shinning on the lake. Ja! Akere o kleva wena. Heh heh ke tla o loma die spareribs. Ek is ou Phokobje ek. Die grootste kleva in die weerld. Umjekejeke ongaphel'u moya. [You thought you were wise. You were dreaming of biting my ribs. I am Phokobje. You can't quench my spirit]

MGODOYI: Jou fokon spy. Ek saal jou kry! [You sell out. I will get you!]

PHOKOBJE: (*Chuckling*) Jy kry vir wie? O doyile wena Mgodoyi [Get who? You have failed Mgodoyi]. Right now, you are swimming in poison, and you don't know it. You are swimming in acid from the mine dump. Robala ka kgotso kleva! [Rest in peace]

PHIRI: Ne man Phokobje o sa chuna daai ding. [No Phokobje. Don't do that thing]

PHOKOBJE: You want to save them? Then dive in! What was I supposed to do? Let your friends eat me? Ha ba shwe [Let them die]

PHIRI: (*Watches helplessly as MGODOYI and the wild dogs sink to the bottom)*
Ne maan. Jy maak twak! [No man. You speak rubbish]

PHOKOBJE: Ha ba shwe! (*Chanting and jiving*)
Ha ba shwe.
Ha ba shwe bo-Bova, ha ba shwe.
Ha ba shwe bo-Mgodoyi, ha ba shwe.
It's over ka bo-Bova, ha ba shwe.
Ba doyile bo-Mgodoyi, ha ba shwe
Ba re ba nja sebete, ha ba shwe.
Ka ba tshwarisa makete ha ba shwe.

TO BE LIKE MOKGANKGARA

PHOKOBJE wa tlhotsa [limping].

PHOKOBJE: Kyk hierso. Ons het a mission ek en jy. Ons kom van ver af. [Look here. Me and you have a mission. We come from far together]

PHIRI: Ke eng? O ba'tlo ntwista weer? Ek gaan nerens le wena Phokobje. [What? You want to trick me again? I am going nowhere with you Phokobje.]

PHOKOBJE: I need you to help me get my tail back. I am getting weaker every day.

PHIRI: Jy vat my cheap jy. O bodisa skimi saka ke o shebile-[You think I am cheap. You killed my friends while I watch]

PHOKOBYE: Skimi sa go? [Your friends?] Moegos like Mgodoyi were lucky to hang out with a clever like you.

PHIRI: Mgodoyi was a visionary? Jy ken fokol ka Mgodoyi wena. Eintliek, los my uit. Ek vat my uie pad [You know nothing about Mgodoyi. Infact, leave me alone. I am taking my own path].

PHOKOBJE: Phiri. Ek kaan nie oorla o le teng my ma se kind [Phiri I cannot die with you around my friend]. At least help me to get back must tail. Laat ons

saam hlere. Kyk. Dipapa di lahlile ko re yang! [Let's go. Look. There is plenty of food where we are going]

PHIRI: Dipapa? O sa nchaela ka dipapa? [Food? Don't tell me about food]

PHOKOBJE: Hoe meen jy? O kgotse? [How do you mean? Is your stomach full?]

PHIRI: Ne Phokobje. Why nkare ha o verstaane so? [No Phokobje. You don't get it do you?]

PHOKOBJE: Ha ke verstaane eng? [I don't understand what?].

PHIRI: After dipapa and then? What happens after dipapa? Dipapa gape? Jy moet vaker word. [Food again? You must wake up.]. We must fight for something bigger than dipapa?

PHOKOBJE: Hoe meen jy? [What do you mean?]

PHIRI: Ons moet soos Mokgankgara is. [We must be like Mokgankgara.]

PHOKOBJE: Wie is Mokgankgara? [Who is Mokgankgara?]

PHIRI: (*collecting twings and wood pieces and starts making a fire*) Mokgankgara is a manocha van tuka. (*pensively*) [Mokgangkgara is a seer of old.] Mgodoyi told the story sa Mokgangara every day. Ne ke sa mo nagê. Maar nou ek vertaan. Mokgankgara ke masole a le mzwukwana. Die original klevas tsa ko Nageng. [I did not quite attention. But now I understand. Mokgangkgara was a soldier of yesterday. The original sage from Nageng.]

PHOKOBJE: Mgodoyi wa kleima. Die Original klever ya nageng ke Mpungushe. [Mgodoyi is a liar, The original sage is Mpungushe.].

PHIRI: Mpungushe?

PHOKOBJE: Vele [Of course]. The one who stole fire from the village of the great gods in order to warm the cave of the first man and the first woman on earth.

PHIRI: But did Mpungushe sell the secret of making fire to Motho? Mpungushe o gayile motho power vir wat? [Mpungushe gave power to Motho for what (*Making lewd gestures*). Die ding? [This thing?].

PHOKOBYE: Jy praat twak! Mpugushe is nie jou patier. [You are talking rubbish! Mpumgushe is not your playmate.]

PHOKOBJE o veisa PHIRI. PHIRI pushes and Phokojie fall on his back, feeling weak.

-

PHIRI: Kyk hierso Phokobje. Jy soek my help jy gaan nou luister…

PHOKOBJE: (*blowing are into twigs and the fire comes up)* Eeen daag een dag ou Mokgangkgara o tlhakana met a anne Madala. Fede die Madala die o batlo crossa noka maar wa gwaja. Madala ke tse tsa di mosquito weight; nkare noka e tla slaeza ka ene. Fede Mokgankgara a re 'Madala zwakala.' Mokgankgara ke o rwala Madala. Wa mo pepa. Ba crossa noka. Net daar Mokgankgara a re sho Madala re lendile… e re nna ke tswe so. Jiki-jiki Tla! Madala o kenya manala mo mmkokotlong.

[Listen here Phokobje. You want my help you listen… Once upon a time Mokgankgara met some old man. The old man wants to cross the river but he is fearful. The old man was very thin and as it seems, the river will sweep him away. Then Mokgangkgara calls the old man towards him. "Come Madala" He lets the old man climb on his back. And they cross the river. Then Monkgankgara tells the old man that he is taking his own direction. Suddenly the old man plants his nails into Mongamkgara's back.]

PHOKOBJE: Mo mmkokotlong? [Into the spine]

PHIRI: (*getting animated*) O jala manala mo mkokotlong Madala. Mokgangkgara a re wa jumpa. Eh… Manala a gola. Hulle word lang daai manala. A tsenella mo mmkokotlong. Fede manala a Madala a nale le daai goete tsele tsa o gopa madi wa bona? [Madala plants his nails into the spine. Mokgangkgara tries to jump him off. But the nails grow longer. The nails grow deeper into the spine. Infact, the old man's nails start to suck his blood?]

PHOKOBJE: O mo nwa madi? [He is drinking his blood?]

PHIRI: Is waar. Madala o ipompa ka madi. Nou Mokgankgara wa di bala. Madala o gana go fologa mo mkokotlong. Go monate. Hy word nou fat. Madala o start-ta go imela Mokgankgara. [True. The old man fills his

stomach with Monkgangara's blood. He is enjoying himself. He grows fat and heavy.]

PHOKOBJE: Is chandies mos. [It's terrible.]

PHIRI: Is waar. Mokgangkgara moet a chune plane fast of nie so wa oorla. Elke daag Madala o tlhorisa Monkgangara. O mo mamaretse mmkokotlong. Ha ntse ba zola-zola daar mo nageng Madala wa kgetla daar bo- di-apole… bo—di-feiye di mo ditlhareng wa papisa. Now en dan o gaya Mokgankgara perekisinyana e swabileng. Sometimes o mo zama ka bananyana go re a tshwarise mala. Maar madala ka hierso o laisha strong. Fede Mokgangkgara ha a bokora Madala o kenya manala deeeeep mo di vein-ing. Hhhhhlp pint ya madi… elke daag hhhhhlp pint ya madi. Dilo di a itobetsa Madala o ja marei. Mo dipuleng mo diphefong. Fede Mokgangara ka hierso o ja ka di pipe. [True. Mokgangkgara has to make a quick plan or he will die. Every day the old man oppresses Mokgangkara refusing to get off his back. As they move about in the bushes the old man picks fruit from the trees and feeds himself. Sometimes he would share a little just to keep him going. When Mokgankgara complains the old man digs his nails deeper into the veins sipping up pints of blood. A pint of blood a day. He is enjoying the ride while Mokgankgara is miserable.]

PHOKOBJE: Plane dololo? [No plan?]

PHIRI: Wena o ka chunang? [What would you do?]

PHOKOBJE: Nna? Nka mo tsosetsa dust. [I would stir up trouble.]

PHIRI: Mokgankgara vele a tsosa dust e strong. A itathlela mo fatshe; a roll-a le yona daai ding. Ha ntse ba roll-a daar ya chencha daai ding. Skierlik mathlo a ba green. Net daar go tlhaga leino le lengwe, le groot blind-e so. Lezinyo le kana. [Yes, Mokgankgara stirred but big trouble. He dived to the ground and started rolling. While he is rolling the oldman starts to change form. The eyes turned green. Right there a long tooth come out. A very big tooth]

PHOKOBJE: Wa jiya [You lie.]

PHIRI: K-10! E ba'tlo mo gabola daai ding. Ya re gaa! Mokgankgara a re trrrr! Leino fosho! Eh… La tlhaba mo letlapeng. Kgwaaa! K-10 ya robega. Ya screama daai ding. Mokgangara a lata kgokgotso. A re dluv. A squeeze-a. Ya raga-raga daai ding. A squeeze-a viye-viye. Jiki-jiki ya twista fast daai ding ya itatlha! Ya re touch. Mokgangara a e kena onder. A e dripa! Ya kakalla. Eh! Eh! Eh! Nou die las Mokgankgara o lata tlhogo. Pphyyyaaatlhaaa! [K-10! The creature wants to tear up Mongankgara. He missed the target and the tooth hit a rock hard and broke. As the creature was screaming Mokgankgara grabbed its throat and squeezed. The creature tries to shake off the grip and run. Mokgangara went under and bring down the creature. Then Mokgankgara crushed the creature's head.]

PHOKOBJE: A phyatlha tlhogo ya motho? [he crushed the head?]

PHIRI: (*winding up PHOKOBJE with a song)*

Haueng dilo tsa naga. [Let go creatures of the wild.]

Re yo ratha tlhogo ya Motho.

PHOKOBJE nods mildly to the rhythm, thinking deeply while PHIRI, stamps the ground to the beat, twisting and throwing her body into the spirit of the rising sound. The music starts growing on PHOKOBJE.

PHIRI: Haueng dilo tsa naga. [Let's go creatures of the wild]

PHOKOBJE: Haueng dilo tsa naga.

PHIRI: Re yo ratha tlhogo ya Motho. [We are going to smash Motho's head]

PHOKOBJE: Re yo ratha tlhogo ya Motho.

PHIRI: Re re yo phyatlha tlhogo ya Motho. [We are going to crush Motho's head]

PHOKOBJE: Re yo phyatlha tlhogo ya Motho

PHOKOBJE and PHIRI are jerking, shaking, stomping and vibrating so highly the music carries them into a vision. They sing with their whole being, calling. Dilo tsa Naga appear from all directions, tumbling and punctuating the music with high pitched shrieks, grating moans and whistling sounds. They join the dance of war. The dream scatters when Katse summersaults into view.

KATSE: Quick, they are coming. This way.

PHIRI: (*Rushing towards KATSE*) Hao lejeje la mahala. Ke a lora or waat? [Free meat. Am I dreaming or what?]

PHOKOBJE: (*Blocking PHIRI*) Katse ke skimi saka. [Katse is my friend]

PHIRI: (*trying to catch Katse*) O dlala ka lejeje wena [You are playing with meat].

PHOKOBJE: (*getting between them*) Phiri Wag jy. [Stop it Phiri.]

KATSE: Phokobje please Motho is coming.

PHOKOBJE gestures to PHIRI.

PHIRI: (*sniffing the air*) Hulle is nog ver. [They are still far.]

KATSE: That butcher really wants to make meat out of you.

PHOKOBJE: I will eat him before he eats me. But first I must fetch my tail.

KATSE: You can't go back they will kill you!

PHOKOBJE: Go a tshwana. Without my tail I am dead. Kyk. Ek soek a favour. Wena make sure gore coast e clear and leave the rest to me and Phiri.

KATSE: (*o sheba Phiri snaks*) I don't trust your friend.

PHIRI attacks maar KATSE wa kutsa.

(*continued*) Maar o isa kae vuil pop e? [Where are you going with the filthy thing]

PHIRI: Pasop. E tla o kwenya veil pop. [Watch out. This filthy thing will shallow you]

PHOKOBJE: PHIRI relax. Katse Bona[Look]. Phiri and I come from far.

PHIRI: And to go further together we must fight Motho.

KATSE: Fight Motho?

PHOKOBJE: This scavenging for food in the rubbish pits and dustbins of Chilahabolae must end.

PHIRI: We are taking the land.

PHOKOBJE: Ro phyatlha thlogo ya Motho.

KATSE: But Motho is a dangerous creature.

PHOKOBJE: Re ka se gwajisiwe ke Motho. [We will not be intimidated by Motho.]

PHIRI: Vele re Dilo tsa Naga. [Yes we are cannot be tamed.]

KATSE: Phokobje, let's just get the tail and go!

PHOKOBJE: Go where?

KATSE: We have a deal. If it was not me, you would have died on that auction block. I am going to Nageng with you.

PHIRI: (*Bursts into laughter*) Heh wena. You think you can survive ko nageng wena! I will be the first to eat you as soon as we get to Nageng.

PHOKOBJE: Phiri waag [Phiri wait] Katse bona [Katse look] It is not easy ko Nageng. What is there to go back to? Forest trees are dying. Fishes are dead. No life in the rivers. Motho rules nageng with gunpowder. Rhinos are dying for their horns. Ko Nageng, we die for our flesh and our skin. I lost my tail because of a world created by Motho.

PHIRI: We must get your tail back. You will be strong again. And then we fight. (*Sniffing the air and sensing danger*). Shhh! I smell twak. (*They take cover).*

MAFESHINI: Your dog bit off his tail. He ruined my design. I want my money back.

MOTHO: But I already sold him when he escaped. No refunds, no return, no nonsense.

MAFESHINI: Pay me back if you don't want trouble. This is the First Lady's garment we are talking about.

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: You have been arguing all the way. Give her back the money. Let her go. She is disturbing us.

MOTHO: No no no. I can at least give you discount for the tail. Daai fokken jackal ate a lot and I bought it clothes. OK. Here (*handing over a stash of cash grudgingly)*

MAFESHINI: (*She refuses*) You are going to pay back every cent.

MOTHO: Surely in your line of business you know a good tailor who can patch it back neatly.

He turns around, unzipping his pants to pee into the bush where PHOKOBJE and company are hiding when Katse suddenly tumbles into view.

MOTHO: (*zipping his pants)* Hau Kitty?

KATSE*:* Master quickly. The jackal.

MOTHO: What about the jackal

KATSE: (*scurrying away*) That way master.

MOTHO*:* Thank you, Kitty.

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: (*yanking Motho away*) Let's go.

LECHEMI

SONG: Ba lesa Mpja tsa bona dimpogola [They let their dogs bark at me]
Ba tla itshola ha ke di fagola [They will be sorry when I castrate them]

PHIRI draws a circle around PHOKOBJE with a branch. After completing the circle, she chews leaves from the branch.

PHIRI: Kyk hierso wena Phokobje. I am sharing my powers with you. Don't make twak wa nkutla? [Do not abuse these powers]

PHOKOBJE: Hoe meen jy?

PHOKOBJE: Apola hempe!

PHOKOBJE: Wat?

PHIRI: **(***harshly***)** Wa nkutlwa! You want your tail back akere?

Phiri cuts lines into PHOKOBJE'S back, shoulders and chest, spitting and rubbing lechemi into the cuts.

PHIRI: He monna o sa ingwaya o tla tima lechemi bogale.

PHOKOBJE: Ya baba die ding.

PHIRI: O tla ba strong. Repeat after me. Naga e tlhapisiwa ka mogaga!

PHOKOBJE obeys, steeling himself against the itching skin he chants along.

PHOKOBOBJE*:* Naga e thlapisiwa ka mogaga!

PHIRI: Naga e thlapisiwa ka mogaga!

PHOKOBYE*: (letting out a loud cry)* Naga e tlhapisiwa ka mogaga!

Dilo tsa Naga pour into the scene of the ritual, all chanting after PHIRI while they line up to be treated with lechemi.

PHIRI: Naga e tlhapisiwa ka mogaga!

DILO TSA NAGA*: Naga e thlapisiwa ka mogaga.*

While PHIRI is leading the war ritual, cutting DILO tsa Naga and smearing lechemi into the cuts, PHOKOBJE belts out an incantation.

PHOKOBJE: (*incantation*)Ba ile le monate wa whisky ba korobela [The taste of whisky is numbing their senses]

DILO TSA NAGA: Naga e thlapisiwa ka mogaga!

ha e na kgala cheese ya mahala ba e khubamela [no shame for free cheese they go down on their knees]

DILO TSA NAGA: Naga e thlapisiwa ka mogaga!

PHOKOBJE: Nna ke bone leleme le koropa tsela [I have seen a tongue sweep the road]

DILO TSA NAGA: Naga e thlapisiwa ka mogaga!

PHOKOBJE: E le bo mpja ba ipompa dimpa ba olla [It was the dogs loading the stomach]

DILO TSA NAGA: Naga e tlhapisiwa ka mogaga!

PHOKOBJE: Le mathe a motho a ba rothela ba gella [They also lap up Motho's saliva]

DILO TSA NAGA: Naga e thlapisiwa ka mogaga!

PHOKOBJE: Ba re chila ha e bolae ba e fofela ba foufala [They said filth does not kill flew towards it and turned blind].

DILO TSA NAGA: Naga e tlhapisiwa ka mogaga!

PHOKOBJE GETS HIS TAIL

Ba patreka MPJA.

PHOKOBJE: Ja Blackie. Jou fokon hond. Ne o nagana o tla fella kae?

MPJA: (*distressed*) Mjekejeke! Hao Phiri mapetla.

PHIRI: Fede. Wat gaan aan ka die wena? Chain molaleng? Mjekejeke dintshang ka di ding? [What's up with you? Chain around the neck? Phokobje what is wrong with this thing?]

PHOKOBJE: Wa iponela ka matlho ago [Your eyes are telling the truth]

PHIRI: But I am not surprised. Die ding kgale e le lepheaga. [This thing has always been a coward]. We must eat such creatures out of existence.

PHOKOBJE: Re sa ba hemisa! [We must not give them room to breathe]

MPJA: (*Handing over his plate*) A re shereng [Let's share]. Mjakes. Phiri Mapetla! Bobtail barbecue flavour ka di coconut chips.

PHOKOBJE: *(snatching the plate, kicking it away)* Daar ver met jou coconut chips! [to hell with your coconut chips]

PHOKOBJE shoots into the doghouse, coming out with his tail in hand. His piercing howl rouses a whirlwind. The world around them revolves. The music of the whirlwind is punctuated by shrieking sounds and guttural moans from all directions.

MPJA's terror multiplies when suddenly the whirlwind stops and PHOKOBJE appears before him with his tail restored. He breaks into a run but PHOKOBJE steps on the chain and pulling it violently.

PHOKOBJE: O ya kae wena? [Where are you going]

MPJA: Please my chief. I kept your tail safe for you. I knew you will come back.

PHOKOBJE: You have tasted my blood. Was it sweet? I wonder if your fat buttocks taste good.

MPJA: Forget the past…Reconciliation.(*breaks into a song*).Fede tuka nageng; Phokobje le Mpja nageng, disambenche nageng-

PHOKOBJE: Haai fokof wena? Blackie?

PHIRI: Ja! Let's eat this thing fast. He is defiling our song... singing our song with that chain around his neck.

KATSE: (*Bursting in)* Hurry! Motho is coming!

MPJA: Katse! Le wena? [Katse! You too?]

PHOKOBJE: How far are they?

KATSE: Not far.

PHOKOBJE: (*pointing at the doghouse)* Phiri tshwara chaf. [Hide].

PHIRI disappears into the doghouse when MOTHO and company step into view.

MPJA: Get him he wants to kill me. Ja Phokobje you are going to pay chief.

MOTHO: Today I have a zorro for you. I am going to moer you black and blue. You won't know if you are a zebra or a jackal.

MPJA: He is not alone. *(Pointing at the doghouse)* There is another one.

When PHIRI bursts out of the doghouse chaos breaks out. VAN SLAGHUIZEN aims for

PHOKOBJE'S head. KATSE gets between them, and she is slain.

MOTHO: You killed my cat!

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: Aag! Twak happens!

PHOKOBJE and PHIRI escape. MAFESHINI is trembling and fuming.

MAFESHINI: Pay back my money.

MOTHO: But-

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: *(eyeing the cat's cadaver)* OK. Look on the bright side. There is a market for a freshly skinned cat. I can take it off your hands.

MAFESHINI: (*Examining the dead cat closely*) Oh yes, darling. It'd make a fabulous scarf. Those little paws would be cute sandals. Madam President would love those.

MPJA: Yes. Good riddance. Katse was a bloody agent.

MAFESHINI: (*She turns sharply, giving MPJA hard look*). The dog's leather is not bad either. I know a friend who is good with leather. He can treat it. What does the first lady know about jackal leather anyway?

VAN SLAGHUIZEN: (*Skipping about with excitement*) Yes, and I can make a few bucks in Chinatown with that carcass.

MOTHO: *(Baffled*) Are you saying-

MAFESHINI: You hear me correctly. The dog will take the place of the jackal. There is no time. The first lady's function is tomorrow.

MPJA: (*horrified*) Please don't sell me master. I have been a good housedog, and you know it. Please master. Don't let them kill me.

MOTHO o tsipela MAFESHINI leitlho.

MAFESHINI: You've got nothing to lose. You will find another dog tomorrow at the SPCA or something. (*Grabbing the chain and pulling MPJA away*) I have no time. The jacket must be ready for fitting in the morning (*to VAN SLAGHUIZEN*). I will follow you to the butchery.

VAN SLAGHUIZEN picks up the cat's cadaver and they take off. MOTHO is left counting the money.

A DI BA JE

MOTHO is whistling his tune joyfully. Meanwhile PHOKOBJE le PHIRI lead an army of Dilo tsa Naga surrounding MOTHO's yard. From their hiding place Dilo tsa Naga di shebile LEKGOA a tobetsa alarm-o and the electric gate slides open. They move silently in the shadows as LEKGOA shakes hands with MOTHO. LEKGOA whips out a speed point machine and MOTHO swipes his card.

LEKGOA: (*Jumping with joy*) Congratulations sir! You are well on the road of training your dog to be a model K9 citizen. If you have new dog, our package is especially valuable because it's the fastest and most humane way of training your dog. And by the way Sir, well done on buying a new dog. And welcome to the K9 Solutions Family Sir. K9 Solutions is all about a revolution in dog training Sir. (*MOTHO turns away sharply, sweeping, suspecting eyes across the yard, but LEKGOA yanks him*). We are not just about making your dog do something. We at the K9 Family are about your relationship with your dog. Trust me Sir! I am the first CSC sir.

MOTHO: CSC?

LEKGOA: (*Talking fast*) The first Canine Specialist in Chilahaebolae. I am Member of the Super Pub Certified Dog and Animal Comportment Specialists

MOTHO: Member of what?

LEKGOA: Super Pup Certified Dog and Animal Comportment Specialists. LEKGOA is my name sir. Our headquarters are in England.

MOTHO: (*His face brightens)* Oh in England?

LEKGOA: Yes, in England, Sir. Our Chairman is Lord Ching Ching of Chatham

himself, Sir.

MOTHO: Oh really! Lord Ching-Ching of Chaham?

LEKGOA: Yes, my good sir!

MOTHO: Chatham Chatham?

LEKGOA: That is correct sir. Thee Chatham Sir! The father of Dog Training Sir! (*animated*) The Oracle of Super Pub Comportment Specialists Sir. The Aristotle of Mgodoyism – (*Motho is Sensing movement, he turns around to look. But LEKGOA tugs him)* You see sir. The gospel of Ching Ching teaches us that dog training is about coaching them on how to think. We must teach the dog to focus and listen to the owner. If you don't have your dog's eyes and ears, you don't have your dog. Ultimately our major goal is when your dog is faced with a major terror, to look at you as a default. Where can they look and say: 'Hey master can I chase that terror, or do you want me to stay? Sir, you want to generate this concept of your dog listening to you from within. Are you with me? (*MOTHO nods generously*). Yes, your dog must listen from within. That's a much more powerful and much more potent way to teach. At the end of this workshop your dog will be primed to perfection. As I promised Sir. Your dog will be a model K9 citizen, Sir. Training your dog boils down to a few basic steps. You need to have a proper set up and use our advanced management tools. What you need is a short-term confinement area. I see you already have a doghouse.

MOTHO: Absolutely

LEKGOA: Sir, you are an absolute natural sir.

MOTHO: (*Gleefully*) Oh really?

LEKGOA: You were born for dog training sir. You just need to build a cage around it. You need to mark where it eats and where it shits. These creatures don't always know the difference *(Chuckles).* Treats. Yes, sir, treats. (*MOTHO takes out some treats from his pocket*) You have the biltong I see. Very good. Dogs love delicacies. If your dog is on the right track. Let them know you like what they are doing... That what they are doing

is right. Give your dog a jackpot of treats. Don't always use dog food. No! There are times when the dogs must feel exceptional. Give your dog a piece of cheese. Use pieces of cold meat. Turkey, Chicken, polony-

MOTHO: Polony?

LEKGOA: Believe me sir. These creatures love polony sir. They get nuts when you pull out polony, sir. You see how it easy it is to lure them? You can lure them into a sitting position. We teach them how to step and fetch things for you. We even teach them to roll over and play dead, Sir. K9 Solutions has the best dog training package in the world. And for a self-respecting dog-owner like you Sir, we have a special offer. The newly upgraded Lure Training Kit.

MOTHO: Yes, I read about Newly Upgraded Lure Training Kit. It's on special?

LEKGOA: Especially for a well-paying customer like you Sir. We've got to change the mind set of dog training today. I'm going to show you the beauty of this package. Our exercises will guarantee that your dog will listen to you no matter what. Repeat after me sir. Your dog will listen to you No Matter What!

MOTHO: No Matter What!

LEKGOA: It is super-important to use lots of treats. Because treats give you an opportunity to build communication with your dog. And in the final step we fade out the treats. Voice commands become the bigger focus. You see sir, when you are done with your dog the leash is within.

MOTHO: (*Animated*) The leash is within?

LEKGOA: Chaining your dog is a thing of yesteryear. The lure method is more effective than using special tools like choking, prongs, and electric collar. Yes, sir. Through voice commands we put the leash within.

MOTHO: The leash inside?

LEKGOA: Compliance is a thing we celebrate at K9 Solutions. Even in a state of capture your dog must look happy Sir.

PHIRI: *(Net daar wa thlabeletsa)* A di ba je

CHORUS*:* Di ba lome

Dilo tsa Naga di rothile. Di a ba surround-a. MOTHO and LEKGOA bundle together, retreating.

MOTHO: *(pushing LEKGOA forward.)* You are the Canine Specialist. Do your taming thing LEKGOA? Hey LEKGOA where is your voice command?

PHIRI: *A* di ba je. *(Dilo tsa Naga di a thlasela [The wild animals attack]*.

CHORUS*:* *(chant)* Di ba lome.

PHIRI: (*making fist bumps with Katse*) A di ba je.

CHORUS: Di ba lome.

PHOKOBJE: Di ba wele ka meno di ba je.

CHORUS: Di ba lome,

PHOKOBJE: Di tlhafune di phupure di ba je.

CHORUS: Di ba lome.

PHOKOBJE: Di momone di kokone di ba je**.**

CHORUS: Di ba lome.

PHOKOBJE: Dilo tsa naga di ba pokele di ba je.

CHORUS: Di ba lome.

-END-

Some notes about mogaga

"*Naga e tlhapisiwa ka mogaga*."

[The land is cleansed through the power of mogaga]

(Kenalemang Kgoroyadira)

I was holding the microphone reciting incantations when Kgoroyadira shouted out these words from the singing crowd. It was a response to the chorus of my song: "rona re goga mogaga/re re a boe naga" [our faces wear fury/we are taking back the land]. The sting of Kgoroyadira's statement stayed with me long after I left the podium.[4] When I followed up with Kgoroyadira she offered a mystical response: "Cleansing the land with *mogaga* would bring plentiful rain and harvest." Kgoroyadira is a knowledgeable healer and farmer. In our conversation she affirmed the connection I was making between the colloquial and spiritual meanings of the word mogaga.

The reader who has engaged with the playscript notices that *mogaga* is a substance used by Phiri to strengthen the wild animals when they finally prepare to confront Motho's tyranny. Phiri's mantra, "*Naga e tlhapiswa ka mogaga*," is inspired by Kgoroyadira's sagely utterance. Phiri's performance of rituals of *go gagaola* are aided by acts of theatre which include chanting, incantations, and anticipatory dance drama. In the final act Phiri leads a chant by Dilo tsa Naga, as they surround Motho and Lekgoa. The act of eating their tormentors out of existence signals the purifying force of ritual performance. Taking cue from the play text, this chapter discusses importance of using African names for dramaturgical concepts. Raised on the idiom which says that *leina lebe ke seromo* [you carry the meaning of your name], I am affable to the idea that names often frame our comprehension of the nature of things or the character of phenomena we want to apprehend. I agree with Awa Mana Asiedu, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Marimba Ani that to "reconceptualise using an African frame of reference … is intimately connected to how we

[4] I was on a podium at the conference of the International Indigenous Astronomy Experts Society at the Royal Marang Hotel, Phokeng, 27-29 July 2022.

think" (Ani, 1992:np). My project takes its cue from Asiedu's call for "a new critical vocabulary, [and] a clear articulation of theories which emanate from our practice" (2011:367). I am persuaded by Ani's view that theorising and naming by using "terminology from African languages" is a necessary step toward "cleaning ourselves of European concepts" (Ani, 1992: np).

The act of naming one's artistic practice was vogue across the African diasporic performance practices in the 1970s. Barbara Ann-Teer has made considerable contributions in this direction. Her processes, named Teer Technologies of soul, holds great lessons about the currency of ritual performance in the modern world – "Ritual, but not in a frozen or atavistic way" (Baraka, 2002: 378).

The work done by Muhammed Ben Abdallah also holds sway in my collection of muses. It was from Walter Chakela, then Artistic Director at the Windybrow Theatre, in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, that I first heard of Ananse. Chakela directed a musical play, *Kweku Ananse* in 1995, experimenting with the methods of *anansegoro*, a term coined by Efua Sutherland, the Ghanaian playwright who in turn influenced Abdallah. Building on work done by Efua Sutherland, Abdallah studies the tools of Ananse storytelling traditions in Ghana to anchor his radical theatre-making practice. His naming of his work *abibigoro* has inspired my own impulse to find a name which speaks to my creative practice.

Peterson's 2000 study of the history of drama education in his book, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmasking of Colonial Marginality,* reveals how coloniality is carried through language. Through a foundation in missionary education the teaching of dramatic arts has been handled via terms that were coined elsewhere. Peterson invests considerable effort into analysing the pioneering work of the Bantu Dramatic Society, 1932 -1940, who, in contrast to "the evangelical uses of drama" in missionary school explored "novel directions in the spread of drama among Africans" (2000: 4). Although a "major ideologue and playwright, H.I.E Dhlomo", who

emerges from the African elite, wrote a substantial body of essays which theorised the African performance aesthetics which they envisioned, the use of African terms was not in vogue.

In the mid-1950s, while prime Africanist and educator Es'kia Mphahlele and the Syndicate of African Artists "laid the basis for the take-off of professional theatre among Africans beyond the 1960s" (Peterson, 2000: 4) they tended to shy away from theorising using African languages. Although the Black Consciousness era emphasised a return to the sources of ritual, the theatrical terms inherited from Eurocentric education remained largely in use among the emergent Black intelligentsia. The term Malopoets, coined in the 1970s by Eugene Skeef, signals attempts to draw intelligence from African languages and mystery systems. Malopo, a word that a part of the name Malopoets, invites a Bakgatla/Bapedi spiritual practice to into the work of purging the horrors of the apartheid state. While sampling a variety of available Afrocentric dramaturgical concepts like ritual drama and guerilla theatre, it became apparent in my research process that these names, while providing useful handles, may not quite apprehend the full interiority of my artistic practice.

Mogaga is a term I encountered through a language I call *sprakate* or what is popularly known as *isicamto*. Buntu Mfenyana offers the many names by which *iscamto* was known when he wrote in 1980, archiving the *iscamto* of the 1970s:

> Om te thetha, khuluma, bua, wietie, pronk, camta en homva, [scamto] is more than just a sound or letter on the page. It is emotion, history, tears, mind action, gesture, picture … ego tripping enjoying sound and erudition (Mfenyana, 1980:295).

Although many words from that period are still current, in *Chilahaebolae* the *iscamto* is updated. While *icscamto* is a living language that chops and changes with time and location, there are words like *mogaga*, as Mfenyana reveals, that have staying power. *Mogaga* is a word used for the mask of fury that the face wears when we confront botheration with the intention of uprooting its source. It is the face of outrage, also called

bizolo or *Mugabe* by those who are initiated in the grammar of *iscamto*. It is the face of indignation – of lines indented between brows, of unmistakable confrontation. The spirit of resistance is embodied facially. It is also necessary to state that *mogaga* is a central plant used in rituals of war, and this is consistent with the combat elements of guerilla theatre. Because of the plant's purgative powers, *mogaga* gestures towards a formulation where combat and play are not antithetical.

I first picked up the word *mogaga* in the streets of my childhood in Soweto around the 1970s. Wearing the face of fury was not only an act of performing the fire that rages in the bosom - it also implied a rebellion written in the body. I trust that the gesture I am now making in this study, where I deploy *iscamto* terminology in my scholarship somehow closes the gap between the fluidity of the street and fixity of the lecture room.

For a long time, I was curious about the roots of the word until I discovered another layer of meaning from the Batswana mystery systems.[5] It was sometime in 2007 that Motsiba Kgomanyane, on my grandfather and herbalist, noted my growing curiosity about the ways of *badimo* [ancestors] and started giving me my first lesson in plant life.[6] Motsiba's invitation that I help with digging up the herbs rubbed me up the right way. That morning in Modimola, my ancestral home outside Mahikeng, we rose with *Mphatlhalatsane*, the morning star. I played my part doing the *piki-ne-fosholo,*[7] digging up plants while he recited their names: *chupu-yapoo, makgabenyana, serokolo, sengaparile, mogaga*. He explained the properties of each plant and the language with which to address them. Through experimentation I came to know *mogaga* as an itchy plant with a harsh

[5] *Letlhaku le Legologolo*, a book by P Lesenyane explores the Batswana mystery systems. In two chapters, *Pheko ya gole e tswewa ka motlha wa tsholo* and *Moremogolo go betlwa wa taola*, the writer tells stories through which he details the magical and philosophical elements that inform the world of *bongaka* By telling stories of the uses of herbs and rituals he reveals a fantastic world of alchemists who scoop up the winds with ostritch egg shells to silence the storms [*go tshwara phefo*]; of war herbs like *mokaikai*, which cause enemies to lose their path; of the herbal power of *moswang wa tlou* [elephant dung]; of *Moremogolo, Kgadi, Kgatsane, Jaro* and *Modimo*, the five bones of divination.

[6] Motsiba explains that *kitso ya dipheko* [(knowledge of herbs] was commonplace when he grew up in Modimola as a young man in the 1940s. He reveals how the entire land is still a pharmacy: "*Naga e hupile dijo tsa metlhale yotlhe.* " [the soil is rich with varieties of food]. Plants which today we uproot, thinking we are clearing weed, are actually healing herbs. These herbs grow naturally but they are no longer put to use because of a lack of knowledge [*Dipheko ke ntletsetletse mo nageng, ke lona le thlokileng kitso*].

[7] Pik and shovel – reference to physical labour.

temperament or prickly character. *Mogaga* is also a source of high energy and spiritual electricity. It is possible that the prickly character of this plant and its capacity to expel botheration inspired the colloquial use of the term *mogaga*.

When this study commenced, I came across a Setswana dictionary explaining *mogaga*. According to the author, *mogaga*: *"ke semela se se nang le segwere se gantsi se diriswang go phekola le go nesa pula*" [*mogaga* is a bulbous plant which is used to heal/cleanse/purge and summon rain] (Otlogetswe, 2012; 349). It is necessary to indicate that the powers of plants in African mystery systems are usually activated through a combination of song, incantation, and mimetic dance. Mudzunga Davhula, in her study of Malombo Musical arts, calls this combination musical theatre. A keen study of the drama of bone-throwing reveals elements that are theatrical, particularly the songmaking, the incantatory performance and "spirit embodiment". The shaman reveals the message through a process of interactive performances by which to reach for "psychological conspiracy with the audience" (Ajumeze, 2014:69). In the world of the *sangoma* this sense of conspiring with the audience is called *ukuvuma* [to agree with what is being said].

Mogaga became a part of my artistic vocabulary since I wrote the song, *Naga,* in 2013. In line with my search for communalistic technologies of performance, the audience usually sing along when we perform the song with my band in community halls, shebeens, in the streets, at musical festivals, jam session, youth workshops and such spaces and many activist occasions. We released this incantatory song in 2021 in a climate in which the question of stolen land was increasingly becoming a great source of botheration amongst the dispossessed. The music summons the spirit of confrontation and urgency in this degrading world where the geography of poverty is largely black while the topography of wealth remains white.

Rona re goga mogaga.

Re re a boe naga.

Naga ke a rona ntsho tsa ga nna le wena

Re a tlhanoga re a a boe vandaaga naga

[We are turning on the face of fury.

We call for the return of the land.

The land is ours you who is black sibling.

We are rebelling we call for the return of the land]

Go goga mogaga is to confront the new "age of indifference" (Fanon, 1965:1) in a neocolonial environment where the owners of the land are queuing in soup kitchens. In *Chilahaebolae*, *mogaga* finds full expression when ultimately Phokobje and Phiri build an army. Together with Dilo tsa Naga they work to obliterate the blood-drinking world of Motho and Lekgoa. When attacking, they draw power from song and incantation. In the closing scene the players perform a dance drama by which Dilo Tsa Naga surround and swallow the enemy. Their chant, *"A di ba je"* (let them be devoured), emphasises the purging of social botheration. In fact, the last scene is designed as anticipatory dance drama. In this way, the play anticipates the erasure of neo-colonial horrors. This incantation and the ethics of change encapsulate the spirit of *mogaga* play-making.

Speaking to the source (s).

The thoughts that power this study are largely inspired by groundings and collaborations with armies of sages, dissident creatives, insurrectionary spiritualists, and astronomers who operate outside the academe. Songs and stories of revolt against conquest and domination that have reverberated through centuries have also found their way into my meditation. I this chapter I sample the variety of sources and conversations with the company of interlocutors who inform my inquiry. You will note my scholarly curiosity about time-honoured practices where rituals and dance dramas are constantly refashioned as both portals into metaphysical worlds and apparatuses for radical action.

Searching for techniques of *go gagaola* through the prism of the Black Consciousness philosophy has provided a conversation that traverses across "the Afrocentric centripetal paradigm" (Luckett et al, 2017:4). I must indicate that writing in terms of "diasporic alliance" (Luckett et al, ibid) does not mean a flattening of terrain. While the scope of this undertaking attempts to give the reader a global orientation of black artistic practices, it is not intended to undermine the variety of expressions prevalent in black culture. Combing through the numerous contesting voices available in this study it becomes apparent that the Black Consciousness philosophy is not an echo chamber, it is negotiated through deliberations and disagreements.

I trust that this venture will form part of the work that must be done towards undoing Eurocentric biases that, during the #FeesMustFall upheavals, were indicted for stifling teaching and learning. My interactions with the activities of the #FeesMustFall movement exposed me to a variety of experiences and conversation that speak to my scholarly interests. The period in which mass gatherings and song were banned on campus provided experiential lessons about performance as a weapon for insurrectionary action.

In a paper by Simamkele Dlakavu et al (2017 titled *Rioting and Writing: Black Womxn at the time of Fallism,* the authors foreground Pumla Gqola's notion of riot and writing occupying the same body. Mbali Matandela's observations about "how people use their

bodies to write" (2017: 107) places premium on the currency of embodied writing. This awareness of the body as a narrativizing instrument is consistent with the elements of ritual drama and guerilla theatre this study discusses. Dlakavu et al see public space as a stage on which the drama of power is contested. This study discusses *Imfuduso,* a play devised by Women of Crossroads, as a key example of women writing and rioting. In reference to strategies of guerilla theatre, their work of writing with the body dials up a culture of mobile agit-prop play-making processes in the 1970s that required no stage and did not burden the players with a script.

Being a performing arts educator and theatre activist writing after the fall of Cecil John Rhodes' statue, I must insist on calling out the lingering ghost of colonial education. I see my work as part of the lineage of African theatre practitioners like Ama Ata Aidoo, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and others who sought to break away from "a racially monolithic thought stream" (Luckett et all, 2017: 60) that has dominated the teaching of dramatic arts. As it turns out, the Theatre and Performance Department in the Wits School of Arts, where I was a student and now work, is struggling to overhaul its colonial foundations.

Until recently the Drama Department was largely oblivious to the wealth of theatrical languages in Africa and elsewhere. For a long time, it was possible for students who did not take the African Literature course to graduate without knowing the work of: H.I.E. Dhlomo, Barbara-Ann Teer, Joe de Graft, Sadeque Variava, Efua Sutherland, Muhammed Ben Abdallah, Amiri Baraka, Bob Maza, Bob Leshoai and Abdias Nascimento. In my experience of teaching performance arts, I have noted interesting tensions between the sea of Eurocentric assumptions and the currents of Afrocentric perspectives.

During my student days, from 1994, we staged numerous theatrical performances at the Wits Box Theatre under the umbrella of the Africa Literature Association. We were carried by the wisdom of Audre Lorde: "You will never dismantle the master's house using the master's tools" (1984: 110). Our efforts were dedicated to fostering a practice of theatre that did not alienate us from the struggles of our communities. We were ready to exorcise

the "historical myths" (Rodney in Campbell, 1993: 128) that mainstream curricula had planted in our minds.

In many ways our artistic events precipitated the push against a theatre curriculum that was organised on the basis that Europe was the mother of dramatic arts. Before the palisade fencing, the heavy metal turnstiles, the access cards and biometric passes, the audience poured onto campus from everywhere. Luminaries like Don Mattera and Gha-Makhulu Diniso interacted freely with the space through performances and discussions.

"How do I wean [myself] from Eurocentric training and European art history, rediscovering [my] own metier?" (Mphahlele, 1984:76). This question, raised by Es'kia Mphahlele, loomed large at the beginning of my research. I found it irksome making art in a field where critics are generally preoccupied with "tracing the European pedigree" (Mphahlele, 1984:76) of African dramaturgical practices. The morning after the first showcase of *Chilahaebolae* at the Market Theatre I had to contend with the limitations of a commentator who opined that I had failed to reach an Orwellian aesthetic.

> The downside of this play is its utter lack of subtlety. Skirting around issues of sinister intent, death, murder and horror, the work is a very shouty one and rather than grabbing audience attention by the scruff of its neck, it tends to degenerate into a volume contest, which does become a bit of an assault, given the limited space of the theatre. You find yourself grabbed by the ears, and not in a good way. This is a pity: the basic premises of this work bring it to the periphery of narratives of the ilk of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* or Aesop's fables, but the articulation leaves it just there (Sassen, 2017:np).

It is unclear why my work is evaluated by the writer for objectives that I did not set out to achieve. This appraisal of my work says little "if anything valuable about the work itself and entirely nothing of its debt to the African traditions" (Chinweizu, 1975:91). My inspiration for writing *Chilahaebolae* is a story from Setswana folklore or *mainane* which

preceded Orwell. Africa has a longstanding tradition of staging fables that carry political commentary. While Sassen finds it disturbing that *Chilahaebolae* "is "very shouty", as a form of agit-prop theatre it intends to "bring da noise" from the soul as a way of exorcising the terrors of the neo-apartheid scenario. It is expected that a theatre of resistance will aim to "grab the ears" of the new ruling elite and their settler handlers crudely and shake them out of their comfort.

My work has precursors like Job Moteane and Azariel Sekese who, in the 1880s in Lesotho, "dramatized animal satires" (Kavanagh, 1976:46). The work of Mochabe Mofokeng, who in 1956 published a play, *Senkatane*, basing the story on the fable of Kgodumodumo, is an extension an ancient practice. Fables and folktales, like Tselane le Dimo and Kgodumodumo, are different versions of narratives about monopod giants, Bo-Dimo, who are said to have roamed the southern cradle of Africa in ancient times when *matlapa a tobetsega* [stones were soft]. Mofokeng recreates the fable in the context of the 1950s anticolonial upheavals in Africa and the Black world. Arguably, by rewriting victory against an all-swallowing ogre Mofokeng anticipated the independence of Ghana and the rest of the continent. Interestingly, Mofokeng's play also dialogues critically with the culture of self-interest that riddles the neo-colonial dispensation. In Mofokeng's world it is the *Kgodumodumo* of greed, which lies within us, that must be purged. It is this angle of vision that informs the character of Mpja and his ultimate demise in *Chilahaebolae*.

When I began school in 1974 at Tshimologo[8] primary school in Meadowlands in Soweto we performed fables like *Kgodumodumo* in class. Then it was emotionally satisfying to experience the ultimate fall of the monster who swallows people and livestock. It is only later in my high school years that I began to perceive this image of a falling *Kgogumodumo*

[8] Ms Pooe, the Setswana teacher, was a truly fantastic storyteller. She always filled the class with energy when teaching fables, songs, and plays. We had to embody the characters in the stories. Like all other Bantu Education teachers, I have experienced she did not spare the rod of correction. When Ms Pooe insisted that we perform with oomph and gusto I did not realise the seed she was planting.

as precipitating the demise of the apartheid regime. Leshoai reveals that there is a similar legend among the Zulu people in the story of Nontombinde, the king's daughter, who is swallowed with other people and animals by the *Isiququmadevu* – an ugly hairy monster as big as a mountain (1981:249). The heroes in both stories kill the monster with "one stab" (1981:249), cutting open the stomach and freeing the people. Evidently, these traditional fables celebrate militaristic activity as a means for dispelling tyranny. Through the journeys of Phiri and Phokobje, my creative project draws from this practise of fables in which trickster-heroes "usually champion the cause of the weak and oppressed" (Leshoai, 1981:249).

Lefifi Tladi (of the 1970s music and poetry band, Dashiki) is convinced that the influence of Cheik Anta Diop's writings, which celebrate the wealth of African sciences, astronomy and arts, persuaded elements of Black Consciousness arts practitioners to look deeply into the spiritual dimension for their artistic expression. The emergence of groups like Malombo Jazz Makers and Malopoets as part of the Black Consciousness movement's cultural combat wings signals the ways in which performances of resistance are ritualised or sanctified. Malombo is a nomenclature derived from Vhavhenda mystery systems. When I invited Eugene Skeef, one of the founders of Malopoets, to speak in my Black Theatre class, he explained that the first part of the name, Malopoets, draw from *malopo*, in reference to Bapedi/Bakgatla ritual performance practices. The concrete struggles of the dispossessed against oppression birthed new languages for purgation, providing for a radical opening in the cultural space.

Undertaking this inquiry therefore presents an occasion to recast the questions and debates of my precursors. The tensions that arose between social realism and radical spiritism or "spiritual realism" (Mahone, 2002:270) will be addressed in this study. Can African socialism accommodate the weapon of ritual? For instance, it is noteworthy that Marimba Ani a conversation with Listervelt Middleton, *Let the circle be unbroken- Mama Marimba Ani Interview* (1992), celebrates the political currency of ritual drama. Ani wants to correct the "mistake [of separating] the spiritual from the political" (1992:np). Fanon, on the other

hand, displays apprehension. For Fanon “during the liberation struggle there is a singular loss of interest in these rituals”. (1967:20).

Ani’s work forms part of the studies of ritual drama in the Black Diaspora. Teer Technologies of Soul by Babarah Ann Teer is a luminous example of the pioneering research work in ritual performance. Teer’s Technologies of Soul is a luminous example of the pioneering research work in ritual performance. Teer spent time among the Yoruba in Nigeria studying under spiritual guides. Other seminal examples are Carter Harrison’s *The Drama of Nommo: Black Theatre in the African Continuum (*1972) and later Black *Theatre: Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora* (2002). Efforts towards studying the mechanics of ritual drama have been made in the southern African region.

Numerous scholarly works have influenced my own work including, H.I.E. Dhlomo’s essays and Mudzunga Davhula’s PhD thesis. Although Dhlomo wrote playscripts and essays theorising play-making in the 1930s, it is Davhula’s 2015 thesis, *Malombo Musical Arts in Vhavenda Indigenous Healing Practices* that uncovers significant detail about the performance of healing rituals and provides insights that I lacked, particularly regarding the links between *Vho Maine Mudzhukwa* (those who heal using music, dance and herbs) and *Vho Maine Vha Tshele* (those who heal through rattles used as rhythm accompaniment to the chanting and dancing) with musical groups associated with the Black Consciousness movement such as the Malombo Jazz Makers. She has also helped to make the links between theatrical arts and ritual performance visible.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s writings about his work in Kamirĩĩthũ provide strong theoretical models for *mogaga* dramaturgy. His self-reflective essays, memoirs, novels and plays are a great influence. His emphasis on the role of play-making as a site for constructing rituals of resistance is a central point in this thesis. I agree with David Kerr’s observations in the chapter, “Towards a Theatre of Popular Struggle”, that through the Kamirĩĩthũ Cultural Centre a theatre of resistance is possible, even in a neocolonial setup. In fact, Kamirĩĩthũ offers fantastic data for *mogaga* play-making, particularly the aspect of an open-air theatre.

I was exposed to work done by Benjy Francis and Bheki Peterson at the Africa Cultural Centre in 1993 through my student project at Khanya College. Participating in the drama workshops was a life-shaping experience, which was enhanced when I read "The Creative Act*"*, a weekly column by the two that had been published by the *Sowetan* newspaper in 1990. Appearing every Tuesday, the column would discuss "the methods, problems and issues involved in making theatre" (Francis and Peterson, 1990: np). Their commentary was informed by their efforts as theatre practitioners observing their own practices at the African Cultural Centre and before at the H.I.E. Dhlomo Theatre. Through this "series on community playmaking for everyone" they fielded a range of weekly topics that included: "The Language of Theatre"; "The Politics of Organising Theatre"; "The Electricity of Movement"; "Conflict, Crisis and Confrontation" among other topics.

The story of Francis and Peterson's operations at the H.I.E. Dhlomo Theatre and the Africa Cultural Centre is worth studying in detail on another occasion. Francis speaks fondly about how some of the workshop participants who enjoyed their theatre-making programme were underground recruits of the Azanian people's liberation army (APLA) readying to go into exile. He indicates that the H.I.E Dlhomo Theatre was shut down by the apartheid police, who correctly suspected that the centre's theatre training programme provided a cover for militaristic operations. They regrouped by building the Africa Cultural Centre, a stone's throw away from 66 Pim Street, where the Dlhomo Theatre had been located. My appetite to study African theatre history and aesthetics increased when, in 2008, I started operating at the centre. Francis offered me the space to experiment. When the African Cultural Centre closed, not only did I lose an office and rehearsal spaces, but I also lost an intellectual and spiritual home.

The work done by Credo Mutwa on African storytelling, mythology and ritual drama has been essential in my line of research. Reading through *Indaba My Children, Isilwane* and *Zulu Sharman* as well as staging his play, *uNosilimela,* afforded me interesting insights into his world, where spirituality and materiality make interesting encounters.

On another occasion I will address Mutwa's complex relationship with the apartheid state and his alienation from the forces of liberation in Africa. While I dig voraciously through the treasures he left behind, I also remain aware of the voices that indicate that Mutwa was an apartheid apologist or an agent. His own writing sometimes reveals his indebtedness to white patronage or complicity with colonial regimes. There is an instance in *Zulu Shaman* where he remembers getting stuck in a bus in Kenya. It raises curiosity when he appears to display a belligerent attitude towards the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army: "At first, we saw nothing. I had my gun with me because these were the times when the Mau-Mau was still active in Kenya. It was ready in my hand when I left the bus" (1996:140). The well-known story of Mutwa's condemnation/denunciation of the student uprising, which led to his Soweto house being torched by the youth of 1976, does not cover him in glory.

Inversely, there is popular mythological story about Mutwa and another well-known herbalist, Khotso Sethuntsa, engaging in a contest of skills with muti, magic and ritual performance to determine who had greater power over the forces of history. Folklore tells us Sethuntsa had strengthened apartheid ideologue and leader Hendrik Verwoerd with strong muti. On the other side, it was said Mutwa had been given the historical mission of doctoring the knife that Dimitri Tsafendas carried into parliament to assassinate Verwoerd. This mythopoetic tale gives Mutwa a warrior profile.

In recent years, given the rising tide of interest in African spiritual traditions, Mutwa has resurfaced into public consciousness and popular culture as the great custodian of African spiritual practices and a prophetic voice in the service of a postcolonial cultural revolution. For instance, Luisha Teish a luminous ritualist, writer and storyteller sings praises to Mutwa in the foreword to the first publication of *Zulu Shaman* in America.

Introducing him to the African diaspora Teish presents Mutwa's work as a victory over the pollution of "real knowledge about South Africa by "anthropologists' opinion".

Looking at the wealth of folklore in the book, Teish argues that Mutwa's work "speaks strongly in favour of the Cradle theory of civilisation – that the civilisation of Africa did not drift from the north but evolved from the south and spread across the world" (1996: vii). In my study, Mutwa's work in folklore complements Diop's work in anthropology. A comparative study of their work which was instrumental in my efforts to trace the roots of ritual performance into the passion plays of Kgalagadi and "Omo Valley" (Diop, 1981: 11).

The experience of studying Marimba Ani's conversations about ritual drama alongside Mudzunga Davhula's thesis about malombo ritual performances has also provided thrilling vistas of experience. Their insightful articulations of African mystical practices gave me a language with which speak about the complementarity between spiritual philosophy and political goals. In drinking up what I assume to be a strong mixture made from a variety of Afrocentric sources, I seek for a scholarly concoction that helps me "to cleanse ourselves of anti-African modalities" (Ani, 1992:np). My work engages critically with performative traditions, public performance and communal ritual that are features which mark various aspects of life, including insurrection. They are deployed to maintain social order, but they can also be weaponised to dismantle tyranny.



Figure 2 . Chilahaebolae, Market Theatre, 2017. Auction scene: Shane Veeran (Zookeeper), Abongile Matjutju (Motho), Paul Noko (Phokobje) and Sibusiso Mkhize (Mpja).

Mogaga: Three Principles

The principles of *go gagaola* (a principle being an essence that cannot be done away with) can be yoked from the dramas of revolutionary change across the world. I insist that it is impossible to revolt without practicing *huru, imvumakufa* and *khepera*. This trinity of intersecting principles of *mogaga* play-making, as I am learning, forms elemental parts of resistance art. Although I call them by names that I have chosen, the reader will recognise their characters. I have trusted oral testimonies mostly, and the stories I share in this chapter have advanced my insights about how play-makers use the tools, techniques and idioms of *mogaga* play-making to negotiate the nexus between divination and the pursuit of freedom. I have included guerilla forms without fluorescent lights, opening nights, box

office tickets, photo opportunities and applauding playgoers. There are lessons to draw from a theatre of revolutionary action and personal sacrifice. Often, in guerrilla drama the "theatrical event is both immediate and performed by real people playing themselves as opposed to characters" (Ravengai, 2016:171). This chapter cultivates the key principles of *mogaga* play-making. *Khepera, imvumakufa* and *huru* are harnessed in the work of Makeba, in Bantu Biko's oratory, in Lefifi Tladi's "art of dissembling" (Euba, 2002,1967) and later in the work of playwright, Gha-Makhulu Diniso, Women of Crossroads and other dissident artists and leaders whose performances and gestures prompt my own *mogaga* play-making.

Uhuru,[9] the pan-African slogan for anticolonial upheavals, is ordinarily explained as a Swahili term for freedom. *Uhuru*, arguably, is an expression that traces back to the mystery systems of Kgalagadi. The root word, *huru*, among the /Xqu and Batswana is about change as a life-giving force. Performances of *huru* dance drama demand the deconstruction of the body. The shape-shifting body of *lelopo* demonstrates that nothing is ever fixed in one form. To activate *huru,* the body becomes elastic, breaking the norms of the human structure as *malopo* take animalistic forms.

The trance/formative actions of *huru* dance drama are a celebration of the constantly changing characters of the spirits, the mercurial personalities of trickster gods and, by extension, the inevitability of change (Keeney, 2015:181). Huru is the "art of motion" (Diop, 1981:306) which expresses freedom from the tyranny of rigidity. The capacity to defy physical strictures in order to embody animal spirits and the disruption of boundaries between physical and spiritual realities are indexes of free will.

The insurrectionary principle of *khepera* stresses the notion of self-creation. The making of self is achievable through the altering of matter. *Khepera* collapses the dichotomies between spirit and matter. In Khepera spirit creates matter. Through play and it's making

[9] Aimé Césaire's play, *A Tempest*, a francophone drama about resistance to western colonialism, links the struggle for independence in the Caribbean with the struggle for independence in Africa. Césaire has Caliban articulate the revolutionary spirit by chanting uhuru.

the spirit vibrates. To play, therefore, is "to actualise the archetypes" (Diop, 1981:310). *Khepera* stresses the idea of being "created in potentiality, before being created in actuality" (Diop, ibid). In *khepera* the past, the future and the present penetrate each other. The science of *khepera* can be explained in the word of Marimba's Ani when she says that: "Spirit and matter are joined… they exit in a continuum. Spirit is energy. Matter is the manifestation of spiritual energy. Material reality expresses spiritual reality" (1987: np).

The principle of *imvumakufa* has been applied in the dramatic arts. The *malopo* process of working with spiritual entities, where *lelopo* offers their body to host personalities from invisible realms, is the art of characterisation. Performers give their bodies to the characters in the story. To play a part in a play is equally a moment of dying and becoming. The process of embodying characters is, arguably, like the practice of spirit embodiment. The admission of *izangoma* into *ukuthwasa* [the initiation process] includes *imvumakufa*, where the initiate must kill a social identity in order to bring into being a spiritual personality. Here there is no distance between *lelopo* and a character in a play. The tools of tapping into spiritual realities to fetch characters are usually availed through spiritual training or through intuitive arrangements with the people inside you. Guided by the principle of *imvumakufa*, *malopo* learn techniques of letting the spiritual personas live through their bodies. It is a system where dying is becoming, or death is an illusion.

There are clues in the work of dissident artists that seek to explore the intersections of the imagination, spiritual revelation and *malombo/malopo*. There are those who refashioned the mystery of dying and becoming, *imvumakufa*. Agreeing to face brutal consequences or isolation as a result of their refusal to be adjusted by anti-people regimes was a form of imvumakufa. Resistance theatre is replete with trickster figures, dissident type characters who die a death that is a refusal to die.

The mystery of the undying sage is woven through African spiritual/communal ritual performance. Arguably, the concept of an undying sage traces back to ancient Africa passion plays. For Diop, the first self-creating undying sage is the passion of Asar (Osiris). He traces the beginnings of ritual drama to Athens in ancient Kimet (Egypt), before 534

BC. Illustrating his point, Diop (1981:337) gives the example of the dramatist and poet, G.M. Tsegaye, who, during the Pan-African Congress in Addis Ababa in 1973, presented a translation of a play from that era. Echoing Diop's pointers, Victor Leo Walker states:

> The African roots of black drama and theatre in the Diaspora date as far back as 2500 BCE to the ancient Egyptian Passion Plays … The first 'plays' were extensions of religious observances among those ancient Africans – today known as Nubians and Egyptians – who inhabited the long, lush valley of the Nile … They were often, in effect, elaborate Passion Plays … The best known of the early Egyptian dramas is the 'Abydos Passion Play,' whose god-hero was Osiris, corn-deity, spirit of the trees, fertility patron and lord of life and death (2002:16).

In De Graft's play, *Muntu*, Odomakoma, the self-creating deity dies, and returns to life. The undying sage formulation, which collapses the boundaries of philosophy, cosmogony, myth and drama, is an archetype that recurs in African theatre and performance practices. There are various performative elements of communal rituals that highlight the idea of the *imvumakufa*. The dualisms between physical and spiritual, life and death, real and imagined are subverted by ritual performances.

Rituals of resistance emphasise the channelling of warrior spirits and acting according to the temperaments of the inspiration. To this effect, the combat aspects of "sacred ritual drama" include memorialising the "rebellions of ancestors" (Ani, 1980). Contemporary discourses of African resistance often revise and dramatize pantheons of gods, particularly parading those who are considered figures of rebellion in the Black world: Assata Shakur, Yaa Asante Wa, Dedan Kemathi, Mbuya Nehanda, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, Ntozakhe Shange, Mathakgong Kepadisa, Manthathisi and others. Through their actions, these "icons of Black life … have achieved mythic stature in the consciousness" of the African Diasporic communities (Holton, 2002:253). Calling out these names deliberately invokes the undying spirit of uhuru. Interacting with these spiritual entities heightens the frequency of a person's or an individual' vibrations. Change in the person's spiritual ecosphere alters their physical energies, postures, and utterances.

That said, Mafika Gwala cautions against the deification of individual heroes by problematising the tendency to present Biko as the father of Black Consciousness. It "could not have been founded by any person … Black Consciousness was the embodiment of an historic moment" (1981:227). For Gwala, building spiritual traditions or resistance practices from deifying individuals undermines the ethos of collectively that informed the operations of the Black People's Convention. While the contributions of the individuals must not be erased, and must be celebrated as exemplary, I stress a collective ethos. In the search for *mogaga* play-making the heroic actors on different stages of Black history serve as "ritual archetypes that represent the intellectual and metaphysical power" (Walker: 2002:137).

Makeba's life story is illustrative of the meeting between *imvumakufa, huru* and *khepera*. Makeba's own life is an open stage of numerous dramatic encounters with oppressive systems globally. When she first left South Africa in 1959 to promote Lionel Rogosen's film, *Come Back, Africa,* at the Venice Film Festival, she did not realise that fortune would drive her to become a spirit of rebellion across the Black world. She stayed in London before settling in New York, where her voice took off. However, when she increasingly offered her voice to the Black Power movement, the American music industry isolated her. The point of no return for Makeba was when the apartheid embassy nullified her passport. The booking agents began to shy away because of her association with Black radical activists. Makeba, however, stayed true to her intuitive faculties. "The life that is in me may be more than just my own," she says in her autobiography (1987:112).

Earlier in her life, having provided support for her mother, who received spiritual training in Swaziland, Makeba had grown up into a full appreciation of African knowledge systems. Through her years of musical practice, her intuitive connections with the life inside developed. Making music was the switch she needed to step into the "stage of in-between".

In 1988, when titling her album, *Sangoma*, she made a statement about her spiritual temperament. Makeba tells the story of how the spirits announce themselves through the songs they gift her whenever she trances on stage. She calls these moments of channelling "dancing with the life that is in me" (1989:112). Her choice of the word "dancing" suggests that *amadlozi* do not come as a disruptive force. The notion of dancing with the life inside expresses the principle of *huru*. Dancing with the life inside her implies cooperation and dialogue with spiritual entities. As a voice of the anti-imperialist rebellions of the 1960s, Makeba seems to permit trances that advance her combatant spirit. That her songs became part of the soundtrack of anticolonial upheavals suggests Makeba was channelling warrior spirits. Evidently, Makeba displays the capacity to engage in a process of "conscious dreaming" (Ngũgĩ, 1998:19). In conscious dreaming we tap into "the subconscious of our inner senses" (Ngũgĩ, 1998:19) to fetch our deepest desires.

Khepera is engineered by dreams. Dreaming allows for unhindered flights of exploration where there is "freedom to ask any question" (Ngũgĩ, 1998:19). Makeba's discography and utterances suggest there is a conscious pattern that shapes her artistic and political garments. In fact, it seems clear that she came into a higher self when she aligned her songs to the fight against tyrannical regimes around the world.

Ordinarily, Makeba's practice would be perceived in terms of spirit possession, but this problem of terminology inhibits comprehension. It seems more accurate to look at Makeba's musicality as "a system of inspiration' (Armah, 2019: np), not a terrain of spirit possession. Notably, David Kerr says that in "spirit possession" dances are spontaneous, "lacking self-consciousness" (Kerr, 1995: 49). For Kavanagh, "In ritual masquerades, for instance, there is the element of possession and trance. The actor becomes, literally, "beside himself" (Kavanagh, 2016: 4).

On the contrary, trance states for Davhula are a "stage of in between", not a loss of mental faculties or a surrender of self-consciousness. Cooper concept, "dance of self-possession," (1993: 18) is more accurate than the notion of spirit possession. Although Davhula also

uses the latter term, she observes that there is a high level of organisation and structure while allowing improvisation of a "completely spontaneous response" (Davhula, 2015:1-11). Malombo sessions for Davhula are rituals of letting the spirit in. De Graft refers to a similar practice of reaching "a state of ecstatic release" where the medium engages in "role playing" or an "act of impersonation … When [this] act of impersonation is determined by a conscious selection and shaping of creative elements, then drama begins to take on the lineaments of consciously ordered art" (De Graft, 2002: 22). To this effect, it would be preferable to say that the likes of Makeba worked with *amadlozi* – they were not possessed by the spirits.

This tradition of "conscious dreaming" hails from the sangoma who uses the power of incantation to energize herbaceous plants. Unlike spirit possession, it is a consciously structured construct negotiated through poetic incantations. The drama of divination is at home with methods of free association and "yoking together" (Ngũgĩ, 1998:19) of elements from interior senses. Summoning *amadlozi* is not spirit possession because the *sangoma* or *lelopo* instructs and directs the spirit. I am persuaded by Armah, who regards spirit possession as a forced, suffered, pathological happening for unprepared victims.

From Armah's statement we may infer that spirit possession is, in fact, the grip of coloniality on the African psyche. When Armah says spirit possession happens to the ignorant and undisciplined, he may be referring to those who, unlike Makeba the song warrior, stray from the path of rebellion that Isanusi walks in his novel, *Two Thousand Seasons*. For Armah it is those whose souls have been burrowed out by foreign religions who are the spiritually possessed. I share Armah's distrust of spiritual practices without political clarity and outrage. Inspection suggests that the three principles of *mogaga* express a spirit of revolt in which, like Isanusi, Makeba, Assata Shakur and other Maroon characters or dissident personalities, you disengage from the oppressor's world and culture and charge from timeless streams.

Mogaga play-making, therefore, as we learn from Makeba's illustrative story, is a system of inspiration in which spiritual activity is "a desired, voluntary, healthy act of informed will and careful preparation" (Armah, 2019: np). Notably, practices of guerrilla theatre, particularly from the 1970s onwards in South Africa, work with the principles of *imvumakufa*. Black Consciousness ideology, which fuelled guerrilla theatre makers, celebrated the will to give one's life for freedom. Agit-prop tools, which the likes of Makeba re-moulded, enabled them to upload spiritual forces into their gestures, songs and utterances.

In the context of anti-imperialist upheavals in the Black world, singing, dancing, and acting were both political action and spiritual practice. When Teer left for West Africa to undergo spiritual training, she may have been spurred on by a conversation popularised by Woodie King Jr in his essay, "No longer a pastime? Black Theatre: Weapon for change" (1967:35). Drawing on her interaction with Yoruba culture Teer aimed to create "Ritualistic Revival-Theatre art that flows from the heart." She also bought a building for the theatre community, creating a shrine of Black power inside the ghetto, where they housed these experiments freely. Teer's Technology of Soul is a precursor to Paul Carter Harrison's book, *The Drama of Nommo,* published in 1972, which discusses the presence of traditional African thought and spirituality in African-American artistry. In his essay, "The Hip-Hop Theatre Initiative: We the Griot", Daniel Banks echoes Harrison:

> The emcee in hip-hop culture carries the legacy of the griot or djeli, the carrier of culture … Word-force, spoken or gesticulated, is essential for ritualistic illumination. The ritual sets in motion the Nommo force. The creative force which gives form to all things. According to Harrison, it is "the power of the word, that Nommo force, which manipulates all forms of raw life and conjures images that not only represent his biological place in Time and Space, but his spiritual existence as well (Banks, 2017:143).

This dramaturgy that normalises spiritual realities, as Banks articulates so sharply, is visible in the plays, poems and essays recorded in magazines like *The Complete Sketsh*: *South Africa's Magazine for Theatre and Entertainment,* a facsimile edition of which was published in 2016, and *Negro Digest* (1969), which became *Black World* from 1970 onwards. Writers like Sipho Sephamla, Mango Shabangu and Felicia Mabuza in *Sketsh* magazine record how theatre grew in social clubs, church halls and open spaces. There was a vibrant intellectual tradition of critique and a rigorous documenting of stage techniques, aesthetic traditions and the political significance of productions.

The 1970s was a period of heightened self-discovery, as reflected in *Black World* magazine - and George G.M. James's *Stolen Legacy: The Egyptian Origins of Western Philosophy* (1954) was among the 'literary' staples. Like Diop, James traces the earliest recordings of plays back to 630 BCE in the theatrical performances that took place along the Nile River and beyond. For James, the codes of theatrical performances were produced in the matrix of African mystical traditions in which spirits ask to be played. Saths Cooper echoes the same sentiments in a document archived by the People's Experimental Theatre:

> Ancient Black civilizations had ritualistic forms of art in their supplication, worship and thanksgiving. Ancient ritual has evolved and developed through the ages, with each social era adding what was outstanding of the time and subtracting the useless. Drama simply did not begin with the Greeks only. It had its origins in the Black civilizations like the Harra and Mohonjedaro (Indian), the Incas and Aztecs (South American), Zimbabwe (African), Mesopotamia
>
> (Middle-East), … dance called Kabuchi, whose roots are untraceable … Throughout history, the artist has been using the medium to mirror the social evils of the time (Cooper, 1973:11).[10]

[10] There are two existing documents of this article by Cooper. A handwritten document which was recited by Sipho Buthelezi, a political activist, at a gathering in Mofolo, Soweto. The other document is credited to actor and theatre activist Nomsisi Kraai, in a magazine produced by The People's Experimental Theatre. Variava explains that Kraai's name was used because at that time Cooper was serving a banning order. [10] Dichaba Mashinini (2023) remembers his elder brother Tsietsi as a master of disguise. Whenever apartheid police thought they had him surrounded, Tsietsi found ways to disappear. There were times he would put tennis balls inside the bras he wore when he draped his body in his sister's dress. He would also make up his

Cooper's points are reminiscent of H.I.E. Dhlomo's musings of 1936 in which he observes that occasions of play-making in Africa, from its ancient roots, provide instances for ritual acts that enable us to engage robustly with forces that threaten our existence and to affirm those that sustain it. While Diop and James's focused on Egypt, my research traces principles of *mogaga* from Kgalagadi. It is Diop who points us to Central Africa and Botswana for the origins of humanity. It must then follow that the early people were also creatures of culture like us and practiced ritual dramas of their own. The culture of malopo/malombo which was popularised in the 1970s arguably draws roots from ancient Kgalagadi.

A great diet of trickster stories was circulated in the streets where I grew up. We swapped contemporary stories born from encounters with the law. The stories of Tsietsi Mashinini, one of leaders of the 1976 uprisings, were especially popular. One that was popular in township folklore is an account of how he slipped through the net of apartheid police wearing his sister's dress[10], his mother's wig and *di-kwai-kwai,* an onomatopoeic name for women's high-heeled shoes for the clacking sound the heels make. Trickster figures who dupe the system were popular in the stories we circulated. Euba, writing in the essay, "Legba and the Politics of Metaphysics: The Trickster in Black Drama", calls this "the art of dissembling". Euba reveals that:

> The trickster's action therefore places the trickster in an important role in black culture, with serious implications for the fate of the individual or community involved. It is a role that identifies the trickster as more than just a performer of tricks (2002:167).

Isabel Hofmeyr, writing about the political currency of trickster stories, reveals how these narratives play a role in "upsetting social order and dissolving dominant ways of seeing…

face with lipstick, maskara and all, covering his head in his mother's wig. When the police came looking for him he thinned his voices addressed them as Tsietsi's sister.

these stories have a manifestly subversive potential that would be available to the teller should she require it (2001, 254). Dashiki poet and painter Tladi tells fantastic trickster stories from his own life. His anecdotes often provide glimpses into the underground youth cultures of the 1970s. In Tladi's stories we get insights into theatrical encounters that are both "immediate and performed by real people playing themselves as opposed to characters" (Ravengai, 2016:171). There are numerous chronicles he has shared about ways to be inventive in an oppressive environment that casts a person in the role of sub-human. In a world that demands that a person either wear the mask of a shuffling savage or perish, that person ultimately performs all sorts of antics to salvage the soul. One often meets situations that require one to deploy "the art of dissembling".

Playing the part of a *sweet-konyana*, an *iscamto* term for a sweet-and-innocent-as-alamb person, forms part of the arsenal of "black dissembling strategies" (Euba, 2002:174). As Tladi recalls, it was one morning in June 1970 when he followed his guru, Mahlarheni "Bra Geoff' Mphakati[11] to Church Street in Tshwane, then Pretoria. Bra Geoff was not fond of wasting words. While on their way he spoke once: "Today, we are turning the Step-and-Fetch-It Act around." As Tladi was contemplating Bra Geoff's coded words, they missioned into the Van Schaik Bookstore asking to see the store manager. The shop assistant told them *Die Baas* [The Boss] would receive them in his office. Stepping into the office and seeing the impatient-looking store manager, Bra Geoff took off his hat and, bowing sheepishly, descended on him quickly with an improvised monologue:

> *Goie môre Meneer. Hoe lyk dit, my kroon?* We are respectful citizens of this country. We know that ignorance of the law is not an excuse for breaking the law. We don't want to go to jail. Please give us a list of banned books from the Government Gazette. We don't want to make mistakes, *Meneer*!

[11] "Geoff Mphakati (1940-2004) nurtured the careers of many artists, writers and musicians from a region that reached south from townships around Pretoria and those near Johannesburg" (Hill, 2015:22).

Closing his monologue with a sob and thinning his deep voice, Bra Geoff bent his knees as if shrinking before power. Moved by this powerful display of supplication, the store manager shot up from his chair, turning and pulling out a paper from the shelves and handing it over. "*Baie dankie Meneer!* [Thank you very much, sir] We will bring it back!" Bra Geoff offered. "That's a photocopy. You can keep it," said the store manager, waving them away impatiently. They actioned out of the store.

Standing tall in Church Street, Bra Geoff instructed Tladi: "Get these books. I will see you after work!" Following his instinct, Tladi shot straight to the UNISA Research Centre. While plotting his mission he bumped into Fourie Matlala, his old classmate from primary school. It turned out that Matlala worked as a cleaner at the UNISA Research Centre. A plan was hatched quickly with Matlala. When Matlala went on his tea break, Tladi would be in the library with the list of banned books conducting a "feasibility study". When Matlala returned to clean the library, he would see the books were out of alignment with the library's shelving system. He would throw these books into black refuse bags.

When Tladi came to collect the *dulas* (*Iscamto* for a "score" or loot) during lunchtime, Matlala would have already packed the books neatly in sealed boxes. Matlala would be highly pleased when he collected his performance fee in Mamelodi after work. It would come with a five-litre bonus bag of cannabis. Matlala offered to serve the revolution from that day onwards. Any time the revolution needed *dulas,* Tladi and Bra Geoff knew where to find Matlala - and how to thank him. It was to be the beginning of an ongoing operation to liberate books that the apartheid regime wanted to silence. Opening the boxes and unveiling the books, Tladi says he would be swimming in a great ocean of the foundational voices of the African revolution: Gabriel Kingsley Osei, Cheik Anta Diop, Angela Davis, C.L.R. James, Peter Abrahams, Augustino Neto, Walter Rodney, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek, Frantz Fanon and many more. Whenever Tladi tells this story he insists that these guerrilla operations delivered the books for the revolution.[12] It is his view that it is these "liberated" books that laid the foundation for their rising consciousness. Motlhabane

[12] There were many such operations. As Shannen Hill's study reveals, "[a]n array of banned materials. was exchanged on campuses and in townships across the country (2015:1).

Mashiangoako, Fikile Magadlela, visual artists who, like Tladi, grew from Bra Geoff's tutelage, educated themselves from this arrangement. As Hill observers,

> Despite the banning of several titles, the Mphakati's library included many books popular in the tricontinental liberation struggles of which BC was a part. What arose in this time and place was rich exchange with translational blackness at its core (2015:21)

Tladi remembers fondly that the books circulated through connections with CULCOM, the "Cultural Committee" initiated by SASO's commission on Culture.[13] Sometime in 1971, these unwanted African gems provided a feast for SASO founders when they paid a visit to Garankuwa. Through links made by Nozipho Machoba, an activist, they arranged to meet for a sleepless weekend with Tladi's team, engaging largely about the arts in the revolution. Tladi often speaks delightedly about how the visitors were served fantastic material. He often reminisces about that weekend of fruitful exchanges with Bokwe Mafuna, Bantu Biko, Ben Langa and Mandla Langa. In accordance with Tladi's favourite quip: "When this troupe arrived in Garankuwa we were hip!" Molefe Pheto, in *And Night Fell: Memoirs of a Political Prisoner in South Africa*, speaks about books, paintings and sculptures he collected from the Black world as his "spiritual saviours" (1983:37).

Tladi's stories of his encounters with the law are endless. Sometimes the scenes are brutal, and the trickster does not escape the net. Tladi recalls how pictures of Dedan Kimathi and Mau-Mau guerrillas (of the Land and Freedom Movement) inspired the radical types to keep their hair unkempt. Tladi also reveals that he was raised in traditions where hair is considered a spiritual antenna or sixth sense through which deep connections with the natural world are perceivable. In July 1976 Tladi found himself fighting a psychological

[13] Understanding the value that culture holds to convey BC ideals, SASO organized a Cultural Committee (CulCom) that began to solicit and field proposals from artists, and hired them to perform at SASO events large and small. Lefifi Tladi appreciated the CulCom members who visited him outside Pretoria because they were "not vertical invaders, that is, they were there to listen and share and promote. David Koloane worked with CulCom to build financial support for The Gallery, a project put on hold when SASO was banned in 1979. Until then, then SASO's Cultural Committee was at work realizing BC's vision in the arts. Quite early on, the ideology's aesthetics were expressed through varied forms, political and artistic, with all kinds of cross-pollination (Hill, 2015: 4)

battle at the Brits Maximum Security Prison. "*Jy skeer nie. Jy eet nie!"* ("You don't shave. You don't eat") the prison guard told Tladi when he refused to shave off his dreadlocks. "*Ek skeer nie!"* (I'm not shaving) Tladi refused flatly. For three days he was locked in solitary confinement, living only on water. On the fourth day, when they pulled him out, demanding: *"Skeer jy?"* (are you ready to shave?) he was so physically depleted he fainted, wordless. When he woke up his dreadlocks were gone and a fellow prisoner was feeding him soft porridge. "My father wept when he came to visit," Tladi recalls. He says the apartheid jailing system insisted on shaving prisoners because "they wanted to amputate that perception dimension" (Tladi, 2022: np). Upon his release on bail, while awaiting trail and calculating his chances against a charge of terrorism, Tladi thought it best to skip the country.

The drama of Black power included the practice of growing unkempt hair or dreadlocks, Afros were also popular. Sporting natural looks would not only signal the ousting of the oppressor culture and sense of decorum, it was also a sign of being entered by the rising spirit of rebellion. "Azania was born without a comb" was a popular slogan among Africanists in the 1980s of my youth. It appears that this hair revolution in the Black world was popularised earlier by Makeba (at a time in the 1960s when she was lending her voice to the growing anti-colonialist upheavals in the Third World). As part of the drama of the revolutionary foment of the Black Power Movement the Afro-hair styles of radical activists Angela Davis and Assata Shakur further inspired the pan-African look. In South Africa, Black Consciousness leader in the 1970s, "Mamphele Ramphele tossed out wigs, once worn for a "respectable" look, and opted to show her shorn locks" (Hill, 2015:5).

Insignia, symbols, chants and marches recall the genesis of struggles and project future selves. Leaders in rebellions, on and offstage, take turns in the circle, leading one song and cuing in the next. The performative nature of social and political activism cannot be overstated. From the symbolism of clenched fists and the sartorial styles of Dashiki to the leadership of the Black People's Convention, ritual was embedded in different facets of social and political life. These gestures and expressions abounded in the era of the People's Experimental Theatre, the pungwe circles of the Chimurenga and the funeral processions

of 1980s anti-apartheid activist funerals in South Africa. These moments constitute different forms of rituals of resistance. They are performative, moments of collective surrender to the ethereal. Gestures reveal the collective pulse, they disclose the collective ethos or ecstasy. Rituals mark collective solemnity or stoicism; they fuel their participants' and the collective's rebellion. A breaking free of the weight of reality – 'transcendence' is marked in these moments.

Accordingly, in an interview as part of this thesis, Sadecque Viriava reveals that leaders of the Black People's Convention (BPC), through CULCOM, deliberately turned the so called "Black Consciousness' trial," of (1974-1976), into a form of guerrilla theatre. Nine members of BPC and SASO were on trial for "conspiracy to bring about revolutionary change". Because of the high profile of the trial, CULCOM saw an opportunity to stage the ideas of Black Consciousness for the world. As a result, the trial became a platform for rituals of resistance that aimed to inspire a wider rebellion. The songs, the clenched fists and Black Power utterances combined to style rituals of rebellion against iron-fisted assaults by the apartheid regime.

Trips to the courtroom, accompanied by eruptions of song and Black Power salutes sticking out of the backs of the police vans, formed part of the staging of people's power. Around this period the People's Experimental Theatre, according to Variava, would stage guerilla performances when members of the theatre group would get on buses at different stops to stage performances. A group member, improvising from a script, would rant aloud about the problems that plagued the country. Other cast members, acting as if they were strangers to one another, would pick opposing sides, staging a quarrel. Increasingly, the people on the bus would pick their sides in the word battles. In the heat of these exchanges, they planted key messages from the rebellion's bulletin, ensuring that the bus was boiling with rage against the apartheid regime that was arresting the people's free will. These guerilla performances provided for moments of outburst from the soul through which the people dreamed of activating change – rituals of conscious dreaming.

Viriava disclosed that Bantu Biko offered to act as the "the voice of Black Consciousness", regardless of the consequences he was to face. At that time Biko was under house arrest, and when the leadership caucused about popularising the movement via the courtroom exchanges, Biko was called on to step up because he possessed the powers of the word in great abundance. It was well known that Biko handled oratory with sublime artistry. When the Black Consciousness Movement chose him as a witness, they recognised that he, like Malcolm X, was "an artist who used the power of Nommo (incarnation) to politically activate his people" (Ani,1980). As Frank Talk[14], the character he created as the voice of the revolution, his spirit of confrontation encoded principles of *mogaga*. Arguably, Biko's accepting of this role, and his playing it with disregard for the wrath of the regime, are equivalent to what *izangoma* call *imvumakufa.* Biko agreed "to die for an idea that will live" (Tiro, 1973:np). The will to die for an ideal bespells the principle of *imvumakufa*. The notion of an idea that will live evokes the principle of *khepera*. The courtroom scenes, ending in May 1976, presented a stage from which to launch anticipatory gestures that may have inspired the upheavals of June 1976.

During the sixteen-month-long trial, the 136 days in which the police van ferried the accused frequently from the prison to the courtroom, activists turned the entire territory into a stage for the performance of defiance. In these performances, the principle of huru pronounced itself. People were inspired by scenes of freedom fighters chanting and shooting Black Power salutes through the windows of police vans. The Black Power salute, a gesture associated with workers' solidarity worldwide, the raised clenched fist, took on a double meaning when it became the most prominent visual script of Black Consciousness.

The gesture resonates with the solemnity of Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos of the United States who, in 1968, saluted in recognition of a transnational identity centred on Blackness when they received their medals. Through the power of photography, their

[14] Biko was elected Chairman of Publications for SASO in July 1970, and the following month the monthly SASO newsletters began to appear carrying articles by himself called "I write what I like" and signed "Frank Talk". At the BPC/SASO trial the judge at one point interjected: Isn't (accused) number 9 [Strini Moodley] Frank Talk?" to which Biko replied, "No, no, he was never Frank Talk, I was Frank Talk" (19).

common gesture and posture – raised fist with bowed head – became an icon of tri-continental activism. Members of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) raised an open palm and those of the African National Congress (ANC) used a salute that folded four fingers and extended the thumb outward. Determinedly unaligned, Black Consciousness adherents chose a salute different from these. Black Consciousness organisations showed their strength through the solid clenched fist.

The courtroom scenes offered a series of compelling characters as well as poetry and play scripts which were presented in court as evidence of terrorist activity. The apartheid regime, through its judges, prosecutors, and police witnesses, played the role of villain with great serio-comical enthusiasm. The chain of activities, which began with police raiding people's homes for poetry and play scripts, essays, and pamphlets, exposed the anxieties and pathologies of the regime.

The dramatic antics of apartheid prosecutors and forensic experts interrogating scripts the police found from 19/71 to 1974 under the Terrorism Act of 1950, form a picture of absurdities. These scripts were under suspicion of "promoting revolution" and were "a course of preparation ... [to form a] black power bloc" that would overthrow the state. A study of the entire courtroom drama reveals that the apartheid regime was well acquainted with the idea of art as a weapon. The angle of questioning from the apartheid prosecutor revealed fear for the combat aspects of the arts created by the underclass. In the following scene Biko is questioned about the influence of Black arts:

> *Would you agree with me that they were also fond of culture, arts etcetera, Black Music?*
> – Music, yes, I think theatre is only beginning to catch up of late. All these things are innovations. I mean, the stage is an innovation in a sense in Black culture, it is something which has come of late. You know in our culture back in the tribal days there was no stage, there was just complete involvement and we call it open theatre.

> *Would you agree with me that one of the great advantages of Black theatre, Black drama and poetry being recited etcetera, is that one does not require a literate playgoer. You do not require someone who is able to read, is that right?*
>
> – Well, you have got to understand the language.
>
> *Yes but you do not have to be able to read, is that right?*
> – Sure it is not like those foreign films where word is projected on the screen, it is said by word of mouth (Arnold, 1978:180).

Evidently, the apartheid regime was anxious about an 'open theatre' it was unable to control. The elimination of the stage and the moving away from enclosed buildings made this theatre a threat to the regime because a play could be planted anywhere. The regime was uneasy with performance practices that applied forms friendly to the underclass and spoke the languages of the African people. The judge's final verdict was given on 15 December 1976. All nine accused were found guilty on at least one of two counts under the Terrorism Act. Count One alleged conspiracy to cause or promote hostile relations between people of different races. Count Two declared that the accused had organised a banned rally (Steadman, 1983:131). The dramatic posture of a government based on racist policies and brutal force trying to project itself as promoting good relations between people made a compelling character of the apartheid regime.

It is interesting how, a decade later, Don Mattera reverses the symbols in his play, *Apartheid in the Court of History* (1987), by putting the regime on trial. Mattera combines serio-comical theatre with elements of ritual drama through a series of archetypal characters. Apartheid is the accused; History is the judge, and The Volk is the defence. Humanity enters the courtroom as the witness. Other characters like Hendrik Verwoerd and Adolf Hitler are summoned from their graves to answer for the horrors of Apartheid and other atrocities against humanity. Hitler shies away from the court of History, arguing that he refuses to answer for the crimes of Nazism because his regime has already been tried in Nuremburg. Verwoerd, stands his ground, arguing that Apartheid is correct. As the

prosecutor, Mattera's protagonist, The People, serves not only to confront the horrors of the apartheid regime, but also as a symbol of renewal or social purgation.

The artistic atmosphere of the 1970s and 1980s, including the events that raised the vibrations of the Black world from the 1960s had a profound impact on Gha-Makhulu Diniso. Born in 1956, Diniso moved with his family to Sharpeville a few years after the Sharpeville Massacre. Via the policy of forced removals, Diniso's family had been removed from Top-Location, a multiracial suburb which, like Sophiatown, had taken root before the apartheid regime's settlement policies kicked in. Diniso grew up surrounded by a spirit of rebellion. Beginning as a fine artist he later developed a passion for performance, writing and performing in his plays. Using his background in fine arts and his intuitive knowledge he built a mobile theatre set with lights. Using public and private transport he travelled countrywide with this set, from which he staged many stories.

In 1993, through the efforts of the African Writers Association (AWA), I travelled to Harare, Zimbabwe with Patrick Ngamlana (AWA President) and Benson Makele (AWA official). We picked up Diniso at around 3am. It turned out I had met him before around the photocopy machine at the AWA offices in Braamfontein. We were going to be guests of another writers' association. It was to be my first encounter with Ngũgĩ wa Mirii, then exiled from Kenya after Arap Moi's government had razed the Kamirĩĩthũ Theatre to the ground. For a week our hosts offered a feast of performances and dialogue about ways in which the arts could be deployed in the quest for social and political autonomy. Fanon was on everyone's lips. Fanon's phrase, "combat literature" had ritualistic currency during that gathering. My young head was exploding with new insights about the arts, Black magic and the struggle for independence. I was catching up, slowly.

The evening of Diniso's performance was unforgettable. Narrating and enacting the multiple character journeys in these changing worlds formed part of Diniso's magic. His play, *Ikasi,* is a fantastic dramatization of the workings of the spirits. *Ikasi* is a one hander, split into five parts. Watching him shapeshifting between The Convict, The Body, The

Soul, The Mind and Santa Claus was a magical experience equivalent to watching a trance dance – spoken word theatre meets physical storytelling. Experimenting with a ritualistic form, the play erases the fourth wall with moments when characters pull the audience into the story. The story kicks off with a conflict between The Soul and The Body.

After a violent quarrel The Soul separates, experiencing life outside the prison gates. The Soul soon returns after a violent encounter with apartheid police in Church Square, Pretoria. Back in the prison, the bickering between The Soul and The Body is compounded when The Mind tries to play the peacemaker. The Soul concludes that The Mind is mad to claim that it knows more about freedom. The Convict's interior world has a concrete encounter with the material world. Again, we can invoke Onkgopotse Tiro's idea of "dying for an idea that will live" or *imvumakufa*. The undying sages of guerilla theatre had found ways into Diniso's meditations on, and exploration of African theatrical forms. This point is dramatized sharply in Diniso's play, particularly when The Soul returns to The Body after a moment of free flight. Diniso's performance was very impactful. His way of staging the spirit stayed with my muses of a while.

The Women of Crossroads' play, *Imfuduso,* carries the genes of guerrilla performances or resistance theatre formations that were part of the Black Power movement of the 1970s. The impulse to work outside controlled spaces, the aesthetics of combat and the urgency with which the collective of women respond to contemporaneous political events. The capacity to penetrate the daily *sephethephete* (commotion or helter-skelter of life) with life-giving questions is an important aspect of a theatre that aims for radical change.

The idea of performance as activism often incurs harsh encounters with the state. There is an "inseparable link between philosophy, politics and performance" (Ajumeze, 2014:76). The dialogic methods of performance can be explained, in Ajumeze's terms, as "an epistemology of collectivism". In his synoptic study of Sub-Saharan African performance systems, Obi discusses various ancient and contemporary theatrical experiments that centre the search for "a dramaturgy analogous to *anansegoro* with its structural mechanics that

enable audience interjection" (Ajumeze, 2014:74). This is a method of conspiring with playgoers that includes eliminating the raised platform stage and addressing the audience directly. These are methods of *huru*. *Huru* eliminates the stage, creating a sense of "spatial fluidity" (Ajumeze, 2014:67), where the players' bodies flow into the people. By "deconstructing the territorial boundaries" (Ajumeze, 2014:68) between stage and auditoriums, such performances create a "psychological conspiracy between audience and performer" (Ajumeze, 2014:69). The drama of Women of Crossroads is ritualistic in the way it "invokes the community and audience as chorus to witness and participate in the crucial act of the transformation" (Ajumeze, 2014:70). It is the drama of *khepera* because it is fuelled by a spirit of change.

The generous application of methods like call-and-response by Women of Crossroads is reminiscent of the "open theatre" of Biko's generation, which emphasises full participation and de-emphasises spectatorship; a theatre "of total involvement", as Biko described it. Ravengai's explanation is worth restating here: *Imfuduso* reveals theatrical events that are "both immediate and performed by real people playing themselves as opposed to characters" (2016:171).

In essence, *mogaga* play-making is made from the fusion of ritual drama and guerrilla theatre. In this fusion we want to sustain a communal and participatory ethos. Like Osofisan, it aims "to provoke and energize the audience into rebellion against corrupt leadership in African countries" (Ajumeze, 2014:74). Osofisan explained that properly mobilised, an audience can provide the vanguard for a future army of liberation. (Ajumeze, 2014:74). Osofisan's eloquent utterances express the principles of *go gagaola*. My curiosity has yielded three principles of *mogaga* play-making: *huru, imvumakufa* and *khepera*. These principles are tied together by the notion that the material of substance is alterable through the alchemy of performance.

Gogo Pedagogy: Thuto ya Letsele (knowledge from a mother's breast)



Figure 3 Chilahaebolae, Funda Centre, 16 June 2021.

Viewing this picture of the audience gathered around a place of story, the crackling fire remind me of my grandmothers, bo-Mmadillo and Mma S'kotlele. It's a mid-winter night and some people are wrapped warmly in blankets. Audience members are free to cast wood into the brazier, keeping the fire alive like we did in the *segotlong* of my grandmothers, where food was prepared, and stories were circulated. Around this time, as Motheo Koitsiwe (2019) confirms, just after sunset, a star called *Kopadilalelo* [Evening star that is seen after dusk] appears in the night sky, signalling that it is story time.

In this chapter I reflect on how the moments of storytelling that filled my school holidays with songs and stories from the old world have come to inform my search for dramaturgical strategies. Batswana people speak about *thuto ya letsele* [knowledge from the mother's breast]. The process of getting *thuto ya letsele* is called *go anya*. The phrase *go anya* has two meanings. First, to suckle, as in a newborn. Secondly, *go anya* is also to study deeply or inquire earnestly. The former refers to subsistence of the body and the latter to subsistence of the mind. *Go anya*, therefore associates knowledge and nourishment

with the mother figure. *Thuto ya letsele* is not immaterial to me. My mother used to tease me often about my stubborn reluctance to abandon the delights of breast feeding. The rhythms of my mother's life hold the earliest teachings for me. Drawing from "Afro-matricentric" (Mahone, 2002:270) streams of thought this chapter installs Gogo pedagogy as the methodological framework by which data for technologies of *mogaga* is gathered. Mahone explains the notion of Afro-matricentric perspective:

> My dramaturgical point of view is rooted in an Afro-matricentric perspective derived from personal experience: my mother is the centre of my world. Her dark beauty rivals the midnight sky; a deep well of love, she is a spirit-fixer. Through her womb, I am rooted in the continuum of life. The womb signifies possibility, conception, concept – the thought that precedes the deed. In this context, the MotherSpirit rises not in opposition to but in cooperation with divine male energy as a re-creative, balancing, healing force moving to ease human suffering. Clothed in compassion, the mother warrior speaks the truth to bring about change, a sudden change, a needed change (Mahone, 2002: 270).

Oral history tells us that *abo-gogo* (in Nguni languages) or *bo-koko* (in the Setswana language) inaugurated the culture of *Dinaane (Setswana), Intsomi (isiXhosa), Inganekwane (isiZulu), Anansesem* (Ghana) or storytelling dramaturgies where song, dance, recital, and enactment of scenes are tools for transmitting knowledge between generations. Similarly, Koitsiwe concludes his study of "indigenous astronomy" among Bakgatla ba Kgafela by stating that women from ancient times were the true custodians of *"bolepa dinaledi"* (2019:221). Through their pottery, homestead decorations, riddles, poetry, songs, and stories they passed on "high scientific knowledge of the sun, moon, stars and other constellations" (Koitsiwe, 2019: 221). As one who is born from Bakgatla people, I write as an heir to a world which recognises the mother as the first *gobela* or teacher and the womb as the first classroom. That said, I am aware that my position as a man holding a pen opens my utterances to the risk of falling into a tendency that Alice Walker decried in her 1972 womanist treatise, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*:

> Black women are called, in the folklore that so aptly identifies one's status in society, "the mule of the world", because we have been handed the burdens that everyone else refused to carry. We have also been called "Matriarchs", "Superwomen", and "Mean and Evil Bitches". Not to mention "Castraters" and "Sapphire's Mama". When we have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted (Walker, 1994:405).

The instinct to distort the character of women does not drive this venture. I am open to correction where errors are committed. My intention is to celebrate the lessons that I received from my grandmothers and mothers.

Gogo Pedagogy celebrates the need to light our path from the fire in the bosom. Our grandmothers' call this fire *go fisega*, which is to be in touch with the living flame that dances within; to be alive to the voices of old women inside us. Interestingly, to burn in Setswana is *go sha*[15] – a word reminiscent of shaman. Incidentally, a shamanic experience refers to the inner fire you feel or the song brewing within. "The soul is composed of fire atoms" George James says (James, 2009:50). In the main, Gogo Pedagogy centres the wisdom we gather from forming circles and swapping songs and stories – in call and response; in the ciphers, in and communities of resistance "who use our education to gorge fissures of freedom" (Luckett & Shaffer, 2017:13).

Pabalelo Gaolatlhe Mmila indicates that: "in Botswana old women – usually grandmothers – tend to be the most gifted in the narration of these stories, although children and men do sometimes narrate" (Mmila, 2006:75). Mmila also reveals that grandmothers also fashioned the art of "paralinguistic actions" (Mmila, 2006:77).

[15] The Siberian term saman, from which the word shaman is derived, refers to the excited state of one's body during a spiritual experience. It also refers to the inner heat of someone who is spiritually awakened. And the etymology of saman reveals that the word has a Sanskrit root that means "song". When I say that I feel an inner heat and vibration move me while under the influence of a sacred song, please know that I am talking about a shamanic experience (Keeney, 2005: 12).

> During the delivery of the narrative, the narrator acts out dialogues, uses a lot of gestures, facial expressions and voice modulation as she takes on the personalities of various characters involved. This she does in a subtle manner, she doesn't fully enact the actions of the characters, even when seated she can still vividly suggest the acts and feelings of her characters just using dramatic dialogue, facial expressions and hand and body gestures (Mmila, 2006:76).

Bob Leshoai, in an essay titled, “The nature and use of oral literature”, expands:

> Haven’t many of us on a moonlight night sat at the feet of our grandmothers to be educated and entertained in the finest, most intimate children’s theatre? Haven’t we loved to hear and see, in short hour, the storytellers transform and change character to character in gesture, voice and facial expression? Weren’t we thrilled to hear grandmother’s voice at one moment being that of his kind wife or that of the timid and frightened Tselane or that of her weeping, praying and pleading mother in the story of *Tselane le Dimo?* It is in these children’s stories that we create kings, queens, princes, princesses, heroes, heroines and the rich and poor folks and their hopes, fears, aspirations and loyalties (1981: 242- 243).

Growing up in Soweto and Mahikeng, I was immersed in communities which recognised mothers and grandmothers as the keepers of story and custodians of the spirits of play. In this impulse to label my method of gathering data in the name of the grandmothers, I flow with what Carter Harrison calls “a current trend to bring forth the voices of the African goddesses that have been submerged through the paternalistic hegemony of Christian dogma” (Harrison, 2002:3).

The genealogy of the word *gogo* is worth discussing. Theatre scholar Sam Ravengai reveals that:

> Gogo, like in most southern African languages, means an old woman. From its root word more words are formed. Goka in Shona literally means to get a few embers to start your own fire. Metaphorically it means to draw from something or someone. For example, when I sit to gain wisdom from somebody, I can use the word goka to describe the experience (Ravengai, 2022: np).

Drawing on stories she heard from "two old women" she met in Lesotho, Brenda Sullivan writes about the people who "are remembered in the lore of South African iZangoma as the Bafumi" (Mutwa, 1995: 22). Folklore says that Gogo is an old woman goddess of Bafumi, monopod giants whose priestesses used *igoga*, an instrument like a hook for dragging sacrifices to the fire. Setswana folklore is replete with stories about one-eyed monopod giants, whom storytellers refer to as *Bo-Dimo*. In the old homesteads in Masuthle, Modimola and other villages our grandmothers raised children on a diet of stories about times when *matlapa a tobetsega le ditlhare di bua* (when stones were soft, and trees had voices).

During school holidays in June I looked forward to leaving the matchbox houses of Soweto to taste the freedom of the land during visits to Masuthle and Ga-Modimola outside Mafikeng. In the villages the rituals of swapping stories had their own rhythms. The children brought firewood to *segotlong* to keep the fire going while my grandmothers, bo-Madillo and bo MmaS'kotlele, told stories. The grandmothers made us sing and dance whenever a song came into the story.

It was from the grandmothers that I first heard the creation story about Matsieng, the great giant hunter, and his followers who emerged from a waterhole followed by varieties of animals. Striding across the wet earth, Matsieng and company left their footprints on the forming earth. Folklore says that this history lives in the natural engravings of footprints on a flat expanse of sandstone in Botswana at a place not far from Gaborone. This Batswana story of creation is increasingly drawing scholarly attention. In Mahikeng Matsieng's passing footprint can be seen at a village of Stateng

(Maratiwa and Kgatleng sections). In his study of *bo lelapa dinaledi*, Koitsiwe comments about *Dikgato tsa Lenao la ga Matsieng* or Matsieng's Footprint, which was imprinted when *matlapa a tobetsega* (when stones were soft):

> The light colour around circles implies the different stars in the night sky. The light big, round circle is the symbol of full moon and there are patches on the rocks which represent the clouds. It is also believed that Matsieng came out of the hole during the night when the moon was full and there were bright stars in the night sky, hence we see evidence of celestial bodies in the petroglyphs (Koitsiwe, 2019:245).

Images of celestial bodies align with Zulumathabo Zulu's revelation that the Basotho, "like other African people trace their genesis from the cosmos" (Zulu, 2014:24). Links can be drawn with the Batswana myth of origin and about Matsieng, the monopod giant who emerges from a water hole with his people. Interestingly, the story of Matsieng plays out within the region of Lake Makgadikgadi (Makarikari), a place where Mutwa locates his story about the first people in *Indaba my Children*. Significantly, although writing mythically, Mutwa mentions an ancient city that was "on the shores of lake Makarikari – today a vast shallow salt pan" (1966:70). Cheik Anta Cheik Anta Diop places "the birthplace of humanity in East Africa's Great Lakes region, around the "Omo Valley" (Diop, 1981: 11). He calls this humanoid the "Grimaldi Negroid" (1981:15).[16]Mutwa has shared widely his musings that the word *gogo* began on the lips of this race of monopod giants who lived in the southern cradle of Africa for a long time before they migrated northward with their language.

The Second People's story, Mutwa writes, begins in Central Africa or the Great Lakes region, where the Nile begins, through the immortal pair, Mamerafe and Odu. The story of Odomankoma in Joe De Graft's play, *Muntu*, like the accounts in Mutwa's *Indaba my*

[16] In various conversations I have been unable to explain why Diop adopted the name Grimaldi, which is ordinarily associated with a family of clowns and also kings of Monaco. I am unaware if there is any the connection or meaning.

Children and Diop's *Civilization or Barbarism*, also begins during what Diop terms "prehistory". She self-creates from primordial waters and fashions life on earth. She is the beginning of life. While for Mutwa and Diop the chaotic matter is not gendered, in De Graft's play the creator is a woman. Odomankoma creates life starting with Muntu, the first human. Muntu's children multiply and populate the earth.

According to Diop, the Grimaldi Negroid left the Great Lakes and went to populate the rest of the world. The first inhabitant of Europe is a migrating Grimaldi Negroid (Diop, 1981:13). What is clear is that these accounts of "prehistory" tell the same story. As it would appear, some links can be drawn between mythologies about Badimo and Diop's story about the Grimaldi Negroid. Mutwa tells us that through the ventures of conquest of Badimo the word *gogo* came to penetrate the old languages of Europe through Kemet (Egypt), where Greek philosophers and scientists were schooled. Mutwa submits that the word *gogo* forms the root of the term pedagogy.

I find it interesting that the Greeks have a word, *gogos*, which variously translates to palate or appetite or taste – words which may connote a sense enquiry. The English term, gouge, refers to a hook or to the action of digging, denoting a sense of curiosity. Today, to do research about things, we Google. As Mutwa indicates, it is not coincidental that these terms, with a common root word, *gogo*, express the same notion of a search for data.

Data in Africa is often wrapped in mythology. This point is evident when we map through Diop's scientific finding and Mutwa's mythological world. Speaking from various vantage points and contexts using different tools, they dig up the same narrative. Mutwa draws data largely from dreams, fables, visions and sites of ritual while Diop, as an anthropologist, uses "radioactive dating methods" and linguistics (1981:12). Diop and Mutwa agree that systems of the old world along the banks of the Nile, Zambezi, Dimphompho (now known as Limpopo) and Lake Makgadikgadi played central parts in the creation of ritual theatre. Speaking about the evolution of humanity, Diop views the Nile River as "the world's cultural highway" (James in Diop, 1980: xvii). The Grimaldi Negroid would have devised

ritual performances by which they entered into "a discourse with supernatural forces – in order to channel them, control them, appease them or honour them – and to ensure the survival and equilibrium of the community" (Diakhate and Eyoh, 2017: np).

Mutwa's stories in *Indaba My Children*, presenting the changing species of humanity through time and the temperament of geography, express Diop's theories of the progression of humanity. Through the undying character of Odomankoma, the creator, Mutwa, like Joe De Graft (Ghanaian playwright and essayist) proffers those matriarchal cultures precede patriarchal societies. Odomankoma is the mother of Nyambe, the creator of humans. She "created the Order. She created the Substance of Things" (De Graft, 1977:3). The story of Marimba, mother of music in *Indaba my Children*, memorialises and mythologises the reign of matriarchy in human communities of old. Significantly, Marimba invents the first musical instrument, and she also sings the world's first song. Not only is Marimba the "mother of music", she is also a seer and concocter of life-saving rituals. Marimba's music is instrumental in fighting a war against Nangai and his troupe of night vipers.

> It was just then that a miracle happened – a miracle in the form of a song that came floating through the night air like a ghost of pure mercy and deliverance. This song had a magic spell about it. It stunned the fiendish Night Howlers.
>
> There was an instrument in the singer's hand which in future years became known as the karimba or kalimba. This unearthly music and haunting melody through the night wove a mighty spell around the squatting Night Howlers. It paralyzed and destroyed them.
>
> They let out a mighty roar in unison and, as though they had all become victims of an alien virulent leprosy, their scaly flesh began to slough off their skeletons and to flow sluggishly down the slope of the clearing in the ruined village. Wisps of reeking steam erupted from distended slime-green bellies as their foul bowels burst with sounds terrible to hear, and from these wisps floated the ghosts of the people they had devoured.

> These ghosts were happy – happy to escape and float away to the land of Forever-Night, there to await reincarnation.
>
> First, they joined in the song sung by the woman in the kalimba. They soared and dived and soared again. And they danced and weaved and leaped in the dark night air, and a regiment of them capsized the evil Nangai's throne and it fell like a lump of cow dung into the reeking, oozing slime that had been the flesh of Night Howlers. All the people who had been herded together became caught in the webs of the Song of the Kalimba. They tore off their soiled loin-skins, skirts and ornaments, flung them aside and raised their arms in thanksgiving to the High Gods for their deliverance, after which they joined the sacred Song of the Kalimba.
> Dead and living joined in the very stars rejoiced. The gods wept crystal tears and bowed their heads in tribute and acclaim. Marimba led the hosts of dead and living with her song until the eastern sky greyed with the first promise of dawn (Mutwa, 1966:22-23).

Through Marimba's story Mutwa highlights the notion that artistic expression and spiritual conviction can be harnessed in the fight for freedom. Art can alter "the Substance of things" (De Graft,1977: 3). Marimba is the quintessential custodian of "the science of resistance" (Cooper, 1993:4). Through her Song of Kalimba, Marimba joins the world of the living and that of the spirits. Through the power of song, she marshals "a regiment" of spiritual entities to capsize the throne of Nangai. Marimba teaches her people to make music as a means of fighting a war against the tyranny of an outcast god and bringing a new dawn into their reality. In terms of dramaturgy, Amiri Baraka offers insightful notes about the use of music in ritual drama:

> Music goes more deeply into the spirit than words; music is a living creature, a human intellectual and emotional creation with a readily apparent spirituality that transcends the visible world of its creators. It goes out of the world as the colors of the world. It is not bound by our physicality. The sounds carry whatever

> information rests in the frequencies and rhythms and harmonies of the world, some known to us, some unknown (2002:379).

The story of Marimba inspired *Song of Nongoma*, a play formulated at a once popular Afro-jazz club, the African Freedom Station. Rehearsing first in the parking lot behind the club, in the backrooms and later in classrooms at a school in Melville, we set out to explore the magic of music in the disruption of tyranny. Featuring musicians and actors who gigged regularly at the African Freedom Station we showcased at the club, the Soweto Theatre and the State Theatre. I directed the stage play, which I co-authored with Kwena Mokwena. Mandla Mlangeni was the music director at Soweto Theatre and Malcom Jiyane took over from him at the State Theatre.

Playgoers were treated to fairy-tale-styled musical drama, with players narrating and enacting the various roles. The storytellers, who are conflicted about the happenings, conspire with the audience. The story of Nongoma comes through with the storytellers attempting to divide the people, telling competing versions of the story of the battle between Nongoma the High Priestess of Song and Nagai wa Mashomoshomo. Patching the pieces of the story together, the audience gathers that the protagonist, Nongoma, was born from elements of song. She leads the Sound Warriors to defeat Nagai and the Soul Thieves. Nongoma stops Nagai and the Soul Thieves from spraying synthetic music that paralyses the senses, causing a fever called Tjokotjment, which causes the infected to jive on overdrive and perish. Nongoma and the Sound Warriors provide the antidote and ultimately, they prevail over Nagai and the Soul Thieves.

Gogo Pedagogy, a framework designed from Afrocentric thinking, aligns with the drive to recoup and affirm violated African knowledge systems and to retrieve scattered legacies. Colonial and settler governments in Africa were anxious about the spiritual and political potency of ritual. Native rituals of gathering outside controlled spaces to swap songs and stories were particularly irksome to the apartheid government. They understood that songs

and stories are the sciences through which we see and compute the worlds inside and around us.

Sarojini Nadar's inkling that "stories are data with soul" (Nadar, 2014:25) rings true to my observations and experiences. Nadar may agree with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Okot p'Bitek, who posit that before there were kings, queens and laws to be followed, before there were teachers and priests, there were songs, dances and stories to guide human vision and organisation. Through the feelings which songs conveyed and through pictures which dances painted and through the journeys of characters in our stories lessons were transferred. Perhaps to the outsider the notion of "data with soul" (Nadar, ibid) is a far-fetched phenomenon.

What is soul? Writing in 1954, George James tells us, as already mentioned, that the soul is made of fire atoms. He says that "the world was produced by fire" (James, 2009:51). James had studied the mystery systems of Kemet, which reveal that fire atoms are found in all things animate "especially in the human body" (James, ibid). When the soul is agitated my grandmothers would say "*ke a fisega"* (there is fire in my bosom). Do they know that the "human soul is composed of fire atoms?" (James, 2009:51). If, as Crystal Channelle Truscott suggests, "Soul is an essence beyond words, a state never properly captured in words" (Truscott, 2017:38), how then can the soul be computed? For Truscott, "Soul is experimental. Words require a finite explanation that denies the very nature of soul" (2017:38). From my purview, words can at least capture the outer garments of soul or at best be the window into the spirit. Babatunde Lawal offers an insightful explanation:

> Because of its ontological significance, art played a major role in precolonial African societies – and still does to a large extent today. Many African cosmologies trace the origin of humanity to a piece of sculpture made by a creator god who bears different artistic names in different cultures, i.e., Amma (the originator) among the Dogon (Mali); Daya (the fashioner) among the Gola (Liberia); Borebore

(the carver) among the Asante of Ghana; Eleda (the originator) among the Yoruba (Nigeria); Njambi (the inventor) among the Lele

(Zaire); Imana (the potter) among the Banyarwanda of Rwanda; Musikavanhu among the Shona (Zimbabwe); and Mwatuangi (the shaper) among the Akamba (Kenya). After completing the sculpture, the creator deity infused it with a life force (soul) known as nyama by the Dogon, du by the Dan, okra by the Asante and emi by the Yoruba. This makes the human body a kind of sculpture animated by a soul. Hence the Ewe of Ghana and Togo call a human being amegbeto, a "living molded clay." An individual is alive as long as the soul dwells in the physical body… In other words, art makes the spirit manifest in the physical world (2002:40).

Similarly, from Mudzunga Davhula we learn that the essence of soul is accessible through performance. Davhula's study of malombo rituals reveals that the combination of magic and drama are known resources for catching the soul in Africa. Davhula writes about a sect of healers called Vho Maine Mudzhukwa (who heal using music, dance and herbs) and Vho Maine Vha Tshele (who heal through rattles used as rhythm accompaniment to the chanting and dancing). Healing rituals are performed by means of "liminal dancing", sending participants into trance states where they straddle both material realities and the spiritual ecospheres. Davhula aptly calls this trance state the
"stage of in between" (2015:3-20). The staging of these rituals or performances has profound relevance in the spiritual and material lives of participants.

Tshele sessions use what may best be described as "musical theatre" to invite the ancestral spirits to bring peace into the family. By "musical theatre" it is meant that music (including songs with texts and instrumental accompaniment), dance and dramatic performance are used in combination (Davhula, 2015:3-26).

Davhula's description of Tshele sessions as "musical theatre" spells out the links between the performance of *malombo* and play-making. Similarly, Tebogo Kgobokoe, a revered dance champion, coach and choreographer now studying among the /Xqu people of

Kgalagadi, speaks fondly about her relationship with water spirits. Whenever it rains, Ntombi, her grandmother's spirit, vibrates at her feet. Touching the bottom of her feet with water before stepping on the dance floor awakens the old woman inside her. Kgobokoe's story is like the story of Teish, an African American ritualist who says:

> I can walk in a room and know… in the first ten minutes how many mermaids are in the room because I am a child of the river, of the water spirits and I can feel other water beings and they feel me intently. Being a child of the water spirits, I can always go to the water- to the river, to the lake, to the ocean and be released, be empowered (2023:np).

From Kgobokoe and Teish's experiences we gather that within the mystery systems of African peoples in which water is:

> both as a liminal zone within which the otherworldly and the physical intermingle, and also as a gateway into another dimension. It is believed that rivers and deep pools provide dwelling places for beings and creatures of mystical and magical potency. Some are ancestral figures; others are menacing paranormal presences; many take a serpentine form. (Felicity Wood, 2010:74).

Kgobokoe says that while dancing she journeys to unknown places. Her trance movements are carried through spirit embodiment. Ntombi reveals herself through
Kgobokoe's gestures. Nwabueze highlights the development of characterisation from ritual drama:

> The need for physical representation of the ancestor created the necessity to devise ways of representing the physical presence of the ancestral spirit. It was this situation that led to the evolution of the masquerade as dramatic character (Nwabueze in Ajumeze, 2014:69-70).

Similarly, for Barbara-Ann Teer, founder of Harlem's National Black Theatre (1968), dramatic arts must work with forces of renewal. Contemplating the relationship between drama and spiritual realms, Teer's theatre of "ritualistic revival" experimented with symbolism and African mythology through her Teer Technologies of Soul methodology. Some of the key ingredients were making ritual circles, joining voices around a rhythm and purging the chains from the brains through swapping life-giving songs and stories. Sydne Mahone's idea of spiritual realism explains Teer's work accurately:

> the invocation of spiritual power is not only an act of survival; ultimately it is a call for collective transformation that begins with the process of self-definition. In design and purpose this spiritual realism is a form of social activism, a politicizing force (Mahone, 2002: 270).

Teer's practice, like the work of Werewere Liking at Ki Yi Village in Abidjan, reincarnates the teachings of the grandmothers. Sandra Boukani's documentary film, *The Art of the Priestess,* portrays the ritualistic method they deploy in their play making. Calling it a theatre that is about "revolving of being itself", Werewere partners with Guinean-born director Souleman Koli to produce Koteba Theatre. Beyond the work she does as a playwright, song writer and visual artist, she teaches Ki Yi Mbok, the ultimate knowledge of the universe. Werewere says she adapted the knowledge she got from her grandmother to shape her approach to dramaturgy. Like Teer, Werewere sees alliances between performance, spiritism and social activism.

> I had an idea of trying to find out if there was any equivalent of theatre in our cultural heritage. I had the impression there was a good deal of theatricality in our traditional rituals and that it could be put to good use by them to enrich what they are doing. I began to observe rituals in a new way… I was looking for theatricality in them (Werewere, 2019:np).

When Nadar says “stories are data of the soul” she is operating in the terrain of Afrosurrealism, where performance is a way of making “the invisible visible”. Nadar is excavating ancient wisdom about the import of narration in the acquisition of self-knowledge. Through narration, journeys into interior worlds are conceivable. Through narration you get to know the people inside you. Knowledge of the people and institutions around you is also availed through narration. To the ancient narrator, telling stories and doing the work of self-knowledge is the same undertaking. Like Ntozakhe Shange in her choreopoem, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, Nadar in her essay, “Stories are Data with Soul: Lessons from Black Feminist Epistemology.” celebrates scenes where, as part of their rituals of resistance, women meet to swap stories. More significantly, as Nadar’s avowal suggests, stories are repositories of information. Her approach to knowledge production is guided by what she terms “narrative research”. Her chosen methodology, as she indicates, has been used within the academy:

> both as a tool of knowledge gathering as well as knowledge sharing. Narrative research focuses on both phenomenon and method – that is to say narrative can be researched itself or narrative can be used as a research method to produce data (Nadar, 2014:24).

Nadar’s observations suggest that a story is both container and a vehicle. As a container, a story serves to carry knowledge about our being. To the ancient gobela, telling stories assisted in the work of teaching history, coaching in medicinal sciences and such. Koitsiwe reveals that:

> From the time of "Lowe", the Bakgatla-Baa-Kgafela used their different forms of art, including oral art, to transmit and promote knowledge of celestial bodies. African indigenous astronomy was passed down from older to younger generation using the local language and oral traditions such as poems and songs (Koitsiwe, 2019:282).

Lowe is a term the Batswana use for the genesis of humanity. The ancient gobela understood well that a story can expand your sense of geography. Koitsiwe's musings are reminiscent of Mutwa's teachings about Songs of the Stars. Mutwa says that when the gobela of old told the story of Sixaxa the drunken tortoise who swims around the Sun carrying the Earth on his back, she displayed knowledge about the workings of the cosmos. Here a sharp sense of a knowledge astronomy is visible in the way the story spells out a lesson that the Earth orbits the Sun. The people of Kgalagadi,

> knew that no one can live on the moon and that it lacked air and water. There is a legend of a stupid hunter who feared living with other [people] that he decided to fly on magic wings to the moon. There he died of thirst and hunger because there was neither water nor animal upon the bleak satellite (Mutwa, 1996:11).

Significantly, underlying the telescopic visions of these stories is Nadar's avowal that stories are repositories of information and vehicles for knowledge production. As a vehicle, a story will ferry us through new pathways. The journeys of characters we create are often instructive pointers to the troubles which attend us or signposts for our vision. The conflicts of characters we play may locate our own dualities. The songs which oil the wheels of our stories illustrate the temperaments of our inner worlds.

Nadar's teachings echo the notion that our stories are our telescopes and our microscopes[17]. Narration, therefore, is a tool we use for seeing the farthest or even the tiniest phenomena. A story can make the soul of a place apprehendable. In the main, stories are born from the impulse to compute the totality of our being, including serving the need to make forays into spiritual terrain. This notion of stories as teachers still holds currency in the new world.

[17] "Our people… had no microscopes, yet they had a definite theory about GERMS, for which they had a traditional name in various languages. They had no telescopes, but they possessed knowledge of astronomy" (Mutwa, 1973: 38).

In my personal quest to excavate Afrocentric knowledge systems I have trusted the illustrative power of swapping songs and stories from across Africa and the Black Diaspora. Songs are repositories of narrative. Narrative research methodology as, Nadar explains, is also demonstrated through the principle of "objecting to the objectivity and privileging subjectivity" (Nadar, 2014:25). Narrative research methodology does not shy away from poetic musings.

Womanist scholars teach that the personal is the political. The womanists have schooled me thoroughly about the art of bringing "bias into the dialogue" (Nadar, 1914: 25). I concur with their advice, to disavow traditional research practices that promote the omniscient invisible narrator because it frowns upon subjectivity or getting personal, as it were. Education has never been neutral anywhere. A decolonising agenda challenges an education system which erases "cultural specificity" (Truscott, 2017:40). Experience suggests that in institutions of higher learning, which are grounded on western principles of education, notions of universality and neutrality are underwritten with a syntax of Eurocentricity. Gogo Pedagogy, as my chosen philosophical framework, permits me to tap into knowledge which is written in the body.

Folklore tells us that Gogo Harriet Tubman was once asked how she moved around without a map, how she freed so many from slavery without a knowledge of letters. How, without any fair acquaintance with books, she taught many the road to freedom. Tubman said she was led by the inner self. She followed her intuition or, as in Gogo Pedagogy, she followed the people inside her (Lemmons, 2019). To pursue a decolonising agenda in research is to be like Tubman and begin first with the knowledge that is in our bodies.

Tubman's insights challenge us to dig up treasures that the Witchcraft Suppression Acts (1895 of the Cape Colony) subjugated. The Witchcraft Suppression Act prohibited the use of "supernatural power, witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment or conjuration [which] imputes the cause of death of injury or grief to, disease in, damage to or disappearance of any person or thing to any other person". The Act has its origins in the 1886 Black Territories

Penal Code and the 1895 Witchcraft Suppression Act. This legislation outlawed tribal mediation, healing or communal ceremonies. Tubman's story, like that of Nehanda Nyakasikana, rekindles Africa's memory of making play, which was disrupted when it became illegal to profess knowledge of occult sciences, use charms, undertake to tell fortunes, claim to operate via supernatural forces or solicit the assistance of magic.

The story of Mbuya Nehanda is an illustrative example of the relationship between imagination and emancipation. Folklore tells us that the first Nehanda rose through Nyamita around 1430, born as the daughter of Monomotapa. Four centuries later, she was recast on stages of liberation history through Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana among VaShona. In 1896 she was called to lead a revolt against the British South African Company of Cecil John Rhodes. The emergence of Nehanda's spirit through different personalities and historical periods can be explained in Ayi Kwei' Amah's words: "A spirit does not act as a simple human individual but through a series of several ordinary human mortals" (2019:np).

When the Second Chimurenga began in 1972, the name of Nehanda conveyed its charms through the songs and poetry of guerrillas. Their war strategies included holding all-night Pungwe[18] sessions to drum up spirits of rebellion and perform exorcism rituals against the horrors of the Rhodesian settler regime (Gonye, 2013). Recording her remembrances in *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from the Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe*, Fey Chung (2006) reveals that spirit mediums had their own separate encampment from the military camp. They were seen as "pockets" or "containers" of the spirits and utterances from their trance states were sacralised. Her main point is that "ancestral spirits fully supported the struggle to regain the land" (Chung, 2006:198). Chung also observes

[18] "Pungwes were meetings held in the bush, where guerillas lectured peasants amidst song and kongonya dance about the justice and necessity of the war against the Rhodesian regime. For a people waging a war of liberation, kongonya facilitated political mobilisation, morale boosting, psychological anchoring and above all, a comforting sense of the ordinary in an otherwise traumatic context" (Gonye, 2013). Vimbai Matiza posits that "pungwes … were characterized by dialogue, dance, music, theatre and feasting that were meant to bring people together so that they should discuss their hopes and aspirations … Pungwes [were] a flexible but formative ritual phenomenon … meant to conscientize people on replacing the colonial administrative institutions" (Matiza, 2015).

how spirit mediums provided “a vocal and independent platform for expression of people’s views” (2006: 198) in the Pungwe camps. The songs and stories they swopped form part of the continuum of resurrection narratives that hold sway in Africa and the Black Diaspora. The notion of “working out your own salvation” cuts through these stories (James, 1954: 75).

The journeys of characters ask you to plug into your own steam and be the force of your own renewal. We have seen how Nehanda’s spirit replays through various actors in history. Nehanda is a *mhondoro* or lion spirit that lives on through the people that it chooses. When possessed, the medium is said to be “speaking in the voice and personality of the original Nehanda” (Beach, 1998:27). Basically, the medium performs acts of “imitating” Nehanda, which are often spliced with rebellion.

In the drama of Nehanda’s reincarnation we see how mythical spirits have a flair for theatricality. Charwe and Nyakasikana danced their way to revolt; they chanted incantations which echoed into time. Nehanda danced before the colonial administrators hanged her for refusing to convert to Christianity. She danced to her own drum to the end.

Through the frameworks Gogo Pedagogy provides, I aim to apprehend the technologies of *malopo* and in so doing, concoct the ingredients of *mogaga* play-making. Through stories of fictional and historical characters like Marimba, Odomankoma and Nehanda, the notion of spirits entering arts and politics, which hails from matriarchal cultures of old, still perseveres.

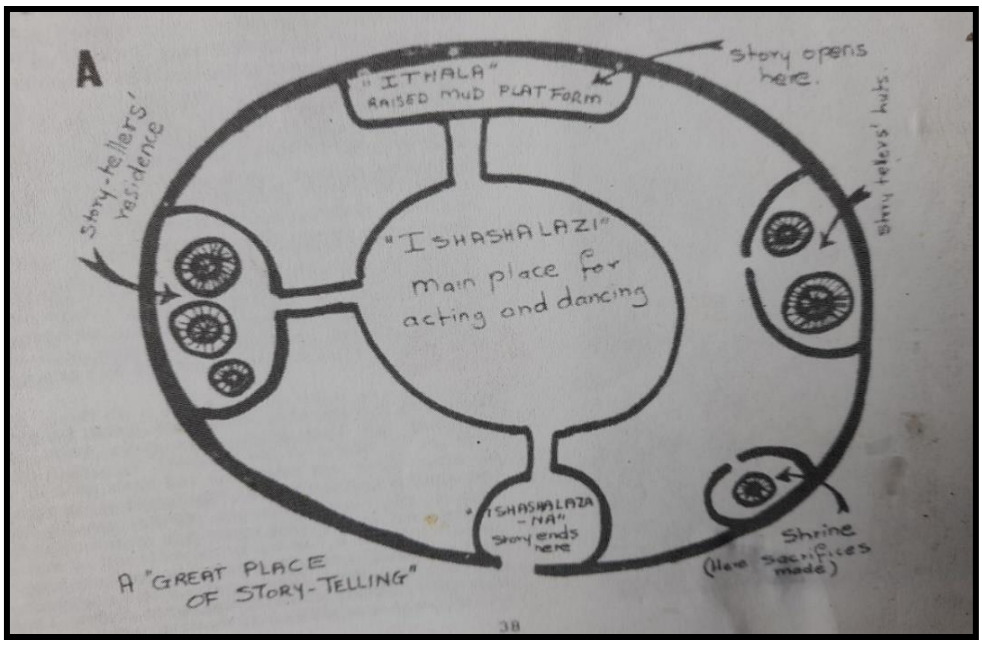


Figure 4. Illustration of a playing area by Credo Mutwa, in Sket'sh *magazine, summer 1973.*

Go Gagaola: Spirits, Play and Politics

> Spiritual realism uses the theatre to reveal the unseen through that which is seen. Metaphysical realities illuminate, transform or enable escape from physical realities. Spiritual forces direct the action of the protagonist towards an elevated, integrated consciousness. The text-performance transfers spiritual energy to the audience, galvanizing an irreversible and contagious change of mind or heart. (Mahone, 2002:270).

Mahone's notion of spiritual realism conveys the idea that ritual performance does not mean a loss of grip on materiality: Magic, mystery or the paranormal are still revered in the social, political and economic lives of Africans. The mystery systems are encoded in everything from the planting of umbilical cords to communal rites of passage where bodies

in dance are inscribed with symbolic reference and social stature. The mysteries can be seen in the revolts against white supremacy and extractive capitalism that necessitate rituals like those performed by Mzwandile Maqina, Miriam Makeba and the Tongalla priest in Mutwa's story, *Curse on the Kariba.* In his play, *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of a Successful Slave Revolt in History*, C.L.R. James dramatizes the rituals that launched the Haitian revolt in 1791, highlighting the force of spiritism amongst characters who made that history. Narratives about magical instruments[19] like Ngoma Lungundu, the drum that thunders or the drum that turn things over, hold sway in my meditations about the ingredients of *mogaga* play-making. We will see how even in the poetic incantations and victories of Muhammad Ali in and out of the boxing arena reverberate with the properties of mogaga play-making and help to demonstrate that ritual drama adapts to various settings. Fanon's notion of "a fluctuating movement" is key.

> It is not enough to try to get back to the people in that past out of which they have already emerged; rather we must join them in that fluctuating movement which they are just giving a shape to, and which, as soon as it has started, will be the signal for everything to be called in question. Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light (Fanon, 1967:227).

Fanon pictures culture as a phenomenon that is always in the process of becoming as society works out internal contradictions. The concrete struggles by the dispossessed against oppression birth new languages for purgation, providing for a radical opening in the cultural space. This is where the oppressed are fully engaged in the battle to dislocate

[19] When he explains the making of the membrane drum, Zulu (2017) writes that engineering technologist in Africa used the animal skin as a drumhead and also looked for a special tree. "The necessary permissions are sought from the gods of the cosmos with regard to a particular tree before sequencing the construction of the drum. After the gods of the cosmos have released the spirit of the tree to be reincarnated, as a drum spirit, another permission is sought for an animal to be offered as a sacrifice to the erudite ancestors. The spirit of the animal and the tree unite as one to produce a sacred sound..." (2017:3). "The rare combination of spiritual knowledge and technical knowledge meant that a drum embodied the crossbreed between spirituality and technology." (2017: 19)

the march of colonial onslaughts and the neocolonial pathologies which they birth. The word occult evokes a `sense of spiritism. Fanon, on the other hand, displays apprehension. While Fanon's work is instructive, he often views things through rationalistic frameworks. To this end he invites of us to think that "during the liberation struggle there is a singular loss of interest in these rituals (1967:20). Although Fanon seems to dismiss the efficacy of mystery, my study is curious about aesthetics and the political currency of mystery systems. A world where animals speak is familiar terrain for mystics and storytellers. Hardened by realism I had to dethrone my own "excessive rationalism" (De Graft, 2002: 34). Spiritism is at the core of *mogaga* play-making.

Spiritism or Marxism.

Let's affirm the point that *go gagaola* is essentially about the use of *malopo* technologies for militaristic purposes against colonisers and subsequent forms of anti-people regimes.

Aspects of "magical drama as the deepest of the roots of dramatic art" (De Graft, nd:22) have been covered abundantly in African scholarship. De Graft, echoing Dhlomo's 1930 reflections, discusses the concept of sympathetic magic in rituals of exorcism. But neither emphasise the combat aspects. Mutwa's work in the field of theatre and performance puts emphasis on spiritism. His illustration of a playing area (figure 3) is informed by "studies and extensive travel in southern and central Africa to reconstruct the form of early African theatre" (Kavanagh, 1985: 44). The reader will notice that Mutwa allocates a spot for the shrine in his playing area, affirming spiritism in the making of play.

Go gagaola draws from the idioms of malopo, malombo, *ubungoma* and other expressions which electrified the Black Consciousness scene in the 1970s. In fact, across the Black Diaspora, there was a movement which called for the emergence of a theatre which intersects "spiritual invocation and theatrical practice" (2002: 9). Harrison explains that from the 1950s onward it became:

> imperative to alter perceptions of self by jettisoning the aesthetic models of Western tradition that have forged such perceptions of blackness. These models must be replaced by the "spiritual temperament" of the ancestors whose songs, dances and art were a manifest act of the "creator from whom life flowed," thereby placing the craftsman at the spiritual centre of his existence (2002:1).

Harrison further argues for the use of mythology as a means towards collapsing realism into the supra-universe of myth that reveals the form of things unknown.

When Robert Kavanagh criticized Black theatre practitioners in South Africa in the 1970s, he was still ill-informed about the "science of resistance" that the elders subscribed to (Cooper, 1993:4). Then he was in the dark about the malopo theory of self-creation when he advanced Marxist theory for drama. Instead, he thought he was saving Black theatre practitioners from the doldrums of "idealistic adherence to African communalism and Pan-Africanism … romanticism and religiosity" when he advanced Marxist theory as scientifically uplifting (1985:168). Writing about a lack of "theory of culture" he was quick to suggest that "in a period of socialist reconstruction … a revolutionary analysis in the field of culture … needs to be a Marxist one" (1985: xiiixiv). It will be necessary to inspect these views and to discuss revered tendencies that limit ritual drama to ancestral veneration, healing therapy and "recreation music" (Lebaka, 2014: np). I argue that this power can been weaponised socially.

Although Kavanagh has adjusted his view in recent times, the words remain in print and practitioners of Afrocentric thought are continually subjected to this line of argument. Of late, his views seem to affirm a different position when he challenges Ruth Finnegan's claim that in "a strict definition of drama" Africa had no tradition (Finnegan in Kavanagh, 2016:1). Drawing on Dhlomo and Mutwa's essays, he schools Finnegan about the roots of African theatre in ritual drama. In this process he points to a crack in his own old argument when for a long time he avowed that "we have the great advantage of a sound and scientific social theory as communicated to us by the founders of

Marxism" (1985: xiv). Then he claims that his pontifications were well informed by "years of praxis". Kavanagh's target was the work "prior to the 1976 uprisings" and his focus was "the activities that took place in the Johannesburg area".

> A Marxist analysis enables us to determine the function of a work in a given society with some precision, and the critic should use this analysis to identify exactly what functions for and what against the revolution. (Kavanagh, 1985:
> xv)

Kavanagh claimed that an artist who eschews Marxist frameworks produces work that is ineffectual and that they lack revolutionary profundity. His target is Black Consciousness theatre. After he derides the movement for "vulgar interpretation" (Kavanagh, 1985:164) of artistic work, he tells us that Black Consciousness theatre practitioners fail "to delineate theoretically the formal attributes of theatre in the way they delineated the function and content" (1885: 165). The frameworks Kavanagh attacked are the resources from which I draw my own "theory of culture". While Kavanagh defends his own frameworks as scientific, he invites the voice of Joe Slovo, a famous African National Congress communist, to preach about "the radicalising role of drama" (Kavanagh, 1985: xiv).

Kavanagh's assumption that he operated in the interests "of the working class and the peasants" (Kavanagh, 1985: iv) is intriguing. By projecting the supremacy of Marxist theory as especially scientific while discrediting Pan-African theories as essentially cerebrally hapless, he displayed shocking simplification. His blanket dismissal of Black Consciousness theatre groups is not handled with scientific rigour. The praise songs to Marxist theory are not explained or justified. They are proclaimed. It feels more like an act of religious fervour than a project of scholarly nuance. Kavanagh has since done his research:

> Thus, despite the lack of informed written descriptions and records, South Africans today can be sure that there is enough to prove that by the coming of Europeans,

> their country already had a wide and rich variety of dramatic performance (Kavanagh, 2016:12).

Here Kavanagh is making a point that is consistent with my search for technologies of *mogaga* play-making. "The rich variety of dramatic performance" includes work which is informed by a "resistance science[20] that establishes an alternative psychic space" (Cooper, 1993:4). Writing about the Surrealism of Aime Cesaire, Robin Kelly observes that the former:

> promoted a vision of freedom that drew on modernism and precolonial African modes of thought and practice; this vision drew on Surrealism as the strategy for revolution and on Marxism for revolution of productive forces (2002:x).

By inviting Surrealism into his views about the world, his poetry and his theatrical writings Cesaire acknowledges the materiality of ethereal realms. Significantly therefore, he does not see spiritism and Marxism as antithetical. The first word of Cesaire's hero, Caliban in *A Tempest* is *"*Uhuru" (2002: 17) and his last utterance and the end of the play is "Freedom hi-day! (2002:66). Freedom for Caliban means spitting out Prospero, the settler who rules the Island with "white magic." (2002:60). There is no freedom for Caliban until he gets back the Island given to him by his mother Sycorax. He chants the name of Shango, a god who strikes with "a big stick" (2002:52) during his battles with Prospero. His "battle

[20] Zulumathabo Zulu in his paper "African Drum Telegraphy and Indigenous Innovation" explores the scientific aspects of African art. He demonstrates how the technologies of making drums enabled communication through a tonal language and rhythm. Zulu argues that the first wireless communication system was invented by the artists in Africa. "Talking drums using membrane, trapezoidal and slit-log drums and others [were] designed to broadcast telegraphic information over long distances using the same principles of mathematics, physics and material science as in modern telecommunications" (2017:2). It is because of this this system of communication that the drum became useful instrument in militaristic ventures. "The communication can be the narration of a story or dispatch of a drum message to a distant receiver via the relay system" (2017:8). "Each drum design obeys certain mathemetical laws, and produces a sound timbre according to its geometry, texture, and dynamic response. It was this ability to harness sound, using a disciplined approach directed by technical specifications and materials that enabled communication across long distances" (2017:15). Among the key technical discoveries, the griots understood that a "sound wave gains greater amplitude when passing through the air medium via the body of water or through a water medium" (2017: 15).

song" (2002:52) call for Shango's militant spirit. At the height of their final encounter Caliban shouts in Prospero's face:

> Shango marches with strength
> Along his path and sky!
> Shango is the fire bearer,
> His steps shake the heavens and the earth (2002:63).

Cesaire's hero, in a play that was first published in 1969, encapsulated the spirit of the Black Power movement that was rising across the African diaspora and the continent. Alongside Marxist or socialist ideologies that were vogue, spiritism played a significant part during the various waves of anti-colonial upheavals in the continent and in South Africa.

The spirits of Black Consciousness theatre

It was thoroughly intriguing when, in Ginsberg in the eastern Cape in December 2018, I was invited to join the play-makers, Maishe Maponya and Mzwandile Maqina, on stage at the 50 Years of Black Consciousness event curated by the Steve Bantu Biko Foundation. The elders and I were scheduled to discuss the melding of art and politics. Maqina, a legendary playwright, actor, preacher and Pan-African activist, provoked my curiosity when he introduced himself as a spiritual healer. When I followed this up in a later conversation he emphasised: "I am a psychic writer. I am told by those in the Spirit world what to say to my people." I was fascinated by Maqina's emphasis on the correspondences between ancestors, play-making and politics. The notion of a psychic writer closes "the distance between the corporeal and non-corporeal worlds" (Harrison, 2002:317). I wondered about the spirits that drove him to write and perform *Give Us This Day*, a musical play banned in 1976. Disguising the story of Onkgopotse Tiro with a biblical title, Maqina managed to tour the play in township halls countrywide from 1974 without

interruption for a while. Although he expressed misgivings, Aggrey Klaaste, a luminous journalist, was moved by Maqina's stage craft:

> I wept. I was so emotionally affected by this simple and well-known story … we have to hand it over to the director and producer Maqina who plays the part of the priest … the acting of the part is made very natural by Maqina, but he reached dizzy heights when he swung into an elegant, swelligant soul number with the graduate superbly done (Klaaste, 1975: 257).

What Klaaste did not know then was that Maqina was already ordained by the Zionist church as a preacher and had gone on to find his own Africanist ministry, Ibandla LikaNtu. As it appears, in the creation of *Give Us This Day*, the playmaker, the priest and the shaman are one. Maqina's work was in conversation with other contemporaneous overtly political outputs that recognise the "reciprocal relationship between the corporeal and spiritual worlds", like Fatima Dike's play *The Sacrifice of Kreli* (1976) and Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile* (1975) (Harrison, 2002: 320).

In Dike's *The Sacrifice of Kreli* the king of AmaGcaleka sends his trusted *igqirha* (spirit medium) to the land of the *abalele*.[21] He brings a message of courage as they will face the belligerent British colonisers to reclaim their occupied lands. The message from *abalele* has the force to break the fear of facing the British. Dike also intends this message for her audience who, so to speak, were at war with the apartheid regime's armies. Ebrahim Hussein, Tanzanian poet and playwright, dramatizes the Maji-Maji rebellion, where the village medium, Kinjeketile is troubled by a message. The Spirit, through him, tells his people to face the invading settlers' bullets because the water the medium sprinkles on them will protect them.[22] Notably, Kinjeketile, in his solitude, is grudging of the spirit who possesses him because he thinks it is foreign. In Kinjeketile's expression of hesitancy, Hussein problematises the political power of the ancestors.

[21] Literally those who are sleeping, in reference to the ancestors/the departed ones.
[22] It will be necessary investigate the links between the story of the Maji-Maji rebellion and a popular phrase from my childhood, "*Dubula kuzo phuma manzi* "or Shoot, Water will Come Out from the barrel.

In the biography by Vuyisile Msila, *Mzwandile Maqina: The Untold Story*, Maqina says that MaXaba, his late grandmother, is his guide in the spiritual world. She advised him in a vision to plant a palm tree at the back of his family house, where the nation's ancestors congregate. Conversations with Maqina lingered in 2019, when I collaborated with Prince Lamla to direct a play by Mutwa, *Unosilimela*. A breakdown of the script revealed that we were navigating the Afro-surreal terrain. We were guided by Suzanne Cesaire's notion that "surrealisms frees the mind from the shackles of absurd logic and so-called Western reason" (2012:35). As it appeared, through the cast of players on our stage, destiny had chosen us, for that moment, to turn spirits into flesh. Close inspection of the characters indicated that we were working on a play that comes directly from the celestial realm, as the author professes. Among the range of fascinating characters in the story, Kimamireva holds sway. Mutwa tells us that Kimamireva, the "Princess of the Stars" he scripts into the story, is the *gogo* or feminine ancestral spirit that occupies or inhabits his creative impulses. In the staging of Kimamireva, Mutwa gives flesh to Amarava, who he fondly describes as one of the most important figures in his inner life:

> It is she who tells me to transmit these teachings, the legends and mythology of the Zulu people, so that they may not wither away, so that humanity can learn from them (Mutwa, 1996:60).

Through the rehearsal process, Henry Ajumeze's notion of "spirit embodiment" becomes clearer (Ajumeze, 2014:78). Spirit embodiment, which is essentially the act of playing the parts of the gods, is a longstanding practice in ritual performance. This process of adopting spiritual personas forms a part of *malopo*. The players, by interpreting the actions and voices of the gods, embody the supernormal characters.

Spirits at play making and liberation politics.

Plotting the journeys of characters when we mounted performances of *Unosilimela* at the Wits Theatre, I mused a lot about spirits and political biases. Could it be that it is our own biases that create spiritual personalities and entities? The revelations I was receiving raised my curiosity about the necessity, even urgency, to recoup the artistic wealth and medicinal, social and cultural knowledge that the Witchcraft Suppression Act and censorship throughout Africa sought to inhibit. As a result, legislation sought to curtail African customary practices.

> Traditional dramatic performances were particularly disagreeable to the colonialists partly because they considered them potentially detrimental to the safety of whites and colonial governments. Hence, for example, the 1899 Witchcraft Suppression Act abolished the mande dance of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), which the colonialists dismissed as a practice of witchcraft (Ukala, 2001:29).

In her autobiography, *Makeba My Story* Miriam Makeba reveals how Africa's spiritual practices were still under siege during her youth in the 1950s. Growing up in Mofolo, Soweto, she noticed the attempt to cut off Africans from their spirit source. She writes: "Recently, the authorities have been cracking down on the *isangomas*. Some are arrested. Some disappear" (1988:33). Notably, violence against African spiritual practices was also an attack on the artistic wealth that accompanied the spirits. *iZangoma* or *malopo* are seekers who use musical arts. Their songs and dances, including their repertoire of musical instruments like *meropa, dinaka, nkokwana, lepatata, ditshela* (hand shakers) and *mathose* (ankle rattles), were under siege.

When Makeba opted out of the American mainstream and undertook the life of a song warrior, she understood that working with spiritual material is a political act. In *Makeba My Story* she writes about a trip to Swaziland in 1980 when it was first suggested that the

life inside her is more that just her own. Wanting a word from the ancestors, she consulted a sangoma with questions about her connection with ethereal realms:

> if a person who is a channel for spirits suppresses them, they can make that person ill, or even kill them. if I am a channel for some spirits, like my mother was, why don't they make themselves known to me by causing illness or misfortune (1988: 212).

Though Makeba does not claim to be a spirit channel, she says she can sometimes get into some trance-like states when performing. She reveals that she has been gifted numerous songs by *amadlozi* when in a trance. While on stage, she would often zone into supernormal terrain. She calls this process "dancing with the life that is in me" (1988:211). The sangoma told Makeba that "The spirits are stealing the show! Amadlozi are show-offs" (Makeba, 1988: 212). Makeba had no *gobela* or spiritual teacher to give her instructions on how to connect to the life inside her. The shamanic illumination happened automatically – through her total immersion in song and its ways: "I sing before the public and the spirits get a chance to steal my mind and present themselves" (Makeba, 1988:212). Makeba's discography seems to suggest that she frequently channels spirits with warrior profiles. She was available to the experience of *go fisega*. Her repertoire of tracks from her *Welela* album from 1989 reflects her growing collaboration with forces of resistance. For instance, the persona she embodies in the song "*African Sunset*" rails against the winds that steal her father's wealth of cattle and loses them to the forest's voracious appetites. She instructs the youth to take up arms and confront the malady:

> Bafana ziphi na izinkomo zobaba?
>
> Ye bafana thathani izinduku
>
> Ye banana thathani izinduku
>
> Niyobhek' izinkomo zobaba
> Esigangeni

[Young warriors where are my father's cattle?
Young warriors raise your fighting sticks.
Young warriors raise your fighting sticks.

Go and find father's cattle.

In the wilderness]

Makeba's vinyl were spinning everywhere, regardless of banning orders. Hearing the elders in the *gumba-gumbas* of Meadowlands, at weddings, in open areas and everywhere, singing and watching them dance to the music flowing from the gramophones was a ritualistic experience. Gumba-gumbas were parties thrown by members of the Cultural Committee of the Black Consciousness Movement (CULCOM) in the 1970s. Lefifi Tladi says these fun sessions were informally arranged for the artists to celebrate each other – perhaps to celebrate a finished sculpture or painting. But poet Mafika Gwala, expressed misgivings towards mixing the Black Consciousness philosophy with strong boogie. He stopped going to the *gumba-gumbas* because of what he saw as "the lack of socio-ideological layout". The boogie was too strong for Gwala:

> To such an extent that a cult of cultural activism sprang up amongst the Black Consciousness movement itself … their lifestyle, their snobbery; their practice – collecting jazz and dashikis for boasts … (1981: 232).

Whatever the case may be, the *gumba-gumbas* were useful for swapping anecdotes and poetry. The gumba-gumba offered opportunities for the "anticipatory dance drama" of elders. Something gives as people jive to songs like Makeba's *Welela* and the bodies form pictures of warriors raising their arms to recover cows from the mouth of a greedy forest. The message was in the body. Deploying metaphoric language, Makeba was calling young people to take up arms and join the armed wings of the liberation movements. Carolyn Cooper's notion of a "dance of self-possession" easily encapsulates the experience of these

gumba-gumba scenarios. Writing about the movements of the character of Aldrick Prospect in Trinidadian writer Earl Lovelace's novel, *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979), Cooper points out that through annual carnival dance Aldrick comes "to a recovery of identity" (Cooper, 1993:18). It is my view that in a similar way, through the *gumba-gumba*, the spirit is recharged.

The interconnection between ritual song, dance, play-making and liberation politics is sharply illustrated in *The Curse on the Kariba*, an eyewitness narration by Mutwa. The meeting of performance and insurrection is aptly described by Mutwa when he relates a ritual led by a Tongalla priest during the rise of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, a project which brought about massive dispossession. Writing a letter from Dilopye, a village outside Tshwane, Ngaka Raletjatji Bokaba indicates that the colonial powers, through the encouragement of research sponsored by the World Bank, targeted African mystery systems. It is Bokaba's view that colonial powers hatched a plan to attack the Kariba environs, even while knowing that the place was considered as sacred across Africa. He highlights that Tongala and Batonga priests had the skill to remove brain tumours, amputate limbs and perform caesarean operations.

In a report titled "The Gwembe Valley Survey", the administration of then Prime Minister of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland Roy Welenky was advised to scatter the residents in the name of development. In line with Bokaba's misgivings Cleggett et al (2007) say the people of Kariba did not need to ask to be saved because of "a long trajectory of adaptation to new ecosystems and look[ing] for patterns that repeat themselves through time and through generations" (2007:20). They note that:

> Difficult living conditions may well be one reason why expatriate observers, scholars and donors once believed, and many still believe, that people like the Gwembe Tonga live out their lives within a barely changing, risk-averse and conservative traditional society. Such a conclusion is far from the truth even today when the Zambian policy environment (including austere structural adjustment measures that further marginalize the poor majority) (Cliggett et al, 2007:20).

There will be another occasion to research the role of the World Bank. Whatever the case is, the construction of the Kariba Dam serves as a symbolic and material representation of imperial conquest. Mutwa's story showcases ways in which song, dance and dramaturgy work as sites for launching spells against colonial encroachment. Mutwa records the performance of a High Curse after the Rhodesian government forced people out of their sacred lands for the construction of the dam. The "chosen ones" among the BaTonga and the Tongalla were led by old Chikerema to perform a ritual drama. Writing her PhD theses about *Malombo Musical arts in Vhavhenda Indigenous Healing Practice* Mudzunga Davhula indicates that ancestors are reached through "performative engagement" (2015:1). Sound, dance, music and drama are "required in order to induce the critical state of altered consciousness requisite for the supernormal, as well as for the healers to communicate with ancestral sprits" (2015: 1).

Davhula's assertions are evident in Mutwa's recollection of the performance of the High Curse. Chikerema and company enact a nonlinear sequence stringing three seemingly loose stories together; The Death of a Madman; The Burial of a Police Sergeant and the Expulsion of the Colonial Prime Minister:

> Rivulets of sweat ran down his face and into his scraggy beard, his bald pate glistened like wet ebony in the moonlight. His whole body shook as he tried to project his prayer to beyond the Ten Gateways of Eternity. His age-wasted body shivered and he held his breath while concentrating on the fate he desired for the White men building the Kariba Dam and for all who had planned the building of it. He pictured them falling, writhing and dying with hideous cries, their flesh melting from their bones. He pictured their women giving birth to serpents turning upon them and devouring them. And all this he saw as symbolic of what he would like to happen to the Federation.

All these prayers were supplication to the Gods … to bring curses not only on the Kariba Dam but on all those building it and on all those who planned it – and on the entire White population of the Federation. And particularly on Great Britain …

He danced till until his legs were white blurs in the moonlight, until his whole, white-daubed body shook like a sapling in a breeze.
He was stark naked save that on his head he wore a headdress of skin, made to look like a helmet worn by the British South Africa Police, and a pair of imitation handcuffs carved from wood hung from a string around his neck. In fact, he represented the police who had come to Kariba to evict the Ba-Tonga and the Tonga-Ilas by force.

Lumbo danced – and while dancing he became as mad as a cave demon. He turned the sharp knife in his hand on himself, stabbing his thighs until blood ran freely. He leapt high into the air and hurled himself to the ground, all the while keeping a tight hold of the struggling monkey. Finally, he leapt a full four feet into the air and as he landed like a cat on his feet, he slashed the belly of the monkey and dragged out its quivering entrails with his teeth before tossing the rest of the carcass into the pit.

He continued to dance fiercely, tearing the guts of the monkey to pieces with his hands and teeth and spitting pieces all over the place. This mad and gory dance was symbolical of the curse these people were wishing on the police. They wished the police to go mad and disembowel their own children.

At this stage the four younger women, symbolizing the Spirit of Madness, threw off their clothes and hurled themselves upon the wildly capering Lumbo. They danced round him, they spat on him and pretended to gouge out his eyes and tear his ears from his head. Then the youngest leapt onto his back and fastened her arms around

his neck, bringing him down to the ground in a symbolism of final, disgraceful and horrible death – the death of a madman …

The men had brought with them two dummies, a large one representing a police constable – a sergeant, rather – armed with a rifle shaped from softwood, which they propped up over the curse pit. Here it was ceremoniously stabbed by every man present… and spat upon by each of the women. Each also spoke an unprintable curse on it. The dummy was then dropped in the pit that was completely filled in …

The second dummy was unwrapped out of the bark cloth and it was a skilfully produced representation of a fat Englishman with a bald head and a face painted white with the eyes and mouth detailed in red and black. The dummy wore carved softwood shoes and carried a briefcase of python skin. There was a photograph torn from a newspaper, stuck with resin to the chest of the dummy, and if the dummy did not in itself portray clearly enough who was being caricatured, the photograph left no doubts whatsoever. It was an eminent figure in the Federation Government.

This dummy was tied to the back and the last goat in a riding attitude, facing backwards. More strings were attached to keep it upright on the big billy goat. The women then busied themselves with decorating the goat with a mixture of mud and filth they had salvaged from the curse pot before it was lowered into the pit. The old man finally tied a lighted torch to the tail of the curse goat and sent it off with a violent kick and a battery of the foulest curses in the Tonga vocabulary. The goat, symbolising the Federation, was driven into the bush to lose itself. It has never been heard of since.

“Go!” Croaked the old man Chikerema, calling the bearer of high office by the Bantu corruption of his real name. “Go and take your empire of death and evil with you. Take it to the depths of Outer Darkness where the Hyena of Death can devour

> you – and it. Go into the valleys of oblivion and obscurity … Go!" (Mutwa, 1964:586-588).

The "Curse on the Kariba" exhibits what De Graft calls "magical drama" (2002:28), which is unlike secular theatre. Mutwa elsewhere calls it a "theatre in the open air" where "arts and spirits are inseparable" (Mutwa, 1973: 114). As it appears, the ritual seems to have worked with all the tragedies that befell the building of the dam and all the problems of natural disasters and distress after. In this story Mutwa's trance could be perceived in Davhula's terms as "liminal dancing" where the player reaches "a stage of in between", straddling both the normal and the supernormal (Davhula, 2015:3-20). The entire performance contains numerous play-making elements. Slices of story unfold through poetic incantations, illustrative dance, puppetry (two dummies) and props (a pair of imitation handcuffs carved in wood, including a goat); costume (a headdress of skin made to look like a helmet). It is a play that deploys, song, dance, mimicry and caricature. In the first story Lumbo represents "the police who had come to Kariba to evict the Ba-Tonga and the Tonga-Ilas by force" as an insane system which must be removed. The women who dance around Lumbo represent the forces of refurbishment. They spit on him and "pretended to gouge out his eyes and tear his ears from his head". There is no dialogue. This is physical storytelling:

> Then the youngest leapt onto his back and fastened her arms around his neck, bringing him down to the ground in a symbolism of final, disgraceful and horrible death – the death of a madman (Mutwa, 1964: 586-588).

In an essay titled "Umlinganiso, The living imitation," recently republished by Robert Mshengu Kavanagh, under the title *The Complete Sketsh: A South African Magazine for Theatre* (2016), Mutwa explains this form:

> … nothing ever dies completely in this world; even a mighty mountain erodes and becomes one with the dusty plain traces of it will always remain behind, traces of a

> thing known as theatre … theatre is old as [humanity] itself, and even in the remotest pre-history men of various races loved to dress up as animals and even as supernatural beings in order to terrify, educate and entertain … the so-called war dances of the Zulus, Sotho, Shanganes … are really plays which tell a story (161).

The death of the madman in this choreography is the demise of the policeman, a symbol of the colonial regime. The entire sequence, from the policeman disembowelling his child, to his collapse, plays out to precipitate the fall of the colonial regime. Ritual drama in this instance uses the aesthetics of combat. Accordingly, the storyteller comments on the use of the foulest curses in the Tonga vocabulary. It seems that swear words are important currency in rituals of purgation. A High Curse is unattainable without a strong arsenal of expletives. Expelling maladies of a vulgar social order is not a gentle process. A caustic tongue is required to scrape off the stubborn discharge.

In the second sequence, Chikerema and company deploy the tools of dramatic imitation. A dummy that represents a police sergeant is "ceremoniously stabbed by every man present … and spat upon by each of the women". They bury the dummy, which is "armed with a rifle shaped from softwood", in the pit, sending it away with a salvo of unprintable curses. Through this ritual act the play foresees the burial of colonial violence:

> … imitation, which is the basis of drama, played out in a large part in these African tribal dramatic ceremonies. If people wanted to precipitate rain, to kill or conquer in battle or cause pain to foes, they had to "imitate" (make representations of) these things. Since they believed in the principle of "Sympathetic Magic" that like produced like, they were extremely careful to imitate – to dramatize exactly whatever the result they desired to accomplish (Dhlomo, 1977: 3).

In other words:

> Making art affords one the opportunity to create that which did not previously exist. Likewise, the act of conjuring brings into being something that would not otherwise have occurred. Conjuring, then, has a direct kinship to art as both seek to release their vision upon the world. Conjuring makes use of natural properties –herbs, roots, blood, soil, water, hair – and the appropriate ordering and repetition of words that activate the *ase,* or life force, of the material elements.
>
> Conjuring's reliance on the power of words gives it a very particular union with theatre (Jones, 2002:228).

Mutwa's story celebrates ritual performance as a site of struggle. In the final sequence, a dummy in the likeness of Welensky, is tied to the back of a goat. Welensky is facing backward in a riding position – an image symbolic of the regime's confusion. The act of kicking away Welensky reflects links between making play, casting spells and the pursuit of freedom. The notion of conjuring applies here. The players deploy the resources of ritual drama to create something that is not there – the expulsion of Welensky. Here, ritual playmaking becomes a kind of agit-prop theatre that, through performing acts of exorcising the terrors of the colonial encounter, instructs "the voice of presentment" (Mutwa, 1964: 73) to bring another day.

Anticipatory dance drama and the poetics of social change

While Mutwa, writing his story in the 1950s, offered an eyewitness testimony, C.L.R. James, completing his script in 1934, assembles *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History* from research in libraries. From the scribal records, he amasses material for dramatizing an historical event which occurred a hundred and twenty years before his time.

Notably, James reconstructs two rituals that launched the Haitian revolution. The writer introduces his protagonist in the second scene through the "Bwa Kayiman ceremony" of August 1791 (Bello, 2019:4) which was led by a voudoun hougan, Boukman. The closing scene of the play presents the second ritual performance that sets off the second revolt, when Dessalines tears out the white from the French tri-colour flag and tramples it

underfoot. James sets the Bwa Kayiman in the "depth of the forests" (2013:52) and the dialogue plays out over a "steady beat of drums" (2013:52). After Toussaint's proposal that they send a petition he wrote, appealing to the aggressor, is dismissed, the ceremony takes off.

BOUKMAN: Their hour has come.

(*Dessalines leaps down from the platform and takes his place in front of the slaves. Toussaint walks down two steps and stands midway between the mass and the Toussaint Louverture leaders. Boukman extends his arm and a hush falls on the whole assembly. The drums cease.*)

The god who created the sun which gives us light, who rouses the waves and rules the storm, though hidden in the clouds, he watches us. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man inspires him with pride, but our god, who is good to us, orders us to revenge our wrongs. He will direct our arms and aid us. Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites who have so often caused us to weep and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks to us through our hearts.

(*At the words: Throw away: he rips off a cross which hangs on a chain round his neck, and many Negroes do the same*.)

(*A Negro emerges from the darkness behind the platform. He carries a vessel which he hands to Boukman. Boukman receives it carefully and raises it high.*
The Negroes drop to their knees.)

(*There is a great rattle of the drums. Again Boukman raises his hand. Again they crouch, looking up at him in silence. Boukman hands the vessel round to those on the platform to drink. Jeannot drinks deeply, dipping both hands in. As he raises his face it is covered with blood which splashes down his dirty white shirt, the only*

garment he wears. Boukman turns to Toussaint and offers him the vessel. Toussaint hesitates.)

BOUKMAN: Drink, Toussaint. (*Toussaint remains motionless*.)

JEAN- FRANÇOIS AND OTHERS ON THE PLATFORM

Drink, Toussaint.

(*Toussaint still hesitates. The kneeling Negroes call to him to drink. He takes the vessel into his hands and drinks*.)

DESSALINES (*Suddenly jumping to his feet*) Liberty! Liberty or death! (*The slaves take up the cry. The drums beat louder as the crowd goes off…* (James, 2013:55-56).

In his venture to write "plays that burst out of history", James paradoxically deletes Cécile Fatiman, a voudoun mambo who, alongside Boukman, supervised the ritual of social purgation in Bwa Kayiman in August 1871. Bayyinah Bello in her book, *Sheroes of the Haitian Revolution,* reveals that Fatiman "presided over the ceremony during which everyone attending took the sacred oath, "freedom or death". The vessel which Boukman passes around in James's play was possibly delivered by Fatiman, about whom folklore says she trance danced, embodying the spirit of the goddess Erzuilie, a water spirit. In this moment of trance, she cuts the pig's throat and offers its blood to the community of Maroons at the ceremony. Bello describes the "history of his story" as a memorialising project about the story of men "within the parenthesis of time" (2019:2). Deleting Fatiman from his play also means erasing her from the pages of history. Arguably, James lost an opportunity to depict this historical moment in its full complexity. Bello argues that James's depiction, unlike "ourstory", does not consider "the mingling relations" (2019:2).

Given her mixed parentage (Senegalese mother and French father), if Fatiman had appeared in the play her heroic presence would have problematised depictions of mulatto characters in the story. Until the last scene, the mulatto characters in James's play are presented as essentially opportunistic. It seems also that the hold of patriarchy has flattened the terrain of dramatic possibilities in James's play, robbing the story of a truly compelling female character. In Bello's writing, Fatiman is:

> a captive assigned to field work, [where] she grew into a Master of Communication and formed codified networks all over the island. It was at this point that she began to organize what would eventually become the only successful revolt in *ourstory*, Cecile trained her network to the stealth while transmitting information from plantation to plantation, miles away from each other. She created codes for names of places and people so that the enslaved informants could not notify slaves. It took Cecile years to organize the most famous gathering in *ourstory,* now referred to in history books as the ceremony at Bwa Kayiman (Bello. 2019:4).

Bello writes about other women whom James and other historical writers silence, like

Marie Jeane, "Director of Spy Office and sharpshooter", and Lieutenant Sanite Belair, "an officer in the revolutionary army" (Bello, 2019:6-7). Contemporaneous reviews of James's play reveal that the author tended to shy away from the language of ritual which informed the Haitian revolution: "… the language [of James's play] was too formal. A little 'spiritual' beautifully sung by Mr Robeson in a prison scene, gave a refreshing touch of naturalness," (*Morning Post*, 17 March 1936) (James, 2013:170).

It could also be that the rationalism of Marxist thought played a part in pressing down the material of ritual drama that a voudoun mambo can bring. As a Marxist historian, James underplays the magical aspects of ritual performance while emphasising the elements of an oath of commitment to liberty – Toussaint is pushed to participate. That said, the ritual of casting away symbols of slavery was a necessary act towards the recollection of self.

The act of ripping off "a cross which hangs on a chain round his neck, and many Negroes [doing] the same," is highly symbolic. Boukman and company want to exorcise the god of the oppressor, combining these acts with incantations by which Boukman instructs the universe to guide the air in the battle to kill slavery. Such voudoun ceremonies carried them through a 13-year war that "ends" with independence in 1 January 1804, when the entire island was named the Arawak-derived name of Haiti.

For a playmaker who is encumbered by the limits of realism, it seems as if James does not find it easy to entertain the voices who insist that the Haitian revolution was partly a product of dramatic performance with magic and its technologies. The written script suggests that the writer has no strategies for breaking the fourth wall, a key aspect of ritual drama. However, through Boukman's incantations, the principle of weaving spells through making play suggests a magical undertaking is reluctantly acknowledged.

One wonders: if Dhlomo's musings about the centrality of rhythm, song and dance in the making of African theatre had reached James, would he have made a more vibrant play? Writing in 1936 around the same period, in a different context, Dhlomo discusses "anticipatory dance dramas" in which humans commanded nature. The ceremony at Bwa Kayiman and Dessalines's ritual of trampling the white of the French flag, if we follow Dhlomo's theory, are performances of imitating desires that apply the principles of "sympathetic magic" (Dhlomo, 1977:3). Bello would find Dhlomo's theory consistent with the popular notion that the independence of Haiti was engineered through voudun ritual.

While I commend Dhlomo's teachings, I am uneasy about applying the notion of "sympathetic magic", which borrows from the jargon of anthropologists to explain the spiritual roots of playmaking. While Dhlomo uses the term "sympathetic magic", I proffer that this nomenclature is insufficient. *Mogaga* is a more resonant expression of the radical impulse contained in the wish to expel botheration. Looking back into James's dramaturgy, although the play perhaps succeeds as a biographical drama or a dramatized biography of

Louverture, it seems encumbered by the author's uncritical trust in the scribal traditions of memorialisation. Boukaman and Dessalines's rituals are arguably acts of *go gagaola* as they are serviced through making play or imitation. If *Toussaint Louverture* had incorporated song, drumming, recitation and dance, it would present, for me, a strong model for *mogaga* dramaturgy.

Sigiya Ngengoma: drums and rituals of social purgation.

My search for a model for mogaga play-making finds good company in the story which holds sway in VhaVenda folklore of Ngoma Lungundu, a drum with magical powers. In a documentary film titled *Two Rivers*, poet and historian Ratshaka Ratshitanga (1985), calls it by another name*:* Kavha-kavha ya manendze. Davhula, who has recorded the lyrics of the chant that goes with praising this instrument, refers to Ngoma Lungundu as "the drum that thunders" (2015:3-4). These descriptions are dramatic attempts to apprehend the magical qualities that legend allots to the drum. *Seli ha Vhembe* is a song that celebrates the hypnotising properties of Ngoma Lungundu:

Seli ha Vhembe

Ro vha sia vho lala Vhembe

Ngoma ya Mwali

Ro vha sia vho lala Vhembe

Ngoma Lungundu

Ro vha sia vho lala Vhembe

[Across the River Vhembe

We left them sleeping at the Limpopo River

The drum of Mwali

We left them sleeping at Limpopo River

The drum of Mwali

We left them sleeping at Limpopo River

The drum of Lungundu

We left them sleeping at Limpopo River] (Davhula, 2015:3-4).

Ngoma Lungundu is a magical drum that the Vhavenda sometimes call the voice of

Mwali or the voice of Raluvhimba, the Great Spirit. “The spirit of the drum can only be played by a sanctified drummer who has been ratified by the clan” (Zulu, 2017:22). Folklore tells us that the sound of the drum would put their enemies to sleep while Mwali’s people found easy passage through hostile terrain. “This drum gives members of the clan transcendental powers to triumph over adversity, providing a sacred source of inspiration” (Zulu, 2017:22). In Ratshitanga’s version:

They beat the drum as they advanced.

As it was beaten so filled the sky with light

And the people living in the lands fled (1985: np).

Those who are in the know tell us that Ngoma Lungundu was guarded by the white lions of Raluvhimba and a two-headed snake. To retain its magical powers, the drum, which is apparently made from human skin, must never touch the ground (Davhula, 2015:34). The Shezi people, forerunners of the VhaVenda, who carried the “drum that thunders” on the southward migration across the Limpopo River, celebrate its spellbinding powers through this mantra:

Ro vha sia vho lala Vhembe

Ro vha sia vho lala Vhembe

[We left them sleeping at Limpopo River

We left them sleeping at Limpopo River]

The song laughs at the enemy's weakness before the drum's mystical vibrations. The story of *Ngoma Lungundu* teaches us that in Africa, and perhaps elsewhere, among other functions, the drum plays the role of a numinous instrument. Mutwa explains that:

> the idea behind the drumbeat … is to drown out all other thought a sangoma may be thinking, to surround the sangoma with a barrier of impenetrable noise so that inside the barrier her mind powers are concentrated … now the drum and the flute achieve the same result … all other thoughts are cancelled out (1996:30).

Ingoma (the drum) is not only the keeper of time, but also a carrier of life-giving rhythms and beats that ferry messages across time. Ingoma works through its own geography. A beat can penetrate the miasma of time and resound in another realm. Sometimes rhythms travel deeper than the gut, beating into your inner fire. Ingoma pulses in the heart of the art of the sangoma. The name sangoma refers to those whose healing practices are fed by the beat of ingoma. Those who have experienced ubongoma, malopo, malombo[23] and such ritual performances have counted on the pulse of ingoma to draw them into the circle, where they engage in "mimetic invocation dances", each one working out their own salvation (De Graft, 2002: 27).

The music creates a channel through which you find passage towards your spiritual path. The act of connecting with the forces within requires total immersion in the beat – to perish, inviting your power to live through gesture and mimicry. I name these passionate dances across Africa and the Diaspora *mogaga* play-making. In the world of

[23] *Malombo* is a ritual dance or "possession" dance performed by VhaVenda. Bapedi refer to these performances as *malopo*. The dance is eponymous with the drums played during these performances (Davhula, 2015).

abangoma/vho miane vha tshele/malopo, to make beats is to speak the language of the spirits. The sound of ingoma and the musicality of our utterances vibrate the spirit and rouse the ancestors into step with our time. As the story of *Ngoma Lungundu* suggests, the music of the drum can be loaded with what Jomo Kenyatta, writing in *Facing Mount Kenya,* calls "hypnotizing magic" We have heard how the thundering power of *Ngoma Lungundu* can turn the tide of history.

Ngoma Lungundu shares some properties with itwanda, a spell fashioned by the Gikuyu mystics of Kenya through a musical threading together of coded lyrics. Kenyatta speaks about the defensive and hypnotising assets of *itwanda* (Kenyatta, 1965:287). He tells us that *itwanda* can be transmitted "through the medium of speech". He further explains that "it was truly believed that by the spell of this magic the enemy could be put in flight or be paralysed and destroyed without showing resistance" (Kenyatta, 1965:287.) The stories of *Ngoma Lungundu* and *itwanda* speak well to the power and magic of performance.

Principally, playmaking, to the ancients, was a site for spiritual insight and inspiration. Songs, together with dances, poetic recital and storytelling dramatics that accompanied them, were like cables for plugging into unknowable spiritual powers. Ultimately, from the story of *Ngoma Lungundu* we gather that the sound of music and the recital of charms have the muscle to dismantle forces of disablement. To the ancient *gobela* of humanity, a mix of song, dance and dramatic storytelling played a vital role in raising one's vibrations. Speaking about the war function of the drum, Zulu points out that:

> Upon discovering that the African Natives in South Africa and elsewhere in the continent were well informed of their prior movements, the White settlers, the missionaries and the British colonial authorities had concluded that Africans possessed telepathic powers. This concept of telepathy was later abandoned in the light of concrete evidence of drum messaging (2017:15).[24]

[24] An example of this rapid communication system is the first Matebele War in 1893 that broke out between the British South African Company and the Kingdom of Matebele of King Lobengula, the son of the great king and military general Mzikazi. The events of this battle were relayed via the drum telegraphy between

There are contemporary examples of ritual drama. Okot' P'Bitek, renowned Ugandan poet, tells a story that illustrates sharply the force of rituals of resistance. At Makerere University he announced African-centred theories by leading the act of removing the grand piano from the centre of the hall, replacing it with a colossal African drum.

After he was appointed Director of the National Theatre, he set out to uproot the forces of disablement. This was post-independence Uganda. P'Bitek was still vexed by the lingering ghost of the colonial order, which, in his view, was represented by the British Council. The offices of the council were housed in the building of the Ugandan National Theatre. It appears that P'Bitek and company felt that the shadow cast by this ghost of coloniality was blighting their light. P'Bitek decided to fashion a ritual of exorcism. He devised a ritual play starring an army of thirty drummers. He explains:

> One of the ways we chased the fellows out was to get thirty drums and start drumming from 8 o'clock until lunch time. And the fellows in the office upstairs could not do any work. And then we would start again at two until four. And then we would have a meeting with them. The issue was that the thing be National (P'Bitek in Kerr, 1995:111).

P'Bitek's ritual of evicting the British Council affirms the power of play-making. It also illustrates P'Bitek's understanding of the force of sound. As Carolyn Cooper reveals: "One culture's 'knowledge' is another's 'noise'. The noise of African indigenous sounds which colonialism had suppressed resurfaces and is let loose on the ears of British officials. P'Bitek's actions express the hip-hop attitude "Bring da Noise!" The ritual of dialling up the noise of African drums is a symbolic call for a decolonised experience of artistic practice in Africa (Cooper, 1993:4).

Matebeleland and Mombasa over a distance of more than 3,000 kilometres and then relayed from Mombasa to Accra, covering a distance of 6,500 kilometres to a total distance of 9,500 kilometres (Zulu, 2017:18).

P'Bitek's trust in the drum expresses a similar attitude to one we find in *Sigiya Ngengoma,* a 1990s dance track by kwaito group Trompies. Loosely translated, the lyrics mean: "we move to the drum" or "we step to the beat of song". The motion of *uku giya* (to move to) is larger than a step on the dance floor. It is the meeting of motion and robust emotion. It is to stride with vigour, energy, conviction, and vision. There is a definite oomph in that step. When Trompies chant *ibiz'emoyeni* or "call it from the soul", they are connecting the drum and dance step to the spirit world. The song may easily be referring to the practice or science of *ubungoma,* the way of the drum in which sound is infused with spiritual force.

Ritual drama is not stagnant, it evolves. This point is evident in *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History,* where the period of action spans from 1791 to 1802. While Boukman's ritual in 1791 was steeped in the power of the supernormal, Dessalines's acts of flag-tearing and flag -raising denote a ritual of state power. Significantly, the tools of ritual performance have transformed. While in the first ritual the drum is prominent, the second ritual emphasises the power of gesture.

Similarly, Muhammad Ali's work can be explained in terms of ritual. We may suppose that to him the drum was the word. He used the power of spoken word to paralyse enemies before he entered the boxing ring. The story of Ali's spoken-word theatre provides a contemporary example of the creative power of language. Ali's ability to picture and capture a fight through a play with words could be understood in terms of "the voice of presentment" (Mutwa, 1964:73). Batswana seekers would call this gift of predicting precisely the round in which the opponent falls, *go dupa* (to divine/predict).

Before a bout, Ali wrote rhymes, comedy skits and spoken-word theatre pieces through which he dramatized the fall of his challengers in the boxing ring. "They all fall in the round I call" says Ali his play, *I Am the The Greatest*. Whether he predicted the fights or called the fall of his opponent into being is a question to ask. He had poetic ways of naming the round in which his opponent would fall. When asked when Sonny Liston would fall, he said "Henry the IV". Liston was knocked out in the fourth round. "The

crowd was not dreaming when they expected the launch of a human satellite …. The total eclipse of the Sonny," Ali boasted in anticipation. Ali's performances in and out of the boxing ring resounded as victories for the Black world. The drama of Ali's life has been ritualised in many performances, including in Wole Soyinka's poem, "Muhammed Ali at the Ring Side":

> Black tarantula whose antics hypnotize the foe!
>
> Butterfly side slipping death from rocket probes.
>
> Bee whose sting, unsheathed, picks the teeth… Space that yields, then drowns the intruder.
> In showers of sparks - oh Ali! Ali!
>
> Esu with faces turned to all four compass points astride a weathervane; they sought to trap him,
>
> Slapped the wind each time. He brings a message … Warrior who said, "I will not fight".
>
> And proved a prophet's call to arms against a war (Soyinka, 1985: np).

Ali's work in the ring is painted in terms of battles against tyranny. Each knockout, counted vicariously as a blow to the system of white supremacy – a form of *mogaga* dramaturgy. Notably Soyinka offers Ali the name of Esu, a Yoruba deity or trickster god who holds the secrets of divination. Soyinka paints Ali as a warrior prophet. The "call to arms against a war" refers to Ali's refusal to fight in Vietnam. This act of resistance, for which he faced imprisonment and trouble with the professional boxing fraternity, endeared him to the radical elements in the Black Diaspora.

> My conscience won't let me go shoot my brother, or some darker people, or some poor hungry people in the mud for big powerful America," he had explained two

> years earlier. “And shoot them for what? They never called me nigger, they never lynched me, they didn’t put no dogs on me, they didn’t rob me of my nationality, rape and kill my mother and father. … Shoot them for what? How can I shoot them poor people? Just take me to jail (Ali in Brown, 2018: np).

“The voice of presentment” resonates with the reflections of Dhlomo when he seeks to explain how the practice of play-making and the arts of casting spells illustrate each other. To paraphrase Dhlomo (1977:3l), in performing ritual and in making play, we want to get the better of nature by acting out our ambitions and desires. The story of the Kariba illustrates how in making play we attempt to dictate to nature by means of magic. The rhymes of Ali are a contemporary example of how we seek to teach the spirits and the elements what to do and what not and tell them what we want by acting out our needs and wishes. Magic is our science. Instead of adapting to Life we always attempt to bend Life to our desires by imagining and acting out what life should be, in relation to us.

Towards a theatre of techno-shamanism.

An essay by the Brazilian theatre-maker, Cibele Forjaz Simõ̲es reveals that spiritism in the making of play continues in the contemporary scene. Simõ̲es’ reflective essay:
“Theatre and Indigenous Peoples: Learning to Imagine New Worlds in End Times” provides interesting departures. She starts by relaying the story of how she travelled the Xingu River “from its mouth to its source”. She decries the impact of a “hydroelectric plant on the people (human and extra-human) who live on the river banks” (2021:374). Via a process she names “techno-shamanism” (2021:374), she works with a team who deploy a mix of ritual drama and a text from Bertold Brecht, which they adapted, giving voice to the river and the Amerindian people. Simõ̲es directed the Margens Project in February 2018, with a performance by the author of the project, Gabriella Carneiro da Cunha.

The methods of techno-shamanism include a “dance game that trains warriors for a people’s resistance” (Simõ̲es, 2021:378). Their play launched a ritual against the state for

"putting an indigenous people's policy in the hands of the people's enemies". The policy is working against the "survival of their culture … the river and the forest". The policy has birthed environmental catastrophe through the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant and has hastened the de-forestation of the Amazon Forest since 1970. The policy promotes "aggressive agri business and mining" (2021:374). "Theatre … cannot shirk its responsibility for addressing environmental and human catastrophes" (2021:374). Simõ̲es concludes with fantastic remarks about the meeting of spirts, arts and politics:

> Techniques, ethics and aesthetics allied are woven through stories, which can be told or sung and danced. Orality is a way of acting, either by telling or singing a story or in a political speech. Rites, in their turn, relive the relationship between people and other humans, as well as between humans and extra-humans. In a sense, shamans are ambassadors between worlds; all real and each with a language of its own. (Simõ̲es, 2021: 374)

Mahone's concept of spiritual realism is perceivable through Simõ̲es' practice of techno-shamanism. It is interesting to note a similar struggle for land and environmental justice in the ritual drama of the Tongalla priests in Kariba and the techno-shamanism of Simõ̲es in the Amazon Forest. Harvesting techniques of orality, the method of technoshanism in contemporary Brazil, and the systems of Kamirĩĩthũ in Kenya in the 1980s are similar to the guerrilla theatre approach by The People's Experimental Theatre in Lenasia and Soweto in the 1970s. These methods continue to challenge my own sense of open theatre. They prompt me to ask: How far do I carry the instincts of play? What are the limits of scripted plays? What are the possibilities of spiritism in the making of play?

Mogaga dramaturgy and spiritism

Looking closely into the primacy of spiritism in the making of play is essential in the task of thinking through elements that make mogaga dramaturgy. I argue that spiritism is empty

if it sits outside the battles to purge anti-people regimes. A cursory investigation of the history of radical playmaking in Africa and the black Diaspora suggests that radical spiritism is a key technical ingredient. From the anticipatory dance dramas of Tongalla priests to Muhammed Ali's voice of presentment into Simo̱es' techno-shamanic theatre a vital aspect play making is about locating spiritual upheaval inside contemporaneous struggles. Essentially, mogaga play making, by adopting a name drawn from ritual drama recognizes the inter-penetration between ethereal worlds and material realities.



Figure 5. Chilahaebolae, *Funda Centre, 16 June 2021. Phiri (Puleng Mafatshe) and Phokobje (Abongile Matjutju) are plotting to crush Motho. Katse (Tjokotla Mokgabo) bursts into the scene to warn them that Motho and his company are advancing. The seated group resembles the flames of a fire that Phiri has started.*

Groundings le Balepa Dilanedi

My repertoire of resources increased when I was invited as a performing artist to a gathering of African astronomers in Phokeng. It was the launch of the International Indigenous Astronomy Experts Society at the Royal Marang Hotel, Phokeng, 27-29 July 2022. The conference theme was: "Facing the Reality, Value and Relevance of Indigenous Astronomy in the 21st Century". With a brief to present performances that hold dialogue with *bolepa dinaledi* [astronomy], my insights about ritual drama expanded. Via breakaway sessions and through the literature that was made available I fielded questions that explored the terrain of performance, African spiritual sciences and the political currency of African astronomical knowledge. At the base of my questions was the need to

know how dramaturgy apprehends and harnesses the knowledge of characters of astronomy

It was an enriching experience plugging into conversations which largely advanced through a finding commonality between the Dogon, Kemetic, Zulu, Kgalagadi and Bakgatla mystery systems, all of which connect the movements of planets and temperaments of the stars to the forces which govern human lives on earth. I was privy to speeches by seers like Baba Dima, who shared insights about "Venda astronomy and cosmology". Zulumathabo Zulu addressed the "Basotho origin of cosmology". Kenalemang Kgoroyadira, like curator Motheo Koitsiwe, drew notes from Bakgatla oral traditions and sciences of astronomy? They largely focused on the import of "stories, songs, poems and riddles to indicate their high scientific knowledge of the sun, moon, stars and other constellations" (Koitsiwe, 2019: 221).

My set was concerned with the question of the "relevance of indigenous astronomy". Between song and recital, I asked how the characters of the night sky have a bearing on my reality in a neocolonial environment where mining companies poison the rivers. Where are the voices of the African astronomer and the sangoma when synthetic human systems eat the soul of the planet? How do we perform rituals on an earth that is choking on plastic? When rivers, the sources of spiritual life and sites of ritual performance are dying. I was echoing Mutwa's outrage when he stated that ancient Africans acted harshly against "defilers of the natural environment":

> The short-sighted, arrogant, mindless modern savages who pollute our rivers with industrial effluent and defile the skies with acid rain, and the skulking poachers who murder rhinoceros through the continent (Mutwa, 1996: 23).

Sixth Son, a character in De Graft's play, *Muntu*, also echoes Mutwa's rage against "noisy machines that turn on poisonous gases – polluting the air and the water and the soil" (De Graft, 1977: 9). In De Graft's play astronomical events are mythologised. Nyambe, the old

man of the sky, withdraws his "sky food". He recedes "farther and farther away" from the earthlings when they get greedy and wasteful (De Graft, 1977: 9). Through these events in his play, De Graft suggests that the relationship between the earth and the stars has fallen into a state of disrepair. By blaspheming against the Substance of Things, humanity "wanders off the ancient path" (De Graft, 1977:33). During a ceremony, the Divine Drummer wants answers from the gods: "When shall the Sky and Earth meet again?" (De Graft, 1977:22). Thebe Medupe reveals in his book, *The Astronomy of Timbuktu,* that stargazing in ancient Africa played an important part in organising people's lives. To what extent, then, can we use "knowledge of the stars and the sun" (Medupe, 2010:9) to give direction to our relationship with the earth? Diop discusses this relationship:

> stars are not simply luminous bodies suspended in space. They have trajectories and weight, dimensions that are to be determined, like the direction of their course, their rays and their revolution's period, as well as their effect on human behaviour (Diop, 1981:317).

An ancient /Xam Story, *The Girl Who Made The Stars* crosses my mind. In the tale, The Girl casts wood ashes up into the night sky, plotting the movements of stars and planets through her utterances:

> But this girl was disobedient. Because she was hungry she rose and went out of her hut and threw up wood ashes to become the stars so that her father and the other hunters would have light to return home by. This girl is said to be one of the peoples of the early race (!xwe-lna-ssho-!ike) (Chapman, 2007:31).

The /Xam story celebrates disobedience as a creative act. The refusal to be contained in a hut and venturing into the open air releases her inventive spirit. Her rebellion is fuelled by a fertile imagination. She creates the stars by throwing wood ash up, brightening the night sky. Drawing on the power of incantations, she arranges the movements of celestial bodies. Speaking to the wood ash she says:

> These wood ashes who are here must become the Milky Way. They must lie white along the sky so that the stars may stand outside of the Milky-Way… The wood ashes must fully become the Milky Way and go around the stars, lying across the sky while the stars sail along.
>
> And so it is this way. When the Milky Way stands low upon the earth it turns across the front of the sky, waiting for the Stars to turn back. The Stars wait for the sun until they feel that he has turned back, for he travels on his own path. The stars also turn back and go and fetch the daybreak so that they may sink nicely to their rest, while the Milky Way goes to rest with them (Chapman, 2007:30).

In the /Xam story, ritual performance alters the substance of material. The dramatic pronouncements of *The Girl who Made The Stars* spell out the elliptical orbits of stars and planets. Through her chants and charms, she plots the movement of time. Essentially, her incantations not only expel botheration in her life, as in anticipatory dance dramas, but she also explores the power of the word to, in the words Jamaican of singer, "remake the world" (Cliff. 1976: np).

This connection between ritual performance, earthly characters and the intergalactic entities is also spelled out in the Zulu Story about Mpaku, the son of Nommo, who placed the egg of a Firebird into the sky in such a way that it revolved around the earth (Mutwa, 1996:128). Speaking about the "extra-terrestrial origins of humankind" Mutwa says that human beings were created on "a world next to ours, a small world of red sands … the original people who appeared on Earth were red" (Mutwa, 1996:125). During fearsome war in the Red Sand world, Moromudzi and Kimamireva and others jump into a gigantic iron dragon and, flying through the stars, they escape:

> After a long time, they came to a star we call *Peri Osifiri Orimbisi* (Sirius), and which is known as *Naledi ya Phiri* in Setswana and *Nanadiyafisi* in the languages of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, It is called *Inja,* which means "a dog." Our name for it means Star

> of the Wolf. There they found a water world, a planet that circles that star (Mutwa, 1996:126).

After the humans commit various trespasses, a war breaks out with the nation of amphibians that inhabit the world. The surviving humans escape using a giant egg, which is rolled down to earth by the twin sons of Nommo:

> When the great egg arrived in our world, it was hard for the twins to control it, such was its speed, and it burrowed its way into the underground, and then the people had to escape and emerge from the underground to the surface of the world. There are two hole that may be seen in South Africa which are claimed to be the holes from which – according to legend – the first people emerged (Mutwa, 1996: 127-128).

There is much yet undiscovered about the connections between creative expressions, play-making, astronomical knowledge and paranormal research. In so far as playmaking goes, the open-air Indigenous Astronomy Festival on 28 July 2022 was a fantastic revelation. A popular childhood chant, *Naledi ya Mariberibe* (rising star) became a refrain among *iZangoma* and astronomers. Dancing around the fire while eyeing the characters of the night sky we recited together:

> Naledi ele ya mariberibe
>
> Ribela tlase
>
> Ro nwa metsi
>
> Metsi ga a yo
>
> A nolwe ke Kgaupe
>
> Kgaupe ga ke mo rate
>
> Ke rata Masilonyana
>
> Kgatlhano di merafe

Tsa bannabagolo

Ba epa kgelegetla

Kgelegetla Moloko,
Tshiololo!Tshiololo! (Koitsiwe, 2019:226).

The persona in the chant addresses *naledi ya mariberibe,* asking the star to descend (*ribela tlase*) so that together they can go and drink water. However, there is no water because Kgaupe drank all the water. The chant presents a highly complex and allusive scene suggesting human alliances and relationship with the sky. For instance: In Zimbabwe there is a tradition called "gazing the orange moon", which is the October full moon, which is orange and red. And medicine women look at the reflection of the moon in the river and that reflection tells them which herb to pick for the people they are healing (Teish, 2023:np).

Leshoai tells us that in 1973 he staged an impactful play with the students of the Theatre Arts Department at the University of Dar-es Salaam. *Praising the Sun* integrates all elements of dance, poetry, song, mime improvisation and storytelling" (1981:254). Leshoai's Sun is praised for throwing the "white butter of blessing on the mountain and the Boabab tree" (1981:254). The notion of a sun that falls like butter materialises the connections with celestial bodies. It is a sun that nourishes and cuddles. The butter of blessing is reminiscent of Nyambe's "sky food" in *Muntu* (De Graft, 1977:9). "Nommo [will] return again and show people the way to the stars." Similarly, Mutwa speaks about how "the gods used to have a chain which connected worlds together" (1996:129). These stories echo each other.

In the most recent instalment of *Chilahaebolae,* I considered the ways in which the performance of rituals was occasioned by "watching the movements of the moon, sun, stars and other constellations" (Koitsiwe, 2019: 221). It was an open-air performance at the Funda Centre, Soweto, from Wednesday 16 June to Saturday 19 June 2021. Our playing

area was a circular space marked with river sand and lit by a streetlamp. Around it we placed five braziers (*mbaola*). We started performances at sunset as the moon appeared in the company *Kopadilalelo,* the star which signals that it is storytelling time. Throughout the play Phokobje has a habit of looking at the night sky, and it seems to have a mysterious hold on him. The scene where Phokobje conspires with the moon to escape trouble worked brilliantly when he pointed to the sky, saying: "It is the moon shining off the lake." There was a full moon. At a basic level, this is simple dramatic action, the natural light flooded the performance area Symbolically, Phokobje has some alliance with the forces of celestial bodies[25].

Among the central characters in *Chilahaebolae* is a jackal, which also occupies a principal position within the Dogon divination system. At the edge of the village, Dogon seers would draw patterns on the sand before going to sleep. They would return in the morning to read the pattern of footsteps left by the jackal, foretelling "events to come" (Temple, 1988:75). Similarly, plotting the journey of Phokobje in *Chilahaebolae* is a way of reading the temperament of the land. Phokobje's rebellion is indexical of the spirit of things that will come to pass. In Kemet, "great reverence" accrued to the jackal. One of the key figures in Kemetic spiritual drama is Anubis, who is depicted with a man's body and a jackal's head.

[25] My experiment with *bolepa-dinaledi* did not work during performances on Bertha Street in Braamfontein. Although we played in a open air environment, the skyscrapers obscured the characters of the night sky. Even if the moon was up, it was not visible from the performance area.



Figure 6. Phokobje, illustration by Themba Mkhoma

The illustration of jackal by Themba Mkhoma, poster designer for *Chilahaebolae*, which is interestingly reminiscent of Anubis, is also conceived as an orbit around Sirius" (Temple, 1998:100). *Chilahaebolae* also samples the Zulu story of Mpungushe, the jackal, who stole fire from the land of the gods and gave it to the first humans. Mpugushe's journey in and out of the land of the gods demonstrates the amaZulu wealth of sacred knowledge about astral travel. Most significantly, the jackal is celebrated as the connection between the gods and humanity. Studying the genealogies of fable characters like Phokobje and Phiri makes it clear that *Chilahaebolae* is tapping into "the Dog Star as in the constellation of Canis" (Temple, 1998:86). According to Koitsiwe:

> A constellation is a group of stars that are considered to form imaginary outlines or meaningful patterns on the celestial sphere, typically representing animals,

> mythological people or gods, mythological creatures or manufactured devices (Koitsiwe, 2019:75).

Mutwa expands:

> The zodiac, with all its creatures – the *Mulu-mulu* as it called - is not just a group of constellations going around the Earth, they are stars from which the various animals we have on earth originated (Mutwa, 1996:121-122).

Considering the centrality of Phiri the hyena in *Chilahaebolae*, I was curious about the name of a star called *Naledi ya Phiri* or The Star of the Hyena (Sirius) (Mutwa, 1996:126). If indeed African fable characters are pointers to esoteric knowledge, there are questions to answer about naming this star *Naledi ya Phiri*. Mutwa's story about the interstellar journeys of the first people aligns with Robert Temple's reading of Dogon mysteries. After they landed on *Naledi ya Phiri* they soon "found a water world, a planet that circles that star" (Mutwa, 1996:126). Drawing on Dogon cosmogony, Temple tells us that "The starting point of creation is a star which revolves around Sirius … it contains the germ of all things. Its movement on its own axis and around Sirius upholds all creation in space" (Temple, 1998:41). Diop calls it "the invisible companion of Sirius … that is situated at the centre of the world, and without its movement no heavenly body could maintain itself" (Diop, 1981:314).

For Basotho this invisible body is called *Mabelega*, "named after *mabele* the most important crop (Zulu, 2014:33). "In African Cosmology there is a causal chain between *mabele* (sorghum) and the cosmos" (Zulu, 2014:34). Could it be that there is a causal relationship between the hyena and *Naledi ya Phiri*? Coincidentally, in *Chilahaebolae* Phiri's intimate connection to the forces of creation seems unearthly. Phiri, as the custodian of *lechemi,*[26] operates with paranormal powers. Through Phiri's mystical powers, the story links resistance politics with spiritual practices. I discovered that the impulse to make Phiri

[26] Lechemi – pertaining to medicine or herbs.

the leading spirit of the revolution is consistent with the character in Mutwa's *Praise song to the Hyena*:

You are the *impisi* that pieces together the assegais.

Of our forefathers

You are the living broom of our great-grandmothers, with which.

They swept their villages.

You are the one who walks splay-footed.

Who passes through the night-unseen

Whose eyes gleam like stars in the darkness, frightening both the *mantindanes* and the sorcerers

You impisi, are the friend of the warriors and those that walk through.

the night

Strange creature that purifies the whole land

Worshiped alike by the great gods, the *amatonga*; and by men and women You laugh in the night as you leave (1996:89).

This image of she "who pieces together the assegais" extols the hyena's capacity to fight the enemy. As "the broom of our great-grandmothers" the hyena is associated with rituals of exorcism. Zulumathabo Zulu (2022) concurs with the spirit of this poem when pointing out that Phiri is highly venerated in southern African spiritual practices as a figure of purgation. She "purifies the whole land". Mutwa's hyena combines the traits of the warrior and the mystic who "passes through the night unseen". The forces of darkness fear her. Zulu's revelations that hyena societies are matriarchal makes me thank the instinct to write Phiri as the "one who pieces together the assegais" in *Chilahaebolae.* Incidentally, in Kemetic mythology, Sirius is named the star of Aset (Isis). Phiri, like the hyena in Mutwa's poem, operates as a force of renewal. Her capacity to remove botheration is consistent with the spirit of *mogaga* dramaturgy. Questions about the intergalactic aspects of Phiri's

character require further investigation. What is clear is that in accordance with African folklore, Phiri is a figure of *go gagaola*.

Asking the question, what good is astronomy? Henry Welsh writes that:

> Astronomy, unlike astrology, has in the past played an important part in freeing mankind from mental and physical bonds, and we have no doubt it has services of the same kind in the future (Welsh,1965:3).

The question of what your place is in the universe is deeply political. Thinking back to my childhood, I remember a daily morning tune, *Mphatlhalatsane, naledi ya meso* (Mphatlhalatsane, the morning star), that played on Radio Bantu to wake us up. As soon as the alarm/song began, my father would light the primus stove and my mother would fill the pots with water. The radio loops the song while the water is boiling and as my parents are getting ready to go to work in the city. At that time my father was a ticket salesman at Park Station while my mother worked as a nurse at Crown Mines in Florida. They woke us up to prepare for school, taking off in different directions while the morning star was still up.

Mphatlatsane appears after *Kgoga masigo*, the star that drags through the night. Before *Kgoga masigo* appears, it is *Kopadilalelo* who shows up as the sun goes down. While the ancients used the art of *bolepa dinaledi* to measure time, the apartheid regime exploited this wisdom of our mystery systems to serve capitalist interests. The mphatlatsane song was emptied of its ritual content because it was used as a daily alarm. Here is a solid example of how knowledge of astronomy has been deployed to regulate time and exploit the natives. This is achieved by using the symbolism of the morning star to wake up the natives to go to work in factories for the benefit of the capitalist instead of going to work elsewhere for their own benefit.

At the beginning of my creative process, I had only a passing acquaintance with the characters of the night sky. While reading fables, essays and taking the cast and creative team on trips to the Johannesburg Zoo and the Pilanesberg National Park, I got to know the world of my play better. There is a living-deadness about caged animals. I wonder about the idea of feeding time and how it interrupts natural time. The Johannesburg Zoo is now in a state of decay. On several trips I have seen it degenerate and the animals getting more lethargic. At the Pilanesberg National Park there is a liveliness about the creatures of the bushveld, yet their freedom is still curtailed by electric fences. On our visit we took notes about the physical movements of animals and put them to practice in the rehearsal room. Putting the animal movements on the bodies of players revealed to me a deeper appreciation of the world of quadrupeds. Finding that the jackal and the hyena loomed large in African mystery systems opened exciting areas of investigation.



Figure 7. Chilahaebolae, *Funda Centre, 15 June 2021.*

Rehearsal and performance: Searching for Technologies of Mogaga

The above pictures take the reader through the preparations of the playing area of C*hilahaebolae* at the Funda Centre Soweto from 16 to 19 June 2021. I am testing the 1970s attitude that a play can be planted anywhere. It is true that theatre was alive before enclosed playhouses were built. In fact, ritual drama has been an open theatre form from prehistory. Diop tells us that Ra was the first god in history to create through the word. "Ra achieves creation through the word … the logos … the spirit" (Diop, 1981:311). Mutwa tells us Kemet is in the southern cradle. In that way we inherit the word. When E'skia Mphahlele founded the Funda Centre for artists in 1984, he meant to create space for our rituals to flourish. The bloodline of "resistance science" is traceable here. Matsemela Manaka and many more ancestors of Black theatre have played here.

Rehearsing here forms part of my research. The spirits of Black arts hold this ground. I am here to catch the spirits, as it were. Like Nadar, I want data with soul. The pictures show the moments before the audience walks into the space. This is the day before opening night. It feels like it has been opening night since we moved rehearsals outdoors. A group of children from the Funda Community would join us daily. Passers by became daily

playgoers. Sometimes we got valuable notes from their comments. The children knew the songs from the play within days of rehearsal. It was joyful whenever they sang along.

Glen Moatlhudi carries the firewood in the second picture. In fact it was through his connections that we got to know someone who knew someone who makes the brazier stands, colloquially called *mbaola*. On this day the *mbaola* is lit and we see the flames dancing. Cast and community level the playing field. The truck had delivered the last load of river sand that afternoon. We had to mix it with kiddies play sand because some cast members found the river sand too coarse, so mixing it with kiddies play sand softened it. It was thrilling to watch the players tumbling about acrobatically in the sand after it had been softened, getting a feel of the playing field, the spirits of play vibrating *bana ba mmu* (children of the soil).

Motsumi Makhene, the man wearing yellow gloves and blue overall trousers, is a veteran composer and ideologue of the Black Consciousness theatre movement. Makhene is pictured with Cedril Nukeri, a Soweto-based visual artist and educator who has a studio at the centre. I find it interesting that Makhene is holding a shovel, clearing the way for an "open theatre" (Biko in Arnold, 1978:180). Makhene is the *gobela* of this space. He is at the forefront of a battle to return the building to the artists who use the centre. Sometimes the battle is ugly. The place has been in a state of disrepair for some time and people from the surrounding community have been parcelling off parts of the ground for themselves. Makhene and some local artists are working to reclaim these pieces. We were rehearsing in the middle of war zone. Working here was a way of holding the ground.

In this chapter I discuss my rehearsal processes, looking at the changes and basic codes that stay in my rehearsal rooms. I attempt to take the reader through my thought processes, and as I look for a language for my piece, an attitude expressed by Achebe's Ezeulu, *Arrow of God,* echoes in my mind: "the world is like a mask dancing, if you want to see it, you stand in one place".

Chilahaebolae, has been through a process of writing and re-writing, which has been aided by rehearsals and performances staged at different venues around the Gauteng area. I have demarcated Gauteng as my research laboratory and making working here has provided fantastic data.

I have seen decades of change in the arts scene and had encounters and conversations with many artists breaking sweat in dead spaces and living places, in the drinking spots and smoking joints, the Horror Cafés and African Freedom Stations, the Monday Blues of Peter Makurube (founder of the weekly open mic sessions named Monday Blues. The Box Theatre and Phaswane Mpe. The questions. The clues. The notes. The feeling of things. These musings signal the multiple forays by which I have arrived at choosing the principles from the process of *mogaga* play-making. Principles, unlike processes, are the essence, the fundamentals of substance, the foundation for action. Principles cannot be removed. Principles are carried through processes. Processes, unlike principles, are the steps toward the substance, the series of actions you take to get to the essence.

Processes: **Mawa** is the Writer's Process. Mawa[27] is a word from Batswana mystery systems which is a message from the bones of divination.
Lefoko is the Composer's Process.

Malopo is the Play-Maker's Process.

Principles: *Huru, Imvumakufa, Khepera*

[27] Mawa (plural) Lewa (singular) "strategic knowledge; transcendental axioms from Basotho system of geomancy known as Ditaola (Zulumathabo, 2017:12)



Figure 8. Chilahaebolae *rehearsal, Funda Centre, 15 June 2021.*

Mawa: The Writer's Process

> *... taola ga e bue jaaka motho e bua ka go wa. Go wa go go bidiwa lewa. Lewa ke mokgwa o taola e welang ka ona fa fatshe. Moremogolo o na le mathoko a mane, o na le mawa a mane (Leseyane, 1963:129)*
> (divining bones do not speak like a human being, they speak by spreading themselves on the floor. Lewa refers to the way the bones fall or arrange themselves. Moremogogolo has four sides, each providing its own meaning.
> (Leseyane, 1963:129).]

In the statement above Leseyane explains the language of *taola*. He explains that *taola* does not speak like us. Dikgaka call this the language of *taola,* mawa. Mawa is from the

word *wa*, which denotes the story the bones tell when they fall, spreading on a divining floor. The message or story is visible from the way the divining bones settle. And position themselves. The Batswana divination system works with five bones: Moremogolo, Kgadi, Jaro, Kgatsane and Modimo (Leseyane, 1963:129). The story the bones are telling often throws up unexpected scenes. Mawa encapsulates my writing process. The scenes that I have in mind when I get onto the page often throw up unexpected characters, ventures and side-streets. I often end up in places I was not expecting. That is why writing is a process of discovery. One often bumps into characters one did not know lived in their psyche.

Scribal arts and performing arts are built with different assumptions about how they are use. Writing a play for performance is not the same as writing literary drama. Writers of literary drama are largely concerned with the literariness of the script. *Chilahaebolae* was developed as a score for a ritual of resistance. Part of the purpose was to work out the principles of *mogaga* play-making. Thus far, I am musing over a trinity of principles that has formed out of the chaotic matter of rehearsal and research. Essentially, a theatrical score is about the relationships of characters and the movement of symbols. The history of ritual teaches that the movement of symbols is at the heart of artistic expression.

The journeys of characters in performance are illustrative of the shifts of power. For the process of concocting *mogaga* dramaturgy I truncated and adapted Baraka's 1969 statement, "Show the chains … let them see the chains fall away" (1969:5), as a mantra. I was mindful of how this mantra provides a structure for a ritual of resistance or the eradication of social maladies. Significantly, for the ritual to be complete, the chains must fall. When you show the chains, you are performing *huru*. The falling chains express the principle of *khepera*.

For my own clarity, I grouped the characters into three categories: the protagonists, the agonists, and the antagonists. This framework speaks to the allocation of power in the play.

The Protagonists

The three-protagonists system that I am experimenting with in this story stresses reciprocity and a community of resistance, which are the central principles of ritual drama. Protagonists in a fable are often not strongly individuated characters. They are usually archetypal symbols of specific tendencies. In *Chilahaebolae*, I explore extended and intricate character journeys. Although our protagonists collectively signify forces of renewal, they don't always move in straight lines. Circumstances sometimes overtake their best intentions, and they get waylaid. They are riddled with complexity. In a play which gives equal dramaturgical treatment to corporeal personalities and spiritual forces, characterisation gets more intricate.

There is a great difference between the approach to characterisation in the first instalment of the play and in the offering at the Funda Centre. When the experiment commenced Phokobje was the sole protagonist but by the time of the offering at Funda he was sharing the glory with Phiri, Katse and Dilo tsa Naga. Increasingly I had become aware that a lone-ranger, hustler-type hero was inconsistent with the revolutionary vision this story is calling for.

I am indebted to the models provided by plays like James's *Toussaint Louverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History.* The story kicks off with Boukman as the protagonist. He leads the ritual that ignites the battle against slavery in San Domingo. Toussaint stands on Boukman's shoulders, carrying forward the watchword: "Liberty or Death". Although Toussaint's story is central, the author emphasises a collective ethos. When the French soldiers surround him and seize his sons, Toussaint makes it clear that the road is long: "destroying me you are destroying only the trunk. But the tree of Negro Liberty will flourish again, for its roots are many and deep." Dessalines picks up the baton of revolution after Toussaint falls. The play ends with Dessalines tearing up the French flag and creating a new flag for Haiti. This model, which allocates power to various

protagonists, convinced me that Phokobje must realise the limits of individual glories and the temporary victories that these fleeting triumphs bring.

Phokobje also has Dessalines' temperament – they share the same hatred for bondage. When Phokobje, alongside Phiri, rallies Dilo tsa Naga to obliterate Motho and Lekgoa's world, he does so as part of a community of resistance. Although Phokobje has been vilified in many fables in which he is portrayed as a thug, my interest is in the narrative that paints him as rebel. Yet Phokobje must overcome the spirit of self-interest if he must triumph over a world made by Motho.

The story of Phokobje le Mpja is easily adaptable as it can be used to interpret different contexts in the changing political landscape. Phokobje's ambivalence about the life of the chain is readable in the colonial and neocolonial set-up. The chain is universally emblematic of the state of capture. Looking into the folklore of Batswana and Vashona, the Phokobje I was imagining has the same symbolic currency of characters as mmutle/*tsuro*, the hare, which is considered prey, outsmarting or outwitting the powerful adversary. The trickster figure provides the kind of radical opening that enables *mogaga* dramaturgy.

Chilahaebolae borrows a key element of African folklore by fielding a "hero who is also a fool.[28]" Phokobje is not without fault. Although at first, he dismisses the food of Chilahaebolae, eventually he eats it. It seems like the flavour of coconut chips adjusts his revolutionary temperament. He gets caught and chained because he lost his sharpness after acquiring a taste for the food. While he fights to break out of the chains after his capture, he appears to be seduced by the life of bondage that Mpja has been advertising. When he thinks Mpja is not looking he sings about going to the zoo, a place of enslavement. He secretly contemplates a life in the zoo, where "all you do is model" for your supper. While singing the song he begins to hallucinate. He fantasises about his chains falling away magically while he sings and dances with creatures of the zoo, eating cheese and drinking

[28] The wise among us know that creation is not perfect and that we are all prone to mistakes; therefore, a hero who is a fool is very much loved by all people because we can find ourselves in him (Muntu, 1996.77).

whisky. When Phokobje realises that Mpja is watching, he cuts the music, snapping out of the bubble of hallucination. He must still confront the weight of chains around his neck. When, finally, Phokobje makes his escape, he loses his tail during the commotion of the escape. Phokobje must choose: to run forever and perish or get his tail back and live.

Dialogue often assists the writing process. After the first showcase at the Market Theatre Monageng Motshabi, playwright and director asked a life-giving question: Why did you kill the wild dogs? I entertained his question when writing the next draft. That is how I decided to bring back Phiri to life. Looking back into the fables that raised me, I realised that hyena's character has not enjoyed the favour of storytellers. Like Phokobje, Phiri has been treated as the ultimate ruffian. I decided to break out of the clutches of this cliché. Phiri's ruffian elements can be weaponised. There is a turning point in Phokobje's character when he realises that he needs Phiri. Phiri does not only assist him to get back his tail, but also, she causes Phokobje to evolve from a hustler into a fighter for the freedom of *Dilo tsa Naga*.

Phiri's escape from the zoo was inspired by Assata Shakur's 1979 escape from the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women in New Jersey. Phiri could be the Assata Shakur or the Sarraounia of my story. Shakur was a member of the Black Liberation Army, which waged an armed struggle against the US government. She has been living in Cuba since 1984. Phiri's character was also inspired by the profile of Sarraounia, the warrior queen and priestess of the Aznes in Med Hondo's film, *Sarraounia*. Leading the army in armed battles, Sarraounia also casts the spell of N'komo to fight off Islamisation and French colonial encroachment. Similarly, Phiri escapes the zoo and refuses to be seduced by the beats of *Zoolicious*, a zombifying song conducted by the zookeeper. Phiri is the custodian of lechemi, a magical power she summons at will. Her religion is her intuition, her psalms are songs of rebellion by which she rallies Dilo tsa Naga into a final battle against their tormentors.

At the beginning Phiri forms a part of the trinity of friendship with Phokobje and Mpja. She is a fearless character who is ready to mission forward in any situation. The trio part

ways when they go to the farm on a chicken-stealing mission and Phiri is trapped by Leburu. Phiri is a slippery type. She boasts about escaping from the zoo when she reappears later with a gang of stray dogs, wanting revenge on Phokobje for what she thinks was a betrayal of a bond. After a series of conflictual events, they work things out. Phiri will help Phokobje to get back the tail he lost at Motho's place on condition that they will "fight for something bigger than *dipapa*".



Figure 9. Phiri, Illustration by Themba Mkhoma

Phiri pumps life into Phokobje by telling him the story of Mokgankgara, an ancestor who dethroned a blood-drinking ogre from across the sea. Through Phiri's influence, Phokobje begins to shrink his self-interest and work for the survival of the species. Together they unite Dilo tsa Naga, confronting Motho and Lekgoa. Their freedom is definite if they evaporate the world of the chain and dog collar, taking back the land.

“Without me you would have died on that auction block,” Katse tells Phokobje when it seems as if he wants to betray her mission to escape domestication and flee to Nageng.
Katse admires Phokobje’s stubborn streak and that’s why she helps him escape. Katse is privy to the secrets of Motho’s world because she lives in the master’s house. She advises Phokobje to refuse the jacket and the shoes because they stick to the skin. She secretly tampers with the poisoned injection, which is supposed to sedate Phokobje, helping him to escape the auction.

Between Katse and Phokobje there is a carnal electricity which grows and lingers unattended. Playgoers have asked me to develop this sensual tension into a fully fleshed out love affair. I thought it best if this part of the theatre plays out only in the minds of the playgoer. Katse eventually dies when she takes the knife for Phokobje.

There is always an enormous gasp from playgoers during that moment when Katse is slain. Many times I was confronted by people who wanted Katse to live. Some accept grudgingly that Katse could symbolise *imvumakufa*, a sacrifice for “an idea that will live”. It was heart-warming when someone offered to ritualise her transition further, indicating that Katse would join the pantheon of fighting ancestors. While customarily, radical elements who lean on Malcom X’s lines would dismiss Katse’s “house nigger” element, there are voices like that of C.L.R. James that offer a more complex portrayal.
For James, it is the house nigger who poisons the master’s plate. James proffers that heroes like Harriet Tubman and Toussaint Louverture were not the field nigger types when they started, yet they risked their lives for the freedom of many. Perhaps, if Katse lives another day she will start her own underground railroad?

Ultimately, the villains in *Chilahaebolae* are custodians of the chain, a pathology that must be removed. When Phokobje sees the chain for the first time it is holding Mpja. Pulling the chain violently, he asks if this is the branch of the Union of Domestic Animals that Mpja has been singing praise to. By linking the chain with the branch Phokobje is already seeing

through the horrors of the system that feeds Mpja. Phokobje reckons that refusing to join the branch and rejecting the chain are the same action.

Ultimately, Phokobje and Phiri join the communities of resistance in the story wanting to obliterate the world of the chain. The protagonists' journeys, therefore, represent a process of losing the chain and, by implication, completing the ritual of *mogaga*.

The Agonist(s)

The Agonist is a blues character. The journeys of Agonist types like Mpja, Mgodoyi and Bova can only evoke pity. Agonists are usually pathetic characters who lack even the capacity to be villains. If they have any agency, it ends with begging for deliverance. The element of self-reliance does note reach them. Mpja typicalises those who put the belly first. The life of chasing food in Nageng overwhelms him. When hunger and thirst get fiercer he disappears from Nageng into Motho's world in *Chilahaebolae*. He soon gets a "gig" guarding Motho's house. Increasingly, Mpja sings praises to the world of chains. The raggamufin life of Nageng is now behind him. He feels elevated in a place where claws and teeth are weapons of yesterday. He no longer has to steal chickens or chase lizards for food because Motho, his master, provides.



Figure 10. Mpja, illustration by Themba Mkhoma.

The symbol of the dog as a slave and tool for oppression came to light on Wednesday 16 August 2023, when the cast and technical team played a soccer game on the lawn next to the William Cullen Library as part of our physical training and team building exercise. A troop of campus security personnel stormed onto the pitch, disrupting a fantastic game. In the conversation that ensued we were told that they were following orders from above. I stopped pressing for extra time after their spokesperson said: *Nna ke mpja. Ha ba re ssa, ke a ya*!" [I am a dog. when I am ordered to attack, I attack]. For me and the cast, the confession provided a deeper understanding of the character we were exploring on the rehearsal floor. It made sense, when back in the rehearsal room, to improvise the line into the world of *Chilahaebolae*.

Mpja is boastful about his job: “Barking is not an easy gig chief!” When Phokobje finds him, Mpja is sampling a combo whose ingredients he recites happily: “Husky, tender lamb flavour and Bob Martin steak flavour spliced with coconut chips.” Although he now drinks cranberry-flavoured water, Mpja dreams of rising from a Dogmore-eating mongrel in a suburban backyard and graduating into a cheeze-munching and whisky-drinking connoisseur in the zoo. Ultimately, Mpja’s glory is synthetic. His appetite for the world of chains ends up consuming him. Motho cashes in on his life. Van Slaghuizen the Butcher takes the meat to the kitchen of the Carnivore Restaurant and Mafeshini, the fashion designer, takes his leather to be treated for the First Lady’s garment.

Unlike Mpja, the gig of barking has eluded Mgodoyi and Bova. They live a parasitic lifestyle, turning over the rubbish bins of Chilahaebolae for food, *aboMalunde* [wild dogs]. Bova remembers tasting cheese once and he is preoccupied with finding another opportunity to eat cheese. Mgodoyi has lost his spiritual compass, and he is also ready to feast on the flesh of his kind. Mgodoyi and his gang of stray dogs are no match for Phokobje’s fast talk. He dribbles them towards their end.

Playgoers sang along when Phokobje celebrated their demise in song. I could have asked why? Were they simply going with the groove or was it a matter of good riddance to parasitic types like Mgodoyi, who feast on the flesh of their own kind?

The Antagonists

Chilahaebolae borrows notes from a realm that is familiar to us, a world ruled by villains. The Antagonists in this society hold the levers of power. They use their power to exploit society’s underlings, while they feed on the fat of the land. They practice the culture of *Bokgoa*, a pathological condition which comes from the word *kgoa*, a name for a bully or a tormentor, in my mother tongue. With the shifts of history, the name *Lekgoa* came to symbolise the general character of the colonial master. In *Chilahaebolae* Lekgoa is the inventor of chains, dog collars and dog houses. He is the unseen hand behind Motho’s

power. Although, to Mpja and other lowly creatures, Motho styles himself as the master, it is Lekgoa who invents the gadgets of incarceration. We feel his presence throughout the story through the rattling of chains, the dog collar, the *sjambok*, the electric fence and such instruments of capture. When Motho finally captures Phokobje, clamping the dog collar around his neck, the force of Lekgoa is felt. Ultimately, Lekgoa reveals himself, promoting new technologies of capture from K9 Solutions:

> Chaining your dog is a thing of yesteryear. The lure method is more effective than using special tools like choking, prongs and electric collar. Yes, sir.
> Through voice commands we put the leash within!

"The leash within" is symbolic of the neocolonial condition that follows other changing phases/faces of exploitation: slavery, colonialism/apartheid. Whereas the past was the era of "choking, prongs and electric collar", the present is a time of the "lure method". While Lekgoa is boasting about the most recent invention, "the voice command" or chain that cannot be seen, it becomes apparent that he is only the salesman for K9 Solutions. His power is borrowed. Behind his show of power there are characters whose faces we will not see. They are larger than life personalities like Lord Ching Ching of Chatham who has become a figure of folk mythology in Chilahaebolae. Remote-controlling things from Oorkant (overseas), Lord Ching Ching has wonders that have earned him colourful praise names from Lekgoa: "The father of Dog Training; The Oracle of Super Pup Comportment Specialists; The Aristotle of Mgodoyism (stray dog that scavenges). The last scene also reveals the layers of power that hold the structures of exploitation in Chilahaebolae.

Motho, the wielder of chains, is under the spell of Lekgoa; and Lekgoa is a servant of Lord Ching Ching. Lord Ching Ching's grip on power is assisted by a system of hierarchies and patronage. Notably, characters like Van Slaghuisen the Butcher, Mafeshini the Fashion Designer, Maslamos the Circus Master and Mzoolisto, the Zookeeper, who all come to buy Phokobje at the auction block, present different faces of Lord Ching Ching's system of capture, exploitation, discrimination, self-interest and bigotry. There is drought

everywhere, but in Chilahaebolae those who comply with the system get fresh water supplies, including flavoured water. Hunger stalks Nageng, but the domestics of Chilahaebolae eat their Dogmore with coconut chips. Even the low-ranking creatures like Mpja have been attuned to the ways of the system. As Mpja will have it, in Chilahabolae, if you want to eat, it is best to join the local branch of domestic animals.



Figure 11. Chilahaebolae *rehearsal in progress – warming up.*

Lefoko: The Composer's Process

Lefoko is the difference between words and the word. Lefoko is the word. Lefoko is the spirit of creation. The music I make takes shape from words. Words are only the vehicle.

What I am searching for is the word. When composing I treat words as curves of musical sounds. The words must also contain the pictures I want to bring forward. In the process of fiddling with lines to find the balance between sound and sight, I recite the lyrics, listening to the sonic relationship between words. I trust that speech is always musical depending on how you listen. Our utterances have rhythmic and melodic soundscapes. I listen for natural melodies which come with the shapes of words. Then I collect some of these scatterings of melodies to create songs, chants and incantations. Ultimately, I formulated two conflictual categories of song in line with the structure of *mogaga* dramaturgy: Songs of the Rulers and Songs of the Unruly clash against each other. Songs of the Rulers celebrate the chains. Songs of the Unruly precipitate the fall of the chains. (*Chilahaebolae* Director's Note, 2020)

Music and movement are central elements in the making of *mogaga* dramaturgy. Rituals of resistance are energised by rhythm and gesture. In the process of building *Chilahaebolae* I took the task of composing music for the play. I also solicited the expertise of Sibusiso Mkhize, who started as a cast member and ultimately grew into the role of Music Director. Mkhize is an accomplished piano player and a vocalist with a sharp sense of song arrangement. When a melody passes through me, I call Mkhize into the flow and we sing together, exploring its musicality and discussing its placement in the play. We then plant the tune into the rehearsal room, guiding the cast to take their parts. Players are free to flex their vocal muscles and stretch the boundaries of melody without losing their part in the song. This is a process that Henry Martin and Keith Waters in *Jazz: The First 100 Years* have named "A Head Arrangement System" (2002:9). A system of playing by ear is foundational to Afrocentric cultures. Most of song in *Chilahaebolae* are our original compositions and sometimes we bring in old tunes for refurbishment. I have seen how new phrases bend and refresh melodies.

Essentially, music-making is an integral part of my process of making play. Where a scene needs a song, my spirit is always willing. Some of the music is born in the rehearsal room by reading the movement of players and such. There are no musical scores, just total immersion, and exploration. The music is in the word and in the body. The characters don't

just walk, walking is choreography. Music is always present in their steps and gestures. Scene changes are also touched with a musical bend. I often assign characters their own sound signatures. A sound can also lead ventures into the interiority of characters. I am taking full advantage of the technologies of ritual drama where "players" do not speak their lines, they chant and sing them (Mutwa, 1974:31). The aim is to formulate a musical experience that goes beyond singing and playing instruments.

The Songs of the Rulers

State power has its own rituals. The drama of singing national anthems is a good example of the ways in which state power is ritualised. The outbursts of song and fanfare are often accompanied by ceremonies of flag-raising, presidential parades, military drills, gun salutes and such, by which state power seeks to performs its magnificence. Popular culture is also a terrain of state power play. Songs that are seemingly apolitical may be marshalled to ritualise state power. A recent example is the hymn-like *Thuma Mina* [send me], recreated by Hugh Maselekela for social commentary but now repositioned to oil the wheels of the ruling party's electoral machine. Luminous figures like recording artists Vusi Mahlasela and Thandiswa Mazwai have been roped in to reinterpret *Thuma Mina*, blowing up its appeal as the presidential soundtrack. The video accompanying the song was launched on national broadcasting stations, staging the lyrics that the ruler has cannibalised by making them a part of his acceptance speech in parliament. The song soon became the presidential soundtrack and slogan for ruling party programmes and election campaigns. A scene in which popular artists perform the ruler's "personal anthem" is charged with great drama. Scenes of this nature inspire my approach to thinking about Songs of the Rulers.

In *Chilahaebolae* Motho has a personal anthem he sings when first we meet him: "Prepare Ye the Way of the Master!" It's a call-and-response exchange with his minions, who back him up, singing: "Long Live Master". Through this song, Motho stages his own power. We see him training Mpja to accept his regime of treats and torture. The treats massage the spirit through the stomach and the torture torments the soul by injuring the body. The dog

collar, the chain and the sjambok form part of the arsenal of Motho's instruments of torture by which Mpja's soul is spirit is tamed. The Dogmore, the cranberry-flavoured water, the coconut chips, the jacket, and the shoes are the treats with which Mpja's spirit is adjusted. This is the way of the master to which Mpja responds by barking and guarding the master and his house. Through this song, Motho styles himself as the Master. Like *Thuma Mina*, the melody borrows from a church hymn, suggesting a spirit of compliance to rules from above.

Mpja advertises his new life in Chilahaebolae with a praise song, *Zoolicious.* The rhythm is mid-tempo. The sing-along melody is modelled from a favourite song we used to sing in the bus during high school trips. While parts of the lyrics remain, I edited and rearranged the lines for the world of my play. In *Chilahaebolae* the ditty is popularised by the animals of the Zoo when they model for human visitors. Singing with absolute glee, Mpja appears to believe in the picture of paradise that unfurls through the lyrics:

Zoolicious! Zoolicious!

We live it up!! We live it up, we do.

So, give us some cheese-nyana!

If the oceans were whisky And I was a duck.

I'd swim to the bottom and never come up.

But the oceans aren't whisky.

And I am not a duck.

So come to the zoo let's have a good time.

Through a trusted companion, Mpja's step-and-fetchism sets in. Mpja betrays the vision of freedom for plates of food. Although Phokobje has a stubborn streak, the song is so popular it becomes contagious. Phokobje is also affected. In his moment of weakness, when he thinks that no one is looking, the song springs to his lips, transporting him into the

fantasy world it is painting. However, Phiri, who escaped from the zoo, dismisses the song completely, calling it a zombie song. Phiri knows that the concrete reality of the zoo is inversely proportional to the bubble of paradise the song creates: "Mpja is a liar, the zoo is *twak*. You must see how they walk. They sing a strange zombie song every morning and night, conducted by the zookeeper." Twak is a word used loosely to describe a horrible condition. Phiri's revelation that the song is "conducted by the zookeeper" indicates that the song, like *Thuma Mina*, is fashioned by the system. Notably, Phiri shies away from the song because it is an instrument of control – a sound which "zombifies".

"Hallelujah the Union", based on a church melody, is a song by cadres of the Union of Domestic Animals. Mpja sings this song when recruiting Phokobje to join the branch of the Union of Domestic Animals. He introduces the song with a short recital about the joys of joining the branch: "From the branch you get Union T-shirt, Union Kanga, Union card. And if you wear the right colours *i-tender ivuthiwe*!" (the deal/tender is ripe).

Seek ye first the kingdom of the union.

And its branches-e

Ask what you wish it shall be added unto you cadre.

Ha hallelujah the union.

Mpja has figured out that joining the branch is "the easiest way to get food" in Chilahaebolae. What Mpja does not know yet is that he is also a part of the food. Phokobje warns Mpja not to get too excited about Motho. Mpja, however, has no vision beyond the plate of food that Motho places before him. Although Mpja denies it, the truth of his fate is soon highlighted in a musicalized dialogue with Motho:

MPJA: *(Retreating*) Master! Master! Why are you tying me?

MOTHO: Come on Blackie! Being tied up is part of your gig.

This brief passage of the song in the play, with a duet-like-structure between master and slave, unfurls as Motho, out of suspicion, takes away the freedom he granted to Mpja of running freely inside a yard contained by an electric fence. The action of tying up Mpja while singing the song emphasises the world of the chain.

The songs of the rulers are two-pronged. They promise delights while they are designed to blight your lights. This point is emphasised when Phokobje refuses to join in singing the song of the master. Motho does not tolerate Phokobje's discordant grumbles. A creature that refuses propaganda is a danger to his system of control. He must be removed. Motho sentences Phokobje to the auction block, where Mpja is forced to lead the song that sends his old friend away:

Jackal for Sale.

He is going cheap.

For only five *stena* (*iscamto* for five thousand rand)

By forcing Mpja to partake in the sale of Phokobje, Motho is teaching Mpja to drink the blood of his own kind. Notably, Motho casts Mpja into the role of a sellout. The song begins with a slow tempo, marking Mpja's reluctance. The rhythm goes up-tempo as Motho pushes and threatens. Mpja sings and jives enthusiastically, Motho talks over the music, calling the buyers to the site of the auction block. The rhythm underscores the scene, dictating the pace of the dialogue as the sale of Phokobje commences. He has been feigning drowsiness, waiting for Motho to unbuckle the dog collar. The sale goes wrong when Motho does loosen the dog collar and Phokobje escapes. The tempo of the music is broken as everyone gives chase. The rhythm of the sale song breaks apart when Mpja bites off Phokobje's tail. The song ends abruptly when Phokobje steals away through a hole under the electric fence.

The songs of the rulers are essentially the many voices of the same grand master in various guises. While spreading the "gospel of Lord Ching Ching", Lekgoa's praise song to Lord Ching Ching ultimately reveals the system's mechanics:

> Thee Lord Ching-Ching-Ching Sir! The father of Dog Training Sir! (*Super animated*) The Oracle of Super Pup Comportment Specialists Sir. The Aristotle of Mgodoyism.

Songs of the Unruly

The Songs of the Unruly have a temperament of ritual. They are unruly because they intend to disrupt the spirit of fear that rules. They are ritualistic because they call for the purging of tyranny. In the opening song, Tuka celebrates freedom from tyranny. The song offers an expository journey into the world of the story. The chorus line, "Fede tuka ko nageng, di saambenche nageng", celebrates the trio's friendship: Phokobje, Phiri and Mpja. In a duet-like song structure, Phiri and Mpja swap memories, providing a sense of nostalgia about life in Nageng, before Motho and Lekgoa's abrasive intrusion. Feigning toughness, Mpja boasts about how they used to have stones for pillows:

> **MPJA:** Fede tuka ko nageng. Go ne go sa re robalwe mo beteng.
>
> **PHIRI**: Vele re ne re teng. Rona bo Phiri diganana re le teng.
>
> **MPJA:** Re sama mafika rona mpja tsa teng. Le botse le Phiri na le teng.
>
> [**MPJA:** Back then in the wilderness. We did not sleep on beds.
>
> **PHIRI**: True we were there. We the unruly hyenas were there.
>
> **MPJA:** We made stones our pillows we wild dogs. Ask Phiri she was there.]

The tune is up-tempo, which also works as an invitation into the story. While they sing and dance the players invite the playgoer to clap to the rhythms and sing along. It is an original melody given by the arrangement of words and lines. Throughout there is a rhyming

sound, “eng”, which recycles continually. I was looking to create a chant for Dilo tsa Naga – creatures of the wild. Ending all lines with the sound “eng” creates a cyclic rhythm structure, “eng” being the point around which the cycle of sound ends and begins. My experiments disagree with Dhlomo’s approach to the construction of lyrics. Dhlomo displays misgivings with rhyme, while I use it to channel the sound:

> The question of rhyme is exercising the minds of those interested in the development of Bantu poetry. Rhyme can be an exacting taskmaster and a cold tyrant. Preoccupation with technique and rhyme may make for art that is self-conscious. This is true especially of rhymes in African languages, where words end almost invariably with a vowel, and where stress and accent play an important part in meaning. Here, rhyme may obscure meaning, stem the flow of thought, and lead to artificiality and superficiality (Dhlomo, 1977:13).

While Dhlomo’s points seem valid I must defy their logic. For me, the repetition of the “eng” sound in Tuka serves to create a mantra-like stylisation through which meaning is voluble. The repetition creates a musical circle. The chant derives its melody directly from the arrangement of words. I am experimenting with a system where rhymes can also assist the flow and the creation of meaning. Meaning can be perceived from the “eng” sound. As the sounds repeats, it implies a question – “Eng?” (“What?”in English). The chant carried by Dilo tsa Naga who form a ritual circle around Mpa and Phiri. Mpja and Phiri take turns to break out of the chorus line into a lead melody. Symbolically, they take moments of freedom outside the monotony of the mantra. Their potential to rebel is marked sonically although their actions remain within the circle. As the stage direction suggests, the singing is conversational and is carried through interpretative dance moves.

Phokobje’s entry and recital interrupt the regularity of the rhythm, and by extension he disrupts Mpja and Phiri’s bubbles of power. Their voices dissolve into the chorus when Phokobje recites over the music, taking over the story. The chorus creates a soft humming sound while Phokobje increases the volume of his recital.

His recital, like the chorus line, still works circles around the "eng" sound, although the length of the lines is irregular. The irregularity of lines collapses the strict tempo while the "eng" sound keeps the circular movement going. The circle of sound remains but the shape is distorted. This arrangement of sound signals Phokobje's temperamental persona. His rebellious character is marked through his free-flowing lines. He is not fettered by the tempo of the chorus, he flows with the truth of his spirit:

Ha diphologolo le ditlhare di bua matlapa a tobetsega ke ne ke le teng

Go belegwa dilo tsa naga rona bo phokobje re le teng

Senonnori le ketlele e le scheme se bofile go tabalatsiwa mo nageng

Mmutle le lekanyane ba tshela molapo ba pagame tlou mokwatleng

Peba le katse ba botsana maphelo phiri a suna phage mo phathleng

O le kae wena go thuntsa lerole re thula-thulana le bo dimo dikgageng

Diganka bo kgodumodumo ba thubega dimpa dithoteng

Tengnyanateng dinokeng 'thlapi di thlabeletsa digwagwa diopela ka kodu a boteng

Selo sa go gana go palangwa pitse ya naga se katakata dithabaneng

Dikoko ha di fologa rona bo phokobje re tshwere di-cypher le dibatana tsa mawatleng

[When animals and trees could speak and stones were soft we were there When creatures of the wild were born we jackals were there bear and cattle best friends hustling in wilderness hare and wild-dog crossing the river riding elephant's back rat and cat hugging hyena kissing wildcat on the forehead

Where were you when the dust rose we wrestled ogres in the caves

Giant creature kgodumodumo's stomach bursting at the mountaintop

Deep in the rivers fish bursting in song and frogs sing along in deep voices.

Creature who refuses to be riden wild horse galloping up the hills

Cocks crowing and we jackals hold cyphers with creatures of the sea].

Much has been lost in this loose translation yet the meaning is sufficiently transferred. Thematically Phokobje and company challenge our anthropocentric views of the world. By speaking from the point of view of the animals and trees, they confront the way we tend to privilege human beings or Motho and Lekgoa, over other species in creation. Chilahaebolae is built on the plunder of Nageng. Motho is destroying Nageng as Phokobje discovers later:

> Forest trees are dying. Fishes are dead no life in the rivers. Motho rules Nageng with gunpowder. Rhinos are dying for their horns. Ko nageng we die for our flesh and our skin. I lost my tail because of a world created by Motho. I must get my tail back and be strong again.

Here, Phokobje decries Motho's malevolent destruction of the natural environment. In the opening song, Phokobje speaks with the voice of presentment. In fact, he is conjuring a rebellion. In celebrating the wild horse which refuses to be mounted, he makes his dislike of domination known. In his claim to holding ciphers with creatures of the seas, he advocates for his mystical complexity.

When the action commences, the trio are on a hunt for food. Before they raid Leburu's farm, they must plan. Piki-Piki, conducted by Phiri, is the mantra they use to decide who will jump over the fence. While instructing the cowards to stay behind, the mantra dares the one who has courage to step forward. The mantra demands a spirit of no retreat, "nix machecha sies tog".

"Ha Ba Shwe" is Phokobje's song of victory over his enemies. The music takes a kwaitolike structure where Phokobje is boastful about conquering the likes of Mgodoyi and Bova, the stray dogs who interrupt his journey by trying to eat him. Phiri does not identify with this song. She refuses to sing along. This is a selfish song, of victims against victims.

She repremands Phokobje for his lack of vision. Refusing to be associated with Phokobje's limited victory, Phiri tells Phokobje the story of Mokgankgara, who defeats a great enemy. Through Phiri's story Phokobje begins to realise that until he rebels like Mokgankgara, Motho will continue to exploit the entire territory. Phiri teaches Mpja a new song, "Haueng", about going forward to smash Motho's skull. The song is a rallying call for Dilo tsa Naga to step forward and destroy the rule of the enemy. Through the song, Phiri and Phokobje begin to dream together. They invoke a vision which gathers Dilo tsa Naga for the final confrontation.

"Mpja Tsa Bona" (their guard dogs) is a song that recognises the enemy within. The song decries the likes of Mpja, who barks on behalf of the enemy. It is a song about supressing the lower self, as symbolised in how Mpja cultivates his own debasement because of his selfish streak. In the end, Phokobje and Phiri build an army of Dilo tsa Naga and obliterate the world of the chain. The closing chant, *A di ba je* emphasises the purging of botheration:

Dilo tsa Naga di a thlasela.

PHIRI:(*chant*) A di ba je.

CHORUS*:* Di ba lome.

PHOKOBJE: Di ba wele ka meno di ba je.

CHORUS: Di ba lome,

PHOKOBJE: Di tlhafune di phupure di ba je.

CHORUS: Di ba lome.

PHOKOBJE: Di tlhasele di ba kokone di ba je**.**

CHORUS: Di ba lome.

PHOKOBJE: Di ba phyatle ditlhogo re ba je.

PHOKOBJE: Dilo tsa naga di ba pokele di ba je.

CHORUS: Di ba lome.

This is the soundtrack of purgation. When Phokobje and Phiri build an army from Nageng which obliterates Motho and Lekgoa they lead with song and incantation. Now Phokobje and Phiri see the total picture. While surrounding Motho's yard with Dilo tsa Naga they see that Lekgoa is the force behind Motho's power. Motho's anthropocentric operations, which turned Mpja into a parasitic creature, are designed by Lekgoa. Lekgoa informs Motho's destructive appetite. When Dilo tsa Naga overwhelm Motho and Lekgoa with their song, they disrupt order. In this final confrontation Dilo tsa Naga eat up the enemy. To this effect, the play anticipates the erasure of neocolonial horrors.

Ngũgĩ 's words encapsulate the spirit of Dilo tsa Naga:

> part of the song the people sing as once again they take up arms to smash the neo-colonial state to complete the anti-imperialist national democratic revolution they had started in the fifties, and even earlier (Ngũgĩ, 1993: np).

Malopo: The Playmaker's Process

Malopo is a theatre of self-possession where characters in a piece are parts of the voice of the storyteller. The conflicts that play out present an interrogative dialogue with self. It is a spiritual act to split a voice and share it among players. A way to open up the players, body and spirit. It is spiritual technique that is consistent with pumping life back into an empty shell: "we want to attain the envisioned self which is free" (Biko, 1977:49). The piece we create is the vehicle. Malopo is about the player not the piece. It is about the players' vibrations. Inside malopo, picking up a character is about spirit embodiment. The player trances into "a state of in between", transforming vocally and physically (Davhula, 2015:30). The players are willing to "die" for the character to live and play fully. We sing and dance to a frenzy, releasing the bodies to the spirits of play.

A statement made by Enoch King carries the DNA of *malopo/malombo*. King, speaking about the Hendricks Method, says: "most directors are about the piece. Fredie is about the

person" (Luckett & Shaffer, 2017:20). This is what malopo is about. I found it appropriate to adopt this line. A theatre about the person is a revolutionary idea. This is what the People's Experimental Theatre was doing. Not a piece about show business but a theatre about the person. In fact, when Luckett and Shaffer published *Black Acting Methods* in 2017 the book became a great companion. The Hendrick Method – particularly how he carried spirituality in the theatre – and the principle of the HyperEgo equate to the idea of pumping life into an empty shell. This is what Black Consciousness wanted to do. This method involves eliminating fear and defying gravity. Luckett & Shaffer explain: "Hyper-Egos are larger than regular egos. A Hyperegotistical performer feels like she can learn to accomplish anything" (2017:30).

As it will appear "[s]pirituality is the nucleus of the Hendricks Method" (Luckett & Shaffer 2017:27). Like Biko, Hendricks understood that "spiritual poverty" (Biko, 1987:28) is the root of "self-negation"(Biko, 1987:101). Just like the Biko formulation, Spiritism and political activism are not antithetical in the Henricks Method. Hendricks encouraged plays that are "Grounded in spirituality, evoke civil responsibility, activism and politics" (Luckett & Shaffer, 2017:27). As students of the Hendricks Method, Luckett and Shaffer agree that "One with a spiritual/Afrocentric grounding is likely to choose spiritual theatrical endeavours that empower and uplift the community" (Luckett & Shaffer, 2017:27).

The Hendricks Method and the methods of malopo are the same method. I weaponised this book in my rehearsals. I had many spiritual weapons from which I drew plans for rehearsal and most, like Hendricks', are about the player, not the piece. The kind of player that the mogaga system desires to create cannot be an empty shell. The idea of theatre of the person appeals to me. *Malopo* has always been theatre for the person. *Mogaga* play-making must make pieces about a person. Dhlomo and De Graft too were about theatre for the person:

> "author" "producer" and performer" at one and the same time. He expressed himself, his soul, mind and feeling to the spectators. And was not a mere "directed," connected link between playwright and playgoer … The best actors

> expressed their soul and individuality without violating the spirit or misinterpreting the message that is being acted (Dlhomo, 1977: 4-5).

Dhlomo's statement implores us to trust the player. Like Dhlomo, De Graft indicates that the stage managers and directors are not as pivotal in the making of play. The player and the persona, both anchored to the story's voice, can find each other. De Graft goes further to suggest that the priests of modern theatre are the performers:

> the impersonators – the actors in whose power it principally lies to communicate the will, the potency of the goddess to her worshippers, thereby inducing in them that state of deep emotional and intellectual involvement through which alone the theatre can assist the willing spirits that come to it to achieve new strength, calm, and sanity (De Graft, 2002:34).

Yes, the players run with the license to explore their characters and the world of the story.

After the allocation of parts, the players take their characters for a swing, experimenting with vocal and physical choices. Given the intimate connection between player and persona, the playmaker learns not to interfere with this exploration of players unless they depart from the voice of the story, which is the anchor of play. Before the scene work begins, the players work almost independently to find their characters. It is important not to interfere with this search, particularly at the beginning. Whatever players bring, I answer questions while they experiment solo, in pairs and in small groups. They can put their character in any situation to see how they react.

It is crucial to start a rehearsal process by unblocking the pathways between the world of the players and the world of the play. Instructions tend to block the experiments while questions open possibilities. Because the characters who emerge find shape in the intersection between player and persona, the relationship must be handled with delicacy. The traffic of information that comes from the crossover between the player and the

persona in the play is richer when both are given full expression. When observing this approach to play-making, the players become generous with their gifts. The rehearsal process is enriched when players are interpretative, not robotic.

Casting



Figure 12. Cast of Chilahaebolae, *rehearsal at Funda Centre, June 2021*.

Through the years of making the play, *Chilahaebolae* has been a home for many talented players and their offers were fantastic. The first pool came from the Theatre and Performance students at Wits. Through the years, alumni, Market Theatre laboratory students and students of the University of Life have played. At the Funda Centre the auditions drew players mostly from Soweto although I had retained the players who were central. Abongile Matjutju and Sibusiso Mkhize have played in all the productions since its inception. Sinenhlanhla Zwane has also driven the technical aspects from inception. This

trio form part of a troupe that is preparing for a tour of the play which began at the end of September 2023 with the street performance in Braamfontein.

Through auditions you meet players who already carry the ingredients of the characters who appear in your vision. Each player who has been through our rehearsal rooms has taught me something about the characters they played. To guide my player selection for *Chilahaebolae* I penned the following note:

Building on a trinity of song, incantation and physical storytelling, the play is conceived as *mogaga* or anticipatory dance drama. Various skills, from vocal agility, acrobatic dexterity to physical elasticity, are required of players who must morph into different animals and features of the landscape.

Making it into the team means bringing one's acrobatic dexterity and physical elasticity because the players are required to morph into different animals and features of the landscape. But first, the spirit of the player must be elastic. Callback is like carnival where the players, with the guidance of the music director and choreographer, will sing and dance while we note their spiritual flexibility. During the callback process we test their appetite for play with children's games. Song is central and therefore vocal agility is also an essential ingredient. *Chalahaebolae* is for players whose forte is song and dance.



Figure 13. Chilahaebolae *rehearsal at Funda Centre, 15 June 15, 2021. Mpja (Sibusiso Mkhize) sleeping in his doghouse. The other players embody the doghouse.*

Groundings with players

Groundings are not only a moment to dish out the parts, they are also an opportunity to examine the incidents through which the play proceeds. At this stage it is necessary to make the players understand deeply the politics that drive the author's pen. Groundings present an invitation to players to discuss the contextual relevance of the story they are carrying. The playmaker, in dialogue with the players, explores the material of the play in order to learn details about the world the characters inhabit. What do their characters want? What motivates their actions, their utterances and unspoken thoughts?

Each player reads their part. These parts include Mpja's shortsightedness and self-defacing belly politics as well as Motho and Lekgoa's blood-drinking spirit. My process is slow because players must understand the granular details of the world they will interpret. They

must grasp the essence of the story they will be telling. We read and stop to field questions as they arise until we get to the soul of the play.

Players will also experiment with vocal choices for their characters. We sing all the songs as they appear in the story. We discuss the lyrics and the music and how they paint scenes or carry us into the interior worlds of characters. Beyond knowing their parts, players must understand the substance of the material we are handling. They must see all the characters they will be playing as representing conflicting parts of themselves.

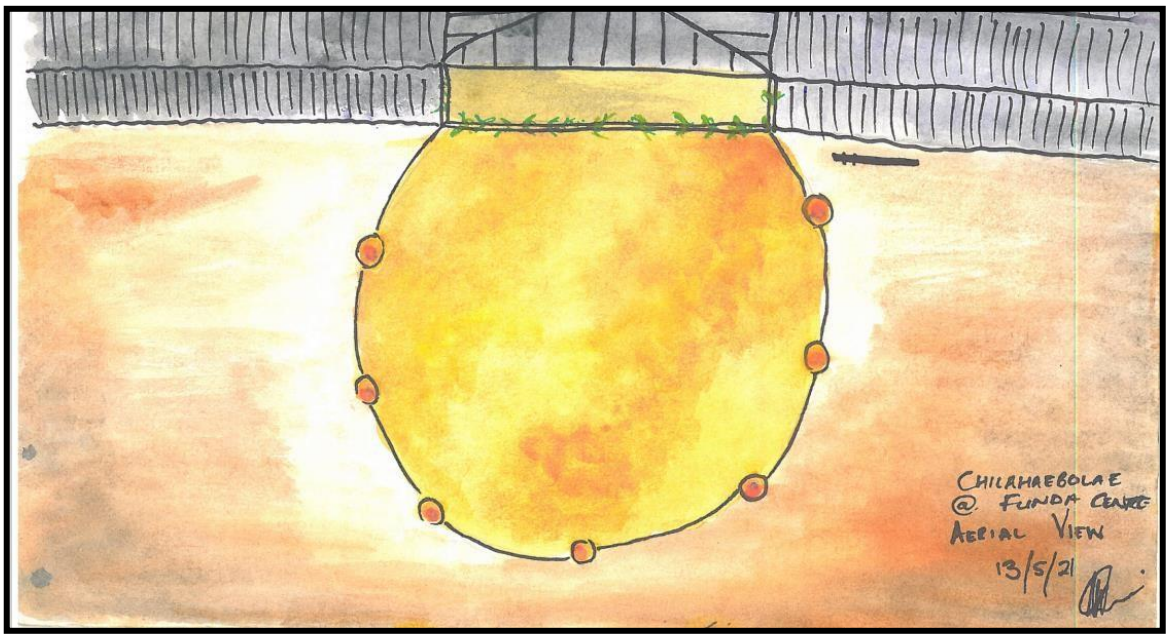


Figure 14. Chilahaebolae *stage design illustration by Sinenhlanhla Zwane.*

Bula Sekele: Fields of play

Bula sekele! Or “make the circle bigger”. This dance floor mantra speaks to the need to create space for another body. It reflects longstanding Afrocentric cosmologies that emphasise inclusivity and an “epistemology of collectivism” (Ajumeze, 2014:77) that includes fluctuation and ceaseless movement. The hunger to make the circle bigger

encodes the *malombo* idea that everyone who is willing gets an opportunity to express themselves robustly at the centre of the circle – the embodied circle of *malopo* ritual dramas lit by the moon; the embodied circle of toyi-toyi drama drawing fire from songs of rebellion and the jiving circle at a night club under fluorescent lights are homological – they are born from the same ethos of expelling botheration, although they may flow in different directions. The circle of revellers jiving on the dance floor, albeit under synthetic light, and the circle of ritual showered by natural light and the toyi-toyi circles arguably reflect each other.

Whether its *malopo* ritual or amapiano jive, a hip-hop cypher or *legaga la mafoko* (a cave of words), there is always an embodied circle which permits a search into the frontiers of interior worlds. In the circle the distance between improvisation and the drama of spiritual redemption is invisible. That's the ethos of *bula sekele* – this yearning for freedom.

Arising from the process of exploring the tools of *mogaga* play-making, we staged *Chilahaebolae* on a circular playing area at the Funda Centre. Sinenhlanhla Zwane, the Stage Designer and Manager shared her sketches. Let's observe the aerial drawing (figure 13). The spots dotting the oval shape symbolise the braziers. The main playing area is inside the oval shape. The circle has a long history in African theatre-making. It is a heritage from ritual drama. De Graft presented diagrams of a concentric circle when he published his play, *Muntu*, in 1977. The circle expresses the vital meaning of the play. So vital, he conceived the circle before he completed the script. It is the symbol of Muntu, the central character in the story. Muntu's story begins in prehistory. He is the product of a dream planted by Odomankoma inside Nyambe's head. When Nyambe created Muntu, it was the power of Odomankoma who created The Substance of Things. De Graft's concentric circle "became a visual point of focus for a whole range of ideas … the central centre is the heart of creation" (1977: np). De Graft says that through the circle he wanted to "represent the mystery of creation" (1977:np).

Mutwa's illustration of the playing circle (figure 3) reflects this heritage from ritual drama. Basing his model of research in Central and southern Africa, Mutwa allocates compartments, naming them: Ithala – a raised mud platform where the story opens; The Storyteller's Residence; The Storyteller's Hut; The Shrine; *iShashalaza* – the main place for acting and dancing; and *iShashalazana* – "where the story ends". Mutwa explains that he made this illustration to show how a typical African play was staged and the shape of the place in which it was staged (1974:32).

The embodied circle was the heartbeat of the Teer-Technologies of Souls. When Luckett and Shaffer say, "the circle, which is a fortress in African thought, is a symbol of unity, including centering and completion" (2017:28), they will have seen how the circle persists in our gatherings:

> The circle is the space where participants shared ideas while collaborating, rehearsing and creating. As an example, there was a "vibe" circle in which YEA stood together in solidarity lending their unique sounds and rhythms into the bowl of sonic soup. In this sense, the circle is synonymous with a pot …
> Members provided the ingredients … a concept of inclusiveness (2017:28).

As Davhula reveals, the circle is a place for "liminal dancing", for getting into the "stage of in between" (2015:3-20). Through circles of ritual, we "invite the ancestral spirits" (Davhula, 2015:3-26). Marimba Ani's idea of sacred time. in her treatise, *Let the Circle be Unbroken,* Ani expresses the notion of the undying sage of the mysteries: "in ritual drama we die and are reborn" (Ani, 1980). She sees the circle of ritual as a place for renewal. For *iZangoma, Dingaka, Vho-Maine* ritual the circle is a place to "work out your own salvation" while the rhythm propels (James, 1954:75). For James the circle begins with the passion plays of Kemet. While Diop may trace the roots of the circle to the Omo Valley, Mutwa finds them in Kgalagadi.

To me, the circle has the blood of resistance theatre. That is why, unlike Mutwa, we eliminated compartments in *Chilahaebolae*. There is no residence and hut for the storyteller. We perish the raised platform and the shrine. The entire playing field, including the audience area is a spirit area. There is constant fluctuation as the play paints the landscape with their bodies. My search is for a form that eschews compartmentalisation. My approach conveys a cycle of confusion; a feeling of running around in circles; "a mad dog chasing its own tail" (Mutwa, 1996:11). Mpja's journey illustrates these spirals of confusion even more. When Motho buys another dog, a new circle of exploitation begins. When Phokobje gets his tail back he completes a circle.

Spirit Embodiment

"Shake your body and the mind will follow," Bheki Peterson[29] used to quip, paraphrasing funk musician George Clinton. I see now how this line explains my beginnings.

Breakdancing as a kid in the 1980s, I had no clue about the extent to which this form drew on traditions anchored in Africa's precolonial history. When we were basking in the streets and malls of Mahikeng, hip-hop culture for us was a matter of shaking the body and collecting the coins. Sometimes the dances felt like war dances – and as gesture you get that dancing as fighting. It was only when I heard Gary Byrd and Stevie Wonder's *We Wear The Crown* that I began to understand that breaking of the strictures of the body is a political act. Later I came to know that those acrobatic feats, the headspinning, windmilling, that "combination of nommo and braggadocio, is about contesting public space (Jackson, 1994:4).

I often share this information with choreographers to indicate the resources from which *Chilahaebolae* drew inspiration. I also bring up Dhlomo's idea that iZangoma are first-class actors. Of late I reference Davhula's ideas that the *tshele* sessions of *malombo* healers constitute "musical theatre". I want my team to see that physical storytelling is not

[29] Peterson was my lecturer in African Literature studies 1994- 1996. The statement was made on a number of occassions during class.

something unfamiliar or foreign. Ritual drama has always put the story in the body. Ajumeze's notion of "spirit embodiment" conveys the idea of taking a spiritual personality. The body transforms and the voice changes. The dance of Lumbo, in Mutwa's short story, "Curse on the Kariba", is a superb example of letting the body tell the story.

> At this stage the four younger women, symbolizing the Spirit of Madness, threw off their clothes and hurled themselves upon the wildly capering Lumbo. They danced round him, they spat on him and pretended to gouge out his eyes and tear his ears from his head. Then the youngest leapt on to his back and fastened her arms around his neck, bringing him down to the ground in a symbolism of final, disgraceful and horrible death – the death of a madman …

Yes, "they pretended". They know that it is a performance. Lumbo and company consciously marry "impersonation and narrative art" (De Graft, 2002:25). Davhula says that healing rituals are forms of musical theatre. It is my observation that sharing pieces of theatrical history is key. When the players know that the tools they are applying are in their DNA, the play takes off sooner. It is important to remove the burden of fetching references from far. When the players know that they own the framework, they become more available to the experiments.

Moeketsi Kgotle and Sinenhlanhla Mgeyi were instrumental when experimenting with these models on the rehearsal floor. Through them I communicated my vision for scenes to the players. It was a dialogic arrangement where all the voices in the room were heard. Improvisation is vital. The point was to emphasise the idea of choice and imagination. Our process was made lighter because Kgotle and Mgeyi's have strong chorographical hands, vibrant minds and a good sense of the world of fables. It was interesting to see how they carried the brief of shaping scenes using only the bodies of players – of creating a world where trees walk, electric fences and poles become alive, speaking and playing their parts. Kgotle choreographed the Soweto Theatre leg and Mgeyi took over mid-process in the

Funda Centre. These were fruitful collaboration. They shaped the final look of this creation.



Figure 15. Chilahaebolae, *Funda Centre, 16 June 2021. Phokobje and the wild dogs.*

Thezi – More Fire

Thezi is the name I give to the approach to the staging of *Chilahaebole*. Bring your wood and we will all make a fire. This is what *thezi* was about when we were playing literally with fire during my childhood years in Meadowlands, Soweto. "*A re dlale thezi*"– let's play thezi. This was the call for us to start a fire during a winter day when the parents were away working or turning on their hustle in the cities. Around the *thezi* we swapped songs and stories, letting loose the *gwaring* and the bubbles of laughter.

The flames that light the scene in figure 14 are a part of the set for *Chilahaebolae*. When we started the *mbaola*, James's revelation crossed my mind. He writes that "the world was produced by fire" (2009:51). Writing in 1954, James had studied the mystery systems of Kemet, which reveal that fire atoms are found in all things animate "especially in the human body" (James, 2009:51). When the soul is agitated the Batswana say "*ke a fisega*" (there is fire in my bosom). Go fisega is an expression which implies that the "human soul is composed of fire atoms"?

Is this perhaps why we danced and sang around a bonfire at the open-air Indigenous Astronomy Festival on 28 July 2022 in Phokeng? What is the import of fire in the making of ritual drama? What about the fire rituals of the San, where the medium walks through fire? Or the dancing shaman with hot embers in the mouth? Slave rebellions trusted the purifying force of fire. How about the poetry nights at the Horror Café in Newtown, Johannesburg when we chanted "More fire!"? I used to be part of a ritual at the Funda Centre called *Mollo wa Ditshomo*, which translates loosely to "the fire of storytelling". There too, a bonfire was lit while we swapped songs and stories.

Tumelo Mokopakgosi in and Thebe Motlhakeng were part of the *Mollo wa Ditshomo* scene and are still part of the Funda Centre community of artists who are holding the ground. Motlhakeng (percussionist) and Mokopakgosi are resident artists at the Funda Centre. During the week of the performance, they would show up carrying axes on the shoulders. It was time to get the firewood. We would go to the back of the building, where there were trees to chop. After making the fire we would leave logs lying around the *mbaola* for the audience. This was mid-winter and the blazing *mbaloa* drew people as they found their place around the playing area. The picture of the audience watching a play in the open reflects the mood Dhlomo captured in words almost a hundred years ago when he said that storytellers:

> took great care therefore to choose a suitable place and time for dramatic representations. For example, if [the] intention was to create awe, mystery and

> wonder among the people, [they] chose surroundings that helped create that intended atmosphere. Awe-inspiring mystery dramatic rituals were staged, not at daytime nor dead of night … but at the "intoxicating," aromatic hours of twilight when everything looks shadowy, ghostly, when nature perfumes herself, when there is a terrifying symphony of "ebbing" daylight melodies and rising nocturnal croons. We have said "aromatic" hours, because the tribal actor appreciated the efficacy and stimulating herbs which, in fact, were part of the "effects". The herbs were used to arouse certain emotions and moods. There were herbs that made people bold or nervous, hilarious, or sad (1977:5).

I doubt if a smoke machine can ever incite such poetic eloquence. Meki Nwezi offers a technical explanation:

> Presentations that take place at night, and watched by spectators, need some form of lighting. Sometimes presentations are given during moonlit nights, and in the open. Those not given under the moonlight required illumination with traditional torches (2005:100).

As playgoers put the logs in the fire during the performance, they collaborate in the making of more fire – this is part of our technique of interactive aesthetics. You reach for a sense of collusion with the audience – an ethos of collectivity ensues. Ajumeze's notion of deconstructing the stage and the auditorium comes into play, creating a "psychological conspiracy between audience and performer" (Ajumeze, 2014:69). In fact, *thezi* is a ritualistic method which, like agit-prop methods, works with the dialectic of "audience as performer". The fire is mightier when we all feed the flames.

The pictures of performance nights show that the playing field is showered with light. When you work in Soweto you turn the hustle on. The Funda Centre community of artists made a plan to get the power. Usanda Soga is an electrician who donated his skills and a streetlamp. This is what Baraka called for – a theatre "that utilizes the resources of the

community (Baraka,1973:33). We also lit the show partly with solar-powered lights. With the full moon and the dancing flames from the *thezi* fire the field of play was lit.

Open Theatres and Enclosed Spaces

Achebe's Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* expresses an attitude: "the world is like a mask dancing, if you want to see it, you stand in one place." The difference between working in indoor spaces and outdoor spaces offers interesting vantage points from which to make theatre. The feeling I get retrospectively when comparing my experiences in different spaces is that in enclosed spaces the containers are tightly defined but the contract gives a sense of safety. Picture an ideal scenario like the Market Theatre or the Soweto Theatre, where props, wardrobe, changing rooms and showers are available. As director you are pampered by the staff. It is a fantastic feeling of having "arrived". Outdoors, there is always a feeling of looking, searching, bending and discovering. It is temperamental but it is a thrilling adventure – you get a sense of a textured and layered working experience. Ultimately, your working experience can either enhance or impinge your creative output. Discussing the factors that dictate the playwright's method, although speaking in a different context and time, George Bernard Shaw reflects on problems that still plague theatre-makers in South Africa today:

> I do not select my methods: they are imposed upon me by a hundred considerations: by physical considerations of theatrical representation, by the laws devised by the municipality to guard against fires and other accidents to which theatres are liable, by the economics of theatrical commerce … (Shaw in Houghton, 1971:3).

Shaw calls attention to how the considerations of theatre representation are loaded against the creative imagination. The rules of theatre-making impose limits on creativity.[30] He also makes an interesting point about the causal relationship between aesthetics and economics.

[30] Another school of thought will claim that the rules are what facilitate creativity in responding to them.

Simply put, the size of the budget informs the technical choices. The point he makes about "the municipality [guarding] against fires" has a double meaning. The one level is about the technical elements, but on another level, Shaw is facing censorship. Those who want to quell the fires of the artist control the budget of official play-making. It feels like Shaw is writing in contemporary South Africa.

At the Soweto Theatre we tried to deconstruct the space, attempting a theatre-in-the round atmosphere. The results were not earth-shifting - until we got to the Funda Centre. The Olive Tree Theatre, although an independent space, was constructed with the same ideas about what the theatre is. Note that when Shaw speaks about the theatre, he has one single idea in mind. In South Africa too, because of colonial miseducation, we are accustomed to thinking about the theatre as an activity that happens in an enclosed playhouse.

There will be no *mbaola* at the Market Theatre, the Soweto Theatre or the Wits Theatre. The Olive Tree Theatre closed its doors in 2020 due to funding constraints. The experience of working at the Market Theatre is captured briefly in figure 6. It gives you a sense of a polished atmosphere. Watching retrospectively, I understand why Norries Houghton was writing against what he called a picture-frame-proscenium stage.

Methods of lighting a play with fire are not acceptable in enclosed places. Inside a licensed theatre building you cannot strike up fire. Enclosed playhouses are fire-hazard free zones. The joys reside in "open theatre". Although the open theatre has its own hazards, open theatre methods have taught me to become the desert plant that:

> Must solve the survival problem that arises as a result of the environmental stresses associated with trying the desert. The gyrations of being subjected to extreme heat, extreme drought, extreme cold nights and extreme events must be correctly managed in order to mitigate the damage to the organism. Unlike an animal organism that can choose to run away from a situation and running away is not a viable option (Zulu, 2014: 6).

The desert plant's character has the spirit of *mogaga* play-making. If *huru* is about movements and rotation, that principle is encapsulated in the gyrations of the desert flower. The desert flower's capacity to vibrate highly in the face of adversity is *huru*. The rhythms, the dance and the incantations are about shaking off the inertia. The refusal to run away is the principle of *imvumakufa* - dying for an idea that will live. Breaking way from "one form of theatrical architecture" is an idea that will live. Managing the harsh conditions is the beginning of *khepera*, the force of change and renewal. Zulu tells us that "the organism must tackle the arresting fetters of adversity in real-time to avoid being tackled by them" (2014:6). Yes, *khepera* is a theatre of self-creation, the knowledge that "an acting on matter through time will actualise the archetypes" (Diop,1980:310)). As Zulu (2014) reveals: when the going gets tough in the desert, the flower uses biochemistry, transcendence and the glorious appearing in order to outshine the darkness of adversity and thrive. It is the desert plant that flowers unaided for which the setswana idiom is *Sethunane nageng se e kitsha dithunya se sa thuntse lerole.*

Instincts of Play

During this writing and staging process, I have had to become the fabled three-headed snake, *Noga ya Tlhogo tse Tharo*: Writer, Composer and Playmaker. Swapping these heads can get intricate but it is part of the art of the African storyteller. Shapeshifting between characters without dropping any part of the story comes with the territory. It is the wisdom of the human body to spilt into fragments and let your guides come out and play in your story. This is not how it ends, it is where I stopped or where the path forks into many. The characters may revisit the muses and the Writer will have to step up again. A sound could rattle the heartbeat and the Composer's ear must catch it.

Rehearsals have their ways of bleeding into the writer's solitude. The stage will call again and the playmaker must sharpen the picture. It is always a stimulating creative process

where the inner *gobela* continuously negotiates an agreement, The Writer bidding for narrative clarity, The Composer vying for musical agility, The Playmaker reaching for gestural power; all serving the commands of the story.

Some years ago, I had an office at the Windybrow Theatre. My task was to create a workshop programme for the youth. I created a writing and directing programme with the aim of building new scripts for the stage. The programme brought forward some strong voices and pulled people from Hillbrow and other surrounds. But I soon felt my spirit shrinking. The tyranny of state precept was felt in the official documents that demanded a commitment to social cohesion and national duty. The idea of theatre for national duty was stealing my oxygen. There was *kwaal* (tension or strife) in the atmosphere. My stay was not extended. I was fortunate to meet Ngũgĩ wa Mirii before I left. We continued to meet when he was in the city. He told me stories about his experiences at Kamirĩĩthũ and in exile in Zimbabwe. He had interesting ideas for a non-elitist theatre training programme. I was still taking his tutelage when he transitioned months later. Fortunately, he left his first draft of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*. This script was our starting point when we co-directed the play at the Wits Main Theatre. Mirii challenged us to rediscover the grammar of resistance theatre.

The Fallism context was great for our production. Audience responses suggest that the play connected with the prevailing spirit of the student community. Our investment in Black aesthetics paid off and I thought I saw Mirii giving it the nod from the other side. Simultaneously I could hear him asking if this was really the depth of my profundity? Is not making theatre at Wits a bourgeois preoccupation? He and his varsity colleagues, Micere Mugo and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, had to step off campus to join the workers and peasants in building an open-air theatre at the Kamirĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre. Although Mirii drafted the first project, *I will Marry When I Want*, "the peasants and workers added to it, making the finished product a far cry from the original draft. Everything was collective, open and public …" (Ngũgĩ, 1983:42). Arguably, even within the university there are underclass spaces. Still the plays are made within the confines of turnstile and biometric keys into the doors of higher learning.

When I started rehearsing *Chilahaeboale* at the Funda Centre we were making a direct intervention in keeping the space alive for the rituals of artists who want to work outside the strictures imposed by politicians. It was not an easy experience but it was liberating to test the open theatre method. This was not my first attempt. During my brief association with the North West University I devised a play with the students titled *Traaibek.* It was produced by a colleague, Kiran Odhav, who worked in the Sociology department. The title comes from a word that was popular in the streets of Mahikeng at the time. It is not unlike what I mean by botheration. The players who came from the spoken word community on campus took advantage of the properties of the stage – their voices were heard in an open theatre. Staging *Chilahaebolae* on Bertha Street in Braamfontein was therefore my third attempt to explore the with the techniques of open theatre.

While the first two performance were in open spaces, they were also enclosed or fenced inside the premises of both institutions. In Bertha Street, although the place was under surveillance by the Wits University security, the players fought a fantastic battle to conquer the noise pollution of foot-traffickers holding their own heightened conversations or sometimes chanting as they pass by; running car engines, hooters and sirens which often would poor into the performance area. The brief to play with the audience instead of playing for them assisted our course of pooling focus into the story. As part of their exploration with interactive aesthetics the players were free to plant moments of direct conversational engagement with the audience (through song, gesture and utterance). From the fourth day up until seventh day of its run the play accumulated fair amounts of street credibility. It was interesting to witness how the playgoers who sang along and sometimes would speak their favourite lines along with the players or interjecting briefly, were taken over by the instincts of play. Most of these playgoers were repeating the experience - some four or five times of attending.

I must conclude by stressing that planting these performances in open spaces is not my discovery nor is it an alien impulse. This inkling forms part of the DNA of ritual drama

where “[t]heatre is not a building” (1986:42). Guerilla theatre activists of the Black Consciousness era, as we have heard from Variava and others, were drawing from this ancient resource. Ngũgĩ’s point that “[t]heatre is made by people” (ibid) is realised when looking back at the interactive exchanges between players and playgoers during street performance of *Chilahaebolae.* To borrow words from Ngũgĩ’ reflections about his Kamirĩĩthũ experience, my artistic practice “is not an aberration, but an attempt to reconnect with the broken roots of African civilisation and its traditions of theatre…
” (ibid). This keen interest in tapping into ancient resources of performance has assisted my ongoing search for the technical elements that go into building mogaga playmaking. Taking cue from the tools of ritual drama my musings in this study have affirmed theatrical devices that encourage the cohabitation of radical spiritism and social activism. Meanwhile, I anticipate that the reader will emerge with more insights and enter this conversation, casting more light into the path that my feet have caved this far. As I recall the steps that I took to this point, Kgoroyadira’s words keep coming back to me. *Naga e thlapisiwa ka mogaga.* The notion of washing the land carries a vision of ritual performance as a transmitter of social change.

Postscript

It began as a "chaotic matter" (Diop, 1981:310) yet the temperaments of those primordial waters were kind to my inquiry. A few projects are already emerging from this study of *mogaga* play-making. The invitation of Themba Mkhoma to design images for the poster has grown into a larger project. Looking through the cartoon-like images that were developing from the process, an idea was hatched that we collaborate in a project that will produce an illustrated book of *Chilahaebolae*. Essentially the work has begun. Mkhoma's illustration in Figure 1 is our first sample. In fact, the creative project which I build through this venture forms part of the duo of fables that I am exploring for the stage. Alongside *Chilahaebolae* I have been writing another fable titled *Nzomela,* where I refurbish the folk story of *Khudu le Dinonyane* for the contemporary stage.

While in the production of *Chilahaebolae* my first focus is on exploring physical storytelling and cartoon-like stylisation of movement, for *Nzomela I* will collaborate puppet makers and actors. The one question that is prompted by the prospect of building puppets for the set is: What makes a puppet a puppet? I pose this both as a philosophical and technical and question. In some ways, looking at Mpja's journey in *Chilahaebolae*, it become apparent how a play can reveal the technologies of making a puppet. I tried to illustrate this point through the metaphors of chains that are visible and a leash that is invisible - the difference between physical and spiritual incarceration. To the technical aspects, my plan for *Nzomela* is to explore ways of collecting waste material to build puppet characters and props for the play. It is to this effect that my project speaks to matters of environmental justice.

Staging *Chilahaebolae* in the streets of Braamfontein (September 24 – October 1) signals a break away from imperialistic and elitist traditions into "a resistance tradition" (Ngũgĩ, 1986:2) of play making. Eight days of a carnival atmosphere where players and playgoers from all walks of life sang together affirmed my trust in the return to methods of open

theatre. It was a revelation to explore a variety of strategies for interactive engagement, which included players breaking out of character to speak to the audience directly. The enthusiastic audience participation, including those who stayed until midnight on days that the play started at 10 pm, suggests that people appreciate the techniques of conversational play making, where players and playgoers conspire to generate meaning.

The conclusion of my study coincides with an invitation I received from Africa Theatre Theory Circle - a platform for directors and actors to meet and discuss theories which guide their work. This invitation is consistent with the intent and spirit of my project: to advance dialogue about the substance of playmaking at home, across the Pan-African world and within communities of resistance at large. Ultimately this is a document for communities of resistance. I see this work generating dialogue about dramaturgy, methodologies of theatre-making and the history of dramatic arts. It is composed for sharing information with radical theatre circuits in Africa and elsewhere globally. I also wish to invite dialogue with the pockets of scholars who are radicalising analysis in the field of theatre and performance. I trust that these ideas will provide good company for play makers who takes interest in theatre activism.

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