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On Joyce's Descendants: The Politics of Gender in the South African Jazz Musical

Hlumelo Siyavuya Ledwaba

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Wits School of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand.

Johannesburg

2019

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Abstract

King Kong: An African Jazz Opera (1959) marked a pivotal moment in the history of South African jazz. It placed on stage the rich panoply of South African jazz and popular musics that had been cultivated in black segregated townships since at least the 1920s. As an avowedly anti-apartheid and non-racial production, *King Kong* heroically challenged how urban black South Africans' lives and cultural practices previously had been represented to white South Africa. In place of the rural and the primitive, *King Kong* presented the urban and urbane; instead of 'African drums' and *ingoma* dancing, which were both popular as mine entertainment, *King Kong* presented black choral compositions alongside jazz, kwela and jive. Its protagonists spoke English and *tsotsitaal*, and the stories that the show's actors presented on stage were familiar: a love triangle and a tale of revenge. The entirety of the spectacle had a broader political aim: *King Kong* was meant to show that black and white artistic creators could collaborate, that white South Africans could enjoy a 'sophisticated' black show, and that black South Africans could compose, sing and act. In other words, *King Kong* sought to show how South African musical and theatrical cultures could be, if not for apartheid.

The production's progressive anti-apartheid politics did not extend to considerations of gender with equal singlemindedness, however, even though women are central to the *King Kong* story, and were central to the broader society the show aimed to represent on stage. The position of women in the jazz musical remains one of *King Kong*'s less examined aspects. This thesis revisits the 1959 production to engage this omission, using archival material – original manuscripts, programme notes and newspapers – as well as various recordings and scores of *King Kong*. Focusing on the show's cultural history, I argue that it is in the examination of the dynamics of gender that *King Kong*'s less heroic impact on the South African jazz musical may be gleaned. Embodied by the figure of Joyce, the politics of gender in *King Kong* distilled women's historical power struggles in South African jazz cultures. While South African jazz has changed since the late 1950s, women musicians in South African jazz cultures are, to a significant degree, still framed by the construction and reception of this figure. They are Joyce's descendants.

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Hlumelo Ledwaba

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Introduction

In 1988, the album *King Afrika: The Musical* was released. It was a recording of the soundtrack to the eponymous musical that had been staged earlier in Johannesburg, to muted acclaim. One reason why the failed production could still release a commercial record is perhaps because *King Afrika* was co-produced by the Performance Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) – a government entity – with Des and Dawn Lindberg, who were leading producers of musical theatre for black and white South Africa since at least the 1970s. Releasing the recording would also have been cheaper, and safer, than organising a countrywide tour in late 1980s South Africa. The *King Afrika* record is a curious object and suggests the show was a curious production. The music was arranged by Peter McLea, who was familiar in the musical theatre scene and would later work with Bertha Egnos on *Sikulu, the Warrior* (1991) (on Egnos see Ballantine, 2016). More familiar in the show's production team is the name Victor Ntoni, who arranged the rhythm section, brass and woodwind. Ntoni was a legendary bass player, arranger and composer, who had cut his teeth in the Cape Town jazz scene from the late 1950s (Rasmussen, 2003: 85), and had worked with Des and Dawn Lindberg as a composer for the stage show *Meropa* (1973), which toured abroad as *KwaZulu*.

Ntoni's presence must have been encouraging to the band personnel listed on the album's sleeves, which included the likes of: Bakithi Khumalo and Fana Zulu on bass guitar; Makhaya Mahlangu and Kevin Kruger on percussion; Vusi Khumalo on drums; Lawrence Matshiza and Mark Khan on guitar; Rashid Lanie on piano and keyoards; Mfaniseni Tusi on trombone; Prince Langoasa [*sic*] and Thabo Mashishi on trumpet; Mike Faure on saxophone; and, Khaya Mahlangu on flute, saxophone and pennywhistle. Many of these musicians remain giants of South African jazz, post-apartheid. The musical's vocalists tell a slightly different tale. They include: Annie Malebu, Eugene Havenga, Faith Kekana, Supafrika, Tshidi Leloka, Elzabe Zietsman, Desirée Baird, Wings Segale, Shadiii, Zwai Bala, Henry Cele, Marah Louw and Abigail Kubeka. Of these vocalists, Kekana, Supafrika, Segale and Shadiii were leading figures in the musical styles popular in black townships in the 1970s and the 1980s (township soul, funk, disco). Zwai Bala was 12 years old in 1988, and would lead the *kwaito* youth music movement post-apartheid. Surrounded by these youngsters, Abigail Kubeka emerges as a remnant of the past. After all, she had toured the country with Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* in 1959, had been the lead actress Miriam Makeba's understudy, had assumed the role when Makeba was too ill to perform, and had

travelled to the United Kingdom for the show's London run in 1961 (Bloom, 1961; Makeba and Hall, 1988).

Kubeka's presence in *King Afrika* allows one to trace the career of the South African jazz musical from its residues. From her appearance in the cast, *King Afrika* is laid bare as a reprising of a spectacle. Such revivals were common from the mid-1980s, as these years saw increasing commemorations of the Sophiatown era and the so-called *Drum* decade (Kruger, 1999).[1] In *King Afrika*, the evident aim was to evoke *King Kong* while updating the music. For example, the presence of formidable jazz musicians in the orchestra echoes that of the musicians in the earlier show, which included the likes of Jonas Gwangwa, Gwigwi Mrwebi, Hugh Masekela, Caiphus Semenya and Mackay Davashe (De Beer, [2001]1960). The popular music vocalists in *King Afrika* similarly bring to mind their earlier colleagues in *King Kong*: members of the all-male Manhattan Brother and Woody Woodpeckers, and all-female ensembles such as Miriam Makeba's Skylarks and Thandie Klaasen's Quad Sisters. The album's song arrangement I introduced earlier (and I have found no evidence of the plot or the musical's book), suggests this to be a love story involving a boxer and his dame. There are songs that introduce the boxer and describe him as a winner, songs that reference Sophiatown's cosmopolitanism in the 1950s ('This is America'), songs that reference older popular music styles ('Kitchen Kwela'), sentimental songs ('I've Lost Him', 'He's Coming Home', 'Together Forever'), and songs that connote some kind of social vision ('I See a Land', 'We Call it Africa'). The musical styles referenced here, including their themes, are all to be found in Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong*.

If these similarities suggest well-meaning commemoration, further scrutiny of *King Afrika* suggests the show was a weak derivative. First, while *King Kong* was an example of concerted collaboration across apartheid's constructed and policed racial lines, *King Afrika*, skimmed the surface of this non-racial possibility. The music and lyrics are by John Rotham – who became famous as a composer of children's songs, most famously for the television show 'Pumpkin Patch' – even though *King Afrika* is a tale about black lives. Whereas Stanley Glasser's musical direction for *King Kong* was acknowledged and credited, Victor Ntoni's similarrole receives no billing in *King Afrika*. The set designer Arthur Goldreich's album cover stressed, in its abstract language, the context that shaped the people represented in *King Kong*. In *King Afrika*, however, what is stressed is celebrity culture: the popular musicians at the time were Supafrika, Desiree Baird, Wings Segale and Shadiii. In the same vein, it is

[1] An unsuccessful attempt to revive *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* was made by Dorkay House's director Ian Bernhardt in 1979. The short run and acrimonious ending of this project is beyond the scope of this study.

worth noting that the lead character is Henry Cele, who had become a household name since his role as 'King Shaka' in the television series *Shaka Zulu* (1986). Henry Cele was a famous football player and actor, rather than a singer. His depiction of the mythologised Zulu king in the television series did not depart significantly from the entrenched stereotypes of Zulu masculinity through which *King Kong*'s protagonist, the 'Zulu from Vryheid' Ezekiel 'King Kong' Dhlamini, had been understood (De Beer, 2001: 1-5). As the literary historian Dan Wylie has pointed out, that 'a certain commonality of attitude should persist over [a] 100-year period' in the depictions of Shaka Zulu and how these depictions have come to label Zulu masculine identity, should not be surprising (2000: 3; 244). Wylie points to the ubiquity of 'white myths' about Shaka Zulu and their versatility (ibid.: 11-36). *King Afrika* capitalized on Cele's celebrity presence and what it could represent in late 1980s South Africa (Figure 1).

Marah Louw, who plays Cele's love interest in the show, portrays a very different image and accompanying story. By 1988, Louw was a well-known figure in South African musical theatre and jazz performance. In the theatre, she had worked with the likes of Corney Mabaso and Gibson Kente, and was a regular performer in the storied Pelican Club in Soweto, where she performed with many of the musicians who would make up the *King Afrika* band, as well as with Abigail Kubeka, Thandie Klaasen and Dolly Rathebe (Louw, 2017). She joined the musical *Meropa* in 1973 for its South African and international tours (Louw, 2017: 33-56; Molefe and Mzileni, 1997). Whereas Cele had come to embody the kinds of identities I have mentioned, Louw was striking in her difference from him. In *Meropa*, her character sported a skimpy, beaded costume reminiscent of Bertha Egnos's primitivising/retribilisng ethos. For her performances at the Pelican, however, Louw's photographs in her book *It's Me, Marah: An Autobiography* show her dressed in clothes whose inspiration range from African American Black Power chic (complete with what she calls her 'signature Afro wig'), to flowing pan-African robes matched artistic headdresses. Louw's daringly Afro-chic outward appearance was matched by how she chose to live her life at the time. In 1986, while apartheid scorched black townships, Louw met the Scotsman Billy Thomson at a club. Defying apartheid laws, they fell in love, and what followed was a risky romance that made it necessary for her to leave Soweto for Yeoville in Johannesburg, where it was easier for them to spend time together. Louw insisted that Thomson pay *lobola*, and the couple married in March 1987 (Louw, 2017: 102-111). Louw poignantly and humorously explains that their marriage was framed by the repeal of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, 'but the Group Areas Act was still enforced' (ibid.: 111).

Louw's fame as a stage, popular and jazz vocalist, her cosmopolitanism, and her flouting of conventions marks her out as a descendent of those 1950s women musicians commemorated in Lara Allen's (2000, 2003, 2004) and Carol Muller's (2011) work. The women recognised and sometimes praised these aspects too. For example, Miriam Makeba has recalled women's situations as follows:

> Being a young woman on stage wasn't easy. The stage and late-night performances in clubs and dance halls were always associated with prostitution or something bad. Good families would not allow their children to become performers! It wasn't proper for women to be on stage. This is why we all looked up to Dolly Rathebe. Dolly didn't give a damn. (2004: 28)

In her interview with Z.B. Molefe and Mike Mzileni, Louw echoed Makeba's observations and sentiments. As Mzileni writes:

> Mara[2] remarks that she has not experienced any major problems as a black woman in show business. But there have been some minor problems from her family … She dismisses the common perception that women in show business are of low morals. 'It's not true [she says]. If I did that, I wouldn't be where I am right now'. (Molefe and Mzileni, 1997: n.p.)

Louw's similarities to Lara Allen's 1950s 'songbirds' go further. In her autobiography, she reveals her role in the controversial 1979 run of *King Kong* where, amongst other disasters, she was coerced into smoking marijuana, by the show's African American director Ossie Davies (2017: 99). The drug disagreed with her, and her understudy had to take the stage at the opening gala evening. She recalls that Todd Matshikiza's widow, Esme Matshikiza, furiously demanded that Ian Bernhardt 'stop "this travesty of my husband's work"' (2017: 100) and that the show closed after a week. Despite the show's failure, Louw received some positive reviews:

> Marah Louw, I can bet all my money on her. In fact she has a better voice than Miriam Makeba the first lady of *King Kong*. She also has a saucy bitchy way about her that is tremendous in the shebeen queen-cum-moll role. (*Post Transvaal*, 27 April 1979. Cited in Louw, 2017: 100)

[2] Louw's name is spelt as 'Mara' or 'Marah'.

Makeba was less than impressed. For us, however, what is telling is how Louw's voice, demeanour and roles, as well as aspects of her biography, are interpreted by the *Post* reviewer. The extract encapsulates the themes explored in this thesis: the politics of gender in the South African jazz musical. The themes I explore enable me to do at least three things. First, they allow me to return to the story of *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* (1959) in order to offer a new narrative both of the production and of South African women jazz musicians (Chapter One). I can then focus on how jazz and women are put to work in the *King Kong* story, to explore how the show's progressive non-racial and anti-apartheid politics included or excluded women in its vision (Chapter Two). These foci will then enable me to examine whether or not women's roles and representation in the South African jazz musical evolved to meet the new aesthetic and political demands demanded of South African jazz in general. For the latter, these demands were stark. For example, the London run of *King Kong: All-African Musical* (1961), was criticised for 'diluting' South African jazz in its arrangements and for adding too many retribalizing 'traditional' styles to please it British audiences (Dalamba, 2011: 95-102), while the 1979 *King Kong: A proper Zulu Man* was castigated for changing 'all the music into American rhythms and arrangements. Songs like "Back of the Moon" became like disco music and the African jazz was lost' (Louw, 2017: 99). *King Afrika*, for its part, was suspected by the anti-apartheid United Democratic Front of having been funded by the apartheid regime's Department of Information, 'and was to be used to imply that black artists were opposed to the struggle slogan "Freedom First before Education"' (Louw, 2017: 119).

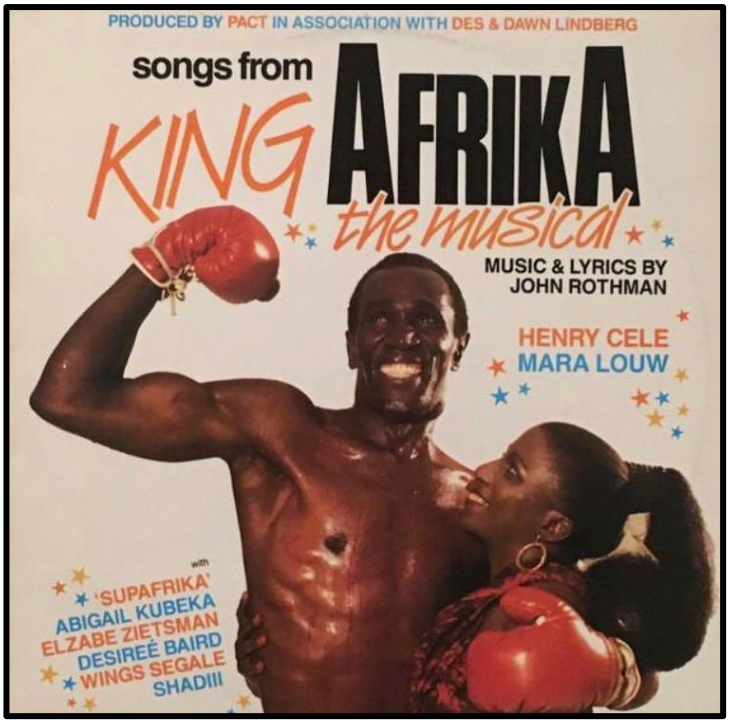

Figure 1: Henry Cele and Marah Louw on the album cover of *King Afrika: The Musical*, 1988. Copyright: RPM Record Company (Pty) Ltd., reproduced with permission.

These aesthetic and political changes did not necessarily result in the formal transformation of the jazz musicals' plots or in the change in jazz women's representations. The album cover of *King Afrika: The Musical* best embodies this observation. Henry Cele's towering figure occupies most of the space. His raised right arm, tipped by boxing gloves is raised and flexed to show off his muscles while the other envelopes Mara Louw's body. Bare chested with his skin glistening, the viewer's gaze is directed towards his chest or, in *King Kong*'s parlance, his 'marvellous muscles'. Marah Louw is against Henry Cele, her arms clinging as she gazes adoringly at the boxer whose sole acknowledgement of her presence is his arm that protectively surrounds her. His own gaze facing upwards, it is uncertain whether the victor he celebrates is a successful match or his ownership of Louw. The cover replicates older themes and stereotypes that had long been expected from the leading ladies of the South African jazz musical (Figure 2).

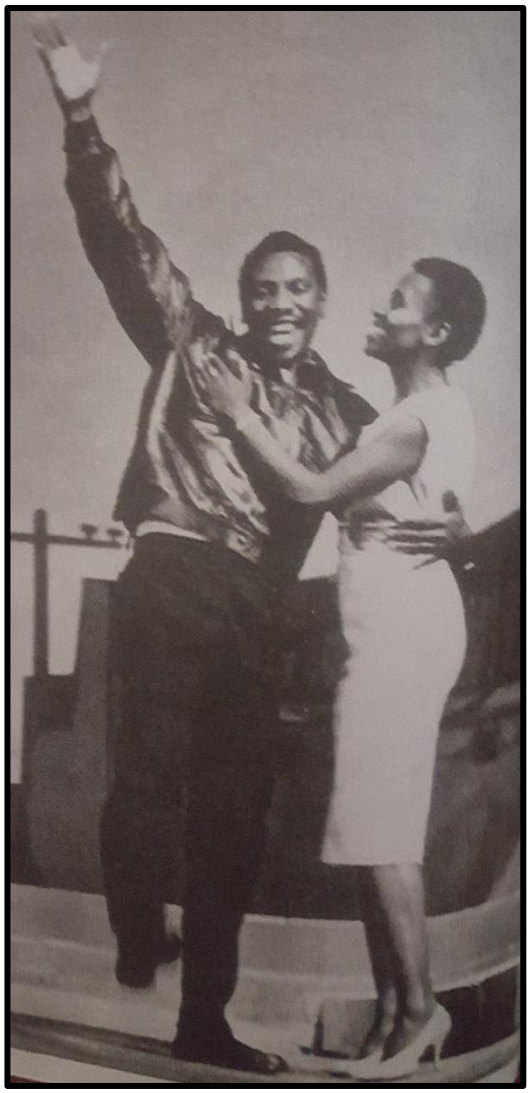

Figure 2: Nathan Mdledle and Miriam Makeba in *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera*, 1959. Photograph by Ian Berry for *Drum* magazine. Reproduced from Mona De Beer (2001 [1960]).

Focusing on the show's cultural history, I argue that it is in the examination of the dynamics of gender that *King Kong*'s less heroic impact on the South African jazz musical may be gleaned (Chapter Three). Embodied by the figure of Joyce, the politics of gender in *King Kong* distilled women's historical power struggles in South African jazz cultures. While South African jazz has changed since the late 1950s, women musicians in South African jazz cultures are, to a significant degree, still framed by the construction and reception of this figure. They are Joyce's descendants. In what follows, I position my research in the field of South African jazz studies in three ways. I do this firstly by providing a synopsis of *King Kong* and an account of its production history, drawing on scholars who have written on the musical. I then centre the character of 'Joyce' in the musical, to introduce how women and women musicians have been written into South African jazz history and the dialogue their

inclusion initiates with broader studies on women, gender and politics in mid-twentieth-century South Africa. Since these women have been predominantly vocalists and were received as singers of jazz and jazz-influenced popular styles, my third intellectual location is literature on jazz, gender and the voice.

Revisiting *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera*, 1959-2017

King Kong: An African Jazz Opera, tells the story of the heavyweight boxer Ezekiel Mandlenkosi 'King Kong' Dhlamini. It relates his successes in Johannesburg's 'non-white' boxing rings, and the admiration and fear he inspired in black Johannesburg more generally. The musical's plot does not relay Dhlamini's full biography, which in many ways tells a more complex story of migrancy, crime and incarceration, sport, and constructions of masculinity in apartheid South Africa (Flemming, 2009). Rather, the plot gives us an account of Dhlamini at the height of his powers and fame, culminating in his disgrace and tragic suicide (Bloom, 1961). The plot's narrative is structured as a series of flashbacks of varying lengths. We encounter Dhlamini as a legend, whose role in the community is to remind them of more glamorous and exciting times (Act 1, Scene 1), and to relieve the boredom of their menial tasks (work, washing white people's laundry) while the threat of eviction from Sophiatown to 'Sunshine Gardens' (i.e. Meadowlands), looms (Act 2, Scene 6).

The musical, in other words, was more concerned with portraying 1950s Sophiatown and the suburb's demise in the face of the apartheid state's aggression. As David Coplan has written, Sophiatown was the centre of cultural and political life from the 1940s to the end of the 1950s, especially for urban and urbanising black South Africans; 'its destruction epitomised the nature of apartheid and remains one of the darkest chapters in South Africa's modern social history' (2007: 8-9). For the writer and critic Lewis Nkosi, the 1950s were 'the fabulous decade' (1983), whereas the scholar Michael Chapman refers to these years as 'the *Drum* decade' (1987). Dorothy Driver argues that the appellations are connected. Crucial to the 1950s literary and cultural flowering 'was the publishing opportunity provided by *Drum* magazine, which has given to this period the name the '*Drum* decade'. However, Lewis Nkosi's term 'fabulous' in his essay 'The Fabulous Decade' encapsulates the period's extraordinary atmosphere of romantic self-construction' (2012: 387). The romantic constructions worked at various levels, ranging from the individual to how the community saw itself. Ezekiel Dhlamini was part of this process. Born in the rural town of Vryheid in now KwaZulu-Natal in 1925, Dhlamini briefly and sporadically attended school at a Catholic Mission until the age of 14. He deserted home to work as a gardener to a white family in

'white' Vryheid, but left after a few months for Durban. He soon made for the well-trodden paths of migrant labourers for Johannesburg, living on the streets and earning a living through gambling and other nefarious activities. He encountered modern boxing – with gloves – in Johannesburg's Bantu Men's Social Centre and soon took lessons. Showing talent for the sport, Dhlamini conquered the amateur division and went professional from 1951. It was then that he began his romantic self-construction, as 'Spy Smasher', 'Lightning Marshall', 'King Marshall' and, definitively, as 'King Kong' (De Beer, 2001: 1-2).[3] The name suited his fans, who said he conquered his opponents like a 'King'. 'Kong', a reference to the 1933 Hollywood film *King Kong*, compared his strength to that of the famous gorilla. For Lewis Nkosi, the 'King Kong' he saw on the stage of the University of the Witwatersrand's Great Hall in February 1959, when the show premiered, was far more suave, articulate and sophisticated than the Dhlamini he had known (1983: 3-24). Nkosi's view here shows that *King Kong*'s writer Harold Bloom, its director Leon Gluckman, its composer Todd Matshikiza and co-lyricist Pat Williams, its choreographer Arnold Dover and its set designer Arthur Goldreich, had also indulged in the process of romantic construction. The aim of this construction, as Nkosi writes elsewhere, was to celebrate an 'idea' of Sophiatown, and it was this idea that the show's audiences applauded in 1959.

Nkosi's somewhat deprecating tone towards 'King Kong' and *King Kong* is curious. Nkosi fails to note that the iconic people of Sophiatown were bound in common by 'the unreal reality of their world' (Gready, 1990: 139-164). If a young Zulu man from Vryheid could refashion themselves as 'King Kong', Nathan Mdledle – who played the lead character in the show – was at times known as 'the Bing Crosby of South Africa' (Ballantine, 2012: 119). The most famous close-harmony male ensemble the Manhattan Brothers, of which Mdledle was a member, were and inspired by and aimed to imitate the American Mills Brothers and the Nicholas Brothers (Ballantine, 2012: 120-121). The writers associated with *Drum* – Henry 'Mr Drum' Nxumalo, Arthur Maimane, Can Themba, Casey Motsitsi, Bloke Modisane, Nat Nakasa, Es'kia Mphahlele, Todd Matshikiza and Nkosi – also sought ways to refashion the world their observed, including even Elizabethan England as 'the closest parallel to our mode of existence' (Nkosi, 1983: 18). According to Dorothy Driver:

> The modern urban individual depicted in *Drum* is informed by a multiplicity of cultural contexts, including not just the life of the streets (itself informed by the

[3] The 'Marshall' in the earlier sobriquets probably refers to Marshalltown, which was also the location for the infamous Marshall Square Prison.

> Hollywood B-movies from which the young gangsters took their lead), but also a range of reading: notably, British and American detective fiction (Peter Cheyney and Damon Runyon) and the Harlem Renaissance (Richard Wright, Willard Motley). The latter, which reassessed the American dream through the lens of an enforced marginality, helped the *Drum* writers to present themselves as "iconoclastic, independent, and ineradicably cosmopolitan" … Sophiatown was South Africa's Greenwich Village. (2012: 397)

Dhlamini's self-construction as 'King Kong', inspired from a B-movie, is not as far removed from the sophisticated construction of the decade as the 'Sophiatown Renaissance' as Nkosi would like.

In *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera*, then, all the Sophiatown world's a stage rather than, as Bloom problematically writes, 'actors … not so much acting, as living out their normal lives on the stage' (1961: 16). Bloom undermines his own observation when he later concedes, 'perhaps there never was a shebeen quite as big as Back of the Moon' (ibid.). It was the show's music, however, that held the story together. Less forgivable is Bloom's comment that *King Kong* 'would naturally be a musical, not merely because we wanted to give new opportunities to our concert artists, but because township people live in the idiom of musicals. There is nothing artificial about African people breaking into song and dance, or doing so in chorus. They sing when they are sad as well as when they are happy' (1961: 11-12). If Nkosi's elitism was one strand of *King Kong*'s early reception, Bloom's primitivising and naturalising language formed another. For example, Mona De Beer also regularly points to the tremendous difficulties the white creators faced in working with the black cast, and that 'very few of the players were musically sound' (2001: 9). More recently, Pat William's memoir *King Kong: Our Knot of Time and Music* revisited her earlier assumption that Todd Matshikiza 'must have had very little musical education' when she worked with him in the 1950s:

> So without enquiring further, I decided that Todd was an instinctive genius, but without technical grounding. How stupid and patronising! I could have learned the truth at the time, had I asked him. In fact it was only years later when Esmé, by then Todd's widow, took issue with the description I had written which spoke of Todd's brilliant musicianship, saying that he was "made of music" but innocent of training or musical education. In fact, she told me, he had graduated from St Peter's College in Johannesburg with a diploma in music and a teaching diploma as well, and he also taught English and maths. He came from a family of ten, all saturated in music and learning. (Williams, 2017: 27-28)

Lindelwa Dalamba's research shows Williams is mistaken here: Matshikiza studied at Lovedale College in Alice in the Eastern Cape, and at Adam's College in KwaZulu Natal (2019). More important for my argument, however, is that Williams's acknowledgment that she was 'stupid and patronising' transposes what Dalamba refers to as 'the *King Kong* debate' to a different key. It took sixty years to reach this point, and not all lessons have been learnt. Robert Kavanagh summarized *King Kong* scholars' dissatisfaction with the white creators' assumptions, noting that the latter 'underestimated the creative capabilities of their cast and its culture' (1985: 96). Michael Titlestad's deconstruction of *King Kong*'s reception in South Africa in1959 shows how the jazz musical came to be framed by discourses of primitivism and naturalism by the white English and Afrikaans press (2004: 83-104). If the white creators' assumptions erased the black actors' and creators' artistic and cultural knowledge (Peterson, 2000), the reportage furthered this elision to such as extent that, Titlestad concludes, *King Kong* became a stage for debating South African whiteness. Kavanagh critiques this state of affairs as follows:

> It should not be necessary to expose the errors contained in these assessments of the black actor and his art. Most of them are obvious. Why, for example, should English "with the characteristic African accent" be a problem? The white South African, after all, has his own "characteristic accent". It is a common racialist error to assert that when a black actor acts so well as to appear natural, he is not in fact acting but just "being himself" or "living out his normal life". The dancers, we are told, were too bad to learn "real dancing", the black actor found it difficult "to control his movements and to speak", etc.! The only way to make sense of this is to assume that by "real dancing" was meant European and American dancing – Dover was a classical ballet instructor – and that the traditional and urban dances of South Africa were not "real", and that they style in which the actors were required to move and speak was so foreign to them that, like children, they had to learn the simplest of human functions from scratch. Gluckman is, of course, right to insist on the necessity of technical training for inexperienced actors, and this applies to any social group. His error lies in assuming that the techniques and forms and critical criteria of his own culture are the only appropriate ones. (1985: 96)

Kavanagh and Titlestad do not spare either liberal or conservative white South Africans from their critique. For Kavanagh, the asymmetrical relationship between black and white, in apartheid society and in the musical's making, enabled the cultural assumptions made and resulted in an *imposed* romanticization of Sophiatown life rather than in Driver's 'romantic self-construction' (1985:94-96). This imposed romanticization, Titlestad argues, was a result of the 'white slummer' who, like a flâneur, leaves their white suburban world for the black

township in search of existential release (2004: 105, see for example Schadeberg 2017). Titlestad and Kavanagh are, respectively, literary and theatre scholars. Dalamba builds on their insights to argue that, at least in South Africa, music to some degree resisted the kinds of reductionisms I have discussed. De Beer and Bloom could not but acknowledge the thriving black jazz cultures of Johannesburg, whose history has been documented by Christopher Ballantine (2012) and David Coplan (2007). Unlike these music scholars' seminal works, however, De Beer and Bloom – like the younger Pat Williams – saw South African jazz as the product of natural geniuses that had to be saved, and whose musicians had to be tutored and protected. Much of this was well-meaning. For example, Harry Bloom's search for the mbube musician Solomon Linda, so that he could receive his royalties for his composition 'Mbube' ('Wimoweh'), must be acknowledged (Bloom 1961: 9-10). Similarly, the formation of the Union of Southern African Artists ('Union Artists'), despite the problems caused by its closeness to white capital identified by Kavanagh (1985: 84-86), was an important institution for South African jazz cultures. Moreover, Dalamba has shown how the Union's intimacy with white power enabled *King Kong* members to travel to the United Kingdom in 1961 (2013: 61-82).

Despite these positive points, the white *King Kong* members strove to construct South African jazz and its musicians within the frames of primitivism and naturalism. Here, for example, is Bloom:

> Why, then, a *jazz* opera? For many years groups of musicians made a precarious living touring the townships around Johannesburg. They performed in candle-lit shanty halls at weddings, concerts, and dances, enlivened political rallies from the backs of motor lorries, supplied spiritual or laudatory music at funerals. Their repertoire was designed to meet all needs. Practically none of them could read a score. They played or sang, as the spirit moved them, and they blended the music of the city – jazz heard on gramophone records, radio, hit tunes, film music – into their older fabric of tribal rhythms and work songs, to make a music of their own. In time, this music came to be known as "Township Jazz". And since *King Kong* is a culmination of the work of these early musicians, it is descried as a jazz opera. (1961: 7)

For De Beer, the artistic strides made in South African jazz in the 1950s are made to seem inextricable from Union Artists. She writes:

> It was in the Township Jazz series that the value of the Union's work became most apparent. Music which is improvised, however imitative, however good or bad, becomes folk-music – an expression of the people. The players and singers in the earlier Township Jazz concerts went for cool and sophisticated music, away from

> everything which was "black". There was little of the straight style, no Peter Yorke, Fats Waller or Harry James imitation, nothing of Dixieland. There was resistance to written orchestrations, to introductions and to formality. The quality was inexact and moods led to tremendous fluctuations. The same number could one evening be played as a slow fox-trot, the next it was a bouncing quick-step. If the players "got hot" one number could last 25 minutes … Soft sentimental numbers associated with white jazz were often chosen. Very few of the players were musically sound. Vocal groups in particular seldom understood intricate harmonies. Subservience to a soloist was virtually unknown and a vocalist often had a hard time of it competing, say, with a saxophone. *It was the sheer vitality, the ability to explode in a small space that put the music across, and the abandoned enjoyment of singing or playing which communicated itself to the audience*. (2001: 9, my emphasis)

Read against these evaluations and misconception, the importance of Ballantine's (2012[1993]) and Coplan's (2007[1985]) work is clear. From both scholars, we learn that the South African jazzing tradition was forged early in the in the 1910s and reached its first peak in the 1920s as part of the broader marabi slumyard cultures. It was nurtured by predominantly unschooled keyboardists and was an integral part of black leisure activities, whose institution was the weekend-long marabi party and the shebeen. Although unavailable in recorded form, marabi keyboardists were legendary and their music formed part of urban blacks' cultural memory. Marabi melodies formed part of the growing big band cultures between the World Wars, and were adopted different by musicians Coplan separates into 'the rank and file' (the black working class) and 'the situations' (the black middle class) (2007). Without being determinist, certain trends regarding how marabi infiltrated South African big bands can be discerned. Generally, elite bands like the Merry Blackbirds performed in, yes, candle-lit shanty halls but also in ballrooms, cinemas, restaurants and hotels until white jazz musicians complained – using apartheid laws to express their grievances (Ballantine, 2012: 94-99). Repertoires of such bands varied, but they mostly consisted of American dance music that they learnt from imported scores and arrangements.

In the early 1930s, these musicians experimented with marabi, mostly using it as parody (Ballantine, 2012). Marabi's changed position coincided with the changed political discourse in the 1940s, in particular with the formation of the African National Congress's Youth League and the seepage of New Africanism into popular and musical cultures in the 1940s (Ballantine, 2012: 48; 73-82). As Christopher Ballantine has written:

> The explicit and conscious acceptance of aspects of a social and political philosophy – in this case New Africanism – into the very constitution of music, was a turning point

> in the history of South African jazz. Musically, as much as socially, the early 1940s were a time of transition … The coincidence of these events signalled, for black South African music, both the end of one era and the beginning of the next. (2012: 82)

An important institution that sustained these experimentations and transitions was that of 'concert and dance' (Ballantine, 2012: 16-53). A move away from the shebeen, concert and dance performances saw the move away from the intimate spaces (mostly living rooms) of houses to a more public space. As Lara Allen has pointed out (2000), the move to the stage enabled women musicians to participate more intimately in music making because the divide between performer and audience was more assured. For our purposes here, what I want to point out is that black South African jazzing traditions had created their own institutions long before the formation of Union Artists.

Dalamba has pointed out that ignorance of this jazzing tradition's ethos and institutions had specific consequences for *King Kong*. As she writes,

> *King Kong* occupied two sites in South Africa's racialised imaginary. In black South Africa, firstly, its eclectic soundtrack transposed popular township music, most importantly African jazz/*mbaqanga* and its vocal variants. *Marabi*'s foundational influence as the first improvised pan-ethnic urban black musical performance style saw South African jazz bands from the 1930s onwards combine this musical inheritance with swing to create *mbaqanga* in the 1940s (Ballantine 1993). Todd Matshikiza, *King Kong*'s musical creator, was integral to this scene. *King Kong*'s use of *kwela*, a jazz-influenced style that was popular with whites and blacks, and with audiences outside South Africa (Allen 2005), repeats this commitment to township popular music. The second ("white") site imagined *King Kong* as an expression of folk-ideals1. I am not arguing here that *King Kong*'s white creators viewed the music with which they were confronted as "folk music" in the narrow sense. Rather, I propose that they saw this music functioning in a particular manner that strongly resembles how folk music has been interpreted by others who consider their genres to have a folk function. (Dalamba, 2011: 96)

Drawing on Simon Frith's explication of the 'ideology of folk' (1981:159-168), Dalamba points out how Mona De Beer's contention that music that is improvised becomes folk music (2001: 9). Dalamba notes that this privileging of folk ideals was incommensurate with the robust growth of black popular music and the cultural industry in 1950s South Africa, which was more interested in promoting and marketing jive that jazz (Allen, 2003; Dalamba, 2016). Dalamba further notes:

> When these creators were faced with *King Kong*, they had to reckon with the popular, which often undercut their folk-ideals. The extent of the unlearning required was

> considerable. Black city music by the 1950s was a mass industry in which black musicians wanted a larger stake; it did not subscribe to folk's first ideal of non-commercialism and linkage with pre-capitalist modes of music production (Frith 1981) … The second folk-ideal, identified by Frith (ibid.), isolates certain musical features as aesthetic conventions. The white King Kongers also fell prey to this idea … characteristically privileging spontaneity, a non-intellectual relationship to one's music and artistic egalitarianism … A third folk-ideal presumes folk music's ability to express communal values as a political function. Bloom underwrites this in his foreword to the *King Kong* book. For him, black musicians "were at their best when singing of the simple things of their own world, or about events in the newspapers" (Bloom, 1961: 8). Such songs did not form the bulk of 1950s musicians' repertoire. Political relevance was often encrypted by using cosmopolitan or seemingly innocuous styles (Allen 2003), rather than the directness folk connotes. The fourth folk-ideal involves "the people" to whom this music is meant to speak. The white King Kongers were aware of class stratification and differentiation in Johannesburg's black society of the 1950s. Nevertheless, in *King Kong*, they insisted on the full coincidence of the musician-actors with the people they represented on stage, and interpreted this mimesis as the ultimate virtue of their project (De Beer 1960, p. 33). (Dalamba, 2011: 97-98)

The folk imperative, and the white King Kongers' mission to uplift and save the folk, became unstuck when they met Todd Matshikiza. Born in 1921 to black middle-class family, Matshikiza is as complex a figure as Pat Williams had to admit in 2017, as I have mentioned. His 1961 autobiography *Chocolates for My Wife: Slices of My Life* recounts his life from his position in British exile: from a well to do family in Queenstown in the Eastern Cape studying music, maths and English in Alice (also in the Eastern Cape) and music in KwaZulu-Natal at Adams College, to his move to Johannesburg in Gauteng, where he worked as a teacher, salesmen and journalist. Matshikiza's biography and its significance are beyond the scope of this study, and have in any case been studied more thoroughly elsewhere (Dalamba, 2019). What remains important for us is that Matshikiza, and the world he represented, had long found independent ways to maintain their jazz and musical cultures. Indeed, they had even found means to accommodate the changes taking place in the black culture industry (Matshikiza 1957; Dalamba 2016), and were well aware that younger jazz musicians were forging paths in modern jazz through, for example, bebop (Ballantine, 2012: 124). The year 1959 for example saw the release of the *Jazz in Africa Vol. 1 and 2* that arose from a series of recordings made in 1958-9. The trombonist Jonas Gwangwa, who was featured in both, recalls that the American jazz pianist John Mehegan had arrived in South Africa to sell his book on improvisation and did some gigs with white and black musicians (Ansell, 2004: 96-98). The album, according to Gwangwa, was the first LP made by black people in South Africa, because before then all they could record were the shorter 78s. Gwen

Ansell praises the album as the first public statement of the music that was emerging in contrast to the very popular jive music of the 1950s. Of equal importance was Matshikiza's response to Mehegan's tour in South Africa which, Titlestad (2004) summarises, provided the opportunity for Matshikiza to call for higher aesthetic standards in local jazz.

By 1959, then, South African jazz cultures were a mixture of educational, amateur and professional activities – a result of work that had been evident since the 1930s. Bloom's and De Beer's portrait of rollicking and undisciplined musicking is misleading. Their views, as Williams confesses, influenced their approach to *King Kong*'s music, and to Todd Matshikiza as a composer. Their presumptions regarding the music, as was the case with the acting, were why they brought in Stanley 'Spike' Glasser as musical director:

> My assumption was born out of the inescapable brainwashing in which I and those like me had been saturated, combined with the scraps of paper written in tonic solfa, *plus* the fact that Spike Glasser, a music graduate [from King's College, University of Cambridge] returned from London, was later brought in specifically to orchestrate Todd's music. (Williams, 2017: 27)

There is much to unpack here, not least the assumption that tonic-solfa indicates insufficient musical 'literacy'. To his credit, De Beer writes of her then husband, 'Spike was impressed by Todd's music, and thought that the various numbers showed a wide range of musical emotion and imagination' (2001: 14). The '*King Kong* debate' is far from being settled. First, it was dominated by white 'liberals', for whom South African jazz traditions allowed them space to challenge apartheid, even if it did not lead to them challenging broader notions about music as such. Later, radical scholars took issue with the liberals' ideas, and even with the show itself, and did so using the political and intellectual tools of black consciousness. Post-apartheid, literary and theatre critics and scholars have revisited the politics subtending *King Kong*'s making, to rescue the show from liberal condescension and from the unyielding demands made by the radicals. More recently, the debate has been taken up specifically by musicologists, whose aim is to explore how Todd Matshikiza – who remains silent in this essentially 'white' debate – and his music may challenge what we know about the show and about South African jazz. A striking consistency in the *King Kong* debate is that all contenders betray their love for the jazz opera; it is how it should be loved that is at issue. As Coplan has memorably concluded:

> In the Johannesburg of 1959, *King Kong* represented at once an ultimate achievement and final flowering of Sophiatown culture, a typically sturdy South African 'hybrid'

> that the devotees of racial and cultural purity and separation were determined to root out. The white suburb of Triomf rose where Sophiatown had stood, its final days immortalised in Lionel Rogosin's brilliant, searingly political film *Come Back Africa*. The African jazz epitomised by Miriam Makeba's cameo performance in the film died out or escaped into exile with Miriam, Dorothy Masuka, Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa, Dollar Brand, Letta Mbulu, Caiphus Semenya, and so many other leading lights. Still, *King Kong* remained as both an enactment and a symbol of the character and indestructibility of Johannesburg's urban African community. (2007: 217)

The truce reached by these scholars redeems *King Kong*'s position in the history of South African jazz. It reminds us of how *King Kong* placed on stage the rich panoply of South African jazz and popular musics that had been cultivated in black segregated townships since at least the 1920s. As an avowedly anti-apartheid and non-racial production, *King Kong* heroically challenged how urban black South Africans' lives and cultural practices previously had been represented to white South Africa. In place of the rural and the primitive, *King Kong* presented the urban and urbane; instead of 'African drums' and *ingoma* dancing, which were both popular as mine entertainment, *King Kong* presented black choral compositions alongside jazz, kwela and jive. Its protagonists spoke English and *tsotsitaal*, and the stories that the show's actors presented on stage were familiar: a love triangle and a tale of revenge. The entirety of the spectacle had a broader political aim: *King Kong* was meant to show that black and white artistic creators could collaborate, that white South Africans could enjoy a 'sophisticated' black show, and that black South Africans could compose, sing and act. In other words, *King Kong* sought to show how South African musical and theatrical cultures could be, if not for apartheid. I suggest in what follows that this truce was reached, and could only be reached, by a ignoring a crucial component of the social world the musical aimed to represent: black women.

'The radiance of ordinary daily life': Black South African Women In and Out of Jazz[4]

> At one level, the love plot of *The Cardinals* rests on a cliché: handsome, worldly man meets and loves shrinking violet. This was the basis of many of the escapist romances Bessie Head had handled each week at *Golden City Post*: they were fodder offered in compensation for the subjection that women suffered … *The Cardinals* is not only expressive of complex fears and angers. There is a haunting beauty in its many love stories; there is a real pathos in a waif's searching for a wheel-chair that will never reach the old lady who needs it; there is an unerring eye for the pretensions of sexual

[4] M. J. Daymond. 1993. 'Introduction'. In Bessie Head, *The Cardinals: With Meditations and Short Stories*. Cape Town: David Philip, viii.

> combat; there are glimpses of what it means to find in jazz an echo and a challenge to one's own suffering. (Daymond, cited in Head, 1993: xiii-xiv)

Es'kia Mphahlele's conflicts with editorial policy on *Drum* magazine, in his capacity as editor of fiction writing, is well known (2004 [1959]). Increased attention to these fissures has enhanced our understanding of black literary cultures funnelled through the publication (Masilela, 2012; Peterson, 2012). These reconsiderations have extended to South African music studies (Dalamba, 2019). What remains curious, for music studies, is that the writer Bessie Head's conflict with *Drum* has not caused a comparable ripple. This might be because her novella *The Cardinals* was only recently resurrected, and it was this story that spoke of her apprenticeship in what the fictional story calls *African Beat – The Paper of the People*, which for Daymond was *Golden City Post* but was for Dorothy Driver more probably *Drum* (1996). The two publications were closely linked in any case. According to Driver, 'Head survived as a writer in spite of *Drum*' (1996: 231). My reason for introducing Bessie Head here is to show that, in South African jazz studies, the prevailing truce regarding *King Kong* that I discussed earlier has been negotiated in the absence of women's voices in the dialogue.

The roles and positions of black jazz women in the story of South African jazz are a sorry tale in academia. Our scholars are few: Lara Allen (in Molefe and Mzileni 1997, and in 2000, 2003, and 2004), Carol Muller on Sathima Bea Benjamin (1996, 2011) and Ceri Moelwyn-Hughes on women jazz and popular musicians in post-apartheid South Africa (2013). Lara Allen pioneered this engagement with her doctoral dissertation (2000). As Nishlyn Ramanna has written, 'if South African jazz studies can be said to have "begun" with *In Township Tonight!*, Lara Allen's 2000 PhD dissertation *Representation, Gender and Women in Black South African Popular Music, 1948-1960* presently inhabits the midpoint of that thirty years history' (2016: 12). Allen's seminal work delves deeply into the working and personal lives of 1950s jazz women. She focuses on how the stars of the day – such as Dolly Rathebe, Dorothy Masuka and Miriam Makeba – were represented in films, on stage and on record covers, as well as how they were represented by journalists such as Cab Themba (1988), Nat Nakasa (1985) and above all by Todd Matshikiza's jazz journalism. All three (and others like Bloke Modisane and Casey Motsitsi) were associates with *Drum* and *Golden City Post*. Other newspapers and magazines, such as *Zonk*, are also referenced. Echoing the views by Makeba and Louw that I cited earlier, Allen concludes that 'public discourse about women musicians falls into two major areas characterised by the dichotomous roles of Madonna and whore classically projected onto women: mother and siren' (2000: 218). This

projection is evident in *King Kong*'s principal female characters. Christopher Ballantine's work on gender and migrancy also shows how these kinds of representations 'are replicated again and again' (2012: 153). If we recall that *King Kong*'s story was written predominantly by liberal white slummers, and also that Matshikiza was central to *Drum*'s fabulations, then it unsurprising that these representations are replicated in the musical. *King Kong*'s women, like the jazz women examined by Allen, also appear as 'icons of a male conceived world' (2000: 117).

Allen's work moves beyond representation, as her research also consists of oral history interviews that afford her a glimpse into the jazz women's experiences as 'jazz women' and as individuals. The stories she relates here challenge males' representations. The stories these musicians relate to Allen are marked by ironic awareness of how the black patriarchy oppressed them as women and as musicians; however, they also show a certain degree of agency. This agency, for Allen, is ambivalent. Black South African jazz women musicians 'acquiesced to, and worked within, male-defined roles; reproducing gender stereotypes and colluding with gender oppression', but also 'manipulated, circumvented, co-opted, contested and changed established rules of gender relations (2000: 210). Her case studies on Masuku and Rathebe remain unparalleled examinations of this thesis. I argued in my earlier discussion of *King Kong* that, following Robert Kavanagh, the white King Kongers' romanticization of black Sophiatown life was an imposition different from Driver's notion of 'romantic self-construction'. Here, it can be argues that black Sophiatown men's romanticization of black women and black women musicians works in a similar way. Allen summarises the fluidity of these women's romantic self-construction and everyday lives when she concludes:

> The power and vibrancy of the 1950s women musicians as icons lies in their ability to function simultaneously as bodies and voices, mothers and sirens, objects of sexual desire and racial pride; to embody aspirant and reflective identity, the local and the international, the modern and the traditional; to inhabit the spaces between gender and race, individual and group political agency, the public and private, fantasy and reality. *Women musicians functioned at the intersections of these spaces, which existed as continuums in flux rather than isolatable opposing categories.* Their power and independence lies precisely in their ambiguity, multiplicity and malleability; they cannot be contained and frozen into categories by other people's projections or by analysis; they cannot be wholly known or controlled by anyone, including an academic seeking to find significance in, or "make sense" of, their lives—earning a living, running a career, bringing up children—in between and through all these spaces. (2000: 252, my emphasis)

I take up Allen's contention that these women could not be frozen by examining their archetype in *King Kong*: Joyce. My focus is prompted by the absence of discussion regarding what stakes jazz women – then and now – have in the *King Kong* debate. For example, Dalamba has noted that, once in London, the women members of the cast were regularly eroticised as 'the *King Kong* cuties' (2011), divorced from the tragic drama that is the musical's plot. I therefore dwell on 'the Sophiatown imaginary' (Allen, 2004: 19-38) as Dalamba (2011) does, but follow Allen by reading this imaginary from a gendered perspective.

The removal of women King Kongers' from the musical's tragic plot, which was the source of its political resonance, was and remains a gesture of domestication. The domestic sphere was treated with disdain (Allen 2000; Ballantine 2012). Indeed, for men jazz was seen as a means to escape the domestic sphere. Ballantine relates how Nathan Mdledle ('King Kong') blamed 'problematic wives' for his band members' unreliable attendance of rehearsals and performances (2012: 156). He continues:

> If stories about problematic wives accumulated, so did evidence in support of the view that women had no place inside established performing groups, other than as a solitary young female singer who could be invited to join so as to bring decorative allure to a male group and could be dispensed with whenever necessary. (2012: 156-157)

Joyce, Petal and Miriam Ngidi were supposed to function in this manner in relation to the *King Kong* story. As I explore in the thesis, their relationship to the domestic sphere determines their fates in the musical. Beyond this, I also aim to enfold women King Kongers into a broader musical community that is suggested by their ensemble numbers. I do this because 1950s jazz women also formed their musical communities. Thandie Mpambani (later Klaasen) formed the Quad Sisters and Miriam Makeba formed the Skylarks. Dorothy Masuka's success as a soloist also challenged male jazz hegemony (Allen, 2003: 228-249).

Arguing for women's centrality – musical and historiographical stake – in the story of South African jazz should not repeat the disregard of the domestic sphere. One of this thesis's aims is to show how broader socio-political dynamics or lenses also pertain to the domestic, with the domestic also viewed alongside its customary feminized aspect. Belinda Bozzoli, in her 'Marxism, Feminism and South African Studies', echoes the study's cultural concerns as it deals with the concepts of 'internal' and 'external' domestic struggles (1983). She

highlights how preconceived gender binaries within African cultures were preserved and strengthened, owing to the fact that the threat of external contamination and cultural extermination outweighed the pre-existing and internal domestic struggling of gender inequality and oppression (1983: 150). Using Brenner's analysis of how pre-capitalist communities obtained the ability to withstand the destructive nature of capitalism, Bozzoli adopts Brenner's analytical methodology to construct a feminist reading of colonialist/post-colonialist South Africa. Bozzoli draws attention to concepts of "internal domestic struggle" which refers to dynamics concerning distribution of control, labour, income and property within the 'domestic system' versus "external domestic struggle" which refers to conflicts and compromises inflicted by external forces onto the 'domestic system' (1983: 146-147). Internal domestic struggles are more individualistic in nature in comparison to external domestic struggles which are more communal focused. Issues of perpetuated within internal domestic struggle are ignore in favour of the external threat to the community. Not only are internal conflicts hindered but the dynamics between genders and role distribution alter in favour of protection of the domestic system however these shifts have serves to further perpetuate female subordination (Bozzoli, 1983: 148).

By applying Bozzoli's concepts of 'domestic systems' I argue that jazz in itself creates its very own 'domestic system'. The idea that a musical genre is its own space, its own world, broadens the scope in which we view it. This new sphere operates under its own discourses, conventions, social faux pas and parameters of qualification which indicates whether one is within or without this world. Belsey draws our attention to notions of the 'self' and how the 'self' is created based on the ideologies and rule of the 'social'. Thus, the 'social' is what constitutes what 'self' needs to be considered part of that particular group despite the concept of 'self' being individualistic in nature (1985: 660). This particularly true of a created space with movable physical places such as the musical 'domestic systems' genres create. The occupants determine who constitutes as an occupant which results in the marginalisation, exile/musical banishment of female jazz artists. This banishment is typically to musically genres other than jazz but "lower" on the musical hierarchy that dictates social respectability.

Bozzoli's seminal article gives shoulder to the intellectual struggle into which this study intervenes, as it considers how *King Kong*'s jazz world avoids and inflects the domestic sphere. By applying Bozzoli's arguments, certain dynamics in the Sophiatown imaginary are made clearer. South African jazz narratives – including the *King Kong* debate – have voluntary amnesia towards issues concerning their female jazz artists whose voices, sounds

and characters they play. Jazz makes use of various modes of protection to ensure women are kept within or without the 'sacred' jazz space. These modes of male protection are 'hipness' and authenticity, public and private spaces, and race. Though based on various gender roles and associations, jazz canons – being hip, public and male narratives – are able to justify this amnesia by enforcing the modes of protection particularly to the female voice and all it embodies. As Catherine Belsey pithily noted, the female "becomes a speaking subject only by conforming his speech ... to the system of linguistic prescriptions taken as the system of differences" (Belsey, 1985: 659). Moreover, the concept of musical genre allow jazz to be considered its own musical world (sphere) which allows us to think of the genre as having its own residents (male) and exiles (homosexual males, women). This conceptualisation of the genre means that jazz has its own discourses, conventions, social faux pas, and parameters, which dictate those who can be part of the community, and can be part of the communities' histories. Residents determine who should be within this musical space, and where the lens of our archives and biographies or autobiographies is pointed (Langness and Frank, 2001: 99).

In sum, black South African jazz females have their race and gender working against them. Their stories are typically told through the male and/or female white gaze. This gaze is prevalent in the retelling of their stories presented in productions such as *King Kong* and the musicals which descended from it. This is why it is important to contextualise and vocalise jazz women from vernacularized perspectives; to explore where to find these women, to examine their disappearance, and to scrutinize the kinds of music they created. In this thesis, then, I offer a gendered reading of the character Joyce and the effect Joyce's construction had on subsequent musicals specifically Mackay Davashe's *Phiri*, Gibson Kente's *Too Late* and Todd Matshikiza's later musical *Mkhumbane.* With gender being taken into consideration a more balanced reading of *King Kong* can take place, and we can begin to gauge how the jazz women of South Africa, the women who play these characters, both juggled their race, gender and politics to ensure their musical visibility.

Miriam Makeba was the first woman to play Joyce. Her biography (in 1988 and 2004) is used in this thesis to explore the intersections between iconicity and the everyday mentioned by Allen. As the 'matriarch' to female jazz musicians and to South African jazz cultures, Makeba managed to slip into multiple roles and represent ideologies that allowed her to serve as a consistently prominent female voice within the hyper-masculine jazz space. She is often cited among other iconic female jazz vocalists such as Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and the South African Letta Mbulu. Miriam Makeba was a jazz vocalist born on 4 March 1932 and died on 8 November 2008. She took her experiences of growing up the

daughter of a sangoma (traditional healer) and domestic worker into her music and subsequently her knowledge of jazz and traditional Nguni South African songs, to her international audiences. Getting her start from the cosmopolitan Sophiatown where she lived and aided her mother with work, Makeba was able to engage in the kwela music, marabi, and South African jazz scenes.

She began singing with a band called the Cuban Brothers; however, it was when she became the singer for the Manhattan Brothers that her career took off in 1954. She later came to sing with the all-women vocal group the Skylarks which led to her landing roles in film and musicals, particularly the lead female role in *King Kong*. This gave her opportunities to perform both locally and internationally which paved the way towards her exile owing to the South African government revoking her passport when apartheid began to reach its zenith. Makeba took to cities such as London and New York, where she was met with international acclaim after meeting Harry Belafonte. During her international concerts she became vocal about the operations of the South African apartheid government, even though she never classified herself as a political singer (1988: 45). Even after her return to South Africa after apartheid's demise, Miriam Makeba still represented "the Mother of the Nation" who healed with her voice and work. She took up other humanitarian works such as tackling issues concerning domestic violence, drug abuse and HIV/Aids (2004). This work granted her the position of Goodwill Ambassador to the UN under former President Mbeki. However, she kept on performing her music until her death on stage in Italy in 2008. Like Joyce, Makeba is a useful cipher against which other women musicians' voices can be dialogically made meaningful in the *King Kong* story.

Writing Jazz, Gender and the Voice

In recent years jazz and jazz spaces have been under scrutiny owing to the masculine normative narrative the genre portrays. Thus far biographical accounts of female artists have been the prominent academic medium utilised as a means of adding feminine voices to jazz's narrative. However, this is not enough to create a more inclusive narrative for jazz and has not resulted less gendered jazz space. While approaches such as biographies are important, it is problematic if biographical accounts are either the most prominent or sole form of academic writing. The formation of an inclusive space for female and feminine voices within jazz studies requires the same theoretical analysis and critical work that their male

counterparts' music and lives have enjoyed (Tucker, 2008: 18-19). Theoretical analysis grants female musicians' music and contributions greater prominence within the jazz community (Muller and Benjamin 2011) rather than merely highlighting their presence, which is where most biographies tend to stop (Pekacz, 2004: 39). The mere writing of biographies and autobiographies gives the subject an assumed social stature (Frank and Langness, 1981: 101). This aspect makes this form of academic writing seductive to marginalised groups. During the modern jazz era narrative and canon became a key influence for jazz musicians and audiences. Many black musicians used biography and autobiography to ensure academic inclusion and as indirect method of protest. It informed the ideologies and attitudes that reside in jazz spaces to this day. However, the absence of women as subjects or more simply women as participants/ characters within these biographies speaks volumes.

In 'Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text', Catherine Belsey observes that 'the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology in so far all ideology has the function (which defines it) of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects' (1985: 658). One is only allowed to be considered a subject if 'the subject' functions within the set ideology. Moreover, the idea of the subject is formulated on the basis of the non-subject. This dichotomy is where the power dynamics come into play. While subjectivity maybe dependent on the individual; the individual only gains subjectivity from the community. The communities' acceptance of 'the subject's' acquisition of the language determines the validity of the chosen subject (1985: 659). Women are stereotypically perceived to have not acquired jazz's lingo and musical language, which constitutes them as non-subjects. Therefore, being perceived to be without the jazz language disqualifies women from considered suitable subjects, which results in their marginalisation. This poses a problem to biographical and autobiographical writings with women as subjects as past critics deem the works to be "unimportant, crude or illegitimate" (Anderson, 2005: 86). Bearing these arguments in mind, examining the degree to which women King Kongers were endowed with the jazz language is an important aspect of my study.

As Jolanta Pekacz alludes to in her 'Memory, History and Meaning Musical Biography and its Discontents', authors of musical biographies tend to ignore their subjectivity and would rather defend their beliefs and premises than reflect on the dangers of biographical writing. This presents these premises and beliefs as 'timeless truths' (2004: 40). Specifically, texts concerning instrumental jazz musicians tend to perpetuate jazz's masculine narrative. Because music is reflective of society, the manner in which music is

archived, received and created is indicative of societal ideologies and conventions. Jazz's historical narrative was purposely written in a manner to gain favour from its classical counterpart (Ramsey, 2003: 126). As jazz sought legitimisation as a serious art form, 'feminine' attributes were excluded in favour of the preferred 'masculine' qualities of the music. Closer to home, Cheryl Walker's *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* critiques biographies, stating that within Southern African gender studies the medium is used to simply map women's position within society when what is truly required it the '[integration] of these findings into our conceptualisation of society' (1990: 2). Her argument has also shaped this study: I spend little time discussing the women who took on particular roles in the South African jazz musicals discussed. Rather, I consider how each 'feminine' role is represented in the chosen musicals, how the music they are given enables or disables them from 'voicing' particular subjectivities, and whether women have been treated differently in the history of the South African jazz musical. Throughout, I keep in mind Walker's argument that black women experience a triple oppression of race, gender and class. Where white women's oppression is softened by the privileged granted by their race and class, black women's disadvantages makes them substitutable to documentary silence which result in these women 'disappearing from our view of the past' (1990: 6) This includes our jazz's musical past.

During South African jazz's most prominent and experimental periods (1940s to 1950s), jazz musicians sought to regain their 'lost' masculinity inflected by the emasculating, exploitative behaviours of their white bosses (Ballantine, 2012:160-171). These sentiments of emasculation were typically hidden behind blatant or cleverly concealed sexism within jazz spaces. This feeling of loss and anguish is typically displayed by male characters within jazz novels, poetry and literary writings – and in the musicals' stories that I explore. In turn the supporting female characters come to embody various roles and characteristics to agitate or heal these frustrations which lead the protagonist into action: the mother figure, the seductive "Dame", the unwittingly loyal wife or not so quiet revolutionary. The jazz literary tropes have come to represent the jazz female in fiction and reality and are prominent in *King Kong*. Salim Washington in his works concerning jazz in literature makes note of these recurring methods (2002; 2015). In the novels he analyses, there is a specific way in which the music, its character and the narrative that is rooted in a particular socio-political climate operate. For him, 'the novel … utilises music in ways that help to understand the contemporaneous political moment being displayed within the work of fiction. In fact, the music almost achieves the status of being a character' (2015: 96-120). With music read as an active

character, the choice of music typically gives insight to the protagonist's and supporting characters' internal dialogues and emotions. In his analysis of *To Every Birth Its Blood* by Mongane Wally Serote, Washington points out how the characters convey and communicate through the music they play to each other. This is particularly seen between the protagonist Tsietsi Molope and his wife Lily. Washington's observation that music as character also acts as a social code has informed this study, in particular when I examine the male and female musical interactions (such as duets) to gauge how gendered power dynamics influence narrative, characterisation and music functionality.

King Kong's orchestra (and indeed the orchestras of all the musicals considered here) consisted solely of men. Our study of women's positions in the South African jazz musical is therefore also a study of jazz singing. In 'Separated at "Birth": Singing and the History of Jazz', Lara Pellegrinelli traces how jazz progressively disavowed its connection to storytelling through singing and spontaneity, and instead highlighted instrumental proficiency, composition through virtuosic improvisation and harmonic complexity (Pellegrinelli, 2008: 39). Singing not only carried codes of femininity but it was inclusive in nature. The ability to understand and relate to the music could be attributed to the mass popularity jazz enjoyed during the swing era. These concepts of popularity and entertainment were actively rejected by 'modern jazz' artists. Jazz modernisms solidified the music's move towards iconic instrumentalists and the hastened (and justified) the 'banishment' of singers from jazz towards popular styles like soul and the blues. In South African jazz cultures, these styles were collectively labelled jive. Dalamba's work on the saxophonist Gwigwi Mrwebi re-reads the seminal year of 1954, when Dorothy Masuka released her singular recording *Hamba Nontsokolo* and inaugurated the era of jive (Allen, 2003):

> For Lara Allen, 1954 was important in the history of black popular music "because it was the period between the establishment of the mass media for black consumers and the full institutionalization of high apartheid" (2003:229–43). I would add that the 1950s were also important in this history within black popular music itself and saw *fierce struggles between musical styles*. These struggles resulted in the many hybrid styles perceived as definitive of this decade's black musics. Allen's argument discredits the view that hybrid music was little more than the "candy-floss of popular culture:" (243). While I am in broad agreement with Allen, I am less certain that her findings for vocal jive are, as she claims, applicable to instrumental 1950s big band African jazz … Since sax jive was the instrumental cousin of the vocal jive examined by Allen, we may argue that the commercial imperatives that enabled vocal jive's popularity and cultural significance to thrive had distinctive aesthetic consequences for Mrwebi … Mbaqanga/African jazz was seen as a culmination of black South African jazz … Revisiting the history of African jazz via Gwigwi Mrwebi, however,

> shows us that even at the height of its popularity, African jazz's dominance was always challenged by more popular styles such as pennywhistle kwela or vocal jive. This is why Mrwebi had to be content with being recorded by Troubadour and his ensemble labelled jive. (Dalamba, 2016: 70-73)

The mbaqanga/African jazz to which Dalamba refers had, by this time, banished women from the stage (Ballantine, 2012: 157). Women carved their own spaces within South African jazz cultures as vocalists. However, their music was market as non-jazz – jive music that threatened mbaqanga's hegemony. Curiously, male vocal ensembles such as the Manhattan Brothers or Lo Six did not suffer a similar fate. Indeed, Matshikiza himself toured with the band as their pianist throughout the country. Despite jazz vocalists' symbolic and political importance, as well as their popularity that kept the jazz scene alive, women's vocal jazz has not quite gained the status and hierarchy granted to its instrumental counterpart. I argue that this was owing to singing being used as a bartering tool to ensure the success of instrumental jazz. Distancing and demeaning the value of singing allowed jazz to model its cannon similarly to the classical cannon (Pellegrinelli, 2008: 31-46). In 'When Malindy Sings: A Meditation on Black Women's Vocality', Farah Jasmin Griffin grapples with the black female jazz vocalist's dichotomous role as the healer of the nation and the societal critic (such as Makeba became). The responsibility of the black vocalist to black audiences was to become the mouth piece in which the feelings of frustration, anger and hope were communicated to audience they could not reach with just their speaking voice. The symbol of the black singer mouth out, eyes close by the microphone became more palatable than the black revolutionist speaking at a podium: 'the black woman's singing voice [came to] signal a crisis in the spectacle of national unity; it can even invoke such a crisis by mobilizing dissent and forging a space of resistance' (Griffin, 2004: 104). In this study, Joyce's solo music, particularly 'Back of the Moon', allows for the exploration of Griffin's observation.

Methodology and Structure

This study is primarily bases on archival documents, recordings, reviews and previous work on South African jazz and, in particular, on *King Kong*. The size of archival documents on *King Kong* made selectivity necessary. Otherwise, I would have had to take on board the Jack Hylton Archives at the University of Lancaster; papers held at Killie Campbell Africana Library and the Alan Paton Archives at the University of KwaZulu-Natal; John Matshikiza's

papers at the William Cullen Africana Library at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the Todd Matshikiza papers at Rhodes University's Cory Library. I have relied on the Cory Library papers, as these contained the most significant amount of information on *King Kong*'s career in South Africa (rather than in London). The other musicals examined here have scant information available. Information was sourced from reviews, internet research consisting of online blogs (such as the Electricjive blog), and websites (flatinternational.org). From these, I managed to use newspaper articles from *Drum* magazine, original manuscripts of Matshikiza's music and information from LP liner notes.

To navigate the information, I read these sources with the jazz women vocalist in mind, reading against the grain of what others have centralised in their discussions of *King Kong*. In the course of my reading, I was alert to the absences and presences of the jazz female in, and in writing about, the South African jazz musical. I question what their absence enables – what kinds of stories can then be told of South African jazz, and of *King Kong*. When jazz women are present, I examined the terms of their integration and representation in the musical and in talk about the musical.

When dealing with the archives in this research Ann Laura Stoler's "Along the Archival Grain: Thinking through Colonial Ontologies" will be kept in mind. Stoler reminds the reader to be cautious when working with archives as they make claims to capture the "essences" of their subject matters which in turn renders "these essences [as] unchanging and stable in time" (2009: 4). Archives capture wherever the lens is pointing and that is determined by whoever is in power. Be it the colonial anthropologist, the institutions in charge of the archive, the government or the socio-political ideology governing schools of thought within era of time. These power structures govern what is included and excluded from the archive as well as those who granted access to these captured moments in time (Ballantine, 2016: 74). I take interest into how jazz women where archived and who was deemed worthy of being archived. This informs how the "social reality" of the past and the present are defined.

How these jazz women are represented and what they come to embody with their presence, actions and bodies has been informed by the reality of South African jazz cultures. The way female characters operate in these cultures shape the politics of gender in my case studies: *King Kong*, *Phiri*, *Too Late* and *Mkhumbane*. A note on my term 'the South African jazz musical' is due. The jazz musicals discussed here have ostensibly different stories in terms of their content. Their plots, however, assume similar shapes: they are a window into black urban or township life during apartheid, and its various forms of disintegration. For

King Kong, *Too Late* and *Mkhumbane* – this integration takes on a tragic aspect. *Phiri*, which is an adaptation of Ben Jonson's play *Volpone*, gives this theme a comic treatment. What also enables me to use the phrase 'the South African jazz musical' is the importance of jazz in all four, even though each jazz style used tends to reflect the type of jazz that was popular at the time. In other words, my use of the term in the singular differs from Bernth Lindfors's, who identifies a persistent primitivism in this cultural form: from the 'Kaffirs-in Hyde-Park-Corner' spectacle in London in 1853, to Bertha Egnos's *Ipi Tombi* in New York in 1977 (1991: 127-136). Where Lindfors sees consistency in terms of primitivism, I argue that what is even more striking in terms of consistency is the representation of women in these musicals. At the same time, I have remained alert to disruption, where the politics of gender is wrested – either by music, music's interpretation, or something else besides – from jazz patriarchy's grasp.

The dissertation is structured as three chapters: Chapter One is 'Regendering *King Kong*: Todd Matshikiza and the Musical Representation of 1950s Women on Stage'; Chapter Two is 'On Joyce's Death: Jazz, Gender and Ambivalence in *King Kong*', and Chapter Three is "Joyce's Descendants: The Evolution of the Shebeen Queen beyond *King Kong*'. In the first chapter, I focus on how gender operates within the various productions *of King Kong* particularly the 1959, 1961 and 2017 renditions of Todd Matshikiza's production. I examine how female characters operate differently depending on the year, producers and location of the production. I investigate how their characters transform depending on the prejudices of the audiences and creators of *King Kong*. These transformations are revealed through the consideration of the original manuscripts, the 1959 and 1961 recorded audio and the viewing of the 2017 production. I interrogate what has been removed from and added to the original score and production. This alters how these characters are received by audiences and what ideology they represent or embody. Chapter Two focuses on the main female character Joyce and her gendered performance on stage. I explore her creation, lived stereotypes and emplotment. I question her failure or successful portrayal of the Sophiatown songbirds she represents, while also questioning how they in turn embody Joyce. Chapter Three considers the women who surround and descend from Joyce's legacy, the shebeen queen. I analyse the shebeen queen as a stock character and juxtapose various women's portrayals of the shebeen queen against Joyce's. Throughout the story that follows, Todd Matshikiza's musical imagination, and the women who brought this imagination to life, remain a solid guide.

Chapter One

Regendering *King Kong*: Todd Matshikiza and the Musical Representation of 1950s Women on Stage

> *KWELA DANCE*. (*KWELA and PATHA PATHA are the most popular forms of dancing among the African youth. They resemble jive in their absence of formal steps, but the sinuous hip movement, the seductive torso weaving of the women, and in the Patha Patha [touch-touch] the intimate play of hands on the partner's body are pure "township." The dancers perform with great abandon – to wild almost barbaric music, with interjections of whistling and shouting.)*
>
> *King Kong*, Act 1, Scene 4

Introduction

This chapter focusses on gender codes in *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera*. It argues, firstly, that these codes were informed by the broader societal representations of black women in mid twentieth-century South Africa, especially the forms these representations took in the popular English-medium magazines like *Drum*. Beyond these media, the chapter also considers how those black women, also of the 1950s, who were not the staple of popular culture's imagining feature in *King Kong*. In other words, I argue here that notions of gender captured by the popular press intersect with notions of race embodied by the black women who existed in apartheid's 1950s, but not as part of the so-called '*Drum* decade' (Chapman 1987). I show that these female 'types' were transposed to perform particular functions in *King Kong*: to portray the young, idealistic, woman full of hope for a happy life (portrayed by the character Petal), and the mature, petit-bourgeois, respectable woman who is immune to the 'nice time' life of Sophiatown's leisure cultures (portrayed by the character Miriam Ngidi). Both interact with a complex third type, represented by the character Joyce, who is central to Sophiatown nightlife as represented in *King Kong* but occupies this space in specific ways. Indeed, what is encoded in the three types is that Joyce was once as young and idealistic as Petal, but is not yet as cynical as Miriam Ngidi. The intersection of race and gender I have alluded to does not inhere only in these characters as women. As I show in what follows, how they interact with the male characters in the play illuminates the gender politics surrounding and operating within the African jazz opera.

The second prong of my argument in this chapter is that gender codes in *King Kong* are informed by the relationships of jazz and gender, and of gender in jazz. This is one reason

why this chapter is titled 'regendering jazz'. Drawing on David Ake, I argue that training a feminist lens on jazz is a response to how, historically, 'jazz communities … established tacit conceptions of the masculine', rather than an assumption that there was ever a time of gender neutrality in jazz cultures (Ake, 2002: 62). If, following Ake, jazz codes are gendered, then focussing on the musical representations of 1950s black women on *King Kong*'s stage is more properly a change in perspective. Christopher Ballantine has pointed the way in this argument (2012: 146-192). In his examination of South African jazz culture in the late 1940s and the 1950s, entitled in part 'Gender and Migrancy', iconic male musicians and ensembles for example appear as less than heroic. They are still shown to be important to South African jazz history and its development; however, their centrality is revealed clearly to have been bought at women musicians' expense. Ballantine's study, in my view, shows that examining the relationship of South African jazz and gender in these years need not rest with the surfacing of jazz women's stories: relationships and how these changed jazz cultures are important. Following Ballantine's lead, this chapter also explores Todd Matshikiza's shifting opinions on gender during his tenure as *King Kong*'s composer. I deliberately restrict my scope to Matshikiza as *King Kong*'s composer because his complicity in the *Drum* decade's masculinist discourses has been uncompromisingly documented elsewhere (see Ballantine, 2012: 146-160 and Driver, 1996: 227-238). In these studies, Matshikiza exists in the cocoon of black homosociality: *Drum* magazine's offices and black Johannesburg's jazz bandstands. It is from these 'safe spaces' – a term that currently and from certain subjects, contemptuously signals women's vulnerability – that he constructs iconic and ordinary 1950s black women (see John Matshikiza, 2000). Once plucked from this world to join the predominantly male and all-white *King Kong* production team, however, his views on black womanhood and on black jazz women assume a different aspect.

What holds the two perspectives explored in this chapter together is the long association of jazz with primitivism or, more precisely, with 'primitivist modernism' (Lemke, 1998). As Sieglinde Lemke writes:

> "The primitive" is a highly charged term; in the racist discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was infused with negative connotations and indiscriminately applied to peoples and objects worldwide … But when referring to human conduct or manners, "primitive" was the antonym of discipline, order, rationality – the antithesis of "civilized." The racist imagination conflated these two versions of alterity and defined people of African descent as irrational, uncivilized, and not-yet-modern. (1998: 4-5)

As her argument develops, Lemke shows how the characteristics attributed to the primitive became a source of envy and, soon, also of desired appropriation. The Afro-primitive came to symbolise the antithesis to deadening Euro-modernity, something that should not be confused with the likes of Paul Gilroy's notion of modernity and its counter-cultures in his *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). For the primitivists, the Afro-primitive was barely endowed with consciousness and was instead treasured for its negation: an Other. For the likes of Gilroy, however, continental and diasporic Africans were imbued with a double consciousness that *challenged* Euro-modernity. The literary scholar Michael Titlestad has persuaded scholars of South African jazz that primitivism and naturalism overwhelmed white reception of jazz in the country during apartheid, including the reception of *King Kong* (2004). Though some segments of the 1959 *King Kong* audiences were emissaries of the apartheid state as Lindelwa Dalamba has shown (2013), the jazz opera mostly received positive reviews. However, as she argues elsewhere (2011), the acclaim was couched in the language of primitivism (something that Lemke's argument makes space for). Both Titlestad and Dalamba show how *King Kong*'s newness or modern nature was a welcome relief for the more liberal minded white South African, precisely because of its difference to the rigidities of apartheid South Africa. They also argue that, as a result, Matshikiza's music became appreciated for *not* challenging its context.

Building on these two scholars, I want to suggest two things. First, that we are unlikely to craft *King Kong*'s music (and its composer) as counter-cultural if we do not return to the nuts and bolts of the jazz opera. Second, that *King Kong*'s 'modern-ness' – its setting in the present, its privileging of urban settings and its jazz and popular musics – was predominantly carried by women's bodies and women's voices. *King Kong*'s modern male characters are restricted to the Prowlers Gang and their leader Lucky. Photographs of the cast's rehearsals in the book of the musical (Bloom, 1961: 32-33) show the Prowlers dressed in zoot suits, fedora hats and two-toned made famous by the real-life gangsters of 1950s Sophiatown. The main character King Kong, by contrast, is shown dressed either in boxing gear or in his training tracksuit. The rest of the male chorus is in workers' and ordinary clothes. In contrast to this, the three washerwomen who tell the story of the boxer's rise and fall are the only female characters dressed in domestic workers' outfits. Miriam Ngidi is described as being in her nurse's uniform. The rest of the women – the principals and the chorus – are described as permanently fashionably dressed, often twirling parasols. Joyce, of course, is the most flashily dressed. This sartorial hierarchy indexes how the modern was to

be interpreted by the show's audiences. We may immediately note that these women on stage are primarily decorative. This was by now conventional in South African jazz cultures. As Ballantine states, as early as 1952:

> Women now seemed to be disappearing from the black musical stage or, when they did appear, they did so on a qualitatively different basis. Their involvement now largely depended on their allure … the primary route for an aspirant singer or dancer was to be adopted by a male group for her sexy, decorative qualities. (2012: 149)

Noting how this 'foreclosed opportunities for women and confined them to a particular stereotype' (ibid.) is instructive for my argument in this chapter. The distribution of solo numbers provides a clue. The principal male character King Kong justifiably has the most number of solos: 'King Kong' and 'Death Song'. The gangster Lucky swears his revenge on the boxer for stealing his girlfriend Joyce in 'Damn Him!'. In other words, solos are given to male characters who represent the broad spectrum of the male world represented on stage. By contrast, women's solos are given to those characters that represent the glamourous representation of Sophiatown's female world, Petal and Joyce (the nurse Miriam, for example, has no solo).

It is, however, in how male and female interactions are staged in the show that brings together my argument about the intersection of race and gender, subtended by notions of primitivism. Stage directions (in Bloom 1961) frequently show the men take centre stage in scenes' compositions, including in group scenes where the people of the township as a whole are portrayed. Act 1 Scene 4, part of which is the epigraph to this chapter, is the only scene in *King Kong* where women are centred on stage. I began the chapter with this excerpt because it focusses on the black body and its movement. In line with primitivist discourse, black bodies are sexualised in exaggerated fashion including their dances. The scene occurs after big musical numbers such as 'King Kong', a song about the prowess of the main male protagonist, and 'Marvellous Muscles', a song about the physique of King Kong which warrants undesired attention from the township women. At this point in the play we have been introduced to King Kong as a budding boxer with the prospect of fighting overseas which promises him an escape from his everyday township life. We have also already met Jack his trainer and friend, Miriam who is Jack's girlfriend, King's young friend Popcorn and Petal, who is in love with King. To all these characters, King Kong represents an escape of some sort from the confining life in the township. The hopes they pin on King are individual and communal. For example, his success would earn his trainer Jack enough money to marry

Miriam. For the people of the township in general, his desired success abroad would, in Jack's words, make him more than 'a non-European champ, fighting for peanuts' (Bloom, 1961: Act 2 Scene 3). He would 'fight without this weight [of apartheid] on his back – and make some dough and come back home and buy that truck and house' (ibid.). King's success is black South Africa's success, and this is what the group scene here is meant to portray.

The importance of these interactions to the story's meaning is undermined by the stage directions I have cited at the start of this chapter. Kwela and phatha phatha are simplified to dance forms rather than also understood as musical styles. The communal practice of dancing is sexualised, and it is women, and their 'seductive torso weaving', who bear the brunt of this eroticisation. Communal dancing to jazz-influenced popular music is generalised as performing 'with great abandon'. *King Kong*'s choreographer was Arnold Dover, and his interview with Mona De Beer (née Glasser) provides some clues for the dynamics. Dover, De Beer points out, 'had worked before with Africans on the choreography for a film and so started the *King Kong* rehearsals with a fair idea of what Africans can and cannot do' (2001 [1960]: 37). For him, problems with choreography were due absence of training, women's conservatism, and that 'the idea of "daintiness" in women is a bit alien' (ibid.). Dover further notes that another source of difficulty is that the cast is 'used to *ex tempore* expression. I'm sure … that [the musical director] Spike has this problem with the music too' (ibid.). We may note that Dover does not wonder if the *composer* Matshikiza had problems with the cast's improvisation on his music which, in the end, is described as 'wild [and] almost barbaric'.

The politics of race and gender in South African jazz cultures are therefore acutely present in *King Kong*. In what follows, I explore the interactions of these politics. I do so by focussing, first, on Todd Matshikiza and the politics of collaboration, to consider how his attempts at musical representation rubbed up against the ideas proposed by his white creative team. I then shift my attention to how the women characters' ensemble vocality was treated, and compare this with Miriam Makeba's memories of her singing career in 1950s South Africa. I do so to support my argument that *King Kong* distilled the conventions of representation of the time. The evolution of the song 'Marvellous Muscles' also helps with my analysis. Threaded throughout my narrative are considerations of primitivist discourse and the position of women singers as jazz musicians. In this way, regendering *King Kong* becomes part of a broader project to regender South African jazz.

Todd Matshikiza and the Politics of Collaboration: Race and Gender

For years musicological studies have been concerned with artists' intentions. This is partly because art products may reflect the everyday stories of those who live and create art. Artists both consciously and unconsciously interweave their lived socio-political climate and ideologies into the art they create. This is true for both theatre and musical productions. Creators' politics are often echoed on the stage through the creation of the project as one creates within the bounds of what one has experienced and manage to imagine from that vantage point. When regendering a production such as *King Kong*, considering how the politics and politicking that surrounded its creation is crucial as it gives insight into how and why gender was performed in the 1959, 1961 and 2017 versions of the production. It gives us insight into the creation and maintenance, or possibly even subversion, of jazz gender conventions and stereotypes. Keeping this under consideration, examining *King Kong* becomes an exercise of translation between stage and lived everyday 1950s township life. The musical unravels into a complex and nuanced story, especially when we bear in mind that each member involved in the creation of the production had vastly contrasting intentions for the purpose of the play's conception, and each reached different conclusions regarding the production's fulfilment of its purpose once it began to exist and circulate in public spaces. *King Kong*'s success is subjective in that regard.

Understanding the individuals, communities and societies involved in the show's making gives one insight into possible decisions and creative intentions that informed the production's conceptualization. The 'behind the scenes' proceedings of *King Kong* were shrouded in controversies, politics and imbalanced power relations regarding race and gender, and these ended up reflecting on the stage of *King Kong*. Todd Matshikiza has told his 'behind the scenes' story about on various platforms, including in his autobiography *Chocolates for My Wife* (1961). Curiously, Matshikiza delays mentioning *King Kong* to the final chapter of his autobiography:

> The chief reporter, a white man with a greasy beard, said, "Ezekiel Dhlamini appears on a preparatory charge for the murder of his girl-friend. Cover it! … I sprawled broad ink on my reporter's notebook cover, "I Cover King Kong". (1961: 110)

What follows is the story of the real King Kong's murder trial. In these pages, some of the main male characters of the production are introduced: the belligerent boxer who insists on a death sentence rather than imprisonment, the gangsters known as the Spoiler Gang who are

reimagined as the Prowlers in *King Kong*, and the shebeen Hell's Kitchen that becomes the Back of the Moon in the jazz opera. King Kong Dhlamini's murdered girlfriend Maria Miya, Joyce in the play, is present as a silenced victim. Writing about the trial was as important for Matshikiza as composing the music would be a few years later. The manner in which he was offered the commission is narrated in Matshikiza's typically caustic and ironic style:

> I think *King Kong* will make a marvellous excuse for a theatrical production, your people are so much alive especially for this sort of thing. I think it's perfect for any innuendos. I will put some of the language down as spoken in the township, can you give me a few phrases, for instance what do you say when a policeman approaches, what is the lingo? More and more white people came around black people telling us to never mind the regulations let's get to Rupert's place and put down as much African lingo as we can although Rupert's place is in the heart of the White kingdom and blacks are shot at sight after nine, 'specially if you're talking some lingo. (1961: 121)[5]

The trial and death of the real King Kong did make 'a marvellous excuse for a theatrical production', and has captured the South African imagination since its premiere on 2 February 1959. For Matshikiza, *King Kong* became a marvellous excuse for him to speak back to the racialized structures and their representatives, both as they directed his life and livelihood as a journalist (in the instruction to cover the dangerous trial) and as a composer (to provide lingo in dangerous white-only suburbs). For us, *King Kong* is a marvellous excuse to examine jazz's complex relationship with race and gender. Race plays an important part in how jazz and gender functions. Though not unique in this, jazz's aesthetic has always been interlinked with extra-musical influences. Jazz cultures prescribe the music jazz musicians create. From what is revered to what is marginalised, race informs perpetuated behaviours and stereotypes within the jazz community. The black male artists were treated by commercial music industry and event organisers as a means to maintain the ideology of white male musicians or composers versus the commercial emasculation of black male entertainment and songwriters (Monson, 1995: 398). In Matshikiza's words describing the black male artist: 'he is burning inside because race happened to him. And race has no business to happen to anyone' (2000: 46).

Music composition is one of the defining aspirations for modern jazz musicians, particularly for the black artists of the 1950s and the 1960s (Monson, 2007: 66-106). Societal labels such as composer in comparison to songwriter carry contrasting connotations. The

[5] Rupert was the husband of Pat Williams, who contributed some of the lyrics to *King Kong* and worked closely with Todd Matshikiza. Where Matshikiza was the only black member of the production team, she was the only female member of the production team.

former implies intellect and confers an elevated musical status, while the later insinuates a natural talent that leans more into a coincidental non-educated creation of music (primitivism as naturalism). The Composer is a title many western modernists thought unattainable for people of African descent (Lewis, 2004: 131-162). For example, composer John Cage infamously had a distaste toward improvisation and hot jazz stating that 'most people who improvise slip back into their likes and dislikes, and their memory, and they don't arrive at any revelation that they're unaware of" (Feisst, 1987: 3). This patronization towards black composers was not simply a Western phenomenon experienced by African Americans: African composers had similar experiences. In his writings composer Todd Matshikiza has referred to multiple occasions where his and other South African composers' compositional integrity has been undermined and altered in undesirable ways on the basis of lack of knowledge. If *Chocolates for My Wife* discusses these dynamics briefly and ironically, his article in the *New Statesman*, titled 'King Kong – Making the Music', forthrightly details an experience with the city council of white Johannesburg 1956 for the city's 70th birthday.

> They asked me to write a 'Song of Joy' for 200 voices and orchestra. But the SABC Symphony Orchestra would not touch the work, as a public appearance with a Black choir would have been an embarrassment. So, the white conductor in charge of the music group of the "Native" section of the City Council found me a brass band. When I suggested 'thunder' and lightning' in the music, he drowned brass in timpani. When I said the work *Uxolo* meant peace, he bounded with enthusiasm. When I tried to explain that the Xhosa phrases in the piece were satirical of the claw (and I raised my hands to my throat demonstrating strangulation), he said nobody will "dig" that. (1961: 315).

King Kong was written at a time when South African musicians, composers and artists were actively looking for their unique artistic voice. In *With the Lid Off* (2000) a collection of the reportage of Todd Matshikiza and his now deceased son John Matshikiza, the musician highlights moments of South African jazz trying to find its feet. What Matshikiza sought to achieve with the music of *King Kong* was a true representation with great dignity and respect of the sounds, culture and music coming out of South African townships.

This vision seemingly did not suit the vision of *King Kong*'s producers (Dalamba, 2011: 96-97). They had their own conceptions of what was occurring in South African townships, including their musical cultures. Michael Titlestad (2004) explains this clash of vision and kinds of knowledge through recourse to the idea of the white 'slummer'. He highlights how persons such as Harry Bloom and Anthony Sampson, and literary figures like Toby Hood, experience the South African townships in real life and in South African

literature of the 1950s are 'expatriate observers' (Titlestad, 2004: 105).[6] Typically, such white slummers entered the townships during the 1950s to find and solidify preconceived expectations of the South African urban blacks' cultural existence. For Titlestad, these expectations were primitivist, as the slummers sought to affirm the notion that 'black South Africans burst into song at every occasion, they imitate American examples, but have an innate musicality that emerges *despite* their inclination to mimicry and their music is embodied and sensual at its core' (2004: 105). Lending credence to Titlestad's argument, Harry Bloom's foreword to the book of the musical includes such observations. For him, *King Kong* 'would express not just the music, but the drama, colour and effervescence, as well as the poignancy and sadness, that made the peculiar flavour of township life' (1961: 11). While Bloom's expatriate observations are notably balanced, he too falls into the primitivising trap when he concludes:

> It would naturally be a musical, not merely because we wanted to give new opportunities to our concert artists, but because township people live in the idiom of musicals. There is nothing artificial about African people breaking into song or dance, or doing so in chorus. They sing when they are sad as well as when they are happy. Musicals are an old tradition of the European and American stage, but really they properly belong to the African. (1961: 11-12)

What is missing from Bloom's observations here is the amount of creative work – composition – Matshikiza undertook in writing the music for the jazz opera. This is perhaps why the *New Statesman* article came to be subtitled 'Making the Music'. The thrust of the article is that the music London audiences heard in Princes Theatre in 1961 had a far longer history than the 1950s. Moreover, whereas Bloom attributes the music to some natural urge, for Matshikiza it was 'a distinct art form' and moreover 'grows from struggle' (1961: 315).

With this in mind, Matshikiza's description of hearing his first encounter of the completed musical product of *King Kong* makes a bit more sense and carries great significance. His description is not what one would expect from a composer who placed so much weight on his initial composition. This first encounter was the 'Backers Evening', staged to entice moneyed white South Africans to sponsor the show's South African run. Matshikiza, who in his autobiography describes his marginalization from the creative process

[6] Anthony Sampson was the editor of *Drum* magazine responsible for its popularity and symbolic importance in the 1950s, and he was a close friend to Todd Matshikiza (see Sampson 1956). Toby Hood is the main protagonist in Nadine Gordimer's novel that portrayed the 1950s, *A World of Strangers* (1958).

including from his music's orchestration and arranging (1961: 123), narrates the evening near the end of 'Making the Music' as follows:

> And then the music began. I looked round at the surrealist paintings on the walls. I looked up at the ceiling in hessian sacking held up conically in the centre to look like a beatnik's hideout. The cigar smoke drenched the Latin Quarter and hung round the hessian like the tentacles of a giant octopus. The whole place was pretentiously artsy, designed to look like that for Johannesburg's big money. (Matshikiza, 1961: 316)

His silence about the music is concerning at best. He makes no mention of the music after it had begun playing. He does not even mention listening of any kind. Instead he draws the readers' attention to another sense, what he sees and gives and opinion on how his music's premiere was decorated. In any case, Matshikiza as composer is vindicated, because, as he says, 'the backers didn't bite' (ibid.). For him, the evening's failure was due to how much his music had been changed without his permission and by people who, as had happened in the Johannesburg Festival incident, did not dig (understand) the music. His reasoning differs markedly from Mona De Beer, for whom the evening 'had been only partly successful from a financial point of view' (2001[1960]: 19).

These contrasting evaluations of the evening show, again, the clashing visions and intentions of the various actors involved in the making of *King Kong*. Examining the politics of collaboration in this way allows us to trace the workings of primitivism in *King Kong*'s music more carefully. If for Matshikiza *King Kong* represented an opportunity to create art and to experiment, for the white creator it was an opportunity to stage an ethnographic spectacle. Marianna Torgovnick tackles these oppositions – art versus ethnographic spectacle – in her book *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (1990). There, she critiques how primitivist language and attitudes became normalized into societal ideologies. Much like I have shown here, she points to the exclusive focus on sexuality, religious ritual and violence. In ways we too have seen *King Kong*'s protagonist, music and composer described, she writes:

> To study the primitive is thus to enter an exotic world which is also a familiar world. That world is structured by sets of images and ideas that have slipped from their original metaphoric status to control perceptions of primitives –images and ideas that I call tropes. Primitive as like children, the tropes say. Primitives are our untamed selves, our id forces- libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. (1990: 8)

Matshikiza was intensely aware of the primitivistic stereotypes that played such an active role the South African jazz scene during apartheid. His article in the *New Statesman* explains how that in the past he has fallen victim to perpetuating these stereotypes owing to the pressures from art patrons. And, for *King Kong*, he points to 'a patronizing attitude that has found it hard to dissociate him from Edgar Wallace's fabulous, terrorising ape' (1961: 315). He was also aware of how detrimental these narratives are for the people they depict. To emphasize this dangerous misrepresentation, Matshikiza turns to the representation of women. Recognizing that these stereotypes bleed into the broader black art scene beyond music, he writes:

> My fellow sufferer and friend, sculptor Samson Bhavuma, was similarly faced with having to 'hand over' his work to a committee of white patrons who set themselves up to "encourage and develop Native talent". I do not know why Samson chose a monkey for his subject, but he carved a monkey on wood, pronouncing the monkey's masculinity somewhat grotesquely. While he was working on the subject his patrons of the "Native Development Committee" suggested he should add, to complete his piece, a nude African woman carrying food on a mat and bringing it to the monkey. Samson accepted the suggestion "from above", but in addition he bound his monkey in a rope, and produced the effect of an improvised [David Alfaro] Siqueros "Proletarian Victim". I asked him later why he did it and he replied, "They wanted it so". (1961: 316)[7]

With *King Kong* Matshikiza stated that he sought to change these misrepresentations in his original score, and aimed to construct a main black female character that was "neither nude nor subservient" (ibid.). Matshikiza's comments on the black South African female in this article contradict of the imaginary favoured by the white South African art patrons and critics. They are also at odds with his customary complicity in *Drum*'s masculinist ethos (Driver, 1996). This anomaly encourages one to consider the degree to which the magazine's tabloid editorial policy and ethos were commonly shared by its staff members (see for example Mphahlele, 2004[1959], 184). What we do know is that Matshikiza was protective of his musical creation, even collaborating with two fellow black musicians to try and raise funding that would enable them to orchestrate *King Kong*'s music themselves (1961: 316). The attempts failed, and *King Kong* thus became 'a tremendously exciting inter-racial' adventure (Kavanagh 1985). Knowledge of these contexts supplements and critiques the

[7] Siqueros was a Mexican painter of the Expressionist and social realist school. Matshikiza here is referring to the artist's "Proletarian Mother" (1929) rather than "Proletarian Victim".

views held by Mona De Beer and, more recently, by Pat Williams (2017). In her memoir *King Kong – Our Knot of Time and Music: A Personal Memoir of South Africa's Legendary Musical*, Williams suggests that from the moment she was added to *King Kong's* creative team the score had multiple people working contributing to its composition (Williams, 2017: 15). Many instances speak to the score not being solely created but Todd Matshikiza, something that is not borne out in the Todd Matshikiza Papers held at Rhodes University's Cory Library. While Pat Williams and Mona de Beer speak of the composition as a more collaborative effort, they pay little attention to the politics of collaboration.

This blindness to the politics of collaboration leads to patronization, which results in *King Kong* becoming yet another example of black male musicians becoming silenced by what Matshikiza called 'the white claw' of censorship that altered black composition and performance to appease white audiences. What is crucial to note here is that the representation of black women in *King Kong* marked the limits of Matshikiza's tolerance of the 'white claw', showing again the complex interaction of race and gender in South African jazz history and discourse. Despite Matshikiza's protective words regarding the representation of the African women on stage he and his peers are not completely innocent of such prejudices.

King Kong's Jazz Women and the Politics of Gender in the 1950s

The females of the *Drum* era have been written about and displayed as women who either embody all that is traditional and all that is evil, or all that is natural, nurturing and maternal. How women of the 1950s and 1960s assimilated into these roles affected their commercial popularity as well as their position with the male jazz bands of the time. Their level of skill was strictly based on their ability to present themselves in a favourable fashion for either the jazz band or the record companies (Allen 2000). The failure to assimilate led to women's marginalization in the music industry. This led to singing becoming the only 'appropriate' position for a black female to fulfil. Black jazz big bands and smaller ensembles were once integrated spaces for both male and female musicians. Gradually, they transformed into spaces where women were expected to embody male prejudices of female roles and behaviour and to know little about jazz:

> One *Drum* journalist … probably Todd Matshikiza – wrote provocatively of a discussion he had had with the vocal group, Lo Six. These were "self-sufficient young men" whose opinion, he averred supportively, "represents the bulk of the dominant sex." This "opinion" comprised several reasons for keeping women out of the

> performing groups. First, women want to become show-business executives. Second, while they can be "cute", the problem is "they don't stay that way long enough". Third, because "they just want to be idols", they often turn rehearsals into occasions for "imminent nervous breakdown or alarming hysteria". And fourth, their "shouting effect: of the "low-toned generally explosive effects" of *mbube* male-voice choirs, as Lo Six were doing in a novelty programme at the time – demands that would be like "Greek or a strenuous undertaking for any woman". The conclusion was emphatic. There was only one thing to do with women: "CUT THEM OUT"! (in Ballantine, 2000: 384)

If for Arnold Dover 'daintiness' was a foreign concept to black women, for black men 1950s jazz women were too delicate to participate in the crucible that led to the creation of African jazz. Indeed, Ballantine reports that when Lo Six recruited the singer Thoko Thomo to their group in 1955, Matshikiza applauded their choice because Thomo had, amongst other non-musical attributes, 'disarming daintiness' (2012: 150). The evolution of gendered power relations in black South African jazz cultures demonstrate that black females were consciously and systematically removed from the South African jazz community. This excerpt from Christopher Ballantine's article 'Gender, Migrancy, and South African Popular Music in the Late 1940s and the 1950s' gives insight to the methods used to discard women from performance spaces, legitimize this marginalization, all the while rewriting and solidifying a narrative and role for women in their absence. The excuses provided by the group Lo Six – some of whose members would form part of the *King Kong* male cast – are nothing new. The narrative of these fame hungry business savvy women who will inevitably seduce men, then dissolve into inconsolable hysterics, is a tale borrowed from opera prima donnas to re-clothe the jazz diva.

Ballantine's exploration of the gendered power dynamics of the 1950s details the causal factors that led to the polarizing relationship between male and female jazz artists. Women and mixed gender bands in South Africa had been prevalent during the 1930s and the1940s. Indeed the Merry Blackbirds, the foremost elite swing band from the 1930s on, was led by the woman pianist Emily Motsieloa, who was also its dominant composer and arranger. During the 1930s and 1940s, it was not uncommon for women in jazz to participate as instrumentalists, band leaders, composers and singers in vaudeville acts and swing bands (Ballantine, 2012: 118-145). During this period of relatively egalitarian gender interaction in jazz, black jazz musicians together faced the racial prejudices in segregationist South Africa.[8]

[8] It is telling, for example, that the chapters and articles on jazz and gender appear only in the second edition of Ballantine's *Marabi Nights* (2012). The 1993 edition, although not blind to gender dynamics (for example the

By tracing how swing and big band music manipulated their racially charged performance spaces in the earlier decades, Ballantine prefaces one of the elements that contributed to the gender power imbalances that followed in the decades to follow.

The shift in gender relations in the 1950s came with the legislation the Nationalist government passed in 1948 which restricted and criminalised the movement of black South Africans in urban areas. Sylvester Stein, another editor of *Drum* magazine during its 'golden age', recounts in his book *Who Killed Mr. Drum*: *A Historical Caprice* (1999) multiple instances he had to bail out his journalists from jail owing to this pass legislation, known as Section 10 of the Urban Areas Act, which ensured that no African could remain in a 'prescribed area' for longer than seventy-two hours without official permission. The result of the law was further destruction of the black family structure as many black people were forced to return the rural areas they initially left for employment, or to remain 'illegally' in the city in case they were barred from future entry. For Belinda Bozzoli (1983), coerced migrancy is not only a tale of male movement and female stasis. In her trenchant Marxist analysis of feminism and South African studies, Bozzoli highlighted how women also moved to the cities, and that their being left behind in the rural areas and reserves facilitated changes in their subjectivities as well as their subject positions. By this, I mean black rural women assumed the roles and duties that men had typically fulfilled (change in subject position) and, identified with the status these roles and duties had conferred to men (change in subjectivity). She describes the two aspects of this flux as 'internal domestic struggle' which refers to dynamics concerning distribution of control, labour, income and property within the 'domestic system' versus 'external domestic struggle' which refers to conflicts and compromises inflicted by external forces onto the 'domestic system' (1983: 146-147). Internal domestic struggles are more individualistic in nature in comparison to external domestic struggles which are more communal focused. As I show in the following chapter, the character of Joyce – strong and individualistic – and her relationships with King Kong and Lucky may be viewed as examples of internal domestic struggle in *King Kong*. The boxer's struggle as a frustrated black man in an oppressive racially stratified apartheid world index the external forces identified by Bozzoli. The ways in which King and Joyce interact, and the femicide perpetrated by King, together become an example of how 'the external domestic system' works. Bozzoli's deconstruction of gendered power dynamics is important for regendering *King Kong*, because issues perpetuated within the internal domestic struggle

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chapter 'Music and Repression'), is more a history of black jazzing traditions under conditions of racial capitalist oppression (in particular the chapter 'Music and Emancipation).

tend to be ignored in favour of the external threat to the community. For the current argument, women's roles in *King Kong* (internal) have been ignored in favour of the broader external threat posed by apartheid to black endeavour. Both types of marginalisation (aesthetic and socio-political) further perpetuate female subordination (Bozzoli, 1983: 148). Both Ballantine's and Bozzoli's work detail how migrancy and urbanization led to traditional gender structures being infiltrated, broken and challenged. Male artists' actions towards their female counterparts, the strict division of musical labour during the 1950s, including in *King Kong*, reflect these strains. Ensemble singing, a once integrated art form, became a case of live performance (male) versus recording companies (female), jazz versus pop and vocal jive, all-female ensemble versus no female or one single female voice fronting a male ensemble.

Aware of and complicit in the widening of these cracks, Matshikiza laments to his readers that 'musical circles are worried … our women seem to have lost the ability sing, act, dance or even mimic. They all clamor [*sic*] for equality with men, but they seem to make no effort nowadays to prove their worth against men - on the stage, anyway' (in Ballantine, 2000: 376). The double labour of having to be dainty and to prove their worth with men is worth additional commentary. Feminist jazz musicologists have highlighted the contradiction, which is in fact a catch-22. Foremost in the field is the work of Sherrie Tucker on the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and the Darlings of Rhythm (1998). Tucker teases out how race, colourism and class directed how the two bands were received in the United States of America in the mid-twentieth century. Briefly, the comportment of the light-skinned college-based International Sweethearts of Rhythm contrasted starkly with the more working class, darker skinned Darlings of Rhythm. The latter were understood as possessing a 'masculine' sound and a 'masculine' approach for playing music and were seen as the better playing band in comparison to their competitor The International Sweethearts of Rhythm (Tucker, 1998: 257). Equally importantly, the fact that the Darlings of Rhythm were more prone to improvising brought them closer to the masculine jazz ideal, necessitating the erasure of their identities as jazz women.

The Darlings of Rhythms' facility for improvisation came at another cost that has also been identified by feminist jazz musicologists. Julie Dawn Smith, for example, specifically deals with the challenges female improvisers face. In her article 'Perverse Hysterics: The Noisy Cri of *Les Diaboliques*', Smith deals with improvisation and questions what noises and sounds are considered appropriate for women to make (2008: 184). She argues that women improvisers are firstly marginalised in terms of their status within society and in the jazz sphere as women. Secondly, women are marginalised if they display avant-garde

improvisational treatment to their music (189). She links these prejudices to the history that women, noise and hysteria share, something we have also encountered in South African jazz as I earlier discussed. Historical 'noise' from women was seen as 'other' by society and was often pushed into private spaces. The sonic representation of 'mad women' was often shown in music 'abnormalities' such as chromaticism, ornamentation, extravagant virtuosity and excessive sound (Smith, 20008: 186-187). The residues of these perceptions still linger to this day, making 'both women and improvisation … [occupy] a socially dangerous space that violates the boundaries of masculine and feminine and threatens to disturb representation' (Smith, 2008: 189).

What I have shown in this part of my argument is that the politics of gender in 1950s South Africa informed South African jazz cultures. Prominent figures in these cultures would participate in the making of *King Kong*, carrying their prejudices into the production. Where Todd Matshikiza had earlier emerged as protective of black women's representation by white patrons (external domestic struggle), when operating in his black homosocial worlds he appears as a more ambivalent champion of black women (internal domestic struggle). What binds and to some degree enables these contradictions that Matshikiza embodies is the discourse of jazz itself and, to refer back to David Ake, its 'tacit conceptions of the masculine' (2002: 62). Following Christopher Ballantine, I have shown how the 1930s and early 1940s saw a temporary truce between the sexes, in the course of negotiating intensifying South African racism. From Bozzoli, I then argued that the inauguration of apartheid and its effects on black family structures changed black women's subjectivities and subject position. Male backlash to these changes become evident in the jazz sphere's expulsion of women ('CUT THEM OUT!'). Thereafter, black jazz women occupied the space of the 'other' that, in the earlier decades, had been jointly shared under the sign of race. If we recall that this space of the racial other was also labelled primitive, then it becomes clear that the black woman, and her musicking, now bears the brunt of this designation.

Jazz, Respectability and the Modern Girl: Women Ensembles in *King Kong*

According to Leslie Dunn and Nancy Jones, the narratives I have traced 'testify to the persistent desire of male artists to control through representation the anxieties aroused by the female voice, even while they license the display, and the enjoyment, of its power' (1996: 4). Drawing on Dunn and Jones, we may argue that while women have been explored in the western cultures, a direct application of these Western imaginings to an African and South African context is, and has proven to be, problematic. The scholar and gender activist

Nomboniso Gasa points this out in her study 'Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies and Women's Voices in the 1950s' (Gasa, 2007). South African jazz analyses of jazz female voices as feminist are few and far between (but see Allen 2004, Muller 2011 and Moelwyn-Hughes 2013). This is partly because black South African women's voices tend to be excluded from narratives of larger movements such as western feminisms and Black Consciousness Movements. This is why the re-imagining of Western feminisms to suit African contexts is pertinent and it is in this gap that this thesis hopes to contribute. I do this because leaving the representation of the (black) jazz woman as dangerous, exciting, erotic or such similar tropes is reductive. These characteristics only account for the glamorised images of 1950s women favoured by the *Drum* decade's tabloids. While these fictionalized women were creations born from the current societal attitudes of the musicians, composers and authors, they in turn became the hyperbolized stereotypical model for what one would expect from real life jazz women who then, subconsciously or consciously, had to embody them to have a successful career.

Like the glamorised characters in the play, South African jazz women would change their behaviours to suit a stereotype as a means of survival. Jazz women used the glamorisation of the female form with purpose, by embodying tropes such as the Modern Girl, a female figure identified by her cosmopolitan look, explicit eroticism and use of specific, usually cosmetic, commodities (Thomas, 2006:462). Singers like Dorothy Masuka performed this identity as a means to navigate *tsotsi* township culture through protection (as gangster molls) and by assimilating aspects of *tsotsis*' male bravado that was similar to and modelled on its American equivalents (Allen, 2000: 92). It was the adoption of this persona that, in part, enabled her to drive the genre of vocal jive during the 1950s. However, the autonomy of the Modern Girl posed too much of a threat to the social gender hierarchies of the times. This threat led to the demonization of women who embodied it even though, to return to Dunn and Jones, these women were on constant, celebratory, and fetishized display (1996: 4).

I want to dwell here on those women who did not embody this stereotype: Petal and Nurse Miriam Ngidi. Petal, as I mentioned earlier, is a young and idealistic character who nurses unrequited love for King Kong. She is, however, a stereotype of youth, with her unwavering loyalty, her character is defined and dependent on her relationship with a male character, where it is as King Kong's ever-present groupie or, later, as Pop's wife. Despite her love for King Kong remaining unreciprocated, it is this very love that keeps her innocent and naïve throughout the musical. I would argue that her innocence remains untainted until

her adoration for King Kong is shattered by his blatant rejection of her advances. Once she loses her innocent outlook her character rushes toward social respectability through marriage, since she seeks the comforts of becoming a wife throughout the play.

Miriam's character is portrayed throughout as an example of respectability. The only character in the play with regular employment, she is the only female character in the play with a surname, Ngidi. In many cultures having a surname carries weight, a sign of trackable lineage. A name inherited from her father. Having a surname, where Joyce and Petal do not, automatically boost Miriam's respectability within the social hierarchy of the 1950s South African townships. As the mothering character, she is defined by her position within the community. While her story arch does ultimately end in romance she does add the twist of her constant refusal to marry Jack. This serves as a great contrast to the other female counterparts. She insists on marrying only once Jack can offer her a respectable lifestyle. Of all the characters, hers is the most reflective of Bozzoli's ideologies concerning domestic spaces and cultural preservations. Indeed, whereas other *King Kong* characters live individual lives in Sophiatown, Miriam Ngidi has a mother (Ma Ngidi) whose disapproving presence is felt during Miriam's wedding to Jack.

Miriam and Petal are different from the glamorised women of the 1950s because of their unthreatening femininity. Their musical representation on stage is similarly unthreatening or, in the preferred language of the time, dainty. Mainstream jazz singers prefer a more traditional crooner approach to singing; they tend to sing about love and loss (but not always); and, their scatting (if they chose to scat at all) is typically in the style established during the big band, and swing and mbaqanga eras. The character Petal is an example of this singing culture, as may be heard in 'Petal's Song' (1959) that is renamed 'The Earth Turns Over' in the 1961 version of *King Kong*. Her whole character is defined by the male characters around her which points to her stunning lack of depth and character development. The songs she sings are mostly about her unrequited love for King Kong who has been mostly aggressive towards her character, to her heartbreak, to her engagement and ultimately her marriage. Miriam's character is too respectable and pragmatic to take a solo, and she features singing only in ensemble numbers.

The musical treatment of these 'unthreatening' female characters shows the degree to which jazz was deemed incompatible with respectability, in particular with notions of feminine respectability. Young women like Petal and responsible women like Miriam had no business being in shebeens, partaking in illegal drinking of European liquor. What remains curious is why, apart from Petal's sentimental solo, their participation in ensemble work that

included the disreputable Joyce was allowed. I want to argue here that this form of musical representation was drawn from the increasing marginalisation of female ensembles as members of South African jazz culture. Female ensembles were perceived as less dangerous. In South African jazz during the 1950s and the 1960s multiple female vocal ensembles were more prevalent within recording companies as jazz band and male singing groups preferred one woman to be the face of the group (Ballantine, 2000: 379). Examples of such singing groups are: the Skylarks (headed by Miriam Makeba), the Quad Singers (founded by Thandi Klaasen), the Sidney Sisters and many more like them. Lara Allen's body of work (2000, 2003) has provided rich analyses of this decade's 'songbirds'. She arrives at similar conclusions to Ballantine, who singles out Masuka, the Skylarks and the Quad Sisters in his discussion on gender and migrancy. He writes that Thandi Klaasen (née Mpambani) decided to form the Quad Sisters 'as a direct challenge to the hegemony of the male groups' (2012: 159).

The women ensembles' popularity had perhaps predictable consequences: it became proof that the Lo Six were correct in their suspicions that women 'want to become business executives' and 'idols' (Ballantine, 2000: 384). Discourses about jazz and art were also mobilised to prove that by virtue of their popularity, women's ensembles more properly belonged in the realm of popular music rather than serious jazz. In 'Separated at "Birth": Singing and the History of Jazz', Lara Pellegrinelli explores the separation of male and female musicians in the American jazz community (2008: 33). She argues that while singing and singers have been attracted large audiences and popular recognition, they have been neglected in jazz scholarship and its stories of origins (Pellegrinelli, 2008: 37-38). Singers, she continues, are only included in the jazz canon if they have achieved an undeniable amount of prominence to be deemed as influential such as the swing era's 'canaries' and in case of South Africa the 'Sophiatown songbirds'. Alternatively, when a jazz woman's voice could not be expelled from the canon – Ella Fitzgerald for example – terms of praise are usually that they use their voice like an instrument. The scoring of Petal and Miriam, then, should not be seen merely as a foil to Joyce that is in line with the female 'type' each represents. Male ensemble voices in *King Kong* narrate the external struggle, singing of 'Sad Times Bad Times' and 'In the Queue', and accompanying King Kong in his 'Death Song'. They also enter with the protagonist:

> *KING KONG, a towering, powerful figure in a white track suit with KK in large red letters stitched on his chest, comes on to the empty stage, stands glowering at the*

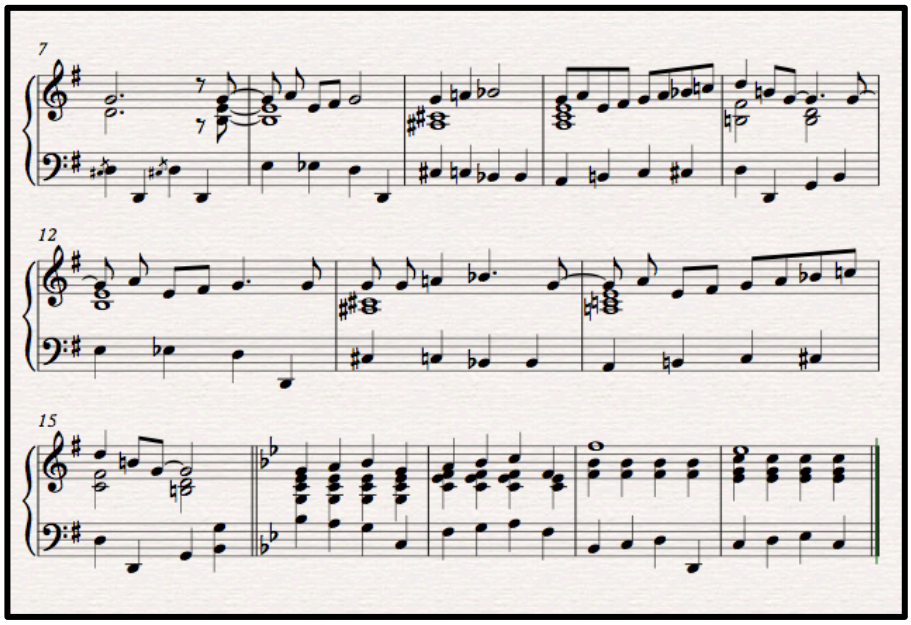
> *audience, walks to centre front stage. Then – after a moment – a group of boxers in red track suits come on briskly and do a shadow boxing dance routine behind him.* (Act 1 Scene 2)

The men enter the stage with their hyper-masculine idol, to celebrate his 'marvellous muscles'.

King Kong's Beautiful, Marvellous Muscles

Many factors are taken into consideration when a composer is writing music for a theatre work that has already been written. The music must have the ability to stand on its own and function in a manner that supports the narrative and its characters, while aiding in the direction and drive of the musical's plot. This must be accounted for as we question Matshikiza's compositional autonomy during the making of *King Kong*. However, having said this, I must acknowledge that Matshikiza has alluded in multiple texts that he wished for the music of *King Kong* to be strongly representative of the musical song style of black South Africa. This aesthetic continues to feed the highly competitive, virtuosity focused nature that surrounds jazz and improvisation circles (Smith, 2008: 186). Woman vocalists must overcome and navigate two obstacles: the marginalisation that comes with the gendered experience of a singer and the eradication of feminine elements within the modern South African jazz of the 1950s.

Figure 3: 'Oh! Your Beautiful Muscles'. Todd Matshikiza from bars 7-19



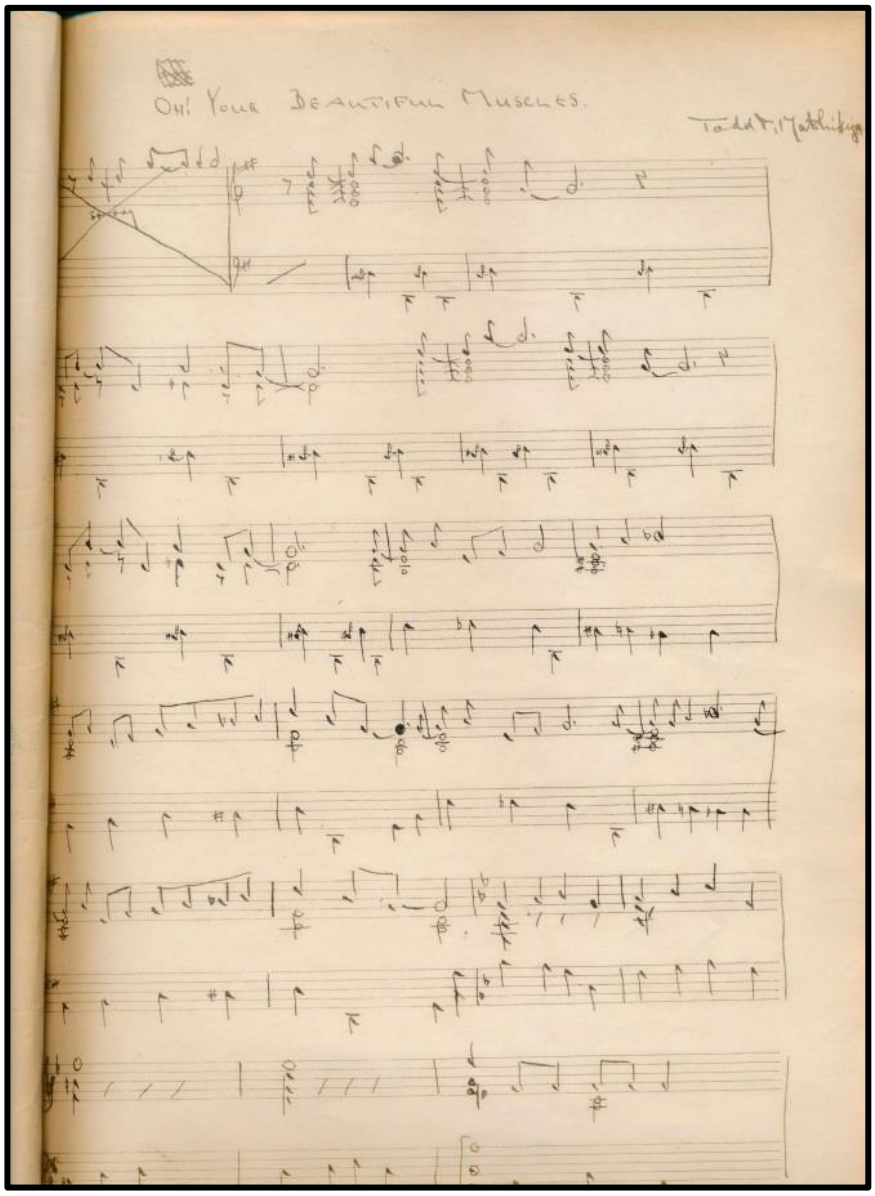


Figure 4: 'Oh! Your Beautiful Muscles'. Composer's Original Manuscript. Todd Matshikiza Papers, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown

One can see such changes when engaging with Matshikiza's original musical score of *King Kong* (Figure 4) versus the music sung by the original cast of 1959. Tracing what was kept, what was changed and how these changes affect the overall music is one way in which the musical representation of 1950s women in *King Kong* may begin to be read. At first glance, the first change I noted was in the title (most of the titles from the original score were changed by the time of recording in 1959). The original title changed from 'Oh! Your Beautiful Muscles' to 'Marvellous Muscles', something that might be explained by American musical theatre's preference for catchy alliterations and rhythms in their lyrical composition and titles. The overall structure of the song was also extended for the performance and the

recording. Originally, 'Beautiful Muscles' was in AB song form with call and response in the melodic line of the A section which is not as prevalent in the B section. The final version of song that was performed by the original cast structure added what I will call a C section to create this extension. This C section emphasises the musical theatre, vaudeville element that was not, or was at least muted, in the composer's original tune. The key of the song was also changed from G major to B flat Major, probably to suit the cast's voices more comfortably. The most significant changes made are to the melody and rhythm of the song. Multiple melodic changes were made particularly to the part King Kong sings. Where the original rhythm had swung eighth notes in the original score, these were substituted with quarter notes that outlined the eighth note pattern in the final production (Figure 3, bars 8 – 15). While the modulation of a minor third was kept for bar 14-16, the rhythm and larger portions of the melodic lines were changed. From bars 29 to 36 the feel, the melody and the rhythm of what the cast sang and the original score differ greatly. They are not even thematically similar.

The move from Matshikiza's jazz inflected voice to the characteristics I have sketched here indicate the kinds of compromises the composers had to undertake for *King Kong* to work as a piece of musical theatre rather than as an African jazz opera. As the fellow lyricist Pat Williams recalls, 'Marvellous Muscles' 'was to be a swaggering celebration' (2017: 5). Williams makes little of the song's misogynistic lyrics, which read in part:

> Women as the same
> All the same
> Flapping round like moths round flame.

The song continues in this vein, with choice passages including 'women should be drowned' and 'women are a pest'. The song's lyrics of course serve to introduce the boxer in a particular way. The intended humour is evident in the spoken words after the song ends. A journalist sent to cover King Kong asks his trainer, Jack, 'No romantic angle yet, eh, Jack?' (Act 1 Scene 2) – a sardonic response to the song. Despite the humour, the manner in which women are represented musically here bears further scrutiny. First, when King Kong flexes his muscles during training, the female comments on the boxer's physique. The male chorus then charges that 'women are the same, all the same', a phrase then echoed by King Kong. The lyric structure of the song is: women – men – King Kong, throughout. This voice distribution distils the kinds of role distributions I have discussed in this chapter: the males provide the masculine societal censure that is then echoed by the boxer. The female chorus's

lines have little in common with the male lines, either musically or in terms of the song's theme. Call and response is restricted to male vocal interaction. When the male and female choruses combine to sing 'Oh those marvellous muscles', the unity is superficial. It is women who carry the melodic phrase, in a rhythmic pattern reminiscent of a 1920s Broadway tune. This is not a transposition of 1950s women's ensembles: these are showgirls. In seeking the 'authentic', then, certain stereotypes about black township life (living in the mode of musicals) held by the white slummer, and preconceived beliefs about black women from the black male artist, were solidified.

Chapter Two

On Joyce's Death: Jazz, Gender and Ambivalence in *King Kong*

> PAULINE: Yeah, he was really the King then.
> DAN: So what does he do? Gets caught up with Joyce. That Joyce dame was his downfall.
> PAULINE: And he was her downfall … Well, she was important too. If he was King around here, she was queen.
> DAN: Exackly. A Shebeen Queen.
>
> *King Kong*, Act 1 Scene 3

Introduction

I first experienced the revival of Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* in September 2017. It was not the opening night so I missed the excitement, glitz and glamour of a premiere. Having arrived late and breathless, I was almost the only person on the second floor in the main auditorium of the Joburg Theatre, something that further alienated me from the effervescent excitement that gripped the show's audience. This isolation, however, brought home to me that, as a young scholar, I was not there solely to enjoy the show. Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* is a crucial part of my growing interest in arguments involving jazz, gender and race and enriches my broader aim of exploring the role and representation of women in South African jazz musicals during apartheid. These musicals were strongly influenced by Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong*, as studies of Gibson Kente's early works (Solberg, 2011 and Kavanagh 1985; 2016) as well as listening to Mackay Davashe's *Phiri* (1972) show. They share with Matshikiza a preference for urban settings, the foregrounding of everyday township life, allusion to the apartheid situation without direct confrontation, and deft amalgamation of choral music, neo-traditional styles, and (South African) jazz.

Scholars such as Michael Titlestad (2004) and Lindelwa Dalamba (2011; 2013) have examined how apartheid and its accompanying discourses of primitivism and naturalism shaped the show's making and reception in South Africa. Both argue that these discourses determined the show's permission to travel to London and informed its subsequent reception there. Drawing on state archives, Dalamba has argued that apartheid government officials deliberately read *King Kong* as an example of dissident black, urban, South African culture, to justify their initial refusal of permission to travel outside South Africa (2013: the close of

the 1950s seguing to the Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960 and the beginning of so-called 'high Apartheid', and the final destruction of Sophiatown. Because of this context, *King Kong* and Todd Matshikiza have tended to be read only as foreshadowings of endings, available only for commemoration.

The productions staged by Matshikiza's younger contemporaries who remained in South Africa defy this truncation: Ben 'Satch' Masinga's *Back in Your Own Backyard* (1962); Gibson Kente's *Manana, the Jazz Prophet* (1961) and Davashe's *Phiri* (1972), all took place after Matshikiza's departure for England and his eventual death in 1968 in Zambia. As David Coplan has commented on *Manana*, for example, these 'post-Sharpeville' shows

> [were] designed to succeed with the African township audience. *Manana* was scripted in English, the language of international show business and the one that symbolised urban Africans' desire to overcome ethnic division, local parochialism, and the implications of apartheid. The plot was a straightforward melodrama … Heavily influenced by African-American music, Kente used this story line to blur the boundaries between gospel, jazz, and local musical styles, creating an uplifting spectacle of township dance and song. Equally effective was the expressive tension he created between rhetorical exaggeration and the thoroughly realistic portrayal of the conditions of urban African life. *Manana* was a black play, produced, directed, written, and scored by a black playwright, using black actors to dramatise their experience according to emerging black urban aesthetic conventions. (2007: 268-269)

Apart from *Manana* being a show produced, performed, written and directed by black people, Coplan's description might well apply to *King Kong*. Like *King Kong*, Masinga's and Kente's musicals were also produced by the Union of Southern African Artists (later also with Dorkay House); an association that Kente later insisted on severing (Solberg 2011, 10-12). The persistence of *King Kong*'s musical tropes in the later apartheid-era jazz musicals points to Matshikiza's enduring importance in the country's cultural history – both for theatre and for jazz. It is possible to continue interpreting these shows within the frame of apartheid to stress this continuity. This would enable one to view the staging of *King Kong* and similar works in post-apartheid South Africa as fulfilment of previously frustrated triumphs.[9] Since the 2017 *King Kong* was marketed in this way by the Fugard Theatre production team, I arrived at Joburg Theatre to experience the show I had been working on for some time.

I expected a jazz opera, but what I got was a musical, subtitled *Legend of a Boxer*.

[9] Soweto Theatre and the Market Theatre staged revivals of Gibson Kente's music in 2018, directed by Makhaola Ndebele.

This obvious change led me to ask: in the eliding of apartheid and even of the primitivising echoes suggested by the appellation 'all-African musical' for the show's London run (Dalamba 2011), how may *King Kong* be understood today as more than exceptional in South African music history? Is the fact that the show has been branded 'iconic' enough to construct a usable past, for myself as a jazz performer and scholar, and (importantly) for my broader research topic? I recognised that the members of the 2017 band in Johannesburg consisted of prominent jazz musicians in the contemporary scene, much like the 1959 orchestra was comprised of the likes of Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwanga, Gwigwi Mrwebi and Mackay Davashe, who were also at the vanguard of South African jazz in the 1950s. The cast 2017 consisted of award winning actors, unlike its 1959 predecessor, where only three members – Ken Gampu, Dan Poho and Stephen Moloi – could claim to have any acting experience (De Beer, 2001 [1960]: 29-30). De Beer points out that all three had earlier worked with Athol Fugard, for his production *No-Good Friday* (2001 [1960]: 29); others, like Dan Poho, had also appeared in the film *The Magic Garden*.[10] Attempts to 'improve' the score have caused much controversy in the academic jazz world, none of which has as yet made it to print. As I showed in the previous chapter, Matshikiza's score was protean. It changed from his original manuscript to the 1959 recording, was further changed for the for the show's London run in 1961, and was re-arranged for the sale of the sheet music in the course of the same year. Careful analysis of these changes is beyond the scope of this study, and is only obliquely important for the present purposes. Changes to the music were therefore read as unevenly successful attempts to engage with Matshikiza's music in a post-apartheid context.

None of the features I have described were unexpected, so I had to consider further what the source of my discomfort could be and whether this discomfort was due to the revival's politics. In the end I concluded that the ambivalence lay with the character of Joyce: Joyce was complicatedly the same and different (Figures 5 and 6).

[10] On Dan Poho see Dalamba, 2013: 66-69.

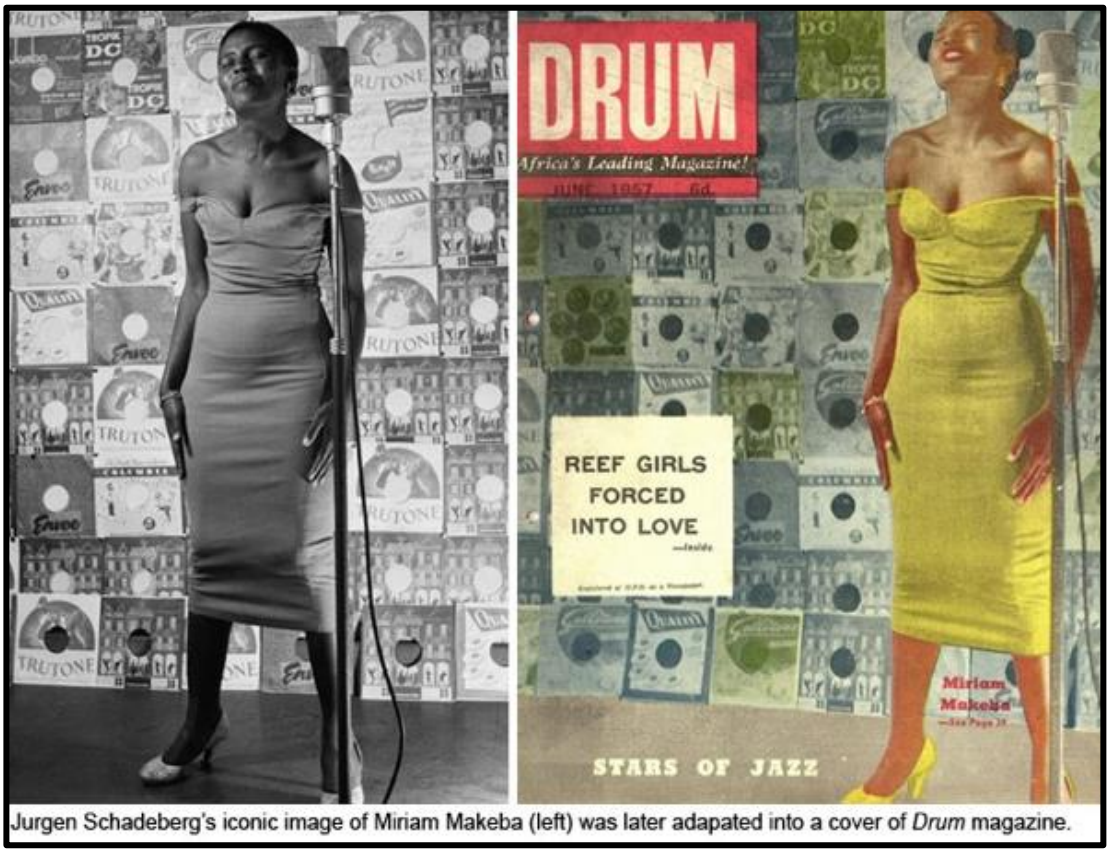


Figure 5: Miriam Makeba, who played the original Joyce, photographed by Jurgen Schadeberg. Copyright: Jurgen Schadeberg, reproduced with permission.



Figure 6: Nondumiso Tembe as Joyce in *King Kong: Legend of a Boxer*, 2017. Copyright: Fugard Theatre, reproduced with permission.

The photographs of Joyce are eerily similar. The original Joyce was played by Miriam Makeba, though it remains uncertain that this was Makeba's costume in *King Kong*. The photograph was taken by Jurgen Schadeberg, who has recounted his memories as a photographer in 1950s South Africa (2017). The photograph was later reproduced as a cover for *Drum* magazine. In the artist's reproduction, the featured woman bears little resemblance to Makeba (Figure 5). Where the original is in grey scale, the reproduction is bathed in a patina of greenish gold. The sketched Miriam Makeba is also stylized – what today we may liken to a photoshop effect. The real Makeba's legs are at a slightly awkward angle, her eyes and lips are closed, and she sports a short Afro hairstyle. In the adapted reproduction,

‘Makeba’ stands with her legs placed more symmetrically, and her breasts are roundly and more fully sculpted. Her waist is higher and shaped to approximate an hourglass figure. She is also considerable lighter toned than either the original photograph or the real Makeba would look. What strikes one most is her mouth. Framed by red lipstick, her teeth glitter whitely; clenched in throes of musical passion. Were it not for the directive that this is Miriam Makeba and that her story appears within the covers of the magazine, there is little to guide the viewer to recognise this to be Miriam Makeba.

Nondumiso Tembe, 2017’s Joyce, plays the image well (Figure 6). Her green dress is in similar style, and she, too, sports red lipstick and nail polish. A composite of the earlier ‘Makebas’ (see the placement of her hands), Tembe’s hair is straightened, her facial expression suggests she is singing. The overall impression, however, is neither Makeba’s contemplative listening, nor is it ‘Makeba’s’ Dionysian bliss. Tembe, instead, gives us ‘black girl magic’. The sexual politics energising her image are manifest in how she stands squarely behind her microphone, whereas for the two Makeba figures this stands to the left of the singers.

The mutating semiotics of Schadeberg’s photograph should not really detain us here. As I have said, there is no indication that this is a photograph of *King Kong*’s Joyce. In fact, the occasion of the picture has been recently explained by Schadeberg. The year was 1956, and Todd Matshikiza wanted to write a feature on Miriam Makeba. The then editor of *Drum* Sylvester Stein, who had replaced Anthony Sampson, asked Schadeberg to produce the cover (Schadeberg, 2017: 276). Here is the photographer:

> The walls of the room were covered with the standard soundproof tiles perforated with holes. I looked over the heap of junk and found an old microphone and a couple of stands. Miriam and I got to work, pinning up the record covers on the wall and setting up the microphone. While I left the room to find some more pins, Miriam changed into her favourite dress. When I returned we started the shoot, which was somewhat difficult because Miriam was very unrelaxed. I don’t think she had ever been photographed in such a bizarre situation before, and by a white man. Eventually, after some joking, performing and attempting to sing, totally out of tune as I am tone-deaf, I managed to get her to laugh and then I got some good pictures. (2017: 278-279)

The story is classic Schadeberg, a transfiguration of Johannesburg’s tatty spaces to simulate glamour. The more famous story is his photographing Miriam Makeba’s contemporary Dolly Rathebe in a bikini on a mine dump that contrived to look like the beach (Schadeberg, 2017: 180-181). This shoot, though not the details thereof, was also requested by Matshikiza. What

we learn from Schadeberg's photograph of Makeba is how fabulations of Sophiatown during the *Drum* decade were squeezed out of apartheid's banality (the two experienced racist abuse on their way to the venue, for example). The glitz suggested by the album covers on the wall, as if Makeba was endorsing the label Trutone, was really to cover up the holes. Tembe's posture as a strong black jazz woman in Figure 6, I suggest, is a similar covering up of the holes. The holes, for the purposes of this chapter's argument, have to do with the making and unmaking of Joyce in *King Kong*. More precisely, the holes covered up conceal the fact that, while scholars like Kavanagh (1985) have criticised the absence of a true antagonist in *King Kong*, they do so because the show's oblique reference to apartheid leaves them bereft. Absent a gendered perspective, they cannot recognise Joyce to be a worthy opponent of the boxer. The three photographs in Figures 5 and 6 tell the story of Joyce's unknowability. What occurs instead is that those with knowledge of Sophiatown's mythology do the work of recognising Tembe as an approximation of an approximation. Joyce, like the Maria Miya on whom she is loosely based, escapes the will to display and to fetishize the decade's jazz women (Dunn and Jones, 1996: 4). Figure 6 almost betrays Joyce's elusiveness. The betrayal proceeds as follows: an iconic picture of an iconic female musician who was the main female lead in *King Kong* is decontextualized and used to signify only iconicity, or only itself. In this way, the notion of *King Kong* as iconic merges with other tropes that create 1950s Sophiatown as myth – something that Lindelwa Dalamba would probably call a chronotropic illusion (2008; 2012). What I was witnessing in Joburg Theatre was a play of icons: a failed revival.

The show took particular care to keep the African jazz influence in the music, as had been Matshikiza's aim (1961: 315-316). However, what its producers had neglected was the 1950s style in which the original cast *sang*. In her recollection of *King Kong*'s audition process in the 1950s, Mona De Beer (2001 [1960]) has detailed the care that went into choosing the actors and actresses for their singing abilities. For the female roles alone, the producers considered prominent singers such as Dolly Rathebe, Miriam Makeba, Abigail Kubeka, and Thandi Klaasen. Although the part was eventually given to Makeba, she was not their first choice. The care that went into choosing the lead singers makes sense in the context of musical theatre, both because of the genre's demands *and* because of singing's importance in the history of South African jazz that is dramatized in *King Kong*. Unlike in the mainstream scholarship on American jazz that I touched on in the previous chapter, separation of singing or the voice from instrumental jazz in South African jazz history has been less successful. Iconic male jazz instrumentalists – pianists Tete Mbambisa and Andile

Yenana, bassist Johnny Dyani, trumpeter Hugh Masekela and saxophonist Zim Ngqawana, for example – have freely admitted their debt to singing, and their compositions show strong melodic leanings. Contemporary women jazz instrumentalists, such as the trombonist Siyavuya Makuzeni, the double bassist Chantal Willie-Petersen and the pianist Thandi Ntuli, fluidly double as vocalists. Lara Allen (2000), Christopher Ballantine (2000) and Carol Muller (1996; 2011) have written of the rich interaction between vocalists and instrumentalists in the making of South African jazz cultures to make sense of this fluidity. They have also documented its tensions, in which Todd Matshikiza, as a *Drum* magazine music journalist, played an important and complex role (Ballantine 2000).[11]

Building on their work and on the work of *King Kong* scholars, this chapter focusses on the making of 'Joyce' and what this construction of the character may tell us about women vocalists and jazz in 1950s South Africa. For example, it is worth noting that while the male singers of *King Kong* 1959 were recruited as groups – the Manhattan Brothers and the Woody Woodpeckers, for example – the women mostly had to go at it alone. This differentiation echoes the common 1950s practice of having a woman singer fronting an all-male close-harmony group (Ballantine, 2000). In my view, the isolation of *King Kong*'s women singers from their groups – the Quad Sisters or the Skylarks for example – deserves further scrutiny, since it is also a kind of erasure of women's musical collectives or communities that, as I have argued, were important for the singers and were successful enough to threaten male jazz musicians. In my interview with singer Dorothy Masuka (2018), for example, I was struck by her fond recollection of sisterhood in the 1950s jazz scene. For Masuka, despite the fierce competitiveness of the scene, where divisions were entrenched by various modes of women singers' objectification, friendships also emerged and at times endured.

Although I had begun my research before knowing of the pending *King Kong* revival, the chapter is strongly shaped by my response to *King Kong* 2017, where the representation of Joyce (played by Nondumiso Tembe), seemed radically different to that of Miriam Makeba and Abigail Kubeka (who briefly subsidised for Makeba during her illness, see De Beer, 2001 [1960]: 63)) who played the role in 1959 and to that of Peggy Phango (Makeba's cousin) in 1961. I am guided by Lara Allen's view that singing in jazz has been a female or feminised space (which is obviously not to say that only women sing jazz). In many instances 'the singer' is the only role female musicians were or are socially permitted to occupy. On

[11] Matshikiza's imbrication in these dynamics as a journalist is explored in Chapter One. For this chapter, I focus on the music composed for women characters in *King Kong*.

top of being the only permissible musical space for women to reside in, 'the singer' has continuously been relegated to the fringes of jazz or otherwise banished to the realm of popular music. This marginalisation results in only a select few singers gaining the privilege of joining jazz canons and recognition as jazz artists; another erasure of women musical collectives (Placksin, 1982; Moelwyn-Hughes, 2013). In this process of marginalisation, the singer has been forced to inherit the stereotypes that black jazz modernists, in their struggle for jazz to be understood as art rather than only entertainment, had sought to shed since at least the 1920s (the Harlem Renaissance's Afro-modernism) and most emphatically in the era of modern jazz or bebop (Ramsey, 2003: 96-117). Lara Pellegrinelli (2008, 31-46), in confirmation of this gendered perspective, highlights how associating jazz singing with the modes of naturalness, spontaneity and entertainment aided black male instrumentalists' quest to validate their instrumental jazz as serious music. As instruments carry connotations of a tool to be mastered and singing is reduced to a natural product of the body, she argues, it was easy to make these fractures and distinctions: between blues (voice and female-dominated) and jazz (instrumental and male-dominated). In South African jazz's late 1950s, these distinctions and separations were still uneasy. Revisiting this context, however, enables us to trace women's relegation to the *unheroic* underground of jazz patriarchy post-Sharpeville, and to excavate the processes that led to this banishment.[12]

To do this, I read *King Kong* from the perspective of Joyce rather than the boxer. I explore how the show represents Joyce's aspirations and desires, beyond King Kong's dream to be a heavyweight boxing champion with Joyce as his partner cheering from the ringside. The jazz opera, as we know, tells the story of an ordinary black South African with considerable boxing talent, who rises in the country's boxing cultures to become, briefly, a heavyweight champion. Because these pugilist cultures are framed by apartheid legislation that policed interaction, Ezekiel 'King Kong' Dhlamini was not allowed to fight white boxers. In the work's narrative (Dhlamini's real life story differs somewhat) King Kong's limited career leads to increasing frustration. He loses to a boxer in a lesser division, falls into a life of crime, kills a gangster with his bare fists and, eventually, kills Joyce. He pleads for the death sentence and commits suicide once the law denies him his wish. For 1950s audiences and especially for the male *Drum* intellectuals, *King Kong* and its eponymous character's fate was a thinly veiled metaphor of black ambition thwarted by apartheid. None,

[12] I term this underground 'unheroic' because, in South African studies of jazz during apartheid, the underground referenced guerrilla movements, exile and armed struggle. For women, however, expulsion from the stage marked the way back to the kitchen.

to my knowledge, have pointed out that it is black *male* ambition that is explored in the jazz opera's story.

I want to suggest that *King Kong* is as much a parable of frustrated male ambition as it is a tale of female ambition with its own stories of asserting autonomy. Whereas the boxer King Kong's narrative arc is that of 'rise and fall', however, his lover Joyce is introduced as an already 'fallen woman' who drags King Kong down to her fallen state, when she should have been a salve for his apartheid-inflicted wounds. I explore how, as the principal female character in an African jazz opera that was the first of its kind in South Africa, Joyce was constructed and represented. Examining the making and undoing of Joyce is key to exploring how this character shaped the conception of the female leads who follow her in later South African jazz musicals, a process I explore in Chapter Three. This shaping may be gleaned from how her personality is sketched, and also from the musical treatment and tragic plotting she receives from the male writers, producers and directors who created the show. Joyce as a fictitious female is interesting especially when juxtaposed with her real-life counterpart, Maria Miya, and the dynamic she shares with her first impersonator or interpreter, Miriam Makeba. I proceed, firstly, by tracing how Joyce is represented in the play's rather conventional storyline, and how she anchors its conventionality. I then work outwards to suggest that Joyce is a composite of how women jazz singers were represented or portrayed in 1950s popular culture. Throughout, I keep in mind the washerwoman Pauline's words with which I began this chapter: if the boxer was king, Joyce was queen, and not only a shebeen queen (although this is an important trope), as a trope Dan Kuzwayo scornfully dismisses.

Burdens Of Convention: The Theatrical Plotting Of Joyce

Harry Bloom was the author of the book of *King Kong*, Leon Gluckman was the director, and the musical staff included Pat Williams as co-lyrist, the composer and main lyricist Todd Matshikiza, and Stanley Glasser as musical director; Arnold Dover was the choreographer and the set designer was Arthur Goldreich. *King Kong*, a dramatized retelling of the boxer Ezekiel Dhlamini's story situated in the townships of 1950s South Africa, only had one black member in its production team and an all-black cast and musicians. Despite this, the show has received both criticism and praise for its 'multi-racial' team in early apartheid South Africa. In his book, *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*, however, Robert Kavanagh (1985: 92) highlights the discrepancies between 'political, cultural and economic factors that characterize relations of liberal English-speaking capital and urban blacks in South Africa at the time'. Shows like *King Kong* with predominantly white production staff and black

performing talent historically suffered from the contradictions traced by Kavanagh owing to the political, cultural and economic disconnect engendered by apartheid, notwithstanding the 'multiracial' mandate fed to the public by their corporate patrons.

Michael Titlestad traces this disconnect in his study of the media's reception of *King Kong* in South Africa and in London in 1961. As he argues, 'popular white South African writing in the 1950s and 1960s is commonly inflected with a sense of either threatening blackness or a mysterious otherness' when the focus is on the indigenous South African population (2004: 79). He found that more traditional (conservative) South African reporting focused on this threat of blackness in their reception of the musical. In March 1959, for example, the *Pretoria News* reported in a piece called 'Kongless But Unbowed' how Pretoria is a city left untainted by the performance of the all black cast boasted by *King Kong*. The correspondent mocks the capital's disproportionate reaction to the show by writing: '"The historian … will have much puzzled fun trying to unravel the motives of those who placed every obstacle in [*King Kong*'s] way and finally succeeded in leaving Pretoria kongless but uncontaminated"' (cited in Titlestad, 2004: 101). Conversely, the liberal English media for Titlestad appeared more fascinated by the mystery of the black talents' bodies and race, rather than viewing them as an outright threat. Typically, Titlestad also shows, this media's writers searched for confirmation of their preconceived notions of blackness (based on colonial primitivist ideologies) rather than creating an authentic connection and understanding of black artists or of their lives in segregated townships.

In this literature and reporting, the urban black experience as a whole gets generalised. These generalisations were based on primitivist concepts such as 'natural musicality', spontaneity and sensuality. This fascination with otherness and exoticism is what many art patrons and producers played into and demanded from black artists even before *King Kong*, such that:

> Jazz became increasingly the music of dissonant black self-representation and, therefore, the acoustic expression of *political* identity and authenticity. Rather than a journey to some fundamental modernist truth, jazz emerges as a site in which whiteness brushes up against black political legitimacy. (Titlestad, 2004: 106)

The jazz opera could not escape these contradictions. It became dichotomous and dissonant in nature and, for example, primitivism became both a selling point and a point of critique in the white media coverage of the play (Titlestad, 2004: 104-5). I intervene in this now familiar

and influential critique by observing that, while claims of primitivism and naturalism undermined *King Kong*'s black urban aesthetic conventions, the character of Joyce and her actor, Makeba, were doubly undermined. This is because Joyce's employment in *King Kong* is meant to serve or exists only to underscore Ezekiel 'King Kong' Dhlamini's seemingly broader and more socially significant tragedy. Joyce's first appearance on stage in the fourth scene of Act 1 is, in my view, her first assertion of autonomy. This is the case even though her entrance's theatricality is meant to heighten her sexuality and desirability. She enters with the lively medium swing song 'Back of the Moon', commanding the audience's attention and controlling the transactional operations between herself and the odd assortment of occupants inside her eponymous shebeen: gangsters, prisoners, girlfriends and female escorts, boxers and policemen. Joyce asserts her independence the moment she steps onto the stage to sing 'Back of the Moon'. She is the first woman soloist in the show. Her tune's languorous beginning slows down the pace of the mise-en-scène, and the vocal dexterity required to sing Matshikiza's 'Back of the Moon' is far closer to mainstream jazz than Dhlamini's bombastic earlier 'King Kong'. Moreover, although Joyce's song centralises the character, and the song's lyrics also invites one to do this, it is notable that the tune is not about herself (unlike the boxer's song) but about her business and what it represents.

Joyce's entry emphasises her equal stature with King Kong, even though this equality is disavowed by the male characters in the play. Like him, she is first introduced as legend by the three washerwoman and the township gossip Dan Kuzwayo (played by Gwigwi Mrwebi in 1959 and 1961),[13] in the 'framing scenes' of the play. Only after she is remembered (or after Pauline forces the group to remember her) does she enter to hold our attention. It is worth noting for the moment that Joyce and King Kong are afforded opening solos on their entry. However, where King Kong's tune has a 'chorus' – the people of the township – as its response, Joyce's solo ends in a duet with her current partner, the gang leader of the Prowlers, Lucky (played by Joe Mogotsi in 1959 and 1961).[14] Even here, though, Joyce *invites* Lucky to join her in the duet at the end of her solo (she sings 'Come on Lucky, let's go!). Miriam Makeba herself mentions the iconic quality of 'Back of the Moon'. In her autobiography *Makeba: My Story* (1988, 70) she makes special mention of it, saying 'King *Kong* is a great success and I am happy to be a part of it. One of the songs I sing in the show, "Back of the Moon", is a hit'. And a hit it was. Its bluesy lilting melody and cheeky lyrics

[13] On Gwigwi Mrwebi see Dalamba, 2016: 67-90.
[14] On Joe Mogotsi see Mogotsi and Connor, 2002.

detail the unrepentantly illegal nature of shebeen life with a promise of a good time for its male patrons, despite its dishevelled appearance. It is Joyce's premiere song that becomes synonymous with the musical and appropriated into the imagination of the South African jazz canon.

At this point in the story, Joyce is in a relationship with Lucky the gangster and is the owner of her own shebeen, which is why she introduces it musically. King Kong, having just won a boxing match and with a budding promise of a career in England, enters her shebeen with his boxing crew to celebrate. King Kong's distaste for alcohol and women does not deter Joyce, who proceeds to serve King Kong a drink and flirts wittily with him. This is the beginning of their relationship and we learn little more about her afterwards. Her story proceeds after King Kong gets arrested for killing one of Lucky's henchmen. While King Kong serves his sentence, Joyce continues to run her business rather than play the doting prisoner's girlfriend as expected. The character's decision to continue with her life is Joyce's second assertion of autonomy.

Continuing to show her critical take on love – or more strictly sentimental romance – Joyce addresses the fleetingness of time in the song 'Quickly in Love'. This song is meant to highlight how quickly all the female characters in *King Kong* succumb to love for their significant partners. The lyrics, 'just a very short while, the end of a smile, just a century that goes in a dash, just eternity that's past in a flash', carries a poignant significance as 'Quickly in Love' is the last song sung by Joyce in *King Kong*. When she next appears she does not speak or sing; she physically, wordlessly turns her back on King Kong, who demands her attention during the wedding ceremony of Pop and Petal, and Miriam Ngidi and Jack. This physical gesture is Joyce's last and final assertion of autonomy. At King Kong's lowest point, after losing a fight against the welterweight Caswell, Joyce is faced with a choice: to choose a more 'honourable' gender role as the devoted athlete's girlfriend or her independent life. But Joyce's fate was sealed long before she physically turned her back on King Kong. Her choice to move on (in her business and in her personal life with the gangster Lucky) while King Kong remained in jail is her first transgression of respectable womanhood (represented by Nurse Miriam) and seals her fate as a tragic female lead. At the point that she breaks societal expectation, the story in turn demands her demise for the return to the community's patriarchal equilibrium, a convention Catherine Clément notes in *Opera, or, The Undoing of Women* (1989).

Joyce's interactions with her community are dictated by her relationship with her male counterparts, so much so that she deems it necessary to assert herself in the various

ways I have noted. In this, the Joyce character appears as a composite of the 1950s songbirds. For example, her actions remind one of other mythologised women vocalists of the 1950s, in particular Dolly Rathebe, who recounted her encounters with police, gangsters and male musicians to Lara Allen (2000, 2004). Instances with which Joyce herself grapples as a shebeen queen or jazz woman are also echoed in Miriam Makeba (1988), who throughout her life struggled to assert herself rather than act out gendered stereotypes (including that of Mama Afrika). Indeed, so resonant is the Joyce character with urban black jazz women of the 1950s that, during the death scene where she is strangled, Makeba relates in her autobiography that her mother screamed in terror as she thought Nathan Mdledle (who played the male lead) was murdering her daughter:

> My mother has never seen a play before. The big scene at the end comes when I am being strangled by the boxer. A scream fills the theatre. But it is not mine. It is my mother! She thinks that I am really being killed. She screams, 'My child! My child!' (Makeba and Hall, 1988: 70)

Makeba's recollection here is powerful. Rather than reducing her mother's horror to ignorance of theatrical conventions, her refusal to suspend her disbelief arguably stems from deeply recognising what is about to happen. After all, a similar fate befell Maria Miya – the real King Kong's partner. For Makeba's mother, in other words, the social conventions that result in femicide are now played out on stage as theatrical conventions. King Kong's rapid downward spiral guarantees that Joyce's death solidifies as quickly, recalling her lyrics in 'Quickly in Love' ('the end of a smile'). She dies soon after it is driven home to King Kong that she is not to be won like a prize in a boxing match.

Joyce's death is left open to interpretation because little is said during and after her fatal strangulation. Unlike her Western operatic counterparts, she is allowed neither a death aria nor the magnificent 'Death Song' that is King Kong's peroration. Instead, her death is left to symbolise King Kong's final demise, requiring little reflection from the cast and, by extension, the audience. This situation follows what Catherine Belsey has pithily noted, namely that the female 'becomes a speaking subject only by conforming to [male] speech ... to the system of linguistic prescriptions taken as the system of differences' (Belsey, 1985: 659).

This violence of conformity or assimilation, which leads to amnesia (since all that is remembered is the boxer's tragedy), is repeated in how South African jazz cultures have nursed voluntary amnesia towards issues concerning their female jazz artists whose voices

and sounds, I argue, encourage feminist critique (Rustin and Tucker, 2008: 1-28). Jazz cultures and communities make use of various modes of protection to ensure women are contained within, or kept without, the 'sacred' jazz space. These modes of male protection are 'hipness' and authenticity, the division between public and private spaces, and race (Monson, 1995: 396-422). Black male jazz musicians shed stereotypes attributed to them by structural racism and passed them on to the black female jazz singer (Pellegrinelli, 2008). Stereotypes of 'natural talent' now became more closely related to the female singer; primitivist prejudices such as danger, spontaneity and sensuality became synonymous with the likes of Dolly Rathebe, Dorothy Masuka, Abigail Kubeka, Thandi Klaasen, Miriam Makeba and many more (see Ballantine 2000).

Indeed, Makeba remains important for analysing these processes. She had the most magnificent spatiotemporal success in both South African and international jazz, and is arguably the overarching matriarch to female jazz musicians and to South African jazz cultures. Makeba managed to slip into multiple roles and represent ideologies that allow her to serve as a consistently prominent female voice within the hyper-masculine jazz space. She is often cited among other iconic female jazz vocalists such as Abbey Lincoln, Nina Simone and the South African Letta Mbulu. Miriam Makeba was a jazz vocalist born on 4 March 1932 and died on 8 November 2008. She took her experiences of growing up the daughter of a sangoma and domestic worker into her music and subsequently her knowledge of jazz and traditional Nguni South African songs, to her international audiences. Getting her start from the cosmopolitan Sophiatown where she lived and aided her mother with work, Makeba was able to engage in the kwela music, marabi, and South African jazz scenes. She began singing with a band called the Cuban Brothers; however, it was when she became the singer for the Manhattan Brothers that her career took off in 1954. She later came to sing with the all-women vocal group the Skylarks which led to her landing roles in film and musicals particularly the lead female role in Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera*, South Africa's first jazz opera. This gave her opportunities to perform both locally and internationally which paved the way towards her exile owing to the South African government revoking her passport when apartheid began to reach its zenith.

Makeba took to cities such as London and New York, where she was met with international acclaim after meeting Harry Belafonte. During her international concerts she became vocal about the operations of the South African apartheid government, even though she never classified herself as a political singer:

> I'm not a political singer. I don't know what the word means. People think I consciously decided to tell the world what was happening in South Africa. No! I was singing about my life, and in South Africa we always sang about what was happening to us – especially the things that hurt us. (1988: 45)

Even after her return to South Africa after apartheid's demise, Miriam Makeba still represented the Mother of the Nation who healed with her voice and work. She took up other humanitarian works such as tackling issues concerning domestic violence, drug abuse and HIV/Aids (the 2004 biography). This work granted her the position of Goodwill Ambassador to the UN under former President Thabo Mbeki. However, she kept on performing her music until her death on stage in Italy in 2008. My argument in this chapter is that not all jazz women vocalists were like, or wanted to be like, Makeba. Makeba is the useful cipher against which other women musicians' voices can be dialogically made meaningful.

Furthermore, it is these stereotypes that give birth to Joyce as a character and allow the audience and the creators of *King Kong* to accept Joyce's death as part of theatrical convention (employment), and to sympathise with the fallen hero King Kong as a result of unacceptable South African norms: apartheid. These various gendered roles and associations within jazz allow us to justify this amnesia: of singers' achievements, of Joyce's murder, and the amnesia about Maria Miya – the real life partner of Dhlamini about whom we know nothing.

We enable this forgetting by taking the modes of male protection that I have discussed for granted. By failing to understand this forgetting as gendered, we are thus able to stage revivals that circumnavigate the ambivalences of *King Kong*'s story, that would pacify us with equally pernicious narratives of 'the strong black woman' and the romance of 'black girl magic'. What I have done so far in this chapter is to revisit *King Kong* as the tale of a couple, both of whom die by the end of the show. Only one character is responsible for both deaths, while the other is made to bear the moral responsibility, as she spurred the culprit to commit the femicide and suicide.

The Tragedy of the 'Modern Girl': The Social Construction of Joyce

> I play the boxer's girlfriend, Joyce. She is known as the Queen of the 'Back of the Moon' which is a *shebeen*, an illegal bar for blacks. It is a lively part for a twenty-six-year-old to play. Joyce dresses nicely, sings some of the best show tunes, and in the end she gets to die in the niftiest strangulation scene since Othello killed Desdemona. Joyce is like Desdemona because she dies when her lover thinks she betrayed him. (Makeba and Hall, 1988: 69)

Makeba's musings draw our attention to yet another female character who suffers at the hands of her partner – Desdemona – and thus reminds us of how old this tragic trope is, whether Shakespeare's *Othello* or Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. Moreover, the centrality of women as sacrificed characters in such plots bears out the manner in which 'the anchoring of the female voice and the female body confers upon it all the conventional associations of femininity with nature and matter, with emotion and irrationality' (Dunn and Jones, 1996: 3). As I argued earlier in this thesis, such metaphors are crucial for the identification and interdiction of the primitive: once black, and now black woman. For Joyce, it is her departure from the black 1950s categories of race and respectability which demeans her as irrational and ultimately leads to her tragic demise (Goodhew, 2004). Rather than respectability and convention, Joyce's characterisation as a robust (jazz) woman during 1950s South Africa draws upon the aesthetic politics urban black women constructed in terms of 'glamour', 'independence' and what was considered over-sexualisation during the *Drum* era (Driver, 1996: 227-37).

From at least the 1930s, these women were described as 'Modern Girls'. Lynn Thomas's work on these women explores the different ideologies concerning and surrounding the Modern Girl. She particularly focusses on how 'the modern girl emerged through and posed challenges to categories of race and respectability' (2006: 461). How women negotiated the limitations placed upon them owing to their race and gender in Joyce's context, both on and off stage, deserve scrutiny. Joyce, much like the Modern Girls of the 1930s to the 1960s, bent societal rules as much as they could in their own favour. However, the choice to create Joyce to embody the ideal modern girl complete with a focus on independence ultimately led to Joyce's story serving as a cautionary – even morality – tale to all the women who lived this lifestyle. This has been enabled by the silencing of the 'internal domestic struggle' of which I spoke in Chapter One. The tragedy of Joyce's story remains the implication that if one were to seek these ideals this may be their eventuality, something similar to what Belinda Bozzoli (1983: 149) has described as a 'patchwork quilt of patriarchies'. This patchwork, I have argued throughout, is calibrated by race and by class, and is funnelled through the medium of jazz.

As I have also previously mentioned, revisiting *King Kong* for Joyce's story foregrounds how literary and musical representations and conventions began to interact with real life societal expectations and conventions in an interesting way. While *King Kong*'s fictional women were creations or constructs, they were born from current societal attitudes, including those collaboratively crafted by the mostly male musicians, composers and authors

who were key to women's positioning in the South African jazz scene. The black South African modern jazz girls on stage in turn became the hyperbolised stereotypical model for what one would expect from real life jazz women who then, subconsciously or consciously, had to embody them for the sake of a successful career. It is for this and other reasons that the history and politics of gender in the South African jazz musical has to include the making and undoing of 'Joyce'.

I repeat: Like the characters in the African jazz opera, jazz women would change their behaviour to suit a particular stereotype as a means of survival. Miriam Makeba was the Modern Girl (Joyce), the sentimental crooner (like the Petal character in *King Kong*) and the Mother of the Nation (Mama Afrika) at varying junctures in her life and career. Other South African jazz women used the glamorisation of the female form with purpose: by embodying tropes such as the Modern Girl – 'female figures identified by their cosmopolitan look, their explicit eroticism and their use of specific commodities' (Thomas, 2006: 462) – singers like Dorothy Masuka created a means to navigate masculinist *tsotsi* township culture through protection (as gangster molls) and by assimilating aspects of *tsotsi*s' male bravado that was similar to and modelled on its American equivalents (Allen, 2000: 92). Of the many women singers of the 1950s, however, the social construction of Joyce recalls the many ways in which Dolly Rathebe was featured in the 1950s (Fig. 5). Like Joyce, Rathebe openly defied the expectations placed upon her as a woman of the 1950s (Allen, 2004). As Lara Allen explains:

> Rathebe and other stage women who openly defied the modest, retiring, homebound model advocated by respectable society for avoiding contact with undesirable men had either to have male protection or be able to defend themselves. (Allen, 2000: 32).

In other words, they had to act and behave almost like Petal, a process that could also be seen as infantilising when one remembers Petal's youth in the play. Like Joyce, however, Rathebe used both the police and the gangsters of Sophiatown to her advantage to ensure her security in the rowdy modern environment of urban Johannesburg. She also used her wit, her fashion sense and sexuality to her advantage. In situations that called for her to gain attention and perform, she wore dresses and embodied the ideal 'Modern Girl', like a pretty gangster moll. However, she refused to become an actual gangster moll, preferring to dress in men's clothing and carry a knife instead. Rathebe's fluidity importantly allowed her freedom from prescribed gender roles that Joyce was not scripted to experience. While Joyce depended on Lucky and King Kong for protection, Rathebe knew to protect herself from the very security

she used for protection against others. It was in many ways these kinds of transgressions into male social worlds that allowed them success in the male jazz worlds that, dissonantly, proved more restrictive than the real world.

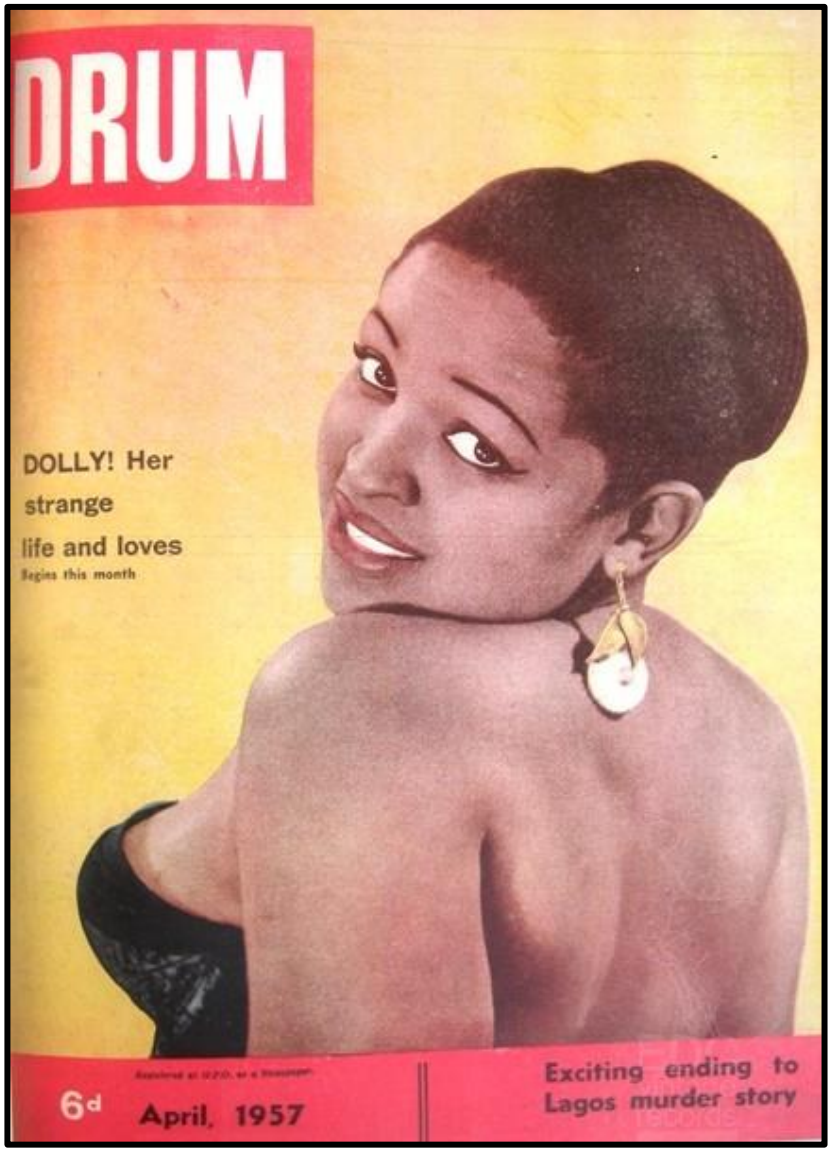


Figure 7: Dolly Rathebe as the 'Modern Girl' on the cover of *Drum* magazine, April 1957. Copyright: Jurgen Schadeberg, reproduced with permission.

Joyce's three ways of asserting independence and autonomy set her apart from the other female characters in *King Kong*; however, she is ultimately killed. Her death fades into ambiguity and is completely overshadowed by King Kong's suicide. Unfortunately, then, the jazz opera's otherwise progressive politics, summed up by Coplan as 'emerging black urban aesthetic conventions' (2007, 269) provide scant empowerment for the female characters of *King Kong*.

(Re)Politicising Joyce

The revival of the 1959 *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* as *King Kong: Legend of a Boxer* in 2017 was greeted with more enthusiasm than analysis, including from scholars who had written on the earlier work. *Legend of a Boxer* was instead seen as a revival of the interracial optimism that the opera had embodied in 1959, and as an opportunity to revive memories of the *Drum* era's musical icons as well as their music. What critiques there were, were focused on questions of appropriation, on Todd Matshikiza's status as *King Kong*'s composer, and on the degree to which his musical voice was respected or disregarded. In this chapter, I argued that these discussions ignore the politics of gender in the play, continuing the marginalization of women that shaped *King Kong*'s making in the 1950s. I observed that the most emphatic socio-political change from the 1950s, in 2017, involves the foregrounding of gender in our cultural landscape and how we think about gender in (South African) jazz studies. Drawing on scholarship that has taken on the challenge of South African women in jazz, I argued that the figure of 'Joyce' – the lover of the boxer King Kong who was portrayed in 1959 by Miriam Makeba – encourages new interpretations of the jazz opera, beginning with viewing the female lead as King's protagonist rather than as his foil. To do this I laid bare the conventions that restricted Joyce to a conservative role in an otherwise progressive production.

Since 1961, when *King Kong* was staged in London, discussions and debates concerning its authenticity or relevance have plagued the work in question. These debates have not included gender, despite the rich literature on this theme in South African jazz studies. The 2017 revival of *King Kong* was disappointing in its neglect to engage with women as dynamic characters and redeem South Africa's first leading lady in jazz musical theatre. I want to end this paper by reminding the *King Kong* family of the one overtly political lyric in the jazz opera:

> Behind all the shacks boys
> They built for the blacks boys

The lyric is sung by Joyce: snuck in the middle of a jaunty tune that is meant to exhibit flirtatious black women's sexuality. Joyce utters these words in the safety of *her* world, in this way showing that her space is not removed from the social but rather resides in the interstices of the public and the private. The political significance afforded *King Kong*, it

transpires, was most unapologetically articulated by Joyce – much as in the 1950s it was expressed by those women who marched to Pretoria in August 1956. The burden of convention destroys her, but her memory resides in the recollections of her silent sisters: in the world of the play this is Pauline, in South African jazz history it is women jazz singers whose careers spanned the 1950s onwards. As we remember Todd Matshikiza beyond *King Kong* the musical, we should also think beyond King Kong the character, and recognise Joyce as more than a shebeen queen who dies on stage.

Chapter Three

Joyce's Descendants: the Evolution of the Shebeen Queen beyond *King Kong*

> *Back of the Moon. This is a shebeen, an illegal drinking and nice-time joint. Seeing that there is very little fun to be had elsewhere in Sophiatown, Back of the Moon does well and has come up in the world. It is decorated with paper lanterns, café chairs and tables, coloured posters of boxing matches, jazz concerts, flags, bunting. At back there is a little raised platform with balustrades.*
>
> *King Kong*, Act 1 Scene 4

Introduction

Maria Miya is not known to have been a shebeen queen, but it was necessary for Joyce to be one in *King Kong*. Pat Williams recalls in her memoir that when she prepared the early drafts of the play, Joyce was just a girl in a shebeen. This is because, as the chapter's epigraph shows, shebeens were an alternative public space presided over by, at times, glamorous hostesses. Joyce is of course a fantasy. The numerous articles, memoirs and reminiscences about Sophiatown's shebeens do not mention singing hostesses. Rather, they often fondly recall strong, married, women who could bribe the police to escape a raid or to be released early from prison; women who could negotiate with liquor suppliers to procure the best price for their stock; women who could manage their rowdy customers; and, women who could doctor their liquor to make it stronger, to gain leverage over their rivals (see for example Nicol, 1995). Joyce, much like King Kong, is a literary creation of the *Drum* decade's black male intellectuals. As I have shown throughout this study, the fictions they created were geared towards celebrating urban black South Africa. This celebration, I have argued, was not unproblematically progressive: women were only reluctantly admitted into Sophiatown's myths of modernity. As I have previously investigated, the socio-political situation the characters Joyce, Miriam and Petal embodied on stage failed to challenge the stereotypes about women. In turn these stereotypes persist within the lives of those who represent them and those they in turn represent the women of their communities and our South African 'songbirds': Miriam Makeba, Dolly Rathebe, Abigail Kubeka, Dorothy Masuka, Sophie Mgcina and many more like them. In this chapter I will be investigating how these stereotypes persist, manifest and transform in the productions staged after *King Kong.*

Many productions post *King Kong* used the show's format as inspiration. When considering these shows, I will be questioning which elements of gender dynamics identified in *King Kong* persist and change from production to production. In doing so, it will become apparent what social factors contribute to these stereotypes' longevity, despite their disruptive and disempowering effects on the women they claim to represent. The three productions discussed are Todd Matshikiza's *Mkhumbane* (1960), Mackay Davashe's *Phiri* (1972) and Gibson Kente's *Too Late* (1974). Each musical includes a shebeen queen with a particular role in the plot. These shebeen queens may be seen as Joyce's descendants. In exploring their roles in the musicals' plots, and their musical representation, I ask if the trope of the shebeen queen evolves along with the changing political situation in South Africa. For, even as early as 1960, the time of *Mkhumbane*, South Africa felt like a different country: Sophiatown was destroyed, Mkhumbane (Cato Manor) was being destroyed, and the Sharpeville Massacre occurred that year. Sharpeville and the repression that occurred in its aftermath have meant that very few people know Matshikiza's second musical, especially in comparison to *King Kong*. By the 1970s, when *Too Late* and *Phiri* were staged, South Africa and its jazz were in a different space. The Black Consciousness Movement was gaining ground, and jazz was no longer the popular music of the day, having been replaced by soul and disco. The composers of *Phiri* and *Too Late* were, however, Matshikiza's descendants. All three had worked together in Sophiatown; Davashe, in particular, had been intimately involved in the making of *King Kong*.

The success of their shows suggests that Kente and Davashe were able to tap into the prevailing mood. The figure of the shebeen queen however, required much rethinking. The problematic stereotypes and simplification of the character noted earlier in the study were further solidified, cloaked also in nostalgia for the 1950s. As Mary Rörich has summarized the shebeen queen, black woman type:

> In the townships that have grown up alongside the major southern African white cities during this century, she is socially and culturally severely disadvantaged. She is the victim of colonialism, capitalism and racial discrimination; she has been economically dispossessed, discriminated against legally, and forced to accept the alien values of Western education, a missionary Christianity. She lives with little security, frequently providing economic and domestic support for families whose menfolk are out of work in goal or absent as migrant workers. (1989: 78)

Understanding the shebeen queen requires a combination of *Drum*'s romanticization of the character, to counter this picture of abject victimhood (La Hausse, 1988). In what follows, I provide a brief description of the shebeen queen's rise in the South African political context. I then revisit the contest of power between Joyce and King Kong, to show how her shebeen queen status provides a spatiality of power (Driver 1996) that challenges the boxing ring in Jack's gym, where she is murdered. I then examine roles and music of the shebeen queens in *Phiri*, *Too Late* and *Mkhumbane*.

Shebeen queens, apartheid and jazz

> My mother accepted her life, and I suppose, so did other shebeen queens; they chose this life and accommodated the hazards, a kind of insurance against poverty. Life in a shebeen exposed me to a rude introduction to the South African Police. (Bloke Modisane, cited in La Hausse, 1988: 5)

Owing to the economic and political conditions of apartheid South Africa, many women found varying means to generate income in order to support themselves and sustain their family. With the strengthening of the apartheid regime, women were forced to join the migrant work force and populate jobs as domestic workers, laundry washers, shop clerks or shebeen queen. A shebeen is an illegal bar found in the black township; the name persists even though they are no longer illegal. With the apartheid government creating barely liveable conditions for black people and the 1927 Liquor Act which 'prohibited Africans and Indians from selling alcohol or entering licenced premises', the shebeen became a staple in townships like Mkhumbane and Sophiatown (Naidoo, 2015). Traditionally, women were the brewers of alcohol. As women became more urbanised, they proceeded to fill this gap in the market by selling alcohol from the home and creating the informal bar-like setting of the shebeen. Through these practises, the hard business-like manner they conducted themselves and their sometimes association prostitution awarded them the title Shebeen Queen (Rörich, 1989: 84-85).

The importance of shebeen queens in the early history of South African popular music has been acknowledged by David Coplan (2007) and by Christopher Ballantine (2012). It was through the economic actions of these women that the marabi culture of the 1920s was nurtured, something that gave rise directly to the development of South African jazz. Marabi and other popular musics of the time were supported in performance, to boost each shebeen's popularity. Marabi was the first improvised pan-ethnic urban black musical performance style. It was refined by black unschooled keyboardists since before the First World War. It is

a rhythmical, repetitive and propulsive instrumental dance music that was closely intertwined with the culture and economy of the illegal shebeens in the ethnically mixed ghettoes in the mining cities such as Johannesburg or Kimberley. The term marabi (from Sotho lerabi, slang for 'lawless person; gangster) locates the era, the people, and the culture of emergent African urban communities. Developed out of a melting pot of older styles, marabi's syncretic repertoire, form and orchestration reflected how its musicians assimilated elements from all accessible performance traditions into a single urban African musical expressive style.

Before and during apartheid, popular South African jazz female artists played the role of the vocalist (Ansell, 2004: 294). Audiences preferred sung music as it required less interpretation than instrumental music, they could sing along to it more easily (Allen, 2003: 234). Singers at times assumed the character of the shebeen queen in their song, which allowed them to express views that would otherwise risk censorship (Allen, 2003: 234). Singing as a more direct form of musical communication was a good political tool, which increased the popularity of the character. Popularity was important for shebeen queens as it kept their doors open. Like the 'jazz women' who represent them on stage, their popularity is a means of survival within their respective industry. Both 'songbirds' and shebeen queens were often exposed to volatile environments that forced them to source protection of some kind in case of an incident (Allen, 2004: 31).

There is, therefore, some kind of similarity between shebeen queens and jazz women. The similarity is due to the structures of power during apartheid that, as Rörich has argued above, collectively subordinated them by race and by gender. Both shebeen queens and jazz women were also subject to what Ballantine calls 'internal repression' (2012: 99-110). As he writes marabi-jazz and shebeen culture inspired moral panics:

> In this climate, *marabi* came in for especially vituperative treatment from ministers, teachers, newspapers, columnists, some parents, and other self-appointed guardians of the commonwealth. Branding *marabi* as an "evil", a "disturbance" and "a great menace to the community", their criticism was ostensibly motivated by such issues as the propensity for *marabi* dances to lead to "scuffles", "violence", "lawlessness" and "intoxication". (2012: 99-100)

Before the advent of the more elite concert and dance culture, however, shebeens were the home for jazz and, ever since, a somewhat mythical bond has existed between the two. For Allen, both shebeen queens and jazz women had to reckon with conservative society, a state of affairs that continues today. For example, in a review of the 1950s play *Nongogo*, a journalist reviews Fugard's masterpiece as follows:

> In every bar and every shebeen you'll find the broken characters of life. The misfits and the displaced, the hopeless and the loveless, trying to find solace or oblivion in the booze. Those who profit from them are there too, often feeling no better about themselves than those they fleece. That's the setting for *Nongogo*, an Athol Fugard play set in a 1950s shebeen is a magnet for malcontents, far from the joyful, musical versions many other plays have brought us. (Stone, 2014)

Joyce is presumably the first of the "joyful, musical versions" Stone highlights in the above article. "The shebeen queen is a stock character in plays set in the black urban culture" (Kavanagh, 1985:123). However, before Joyce there was Queenie, a former prostitute seeking to legitimise herself as a business owner, because being a shebeen queen carried greater respectability than prostitution. Inspiration from two of Athol Fugard's plays *No Good Friday* and *Nongogo* aided in the conceptualisation of Joyce and the world she lived in. However, what inspired Joyce's creators were the superficial aspects of Fugard's plays. This contributed to the glamorisation and romanticisation of Joyce and Sophiatown that Robert Kavanagh critiques (1985: 122-124).

The conventional characterisation and the lived realities of a shebeen queen have a vast disconnect. *King Kong* was not the first to feature the character as we see with Queenie in Fugard's *Nongogo.* Queenie, like Joyce, seduced the main male protagonists, Blackie and Johnny, toward their respective demise. Both Queenie and Joyce are similar in that they share a story. They both are larger than life characters seemingly untouched by the politics associated with life as a black urban woman of the 1950s living in apartheid South Africa. Both have been understood and dismissed as the happy outcasts living carelessly on the fringes of society, only seeking to drag any unwitting male into their web of deception. And, both meet their deserved fate, a curse for their actions and any who choose to associate with them. Moreover, because both are seemingly without community they are used as vehicles or ciphers to portray underlying political intonations the plays and *King Kong* strive for. Fugard's *Nongogo* shebeen queen, Queenie, is no less glamourous and seductive than Joyce as she serves as a prototype to formulate Joyce. *No Good Friday*'s portrayal of Sophiatown inspired Harry Bloom characters and staging in his imagining of *King Kong* (Kavanagh, 1985: 98-102 and De Beer 2001[1960]: 29).

While the shebeen queen continued to take this shape in Joyce's form it is interesting that they are also used as the characters to deliver polarising political moments. Shebeen queens disrupt their respective societies as they slip in and out of their community's favour and acceptance. We have seen these dynamics at work in *King Kong*'s Joyce, with Queenie

who acts both as the villain and the councillor to her patrons and as we will see with *Phiri*'s shebeen queen, Mambele. Fluidity of context, representations and embodiment of performative gender imaginings of what a jazz female is appear to be the manner in which these female voices can succeed in male-dominated and white liberal spaces.

Owing to the socio-political context that gave birth to the shebeen queen, the figure occupies a place of interest in jazz. While her position is conditional, it is important because it allows for political commentary to slip into the narrative of the 'light hearted' productions. In chapter 2 we saw that black women's absence as authors and creators allows their bodies and societal positioning to be reimagined and represented at will. This reimagining requires women to embody and represent ideological concepts that are often detrimental to their career and imagery outside and within the music they create. Authors and creators make it difficult for women to reside just as they are. Shebeen queens and the jazz women who represent them on stage subsequently must be sexually unattainable, or they must be sinister, or mothering, or be a threat to social order:

> *Joyce poses. She is all preening, and while her mind is on the talk, she's putting an awful lot into the posing. She drops something from her bag. Two men rush to pick it up.*
> *Two men:* Joyce
> *Joyce:* Thanks, boys. Jordan, how come we don't see you around the Back of the Moon anymore?
> *Jordan;* My wife
> *Joyce:* Well bring her along.
> *(Jordan offers her a cigarette. Two men rush forward to light it.)*
> *Joyce:* Thanks, boys (*King Kong*, Act 1, Scene 6)

Rereading *King Kong*: Maria Miya, Joyce and domestication in the guise of romance

Read from the perspective of gender relations, *King Kong* favours what may be termed a liberal conservative meaning. Despite its seeming valorisation of underworld spectacle, what it ultimately favours is 'family values'; those who do not subscribe to them, die. Women characters like Joyce failures have little to do with the prevailing context of apartheid. Rather, they are due, within the play's economy, to the responses to apartheid that are implicitly endorsed: patience, moderation, endurance (Kavanagh 1985: 73). More than broad

ideological arguments, it is by examining the couples and their interaction in the world that the musical's conservative liberal politics are illuminated, though the play actually disguises these political positions in the guise of romance. Dhlamini was a popular literary hero who, along with the typical male heroes of *Drum*'s fictions, was the subject of love tales, surrounded by admiring women who inevitably 'delilahed' him with other men. Boxing formed part of the 'romance' and candyfloss that was Sophiatown's fringe culture (Flemming, 2009). Ezekiel Dhlamini's life seems in some ways representative of this cardboard romanticism; after all, he too spent his early life attending 'nice-time' parties, and, with his only known partner, Maria Miya, would in her murder show himself violent in love and temper. This murder becomes the 'love angle' of Dhlamini's story, firstly reported in the sports pages, where it is linked to the boxer's incarceration in late 1956:

> He's now awaiting trial arising from the death of a girl at the Polly Street Centre. But while awaiting trial, "King Kong" wanted to keep fighting fit, so he chose an unwilling warden as sparring partner. But that only earned him a sentence of two months! (*Drum*, January 1957)

In his obituary, written by Casey Motsitsi, the same dynamic appears:

> Nine days after he had been sentenced to twelve years in prison for the murder of Maria Miya at the Polly Street Centre, Johannesburg, Kong made a dramatic death plunge into Rivonia River which washes Leeuwkop Prison Farm. (*Drum*, June 1957)

In both these extracts the so-called domestic problems that led to Dhlamini's ultimate death are left unexplained. Their inclusion in *Drum*'s bloody, brutal and unsentimental boxing pages defamiliarises their normative inclusion in the cultural pages of the magazine as 'cheesecake' or 'domestic problems', and exposes their brutality: Maria Miya, like Dhlamini's reluctant jail warden, becomes Dhlamini's punching bag. The climax of the boxer's domestic problems, the 'big conflict' is attributed to a conventional cause: 'King [had] suspected that the girl had been unfaithful to him for some time. So when a misunderstanding came up between them, King stabbed her to death' (*Drum*, February 1959). Nakasa's (February 1959) stark reportage of Miya's brutal murder is suitably shocking, but only formally so. Its aesthetic effect works because Nakasa writes the murder as the culmination of the hero's inexplicable and tragic decline; the story maintains its tragic aura through this conventional narrative. This, to me, undermines Michael Chapman's claim that

Nat Nakasa's 'skills of "objectivity" and ironic perception' are here well illustrated, 'where the township hero … is firmly demythologized even as he is allowed to retain his vulnerability as a human being behind the bravado of his public presence' (1987: 216). Rather than a demystification of the boxer, Nakasa privileges the romantic plot as the primary motivation for Dhlamini's decline, and that of thwarted ambition as romance's equal. The story is insufficient – it neither dispels Dhlamini's public and personal decline (the distinction here is nominal) as a manifestation of neurosis, nor does it account for Miya's demise. Instead, the story of a brutal romantic relationship is subsumed under a 'Romantic' story that privileges a hero alienated from his society, with Miya's murder one projection of this alienation and his suicide its ultimate expression.

The political and social conditions that lead to Maria Miya's death and its marginalised narration in the story of King Kong Dhlamini are repeated uncritically in the play. More than any other index of the play's desired realism, it is this translation of the affective relations within and between 'couples', and women's roles in them that provides the starkest parameter. Nurse Miriam Ngidi's and Petal's roles and their musical realisation in the play have already been noted. The women's gendered roles in the play are also collectively expressed in the Matshikiza's and Williams's 'Quickly in Love' – sung as Joyce's solo in the 1959 run and as a group number in 1961. The song is a brief rendition, again in sentimental jazz/showbiz style, whose lyrics celebrate the 'fantasy' of love and especially the myth of 'love at first sight'. In the South African rendition Miriam Makeba's Joyce solo imbues the song with some poignancy through the texture of her voice and the song's scoring in a high register, while this poignancy is enhanced by dramatic irony (we know her love for King ends tragically for her). In the London version, the song's group celebration of love may be heard as an attempt to not only humanise the people of the Township; perhaps more importantly, it functions as an attempt to represent a concept of love that would be beyond politics.[15]

But, there are limits to this treatment of love and its productivity in the play. For while the idea of love is treated as useable material for its story, this same story depends for its tragic form on misogynist violence which must be both staged and at the same time naturalised. This naturalisation is effected in two ways: firstly, by the manner in which the couples are positioned in the play; secondly, by the manner in which Joyce is represented

[15] This treatment of love is typical in the play. Another duet, 'Strange', elaborates on this version of love, this time as something that happens in the dark. The duet is not credited, but is probably sung by the Nurse Ngidi and Jack characters. It was omitted in the London run of the musical.

musically in her signature tune 'Back of the Moon', and her bearing of the blame for her own demise. 'Back of the Moon', as I discussed in chapter 2, is one of the jazz opera's musical highlights. The song begins with a dramatic introduction accompanied by a piano that outlines the harmonic structure. In-between these are sprinkled coloratura phrases. As the song builds in pace, these coloratura phrases are picked up by the orchestra's brass section, supported by the woodwinds. This confluence crescendos into a climax reminiscent of the best in big band arrangement and quickly segues into the chorus and groove of the Back of the Moon. The shebeen is vocalised in the lyrics as a place of fantasy and glamour, somewhat raggedly realised:

> Though flowers may bend in driving rain
> They spring right up when it's clear again
> Don't snap or cry when you're feeling low
> The Back of the Moon is where the folks let go
> Back of the Moon boys
> Back of the Moon boys
> Right in front is the Back of the Moon […]
>
> Though the floor starts shaking when the biz gets packed
> Chairs are breaking and the glass is cracked
> The night is in front
> The day's left behind
> The Back of the Moon is where the folks unwind
> Back of the Moon boys,
> Back of the Moon boys,
> Behind the shacks is the Back of the Moon[16]

The lyrics are ironically aware that the shebeen's tenuous promises of freedom and abandonment ('oh the moon shines bright on the whole tin town') are far from the glittering premises of tinsel town. Rather than try to approximate the latter, as such gestures have been commonly interpreted in South African popular music of the time, Joyce, instead, owns the space where things are back to front (the double use of 'moon' versus 'Moon' to connote both the shebeen and light or its absence is one example). This carnivalesque space also serves as a political vehicle, as I argued in chapter 2. Joyce's lyrics also show her awareness that her shebeen serves a social function within the repressive environment of the country at the time:

[16] The lyrics are the author's transcription from the 1959 South African recording. They do not appear in this form in the musical's book (1961) either because they were incorrectly transcribed or because they were changed for the London production.

Back of the Moon boys
Back of the Moon boys
Right behind the shanties is the Back of the Moon
Behind all the shacks boys
They built for the blacks boys
Right behind is the Back of the Moon

There is also, however, a sinister undertone to this freedom, tinged with recklessness as Joyce (joined by Lucky) also encourages that at 'the end of the days boys/ up with your pay boys/ spend it at the Back of the Moon'. Seen as such, the shebeen is also inimical to societal cohesion and Joyce's role in the communal dynamics of the musical becomes anti-familial and anti-female.

Joyce's transgressions of the play's female codes immediately mark her for a fatal end as we have seen. The play in many ways transfers the cause of her murder to its victim, much as the writing of Maria Miya's death had done so as we saw above. The first way that this is done is through the positioning of Joyce with King and Lucky. King's tragedy begins with his entrance into the shebeen space, the antithesis of the boxing ring, where things are turned up and down as well as back to front. While the lyrics and the music of 'Back of the Moon' indicates that this carnivalesque space to be part of the politics of the Township and indeed of apartheid South Africa generally, the love story that begins in the shebeen is reified as a story of two individuals somehow divorced from this context and its gender dynamics. For, it is in this space that, upon meeting Joyce, King is in effect de-brutalised or humanised: his bravura is hopelessly out of place in the shebeen (recall my reading of 'Marvellous Muscles') and he is clearly out of his depth. Once Joyce chooses King over Lucky, the next scene (I: V) sees King choosing to spend time with Joyce rather than at his training. All this encourages the audience to identify with an otherwise unsympathetic character by endowing him with supposedly feminine attributes that are aroused and can only be nurtured by Joyce. Lucky swears revenge on King for killing his gang member and for winning Joyce, as his recitative 'Damn Him' portrays. But rather than kill King, as he surely could have done, Lucky seeks to humiliate the latter by effecting what in the play is conceived as emasculation – by interfering in his fights, by taunting him mercilessly and publicly, and by eventually gaining Joyce back. This is the strongest plot line in the narrative: boxing and love become intertwined as expressions of masculinity. Jack recognises this in his speech recounting the fall of King Kong, where he interprets boxing as one occupation for a black man in apartheid South Africa that won't have him called by the generic 'Jim' and derogatory 'boy'(II: III).

However, while boxing's social function is in this way deconstructed and shown to be imbricated in the discourses that construct other kinds of cultural experience, love is not deconstructed to a similarly productive degree. True, it is broached by the washerwomen in the play, in their role as commentators. For example, Pauline defends Joyce's relegation to a marginal but destructive role in Dan Kuswayo's masculinist interpretation of King Kong's story:

> DAN: So what does he [King] do? Gets caught up with Joyce. That Joyce dame was his downfall.
> PAULINE: And he was her downfall […] Well, she was important too. If he was King around here, she was queen.
> DAN: Exackly. A Shebeen Queen.
> PAULINE: […] Joyce got to be rich – someone – cars and nice clothes and everybody glad 'cause she says Hiya to them.
> LENA: No one's arguing about that. But like they said, King Kong din know his own strength, so Joyce din know *her* own strength – her woman strength. Messing 'round with Lucky, then with King, then with Lucky, and maybe a couple others in between. (I: III)

As the story of King's fall proceeds, Joyce is again placed on trial by the play's narrators regarding her loyalty to King while he was in jail for ten months on charges of culpable homicide (I: VI). In these scenes too, Joyce's worth is measured against her unconditional 'faithfulness' to King. This loyalty is a double serving: Joyce must not only remain faithful to King in demeanour and action, she must also not abandon him, whatever his wayward ways. Her 'woman strength' is, then, one of endurance and patience – the exact same qualities for which Jack and Nurse Miriam are cast in a favourable light by the play's politico-moral economy. Love in the play is in this way used as a crucial stratagem of ideological production that serves to reinforce its *political* narrative by making the *love* story an alternative position for being-in-the-world that is conceived as natural and apolitical. Thus love is a constituent element of the power dynamics informing the musical, especially gender relations. These issues are explicitly addressed in one crucial scene in the play that begins its second half, in which the pivotal role of Popcorn plays a crucial part and solidified his function in the play. Popcorn warns young male children to 'lay off the fight game' in the song "Mad" ("Be Smart, Be Wise" in the London version). Popcorn's scene begins the second half of the play and summarises King's decline from a boxing hero to a gangster. The drama is played out against a better part of the township, where children play their penny-whistles and execute

dances that suggest boxing. Popcorn arrives perched atop Caswell's ice-cream cart (Caswell is King's heavyweight replacement who has decided to sell ice-cream rather than box):

ALL: Boxing is a no good thing;
find yourself inside the ring;
middle of the second round;
boom you're lying on the ground;
listen to the birdies sing

POP (*speaking*): Cas you done the right thing getting this job, selling ice cream: real cool man, don't depend on boxing. So OK you wanna fight OK – Jack fixes you up an engagement. If you win, OK; if you lose – you go on selling the ice. Cas, you don't look smart, you look dumb enough to be a champ of two divisions. But I can see … there's something in that head of yours after all. Managing a boxer's a smart game.

CASWELL: give me a cherrie every time

ALL: Managing a dame is tricky,
rolling with a dame is sticky;
once you get yourself a dame,
it's boxing with another name,
she'll knock you out to take a … tickey?

MAN 1 (*speaking*): Don't you like anything?

MAN 2: Yes I'm … (*singing a waltz*) mad about the Joburg Zoo
Mad about the Joburg Zoo …

MAN 3 (*speaking*): There's Petal, hi Petal
CASWELL: Give me a cherrie every time!

POP (*singing*): Mad about a girl called Petal;
Call me yours and then I'll settle;
Mad about the way you dress -

CASWELL: Give me a cherrie every time!

POP: Petal make an honest man
ALL (*respond singing dramatically*): A man of men

POP: Petal do it if you can;
all our kids will look like me
and go to school –

ALL (*yelling mockingly*): Till standard three!
Hail to our statesmen!

Sikelel' iAfrika.

POP (*speaking*): You stick to your ice cream Cas. Ja I salute you, Cas, because you got out before you got in. Now look, what happened to King.
Everything is getting crossed-up. Boy, when a boxer, especially a top champ begins sliding, look out, run for it boy. It's like a tree toppling over. You never know who's gonna get hurt. You want to happen to you what happened to King? No-o-o-o stick to your ice-cream boy.

CASWELL: Sweets, chocolate, ice-cream!

ALL: Mad about the things we hate
CASWELL: have a banana

ALL: Mad about the things we hate
CASWELL: have a banana

ALL: Mad about the whole damn lot, Mad about -

MAN 1: Well … what have *we* got?

MAN 2: Drink;

MAN 1: The weather;

MAN 3: Dames;

MAN 4: And jazz.

ALL: Everybody around here's mad
MAN: oh boy you said it;

ALL: Everybody just as bad
MAN: let's forget it;

ALL: Everybody's daggers staring,
eyes are rolling
hair is tearing,
everybody around is mad. (II :I)[17]

The vignette's verbal acrobatics and word play, as well as its comic brilliance, all suggests Todd Matshikiza's influence familiar from his *Drum* writings more than that of Pat Williams. The mockery made of boxing's brutishness here is common in the writing of *Drum*'s black intelligentsia generally. My extensive inclusion of this scene, however, is due to the second

[17] Author's transcription. The published London version differs from the South African one, though similar themes are broached and it performs the same thematic and structural function.

chorus, where gender relations are likened to 'boxing with another name'. The fear of women here is explicit, particularly their stereotyping as acquisitive. The other side of this stereotype is of course the by now familiar veneration of women in domestic, nuclear, contexts of marriage – hence Popcorn's comic proposal to Petal. Finally, women are listed by the Township men as one of the things they have, or own, along with drink, the weather, and jazz. These stereotypes are familiar rhetorical strategies in masculinist discourse and differ in detail only with regard to this particular context. The piece however cannot be so summarily dismissed. We may note, firstly, that unlike the barely problematised discourse of love in the play, Matshikiza's and Williams's lyrics and music very pointedly mock the idea of reified love. For example, Popcorn's chorus mocks his proposal to Petal that promises marriage and children by noting that the latter will not get much by way of education. Secondly, the tragic-comic irony that pervades the whole scene's manifest playfulness culminates in a mocking salute or toast to the apartheid statesmen – the eminent gesture of the 'cheeky kaffir' – and a doubly ironic gesture to bless Afrika.

The second reason for closer reading of this scene involves its complex gestures regarding gender relations. We have already noted that women in this play, including especially in this scene, are rendered through the prism of masculinist discourse and its stereotyping rhetoric. Stereotyping, however, and as I have shown in chapter 2 is always a process marked by ambivalence, where the 'otherness' being stereotyped is simultaneously an object of desire and derision. Such is the position of the sign 'woman' in this scene and, I would argue, in the music and lyrics of Matshikiza and Williams throughout the play. In 'Mad', then, the first sign of this ambivalence occurs early in the song, specifically in the musical pause (represented here as ellipses) where the tricky, sticky dame will 'knock you out to take a … tickey?' This pause and fumbling about for an appropriate rhyming word and its ultimate presentation as a hesitant suggestion has more than comic consequences. Prior to this moment in the scene, the male chorus has been strutting about rhyming glibly about all sorts of things. This hesitancy in some ways therefore shows the essential ambivalence to their stereotyping, one that relies on probabilistic truth (itself based on the typical circular argument upon which all essentializing discourse relies). This inability to 'fix' woman to the male gaze and prejudices is also evident in the many names used to refer to women, in particular Caswell's regular interjections, 'give me a cherrie every time' ('cherrie' implying an ice-cream flavour as well as a pejorative nickname for women). Both Matshikiza's and William's attempts to ridicule women, as well as those that attempt to co-opt them into the domestic sphere, fail. Importantly, it is through the play's music and lyrics that this failure is

more evident, such that the latter provides an implicit critique of the very narrative on which it is meant to provide comment and entertainment value. Through this examination, the play no longer seems to be a sympathetic portrayal of an extraordinary but marginal individual.

Looking at the couples and their representation through music also enables us to map what alternative stances are suggested by the play. Through this, we see that what the play does is domesticate the underworld (which domestication the music resists) so as to launch a moral appeal, by positing a definitive difference between 'good' and 'bad' – where good and the possibility of redemption are undercut by social mishap. This is achieved by the placing of Lucky and King as adversaries, while they are in fact interchangeable. Lucky's villainy is shown by his constant use of the knife and at one point a pistol – unlike King, who is never represented with a weapon either than his fists. Lucky's exit shows him as less than heroic: he is last seen standing 'paralysed with fear' in front of an incensed King Kong (II: V). Though clearly a gangster, Lucky is not presented as villainous in the play until he preys on 'ordinary' working members of the community (II: II).

Despite this characterisation, Lucky is less King's antagonist than he is his double. The anxiety of 'doubling' forms an intriguing thematic thread in the play. Lucky is the first to warn Joyce not to double him for King (I: IV). On his return from prison, King accuses Jack of doubling up on him by signing up Caswell – who has the temerity to wear his suit – in his absence (I: VII). Doubling also occurs in the music. In Act One Scene Six (vignette one), 'Back of the Moon' appears as a jazzed-up piano version to accompany Joyce's activities during King's incarceration, while 'Oh Those Marvellous Muscles' – a song commemorating King's prowess – reappears as a ragged version to introduce Caswell in vignette two. While this device is useful dramatically, the anxiety that potential doubling causes for Lucky and King is more interesting. It suggests that both characters are implicitly aware that their importance exists insofar as it positions them structurally and that within this structure, say being a black man in apartheid South Africa, their specificity as individuals is arbitrary. This anxiety of doubling, therefore, also illuminates how these men's identities are self-inventions ('the boxer', 'the gangster') constructed under duress, hence their tenacious hold on their respective meanings. Indeed, the existential and narrative breakdown in the play occurs once doubling performs its arbitrariness by showing the characters' substitution of roles, when as Popcorn warns, everything gets 'crossed up'. For example, Lucky's preying on Township residents (II: II) is doubled by King's robbery of a local Chinese shop (II: III). This exchange or usurping of roles had already been suggested in Lucky's song 'Damn Him' (I: V), in which his vengefulness leads him to declare 'that Lucky's King', implying not only his status

as head gangster but also threatening King's position that he will subsequently undermine. This role exchange reaches its zenith in the scene of King's public humiliation in front of the Township residents and his abandonment by Joyce that leaves him 'a broken man' (II: IV). Performed to the tune of his title song, 'King Kong', the gangsters firstly mock King by comparing him to Edgar Wallace's creature and then Lucky breaks the boxer thus:

KING: I'm Kong.
LUCKY: [*Suiting action to words*]: I'm Kong.
GANG: I'll eat you like popcorn.
LUCKY: I'm Kong.
GANG: I'll scare you to death! […]
KING: King Kong. Brave as a lion. I'm Kong! (II: IV)

King's final, agonized, declaration of self receives no response, sympathetic or otherwise. This interpretation blurs and ultimately undermines the play's moral matrix of good versus villainy, highlighting instead a more fundamental structural sameness of Lucky and King that is missed by Gluckman and his creators, though it is embedded in the text.

Robert Kavanagh and other revisionist scholars of *King Kong* bemoan the white King Kongers' failure to portray a suitable antagonist in the play. Kavanagh writes:

> The play does not provide an antagonist, a real figure that we can identify as being King Kong's *political* enemy, i.e. one who bears the responsibility for "the wasted powers of the African people" and who makes the struggle for emancipation necessary in the first place. It thus emasculates and distorts the "intended" meaning, i.e. that identified by Bloom. Instead of such an antagonist, we have Lucky, the gangster. King Kong's enemies, it appears, are the gangsters and himself. Thus again the radical analysis is subverted. (1985: 99-100)

Kavanagh is right to point out Lucky's inadequacy as King's antagonist, political or otherwise. This inadequacy is especially relevant if we bear in mind the normative preferred content or orthodoxy of the 1950s anti-apartheid public sphere referred to earlier, where the antagonist should be apartheid or the Law. From such a perspective, it is indeed peculiar that the play offers little by way of a political protagonist. It shows, as I have argued elsewhere in this study, that what was really multi-racial about *King Kong* was its making; what was placed on stage, however, was the story of a man (King Kong) and a society (the Township) in a process of dissolution (suicide and forced removal to Sunshine Gardens). The antagonist to the play's moral politics that is elaborated through coupling is, I have argued, in fact doubling. The dynamics teased out on doubling are illuminated by the figure of Joyce, who

chooses alternately Lucky, then King, then Lucky. As we have seen from Lena's words (I: III) cited above, Joyce's emotional vacillation was ultimately to blame for King's fall and ultimately for her death. It is this logic that explains why King kills Joyce rather than his adversary, Lucky. It is also this logic that illuminates why Joyce had to die during the Wedding Scene (II: V) as her actions have been condemned as anti-familial and therefore anti-social. The reason for Joyce's murder at the wedding (by strangulation where Maria Miya was stabbed repeatedly) is set out in the play thus:

> JOYCE *comes in very flashily dressed – she is a gangster's dame once again … A moment's pause – all look towards the door – and* LUCKY *comes in.* LUCKY *and* JOYCE *stand together for a minute, and Joyce hangs limply on his arm. Then she leaves Lucky and goes up to the bridal couple, offers her hand, which* MIRIAM *takes in a daze.* JACK *ignores it.* KING *stalks up to* LUCKY. *A great rage overwhelms him, and he is about to attack* LUCKY, *who is paralysed with fear. But at the last moment, he turns and sees Joyce, and realises that she, dressed so gaudily and accompanied by Lucky, symbolises his defeat.*
> (II: V)

Exactly which defeat or what kind of defeat is implied here remains unclear, but Joyce is murdered nonetheless. Because of the setting (the wedding scene) it is easy to read King's defeat to be the result of thwarted love for Joyce and Joyce's murder to be a crime of passion. This displacement continues the role of the love story here as a guise for the play's politico-moral arguments. However, it cannot only be defeat in 'love' that motivates King's actions. The description of Joyce's entrance in the scene provides some clues here: she is brazen and flashily dressed, much like the pre-King Joyce audiences encountered first at the Back of the Moon scene. Also important is Jack's dismissal of the women's gesture of goodwill. These two features combined illustrate the masculinist gaze and judgment on Joyce. For, Jack's action (him being the male moral, and therefore normative, centre of the play) and King's reaction to seeing Joyce, reveal the extent to which the latter's construction of Joyce is contaminated by broader male discourses that have constructed women of the Township in a particular way. Bearing in mind the allegorical meanings invested by King Kong's white men on the boxer, which describe him as a symbol of the wasted powers of African people, that Joyce is made to symbolise King's defeat becomes an even greater indictment. To go back to Kavanagh's complaint, it becomes clear that the play *does* provide an antagonist who bears the responsibility for the wasted powers of the African people and who makes the struggle for emancipation necessary in the first place. It might be fortuitous that Kavanagh's criticism is that the lack he perceives 'emasculates' the play's intended meaning. It is also, however,

telling. For the real enemies of King Kong (and the male world he embodies) are women (embodied by Joyce) and the 'radical analysis' whose subversion Kavanagh decries, one which is predominantly absent in the content of the public sphere we have engaged, is feminist.

On Joyce's Descendants: *Phiri, Too Late* and *Mkhumbane*



Figure 6: Mackay Davashe. 1971. Hits from Phiri. CBS – ASF 1652.

After *King Kong*, many jazz musicals utilised the play and its characters as prototypes to create their own plays owing to *King Kong's* international success. Barney Simons sought to create an Africanised production of Ben Johnson's *Volpone.* *Phiri* the musical is a production that tells the story of the richest and poorest people in Soweto and was a collaboration between Simons and the poet and novelist Wally Serote, who worked on the musical's writing. The music and direction came from Mackay Davashe and Cyril Magubane. The production's band was a mixture of members from the Heshoo Beshoo Group, Davashe himself on saxophone and fellow saxophonist Barney Rachabane.

The production tells of a mischievous villain named Phiri who made his riches from scamming the residents of Soweto. In his latest scheme, he pretends to be fatally ill and makes public the fact that he is in search of a wife and heir to inherit his fortune. His declaration attracts the attention of many people in Soweto who in turn bring bribes to Phiri's business partner Mutla to be favoured as a potential heir. Phiri's declarations reach the ears of wealthy shebeen queen Mamabele, played by Sophie Mgcina. Mamabele is pregnant and has decided she is tired of 'having bastards'. Phiri, being on his deathbed, is beneficial as it allows her a chance to give birth to a legitimate baby and a chance for the baby to be named his heir. Originally, Phiri planned to have his will read over his coffin and to leave his inheritance to Mutla. He would then leap out of his coffin with a *sjambok* (whip) to chase all those who paid a bribe away. However, Phiri did not anticipate Mamabele contacting the police to read his will during his funeral. With the threat of being caught, Phiri remains in his coffin and later flees to his homeland. Mutla in turn shares his wealth with the people of the street after Phiri's departure.

In *Phiri*, the character Mamabele is of interest. While she is older than Joyce in age, she and Joyce share many stereotypical qualities expected of a shebeen queen. Like Joyce, she resides in the fringe of society where she acts as a pseudo-villain to the action presented on stage. She, as with Joyce, is a character clothed in glamour with seeming carelessness expected of the shebeen queen. Mamabele and Joyce are both concerned with appearance, both in their physical look and the reputation they carry within their respective communities. In the scene I mentioned earlier, to conclude my narrative of the socio-political contexts of shebeen queens, we see Joyce interacting with two men sitting in her shebeen. The scene is taken after she has sung "Back of the Moon" and she begins mingling with her patrons while trying to keep the attention of King Kong who has just entered her shebeen. As the stage direction reads "*Joyce poses. She is all preening, and while her mind is on the talk, she's putting an awful lot into the posing*". These words emphasise her appearance and the amount of care Joyce has to place into how she appears to the men she is speaking to. She uses her reputation of promiscuity to draw in customers. One telling moment is when Joyce asks Jordan, someone who seems to be a regular at the shebeen, why he no longer comes "around the Back of the Moon anymore". Jordan responds with "my wife", an answer that further solidifies this notion of the promiscuity of shebeen queens. There is an underlying understanding that his wife would be upset about her husband's whereabouts owing to the alcohol served and the presence of Joyce and women like her in the shebeen. When Joyce quips in reply "bring her along" the line is intended to be humorous. The element of

respectability or lack thereof is at play as one would not expect a married woman to visit a shebeen because of appearances and what is deemed appropriate of a married woman of the 1950s.

Marriage, and how it bequeaths a woman and her children respectability, is the societal norm that Mamabele is manipulating during her time on stage in *Phiri.* Mamabele's promiscuity is implied through her pregnancy as an unmarried woman and her main objective to marry *Phiri.* She wishes to legitimise herself and in turn her unborn child by marrying a man who is seemingly on his deathbed. Less obviously, Joyce also seeks out communal respectability which she briefly attains with her pursuit and eventual relationship with King Kong. She leaves Lucky the gangster for a similar motive to Mamabele, who seeks to marry Phiri. As the girlfriend of a promising young boxer, King Kong offers Joyce financial security, an opportunity to become a more respectable member of her society, and an escape from South Africa as well as the politics surrounding being a black woman, a 'shebeen queen'.

The theme of women chasing after men is present in both plays. In *King Kong* the character Petal consistently follows King Kong as a devotion of her love for him. She then follows Pops who returns her love and marries him. Joyce is more nuanced in her chase. She poses, postures and positions herself in a manner that makes her desirable to men. Returning to the stage direction, "*she's putting an awful lot into the posing"* makes it apparent that Joyce's movements are deliberate and calculated. Her actions are meant to attract the attention of "two men" –she chases after King Kong at the Back of the Moon and once he falls from grace she runs back to Lucky. Respectability is at the core of both women's pursuit of these men. Mamabele is more blatant in her portrayal of her stereotypical characterisation. In the album cover shown about she is physically running after Phiri, arms reaching out to grab him. All three characters are surrounded with money flying everywhere which forefronts money as an important theme within the play.

While Mamabele is chasing after Phiri, Phiri is chasing after a younger woman who appears to be running away from him. The matter of age enters the equation. Joyce's youth allows her the liberty of subtlety and seduction. Mamabele, already a mother with another child on the way, is expected to already be a respectable woman. These her allow her a harshness and brashness that she uses to express her desires, and how she feels concerning even political matters. In the song "Mamabele" (an upbeat kwela jive) she details in lyrics her many experiences as a shebeen queen. She tells of her time in jail for selling alcohol and being violent; of a time the hard labour she endured caused callouses on her hands; and she

lists the different kinds of men she has encountered –a tea boy, a white boy, a garden boy etc. All of which is not suitable for her. She tells her patrons to "find a man for [her]. [She] means a real man! Because "she's Mamabele" (*Mamabele,* 1972: 1:14-1:34).

As Mamabele's larger than life character is often light-hearted and humorous, she carries a darkness and maturity Joyce has yet to experience. She understands the weight respectability and legitimatising allow her and her children that money could not award her. The social currency of respectability awards her what she wishes for the most for her children: insight. This adds a depth to her character and becomes apparent in her big solo number 'Madam Please'. When she is asked advised by a young domestic worker on how to fix a conflict with her "Madam" (white female boss).

> Madam, please -
> before you shout about your broken plate,
> ask about the meal my family ate.
>
> Madam, please -
> before you laugh at the watchman's English,
> try to answer in his Zulu language.
>
> Madam, please -
> before you say that driver stinks,
> come! – take a bath in a Soweto (South West Township) sink.
>
> Madam, please -
> before you ask me if your children are fine,
> ask me when – ask me when I last saw mine.
>
> Madam, please -
> before you call today's funeral a lie,
> ask me why my people die.
> Ask me why my people die.

Both Joyce and Mamabele deliver politically charged moments in their respective plays. Their characters as shebeen queens allow them to conceal political critique in the humour of their characters and the drama of their misfortunes. Though similar, Mamabele and Joyce differ in the extent of their stereotypical exaggerations and tone of their characters. Where Mamabele is dark and dangerous, Joyce is light and cunning.

Phiri was produced by the Phoenix Players, a collaboration founded in 1965 at the Dorkay House by Ian Bernhardt of the Union Artists and director Barney Simon. Dorkay

House plays a fundamental role in South Africa's entertainment history. Located on 1 Eloff Street, Johannesburg, the once clothing factory provided black creatives a space to congregate, learn and produce their creative products (Solberg, 2011: 6). Bernhardt first bought Dorkay House in 1956, and thus created a space for *King Kong, Phiri* and *Too Late* to be conceptualised and created. His ownership created a white shield which protected the black creative from the interference of the white government at the time (Solberg, 2011: 7). As the Phoenix Players, Bernhardt and Simons first collaborated to produce Athol Fugard's *Hello and Goodbye.* They went on to sponsor Corney Mabaso's 1968 Soweto Ensemble's *Shaka* and Simon's *Phiri* (1972). However, they, like many production companies, it consisted of white producers who sought to further black cast productions. As an off shoot of the Union Artist which sponsored the production team of *King Kong*, one would hope the Phoenix Players would evade the pitfalls the *King Kong* were entrapped in. "The entertainment industry overall was still controlled by whites; blacks might sing, play, dance act and produce banners and props, but organising and running the whole show was a different matter" (Solberg, 2011: 7).

In collaboration with the Phoenix Players who enlisted the help of saxophonist Mackey Davashe for the musical composition and direction. A pattern of personnel starts to emerge from the production of *King Kong.* Ian Bernhardt sponsored *King Kong* as part of the Union of South African Artists, Sophie Mgcina played the role of Petal in the original production of the Jazz Opera and Davashe himself played the saxophone and acted as bandleader in *King Kong.* Continuing this trend, much like *King Kong*, *Phiri* is a multi-racial collaboration between a white production staff and black cast, one that imagined and dramatized the life of the residents of Soweto.

I argue that the shebeen queens of Gibson Kente's *Too Late* and Todd Matshikiza's *Mkhumbane* offers a more realistic portrayal of the shebeen queen and her role in her communities. While these productions don't deny the illegal nature of their business, the title shebeen queen defines the women they represent as someone people who are out of the ordinary. Part of Kente's 'Political Trilogy' *Too Late* follows his formula of focusing on representing integrated communities (Kavanagh, 1985: 122). The play follows *King Kong* model. Kente took direct influence from *King Kong.* Both plays seek to highlight the urban culture of black Africans in apartheid South Africa. The thematic basis of the plays is the same in the typically sensationalised areas such as urban township everyday living, shebeens and isolated protagonist figures (Kavanagh, 1985: 122). However, the treatment of these areas is where *Too Late* differs from the rest.

Too Late is a production centred on a young boy named Saduva set in 1960s South Africa. Originally from the Transvaal, Saduva was forced to leave his childhood home to live with his maternal aunt, Madinto, in Soweto after the passing of both his parents. Madinto owns a shebeen where she lives and raises her disabled daughter, Ntanana. It is here where Saduva meets and falls in love with Totozi, Ntanana's friend. As Saduva looks for work in Johannesburg he gets in trouble with the police owing to lack of the necessary stamps in his *dompas* (passbook which granted and restricted black South African access in urban areas). The local priest initially aided Saduva from being imprisoned however the overzealous policeman Pelepele continued to pursue Saduva with regards to his pass and in an act of revenge arrested Madinto for selling illegal alcohol. Being the sole breadwinner in the family, Madinto's arrest left both Ntanana and Saduva destitute. Without the protection of Mfundisi (the priest) and Madinto, Saduva was eventually arrested for the 'pass' transgressions. During Saduva's arrest Ntanana was murdered by Pelepele as she tried to prevent the arrest despite her disability. Once released, Saduva seeks revenge from Pelepele, he is stopped by his friend and town gossip, Offside. Having avoided another arrest Saduva is allowed to re-unite with Madinto.

First performed in 1975, *Too Late* was able to withstand the pitfalls of those that come before by contextualising the character's circumstances. Of the shebeen queens I have previously mentioned, Madinto is the first one that has a stated origin for her occupation. She already holds the respect of her peers and family despite being unmarried and is a mother, a woman of the community and subsequently a shebeen queen (Kavanagh, 1985: 123-124). Madinto took up the job so that she could provide her disabled daughter the care she needs. By elaborating on her character Madinto is awarded cultural sympathy from both the audiences and her stage community. By presenting her as a person other than the shock character such as Joyce has become in *King Kong*, Kente was able to penetrate the shebeen queen stereotype and create a more authentic, less romanticised representation of a shebeen queen.

Mandinto's stage directions also differ to Joyce's. "*Madinto looks worn and worried. Slowly she keeps looking around as if asking 'Where now Lord' Her eyes suddenly land on a toy next to a dustbin. Her face opens into a glare of joy. She goes to pick it up. Like a little baby she hugs I*" (Kavanagh, 1985: 123). These directions are taken form the scene after Madinto is released from prison after being arrest for selling illegal alcohol. Unlike Joyce, her movements are not picturesque, all poses and postures. She is not sure of herself in her actions, or assertive in any way. In this scene she is simply herself, having escaped a trauma

only to enter grief when she returns home to discover the toy she so lovingly found for her daughter would never be received by her as she had died whilst she was imprisoned. This scene not only depicts Madinto's grief but also Ntanana's tragedy as the daughter of a shebeen queen and a differently abled person/female.Here, Ntanana becomes a victim of a violent crime and not just the object of Saduva's romantic affections.

Like *Too Late*, *Mkhumbane* grapples with similar themes as *Kong Kong*. The play centred on the not-so glamourous living conditions of black people in 1960, in Durban's township Mkhumbane which, like Sophiatown, faced destruction. The story tells of the Buthelezi family who have fallen on hard times after the father figure of the family got robbed of their savings by the area's *tsotsis*. The money was meant to further their son John's ambitions to become a doctor. After this occurrence, John is forced to leave school and seek work in the city to aid with the family finances. This upsets both John and his girlfriend Lindiwe as they had made plan to go through school together and eventually marry. That evening Lindiwe with the aid of her community organised a fundraising concert for John and his family. At this concert the stolen wallet makes a miraculous reappearance after the community intervened and reprimanded those who stole it. While there is a conflict between the working class citizens like the Buthelezis and the local tsotsis with their leader Mr Charlemagne, the underlying current of apartheid persists throughout the play, inferring and governing the community's lives. This is highlighted on when John Buthelezi is denied a working permit. While the play couldn't afford to be covertly political, it offers a more realistic depiction of life township culture. In this production the people represented maintained their humanity on stage instead of becoming caricatures.

After his collaboration with Harry Bloom in *King Kong*, Matshikiza was reluctant to enter another collaborative project. When Alan Paton approached him to work as the composer for *Mkhumbane*, Paton approached Matshikiza knowing the points of contention regarding his experience during his collaboration with *King Kong*'s production team. While it had all the trappings of *King Kong*, Paton reassured Matshikiza that the musical will be more of an equal partnership than a boss-employee situation. His reassurance is believable when we consider the character development of *Mkhumbane*'s shebeen queen, Rachel. While Rachel is described as flamboyant and bubbly, she carried humility that Joyce and many like her displays.

> *Rumour has it that he and RACHEL were lovers once, but then he married ELIZABETH YENI, and became a model husband and father. He is benevolently strict with his children, and would certainly not like to see any of them adopt Rachel's easy-going way of life. But he has a soft spot for her and admires her still, not only for her charms, but for her warm-heatedness. His nature being what it is, he is not above still teasing Elizabeth [or have] an occasional flirtation with Rachel. Rachel herself is a buxom, good-natured woman od about 57, a real woman of the world, with an eye for a man and for the main chance; she is renowned both for the variety of illicit liquor that she sells and her generosity. Her entrances are heralded by a flourish on the clarinet.*
>
> *Mkhumbane*, Act 1, Page 1

We first encountered Rachel when she visits the Buthelezi's after Buthelezi himself was robbed of their life's savings. We see for the stage directions that she dated Buthelezi when they were younger and still maintains a relationship with him despite his wife and family. However, their relationship is platonic with the occasional flirtation. In these stage directions, we get quite the in-depth description of Rachel and her character. While she still maintains the stereotypes of being a wild spirit and eccentricity and being a flirtatious woman who is popular with men, her character is redeemed with the description of her more humanising qualities of a kind-hearted, generous woman who is popular with her community.

Rachel is not just living in her community only to take part when selling alcohol. She is an active member who engages with every day and extraordinary events that occur. After Buthelezi she is the one who raises the question of when the elder men in the community would take a stand against the violence and the robbing. Her words are a call of action "How long is this to go on? How long are husbands of wives, and fathers of children to be beaten and robbed? If I were a man, the one night I would wait at the buses too." (1: 11).

When we next see Rachel, she is in her shebeen meeting John Buthelezi's young girlfriend Lindiwe. She pleads Rachel to throw a fundraising concert for John in order to raise the stolen money so that he can return to school and in essence return to her. Lindiwe is worried John will forget her as a working man and lose interest in her while she is in school to become a doctor (2:7). She asked that she host the concert in the coming evening which assumes Rachel as she believes Lindiwe is acting in haste especially for a boy. However, when Lindiwe shows Rachel a picture of John she is reminded of his father and the love they used to shared. This event leads up to Rachel's solo which is quite unlike her fellow shebeen queens solos.

Child, why did you come to me?
Why did you come to show me?
The kind of child I used to be
And send me back to weeping?

Child, why did you come to me?
Bring back the past to me?
Why did you come wake my heart
That was grown used to sleeping?

Oh boy from home
Who sleeps in the bitter sea,
Why does this take so long to go by?
Oh boy from home
Who sleeps in the bitter sea,
Do not look at me now,
So old, so careless am I

Now for a day or two
I'll be what I used to be,
For the sake of these tender two
Who remind me of you and me.
So girl with the wonderful boy
I'm glad you came to me

The music of *Mkhumbane* is mostly acapella choral work and *Rachel's Lament* is no different. Sung in a minor key to represent Rachel's heartbreak, the solo Rachel sings is about a love she once possessed and a youth that is now in the past. Her solo first is not an introductory solo like Joyce's and Mamabele, and she does not enter the scene unassumingly like Madinto. She is unique in that regard as she does not completely subvert the stock character she represents but she still maintains a depth that eludes the shabeen queens before and after her. The lyrics she sings are not solely about her heartbreak but details her change of mind towards Lindiwe's situation. First she laments about her lost youth which leads her back to heartbreak "why did you come to show me? The kind of child I used to be and send me back weeping?". She then details her way to accepting to help Lindiwe. Joyce's descendants do in these various ways evolve. It cannot be said that later composers of the apartheid-era jazz musicals redeem women from certain prevalent stereotypes. However, the richness of the shebeen queens post-*King Kong* enhance these productions' values in South African jazz history. Joyce, after all, was a complex character: it is that which should be recognised.

Conclusion

During his collaboration with Harry Bloom on *King Kong*, Matshikiza expressed concern about how black bodies were being presented on stage. The production's mission was to enlighten white audiences of the talent residing in the apartheid South African townships. In the quest to appeal to such audiences, Matshikiza's collaborators exaggerated the mythologies of black township cultures. Their failure for introspective critique led to tensions arising between Matshikiza and his collaborators. Further failure to attend to introspection led to serious ideas and themes being cloaked in glamour and song. Scholarship surrounding these issues interrogates *King Kong's* politics pertaining to race, the myth of the utopian multiracial collaboration, government restrictions which furthered the ignorance of Matshikiza's white colleagues and the media coverage that aided *King Kong's* primitive stereotyping to be further solidified into theatre conventions.

My intention with this scholarship was to provide a gendered reading of *King Kong.* Where Dalamba (2011; 2013), Titlestad (2004) and Kavanagh (1985) interrogate the power imbalance between an all-black cast and an all-white cast, I interrogated the absence of a black female presence in the construction of *King Kong.* Much like the white collaborators who had their mythologies rooted in primitivism, the producers of *King Kong* embedded their preconceived notions of jazz women and shebeen queens throughout the various characterizations within the work. This informed my investigation of the character Joyce.

The Joyce character continued to grow in popularity and became a staple in the South African jazz musical. From Miriam Makeba to Marah Louw, her glamour became an indicator of the urbanised black woman and was further popularised by Sophiatown-influenced jazz singers. Joyce's style and demeanour became synonymous with the lifestyle of those who frequented shebeens and the shebeen became the venue that housed the songbird stages. The Sophiatown songbirds also tended to adopt this 'Modern Girl' aesthetic and attitude as a way to navigate the shebeen spaces. This adoption was a mechanism to gain the attention of the rowdy patrons and to add challenging sexuality to an exclusively-male jazz group. As a result, the likelihood of securing jazz work and engagements rose. These dazzling dames served to pioneer vocal jive into acclaim. In turn, their presence crystalized into the mythologies of 1950s Sophiatown and into the personifications of the stock shebeen queen character.

As we have seen throughout this study, the character Joyce was born out of these expectations. Joyce, as the leading lady of *King Kong*, articulates Sophiatown gender typecasts from her conceptulisation, enactment and demise. Scholars Christopher Ballantine (2000), David Coplan (2007), Dorothy Driver (1996) and Lara Allen (2000) contextualised the socio-political contexts that gave rise to Joyce's creations. Through my intervention, I have added to the existing body of knowledge by analysing Joyce's characterisation through the lens these scholars have previously provided. It can be seen that Joyce is not, after all, King Kong's enemy. She is packaged as a flamboyant shebeen queen, with the voice of a siren and an untameable spirit, embodying all the stereotypical qualities expected of a jazz woman of the 1950s. Her plotting leads audiences to be less than sympathetic of her death, at best leading to ambivalence. I show that the ambivalence shown to Joyce began from the start: from the myth that inspired her creation through to her embodiment within the work of said myth as a character. Her promiscuity, glamour and outspoken attitude veil the horror of her death. As a result, the tragedy begins when Joyce is remembered as a member of her society and how her story is an echo of many who may have been like her.

Like the characters within the play, jazz women would change their behaviour to suit a stereotype as a means of survival. Miriam Makeba was the Modern Girl (Joyce), the sentimental crooner (Petal) and the Mother of the Nation (Miriam) at varying junctures in her life and career. Jazz women used this glamourisation of the female form with purpose. By embodying tropes such as the Modern Girl, who were "female figures identified by their cosmopolitan look, their explicit eroticism and their use of specific commodities" (Thomas, 2006:462), singers like Dorothy Masuka navigated tsotsi township culture through protection (as gangster molls) and by assimilating aspects of tsotsis' male bravado that was similar to and modelled on its American equivalents (Allen, 2000: 92). Through the interrogation of these songbirds' lives, it becomes apparent the extent to which life and stage mimic each other.

The autonomy of the Modern Girl is detrimental to Joyce, who embodies these ideologies full heartedly in *King Kong*. Joyce poses too much of a threat to King Kong and Lucky's verbose masculinity. Her manipulations disrupt the social gender hierarchies of the 1950s Sophiatown depicted on stage. This threat led to the demonization of Joyce and, subsequently, anyone who emulates her role post *King Kong*. This can be seen in how the character of Joyce was created and how the other characters within the play interacted with her. Joyce, as a 'Modern Girl', is seemingly alone in her journey on stage and, in the end,

Joyce's autonomy costs her her life, because she became a threat to the male protagonist's masculinity.

Joyce's silent sister, within Todd Matshikiza's *King Kong*, is also analyzed a prototype of the resultant stereotypes South African jazz women assumed. As aforementioned, these women embodied such stereotypes as a means to obtain recognition and work within hyper- masculine jazz spaces. The female characters act as exaggerations of what would be displayed within social jazz settings during the apartheid era. The positioning of these women not only illustrates the gender prejudices of the time, but also the gender prejudices Matshikiza himself possessed. It is these attitudes that he and his peers carried into their music making. The three main female characters within *King Kong*: Petal, Miriam and Joyce are each characterized in relation to the relationship they have with the men they share the stage with. Petal, with her unrequited love for King Kong, miraculously transformed her affections into an adoration for King Kong's barber Pops; Miriam, with her repeated refusal of her boyfriend Jack's proposal, eventual resigned her choices and will; accepting and marrying Jack without any change in what she asks from him and finally Joyce, who stood mostly on her own as a character despite her relationship with two main characters: Lucky and King Kong. It is this independence that lead to Joyce's ultimate demise.

Mara Louw as 'Joyce' is a descendent of the character's legacy. With the success of musicals and plays such as *King Kong*, *Nongogo* and *Phiri*, the stereotype of the shebeen queen discussed in chapter 3 is easily identifiable. Louw's portrayal of 'Joyce' perpetuates these preconceptions that occur through the frequent use of the jazz singing, shebeen queen character. Revisiting the idea of Joyce as a cipher against the women who surround her and the women who have represented her, a concept presented in chapter 2 of this thesis, I juxtapose Louw's Joyce against the shebeen queen from whom she was descendent. By highlighting the various revivals post 1959, from *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* up until the 2017 revival *King Kong: Legend of a Boxer*, I questioned whether the role economical gain and nostalgia played in the recreations. The 2017 production was greeted with more enthusiasm than analysis, the musical serving as a treat which started from the 1961 *King Kong: the musical*, into the adaption of *King Afrika: the musical*. Rather than a prepared critique of the ideologies of the day, the 2017 revival was greeted as a reclamation of: the interracial optimism that the opera had embodied in 1959, an opportunity to recall the musical icons of the so-called *Drum* era in their youthful peak and to hear the music of the 1950s again. With the 2017 production's focus on set on nostalgia and authentic recreation,

the subsequent musical became a reclamation of interracial optimism which furthered exaggerations of gendered stereotypes.

Critiques of the revival instead focused on the politics of appropriation, including Todd Matshikiza's status as the music's composer, and the degree to which the faithfulness to his musical aesthetics was adhered to historically and in the *Legend of a Boxer*. Through this research I intervened in these discourses of commemoration by noting an important omission: gender. Through my intervention I observe that the most emphatic socio-political change from the 1950s to 2017, involves the foregrounding of gender in our cultural landscape and, relatedly, of how we consider gender in (South African) jazz studies. This consideration meant that the figure of 'Joyce' – the black the lover of the boxer King Kong portrayed in 1959 by Miriam Makeba – encourages new interpretations of *King Kong*: *An African Jazz Opera*. It is these new interpretations that this study aims to engender. Critiquing the problematic politics of gender in the South African jazz musical should not lead to our abandoning of this tradition, which has been crucial to the history of South African jazz. Similarly, exploring and exposing these politics as foundation to the musicals' composers and creators need not result in their banishment from our jazz narratives. As I have shown, rather heroes and villains, these composers wrestled with the position of women in the South African jazz musical. Revitalising our engagement with these shows should, instead, enhance our narratives of South African jazz.

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