Theatre of Resistance in Johannesburg, 1960–2010

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

KASONDE THOMAS MUKONDE

Department of History

School of Social Sciences

Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg

July 2024

Supervisors: Prof. Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi & Dr. Ali Khangela Hlongwane

Acknowledgements

Working on this project has been one of the most difficult things I have done in my life. But, in the end, I am glad I did it. My hope is that readers, scholars and theatre practitioners alike, will derive value from this labour of love. Maya Angelou famously said, 'I come as one, but I stand as ten thousand.' While I, alone, sat in libraries, archives, at my desk in the History Workshop, or in the succession of modest dwellings I lived in for the past few years in the quest to find affordable housing in Johannesburg that was also suitable for the gruelling demands of doctoral study; the love, support and guidance of so many have kept me going. The biggest thanks go to my supervisors, Ali Khangela Hlongwane and Sekibakiba Peter Lekgoathi who have provided steady guidance and wise counsel throughout this project. Their interest in my project was motivation to carry on at moments when things seemed bleak, and the end seemed beyond reach.

Although the financial sacrifices I made were real and often a source of immense stress and anguish, the Wits History Workshop PhD Fellowship (Mellon) under Noor Nieftagodien, a Social Science Research Council Doctoral research grant, and the University's modest Postgraduate Merit Award went a long way in ameliorating these challenges to help me finish this project. Pursuing an academic career within the systems of higher education I am familiar with is becoming almost unfathomable for people who do not come from great wealth and privilege, and I count myself fortunate to have received some grant funding to work on this thesis. I am also lucky to have friends who extended gifts of financial help at critical moments, without which this process would have been much more unbearable.

Being a fellow of the Wits History Workshop, under Noor, gave me a sense of community and intellectual camaraderie that added depth to my doctoral experience. Through the Workshop, I have met leading historians from southern Africa and beyond in addition to developing working relationships with other postgraduate fellows and the senior researchers.

In addition to Hlongwane, who is a senior researcher in the Workshop, I am also grateful for Arianna Lissoni's continuing interest in my academic and professional development. Among the fellows, it has been great to get to know Thabiso Moyo and share many an encouraging word while grabbing cups of coffee. The History Workshop senior administrator, Antonette Gouws, continues to turn the proverbial water into wine and made my experience as a postgraduate student much easier through her unmatched professionalism. Gratitude is also due to the entire faculty of the University of the Witwatersrand Department of History, especially for their critical feedback during my proposal seminar. I am grateful to Annie Devenish, who runs the Department's writing seminar, for creating a wonderful space in which to think and write.

While I take full responsibility for this intellectual product, the research participants should receive highest adulation for sharing interviews. It has been a great pleasure of this process to get to know some of the participants slightly better than a researcher would normally do. The participants respected that I should maintain my objectivity while embracing me as a part of their lives. Among others, Mam Nomsa Manaka, Tshamano Sebe, Motsumi Makhene and Maakomele Manaka gave me a lot of support in this project. I would also like to point out that Ntate Molefe Pheto went out of his way to help me acquire classified surveillance documents. The bureaucratic process to declassify his security file required that he travel to a police station and magistrate. Melusi Dlamini and Sindile Bongela, my fellow travellers, provided a wonderful community of scholars. Our telephone conversations and in-person chats kept me motivated.

I am grateful to the librarians and archivists who helped me acquire the necessary primary and secondary sources for this project. At Amazwi in Makhanda, Marike Beyers, Andrew Martin, and Mthetheleli Sukula were very helpful. Gabi Mohale, Elizabeth Marima, and Mpho Taulela at the Wits Historical Papers allowed me to explore the vast collections in

this archive. Whether dropping in for two hours between other commitments on campus or for longer multi-day stretches of time, they always welcomed me with smiles and open arms. Additional thanks go to the library staff in the Wits Libraries, especially the William Cullen, for all their help with various information needs. In addition to the information professionals already mentioned, staff at the following libraries and archives connected me to important material: UCT's Hiddingh Hall Library (Ingrid Thomson), South African National Archives (Gilfort Mabitsela and Zahira Adams-Ngoepe in Pretoria and Erika Le Roux in Cape Town), the University of South Africa Library Archive Repository in Pretoria (Anri van der Westhuizen, Ncediswa Peter, Joe Sindane, and Lufuno Kgamedi), and Phillipa Van Straaten at the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

I am also grateful to Sally MacRoberts, Jennifer Kimble, Desre Stead, and Mike Makhado for understanding my plight as a student and expressing deep interest in my scholarly pursuits during the eighteen months I interned at the Brenthurst Library. Working at the Brenthurst allowed me to encounter rare books and archival collections that are vital to telling the story of southern Africa. It is fortuitous that there is such a resource within the city of Johannesburg where I could hone my research and librarian skills.

I am also grateful to the following academics, theatre practitioners, relatives and friends for their mentorship, guidance, care, and counsel during the last few years: Admire Mare, Asher Gamedze, Change Kwesele Malama, Chris Yaluma, Dan Lee, David Coplan, Duncan Money, Eglah Mukonde, Fernanda Pinto de Almeida, George Longwani, Gift Nzube, Gillian Hart, Harvey Dimond, Minh Dũng Hoàng Lê, Irene Anne Jillson, Itumeleng Moraba, Joel Pearson, Jon Kesten, Jonathan Mgadi, Kamogelo Molobye, Kanyi Mantwana, Karabelo Temeki, Keanan Jaftha, Kgothatso 'Kenzo' Selepe, Khotso Khanyapa, Laura Phillips, Laurence Stewart, Len Makhoba, Lerato Myaka, Lesego Mpumelelo Nzuza, Lloyd Hazvineyi, Longa Mukoma, Madalitso Phiri, Marc Epprecht, Mary Jane Barnett, Matome Ramphele, McPherlain Chungu,

Menzi Sibiya, Meredith McKittrick, Mojuta Steven Motlhamme, Motheo Nkosi, Mulenga Kapwepwe, Musa Nkosi, Mwenya Kabwe, Mwila Mukonde Njovu, Namukaba Hichilo, Nehal Shukla, Nkatya Kabwe, Nobantu Shabangu, Paul Jacob Bueno de Mesquita, Prince Lamla, Raymond Baker Kemp, Rivaldo Basie, Riyaadh Loonat, Sasha Rai, Simon Nkemeleng Lesejane, Sishuwa Sishuwa, Soteli Chanda, Steve Okoth, Sreddy Yen, Sula Namwila, Suwi Siwale, Teboho Thamae, Tinashe Mushakavanhu, Tom Penfold, Tumelo Mamabolo, Vanessa Cooke, Walker Syachalinga, and Zakes Mda. These and other people played roles, both big and small, as sounding boards for ideas. They also reminded me that there is life beyond the thesis.

In addition to my mother, I am grateful to my father, Samuel Alfred Mukonde, for the role he played in giving me life. I may never understand why things worked out the way they did and hope that if he had any dreams for me, I have exceeded them. By the time I came around, mother's parents were not together anymore but I remember meeting both Lucia Maipambe and Christopher Kasonde, two people who lived through great changes in their society—changes that came about due to the development of the Zambian Copperbelt, leading to alienation not dissimilar to that tackled by the playwrights who are the subjects of this study. It is remarkable that my mother, coming from such a background, was able to impart on me a decent upbringing and a sense of self that is a source of courage and strength years after her transition to the realm of the ancestors. Finally, I thank those teachers who lit the way during my early education in Zambia; teachers at Aunty Kumar's Preschool, Parklands Primary, Nkana Trust, Mukuba Boys, and the Hillcrest National Technical School. It is to the memory of my mother, Christine Mulenga Kasonde, that this thesis is dedicated. Ba Mayo, Natotela.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree in any other university.

Ethics clearance was obtained from the University's Human Subjects Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), under protocol number H22/01/15

Kasonde Thomas Mukonde

19 July 2024

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List of Abbreviations

AMDA	African Music and Drama Association
ANC	African National Congress
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CAP	Community Arts Project
CYA	Creative Youth Association
DOCC	Donaldson Orlando Community Centre
FUBA	Federated Union of Black Artists
BPC	Black People's Convention
MDALI	Music, Dance, Arts and Literature Institute
TECON	Theatre Council of Natal
SABTU	South African Black Theatre Union
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PET	People's Experimental Theatre
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SRC	Students Representative Council
TfD	Theatre for Development
UDF	United Democratic Front
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Chapter One: Introduction

> You know for me, I still feel that the theatre has a major role to play, to be able to deal with the consciousness of the people … my theatre is going to be all about social change, political change and things like that… I can't write about love and other things, you know.[1]

In this 2014 interview poet, activist, administrator, academic, actor and playwright Maishe Maponya maintained that the theatre should deal with themes about raising consciousness among the marginalised and creating conditions to change the political and social order. For more than 30 years, Maponya had consistently created theatre that sought to raise the consciousness of his people. For him, Theatre of Resistance was not a thing of the past but remained entirely relevant in the new, post-apartheid South Africa. This thesis traces the establishment of a new genre of theatre from the late 1960s that, following Zakes Mda, I call the Theatre of Resistance. Maponya is one of the key exemplars of Resistance Theatre in Johannesburg.

As previous scholars writing on the history of theatre in South Africa have pointed out, theatre was an important cultural phenomenon in urban South African townships, particularly Johannesburg, from very early in their establishment. In the following chapter, I review the literature on black urban township performance traditions from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century. By the 1960s, largely fuelled by commercial entertainers like Gibson Kente, theatre had become so institutionalised in Soweto society that when the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was considering ways to spread its message, drama was a natural form for them to choose. Theatre seemed to have the advantage of bridging the

[1]Maishe Maponya, Interview conducted by Vanessa Cooke, Johannesburg, South Africa, 15 April 2014, AG3406-A5-001, Market Theatre Oral History Project, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

boundaries between the literate and non–literate and had an immediacy and affect few other means of communication could achieve. Theatre also had the advantage of being ephemeral and thus evaded surveillance and censorship by the apartheid state more easily than print.

Historicising the Theatre of Resistance

A full history of the BCM is out of the scope of this thesis, however, a brief overview of major developments leading to 1970 is necessary for laying the background for a core argument of the thesis: Resistance Theatre was informed by the BCM. Black Consciousness (BC) did not emerge *ex nihilo;* its background lay in changes in political culture globally which also saw expression in South Africa. At the historically black University of Fort Hare, students had been politicised by the conditions of oppression at their campus throughout the late 1960s. This culminated in the student body refusing to attend the installation of a new Vice Chancellor, who was another Afrikaner with likely links to the Broederbond.[2] More will be said about Afrikaner Christian Nationalism, the Broederbond, and apartheid below. While Fort Hare had existed since 1916 as a private institution and had educated many of South Africa's black elite regardless of ethnicity, under the government's notion of separate development and specifically the University of Fort Hare Transfer Act of 1959, the university was brought under government control and enrolment was 'restricted to Xhosa-speakers'.[3]

The broader Extension of University Education Act in the same year established ethnically segregated universities in far flung rural areas with the hope of entrenching a tribal mentality among blacks in order to create and co-opt an intermediate class of black collaborators for their

[2] Shannen L. Hill, *Biko's Ghost: The Iconography of Black Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 2–4; Thomas Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990. Volume 5, Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979*, Rev. and updated (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2013), 93.
[3] Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, Bavusile Maaba, and Nkosinathi Biko, "The Black Consciousness Movement," in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, ed. S. M. Ndlovu, vol. 2 (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2007), 107.

apartheid project. These universities, together with the University of the Western Cape for coloured students and a university in Durban for Indian students, proved to be the breeding ground for a new political and moral philosophy: Black Consciousness. Mzamane, Maaba and Biko show how there was a spirit of resistance that blew across the black university campuses in the 1960s. At the University of Durban–Westville, then called Salisbury College, which was reserved for black students of Indian ethnicity, most students favoured keeping their distance from Africans—because of the few privileges they enjoyed under apartheid—but for 'a handful of radical students who came to be known as the Café Clan, owing to the fact that the campus café had become their meeting place.' These students, who included Strini Moodley among others, 'staged a play, "Black–on–White", that satirised apartheid' and 'most members were expelled after involvement in a fight between them and a conservative clique of students who opposed their activities and their leanings towards Africans.'[4] I will return to the theatrical work in Durban in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Up to 1968 many black university students aspired to be or were part of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), a student association dominated by white liberals. While the ideas that came to be called Black Consciousness were developed over the next half decade by a collective of intellectuals, Steve Biko was a prominent and leading figure at its inception. In 1967, NUSAS held their conference at the historically white Rhodes University. At this conference African students were asked to lodge in a church in the nearby segregated location, while white students could stay in the dormitories as students were on vacation. Biko and another medical student from the University of Natal–Black Section, Ben Ngubane, were in attendance. 'Biko moved a motion of adjournment until a non-racial venue could be found; it was never found, of course, and the decision to carry on with the conference prevailed.' To placate black students, the conference elected Ben Ngubane Vice president of NUSAS, a

[4] Mzamane, Maaba, and Biko, 107.

position which he later resigned under pressure from his fellow students at his home campus. Black students' grievances with NUSAS went beyond the indignities of the Separate Amenities Act, however, and included language and epistemic matters with the way debates were conducted. Because they were numerically outnumbered by white students in NUSAS, at conferences they 'felt linguistically disadvantaged and intellectually challenged; they would often listen to first-language speakers "ventriloquise" their thoughts and feelings.'[5]

At the UCM congress of 1968, which Biko, Barney Pityana and Justice Moloto attended, African students were again subjected to apartheid laws. Held in the white town of Stutterheim, they could only be in town for 72 hours before leaving the town limits to return for a fresh 72 hours. Nevertheless, the black students in attendance risked arrest by ignoring this statute. When Biko asked the conference to 'challenge the legitimacy of the South African government,' his motion was defeated.[6] Unhappy with what he saw as the double standards of white liberals, he broached the idea for a black–only organisation for university students among his peers. SASO, the South African Students' Movement, was formally launched in 1969 with the goal of uniting African, coloured and Indian students under one body. For Biko and his compatriots, 'black' did not refer to skin colour but referred to a chosen ontological way of living in the world that asserted the dignity of all groups who had historically experienced oppression in South Africa. As Daniel Magaziner summed it up, emphasising the historical contingency of the invention of Black Consciousness and the importance of the constitution of the being for adherents of this philosophy, 'family and pigmentation did not matter; a historically constructed ontology—which was also a subjectively developed and vehemently asserted identity—vis–à–vis the extant state of oppression did.'[7] For Black Consciousness,

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[5] Mzamane, Maaba, and Biko, 111.
[6] Mzamane, Maaba, and Biko, 112.
[7]Daniel Magaziner, '"Black Man, You Are On Your Own!": Making Race Consciousness in South African Thought, 1968-1972*', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies; New York* 42, no. 2 (2009): 228.

creating blackness was a historical necessity that would in a future liberated South Africa lead to a broader national identity. At its inception, the initial goal of Black Consciousness was to rid blacks of inferiority and encourage them to embrace a positive view of themselves.

The leaders of the BCM were concerned with expressions of culture that would lead to this transformation. In Biko's speeches and writings, he grappled with the cultural bases of this new identity. Drawing from sources as diverse as Kenneth Kaunda and Frantz Fanon, he sought to fashion a new black who was at home in him/herself and in the world. While citing Kaunda's African Humanism and its insistence that the greatest gift that Africa would give to the world community was better relationships between human beings, Biko went further, replacing African with 'black' and embracing a global blackness expressed in the freedom in cultural products like Soul music.[8] The influence of African American radical politics of the post-Civil Rights era on Biko was profound, including bequeathing the movement with the idea of 'consciousness' as a necessary prerequisite before any revolution could take place.[9] Magaziner notes, however, that South Africa's black intellectuals appropriated only those ideas that fitted with their particular situation where they were still an oppressed numerical majority living under white minority rule. 'Students copied,' Magaziner notes, 'but they also translated; they read words from one context and wrote them into their own. They used ideas and moved them across boundaries; in the process, the ideas' meanings changed - just as Biko had moved Kaunda's African humanism into a historically bounded modern black culture.'[10] It was through relevant, or authentic, black culture that black people would find this spiritual transformation. One of the practical changes that ensued was that black people began defining

[8]Magaziner, 233.

[9]Magaziner points out that while the phrasing Black Consciousness was from around from the late 1960s, it is only in 1971 that the term was formally adopted and defined by SASO. The student leaders read Hamilton and Stokley Carmichael's *Black Power* and adapted its lessons for the South African context.

[10]Magaziner, 'Black Man, You Are On Your Own!', 234.

themselves as the positive 'black' rather than the negative 'non-white', which was the term used by the ruling class.

The goal of Black Consciousness art was to disrupt the social and political order and contribute to a new consciousness. Even while forging a modern black identity, Biko affirmed that the primary culture that would eventually form the basis of a national culture in South Africa - even while borrowing from Western and other cultures - was African since the country was located on that continent. In an article in the *SASO Newsletter*, Biko maintained that 'one cannot escape the fact that the culture shared by the majority group in any given society must ultimately determine the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society.' He continued, '[t]his need not cramp the style of those who feel differently but on the whole, a country in Africa, in which the majority of people are African must inevitably exhibit African values and be truly African in style.'[11] In Chapter Two, I explore in some detail how these ideas were developed in the BCM and in Chapter Three, I show how the *SASO Newsletter* was an avenue for some of the early poems that were incorporated into Resistance Theatre of the 1970s.

It is important to locate the theatre I write about in this thesis in the broader traditions of contemporary South African theatre. Writing about the adversarial tradition of theatre in South Africa, the critic and writer Zakes Mda notes that:

> the playwright wrote about those men who went to jail, and examined their sufferings and - in a later phase of his writing - their resistance. He told the story of those who laboured in the belly of the earth to make white South Africa rich. He clearly depicted their condition, their trials, their struggles, and in some cases their defiance and determination to change their situation. But he forgot to tell the story of those who did not follow them to jail or to the mines - the women and children who stayed at home and struggled to make the stubborn and barren soil yield.[12]

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[11]Steve Biko, 'I Write What I Like: Black Souls in White Skins?' *SASO Newsletter*, August 1970, 20.

[12] Zakes Mda, ed., *Four Plays*, 1st ed (Florida Hills, South Africa: Vivlia Publishers & Booksellers, 1996), ix.

Here, Mda describes what critics and scholars called protest theatre that encompassed a wide variety of work produced by a wide variety of companies and authors. This theatre was often male and urban, Mda continues.[13] Furthermore, Mda makes an important point that is worth foregrounding: 'There has been a tendency in the South African media [and criticism, I would add] to refer to any play that treats political themes as "protest,"[14] Mda writes. '**Not all political theatre is protest theatre.** Least of all, agitprop cannot be protest. That would be a contradiction in terms. Protest theatre makes a statement of disapproval or disagreement, but does not go beyond that (emphasis mine).' He continues, adding that protest theatre:

> addresses itself to the oppressor, with the view of appealing to his conscience. It is a theatre of complaint, or sometimes even of weeping. It is variously a theatre of self-pity, of moralizing, of mourning, and of hopelessness. It never offers any solution beyond the depiction of the sad situation in which the people find themselves.[15]

In Chapter Two, I review the literature on protest theatre and make the argument that there is a gap, or erasure, of the tradition of resistance theatre in South African theatre historiography and criticism.

Following Zakes Mda's distinction between protest and resistance theatre, this thesis argues that the work of Mihloti Black Theatre, People's Experimental Theatre, Bahumutsi and Soyikwa constitute theatres of self-affirmation. These theatres shared elements with broader anti-apartheid theatre, such as the work of the Serpent Players, the Company at the Market Theatre, but they were also distinct given their radical style of dramaturgy and concern with self-reliance. While drawing from a variety of sources, including Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Jerzy Grotowski, and Pan-African sources, the theatres drew inspiration, in the first instance, from Black Consciousness. Even while acknowledging Matsemela Manaka's unique

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., xv.
[15] Ibid., xv.

contribution to South African theatre, Steadman asserts that Manaka conflates 'complex class and ideological divisions amongst blacks into the so-called "black experience."'[16] Ignoring the impact of Black Consciousness leads Steadman and other scholars to this conclusion. This thesis shall show that Steadman missed the broader discourse of the BCM, i.e., a closer reading of the art produced by the movement shows a deep engagement with class issues. As shown in Chapter Three, on Maishe Maponya and the Bahumutsi Drama Group, Black Consciousness theatre practitioners were aware of the way that race and class were closely intertwined but distinct phenomena in South Africa. That Black Consciousness artists chose to emphasise the destruction of African culture, even at the risk of portraying an inaccurate idyllic African past, as part of their efforts to reclaim black dignity.

One of the key writers in what has been called Soweto Poetry and a pioneer of the Theatre of Resistance, Mongane Wally Serote, explains how SASO and Black Consciousness, in turn, inspired this new generation of poets to create their own aesthetics based on the Black experience, eschewing standard critical voices in existing periodicals:

> From around 1969-1974 a whole new group of people started writing; the newspapers described us as 'a new wave of poetry', whatever that means. At the head of this group was James Matthews, who set the standard of how we were going to deal with the things around us. There was also a group of students, the South African Student Organisation SASO which was very influential in determining what people were going to write about. At that time many people were responding to literary criticism in the newspapers: their writing was being influenced by the standards created by the newspapers. Then SASO, BPC, BCP and other black organizations came out with their own magazines, through which we could publish; they gave us a platform from which we could speak directly to the black community.[17]

When a group of committed writers left South Africa in the wake of Sharpeville, such as Es'kia Mphahlele, Alex la Guma, Mazisi Kunene and Keorapetse Kgositsile, those left behind

[16] Ian Steadman, 'Performance and Politics in Process: Practices of Representation in South African Theatre', *Theatre Survey* 33, no. 2 (November 1992): 201, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557400002404.
[17] Mongane Wally Serote qtd in Mongane Wally Serote, 'Introduction', in *Selected Poems*, ed. Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1982), 9.

had to chart their own path, Serote argues. Inspired by Black Consciousness, the younger generation of writers began to confront the state forcefully. Soweto Poetry was one conduit that fed into the Theatre of Resistance, as shown in Chapter Three. This new poetry was a break from earlier black poets. Instead of merely lamenting the conditions in which black people lived, the new poets sought to redefine the consciousness of the oppressed and awaken a sense of resistance. Elsewhere, Serote clarifies that he did, in fact, find 'all sorts of ways to read' the poets and writers of the 1950s.[18] Chapter Three shows how a Theatre of Resistance was established in Johannesburg in the 1970s and the rest of the thesis focuses on the work of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre, closely associated with Matsemela Manaka, and Maishe Maponya.

Apartheid's Role in Supporting a Divided Arts and Culture Sector in South Africa

In 1948, the National Party came to power in South Africa. Building on the previous systems of segregation, they developed the policy of apartheid, or 'apartness.' The system became a nefarious means to control the movements and dignity of black people, strip them of their citizenship and exact physical and epistemic violence, all the while extracting cheap labour from them that made South Africa a wealthy country.[19] The censorship and oppressive apparatuses feature largely as a counter to the work of the practitioners of the Theatre of Resistance in the chapters of this thesis. Moreover, the context of Afrikaner nationalism, and particularly the influence of a group called the Broederbond, is important to grasping how what—before 1948—was initially spatial segregation developed to include the marginalisation of the cultural lives of the black majority.

[18]Jaki Seroke, 'Poet in Exile: Interview with Mongane Serote', *Staffrider* 4, no. 1 (1981): 30.
[19] For a detailed account of South African apartheid, see Saul Dubow, *Apartheid, 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

The Broederbond, according to Thula Simpson, was 'formed by three Afrikaners in April 1918.' Its 'constitution identified its goals as being the promotion of Afrikaner unity and culture.'[20] While it led a largely secretive existence, it nevertheless promoted right–wing Afrikaner objectives and had a major role in shoring up Afrikaner nationalist politics. One of the organisations that the Broederbond operated through was Federasie van Afrikaanse Kuluurverenigings (FAK). '*The Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings*, founded in 1929, set out to establish Afrikaans as a national language through cultural associations and teachers. Although intended as a specifically cultural organisation which hoped to stand aloof from party politics, FAK's belief in "the inseparability of nationalism and culture" inclined it towards the more exclusively Afrikaner Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party,' a predecessor of the National Party that came to power in 1948.[21]

With the ascendancy of the Afrikaners on the political stage, and with many members of the new government belonging to the Broederbond, the cultural objectives of the group could now become government policy. Beyond elevating the Afrikaans language, the Broederbond was also concerned with promoting a 'pure' white culture, that looked to Europe as the yardstick of 'civilisation'. Basing its ideology on concepts of Christian Nationalism, this new government invested heavily in cultural institutions that operated on a segregated basis. For the performing arts, the government established the four performing arts councils from the 1960s. Among the four was the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (Pact). 'As an ideology production centre for the newly constituted Republic of South Africa, Pact's (unstated) task was to institutionalise and promote *volkskultuur*,' Carol Steinberg argues.[22]

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[20] Thula Simpson, *History of South Africa: From 1902 to the Present* (Cape Town, South Africa: Penguin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House South Africa, 2021), 132.
[21] Melvin Goldberg, "The Nature of Afrikaner Nationalism," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 23, no. 1 (1985): 125–31.
[22] Carol Steinberg, "PACT: Can the Leopard Change Its Spots?," in *Theatre and Change in South Africa*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis and Anne Fuchs (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 247.

That apartheid was as much a cultural project as it was a political and socioeconomic one is evidenced by Bhekizizwe Peterson's comments that up to 1990, all 49 theatres provided by national and local government were in 'areas which are officially designated as white.'[23] Further illustrating the role of the state in appropriating theatre, Peterson adds that: 'The Nico Malan [now Artscape], in Cape Town, and the Pretoria State Theatre, completed at a cost of R 46.5 million, correspond with the 10th and 20th anniversary celebrations of the Republic. The Johannesburg Civic Theatre is a reminder of 50 years of Union, and the Ettiene [*sic*] Rousseau Theatre was donated to Sasolburg by Sasol on the latter's 25th anniversary.'[24] 'Imposing in structure and boasting some of the most modern features when it was built, 'Pact's State Theatre is a tell-tale sign: located on Strijdom [now Lilian Ngoyi] Square in Pretoria,' writes Steinberg. 'It is watched over by an over-scaled bust of J.G. Strijdom—the architect of apartheid—framed by a towering arc of concrete. The State Theatre is a monument to the culture of Afrikanerdom,' she concludes.[25] There were attempts at reforming the performing arts councils in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But, as Steinberg observes, '[w]hile racial policy was amended and a few token measures adopted, Pact [continued to] quietly pursue… its original mandate to address the cultural interests of the white population.'[26] It is against this material context that the Theatre of Resistance practitioners operated. In addition to material limitations on their work, black theatre practitioners also had to contend with an unfavourable censorship system.

An Overview of the Apartheid Censorship System

Soon after coming into power, the National Party government enacted the Suppression of Communism Act (No. 44 of 1950). On the surface, this law was designed to root out

[23] Bhekizizwe Peterson, "Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theatre," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 2 (June 1, 1990): 232, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079008708232.
[24] Peterson, 232.
[25] Steinberg, '"PACT: Can the Leopard Change Its Spots?," 247. This bust of Strijdom collapsed in 2001.
[26] Steinberg, 249.

communist influence in South Africa and protect the values of (white) Christian South Africans. In practice, however, it was used to suppress internal dissent and contain oppositional ideas and art. Working through the notorious Security Branch, many critics of the apartheid regime were abducted, tortured and murdered. In terms of books, films and literature, 'the Suppression of Communism Act could be labelled as a defining moment in the consolidation of State censorship in South Africa.'[27] For black South Africans, subsequent apartheid laws restricted performance. These included the Riotous Assemblies Act (1956) and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1953).[28] The Suppression of Communism Act's major political impact was declaring the Communist Party of South Africa unlawful, but it also gave powers to the Minister of Justice to ban people and organisations which were suspected of spreading communism, whose definition was so vaguely defined that the law came to be applied to many forms of dissent. In terms the law's impact on cultural production, banned people could not address gatherings or be quoted in the press. Their publications were effectively banned.

'Through the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act, most of the black literary references were either banned and black intellectuals were exiled, and through the various apartheid legislations black South Africans were put in a disadvantaged position from the onset in terms of public participation in mainstream socio-political affairs and access to books,' Matteau writes in a notable study on censorship and reading cultures in South Africa.[29] The black writers living in exile banned under the Act included Es'kia Mphahlele, Mazisi Kunene, Lewis Nkosi, and Alex la Guma.[30] Censorship legislation in South Africa should be

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[27] Rachel Matteau, "Real and Imagined Readers: Censorship, Publishing and Reading under Apartheid" (PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2012), 51.

[28]Geoffrey V. Davis, 'Of "Undesirability" The Control of Theatre in South Africa during the Age of Apartheid', in *New Theatre in Francophone and Anglophone Africa: A Selection of Papers Held at a Conference in Mandelieu, 23-26 June, 1995*, ed. Anne Fuchs, Matatu (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1999), 182–208.

[29] Matteau, "Real and Imagined Readers," 95–96.

[30] For a rich account of the work of these exiled South African artists in raising solidarity, see Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu, 'Culture as the Fifth Pillar of the Liberation Struggle, in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 4, part 3, ed. S.M. Ndlovu (Austin: Pan-African University Press, 2019), 2075 - 2085.

seen against the backdrop of wider forms of repression, including the Suppression of Communism Act.

A broader history of the censorship system is found in Peter McDonald's *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences.*[31] South Africa's first comprehensive censorship system was set up by the passing of the Entertainments (Censorship) Act of 1931. This act set up a Board of Censors who worked with customs officials to censor mostly imported literature. The Board had relatively limited powers compared to the Publications Control Board that was introduced more than thirty years later after the Cronjé Commission into 'Undesirable Publications.' The Cronjé Commission was inspired by events that had unfolded in the United States around moral panics on comic books corrupting the morals of the youth.[32] According to McDonald, the Commission's 'darkest fears which neither its scientific pretensions nor its blandly bureaucratic prose managed successfully to mask, centred on the degeneration of the "European"'[33]

This racialised thinking made it into the Commission's report of 1957 and some core recommendations were adopted in the first major apartheid censorship legislation, the Publications Act of 1963. McDonald argues that the main concern of the Commission, and later the act, was to protect the Afrikaner *volk*, while adopting a paternalistic attitude towards Africans and their relationship with 'Western' culture. The statutory provisions in the 1963 law, which defined what materials were undesirable (this time both locally produced and imported), would for the most part be carried over into the more draconian 1974 Publications Act. The latter Act, among other things, abolished the Board of Censors, replacing it with a powerful Directorate of Publications headed by a 'chief censor', the Director of Publications. Although

[31]Peter D McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences* (Oxford; New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[32]McDonald, 22–23.
[33]Ibid., 24.

there was a new Commission of Enquiry before the 1974 Act, the new legislation followed the Cronjé Commission and abolished appeals to the courts and set up a Publications Appeals Board. The new apparatus, critically, abandoned pretensions of being a defender of literature for the *volk* and instead took a more partisan line. This should be seen in light of the backdrop of increasing resistance in the early 1970s.[34]

The 1970s saw a highly repressive censorship apparatus but, by the 1980s, echoing P.W Botha's policies, there was what Jaki Seroke has called a period of 'repressive tolerance'.[35] By this time, J.C.W. Van Rooyen had taken over as the head of the Publications Appeals Board, while the chief censor was Abraham Coetzee. Seen as a reformer, Van Rooyen was a 'young professor of criminal law at the University of Pretoria'. Coetzee, on the other hand, was a compromise candidate for the job. He, as McDonald notes, was both a minister of the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk and 'as a former vice principal of Fort Hare, South Africa's oldest and most important black university, he had first-hand experience of the realities of resistance politics.'[36] What follows is a discussion of the sources of evidence for the arguments developed in this thesis.

Notes on Research Methods and Sources of Evidence

Life History Interviews (Oral History)

For this thesis, I interviewed practitioners in the Theatre of Resistance who have been active from the 1950s to date. These life history interviews uncovered the political and social context in which the plays, which are also analysed in this thesis, were developed and

[34]Ibid., 58–61.
[35]Ibid., 77.
[36]Ibid.

performed and are key to gaining a broader understanding of the social consciousness among subaltern groups of the period. These interviews are complemented with existing interviews in a range of archives or published in books, journals or newspapers. Unfortunately, both Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka—the key practitioners in the Theatre of Resistance in the 1980s—have passed away. However, I was able to interview members of their companies, their friends and colleagues, and also analyse the numerous interviews they gave in their lifetimes.

The problems of using oral history are well known, and so are its unique strengths. Oral history interviews are created in dialogue with the researcher and, as Sean Field points out, the idea that oral history interviews alone can "redeem" the stories of the subaltern is dubious.[37] Other considerations, especially issues of positionality and memory, have to be taken into account when doing oral history. While I am black and conducted this research in an African country, the very fact that I am associated with a university that was very much implicated in the colonial project raised serious ethical questions around power relationships with research participants. Throughout the project, I endeavoured to build a careful rapport with those participants located outside the colonial and institutional archive.

While conducting the life history interviews, I let my interlocutors suggest directions for the conversation, even while having some key questions I needed to ask to guide the conversation. Invariably, the participants were keen to tell their stories. In this way, I shared authority in the writing of this history. Similar to Field's understanding that an oral history narrative, or text, is a creation at the moment of the interview, sharing authority attempts to recognise that participants have stories to tell and should be allowed to tell their stories while the ultimate responsibility for the research project remains with the researcher.[38] The oral

[37]Sean Field, 'Turning up the Volume: Dialogues about Memory Create Oral Histories', *South African Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (1 June 2008): 175–94.
[38]Lorraine Sitzia, 'A Shared Authority: An Impossible Goal?', *The Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (1 January 2003): 87–101.

history aspect of this thesis makes it stand out from previous studies of adversarial theatre in South Africa as most of these were written at a time when the practitioners could not be interviewed for security reasons or because they were in exile. Moreover, the interviews add a rich dimension to the history of Resistance Theatre in South Africa by adding details that few other studies could have encountered. Most of the interviews were carried out in 2021 after the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic had passed. Nevertheless, I took care to adapt my interviews for pandemic conditions including reducing the amount of paper exchanged (asking for consent on the voice recording) and using telephonic and virtual means of interviewing in some cases.

Documentary Sources

This thesis also drew on the key archive of South African Theatre Heritage at the University of South Africa (UNISA) Archives Repository, located in the main library at Muckleneuk in Pretoria. Towards the end of his life Maponya himself was involved in creating an archival collection (205) at UNISA. The collection contains a variety of materials including playbills, scripts, news clippings, correspondence and audio-visual material. For example, the Maponya collection contains an 11 November 1987 document from customs at O.R. Tambo (then Jan Smuts) Airport listing books that were confiscated from Maponya on his return from an overseas trip. The document indicates that the reason for the confiscation was because the books needed to be reviewed by the Publications Board. The books were Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, Vladimir Lenin's *On the Question of Dialectics,* and Paulo Freire's and Ira Shor's *A Pedagogy for Liberation*.[39] This archival record demonstrates the very real oppression Theatre of Resistance practitioners were operating under in the 1980s and the

[39]University of South Africa Archives Repository, MSS 205 Maishe Maponya, 'Republic of South Africa, 'Transfer of Goods from Customs Hall to State Warehouse', 11 November 1987,.'

pervasiveness of censorship during apartheid (censorship of theatre is discussed further in subsequent chapters).

No similar archival collection exists for Matsemela Manaka or Soyikwa African Theatre's work. For this, I had to rely on the personal papers of former members of the Soyikwa African Theatre, including those of Tshamano Sebe and Ali Khangela Hlongwane. Another important source for Soyikwa was the manuscript collections at the Amazwi Museum of South African Literature in Makhanda, Eastern Cape. Initially, I had believed such an institution - established during apartheid - would not have collected material related to Resistance Theatre. However, during an extended visit to Makhanda in the winter of 2022, I spent many hours going over both manuscripts and newspaper clippings. Another state institution I used is the South African National Archives. In the Security Legislation Directorate records in Pretoria and the Censorship Directorate files in Cape Town, I found records of how the state viewed practitioners of the Theatre of Resistance. This is a first in the study of theatre in South Africa, no previous study has used the actual records of the apartheid security and repressive apparatuses to understand its relation to the state.

Another extant collection are the Market Theatre Oral History Project (AG3406) transcripts at the Witwatersrand University Historical Papers Research Archive. This archive is extensive and includes a key interview with Maishe Maponya quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Other people interviewed for this project included John Ledwaba, and Mannie Manim, a founder of the Market Theatre. The insights of other people interviewed for this project into the broader theatrical arts in the decades under study were invaluable. Additionally, records about the Market Theatre in collection AG3005 helped contextualise the relationship that this important venue had with the Theatre of Resistance. Among other things, the collection included photographs, programmes, stage managers' reports and promotional material.

Additionally, periodicals were an important source of data for this study. The *Rand Daily Mail*, *The World,* and *The Sowetan* were indispensable sources on developments in township cultural life from the 1970s. The *Rand Daily Mail's* columns by Doc Bikitsha over several years (1976 –1985) were a weekly commentary on cultural events, focusing on Johannesburg's black townships. His 8 March 1984 column reports that Soyikwa had performed Zakes Mda's plays *Dead End* and *Dark Voices Ring*. *Staffrider* magazine, an important space for debate on culture within South Africa, was key in understanding the cultural milieu of the 1980s generation of black cultural workers and artists. Manaka, at least, considered himself a Staffrider and worked for the publication in its earlier years.[40] I use critic's articles to provide a sense of the audiences of these plays and spaces in which they were performed, complementing the memories of the theatre practitioners themselves. As stated above, oral history alone is not sufficient in telling the full story of the subaltern.

Finally, the study engaged with a variety of memoirs and biographies written by people involved in the cultural field during the liberation struggle. These included Molefe Pheto's *And Night Fell*, Zakes Mda's *Sometimes There is a Void: Memoirs of an Outsider* and Jerry Mofokeng wa Makhetha's *I Am a Man,* among others. Although not strictly a source for this thesis, in the Spring of 2023 I signed up for a part time acting class at the Market Theatre Laboratory in order to get a better understanding of acting for stage. This class challenged me greatly. Although I have a keen interest in the arts in general and their potential to inspire social change, I had never acted before (save for being a tree or background chorus in primary school musicals) and I found that my participation in the process of learning to act increased my understanding of the actor's craft.

[40]Manaka's work at *Staffrider* is discussed in Chapter Five.

Why a History of the Theatre of Resistance?

The study of the popular culture of formerly colonised people in Africa has become an increasingly important part of historical studies. The 1980s were the last full decade of sustained opposition to apartheid in South African black townships and included a resurgence of the labour movement, student resistance and the growth of civic associations. After the relative quiescence of the late 1960s and the suppression of Black Consciousness-aligned organisations in 1977, many groups found inspiration in the ideals of the Freedom Charter. By the time that the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in July 1983, it seemed like overt resistance was regaining traction. The Black Consciousness tradition continued in the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) - founded in 1978 - and National Forum.[41] While remaining overtly non-partisan, the theatre practitioners and playwrights discussed in Chapters Four to Six were sympathetic to Black Consciousness and Africanist formations. The mid-1980s saw the height of political opposition to government's reform policies, and concomitant repression through a series of states of emergency and existing methods of quelling protest.

At the same time that these massive political developments were happening, artists such as Maponya kept creating without necessarily aligning to any political group. While creating plays isn't the same as picketing or *toyi-toying,* or even engaging in violent acts of sabotage, this activity was itself a form of resistance. As Enocent Msindo and Nicholas Nyachega state in their study of the everyday in Honde Valley during the Zimbabwean war of liberation, "Power is not exercised in a vacuum, for there must always be those on the receiving end of it, yet the manner in which the majority or ordinary people experience and respond to power is not often predictable."[42] The same can be said of ordinary people in Soweto during the 1980s. I use

[41]Gail M Gerhart and Clive Glaser, *Challenge and Victory, 1980 - 1990*, vol. 6, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882 - 1990 (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana Media, 2013), 46–65.
[42]Enocent Msindo and Nicholas Nyachega, 'Zimbabwe's Liberation War and the Everyday in Honde Valley, 1975 to 1979', *South African Historical Journal* 71, no. 1 (2 January 2019): 71.

"ordinary" here to refer to the fact that black playwrights came from the dominated stratum of society. Chapter Six goes into some detail in describing Soyikwa's emergence as a theatre training programme at the Funda Centre in Diepkloof, Soweto, which was funded through the efforts of the Urban Foundation. The Urban Foundation was backed by wealthy South African corporations such as Harry Oppenheimer's Anglo American Corporation. Even in this context, or perhaps because of it, Soyikwa was able to create committed theatre.

Thus, this study makes a contribution to the historiography of community arts centres and the education of black South Africans during apartheid. Apart from Hlongwane's autobiographical chapter on the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre that discusses the broader context of the Funda Arts Centre, this vital institution for the arts in Soweto in the 1980s has not received adequate scholarly attention.[43] Most of the extant work on community arts centres looks at the visual and plastic arts; this study, however, addresses performance arts. Previous work on the history of community arts centres in urban South Africa, such as Lize van Robbroeck and Eben Lochner's theses, focus on the visual arts[44] in spite of the fact that performance arts were practised at the three arts centres they cover, Katlehong, Alexandra and the Community Arts Project (CAP) in Cape Town. (In Chapter Six, I also discuss the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) and Africa Cultural Centre as other important community arts centres of the 1980s and 1990s.)

Lochner's appendix clearly shows that there were evening and weekend drama classes held at CAP.[45] These authors' decision to focus on the visual arts is understandable, considering

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[43]Ali Khangela Hlongwane, "The Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre and the Cultural Movement of the 1970s to 1990s," in *Public History, Heritage and Culture in South Africa: The Struggle Continues*, ed. Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu and Ali Khangela Hlongwane (Johannesburg: Skotaville Press, 2021).

[44]Van Robbroeck Lize, 'The Ideology And Practice Of Community Arts In South Africa, With Particular Reference To Katlehong And Alexandra Arts Centres' (MA Thesis, Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand, 1991); Eben Lochner, 'The Democratisation of Art CAP as an Alternative Art Space in South Africa' (MA Thesis, Makhanda, Rhodes University, 2011).

[45]see Appendix A: Community Arts Project Information 1987 Lochner, 'The Democratisation of Art CAP as an Alternative Art Space in South Africa', 167.

their training as Art Historians. Lochner also discusses the decline of the community arts centre, which he attributes to a move 'away from the cultural worker's idea of working with people to address fundamental ideas of dignity towards a business model of job creation wherein art is judged by its cash value'.[46] In the sixth chapter of this thesis, similar processes are seen with the decline of Funda and Soyikwa.

In spite of their decline, community centres played an important role in the development of the black visual and performance arts. Unlike the institutional continuities between earlier centres of visual art education like Rorke's Drift and later community arts centres, it is less clear whether the Theatre of Resistance, or black theatre more generally, as a craft has a genealogical continuity, from the early practitioners at Mariannhill and, later, The Bantu Dramatic Society in Johannesburg that Bhekizizwe Peterson wrote about.[47] Theatre, unlike other art forms, is a more immediate art form that at its most fundamental does not require institutional stability. Furthermore, as Martin Orkin suggests, what is missing from studies of adversarial theatre under apartheid is an empirical angle that goes beyond the text of plays. 'More extensive research,' Orkin writes, is needed 'into the conditions of production and the constitution of audiences in South African theatre.'[48] This thesis provides this empirical study and identifies an important genre of theatre. Importantly, through the rich oral history interviews complemented by a close analysis of extant playscripts, the thesis does not lose the aesthetic dimensions of the Theatre of Resistance.

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[46]Eben Lochner, 'The South African Art Centre', *Third Text* 27, no. 3 (1 May 2013): 326.

[47]Van Robbroeck Lize, 'The Ideology and Practice of Community Arts', 33 notes that students at Rorke's Drift later taught visual art at the Funda Centre. It is also worth noting that the Funda Centre had connections with artists from Polly Street. Manaka (an accomplished painter in his own right) was close to Durant Sihlali, who had trained at Polly Street (see section on Community Arts Centres in the literature review below). Sihlali wrote the foreword for Manaka's book on African art. Charles Nkosi, a former instructor and director of Funda, studied at Rorke's Drift.

[48]Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State* (Manchester; New York; New York: Manchester University Press ; Distributed in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1990), 17.

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter Two of the thesis serves as a Literature Review and theoretical framework. It includes a historiography of Resistance Theatre in South Africa and an overview of community arts centres and their relationship to theatre. The chapter argues for the centrality of understanding the influence of Black Consciousness on Resistance Theatre. The following chapter, **Chapter Three**, looks at the early theatre inspired by the BCM in the late 1960s and 1970s, tracing this movement through a detailed biographical study of the lives of Molefe Pheto, uJebe Masokoane and Sadeque Variava. It demonstrates the vital links between the BCM and Resistance Theatre in Johannesburg. **Chapter Four** on Maishe Maponya and the Bahumutsi Players is a biography of Maponya, which covers his education, the founding of Bahumtsi and traces Maponya's work into the 2000s. The next chapter, **Chapter Five**, delves into the life of Matsemela Manaka and traces the early development of Soyikwa African Theatre, first emerging as Soyikwa Black Theatre in the Creative Youth Association in Diepkloof. The chapter shows how the generation of 1976 drew from both their experiences and Black Consciousness to craft a new form of theatre. The chapter uses a variety of sources, including the scripts of plays and life history interviews with early members of Soyikwa to historicise the work by this group. The following chapter, **Chapter Six**, takes up the Story of Soyikwa from 1985 where previous scholars left off by showing the importance of the Funda Centre in Soweto on the development of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre and its rural theatre project. Placing the Funda Centre in the context of movements for peoples' education, it shows how Soyikwa navigated an institution that was mainly funded by business interests and foreign aid agencies like USAID. It traces the decline of Soyikwa into the twenty-first century and suggests reasons for this decline. Finally, **Chapter Seven**, the Conclusion, ties together the different threads of this thesis and offers some provocations for future research.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on the adversarial tradition of theatre in South Africa after 1960 and argues that the literature does not adequately pay attention to a genre of theatre influenced by the BCM, for which I adopt the term Theatre of Resistance. The reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, the existing literature, while acknowledging the importance of going beyond play scripts to study this theatre, fails to historicise the movement by addressing the political context in which it arose. Secondly, as argued in Chapter One, historical tools like the oral history interview reveal much more about the movement than a study that only uses documentary sources. Furthermore, in this Review, I include voices from practitioners themselves who wrote in journals that passed the attention of previous writers. Another body of literature that this chapter draws on is the study of community arts centres. Going beyond a study of theatre spaces in city centres, reviewing spaces in townships where informal art training took place contextualises the broader movement of Theatre of Resistance. The decades that this thesis covered were characterised by social instability in the townships but there were places where some semblance of normality was maintained from which art could be made. The chapter shows how in spite of apartheid, black people used these spaces for self–making.

Historiography of Theatre of Resistance in South Africa

Most studies of the Theatre of Resistance have been done by theatre or literary scholars. As I have argued in the Introduction (Chapter One), a historical treatment of the topic gives us a better understanding of the ideological bases of this theatre while connecting it to broader movements of art for liberation in South Africa. Nevertheless, some literary scholars and theatre researchers who have written about the Theatre of Resistance have employed historical

methods[1] and some, like Loren Kruger's *A Century of South African Theatre,* have included it as part of larger surveys.[2] This is the first study that exclusively offers a detailed study of the Theatre of Resistance in Johannesburg, going beyond mere literary criticism to include the social and political experiences of the theatre practitioners through the use of their archives and extensive oral history interviews.

According to Bhekizizwe Peterson, the development of modern African theatre in South Africa up to the 1960s can be divided into three key stages.[3] The first was the Catholic missionary tradition exemplified by Mariannhill, which produced B.W. Vilakazi. From about the 1880s to 1925, early plays were written by Africans, if not produced by them, and were used for evangelisation. After a relative lull, groups such as the Bantu Dramatic Society began producing plays in the early twentieth century. H.I.E. Dhlomo was the most famous dramatist from this period, a time characterised by increased national consciousness which expressed itself in the arts. Formed in 1932, the Bantu Dramatic Society, renamed the African Dramatic League in 1938, was associated with the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg. The purpose of the African Dramatic League was to:

> encourage indigenous African drama by staging plays written and produced by Africans themselves. It is the aim of the Society to launch a scheme for the establishment of an African National theatre in which African art may be developed and where African dramatic, musical and operatic talent may be developed and encouraged.[4]

[1] Notably, Bhekizizwe Peterson, discussed below, mined the archive of earlier generations of African playwrights to write his influential book *Monarchs, Missionaries & African Intellectuals.*
[2] Loren Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*, Cultural Histories of Theatre and Performance (London: Methuen Drama, 2019).
[3] Bhekizizwe Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries & African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000).
[4] 'Annual Report' of the BMSC for 1938 quoted in Alan Gregor Cobley, '"On the Shoulders of Giants": The Black Petty Bourgeoisie in Politics and Society in South Africa, 1924 to 1950' (PhD Thesis, England, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987). Cobley discusses the role of the Black South African petty bourgeoisie in creating an African national consciousness through social and cultural activities in this period.

Peterson analyses 'the new aesthetic and social agendas introduced into the theatre by the African elite on the Rand' which had, by the 1960s, became fully professionalised through the efforts of individuals like Es'kia Mphahlele and his Syndicate of African Artists.[5]

This led to the development of a more literary theatre on the one hand, arguably a precursor of Resistance Theatre, and the spectacular township tradition of Gibson Kente on the other. In this thesis I show, however, how the Theatre of Resistance in addition to drawing from literary sources also took inspiration from the traditions of Black Consciousness, Soweto poetry, as well as international avant–garde theatre such as the work of Bertolt Brecht. Peterson notes that as early as the first half of the twentieth century there was already a chasm in African drama. "While both elite and *marabi* cultures were intended, in their different ways, to mitigate against the social alienation experienced by Africans, they revealed, as Dhlomo recognised, that 'there [were] deep sharp class differences among Africans.'"[6] As I show in subsequent chapters, the question of whether Theatre of Resistance ever became widely popular (in the sense that it was embraced by large numbers of the black proletariat) was never fully resolved.

Kavanagh nevertheless argues that in spite of the cultural hegemony of liberal whites - a culture to which elite Africans aspired to - some African dramatists before the Black Consciousness era were able to write "protest or satire" plays. He gives the examples of: "the animal fables of Moteame and Sekese, *The Pass* by H.I.E. Dhlomo and political theatre in Cape Town in the 1930s initiated by Trotskyites."[7] Another early group which has left little trace in the archive but produced plays that were in opposition to the political order were 'The African National Theatre' (ANT) of the 1940s who 'saw no contradiction between African nationalism and international socialism.'[8] ANT's work drew from Unity Theatres of Britain and the United

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[5]Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries & African Intellectuals*, 4.
[6]Peterson, 221.
[7]Robert Mshengu Kavanagh, *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa* (London: Zed, 1985), 47.
[8]Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*, 54.

States of America (USA) and explored themes such as pass laws (in Gaur Radebe's *The Rude Criminal*) and *Tau* by Ivan Pinchuk, exploring the conditions of farm workers. Both plays were performed at Gandhi Hall in Fordsburg, central Johannesburg, before urban segregation had been entrenched.[9] Fatima Dike's work in the 1960s also stood apart from drama produced by white liberals and African petit bourgeois theatre. Dike's work still needs to be fully studied for its contribution to the Theatre of Resistance in this decade. This strand of popular theatre continued alongside BCM and interracial groups into the late 1970s. Some artists who remained on the township stage, such as Gibson Kente, were much more influenced by their experiences in multiracial theatre than others (Kente had worked on the Union of South African Artists musical *King Kong*, a huge commercial success, in the late 1950s.)

Surveying modern South African theatre, literary scholar Peter Horn made a useful distinction between ideological theatre, that upheld the status quo of apartheid, even when made by a member of the oppressed classes, and theatre that rebelled against this. Among ideological theatre, the 'Theater of Exploitation…employ[ed] black performers in misrepresentations of the prevailing conditions in the country to largely foreign and white bourgeois domestic audience.'[10] Plays in this category included Bertha Egnos's *Ipi Tombi*.[11] 'Theater of Manipulation use[d] media drama (radio, television, and cinema) to promote the Nationalist party government's views and policies among all sections of the population.'[12] Radio dramas, such as those aired on the various stations of Radio Bantu were designed to promote 'tribal' culture. However, as has been argued by scholars, audiences and the writers of these dramas found ways to subvert the watchful supervision of Afrikaner Broederbond appointees at South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) stations, imbuing the dramas

[9]Kruger, 55.
[10]Andrew Horn, 'South African Theater: Ideology and Rebellion', *Research in African Literatures* 17, no. 2 (1986): 213.
[11]Corruption of the Isizulu Iph' intombi, 'where are the girls?'
[12]Horn, 'South African Theater', 213.

with oppositional messages.[13] Finally, Horn argues that another ideological theatre was the 'Theater of Acceptance and Lament, the black commercial theater which sometimes mildly questions, but usually ultimately assents and declares itself resigned to the fundamental tenets of the South African state.[14]

The prominent practitioner of this type of theatre (Theatre of Acceptance and Lament) was Gibson Kente, whose musicals presented stock characters who lamented conditions in the townships but eventually placed the emphasis on personal virtue rather than systemic issues. By the mid-1970s, though, under pressure from radical intellectuals and seeing some economic potential in making theatre with political themes, Kente made his political trilogy: *How Long?* (1973), *I Believe* (1974), and *Too Late* (1975). *How Long?* explored themes of township solidarity amidst poverty, pass laws and police brutality. Breaking from Kente's previous productions, it called for a united black community even while suggesting that formal education was the only way for young black people to have a future. [15]

The next two plays in Kente's political trilogy were *I Believe* and *Too Late*. *I Believe* dealt with the brewing anger among township youth, using the protagonist Zwelitsha to paint a prophetic picture of the coming confrontation between the state and students. The play was more serious than other Kente musicals and Kente shelved it after a few months but kept the political theme in his next major production, *Too Late*.[16] In his introduction to the play, the only one of Kente's plays that have been published, Robert Mshengu Kavanagh notes that, '*Too Late,* first performed in February, 1975, was Kente's effort to return to the popular formula he had evolved with *How Long,* in which the political and social issues were embedded in a thick

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[13]See, for example, Liz Gunner, 'Resistant Medium: The Voices of Zulu Radio Drama in the 1970s', *Theatre Research International* 27, no. 3 (October 2002): 259–74, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883302000330 on how Zulu radio dramas were able to provide subtle alternatives to the status quo.
[14]Horn, 'South African Theater', 213.
[15]Rolf Solberg, *Bra Gib: Father of South Africa's Township Theatre* (Scottsville: Univ of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2011), 24–25.
[16]Ibid., 27–29.

stratum of comedy, pathos and music.'[17] In *Too Late*, Kente again shows how apartheid laws and oppression affect the African community through a melodramatic story about a young man—Saduva—who comes from the rural area to live with his aunt in Soweto and sets off a series of confrontations with the repressive state in the person of a black policeman, Pelepele. Like *How Long*, *Too Late* was a popular success and drew censorship from both the official government censors and local municipal officials.

However, by the time Kente attempted to film *How Long* in the Transkei Bantustan, authorities pounced on him, confiscated tapes and detained him for six months without trial.[18] Clearly shaken by his experience Kente would, upon his release, return to making plays that were not directly political. Kente was interviewed in the 1990s and he reflected on his period of imprisonment and commented on radical playwrights and their methods: 'I was cautioned by the regime at the time. This was the time when they picked me up, you know, under the emergency, in 1976. They said, Mr Kente, you are the most dangerous person in this country. because your message, whatever it is—you make it stick. People carry it home, they sing about it because it is in musicals. It's very dangerous. We are watching you.' He continued, 'That's why they picked me up. I hadn't done anything. Just written my plays. And I am saying to you: Matsemela [Manaka] was wrong trying to ram the message down people's throats.'[19] While acknowledging that theatre could be used for different purposes, Kente insisted that politically committed playwrights like Manaka did not draw large crowds because they had not mastered the art of subtlety. Kente's comments were incorrect as I show in Chapters Four and Five when viewing the larger range of Manaka's work. Moreover, the driving force behind groups like

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[17]R. M. Kavanagh et al., *South African People's Plays - Ons Phola Hi: Plays*, African Writers Series 224 (Heinemann, 1981), 86.

[18]Gibson Kente, 'Too Late', *Index on Censorship* 10, no. 6 (1 December 1981): 94–95; See also the documentary *I Talk about Me, I Am Africa* (New York: Icarus Films, 1980) This documentary, a rare videographic archive of black theatre in South Africa ,includes discussion of the work of Soyikwa African Theatre and Gibson Kente.

[19]Rolf Solberg, 'Interview with Gibson Kente', in *Alternative Theatre in South Africa: Talks with Prime Movers since the 1970s* (Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books, 1999), 84.

Manaka's Soyikwa African Theatre was primarily political commitment, not commercial success, and Kente's comments do not take this into account.

Horn identifies a 'Theater of Criticism and Confrontation' as a distinct category from ideological theatre which directly confronted the state, notwithstanding diversions from the pattern such as Kente's political trilogy. Although erroneously identifying Black Consciousness with a call for 'Africa for Africans', Horn nevertheless correctly saw Black Consciousness as a formidable oppositional ideology that led to a flowering of drama from the 1970s that confronted the apartheid state—what I call Theatre of Resistance. Horn notes that another oppositional ideology at play on which the Theatre of Criticism and Confrontation drew was class analysis, while acknowledging that most writers could not easily be categorised as one or the other. The work of Athol Fugard and the Junction Avenue Theatre Company is included in this broader grouping of Theatre of Criticism and Confrontation, as are the plays of Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka. For his plays such as *The Hill* and *Dark Voices Ring*, written from exile in Lesotho in the late 1970s, Horn praises Zakes Mda for being 'the most imaginative and articulate voice in black South African theatre [whose work exhibits] a class analysis quite distant from the exclusively racial concerns of Black Consciousness.'[20] Horn writes: 'Some plays are documentary in form, others Aesopian or allegorical, and many employ an uncompromising realism. The material poverty of this theater has led to small-scale productions, designed for ad hoc venues, relying upon the simplest of props, costumes, and technical effects.'[21]

Later in the thesis, I show how the plays of the Soyikwa Black Theatre, later Soyikwa African Theatre, employed aspects of this 'poor theatre'. Horn continued:

> [T]his has resulted in plays in which character and action, rather than spectacle, are central. Plays are frequently devised through improvisation, and drawing upon the oral traditions of storytelling and recitations, characters often relate and animate events, both

[20]Horn, 'South African Theater', 222.
[21]Ibid., 222.

> past and fantasized, in long narrative monologues, thus placing a great emphasis upon the actor and his ability to capture the audience's attention and imagination without assistance from many of the theatrical devices employed on the commercial stage.[22]

In a similar vein to Horn's categorisation of theatre that opposed the ideological apparatus of apartheid, Kavanaugh's *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa* analyses three strains of alternative theatre in South Africa from the 1950s onwards. The first was that sponsored by liberal whites with all African or majority African casts, such as the Union of South African Artists' *King Kong*. A key figure in this union was Bob Leshoai, a black playwright who went into exile and was based in Zambia and East Africa for some time before returning to lecture at the University of Bophuthatswana. Not all black theatre practitioners who participated in this phase of development of majority theatre felt that their skills were being adequately used in these spaces, however. Sipho Sepamla, who was a poet as well as actor, joined the Union of African Artists at Dorkay House hoping to get exposure in the arts. Unfortunately, as Mbulelo Mzamane puts it, Sepamla found himself "reduced to a glorified messenger boy" and soon left to work independently.[23] The second is the black commercial theatre beginning in the late 1960s as exemplified by Gibson Kente and already discussed above. The final strand was the theatre associated with the BCM, the topic of the next Chapter.

Ultimately, Kavanagh argues that none of these traditions served the interests of liberation for the masses of South Africans still suffering under apartheid.[24] While Kavanagh asserts that plays in the BCM tradition did little to further the cause of liberation, he does not adequately explore the range of work that was part of the Theatre of Resistance tradition, and his analysis does not cover work produced after 1976. This thesis attempts to redress this gap in the literature by showing that Resistance Theatre in Johannesburg had deep roots in the experiences of its practitioners who grew up in the townships and espoused a committed

[22] Ibid., 222.
[23] Mbulelo Mzamane, 'Black Consciousness Poets in South Africa, 1967-1980: With Special Reference to Mongane Serote and Sipho Sepamla' (PhD Thesis, Sheffield, England, University of Sheffield, 1983), 197.
[24] Kavanagh, *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*, 198.

political ideology. This ideology was supercharged by the events of June 1976 and led to a movement of theatre practitioners who continued to produce relevant work well into the twenty-first century.

Theorising Resistance Theatre

A key theoretical intervention to help in contextualising the Theatre of Resistance came from the renowned black poet Mafika Pascal Gwala in a 1973 article entitled 'Towards a National Theatre'.[25] Writing in the publication *South African Outlook*, published by the historic Lovedale Press, Gwala outlined his understanding of a theatre that would represent the aspirations of the majority of South Africans while embracing minority citizens who still maintained economic and cultural hegemony. While black involvement in modern theatre, whether as actors or- -in the case of Gibson Kente, for example - producers and directors had a long history in South Africa, from about 1970 as Gwala asserts that 'black playwrights have been trying to change the basic pattern in Black playwriting so as to bring about some new approach in theatre.'[26] However, Gwala maintained that, in spite of these efforts, by 1973 'nothing much has really been achieved; in the manner of response for the audiences and identity standards that can be placed on theatre as an art form in this country.'[27] While black playwrights begin to write based on the reality that they see around them as black people in an oppressed system, their art should not end with merely representing that reality, he continued.

The artist 'is discovering that the struggle against alienation and cultural emptiness is nothing but a struggle for his liberation - psychological and social. And that in this struggle he is getting to understand, through lots of trying, what true love is. Love for a woman, for one's

[25]Gwala was a poet, academic, and prominent early member of the South African Students Organisation. His collection of poems, *Jol'iinkomo* (Johannesburg: A. Donker, 1977) is widely regarded as a landmark in black South African poetry.
[26]Mafika Pascal Gwala, 'Towards a National Theatre', *South African Outlook*, 1973, 131.
[27]Ibid., 131.

kin, for one's country, for truth, for justice.'[28] It is striking that Gwala acknowledged that love would indeed be a topic suitable for a 'national' theatre whereas later theatre practitioners such as Maishe Maponya felt that engaging these themes would detract from the cause for liberation. 1976 radicalised Maponya in a way from which he never quite recovered, as shown in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

However, Gwala acknowledges that Theatre of Resistance will be uncomfortable for some audiences, specifically white audiences unfamiliar with the daily struggles of black people. 'There may be too many truths that sound unfair to a white theatre lover in a black play. But those truths are just the thing about theatre: it does not have to please.'[29] Resistance Theatre will make some people uncomfortable, because seeing those 'ugly' truths of the black experience and tacitly being held accountable is not pleasant. By the time Gwala was penning these words, there was already a movement of Theatre of Resistance in the townships which, as part of its mission, performed only to black audiences (including Indians and Coloureds). In this article, Gwala does not make a distinction between the anti-establishment theatre created by blacks in collaboration with writers like Athol Fugard and theatre that originated from black townships. This latter Theatre of Resistance would only emerge by the end of that decade. In the chapters on Maishe Maponya, Matsemela Manaka, and their respective theatre companies, I discuss how these playwrights staged plays at city venues, making a break with their predecessors in the Theatre of Resistance who only performed for black audiences.

'Black theatre is not an abnegation of art that is not black,' Gwala insisted in a clear nod to the thinking of the BCM. Rather, it is 'a negation of old stereotyped concepts.' He continues, 'Negation in Black theatre is therefore progressive and is a necessity as long as it is a transient force; in a mutation process of black theatre development. Into the positive of

[28]Ibid., 131.
[29]Ibid., 'Towards a National Theatre'.

national theatre and awareness of theatre as an art of national importance.'[30] The early Theatre of Resistance, covered in Chapter Three, was mainly concerned with rejecting the negative notions that apartheid had insisted were part of black culture and with building solidarity among the black community, defined by apartheid as those who were 'non-white.' For Gwala, a national theatre that did not include the ethics of the marginalised was not worth its name. On the other hand, a black theatre that did not strive to be a national theatre was reactionary. Part of the work of black theatre was to recover true black identity, untainted by negative self-esteem. Black theatre that was truly national needed to recognise that it was transient, he added.

After Gwala, another thinker who theorised on the Theatre of Resistance was the publisher and playwright Mothobi Mutloatse.[31] For Mutloatse, this new theatre incorporated different elements from African performance traditions in South Africa, especially music and poetry. This passage from Mutloatse's introduction to the anthology *Forced Landing: Writings from the Staffrider Generation*, published by Ravan Press, reads like a manifesto for the new Theatre of Resistance:

> … We are involved in and consumed by an exciting experimental art form that I can only call, to coin a phrase, 'proemdra': Prose, Poem and Drama in one!
>
> We will have to *donder* conventional literature: old-fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say. Because we are in search of our true selves — undergoing self-discovery as a people.[32]

As this thesis shows, writers such as Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya constantly experimented with form, fusing the different performance traditions they had already worked with in their resistance to oppression into their dramatic work.

[30]Ibid., 133.

[31] Mutloatse became a dramatist in his own right, especially in the 1990s. Among the plays he wrote *were Sell-Out: The Musical, Nkosi: The Healing Song*, and *Kippie*.

[32] Mothobi Mutloatse, ed., *Forced Landing : Writings from the Staffrider Generation* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980), 5.

By 1977 the apartheid government unbanned mixed race theatre companies and some city theatre venues.[33] This concession did not stop dramatic activity in the townships from developing according to its own logic. In fact, there was a sort of renaissance of the Theatre of Resistance among a younger generation impacted by the events of 16 June 1976. Following the Soweto uprising and the brief period of political reconfiguration in the later 1970s, a new style of theatre emerged in Soweto that mirrored the growth of civic associations. There were now efforts of civic renewal through the arts from within the community, whether led by black people themselves or by concerned liberal organisations that felt reform was necessary. Centred at community centres that included the Funda Centre, the Mofolo Arts Centre[34], and the Zamani Arts Association, they continued a tradition of well-established community drama but clothed it with a social consciousness.[35] This thesis shows how the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre created a thriving Theatre of Resistance tradition at the Funda Centre.

Importantly, the new generation of playwrights, represented in this thesis by Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya, had received a broad primary and secondary education, albeit Bantu Education, and did not fully reject western modes of drama. Rather, they worked within them, seeking to find their place and create a theatre that could speak to their experiences. The new generation of playwrights viewed themselves as artists first and foremost. Because of a lack of facilities, many Resistance Theatre practitioners trained in informal settings, but calling them 'amateur' is prejudicial to the serious work they were doing. Studying the texts of the plays alone is insufficient to gain an understanding of this period of theatre activity. This is especially true of the Theatre of Resistance of the 1980s, where the text of the play was secondary to the performance and it was rarely a permanent document but rather changed

[33]David B Coplan, *In Township Tonight!: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 122.

[34]The Mofolo Arts Centre is an older, municipal, initiative based in one of the constituent townships of Soweto.

[35]Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'The Arts in the 1980s: Between States of Emergency and Transcendence?', in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 4 Part 2, ed. S.M. Ndlovu (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2010), 944.

depending on the performance. In this thesis, I use versions of the script that were published by the authors.

Loren Kruger calls this new paradigm that emerged in the 1960s 'theatre as testimony', which, apart from more didactic works by the Maponya etc., also included more spectacular works such as Mbongeni Ngema’s *Sarafina!* One common feature of testimonial theatre was that it engaged in subtly imagining a post-apartheid nation.[36] Kruger places the Serpent Players’ work, especially *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), as foundational in this new testimonial theatre, even while claiming that black theatre practitioners ‘were less interested in developing a clearly defined genre or set of performance techniques than in creating theatre that might challenge the status quo.’[37] *Sizwe* bequeathed the workshopping method, Grotowskian ‘poor theatre’, 'the masculine vigour of the players, and the negotiation of the different knowledge bases of black and white participants' to testimonial theatre.[38] This broad term, ‘testimonial,’ ignores the ideological basis of Black Consciousness theatre and the key moment of 1968–1974 when Black Consciousness impacted cultural production. By ignoring political history, Kruger fails to see just how distinct the Theatre of Resistance was and thus risks the erasure of an entire movement. (I discuss a definition of Theatre of Resistance in the Introduction, section: Historicising Theatre of Resistance).

This thesis is a detailed study of a few representatives of this movement, but there were others who did not receive the same level of media attention that makes a detailed study like this one possible. One example is Dukuza ka Macu, who theatre scholar Mufunanji Magalasi insists has been overlooked in the history of the Theatre of Resistance because he was unapologetically Africanist. Ka Macu’s *Night of the Long Wake*, written around 1976, covers

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[36]Kruger, *A Century of South African Theatre*, 128–29.

[37]Ibid., 125. The Serpent Players was a collaborative multi-racial group consisting of Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona.

[38]Ibid., 126.

the same themes as other testimonial or protest theatre.[39] The plot of the play is centred on generational conflict. A son, Afrika Majola, is eager to participate in a student revolt against his father's wishes. Ironically, Afrika's father turns out to be a veteran of the Sharpeville uprisings of 1960, who went to prison for his involvement. When Afrika is injured at the protests and runs home, he is pursued by a policeman who, aiming for Afrika instead kills his father with a gunshot when the father jumps in front of his son to protect him. Magalasi points out that whereas theatre practitioners such as Maponya found a platform at venues such as the Market Theatre and published their plays, 'many others remained behind in the townships. As a result, those that the world saw as doing anti-apartheid theatre were mostly the ones that joined hands with the liberal practitioners, for bad or for good.'[40]

Martin Orkin, in his *Drama and the South African State*, elaborates on the influence of the BCM on Theatre of Resistance.[41] 'This theatre,' Orkin argues, 'was far more militantly and aggressively positioned against the state than ever before', and believes that 'it also implicitly or explicitly sought to enunciate or dramatise a national culture".[42] He traces two different strands of influence of the BCM in the adversarial theatre of the 1980s: Black Theology - more evident in plays by Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema - and political Black Consciousness in plays by Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya.[43] Nevertheless, Orkin admits that Manaka - —even while heavily influenced by Black Consciousness - had engaged with Marxist ideas, if not texts, in his work after connecting with Medu Art Ensemble in Botswana.[44]

Matsemela Manaka, whose work is covered in Chapters Five and Six, theorised about the movement of Resistance Theatre. Not content with leaving the work to professional critics,

[39]Mufunanji Magalasi, 'Ethnicity and Marginalisation in South African Liberation Theatre: Dukuza Ka Macu's Night of the Long Wake', *Journal of Humanities* 16 (2002): 24–40.
[40]Ibid., 37.
[41]Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*.
[42]Ibid., 209.
[43]Ibid., 218.
[44]Ibid., 219.

Manaka set out his vision for the Theatre of Resistance in a series of articles in the early 1980s. The first article, published in *Staffrider* in 1980 was titled 'Theatre of the Dispossessed' and began with a series of questions:

> What is theatre? What was our theatre before the coming of the white man? How does experimental theatre differ from conventional theatre? With whom is our theatre communicating - the dispossessed, the dispossessor or both? A class distinction must be made between the dispossessed and the dispossessors. What is the theatre of the dispossessed? Is it aiming at being popular or literary?[45]

Manaka did not answer all these questions in the article which was based on a discussion with James Mthoba, a veteran black actor and director who also taught at FUBA and the Alex Community Centre, and Joe Rahube, a performance poet. In his editorial comments, Manaka grapples with the meaning of theatre to the struggle for liberation. He calls theatre a 'colonial platform', which nevertheless can be used for self-discovery. This is an important point to emphasise: Manaka and the younger generation of Resistance Theatre practitioners did not shy away from modern theatre but sought to fashion it to their ends. In the same article, Manaka reflected on language and audiences. Remarkably for a dramatist who grew up on Black Consciousness, Manaka insists that theatre of the dispossessed should speak to both 'the dispossessed and the dispossessor.'[46] Manaka goes on to make a class distinction among the dispossessed, stressing that the role of dramatist was to create a new language for the dispossessed that might seem vulgar to the more educated classes of the dispossessed. Even marking a shift from the pioneers of Resistance Theatre, who only performed for black audiences, Manaka maintains that '[a]t this point in time, the dispossessed are destitute. They are very desperate for the realisation of their aspirations. They are in quest of freedom.' He adds, emphatically:

> They need no entertainment that shall make them oblivious of their state of subservience. They need no entertainment that shall make them submissive to their state

[45]Manaka, Matsemela, 'Theatre of the Dispossessed: An Article Based on Discussions with James Mthoba and Joe Rahube,' *Staffrider*, September/October 1980, 28
[46]Ibid., 'Theatre of the Dispossessed,' 29

> of poverty and servitude. They need no entertainment that will be irrelevant to the black man's bone of contention. They need no entertainment that shall not respond to the call of freedom's cry. But they need realistic entertainment that will give them courage to survive and forge ahead.[47]

Manaka still believed that theatre should be political and held no reservations about this. Finally, on performance poets such as Joe Rahube (more about performance poetry and its relation to Theatre of Resistance in Chapter Four), Manaka notes that 'quite a number of young dramatists are not popularly known in the so-called 'theatre world', but they are very popular in our urban traditional performances. They are an integral part of those who suffer death in the dusty streets of the ghettoes.' These poets, Manaka insists, 'perform at all sorts of gatherings, and this becomes more like ritual theatre.'[48] We shall see in Chapter Six how in plays such as *Toro*, Manaka and the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre explored theatre as ritual on the modern stage.

In the next article, also in *Staffrider*, published a year later under his nickname Mastix, Manaka further developed his ideas around a Theatre of Resistance. Significantly, he calls the movement 'Black Theatre' in this article. The subtitle of this article, 'Theatre in Azania', is also significant. He uses the name for South Africa favoured by the BCM and the Pan Africanists, betraying his political leanings.[49] Manaka continued to call the theatre he made 'Black Theatre' until around 1985 when he began to think of his theatre as 'African' theatre. In this article, the metaphor Mastix used is a hangover/babalaz suffered by Africans at home and in the diaspora caused by social and cultural colonialism or imperial culture.[50] 'Babalaz' is the local term for

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[47]Ibid., 'Theatre of the Dispossessed,' 29

[48]Ibid., 'Theatre of the Dispossessed,' 29

[49]Jaki Seroke, Manaka's close friend and confidant, insists that Matsemela Manaka was a member of the Pan Africanist Congress, even while publicly remaining non-partisan. Jaki Seroke, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, February 9, 2023. As shall be shown in Chapter Four, Maishe Maponya was also sympathetic to Africanist and Black Consciousness formations. The PAC broke away from the African National Congress in 1958 over disagreements on how to approach liberation, particularly on the land question in South Africa. The PAC embraced a view that centred Africanist ideas, while the ANC embraced the Freedom Charter, which emphasised multi-racialism as its guiding document.

[50]Mastix, 'The Babalaz People: Theatre in Azania,' *Staffrider*, November 1981, 32 - 34

hangover in South Africa. Manaka based this article on two interviews he held with two members of the Black Theatre Cooperative of London, who he likely met when he toured that country with Soyikwa productions. In this article, more militant than the previous one, he distinguished between colonial experience in South Africa and that of blacks in the metropole ('Babylon'), the latter have to have a level of integration because they are a minority, whereas in Africa the African culture ought to dominate because that is the majority population.[51] This recalls Biko's theories on African culture in the 1970s. Moreover, Manaka goes further and maintains that South African theatre ought not to be colour blind. 'And yet our understanding of the South African society is that the class struggle is embodied in the race issue. Here, race determines class, a white worker differs in many ways from a black worker. Therefore, in such a class struggle our theatre cannot be colour-blind.'[52] This comment directly addressed theatre practitioners, such as the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, who by the 1980s were concerned with only a class analysis in their work. For Manaka and the broader movement of Theatre of Resistance, race was also important. 'Above all, black theatre should reflect the present in relation to the past and project a vision for the future' he concludes. The Theatre of Resistance, in his estimation, would help free blacks from babalaz but also insulate African society from black dictatorship after emancipation.

In an article in a scholarly journal, Manaka outlined his thoughts further.[53] These ideas help us understand the theatre that he created with Soyikwa Black Theatre/Institute of African theatre and casts light on the broader movement. In this article, Manaka addressed four themes that he saw as central to Black Theatre: the centrality of the actor's body; workshopping plays; and combatting racism. The fourth is the importance of good training for actors, even actors in the Theatre of Resistance. 'Black actors may be physically on stage but vocally, emotionally

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[51]Ibid., 'The Babalaz People,' 34
[52]Ibid., 'The Babalaz People,' 34
[53]Matsemela Manaka, 'Some Thoughts on Black Theatre', *The English Academy Review*, 1 January 1984.

and intellectually, they are off stage. And this is what makes a lot of black productions sound like mere political statements. Bad writing does make bad
theatre but it stands a better chance of being made better if there is good acting.'[54] Manaka acknowledges his debt to Bertolt Brecht and Jerzy Grotowski by citing their writing on developing actors. As discussed in Chapter Four, it is Grotowski's methods that had most influence on Manaka.[55]

Manaka goes on to reflect on workshopping as central to the Theatre of Resistance, even while he himself often scripted plays and then modified them with his cast. After about 1985, most of Manaka's productions were not strictly improvised with actors. Nevertheless, Manaka insisted that workshopping led to more complete works of art that were 'factual'. 'The ultimate production of this type of theatre depends entirely on the total commitment of everyone involved,' Manaka writes. Elaborating on the process of workshopping, he continues: 'Every participant of plural theatre becomes a scholar one way or the other. I am referring specifically to participants who will pay their dues in whatever research they have to undertake in order to come up with a sincere production. This means that plural theatre is factual.'[56] Finally, Manaka gestures towards the political purpose of Black Theatre by stating that it 'is a conscious act of creation in response to reality - not just written for the financial whims of showbiz but for our library of evidence against racism.'[57] Citing the work of Bob Leshoai, Zakes Mda, Fatima Dike, and Maishe Maponya, Manaka tries to explain why the 'emotional outburst of black theatre' is not racist but rather 'like a grenade of change which enhances the essence of theatre in an atmosphere of repression and resistance. Plays make the viewer or reader reckon with the fact that a work of art is like a dance born by the beat of a drum. It is

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[54]Ibid., 33–34.
[55]See also Chapter Three on the influence of Brecht on Maishe Maponya's work, particularly *The Hungry Earth.*
[56]Manaka, 'Some Thoughts on Black Theatre', 35.
[57]Ibid., 38.

not beauty born by the fantasy of illusions and dreams.'[58] Here, Manaka clearly states that theatre should be a weapon of resistance. For Manaka, especially in a state of severe social and political repression, art was also an act of remembering or re-membering, putting back together. The Theatre of Resistance movement was as much about the present as it was about preserving the past.

Community Arts Centres and Resistance Theatre

Previous studies of the Theatre of Resistance have neglected the importance of space. Though acknowledging the difficulty of creating theatre in Soweto where there were no modern theatres until the twenty-first century, these studies barely touched on the spaces that were present. In his writing on the early days of Soyikwa Black Theatre in Diepkloof, Soweto, Steadman touches on Matsemela Manaka's parents' garage where rehearsals of *Pula* took place. 'Manaka's *Pula*,' Steadman writes, 'was first performed for an audience of two in a garage measuring fifteen square metres.'[59] By 1985, another scholar noted, 'Soyikwa found a more or less permanent home when Manaka became Director of the new Funda Arts Centre which had been built by the Urban Foundation in Diepkloof on the edge of Soweto in 1984.'

Soyikwa continued to bring their plays to the Market Theatre, Fuchs argues, because 'they could count on a well-equipped theatre and hope that there would be more press exposure than they would get at Funda.'[60] Chapters Five and Six discuss Soyikwa's evolution from a student group in the late 1970s to a fully-fledged theatre training programme in the 1990s. And while Fuchs is right that the Market offered media exposure and better theatre facilities than the small,

[58]Ibid., 38.
[59]Ian Steadman, 'Alternative Politics, Alternative Performance: 1976 and Black South African Theatre', in *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*, ed. M. J. Daymond, J. U. Jacobs, and Margaret Lenta (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 1984), 227.
[60]Anne Fuchs, *Playing the Market: The Market Theatre Johannesburg, 1976, 1986*, Cross/Cultures : Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English 50 (Chur, Switwerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1990), 87.

experimental, space at the Funda Centre, the Market Theatre was also a space where ideas could be exchanged across racial and socio-economic divides. The rest of this section places the Funda Centre in the context of the broader movement of community arts centres in South Africa. The Funda Centre, which still exists today amid financial challenges and the encroachment of groups that have nothing to do with the centre, was a space where young people came to learn at a time when few other opportunities were available to them. The centre offered a diploma in drama in addition to other educational paths including a fine arts curriculum, music, photography and dance. As a space for alternative education, it was different from institutions of Bantu Education, such as the Ndaleni Teacher's Training College described by Magaziner below. It was also a community space that was provided by neither a Christian church nor by the state but funded by liberal white capital. The fact that it was a relatively open community space allowed Soyikwa Black Theatre to use it as a base.[61]

Peterson argues that over the course of the twentieth century in South Africa, the control of culture was weaponised by the hegemonic classes as a way to demonstrate their 'civilisation' while preventing the subaltern from using cultural practices as resistance. He adds that bannings and censorship were a common method to control black performance while more subtle ways included direct patronising of the black arts. Giving the example of the liberal Johannesburg City Council's failed efforts in the early 1970s to 'train' Soweto residents in theatre, Peterson contends that the state and capital's efforts 'effectively undermined the relationship between black theatre and township audiences' after 1976.[62] This thesis shows how the Theatre of Resistance was born after the Soweto uprising.

[61]Matsemela Manaka and Geoffrey V Davis, *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).
[62]Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theatre', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 2 (1 June 1990): 235, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079008708232.

Built in 1984, The Funda Centre (later Community College) in Diepkloof, Soweto was funded by the Urban Foundation which was started by a group of white businessmen including Harry Oppenheimer and Anton Rupert in 1976. For most of its existence, The Urban Foundation was led by Judge Steyn and mainly focused on improving urban housing for black people in the townships and informal settlements. In the 1980s, the Urban Foundation worked with other civil society organisations to oppose influx control.[63] In the same period, the Urban Foundation expanded its scope to include education and social services and, by the end of the 1980s, it had funded a total of fourteen centres similar to Funda around South Africa. The existence of a space for drama experimentation in Soweto in the 1980s is significant. Indeed, while by the end of the 1980s there were 50 theatres across South Africa none of them were located in townships and this made Funda doubly important.[64] Many found the Urban Foundation's services useful but its presence in townships was not without controversy.[65]

Mukonde writes about social services provided by the state in Soweto during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly public libraries and community halls, and how they were appropriated by students in their struggle against apartheid.[66] While some of these were provided by the reformist apartheid state, others like the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre were run by non-profit organisations like the YWCA. Cultural activities such as field trips and drama clubs occurred at these community centres, which were often staffed by people from the community supervised by formally trained white social workers in the employment of either the Department of Bantu Affairs or the Johannesburg Non-European Affairs Department. The

[63]Kalim Rajab, *A Man of Africa: The Political Thought of Harry Oppenheimer* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2017).
[64]Peterson, 'Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theatre', 232.
[65]David Robbins and Urban Foundation (South Africa), *Learning the Hard Way: Lessons from the Urban Foundation Experience 1976-1994* (Johannesburg: Urban Foundation, 1997).
[66]See especially Chapter 3, Reading Under Repression, in Kasonde Thomas Mukonde, 'Reading and the Making of Student Activists in Soweto, c. 1968-1976' (MA Research Report, Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand, 2020) where Mukonde reflects on the use of publicly provided places by students.

community halls provided by the state were often the location of youth clubs, which contributed positively to the lives of young people in Soweto.

That institutions provided by the apartheid state could contribute positively to self–making among black South Africans reveals the often-contradictory nature of black experience under apartheid.[67] Clive Glaser's work on Morris Isaacson High School (MIHS) in Soweto is an important body of scholarship that reveals how a public high school during apartheid was able to create an environment in which young people could become more fully human through a rich extra–curricular programme that teachers at that school created, often through unremunerated efforts.[68] Among the extracurricular activities that were offered at the school were debating, and a variety of sports and drama programmes. Students, trained by their teacher Bernadette Mosala, presented Shakespeare's plays to township audiences as well as plays in isiZulu. Students at MIHS participated in drama groups outside the school, including Mrs. Mosala's Criterion Drama Group.[69] While other extracurriculars continued into the 1980s, even in the midst of political upheaval, unfortunately drama did not survive the MIHS students working with the Methodist Youth Centre to produce a musical play in 1978.[70]

Similarly to Glaser, Dan Magaziner has written about a lesser known arts training college run by the Department of Bantu Education, Ndaleni, outside Richmond in Natal.[71] Using the case of black people who attended Ndaleni and experienced it as a place that they understood as contributing to their self-making, Magaziner draws us to the evolving

[67]See Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009) for an extended and eloquent meditation on this theme in Katlehong, a township East of Johannesburg.
[68]Clive Glaser, 'Soweto's Islands of Learning: Morris Isaacson and Orlando High Schools Under Bantu Education, 1958–1975', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 159–71; Clive Glaser, '"Beyond the Syllabus": Morris Isaacson High School's Struggle for Human Equality under the Apartheid Education System, 1958–1990', *Paedagogica Historica* 0, no. 0 (3 October 2019): 1–19.
[69]Glaser, '"Beyond the Syllabus"', 8.
[70]Ibid., 16 See footnote 88.
[71]Daniel R Magaziner, *The Art of Life in South Africa* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017); Daniel Magaziner, 'Two Stories about Art, Education, and Beauty in Twentieth-Century South Africa', *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (2013): 1403–29.

historiography of South Africa that, according to Catherine Burns, goes beyond being anti-apartheid, whether calling itself 'history from below, social history, resistance, [or] agency.' Instead, '"complexity" - a scepticism regarding accepted binaries, a renewed focus on culture as a productive field—now holds forth.'[72] One of the students at Ndaleni in the early 1970s, Jessie Muthige, who had been through Bantu Education and initially spoke in its idioms - that he would be going to Ndaleni to learn how to revive the art of his ethnic group - wrote back to his teacher from his home in Venda after the first term. 'The Arts and Crafts course has really changed my way of life. I see things in a different way,' adding that 'my friends see something new in me. They are sometimes so jealous they promise to apply for next year.'[73] That Muthige was transformed by attending Ndaleni, Magaziner argues, demonstrates that 'the work of self-making was ongoing under apartheid, in ways beholden neither to the state nor to its opposition, even as [Muthige was] deeply implicated in the structures of their time and place.'[74] Another point Magaziner makes is that the curriculum at Ndaleni was, in a way, at odds with apartheid ideology. It encouraged self-expression. These contradictions in apartheid, which black people were able to exploit, can also be seen by Soyikwa in a centre like Funda.

Lize van Robbroeck's MA Thesis from the University of the Witwatersrand in 1991 studied the Alexandra and Katlehong Arts Centres.[75] No similar study exists for the several arts centres that existed in Soweto, such as the Mofolo Arts Centre, and certainly not for the Funda Community College. This might be because of the relative paucity of archival sources. The Katlehong Arts Centre was connected to the East Rand Administration Board, at least initially, while the Alexandra Arts Centre was started by the local community. According to van Robbroeck, Alexandra's Art Centre's founders were Jingles Makgothi and Joe Manana.[76]

[72]Magaziner, 'Two Stories about Art, Education, and Beauty in Twentieth-Century South Africa', 1407.
[73]qtd in Magaziner, 1411.
[74]Ibid., 1414.
[75]Van Robbroeck Lize, 'The Ideology and Practice of Community Arts'.
[76]Ibid., 78.

Started in 1985, this centre responded to the political moment and while it claimed not to be a political entity eventually 'openly declared its affiliations with the Mass Democratic Movement.' Furthermore, van Robbroeck writes, the Alexandra Arts Centre 'had representatives on the Transvaal Cultural Desk of the UDF.'[77] In contrast to the Alexander Arts Centre, which seemed to have an ethos of promoting art for liberation, the Katlehong Arts Centre was set up in 1977 to combat 'juvenile delinquency.'[78] This same ethos pervaded community centres in Soweto, but rather than simply keeping students off the streets, the centres provided a space for self-making in ways not deliberately intended by the state. Both the Katlehong and Alexandra Arts Centres were defunct by the 1990s.

The arts centres discussed above built upon spaces of alternative arts education in South Africa which were active prior to their historical moment: Polly Street and Rorke's Drift. Rorke's Drift was an art school founded by Lutheran missionaries Peder and Ulla Gowenius in 1962 at the site of the historic battle. Interestingly, while Rorke's Drift was interested in art as therapy, fine art classes were eventually added. Rorke's Drift is foundational in the history of South African visual arts because many black artists who went on to influence the field studied there. In contrast to Rorke's Drift, Polly Street was a liberal institution in Johannesburg and supported by the Johannesburg City Council's Non-European Affairs Department. It was started in 1949. Similar to the sentiments of the East Rand Administration Board in starting Katlehong Arts Centre twenty years later, Polly Street was meant to control urban youth and provided recreation and evening classes in a variety of fields. That notwithstanding, Polly Street did foster an environment of experimentation and led students to draw from a variety of influences including European and African art.[79]

[77] Ibid., 63.
[78] Ibid., 58.
[79] John Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 25–27.

An arts centre that serves as a comparison case to Funda was the Community Arts Project (CAP) in Cape Town that existed from 1977 to 2003. CAP was associated with the University of Cape Town. Similar to the Funda Centre, CAP emerged as a space for alternative adult education but it quickly became clear that the demand for a comprehensive art education curriculum was high.[80] It held free arts workshops for Black residents of Cape Town's townships and was supported by the facilitators themselves, although it did eventually obtain foreign funding. Apart from the visual arts, CAP also held drama courses.[81] Interestingly, unlike the Funda Centre, CAP rejected funding from the Urban Foundation.[82] In Eben Lochner's MA thesis, Lochner sees this rejection as a rejection of apartheid. However, it is simplistic to say that the objectives of the Urban Foundation were identical to those of the state and that those organisations that accepted funding were absolutely beholden to the objectives of white capital.

Some spaces such as the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) were based in central Johannesburg. FUBA was an important space where many theatre practitioners trained (including some Soyikwa members). In Chapter Six, I explore how FUBA's decline provides some insight into Funda Centre's own struggle to survive after 1990. Some of the members of FUBA left to form the Afrika Cultural Centre (ACC, initially called the Action Centre) in 1978. These included Benjy Francis, Ramadan Suleman, Bhekizizwe Peterson and was based in Newtown, Johannesburg. The ACC formed the Dhlomo Theatre in 1983 which was short-lived and closed ostensibly because it was a 'fire hazard.' In fact, Francis maintained, the theatre was closed because of political interference.[83] ACC continued its cultural work in the black community for another two decades.

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[80]Eben Lochner, 'The South African Art Centre.'

[81]See Chapter 2: Democratising Art Under Apartheid: CAP 1977-1991 Lochner, 'The Democratisation of Art CAP as an Alternative Art Space in South Africa'.

[82]Lochner, 72–73.

[83]Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'Afrika Cultural Centre: Phoenix under Apartheid and Burnt Ember under Democracy?', in *Syncretic Arenas: Essays on Postcolonial African Drama and Theatre for Esiaba Irobi* (Brill, 2014), 207.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how a historiography of adversarial theatre in South Africa after 1960 is enriched by engaging the sources that were written by members of the oppressed classes themselves. The articles by Mafika Pascal Gwala and Matsemela Manaka bring into question the categorisation of all theatre that was made in opposition to the hegemonic ideology as 'protest' or even 'testimonial'. A new category of theatre, Resistance Theatre, was created after 1970, I argue, largely under the influence of the BCM. After 1976, young people in the townships of Soweto drew inspiration from their elders in the movement and from their own experiences and began to use their art to express their political views. Chapters Four to Six trace the legacies of the Soweto moment in Resistance Theatre. The following chapter shows how an older generation of theatre practitioners set the stage for Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya and their contemporaries. It covers the People's Experimental Theatre and Mihloti Black Theatre through following the biographies of key members of these groups.

Chapter Three: Theatre of Resistance in the 1960s and 1970s – The People's Experimental Theatre, Mihloti Black Theatre and *Give Us This Day*

Introduction

As argued in the previous chapter, theatre and theatre practitioners were present at the birth of Black Consciousness because, from the 1960s onwards, across South Africa in black communities from the Cape to the former Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) area, black people were making theatre to oppose the system that sought to contain their lives and imaginations. While most of this theatre was commercial in nature, around 1968 some politically committed artists began creating theatre that was politically charged. Inspired, in the first instance, by developments in the black arts movement in the United States of America, and the negritude movement in the former African French colonies, the South African movement took on its own unique characteristics. This chapter takes a two-pronged approach to the issue of the aesthetic foundations of the Theatre of Resistance of the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. One strand or influence came from the university-based South African Students' Organisation (SASO), represented by People's Experimental Theatre. I analyse the play *Shanti* in the broader context of SASO cultural activism and draw on interviews and periodicals.

The latter part of the chapter covers the work of the Mihloti Black Theatre, primarily through a biographical approach that will trace Molefe Pheto's life in cultural activism. Pheto, a poet and musician who received training in South Africa as well as at the prestigious Guildhall School of Music in London in the late 1960s, was a founding member of Mihloti. The section

uses oral history as well as documentary sources to describe his life in the broader development of the Theatre of Resistance, highlighting his unique contributions to the development of the genre in South Africa. The chapter ends with a brief look at Rev Mzwandile Maqina's play, *Give us This Day,* as an example of Theatre of Resistance and a play that influenced Maishe Maponya.

The People's Experimental Theatre

The People's Experimental Theatre (PET) was a short-lived radical theatre group affiliated to the BCM. It grew out of a Soweto-based group, Shiqomo, and Black People's Theatre Group or Youth group from Lenasia, an Indian designated area near Soweto. The two groups merged in 1973.[1] According to Nomsisi Kraai, a member of Shiqomo and founding member of PET, writing in the *PET Newsletter*, the youth who founded Shiqomo were inspired to found the group by the death of Mthuli ka Shezi. In her own words:

> Before Mthuli could see his play come to fruition he was killed while defending the dignity of Black people. His death hit the Black community very hard. In him we saw an inspiring Black leader and his death, therefore, made us clench our fists and lift them even higher with determination… It is on this note that we young people came together and formed a group called Shiqomo. This means 'spear' and this we use as a symbol of fighting. We came together and decided to perform some relevant dramas like 'Shanti.' We cannot waste time on comical dramas. We live in times of war where a Black man cannot stop thinking of his liberation. We are determined to fight for our rights.[2]

In this article, Kraai highlights the deep impact of Black Consciousness on black youth living in segregated ghettos in the early 1970s. She also hints at a policy position of SASO in relation to the theatre, extended to all cultural activity, of promoting 'relevant' arts. In this sense, these arts were to be relevant to the conscientisation of the oppressed black population towards pride

[1] Mafika Pascal Gwala, 'Arts and Entertainment', *Black Review*, 1973, 109; Sadeque Variava, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 13 November 2022.
[2] *PET Newsletter* cited in International Defence and Aid Fund, *Black Theatre in South Africa*, Fact Paper on Southern Africa, no. 2 (London: International Defence & Aid Fund, 1976), 5.

in their identity[3]. Furthermore, Kraai signals a break from the township musical dramas of Gibson Kente, Sam Mhangwane and others mentioned in previous chapters, which were seen as merely escapist and lacking in political relevance. The new black theatre was to be militant, directly confronting the apartheid state. The chapter will return to detailed discussion of *Shanti.* Below I discuss briefly the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON) and the South African Black Theatre Union (SABTU), which was part of the Black Peoples Convention (BPC), a constituent arm of the BCM. The chapter will then trace the biographies of two of the surviving members of PET who were interviewed for this thesis.

TECON and SABTU

The *Black Review* of 1974 gave a detailed history of the TECON. It described it as the 'first known all-Black effort in theatre which showed a marked awareness of the Blackman's situation in South Africa ... "Black on White" which was produced by the Avon Theatre Company in Durban in December 1966.'[4] Students at the University College for Indians produced the 'revue [which] made cutting comment on housing problems amongst Blacks, the disunity among the Black groups and evils of apartheid.'[5] The Avon Theatre Company became TECON in 1969 and Sam Moodley, Strini Moodley, and Saths Cooper became key figures in this company. TECON, as Avon before it, toured around South African campuses and eventually became strongly associated with SASO and the broader Black Consciousness Movement. According to the *Black Review*, other works that TECON presented in its highly active phase in the early 1970s included *Into the Heart of Negritude* and *Antigone '71*.

Strini Moodley, who studied Speech and Drama at University College for Indians (Durban), remembered that *Black on White,* a production which toured nationwide, including

[3]See, for example, the assertion in the Black Students' Manifesto in *SASO Newsletter* 2, no. 4 (Sept/Oct 1972) that students committed themselves to 'encourage and promote Black literature relevant to our struggle'.
[4]Thoko Mbanjwa, *Black Review* 1974/1975, 'Arts and Entertainment,' 106.
[5]Mbanjwa, 'Arts and Entertainment,' 106.

at the 1968 NUSAS conference at the University of the Witwatersrand was workshopped with peers in Avon. It*:*

> was a political satire, how black people saw white people and vice versa. Just looking at the ways in which people see one another, because at that time race had become such a major argument in the newspapers, you know there are 4 races and what have you, and what have you.' ... 'I mean I know one of the scripts we had somebody reading the 1:00 news and in the report somebody does research and discovers that the 4 main races in SA are the 100 yards, the 220, the 440 and the mile. So it was that kind of thing, just ridiculing the whole notion of race and then ridiculing the whole idea of Special Branch. We had guys walking about with branches that said special on it while people are having a debate at University, and they themselves were having a debate talking shit all the time. But it was very popular and from there it just grew.[6]

An article titled 'The Theatre and Black South Africa' appeared in the June 1971 issue of the *SASO Newsletter.*[7] Rejecting the notion of a bourgeois theatre limited to being a 'pure art' and 'restricted to evening gowns, collar and tie and "coffee bar after discussions" on the merits and de-merits of this particular actor or that particular director' the article, instead, asserts that '[t]heatre began as a religious ritual in Greece, India, China and Africa.'[8] It traces the development of theatre through antiquity and the European dark ages to the Renaissance and the 'Romans [who] banished God from the stage and this carried through to the fake idealism of the restoration comedy or the brutal cynicism of the heroic play.' Theatre became political. Rather than faith, power was the new theme. The author of the piece argues that in South Africa of 1971, most of what passed for theatre was in fact 'hashed, soap-box dramas.' The 'black ghettoes [are b]rain washed by a wholly inadequate press [and] the people are content with variety concerts, meaningless musicals and indistinct revues that touch the superficialities of our "colour problem'.[9] Among the groups that produced relevant drama in South Africa included the Serpent Players, the Phoenix Players, and TECON, noting that

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[6]Strini Moodley, Interview conducted by Daniel Magaziner, Durban, South Africa, 10 April 2006, Struggles for Freedom: Southern Africa, Daniel Magaziner Interviews, JSTOR Primary Sources, https://www.jstor.org/stable/al.sff.document.magazp1b1006.
[7]'The Theatre and Black South Africa,' *SASO Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (June 1971): 14 – 15.
[8]Ibid., 14.
[9]'Ibid.

TECON's '"Into the Heart of Negritude" was… a jazz poetry presentation that examined the concept of negritude - and through its music and poetry, affirmed the path of black assertion'. The article concludes by announcing the beginning of a cultural revolution where theatre would both serve as 'a didactic means and to present entertainment, to the black people of South Africa'.[10]

Another review of a TECON performance, *Antigone '71,* appeared in the *Rhodeo*, a Rhodes University student magazine. It notes that the play was adapted from a French playwright's 1944 adaptation of the Greek tragedy to the occupation of Paris by the Nazis. The original story relates to how Antigone refused to remain subservient under her uncle's rule, choosing to defend family honour. 'Now in 1971, the compiler has adapted this version to make a comment on the South African situation.' The critic praises TECON's efforts as 'polished and professional [although] not enugh [sic] was made of the dramatic conflict, but so much was put into the production (from electronic sound effects to mimed dances) that one's attention was always held.'[11]

S'ketsh, the journal of popular drama founded by Mshengu Kavanagh, reported in its July 1972 issue that:

> TECON has called a conference for 4th-7th July, to be held at Durban's Orient Hall. Resolutions passed at a meeting of the steering committee state that the problems to be discussed affect only black theatre groups. Whites are not affected in the same way and so the conference is for Blacks only. The aim to form a national Black organisation to see to the needs of 'under-priviledged' [*sic*] theatre groups.

S'ketsh added that, '[t]he conference will run simultaneously with Tecon's Drama Festival (3rd-8th July).'[12] The next issue of *S'ketsh'* published a programme for the TECON festival, held under the banner of the new South African Black Theatre Union[13], which now included

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[10]Ibid.

[11]Tony Peake, 'Antigone relates to South Africa,' *Rhodeo*, 19 August 1971, 7.

[12]*S'ketsh'*, July 1972, 3.

[13]The *Black Review* 1974/1975, 106 notes that 'Following their drama festival in Cape Town in December, 1972, SABTU has not done anything since. The main reason for this appears to be the lack of administrative staff.'

Errol Theron of East London Artists and John Kani from the Serpent Players in Port Elizabeth. Another member of TECON around this time was Benjy Francis. The programme of the TECON festival is worth reproducing in full as it tells us about the range of what was seen as Black Consciousness theatre by the leaders of TECON:

> Monday - The Serpent Players' *The Just* (see review on p. 29)
>
> Tuesday - UNICUS (University of Natal, Black Section) *Encounter* by Kenyan Kildup Sondhi, described in the programme note as 'a startling but pertinent expression of the Black viewpoint on White-labelled 'terrorism' emphasised as the legitimate struggle of oppressed peoples against the repressive machinery of White imperialism and bureaucracy.
>
> Dramsoc (University of the Western Cape) Ode to the Black Man, a programme of poetry by Adam Small and folk songs.
>
> Wednesday - Mihloti Black Theatre from Johannesburg in a programme of 'poetry and original works with music'.
>
> Thursday - The Community of St. Stephen's in *Play ... Maybe*, which exposes 'the failure of the church to get involved in the evils of society and its alienation from the people'.
>
> Shah Theatre Academy in 'The Lahnee's Pleasure (a unique spelling of tsotsitaal word for 'whiteman') by Ronnie Govender. The play was based 'on a real life incident witnessed in a North Coast pub, bringing into sharp relief the situation of many blacks in this country'.
>
> Friday - Tecon's *Requiem for Brother X* by William Wellington Mackey, directed by Strini Moodley. The programme announces that 'This is it! True Black Drama! A dialogue of confrontation! It speaks to Blacks only, about Blacks.'
>
> Saturday - The New Era Dramatic Society in *Condemned*, which demonstrates that 'we (the underdog) will finally overcome'. The Serpent Players in *Sell Out* (see review on p. 28).[14]

In 1973 TECON collaborated with Dashiki, the jazz group, to produce *Black Images*. They also 'travelled to Stanger, played in Lamontville, Tin Town, at the University of Natal (Black Section), the SASO conference and in Durban at the YMCA.'[15] In the same year, SASO

[14] *S'ketsh'*, Summer 1972, 4.
[15] *Black Review* 1974/1975, 108.

appointed a Cultural Committee, or CulCom, to coordinate cultural activities. Its role was 'to solicit and field proposals from artists and hired them to perform at SASO events large and small.'[16] By 1974, however, Cooper, Strini and Sam Moodley were facing legal proceedings and TECON's activities effectively came to a halt. At the same time that TECON was developing in Natal, in Johannesburg's townships young black people were beginning to group together and form theatre groups. Among them were Ujebe Masokoane and Sadeque Variava, whose biographies this chapter will now sketch.

Ujebe Masokoane and his poetry

Born Glenn Masokoane, Ujebe Masokoane was born in 1948 in Randfontein on the West Rand in the old Transvaal province. Masokoane's mother was a domestic worker who worked for an immigrant German family in Yeoville, where his mother had a back room. He spent his youth in between Alexandra and Yeoville as a child. By the age of five, Masokoane recalls, 'I was ahead of my class. I had read all the nursery rhymes, [and] I could recall [them] by heart. I knew all the stories in books, so Alex was kind of a social, I mean a cultural shock. I remember my teacher used to put me on top of the table then I would read for the class and recite all the nursery rhymes. So, I was like a typical cheese boy in the heart of then a very Apartheid South Africa.' Influenced by occurrences in Alexandra township in the early 1950s: 'the bus boycotts, "Azikhwelwa" and the introduction of Bantu Education, I remember those social upheavals ... protest in Alex where we lived'.[17] Masokoane's mother got a place in Diepkloof (part of Soweto) in 1959 or 1960, 'but I think as one was growing my mum could not really cope a lot with a township boy, so I was very rebellious, and she took me away back to the West Rand to live under the shadow of my uncle who was a great disciplinarian.'[18] It is around this time that Masokoane travelled north-west to Mafikeng where he met Onkgopotse

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[16] Hill, *Biko's Ghost*, 4.
[17]Glenn Ujebe Masokoane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Telephonic, 5 May 2022.
[18]Ibid.

Abram Tiro. Masokoane attended Orlando High School and matriculated with the class of 1970. At Orlando he felt he experienced the positive influence of teachers like T.W. Khambule. He was exposed to a rich education in English literature and was a keen reader of authors like Charles Dickens. In 1971 Masokoane entered the University of Fort Hare. In the late 1960s, Fort Hare had been one of the 'non-white' campuses where students had already been resisting the efforts of the apartheid regime to control students. Students there had initially refused to form a Student Representative Council (SRC), owing to the constant victimisation of student representatives. Instead they began to organise under the banner of the University Christian Movement (UCM),' which was one of the influential bodies that led to the formation of SASO. Students staged a protest when management refused to agree to their demands and many students were suspended, and some expelled.[19] To send Masokoane to Fort Hare, his mother and brother made huge financial sacrifices, believing that giving him a chance to attend the university where elite Africans studied would give him a good foundation in life. At Fort Hare, Masokoane majored in politics and psychology.

While a student at Fort Hare, Masokoane quickly got involved in student politics and discovered a penchant for writing poetry. He joined the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and contributed poetry regularly to the *SASO Newsletter*. On SASO membership and writing poetry for the SASO Newsletter, Masokoane recalls that he began writing poetry in high school but honed his skills at Fort Hare:

> I think when I was in 1967, I used to go to the blackboards ... after exams, students are lazing around, so I used to write on the blackboard my verse. There was this natural thing in me of the instinct to write and I think that would be the evolution of the South African Students', the SASO newsletter, as it were contributed a lot of poetry to that newsletter, which was then edited at one point by Strini Moodley and Ben Langa, the brother to Mandla Langa, so...

He continues, adding detail on his influences:

[19] Mzamane, Maaba, and Biko, "The Black Consciousness Movement," 109.

> One was reading a lot of banned literature as it were, especially work coming out of the US, Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nicki Giovanni, James Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, yeah yeah so... Yeah, I started writing then in the early 70s. So, after expulsion from Fort Hare, I think my writing really you know grew. I remember I used to move in and around Vrededorp with Don Mattera.[20]

One of the poems Masokoane wrote and was later published in the *SASO Newsletter* was 'Black Nana,' printed in the March/April 1973 issue and reproduced in full below:

> BLACK NANA AVENGE! ARISE!
>
> WHORE! WHORE!
> The rough voice echoed through the air
> WHORE! WHORE!... WHORE!
> It still stands in the sky
> You Black Devil!
> Her jerking knees began trembling
> The Devil! You Black Devil
> She trembled, fear and agony entered her heart
> Master... Master... Master ... Here I stand
> The big stomach seemed to grow stronger
> He may be born at any moment. Please...!
> Her words choked her tiny voice
> I don't want it! No Black devils for me
> He neared the [p]oor lass in anger
> Devil, Devil... Take the devil out!
> His eyes were red, They showed red anger
> I need him, I want him! I need him
> She stood in fear, and the fear gave her
> confidence
> He is coming, the world needs him, here he
> comes …
> She opened her legs and made a short squat
> No … No … BLACK DEVIL NO!
> His hands now had a panga
> Bring the Black Devil, bring him here!
> In his strides death was written.
> In death you stand, Black woman
> She now looked relieved, she needed …
> The hour has come, death have me!
> Comfort got into her, she was calm
> Have him! The devil must die!
> The panga flickered with the skies
> And he dies! Powerful death, die ...!
> Thunder and flicker, the moan, agony!
> There it goes; The devil is dead
> Strodes of blood, filthy water ran her thighs

[20] Ibid.

down
The great womanhood wall was torn open
The blood increased, it ran … It ran …
And ran
The foetus dangled, it was swinging
The womb sparkling white! Carried the baby
She fell, and when She fell. She fell
Chained to the umbilical chord he was there
THE BLACK BITCH IS DEAD!
BLACK BLOOD! FLOW... BLACK BLOOD!
THE MOTHER IS DEAD, BUTCHERED!
RAPED!
The roots grow. BLACK NANA grow
Your ivory is white, your body is BLACK
Grow son. NANA grow, Grow!
Nana … Nana we want our mama Back!
Mama the pig is pink
The pink pig is white
Mama why is a white pig?
The pig, white pink pig
Honkie did you kill my mama?
Honkie did you rape my sister?
Honkie what happened to BLACK mama?
If death sounds there is always a knell
When your soul is troubled you cry
If your body is wounded there is always pain
When death arrives there is no escape
BLACK NANA Save Me!
If a man wants to live he must fight
Black Nana spare me!
You must live, to live you must die
I will never grin to a white pig
I shall never give my eye to a white pig
When I clench my fist, beware white pig
BLACK Nana hates Whiteman
ARISE ... ARISE IF YOU CAN
SPIT THEM WITH BLACK VENOM
RAPE THEM. FUCK THEM, SPOIL THEM
IF YOU WILL
BLACK NANA ARISE, ARISE BLACK
NANA
The white god is out of my heart
Never will I hug him and say master
I shall never speak to you white pig
My Black back is turned against you
Raise your BLACK FIST
PUT i[t] high, I BLACK NANA
BLACK man you are on your OWN
Power, Might, Love, Solidarity!
I am the BLACK NANA!

ARISE! BLACK NANA ARISE!
THERE IS A CRY FOR YOU
ARISE! BLACK NANA ARISE!
I AM THE BLACK NANA!

Glenn Masokoane[21]

An allegory for a raped African continent and the Black womanhood defiled, Masokoane's poem is highly radical. It tells the story of the birth of the black child, Nana, to a raped woman who has been murdered in the process. Her death and the rapture of her womb, however, leads to the birth of a black child who has to take up resistance by raising its fist against the oppressor. In this poem, Masokoane uses the term pig to refer to the oppressor, a globally recognised term that black people used to refer to especially white policemen. These lines were bound to draw the attention of the state and in fact in the SASO/BPC trial from 1975 to the end of 1976, prosecution presented this poem as one of its pieces of evidence.[22] Masokoane remembers that when he later joined PET, 'Black Nana' was one of the poems he read both as a standalone poem and as part of performances of *Shanti*. However, it was not always safe to perform such poems as he notes, 'some poems we won't read because we know that the system is out there you know listening or we were not brave enough.'[23]

After participating in PET and during the arrests and trial of his peers, Masokoane went into exile. First to Nigeria and then settled in the United Kingdom. Masokoane returned to South Africa after the end of apartheid. In London, Masokoane was a founding member of Pitso, a group of South African artists in exile. According to Eugene Skeef, himself a poet and musician, Pitso was founded in London in 1982 and had the mission to be a 'broadly based non-sectarian, supra-politico cultural movement of (mainly) Black South African artists who

[21]*SASO Newsletter* 3, no. 1 (March/April 1973), 6-7.
[22]Michael Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era* (Clarendon Press, 1996), 68.
[23]Masokoane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

realise their great need as Black people to re-interpret themselves to the world, and to arrest the further erosion of the people's culture by the alien, "dominant" culture of the oppressor.'[24] Other members of Pitso included sculptor/poet Pitika Ntuli, Molefe Pheto (discussed in some depth below), Eugene Skeef, the pianist, vocalist and composer Nomvula Dlazilwana, and poet Justice Mabhena. Pitso was non-partisan, although the ANC tried to co-opt the group into cultural festivals in exile. Nevertheless, the group tried to maintain its independence and had connections with artists from Africa and the broader black diaspora, including Paloma Zozaya, a drummer from Mexico, and Luciana Proaño, the Peruvian choreographer. Pitso also had ties with Vusi Mchunu in Berlin (another South African exile), the Black British poet Lynton Kwesi Johnson and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.[25] 'Inxiles' such as Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka, the subjects of subsequent substantive chapters of this thesis, also interacted with Pitso members. While broadly inspiring British artists to support the cultural boycott against apartheid South Africa and maintaining formal and informal connections with the Anti-Apartheid Movement (UK), the group held exhibitions and events to both advocate for the end of apartheid and raise money for the movement. In January 1986, for example, Pitso organised an exhibition at the Brixton Art Gallery called 'Monti Wa Marumo!,' or 'boomerang to the source' in English (orig. Setswana/return to the source), that included music, performances, food and the visual and plastic arts. Masokoane was deeply involved in all these activities before returning to South Africa after the unbanning of the liberation movements in the early 1990s.[26]

[24]Eugene Skeef, 'Exiled South African Cultural Activists Advance the Liberation Struggle in Foreign Lands: The London Experiences', in *Culture and Liberation Struggle in South Africa – From Colonialism to Apartheid*, ed. Lebogang Lance Nawa (Johannesburg: Ssali Publishing House, 2021), 249.
[25]Ibid., 264–65.
[26]Pitso is a Sotho/Tswana word for a public gathering or public assembly in a rural setting in the deep past where public policies were debated and resolutions taken. Decisions included matters of public works, public health, waging war, foreign affairs, etc.

Sadeque Variava

Another member of PET was Sadeque Variava, born in 1949 in Pietersburg, known today as Polokwane. Variava's early political activism included participating in anti-Republican day protests at school. As he tells it, he comes from an Indian merchant-class background. That notwithstanding, a culture of reading was instilled in his home as a youth. 'Just the interesting thing this, in Pietersburg, those days there were no libraries for blacks, so my father was very well read and he birthed a library and the entire time all the guys used to use our house as a library although the house was actually a shack but a big you know with some landlord, the whole town used to come there for books, so I suppose that's where even the habit of reading came at a very young age because I mean you're used to seeing books around you and my dad used to read a lot too, so that's how I caught into things'[27]. In 1970 Variava enrolled at the Transvaal Indian College of Education where he studied to be a high school History and English teacher and became the Student Representative Council (SRC) president in his first year. It is at this time that he connected to SASO.

While an undergraduate student, Variava read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed;* he also read about Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture) and Black Power, as well as works of Fanon such as *The Wretched of the Earth*. Later, through SASO, he got connected to Adam Small (South African poet and Lecturer from the University of the Western Cape who also led a theatre group called Cape Flats Theatre.)[28] Conscious of events happening at other segregated tertiary schools, when Variava heard about the 1972 Turfloop walkouts after Abram Tiro's expulsion he mobilised his fellow students in Johannesburg. Tiro, who historian Anne Heffernan calls 'Black Consciousness's lost leader' was president of the SRC at the University of the North in 1971 (also known as Turfloop after the rural farm in the

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[27]Variava, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[28]International Defence and Aid Fund, *Black Theatre in South Africa*.

then north Transvaal where the college was located), and a member of SASO. It was here that he made his famous graduation speech that criticised Bantu Education and the system of separate development more broadly.[29] The speech was incendiary and caught the university's mostly white Afrikaner leadership by surprise, leading to Tiro's expulsion two days later.[30] Following this, the SRC decided to boycott classes in support of Tiro. The administration subsequently expelled all students, demanding that they reapply for admission by signing a document that acknowledged Tiro's expulsion and the SRC's dissolution.[31]

In support of Tiro, students met in Alice, Cape Province, adopted a document later called the Alice Declaration. It noted the unrest at the segregated black universities, singling out Turfloop, and called for students to support the student body there by walking out of classes. 'The Alice Declaration was taken up by students at the Universities of Fort Hare, the Western Cape, Zululand, and Durban-Westville, and, for a time during the winter of 1972, each of these universities was closed by student protest'[32] Heffernan writes. Another college impacted by events at Turfloop, and the shift to direct protest within SASO, was the Transvaal College of Education for Indians in Johannesburg. Variava remembers the impact of Tiro's speech and the subsequent Alice Declaration on his own activism:

> it was a Friday, I called in a mass meeting of our students and told them that we are marching out in solidarity with Tiro and then from that I got called to go to Durban to speak to the so-called Indian campuses there so we managed to get Durban-Westville, Springfield College of Education, M.S. Sultan in one hall and I spoke to them about joining the student boycott.[33]

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[29]Anne Heffernan, 'Black Consciousness's Lost Leader: Abraham Tiro, the University of the North, and the Seeds of South Africa's Student Movement in the 1970s', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 173–86. Recently, a major biography of Tiro has been published. See Gaongalelwe Tiro, *Parcel of Death: The Biography of Onkgopotse Abram Tiro* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2019).
[30]Mojuta Motlhamme, 'A Social Biography of Onkgopotse Abram Tiro: The Influence of Dinokana in His Life 1945-1973' (Honours Thesis, Johannesburg, South Africa, University of the Witwatersrand, 2018), 51–61.
[31]Heffernan, 'Black Consciousness's Lost Leader', 180.
[32]Ibid.
[33]Variava, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

While Variava was not expelled from the college after these events, he had trouble getting employment after graduation. The first informal work between Shiqomo and the Lenasia group, before forming People's Experimental Theatre - which is discussed below - was *An Evening of Black Thoughts* at the Rama Krishna Hall in Lenasia. At this stage, in late 1972 or early 1973, other Black Consciousness activists such as Don Mattera and Farouk Asvat were involved.[34] These events eventually led to the formation of the Black Peoples' Theatre Group, which would later merge with Shiqomo to form PET.

It is worth noting that Variava was detained at beginning of 1975 as part of the aggressive round up of thirteen SASO and BPC activists following the Viva Frelimo rallies of September 1974. The initial indictment, which included Variava, was challenged by the defence team and the prosecution withdrew it. New indictments prepared by the prosecution removed Variava and charged him separately in November 1975.[35] In December 1974 Nomsisi Khuzwayo (née Kraai) was arrested and charged under the Suppression of Terrorism Act for her writings in the *PET Newsletter*. According to the *Rand Daily Mail* Khuzwayo, then working for the Black Peoples' Convention in Durban, was granted R2,000 bail at the Pretoria Supreme Court on the 8th of December. Variava had earlier been released on R5,000 bail.[36] The same newspaper reported in February of 1977 that 'the State has dropped two Terrorism Act charges against a Johannesburg teacher after he had spent more than seven months in jail and a further 16 on bail awaiting trial.' The article went on to explain that Khuzwayo's charges had also been dismissed. The two were 'former members of the People's Experimental Theatre [and] appeared before Mr Justice De Villiers in the Supreme Court in Pretoria yesterday for formal withdrawal of the charges.' The article continued that 'neither had been asked to plead to the charges, which related to the publication of a PET newsletter in 1973 and the production of the

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[34]Variava; *Black Review* 1973, 109.
[35]Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, 49 Footnote 5.
[36]*Rand Daily Mail*, 'Bail in Terror Case,' 9 December 1975, 6.

play "Shanti" in 1973 and 1974.' The prosecutor noted that his (unnamed) superiors had made the decision to drop the charges.[37] Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper, both members of the TECON (more is said about TECON below), were the only two who were directly involved with theatre to remain on trial. A detailed discussion of their testimony is out of the scope of this chapter, however as, Michael Lobban notes, the very inclusion of SASO and BPC activists who were not directly involved in the Viva Frelimo rallies made this a trial of Black Consciousness ideas as much as it was of a conspiracy to cause insurrection. 'If the Viva Frelimo rallies had great symbolic importance, the threat they presented to public order in the Republic was negligible,' Lobban argues. 'In perceiving the rallies as the culmination of a revolutionary plot, and in reacting to them with such a comprehensive crack-down on black consciousness supporters, the authorities were clearly overreacting to the danger posed. Yet if the actions of the organizations seemed minor, their ideas were clearly potentially dangerous.'[38] Variava became active in the BPC, which led to his arrest in October 1977 on what is known as Black Wednesday. He was detained at Modderbee prison, where he says he got a chance to read and expand his understanding of Marx, Dostoevsky and other writers.[39] After his release, Variava continued theatrical work throughout the 1980s, although on a smaller scale.

According to the *Black Review* 1973, PET staged the play *Shanti* by Mthuli Shezi in Lenasia, Soweto and Durban. Following connections with Strini Moodley in Durban, the group got hold of the play *Requiem for Brother X* by W.W. Mackay. There is no record of how many times *Requiem* was performed, suffice to say that by 1974 the situation in the country had become tense with the initial banning of Black Consciousness activists including Steve Biko, curtailing activities of theatre workers within the movement. The chapter will turn to a discussion of *Shanti* the play within the context of the Peoples' Experimental Theatre.

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[37]*Rand Daily Mail,* 'Terror Charges Dropped,' 1 February 1977, 5.
[38]Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, 77–78.
[39]Variava, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

Shanti and Mthuli ka Shezi

According to an unpublished profile by the political scientist Gail Gerhart, Mthuli Shezi was born Mthuli Nicodemus Shezi in 1950 and came from Alexandra, a township north of Johannesburg. Shezi would later drop Nicodemus and prefer to be known as Mthuli ka Shezi. Like Variava and Masokoane, Shezi took on leadership at the University of Zululand, becoming SRC president in 1970. He remained on the SRC in 1972 when Tiro was suspended from the University of the North at Turfloop, which led to him walking out of classes, never to return.[40] In a 2007 interview, SASO member Deborah Matshoba remembered being at Zululand when the news of Tiro's expulsion came and describes the reaction of Shezi who she calls a 'short guy, but with a gigantic mind [who was] very religious, Catholic.' Matshoba recalls: 'Mthuli comes and says, "There's a telegram! There's a telegram!" And it was lunchtime - no faxes or anything, we communicated by telegram. "Tiro has been expelled! This and that has happened at Turfloop. So solidarity, they care calling for solidarity." And so we had our placards around campus--- "Reinstate Tiro!"'[41] While back home in Alexandra, Shezi conceived of and wrote the play *Shanti*. In her biographical file notes for Shezi, Gerhart writes the following:

> [Tebogo] Mafole was present when Mthuli Shezi, a good friend of Mafole's, told Kente that his plays were not "educational" enough, i.e. political enough. Kente was a big somebody, and he scornfully told Shezi that if he thought so, why didn't he write his own play? So Shezi went and wrote "Shanti". And when Shanti played at the DOCC it outdrew Kente's play which was then running somewhere else in Soweto. Kente then wised up and wrote "How Long?" and "Too Late."'[42]

While this memory that Gerhart recorded after having a conversation with Mafole cannot be verified, it is important to note that the BCM had strong opinions on the popular township

[40]Historical Papers Research Archive [Hereafter HPRA], A2675, Karis-Gerhart Collection, Part V, Political Profiles, Reel 95, 'Shezi, Mtuli Nicodemus.'

[41]Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Suzanne Alexander, and Nigel C. Gibson, 'Interview with Deborah Matshoba', in *Biko Lives!: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, 1st ed, Contemporary Black History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 277.

[42]HPRA, A 2675 Karis-Gerhart Collection, Part V Biographical Files, Shezi

musical, which it sought to replace with more relevant entertainment. Furthermore, after Shezi had been murdered and PET put on the play *Shanti* in Soweto, Masokoane remembers that the experienced playwright came to rehearsals to offer advice.[43]

The young activists, in turn, influenced Kente's work, in many ways launching his 'political' period. Masokoane recalls: 'How Long… How Long was already a song in *Shanti*, the play that we were doing…'. He continues:

> ...understand what happens in 1972 to '73 because the People's Experimental Theatre ran for I would say a year. Yeah, so *How Long* is a line that came out of you know the theatre piece of *Shanti*. And then Gibson you know then wrote *How Long* his stage play. I must say in his favour, he would come to our rehearsals to come and coach because I think we were youngsters, we were just radical you know and had no inkling of you know box office, yeah that was not our purpose, so there was that collaboration, and but we were dealing with very heavy stuff.[44]

That PET and Mthuli ka Shezi were dynamic young people who took Soweto and Lenasia's theatre scene by storm in those few performances of 1972 and 1973 is without question, even pushing the older Kente to reconsider his theatre—at least for a few years before facing Transkeian police while filming *How Long*. The staging was also revolutionary, as discussed shortly and could have prompted a strong response for those in attendance.

Shanti's script was published in *South African People's Plays*, edited by Robert Kavanagh, and it is this version I use in my critical analysis.[45] This section focuses on the political salience of *Shanti* in light of what we know about Black Consciousness and how the actors were exercising their agency in this historical moment, setting off a new wave of Theatre of Resistance that continues to the present day. The anthology *South Africa's People's Plays* was promptly banned in South Africa (more on this below). *Shanti* consists of a total of fourteen characters, played by four actors. While the thirteen subdivisions of the play are not fully

[43]Mthuli ka Shezi was pushed in front of a train by a white railway attendant near Johannesburg. He had spoken up against ill-treatment of black women at the same station a few days earlier.
[44]Masokoane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[45]Kavanagh et al., *South African People's Plays - Ons Phola Hi*.

developed scenes in the standard theatrical sense, the script calls them scenes. Other aspects of the play are quite experimental, such as use of tableau, a circular narrative framework and the playing of several characters by one actor. The characters are Shanti, Thabo Mokgethi, Gift Koos Mogani, General Mobu (in Mozambique), First Policeman, Second Policeman, Seargent, Newspaper Vendor, Sandra (a friend of the trio, Shanti, Koos and Thabo), two prisoners, Themba (another prisoner Themba Kuboni, 'unconscietized'), Mangaya (another revolutionary in Mozambique). According to the editor, 'The first performance of *Shanti* was held in November 1973. It was acted by PET (People's Experimental Theatre) and directed by uJebe Masokoane. The cast was as follows: Shanti - Nomsisi Kraai, Thabo- uJebe Masokoane, Koos - Victor Molathlegi Modise, and General Mobu - Basil Vusi Khumalo.'[46]

In Scene One, the setting is simple, with only a few props on stage. A white dustcoat indicates that, perhaps, Shanti is a medical student. The stage directions note that a song, 'Zikolise,' is hummed in the background as the poem '*How Long'* is recited. It is this powerful poem that inspired Kente's play *How Long* and includes the lines, 'How long shall it be, Lord/ how long must we carry this burden/ how long must we yield?' The presence of the African struggle song, 'Zikolise', whose humming sounds invoked a ritualistic feeling, together with powerfully intoned words would likely have had a powerful impact on the audience of supporters. In Scene Two, the couple, Shanti and Thabo, are introduced, as is Koos whose trouble being racially reclassified (the text implies he would like to change his classification) is explored. The back story is that his parents were a white farmer father and an African mother. In an exchange with Shanti regarding his challenge being reclassified , this exchange and the play in general attacks Population Registration Act. 'You know I am not craving to be a Coloured but I am told I am too fair and my hair too woolly to be an African. I am not dying

[46]Robert Mshengu Kavanagh (ed), *South African People's Plays: Ons Phola Hi ; Plays by Gibson Kente, Credo V. Mutwa, Mthuli Shezi and Workshop '71* (Grove City: Heinemann, 1992), 67. *Shanti* was named after South African anti-apartheid activist Shanti Naidoo.

to be an African either, but I detest to be called ‘Other Coloured’, CA. In fact, I hate classification as a whole. It is so artificial and immoral. Why can't I just be South African?’[47] Koos remarks.

Scene Three further develops the theme of the futility of racial classification, while Scene Four turns to the theme of resistance and how black men would only truly become men if they resisted apartheid. The dialogue culminates in Shanti, very graphically asking Thabo to ‘Take off your pants and come here. Yeah, your pants, man. What are these? Decorations, indeed! You are no man in the sense positive. A man you are if it means having what you have before you. You call yourself a Blackman, What does it mean to you? Have you ever cared to ask?’[48] In Scenes Five and Six, the action turns to Thabo’s imprisonment for a crime he did not commit. In a prison scene, the other prisoners and Thabo question the ‘false garment of Christianity’ that the Nationalist government wears. Above emotive humming music, Thabo suggests a different, liberation theology based on black theology. He exhorts, ‘Sing on, my Black brothers, sing on. But do not make it end. Speak up and demand an answer. Speak up and say your say. You faceless millions! Speak up, you images of God! Ask your white brothers for the truth. Nothing must remain unsaid.’[49] Thabo’s speech reflects the idea of the new black man in South African Black Theology, which was developing at the same time, in which theologians such as Manas Buthelezi were grappling with what it meant to be made in God’s image. According to Magaziner, in the eyes of this new Black Theology ‘To be made in the image of God was to be virile and robust, especially in contrast to the dandified non-white,

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[47]M. Shezi, ‘*Shanti*’, in *South African People’s Plays - Ons Phola Hi: Plays*, ed. R. M. Kavanagh, African Writers Series 224 (Heinemann, 1981), 70.
[48]Ibid., 74.
[49]Ibid., 77.

with his rather effeminate curls pasted on his forehead. In Black Theology, the image of God was a manly one, with a stern, serious expression.'[50]

In Scene Seven, Themba (a comrade) and Thabo discuss escaping from a moving prison truck. And in Scene Eight they have escaped to Mozambique and encountered a guerilla fighter's camp. There's a comic moment when General Mobu, 'throws a gun to Themba'. Themba responds, 'No! I'll not help any terrorist!'[51]; Themba has imbibed the rhetoric of the apartheid government and its supporters (such as the U.S. government). (Themba's character comes back in Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* as an unconscientised individual). Is Themba a freedom fighter or terrorist? It depends on who is defining the term. Mobu's soliloquy prefigures Black Consciousness's impending turn to armed struggle: 'When words failed, I got tired of seeing my people talk-talk to stones, dead stones. I couldn't stand indirectly supporting the evils that are being meted out to my brothers. I couldn't abandon my own kind to some third-class citizenship.'[52]

Scenes Nine to Thirteen are the denouement of the play. Scene Nine expertly mixes politics with love. A discussion between Shanti and Koos, Shanti described her uneasy life as a black person in South Africa: 'Even at prayer I no longer thank as they thank the Lord./Mine is full of petitions, questions, expectations.' But she then turns to speaking of her love for Thabo, beginning, 'If Thabo were to vanish from this world as a drop of water goes to/earth,/ I would seek the same.' She insists, 'I love his resolute outlook on life.'[53] Shanti's love for her lover is increased by him exercising his Blackmanhood. The message that Shezi was sending is clear: to be a black man, to be worthy of love in this new non-racial society that Black Consciousness was building was to resist the infantilisation that apartheid had wrought.

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[50]Daniel Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977*, New African Histories Series (Athens : Johannesburg: Ohio University Press ; Jacana, 2010), 112.
[51]Shezi, '*Shanti*', 79.
[52]Ibid., 90.
[53]Ibid., 90.

Unfortunately, Thabo has died while at camp, meeting his fate by falling headfirst down a cliff. Before dying, he posted a letter to Shanti, which reads, in part, ‘Keep well, my darling, and keep watching the gate for me, for one day I will come carrying a banner of liberation, when racism will be a thing of the past.’ Shanti affirms that she will wait for Thabo, ‘I will always be watching the gate/lest I miss the first sight of liberation/when racism shall be a thing of the past.’ Shanti is impressed with the ‘mighty change’ Thabo has undergone in his exile.

Shanti is, therefore, both a play about apartheid as it is about the effect that apartheid has on black men, and charts a way forward. At the end of the play, as in the first scene, Shanti enters carrying a white dustcoat and upon hearing news of her lover’s demise she begins to mourn while the Song ‘Zikolise’ is sung in the background.

In an interview that historian Dan Magaziner conducted with Black Consciousness and TECON activist Strini Moodley in 2006, he reflected on the play *Shanti* and her involvement in its development:

> when Mthuli brought it to me, I said to him-go and rewrite it and don't be so, keep it subtle. But by then there were other enthusiastic younger groups all over the country who wanted the *Shanti* script because you see, you can make something happen up to a point but thereafter I can't censor and control what those I've taught wish to do. So that when they did *Shanti*, I said fine, you can go ahead and do it, my advice is that its going to fail, because its hitting people on the head with a hammer and it will never in the end get its message across. Which actually turned out that way.[54]

Moodley’s approach to revolutionary theatre was different from Mthuli ka Shezi’s or PET’s, probably because, unlike other people in the BCM, Moodley was trained in theatre at university. His claim that *Shanti* failed does not live up to the evidence; it was indeed curtailed by the machinations of the security state but that does not mean it did not rouse at least some activists, including those involved in its creation. Nevertheless, Moodley’s interview presents

[54]Moodley, Interview conducted by Daniel Magaziner.

vital evidence of links between cultural groups across South Africa in this early period of Black Consciousness theatre. The chapter will now briefly sketch how these connections happened.

Banning of *South African People's Plays*.

In 1981 Heinemann's African Writers Series published the anthology *South African People's Plays,* edited by Robert Kavanagh. The book included scripts of *Shanti*, Kente's *Too Late*, Workshop '71's *Survival*, and Credo Mutwa's *uNosilimela*. Kavanagh, a figure who deserves a study of his own, was a founder of Workshop '71, editor of *S'ketsh'* and an academic. Not surprisingly, the book was banned in South Africa soon after publication under the Publications Act of 1974. It was deemed to be 'prejudicial to the ... general welfare or the peace and good order'. In late 1984 the South African Library applied to the directorate to review its earlier decision; the application was denied. In this case, the directorate sent the book to a Ms. Giannelos to serve as a preliminary reader. In her report, recommending that the ban be maintained, Giannelos singled out *Shanti* as a play that was undesirable because of its past association with the BCM and the SASO/BPC trial. She claimed that such a play was not a 'artistic or literary works but solely intended to achieve its political objectives through immediate or "inartistic" methods.'[55] If this early Black Consciousness theatre bordered on political sloganeering, it nevertheless laid the groundwork for later theatre. The chairman of the committee assembled a secondary group of readers who agreed with Giannelos: 'the plays have sufficient revolutionary content, calculated to incite readers to illegal acts.' The committee was aware of the impact of accompanying music and poetry. They continued, 'the likely audience, as was proven in Soweto, will consist of Blacks who are artificially incited by the strident presentation of the scenes, and the background music.' The committee of four, unanimous in its decision and the events of Soweto still in their minds, raised the spectre that

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[55]South African National Archives, Western Cape Archives and Records Service [Hereafter SANA WCARS], Directorate of Publications Records, IDP 3/217*South African People's Plays* Censorship File.

the use of theatre was a communist ploy to destabilise South Africa.[56] It was only in 1991 when the censors were unbanning political material *en masse* that the book was quietly and swiftly unbanned.

Molefe Pheto, Mihloti Black Theatre and the MDALI Festivals

Almost simultaneously with the development of drama in the SASO, groups of artistically inclined youth in the townships of Johannesburg were grouping together to form poetry and theatre groups. One of the most prominent of these groups was the Mihloti Black Theatre group, started in Alexandra, north of Johannesburg. To trace the development of this strand of theatre which was in conversation with the BCM, I will sketch the life of Molefe Pheto, a leader of this movement. Mihloti is important in the history of South African Resistance Theatre because they directly influenced the playwrights who form the rest of this study.

Molefe Pheto: A Life in Cultural Activism

Molefe Pheto was born on 11 June 1935 and raised in Alexandra township where he attended the Alexandra Swiss Mission School. His family lived at 2125 19th Avenue in Alexandra until 1972 when they relocated to 8395B Diepkloof. Pheto attended Orlando High School when Es'kia Mphahlele - who would become a renowned South African writer and professor of African Literature - was a teacher and taught Pheto Afrikaans[57]. He had a vivid imagination from the time he was a child, as illustrated in an episode he writes about in his first memoir *And Night Fell:*

> During my boyhood days in the slums of Alexandra Township, my friends and I had great fun checking on people whose facial features resembled certain animals. The most

[56] SANA WCARS, '*South African People's Plays* Censorship File.'

[57] Mphahlele would later become the chair of the Funda Centre board, discussed in Chapter Six.

> popular of these were goat, monkey, horse, owl, hyena and dog. In most instances, the names were more fitting in our vernaculars than in English, because often they were suggestive of some mystical qualities or were onomatopoeic.[58]

Pheto would later use this strategy to mentally parody the black security policemen tormenting him during his first interrogation at John Vorster Square (since renamed Johannesburg Central Police Station), the seat of the Johannesburg Security Police in the 1970s. 'He reminded me of tearful hyena,' Pheto recalls. 'He had that firm, long nose of a hyena, starting from somewhere between his eyes and beyond… His mouth was large and wide, accompanied by a permanent smile showing strong teeth which resembled a hyena's. He always addressed the White policemen as *Marena* (kings.)'[59]

Keenly aware of the importance of discovering his own heritage from an early age, Pheto recalls that 'I was baptised a Roman Catholic and they said my name must be Joseph, I said no. Why can't you baptise me … I was still Phineas. No, I don't want Joseph. But they baptised me and called me Joseph.'[60] He later left the Catholic Church after being denied communion before white parishioners and never went back. In his 1983 memoirs, he recalls the challenges with this birth name Phineas [Gaboronoe Phetoe], which he abandoned early on. Both 'Gaborone' and 'Pheto' were incorrectly spelt by the authorities.[61] Partly because of this misidentification through naming, Pheto went on a quest to discover his Bakgatla ancestry in Botswana in 1957.

Pheto held several jobs and was involved in some political activity before becoming one of the founders of Mihloti Black Theatre. He had worked at a clinic in Alexandra and then from 1955 to 1966, and in the library of the University of the Witwatersrand when Robert Sobukwe was an instructor at the same university. At this time, however, and before the

[58]Molefe Pheto, *And Night Fell: Memoirs of a Political Prisoner in South Africa* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983), 43.
[59]Ibid., 43.
[60]Molefe Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Magaliesberg, South Africa, 16 October 2022.
[61]Pheto, *And Night Fell*.

formation of the Pan Africanist Congress, Pheto was a member of the ANC Youth League and a member of a boxing club in Alex alongside Joe Gqabi, who would later be a key figure in the underground ANC, uMkhonto we Sizwe, and was assassinated by apartheid's security agents in Harare in 1981. In 1955, Pheto was part of the team that collected demands from the people of Alexandra to include in the final Freedom Charter and he led a group to Kliptown's Congress of the People.[62] Finally, Pheto was a keen percussionist and 'played drums with VhaVenda dancers in the townships of Alexandra and Soweto'[63] sometime in the early 1960s. 'These groups, BaPedi, VhaTshonga and VhaVenda had a tendency to play music and dance in the yards of the townships on given Sundays.'[64]

Finding himself at Dorkay House, he worked for Union Artists' production of *King Kong* in 1959 as a costume master. The job involved working in the wardrobe and helping dress the men. In this job, he interacted with artists who would later go on to make a huge mark on South African including cultural activists such as Miriam Makeba. Pheto was interested in playing the trumpet and he bought one on lay-by, which cost '35 pounds; it took me six months to pay for it. A pound, maybe here 10 shillings here and pounds but eventually, I got it out. I got it out and then I tried to teach myself by ear.'[65] Recognising the need for training, Pheto approached Vincent Vitali at the African Music and Drama Association (AMDA), which had by then been founded at Dorkay House. He studied under Vitali for two years, between 1964 and 1966, before heading to the Guildhall School of Music in the United Kingdom for a full-time course. At Guildhall, where he would spend the next four years, Pheto studied the trumpet further (with piano as the second instrument). In his last year, Pheto worked on conducting, voice and the double bass.[66] While he did not receive any theatrical training first hand, being

[62]Molefe Pheto, *The Bull from Moruleng: Vistas of Home and Exile* (Johannesburg: Ekaam Books, 2012).
[63]Molefe Pheto, 'The Arts and Liberation in South Africa circa 1971 to 1994' (Unpublished Manuscript, n.d.).
[64]Ibid.
[65]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[66]Ibid.

in the environment of Guildhall, an elite school for the arts in the UK, did leave impressions on Pheto that influenced the work of Mihloti Black Theatre. He recalls: 'when I was at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, as a music student, you could go and watch rehearsals of the theatre or drama group. And during those rehearsals is where they [were] getting further lessons on how to act so I took that in and I brought a bit of that to Mihloti.'[67] Upon return from the UK, Pheto became a musical and cultural officer of AMDA, a job which involved teaching music.[68] While this short overview of Pheto's life is not conclusive (it leaves out his underground work for the PAC and then the BCMA and his later work in AZAPO upon return from exile), it nevertheless lays the groundwork for understanding his cultural resistance work. The chapter now turns to a discussion of the Mihloti Black Theatre. Future studies could also explore the work of Black Consciousness adherents in exile, a field of study dominated by cultural production that was related to the ANC.

Mihloti Black Theatre

In his novel *To Every Birth Its Blood,* initially published in 1978 by Ravan Press, Mongane Wally Serote, an early member of Mihloti, which means 'tears', describes a theatre group in Alexandra that was working sometime in the uprisings of the 1970s.[69] In the novel, Vuki and Onalenna, friends of the protagonist John, are part of the fictive Takalane Players, who risk arrest to share their message with various groups of people in Alex and Soweto. As part of a play that happens in the novel, the Takalane Players perform for a group of church women on a Sunday 'at the Alexandra Creche and Welfare Centre'. 'The hall was packed with red, blue, green and black blouses, hats and skirts of mothers who believed in God. It was very

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[67]Ibid.
[68]Pheto, *And Night Fell*, 27.
[69]Mongane Wally Serote, *To Every Birth Its Blood* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2005), 141.

quiet in the hall.'[70] John walks in on a scene where Vuki is sweeping backstage. Onalenna talks about how 'the streets are clean now,' continuing:

> They took the guns away
> They took the killers away
> Maybe, maybe, just maybe they won't come back.

(She smiled. It was a strange, sad smile, and her eyes were shining.)

> Remember, they did it in Sharpeville long long ago
> And in Cato Manor
> In Sekhukhuniland and in Pondoland
> In Bulhoek
> Every time, after they do it,
> We clean the streets.

(She gestured behind her, where Vuki was sweeping.)

> We remove the blood, it's not nice to walk on
> We remove the bodies
> …
> We are people
> Who have struggled a long long time
> Now we have to use the lessons of our struggle![71]

This fictive theatre show happens in a time when the police and army have left the township after quelling protests and the actors show how—by alluding to previous periods of protest, repression and reconstitution of the political community—it is possible to draw on these lessons to sustain higher levels of resistance. Onalenna does not need to name the apartheid government, the audience knew who 'they' were. This subtlety in revolutionary theatre that was necessary in times of such repression was something that Pheto recalled in his interview, it also made the theatre incredibly powerful. The simple gesture of sweeping after bloodshed belies the strength inherent in the oppressed people, that they keep rising after being shot and killed at Sharpeville, at Cato Manor, in the rural uprisings of Sekhukhuneland/Pondoland, and at the Bulhoek Massacre. The People's Experimental Theatre, as seen in the poem *Black Nana*

[70]Serote, *To Every Birth Its Blood*, 141.
[71] Ibid., 141-124.

by Ujebe Masokoane above were not quite as subtle. In their own testimony, they were young, impatient and fearless and, perhaps, not seasoned artists unlike their counterparts in Alexandra. PET was hence directly censored by the security police while the security apparatus had to find other ways of containing the activities of groups such as Mihloti.

According to Molefe Pheto, Mihloti Black Theatre was founded in 1971 or 1972, soon after his return from studying in England (in December 1970)[72]. A group of young, committed artists came to his home in Alexandra to see what they could do together. Hesitant and apprehensive, Pheto turned them away because he had joined the PAC while in the UK and had underground work to do, in addition to his day job at AMDA. Pheto's wife, Deborah Pheto, encouraged Molefe to give them a chance when they returned, this time with the writer Mongane Serote. Serote was already known as a writer and his debut collection *Yakhal'inkomo* was set to be released that year. This new group was mostly poets. Pheto remembers that the group, apart from Serote, included Montshiwa Seroke, Moje Mokone, Baba Jordaan and a fellow they simply called Squeezy who was 'a beautiful poet.'[73] Other founding members of Mihloti included Thami Mnyele.[74] By this time, Pheto had also written some poems, some of which were published in the literary magazine *The Classic,* edited by Barney Simon and Sipho Sepamla. The initial meetings with this group led to the formation of Mihloti Black Theatre, a group committed to performing only relevant material drawn from original works and from the broader Black diaspora. Pheto, who became the director of Mihloti, recalls:

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[72]Pheto's own recollections put his return from the UK in December 1971, however, the correct date seems to have been December 1970. An article in the *Rand Daily Mail* of 5 February 1971 notes that 'Mr. Phetoe [sic] arrived on Sunday. His wife arrived last month… Mr. Phetoe [sic] is keen to teach music and is presently negotiating with the African Music and Drama Association for a permanent post. He is a part-time teacher at its Dorkay House school of music.' The article also points out that Mrs. Deborah Pheto had studied general nursing at Baragwanath Hospital and a midwifery course at Livingstone Hospital in Port Elizabeth before leaving South Africa. She then studied pediatric nursing at Great Ormond Street Hospital while in the UK 'Couple had success in UK Studies,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Late Final), 5 February 1971, 4.

[73]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

[74]Pheto, 'The Arts and Liberation in South Africa circa 1971 to 1994' Mnyele's life has received a full monograph treatment in Diana Wylie's, *Art + Revolution: The Life and Death of Thami Mnyele, South African Artist* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2008).

> our first performance was in Alexandra Township in a church on a Saturday afternoon, soon after they read their works and then I read my works and then we brought in [French West African poet David Diop's poem] *Africa, My Africa*. We had an audience of about 35 – 40 people there but it was incredible, it was incredible. Saturday afternoon, Anglican church, we didn't pay the priest for the church and for the first time, our people in Alexandra Township saw shirts or something like that because I brought a number of acts from Ghana, from Nigeria and we shared that.[75]

The group also performed work from other local black poets such as Chris van Wyk, the African American group The Last Poets, Jane Cortez, 'speeches from Malcolm X, Du Bois, and from the continent, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong and others.'[76] In these performances, apart from directing, Pheto was the main percussionist. After this performance, the group moved to the DOCC in Soweto, where there was a packed performance. Mihloti grew in leaps and bounds and attracted the attention of the TECON and BPC group in Durban.

While Mihloti was invited to the 1972 TECON/SABTU festival in Natal, according to Pheto they could not make it because of lack of funding. Group members had jobs and did their rehearsals in their free time, often rehearsing at the Alexandra Clinic in the evening. Rehearsals were later held in the basement at the Anglican Church in Orlando. They did not charge for performances. Nevertheless, Mihloti maintained contact with SABTU through the BPC office. It was, in fact, Mongane Serote, at the time working with the BPC's Cultural Committee, who made the connection. As he told Jaki Seroke in an interview published in the April/May Issue of *Staffrider,* 'We had small units within the broad structure of SASO/BPC. I worked with Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper to form South African Black Theatre Union. I then went to Mihloti and later Mdali.' He continues:

> I remember in 1972 we organised a festival in Cape Town under SABTU. We had tried to bring together small and big groups like Mihloti and Mdali to take part in the festival. People felt we were working on a regional level, or an ethnic basis or some such social

[75]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[76]Pheto, 'The Arts and Liberation in South Africa circa 1971 to 1994'.

definition. We tried as much as we could to introduce poetry readings. People were not used to reading poetry publicly. We wanted to conscientize writers and the black public. At that time we had defined our audience as mainly the black community.[77]

One letter in the extant trial records of the State Vs. Saths Cooper case has survived and lends evidence to this vital connection, supporting oral testimony.[78] The undated letter indicates that Mihloti had approached the BPC for sponsorship of performances and that the BPC was following on the matter. Molefe Pheto remembers that Mihloti was by 1973 receiving numerous requests to perform but maintained that they needed time to rehearse; 'we refused to take invitations unless we had 6 weeks rehearsal time.'[79]

Mihloti also performed at the University of the North at Turfloop in May and early June 1973 at an Africa Arts week organised by G.M. Nkondo, who lectured literature at the University. It is this Nkondo who was later called to give testimony at the State vs. Saths Cooper trial. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported that Hugh Tracey, the musicologist and Tim Couzens from the University of the Witwatersrand gave papers as 'authorities on African arts and culture.'[80] The poets Wally Serote, Oswald Mtshali, Mafika Gwala and Don Mattera performed their poetry and there was a staging of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, the play devised by Winston Ntshona, John Kani and Athol Fugard. Other groups that the paper reported would perform included the Ionian chorus and Dashiki. Finally, at a symposium on black theatre, Adam Smal's group from Cape Town and Mihloti staged their works.[81] One of the poems that Mihloti performed at this event was Mokoena Setshedi's 'Tame a Mamba,' which includes the lines:

Tame a mamba

[77]Mongane Serote, interview with Jaki Seroke, *Staffrider* (April/May 1981), 30-31.
[78]HPRA, AD1719, State Vs. Saths Cooper, AD1719 X1, Communication between B.P.C and other black organisations, 'Letter from BPC to Mihloti', nd.
[79]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[80]Martin Mahlaba, 'Week of African Arts at Turfloop,' *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 May 1973, 18.
[81]Mahlaba, 'Week of African Arts.'

Set it to work and starve it
Teach it your language
And when it speaks, lock it in
…
Tame a mamba
But when it resists
And begins to hiss
Send it to the gallows.[82]

In this poem, the mamba is symbolic of black people who, while oppressed, had the potential to fight back. The poem alludes to the harsh labour conditions that black people experienced, and the colonial and apartheid policies of education. Finally, it speaks to the expected results of resistance, imprisonment and death. Poems like these and the symbolic gestures such as holding up of fists during performance had deep resonance with audiences and represented a strong spirit of resistance. This poem provoked the harassment of Mihloti members and eventual arrest of Pheto and other members such as Nkoto Moalushe.[83] In the next section of this chapter, I discuss MDALI festivals, spearheaded by Mihloti Black Theatre, in Soweto. These festivals were opportunities for different groups who were practicing a Theatre of Resistance to come together.

MDALI and the MDALI Festivals

The International Aid and Defence Fund pamphlet on Black Theatre, described the Music, Dance, Arts and Literature Institute (MDALI) as follows: 'MDALI grew from a Soweto theatre group called Mihloti, formed under a tree in 1972.'[84] MDALI was formed by Mihloti, the Obi Theatre Academy ran by David Phetoe, Dashiki which included Lefifi Tladi, Sipho Sepamla's Spirit Theatre Effort, Corney Mabaso Theatre, and visual artists such as Ben Arnold, Ezrom Legae, and Kehla Maqhubela.[85] People like Sepamla and Mohlamme led groups that affiliated with MDALI, while others, including Chris van Wyk, Connie Mabaso, Tiza

[82]Mbanjwa, *Black Review* 1974/1975.
[83]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[84]International Defence and Aid Fund, *Black Theatre in South Africa*, 7.
[85]Pheto, 'The Arts and Liberation in South Africa circa 1971 to 1994'.

Mazibuko, Don Mattera, and Mongane Wally Serote joined as individuals. The cultural activist, poet and filmmaker Rashaka Ratshitanga was also closely involved with MDALI.[86] The word 'mdali' in Nguni languages means 'creator', which unintentionally fit well with the ethos of the group who wanted to radically change the way black audiences viewed the status quo, using relevant art. The main activities of MDALI were the three cultural festivals held in Soweto in 1973, 1974 and 1975.

I now briefly outline these festivals, whose format followed the festivals in exile like the Pitso festival in London discussed above. 'During the day people came to view the exhibited works - sculptures, paintings, traditional implements and utensils. Every day, before the evening performances, the exhibits were cleared from the hall only to be replaced at their stands for the viewers during the day.'[87] The first and biggest festival was held in April 1973 at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC). According to Pheto, the time of year was chosen to coincide with the ceremonial harvest time in several southern African cultures.[88] *S'ketsh'* of Summer 1973 reported on this first festival under an unnamed writer. 'With the emergence of Black theatre groups all over the country,' the article begins, 'it has become clear that the prevailing notion of art is not that of "art for art's sake". To the black artist of today, art is there to serve the Cause.'[89] The article goes on to note that Mihloti performed pieces by James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop and Mongane Wally Serote. Obi Theatre presented *Marat/Sade*, an experimental play about the French Revolution written by Peter Weiss,[90] Sepamla's group presented *This Time Tomorrow* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. There were also jazz performances and visual art was exhibited. The sculptures in the foyer of the DOCC struck the writer as 'something of a traditional Africa in microcosm. The sculptures on display

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[86]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[87]Pheto, 'The Arts and Liberation in South Africa circa 1971 to 1994'.
[88]Ibid.
[89]'The Mdali Black Arts Festival,' *S'ketsh'*, Summer 1973, 43.
[90]This would be the opening play at the Market Theatre in June 1976, presented by The Company.

could only have been done by a black man,'[91] the author opined. Remembering the audience responses to Mihloti's more radical pieces, Pheto says, 'If they agreed with us, they didn't even wait even to hear further, they said it right [laughs] so they became part of the actors and so we had to give space but keep the performance going. But they told us in no uncertain terms right from insight. They were even encouraging us, "let's go for them, let's go for them", I mean revolution.'[92]

The second MDALI Festival of the Black Arts was held in March 1974, in the shadow of Onkgopotse Abram Tiro's assassination by parcel bomb in Botswana. Writing in the *Rand Daily Mail*, Martin Mahlaba reported that during the seven-day festival 'Mihloti Black Theatre presented dramatized poems by leading black writers throughout the world, while Obi Theatre Academy presented *Marat De Sade*, a play based on the French Revolution.' He added that the MDALI award for Black Art Advancement that year went to Eric Nomvete, a jazz musician from the Cape. The award, initiated in the first year of MDALI's festival, had gone to Kippie Moeketsi in 1973.[93] The Summer 1974/75 issue of *S'ketsh* covered this festival and provided a necessary critical view. Under an unnamed author, an article argues that 'Mdali has not yet managed to get to the people' because only 'a small group of conscious brothers and sisters, most of them would-be graduates' attended their festival. The reviewer took issue with what seemed to be an elite inclination. In addition to this conscious educated elite, 'the tycoon's wife, who regards it an obligation to attend and parade her R75 wig and mink coat at such "occasions"'.[94] The critic had high praise for the artwork displayed in the foyer, including sculptures by Mozambican artist Malangatana Ngwenya. The black man, the critic agrees, 'expresses in wood what no other man outside Africa can express—with equal clarity, that is.'[95]

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[91]*S'ketsh'*, 'The Mdali Black Arts Festival,' 43
[92]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[93]Martin Mahlaba, 'Curtain Falls on Mdali festival, Credo's musical,' *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 March 1974, 21.
[94]'The Mdali Festival of the Black Arts II,' *S'ketsh'*, Summer 1974/75, 33.
[95]Ibid., 33.

The programme of performances at MDALI II included David Phetoe's Obi Theatre restaging *Marat*, and Mihloti Black Theatre. The same *S'ketsh'* critic thought Mihloti did not make full use of their physical presence on stage. 'Reading a poem and singing a song is not enough,' the reviewer wrote. 'The song must help strengthen the impact of the poem, underline its meaning, illustrate its feeling. Mihloti should have exploited these things, things that the stage has to offer, otherwise what were they doing on stage anyway?'[96] What the critic liked about Mihloti's performance was the tableau 'where they all came together and with raised hands, each holding a weapon, froze into a beautiful image.'[97] Another highlight of the festival was readings of poems by the likes of Mongane Serote, James Matthews, Sydney Sepamla, and Zinjiva Nkondo. This festival was held at the Methodist Youth Centre in Central Western Jabavu. Molefe Pheto remembers that by the second festival, there was stronger and visible police presence.[98] It is not surprising, given some of the revolutionary content, that by the following year Pheto and other members of MDALI attracted the attention of the Security Branch.

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[96]Ibid., 34.
[97]Ibid.
[98]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

Figure 1 One of the mambukushu drums (from Botswana) played at the first MDALI festival still in possession of Molefe Pheto. Picture taken at his farmhouse, Bangadile, Magaliesberg, Northwest, South Africa 16 October 2022.

Figure 2 African mask displayed at the MDALI Festival in Molefe Pheto's home. This is one of the masks Pheto collected while he was a student in London.

In July of the same year, a Black Culture Week on the same model was held at the Orlando DOCC.[99] In his recollections, Pheto thinks that it remarkable that Soweto residents, who were thought to not value art, bought artwork at the going rate, often walking off with it on the spot. Apart from work from the artist Malangatana Ngwenya, others who exhibited included the prominent painter Ben Arnold, who curated the visual and plastic art section of

[99]'Drums Beat for Mdali,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 22 July 1974, 1.

the festival. Recalling his amazement at how work by black artists was sold successfully at the MDALI festivals, Pheto says, 'I remember one sculpture was bought by an old man who came with a heavy coat, it was a heavy coat so we agreed the price, it was R203 I remember. And this old man you look at him he can't even have R203 there's no way. He didn't bargain and he took the money and took the work off the stand.'[100]

On the night of 4 March 1975, while sleeping at home, Molefe Pheto was arrested by 'four African members of the Security Police' and driven to John Vorster Square. At this time, Pheto was living with his wife and children in Zone One Meadowlands.[101] Pheto had just completed working on the third edition of the Festival of Black Arts, this time at the YWCA in Dube. Little record of this festival exists, perhaps because it was smaller than the previous two and overshadowed by increasing police repression. The Winter 1975 issue of the popular theatre magazine *S'ketsh'* reported that, 'The dynamic leader of the Mihloti Black Theatre group and moving light in Mdali was arrested in March and is now in detention. He had been engaged in a crucial piece of research in the northern Transvaal [now Limpopo Province] into Black music and dance. Now everyone wants to know the reason for detention.' The magazine added, 'Is it to do with Mdali and Mihloti or his research work?'[102] Pheto was, in fact, involved in underground political work while conducting his cultural work. In his prison memoirs, Pheto writes that at the time 'the typical South African response towards MDALI, among some Black artists and other people, mostly Whites, was to regard the organisation as a subversive political front wearing the cloak of art.' Members of MDALI, Pheto continues, had 'acquired files at the Security Police headquarters in John Vorster Square, Johannesburg.'[103] During Pheto's interrogation, a Colonel Visser appeared with 'a thick file with my name on its brown cover.'[104]

[100]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[101]'Pheto held', *Rand Daily Mail* (Extra), 6 March 1975, 1.
[102]'Molefe Pheto arrested,' *S'ketsh'*, Winter 1975, 6.
[103]Pheto, *And Night Fell*, 17.
[104]Ibid., 22.

And Night Fell: Memoirs of a political prisoner in South Africa details his experiences in prison and his interrogation. While the state eventually could not pin any charges on him, he was arrested for transporting a member of Mihloti, Clarence Hamilton, to Botswana as part of his underground work for PAC. However, the state only charged him in November under the Terrorism Act, which means he was held without charge for eight months. During this time, he was held at John Vorster, Hillbrow Police Station and The Fort, and was only allowed one monthly visit from his wife. During his time in prison, Pheto created three poems, committing them to memory. These poems, 'There is no sun in here', 'Mother Mbila-Mutondo', and 'Hikuba those that wield power Ba teke nuna' were later written down and printed in *And Night Fell.* He remembers that:

> I would recite one, lose the words and lose and do it again and do it again until it sticks and then one at a time when I already know it back to front maybe I'm not creative, maybe 4 weeks later something comes up, I start with the first one that I know and then I go to the new one and to the new one and then keep on repeating maybe about two or three weeks four weeks and then performing it in prison. So one step reminds me of the words and so on until I did the third one. After the third one I said, "no no more, even if it comes, no more" because it's too much.[105]

When he was finally brought to trial in early December, the state could not prove its charges and he was acquitted. The *Rand Daily Mail* reported that Pheto thanked his defence, George Bizos and Raymond Tucker, and his wife upon release and said that he would not celebrate his release. 'What is there to celebrate? I'm just moving out of prison where I've been confined to four walls but I know I'm going to a bigger prison.' He continued, 'As long as unjust laws like the Terrorism Act remain, the chances of any individual escaping detention by the Security Police are very slim. It is just a question of who'll be next.'[106] The article reported that there were shouts of 'Amandla' outside the court, and black power salutes. This was not the only time Pheto would come to face with the security branch. After his trip to the FESTAC in 1977,

[105]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[106]*Rand Daily Mail* Extra, 'Who's next? asks Pheto after 280-day detention,' 11 December 1975, 1.

he was continuously questioned and sometimes taken from Dorkay House to John Vorster during the day. His prison experience was harrowing but did not stop Pheto from continuing his cultural activism after release.

FESTAC '77

In 1977 Molefe Pheto led Mihloti Black Theatre to FESTAC, the second Festival of Arts and Culture of the African diaspora, in Lagos, Nigeria. As he tells it, the funds for the trip were sourced from the University World Exchange Fund, which Craig Williamson, an apartheid operative had infiltrated. In his second memoirs, *The Bull from Moruleng,* Pheto writes,

> …'whilst Mihloti Black Theatre thought it had outwitted the Security System, it had actually been set up. On our return, I was interrogated incessantly, on numerous occasions. But today, I must own up, that the line of interrogation from one Security Policeman, a Van Wyk Visser, was correct. He said: "We knew all about it, your leadership of Mihloti Black Theatre, and your departure for Nigeria. It had nothing to do with Black Arts and Culture. You insiders were going to link with the outside enemies of our country. That FESTAC was just a cover!"[107]

In the end, about seven Mihloti members, including a few women, arrived in Nigeria. 'We [were] not on the main programme; we couldn't be it was too late and who would we represent? And we found ANC representing us the country. We found PAC representing the country so we were not accepted but there were colloquiums some theatres there we went and there and really those who came to our performances were blown and said, "you couldn't do this work in the country", and we did it and said, "don't go back".'[108] The *Rand Daily Mail* reported on the massive scale of FESTAC, held in February, which included 10,000 artists from around the

[107]Pheto, *The Bull from Moruleng*, 291.
[108]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

African diaspora. A massive logistical operation, 'hundreds of national dance and music groups coming from all over Africa and the Black communities in Europe and North and South America', the festival was a resounding success. Several new venues were built, including a festival village. 'The face of Lagos has been changed: the building of a huge ring road highway at a cost of millions, proceeded with astonishing speed', the newspaper reported.[109]

In spite of the fears for their safety that comrades at FESTAC expressed, Mihloti did return to South Africa, losing two of their women members who Pheto believed had joined one of the liberation movements. Upon their return, Doc Bikitsha in the *Rand Daily Mail* wrote that Mihloti 'were chosen as the fourth-best group in theatre or play acting.' The members who had returned included Pheto, Sonwabo Thusini, Mmakapa Arnold, Fikile Nosi, Muntu Nvuyana, Mokoena Arnold, Tsagande Mpapele, and Zanu Zolo. In his talk at the United States Information Service library Pheto remarked on how he felt the black arts in South Africa had a long way to go compared to what was happening in other parts of the continent and in the Diaspora. With palpable pride at Mihloti's achievement, Bikitsha wrote that 'It is the singular duty of every member of our society to support the cultural manifestations of their choice, regardless of the medium through which they are articulated. And it would not be fair to castigate us here in Soweto, as not contributing towards this. The awareness is now evident. All we have to do in my opinion is, to come out fearlessly and enact the cultural in us.'[110]

Medupe and the Beginning of Molefe Pheto's Exile

The Medupe Writers Association was formed in May 1977 by a group of Black Consciousness-aligned poets in Soweto. By October that year, it would be banned as part of a sweeping ban of nineteen Black Consciousness organisations. However, in its short life

[109]Gerd Meuer, 'Festival of arts a test for Nigeria,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 8 February 1977, 11.
[110]Doc Bikitisha, 'Its Doc Bikitsha's arts clinic – Festac '77,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 1 March 1977, 13.

Medupe was so influential that it attracted the attention of the security forces. The group was initially called the Azanian People's Poetry and Writers' Association but the name was changed to Medupe, which means light drizzling rain. According to a fact file produced by South Africa's Directorate of Security Legislation that September, and presented to the Minister of Justice as part of a dossier that informed his banning of Medupe, 'on 10 May 1977 during an AZAPOWA committee meeting, it was decided that the organisation's name was "unstrategic" and a "security risk"' and hence the name was changed to Medupe on 19 May.[111] The same report noted that the executive committee of Medupe included Molefe Pheto as chairman, Duma Ndlovu as the Vice Chairperson, the secretary was Thembeka Mbobo and the treasurer was Mothobi Mutloatse. The report attempted to implicate Medupe in connections with the BCP and the Soweto Students' Representative Council. 'One of the most diligent Medupe poets, Malesele Lebelo, is also a member of the SSRC. On 22 June 1977 he actively participated in the organisation of the march of school students from Madibane High School to Vorsterplein.'[112] Another connection to Madibane High School was a young Matsemela [Cain] Manaka, identified in the report as part of regular attendees of the poetry readings. The fifth chapter of this thesis tracks Manaka's career in Resistance Theatre.

The report goes on to note that performances were held at the DOCC, the UNIS-AMDA Library in Soweto and high schools including Morris Isaacson High School and Sekano Ntoane. Themes of the readings 'vary from poems that are of no concern to internal safety to crude, undisguised (explicit) resistance and anti-white poems' dealing with 'oppression of blacks', 'death while detained', 'the homeland policy and urban blacks' political aspirations', 'whites fear of blacks', and 'the inevitability of "liberation day", among others.[113]

[111]South African National Archives [Hereafter SANA], SLD 2/4/2/94 'Unclassified Fact Report on the Medupe Writers Association,' 19 September 1977. I wish to thank my colleague Keanan Jaftha for her help translating this file from Afrikaans to English.
[112]SANA, 'Declassified Fact Report on the Medupe Writers Association'
[113]Ibid.

On the 28 June 1977 Victor Tsuai wrote in the *Rand Daily Mail* that 'A group of writers began meeting at the Orlando … DOCC on Thursday's [sic] to conduct poetry reading and to determine the chances of forming a body.' The group had gained support over the previous few months, including readings from Professor Michael Harper 'a black from overseas'. The article went on to say that prominent writers in the group included Fanyana Mazibuko, 'Sipho Sepamla, for political poems mainly concerned with the hardships of our people, Mr Duma Ndlovu, for his intricate black consciousness writings, Mr Max Lebelo, for his satires on black peoples' problems; the youngest member, Mr Molefe Pheto, presently overseas, for his touching traditional poems.' Medupe had so far reached 10,000 people and apart from the core group of poets, had attracted a membership of 'a staggering 200'.[114] Many of these hundreds of poets were young aspiring poets like Matsemela Manaka. Another poet who was part of Medupe and later became the main figure in the Allahpoets, covered in the next chapter of this thesis, was Ingoapele Madingoane.[115] As I attempt to show, the thread of resistance ran all the way to the early 2000s. These interventions in the 1970s by the likes of Pheto were vital.

The next day after reporting on the success of Medupe, the same newspaper reported that 'Molefe wa Pheto, poet and exponent of indigenous black art left South Africa at the weekend on a two-months trip to the United States - among other things to introduce an African instrument called the Mbila-Mutondo.' Pheto received a fellowship from Operations Crossroads Africa to share his research on the instrument which is closely related to the mbira of the Shona people. 'One of the highlights of his trip,' the article continued, 'will be the reading of his literary works including his poems.'[116] What the article could not reveal is that Pheto's poetry was of a radical nature. During the trip, Pheto read his poems at events in places like Harlem as well as at universities across the United States. Pheto also performed at the United

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[114]Victor Tsuai, 'Medupe reigns for local scribes,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 28 June 1977, 17.
[115]Makhulu Ledwaba, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 24 August 2023.
[116]Montshiwa Moroke, 'Slice of Africa for Harlem Blacks,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 29 June 1977, 21.

Nations Day of Solidarity with South Africa's Political Prisoners on October 11 of 1977, where he read one of his original poems, 'When they Come'.[117] The poem was dedicated to Matthews Malebane, who allegedly jumped from the tenth floor of John Vorster Square in February 1977 while being interrogated by the Security Police. The poem begins:

> When they come for me
> I wonder many times
> who the victor is.
>
> Blasts of bangs
> on dead doors
> in the middle of the night
> unconcentrated torch lights
> of fear
> from those who have
> come for me
> nights without sleep
> are now ended for me
> because at last
> they have come
> and I with victory
> know my fate[118]

The resistance in this poem is unmistakable, rather than the poet being afraid, it is the police who are afraid. Pheto turns a moment of arrest into victory which makes him 'stand tall/a proud Black man.'[119] Of his trip, Pheto recalls that 'I should have been there for thirty, forty-five days, I was there for nine months yeah got invitations to read poetry that's when I was finishing [*And Night Fell*].'[120] On his way home to South Africa, he stopped over in London. Upon speaking to his wife, Deborah, and fellow political activists in the underground over a coded phone call, he was convinced that following Steve Biko's murder a few months prior, returning home had become untenable. 'I call [Ramsey] Ramushu and Ramushu was there and then we had a code, I spoke to him in code and the message was, "don't move! Exile." Exile! Then I

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[117]'Poet Braves South African Ire,' *ACOA*, Fall 1977
[118]Molefe Pheto, 'When they Come,' *ACOA,* Fall 1977.
[119]Pheto, 'When they Come.'
[120]Pheto, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

remained BC and then I was already BC so when it was established in London, I was one of the founding members [of the BCM of Azania in London.]'[121] Pheto's family later joined him in London and he was to remain there until 1995.

Maqina's *Give Us This Day*

While a detailed study of Mzwandile Maqina's life is out of the scope of this chapter, suffice to say Maqina lived a storied life. He was a trained teacher who then became a priest after a stint at an Anglican seminary. During his time serving as leader of the Spiritualist Church of Africa he penned his influential political play, *Give Us This Day.*[122] It was seen by thousands before it was banned by the Publications Control Board in May 1976. Following this, Maqina wrote another play, *The Trial*. Before it could gain traction, Maqina was banned and restricted to Port Elizabeth. His banning order would only expire in 1982. During the 1980s Maqina jumped from AZAPO, which expelled him, to the PAC and eventually became embroiled in factional violence between the UDF and his group called Ama Afrika. The Ama Afrika group, which grew out of Maqina's machinations, was involved in the murder of UDF supporters, although the TRC's findings were inconclusive on Maqina's own responsibility.[123] In the 1980s Maqina continued his attempts in the theatre but none were as successful as those a decade earlier. While Maqina's reputation is overshadowed by his later political activity, *Give Us This Day* seemed at the time a radical statement put on stage by a fearless playwright.

No script of the play *Give Us This Day* could be located. However, since it received coverage in the Johannesburg press during the year it was staged (1975), we can reconstruct some idea of what the play was about and how it was staged. Joe Tlholoe writing in *Drum* of

[121]Ibid.
[122]HPRA, A2675 Karis – Gerhart, Part V Biographical Files, 'Maqina, Ebenezer Mzwandile'.
[123]HPRA, 'Maqina, Ebenezer Mzwandile'

January 1976 noted that Maqina 'has adapted recent events - still painfully fresh in our memories - and tried to use them as a vehicle.'[124] He continued, 'We remember Abraham [sic] Tiro's graduation speech at the University of the North. We remember his struggles to get a job. And we remember his death in Botswana when some madman sent him a letter bomb.' Tlholoe further noted that 'Mr Maqina has transferred these events to the slums of Port Elizabeth.'[125] Similarly, the *Black Review* stated that 'some observers, having seen the play, concluded that the play was dramatizing the story of Onkgopotse Ramothibi Tiro.'[126]

While noting the popularity of the piece, Aggrey Klaaste's review of *Give Us This Day* that was staged at the YMCA in Orlando is scathing. In this staging, Maqina directed and played the priest. Other characters included the protagonist Nkululeko Afrika played by Velile Fina; his wife Thembeka, played by Rebecca Myoli; a security branch policeman played by Kenneth Mynlaard; and Phakama Vantyi who played Mkhulu. A dozen other actors were on stage.[127] Of the overall play, Klaaste thinks it is 'pastoral' and, even though adopting Gibson Kente's musical formula complete with lively band, the play he wrote, 'lacks the slick city-type professionalism of a Gibson Kente play'.[128] Klaaste observed that *Give Us This Day* 'is strictly Kentesian, down to the hymnal songs, the labour bureau (pass office) scene, the church, the shebeen or party, and the inevitable policeman.'[129] However, Klaaste finds Mynlaard's acting of the Security Branch policeman lacking in sophistication. 'The true S.B. is not only a very tragic character, but is also a man who is forced to be quite devilish in his deceit', Klaaste writes. Nevertheless, Klaaste thought the music was more authentically African than that which prevailed in city black theatre including a scene where, Maqina, playing the priest, sings a duet

[124]Joe Thloloe, 'Act it Out—Don't Preach It,' *Drum,* 8 and 22 January 1976, 63.
[125]Thlole, 'Act it Out—Don't Preach It,' 63.
[126]Thoko Mbanjwa, 'Arts and Entertainment,' *Black Review* 1974/1975, 194.
[127]Aggrey Klaaste, 'Give us this Day review,' *S'ketsh'*, Summer 1975, 26 – 27.
[128]Ibid., 27.
[129]Ibid.

with Nkululeko. 'Superbly done.'[130] Joe Thloloe's review in *Drum* also felt that *Give Us This Day*, while politically relevant, lacked theatrical finesse. In Thloloe's view, the play made the audience 'hear about' the various injustices portrayed, including house arrest, poor living conditions in the townships and Nkululeko Afrika's murder by letter bomb. 'You see the letter bomb explode and then you forget Nkululeko Afrika has been killed as you listen to a speech on Solidarity - yes, with a capital S.' Thloloe urged the cast to 'act it out, don't preach it'.[131]

By the time *Give Us This Day* was banned in May 1976, it had been seen by more than 10,000 people. 'At the last performance at the Dube YWCA', The *Weekend World* reported, 'the attendance was so overwhelming that the cast was compelled to stage another show at midnight for those who had been turned away.'[132] In his report, the chairman of the committee responsible for the play's banning wrote:

> Die Komitee het besluit om hierdie stuk af te keur. Die redes is (i) die inhound van die stuk lê alle klem op die swaarkry en die negatiewe aspekte van die Bantoe-lewe en, trouens, buit daardie aspek van sake uit. (ii) Die held as naam is Kululeko, d.w.s. Vryheid, en hy is die simbool van dii Vryheidsstryd van die Afrikaan. Hy word onderdruk, en uitendelik vernietig. Maar sy voorbeeld word aangeprys. Die stuk is bareken om rasse-gevolens gaande te maak, op onredelike gronde.'[133]

As the censors rightly saw, the name Nkululeko, meaning 'freedom,' was symbolic. They further feared, perhaps rightly, that the play would stir up revolutionary sentiments because of its portrayal of the black condition in South Africa. Without a way to directly contact Rev. Maqina, the censors issued a prohibition notice that was distributed to the police. *Give Us This Day* was declared undesirable according to Section 47, subsection 2, parts d and e of the Publications Act 1974. These clauses were applied to works that the censors felt were 'harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic' and 'prejudicial to the

[130]Ibid.
[131]Thloloe, 'Act it Out—Don't Preach It,' 63.
[132]'Ban Deals a Blow to Black Theatre,' *Weekend World*, 10 July 1977, 13
[133]SANA WCARS, Directorate of Publications, 3/19 Mzwandile Maqina's *Give us this Day* Censorship File.

... general welfare or the peace and good order.’ Many young people in Soweto who saw *Give Us This Day* included Maishe Maponya, to whom the next chapter turns.

Conclusion

The preceding chapter traced the foundation of a Theatre of Resistance in Johannesburg from the late 1960s up to the late 1970s. Using a life history approach, it showed how the People’s Experimental Theatre and Mihloti Black Theatre provided a radical break from township musicals that had been primarily concerned with entertainment. PET and Mihloti, however, transformed the status quo, bringing in a radical new energy. Both groups were associated with the BCM through SASO and the BCP. While PET was a group of mostly university educated young people, who had been members of SASO and, in the case of Ujebe Masokoane, even written poems in the *SASO Newsletter*, Mihloti developed more organically first in Alexandra township and then in Orlando in Soweto. Out of Mihloti grew Medupe which, as archival press coverage shows, was highly popular in the immediate aftermath of the Soweto uprising before being banned in October 1977.

This period saw a spirit of revolutionary theatre emerge, which saw even Gibson Kente pen *Too Late*, *I Believe* and *How Long?,* three plays considered to be Kente’s political plays. In addition to Mihloti and PET, Mzwandile Maqina’s *Give us This Day* had a considerable impact on the Theatre of Resistance in Soweto in the early 1970s. As Aggrey Klaaste’s review of *Give Us This Day* shows, there was a tension between the imperative for relevant, political, theatre and artistic theatre. In the 1980s, which the bulk of this thesis focuses on, a new generation of playwrights inspired by these early interventions would go on to seek training and write Resistance Theatre that was faithful to the ethos of the BCM while breaking new ground in form and style. The playwrights Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka experimented with workshopping, Beckettian theatre and African ritual. This eventually led to some powerful

works that were moving as well as artistically sound. The process of self-reliance that Medupe had been in a group called Babupi started continued in the works of these two playwrights and in the movement of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre. The next chapter examines the career of Maishe Maponya in the Theatre of Resistance.

Chapter Four: Maishe Maponya and the Bahumutsi Drama Group, 1976 - 1999

Introduction

This chapter starts with a biographical sketch of Maishe Maponya's early life, including his family background; it then shows how he was influenced by the older generation of Soweto poets. The chapter will address his early work with the Allahpoets and the impact of the Reverend Mzwandile Maqina's play *Give Us This Day*, discussed in the previous chapter, on his decision to become a playwright. It will briefly touch on his early work with Bahumutsi Drama Group, *The Cry* and *Peace and Forgive*. Next, the chapter turns to an analysis of his serious theatre, beginning with *The Hungry Earth*. I will trace the influences of BC in this work, while attempting to show how Maishe Maponya developed his own Brechtian aesthetic which was clearly agitprop and could not be protest theatre.[1] Clashes with the apartheid censorship system are the focus of the section that discusses his plays *Gangsters* and *Dirty Work*. These two plays were particularly bold in their indictment of the apartheid security state, the former was restricted to the Market Theatre but was performed overseas, including at the Woza Afrika! Festival in New York City.

Duma ka Ndlovu published an anthology from this festival, which included the play *Gangsters*.[2] The Directorate of Publications received this anthology for consideration. It found the work desirable, even while readers heavily scrutinised the plays. *Gangsters* seemed to be the most incendiary play to the censors. Ultimately, the anthology was not banned. I will attempt to explain this apparent contradiction between the censorship of the performed play

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[1]Zakes Mda makes this point in the Introduction to his edited anthology, *Four Plays.* See, Chapter Two: Review of the Literature for a definition of Resistance Theatre I adopt in this thesis.

[2] Duma Ndlovu, ed., *Woza Afrika!: An Anthology of South African Plays* (New York: G. Braziller, 1986).

versus the text being passed. A final section addresses Maponya's last major period of creative activity; *Busang Meropa* and *A Song for Biko* are chosen to represent his turn to theatre that bordered on performance poetry. Maponya insisted that these works were theatre and they are analysed using the same framework that has been employed throughout the thesis. The chapter shows how Maponya was consistent in speaking truth to power, before and after the end of apartheid.

Maishe Maponya's Family and Personal Background

'Maishe Maponya is the angry young man of South African black theatre,'[3] began a profile of Maishe Maponya on the occasion of his winning the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year for Drama in 1985, the first black playwright to win the award. As this chapter will show, Maishe Maponya did not see himself as particularly angry. In fact, many people who interacted with him remember him as a gentle person, often disarmingly so. Archival videos I have seen confirm this. While black theatre is a broad term that has been applied to various theatrical enterprises, Maponya preferred to define his work as resistance theatre. 'In the townships of Soweto, young playwrights such as myself and Matsemela Manaka emerged to take the baton for a long and arduous journey in resistance theatre in the mid 1970s. Our work was referred to as the "theatre of the dispossessed", which referred to black disenfranchisement',[4] Maponya wrote. While he embraced Black Consciousness philosophy throughout his life, which meant raising the consciousness of his fellow oppressed black people, Maponya also felt that it was his duty to develop a distinctive *African* theatre, free of what he saw as the disruptive involvement of white collaborators.

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[3]Rose Korber, 'The oppressed prefer entertainment to redirection,' *The Star*, 19 July 1985, 9.
[4]Maishe Maponya, 'The Anatomy of Resistance in South African Theater', in *The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945-1994*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Chicago, Ill.: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001), 311.

Preferring to call himself Maishe, Maponya was born Maishe Isaiah Maponya in 1952. His family was part of the Catholic Church and he was deeply committed to this faith in his youth, serving as an altar boy.[5] While he was born in Alexandra township north of Johannesburg, Maponya's family was forcibly moved to Zone 4 Diepkloof when he was a young boy. Maishe was one of five children in a four-roomed house. His father was a painter of buildings. Although their mother was a homemaker, she also created trinkets that she sold in the community or at the Rand Easter Show. Maishe's younger brother, Maile Maponya, remembers that their mother:

> used to sell at all times – she would either be selling fat cakes and atchaar and polonies and things – if not she would be sewing dresses and things like that and selling those. If not, she would be creating dollies, decorative dollies yes and so on and she would walk around.

Maile Maponya continues,

> she would use a candle and a pin and then punch holes in the acorns and use those to make a necklaces and sell and she used to sell to the white people and they used to buy those and that is what the money that we used to go to school, the money that we used to go to school trips, buy books and things like that.[6]

Despite this modest background, Maishe Maponya was a curious child who eventually went to one of the best high schools in Soweto, Orlando High School. At Orlando, he was exposed to a rich extracurricular programme that encouraged students to excel both in the classroom and outside of it. Profiling a young Maponya in 1978 in the *Rand Daily Mail*, Doc Bikitsha noted, 'he has had theatre interests from primary school and took part in sketches and even in Sunday School sketches.'[7] Bikitsha went on to describe Maponya's interests in pursuing journalism 'as

[5]Maile Maponya, Interview (b) conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 12 January 2024.
[6]Maile Maponya, Interview (a) conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 22 April 2022.
[7]Bikitsha, Doc, 'Teen Bridge to Full Life,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 8 February 1978, 3.

soon as he is stabilised in theatre'.[8] Maponya, we learn, was a keen soccer player as a schoolboy, a memory which Maile Maponya corroborates. Maishe 'played for first division at Madibane High and then went to Orlando High where he played [soccer] alongside Jomo Sono, Webster Dichaba, Jerry Sadike and Brian Tlale.'[9] Maishe's peers would later become star players, while he chose the path of the arts. Jomo Sono, for example, went on to play for the South African premier division team Orlando Pirates and later play in the USA before returning to South Africa to establish and coach his own football team. Maishe Maponya's education was overshadowed by the events of the early to mid-1970s that engulfed his township. Prior to this, however, he was able to access literature from the black diaspora, particularly the burgeoning literature of the African continent. He recalled reading 'Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka and a remarkable Nigerian writer, Obi Egbuna, who wrote an extraordinary play called *The Anthill*.'[10] The catalytic moment for Maishe Maponya becoming an African theatre practitioner was when he saw a performance of *Give Us This Day.* (Maqina and *Give Us This Day* have already been discussed in detail in Chapter Three.) Maponya recalled that,

> from that moment [I] realised that you could begin to mix reality with, you know, the kind of imagination you would have as a writer, to be able to create something that was concrete enough for people to begin to relate to. And it was then I did this play *The Cry*, which was performed only twice, and which had to close because of the unrest.[11]

This chapter shall return to Maponya's early theatrical endeavours later. For the present purposes, it is important to note the strong influence of Black Consciousness on his young mind and the cauldron of 1976 that gave birth to Maponya's creative energy.

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[8]Ibid.
[9]Ibid.
[10]Korber, 'The oppressed prefer entertainment.'
[11]Rolf Solberg, 'Interview with Maishe Maponya', in *Alternative Theatre in South Africa: Talks with Prime Movers since the 1970s* (Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books, 1999), 178.

Maponya's Aesthetic Foundations: The Allahpoets and *The Sun Will Rise*

While the focus of this thesis is the role of theatre in the struggle against apartheid, it is important to note that many of the theatre practitioners of Soweto in the 1970s and 1980s came to theatre via poetry; so it was with Maishe Maponya. In early 1977 a group was formed by black poets including Molefe Pheto and Mothobi Mutloatse. According to the poet Sipho Sepamla, also part of the group, the Medupe Writers Association started its life as the Azanian Poets and Writers Association (Azapowa), led by a ten-member committee. It held poetry readings at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) in Orlando, Soweto, which were hugely popular. The poetry recitations, backed by drumming, profoundly affected on those who attended. By September, on the eve of its banning, there were more than 200 members.[12] Maponya was one of the young aspiring writers who joined Medupe. The banning of Medupe has already been discussed in Chapter Three. However, Maponya remembers that 'when that banning took place ... we then got together ..., closer friends in Diepkloof and ..., you know, in the township, we then formed the AllahPoets.' He continues, '... with [Ingoapele Madingoane], Matsemela Manaka, [Makhulu Ledwaba] and a few other young people who had found us and we then started at that point. We were activists moving around all commemorative services and things like that.'[13] The Allahpoets performed at many venues in the township, including the Regina Mundi church.

The Allahpoets performed one major piece at the Market Theatre in early 1980 before its members were drawn into other cultural activities. The performance poem was called *The Sun Will Rise*. In addition to Madingoane, Maponya and Ledwaba, another central member of the Allahpoets was Ofeng (Franks) Mashego. Manaka, Ledwaba and Mashego had been members

[12] Sipho Sepamla, 'Medupe Writers Association,' *Donga,* Johannesburg, No. 7 (September 1977) in Michael J. F Chapman, *Soweto Poetry* (Johannesburg; New York; Paris: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 124.

[13] Maponya, Interview conducted by Vanessa Cooke, Johannesburg, South Africa, 15 April 2014, AG3406-A5-001, Market Theatre Oral History Project, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.

of the Creative Youth Association while Madingoane was a member of Mihloti Black Theatre. The musicians, who had been in a group called Babupi, included Meshak Paledi on guitar, Matsemela Manaka on percussion, Peter Mashishi and Moss Manaka on a variety of instruments including the pennywhistle, flute, marimba[14] and xylophone. [15] It was first performed at the Market as a try-out of Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* in February and then returned a month later.[16] Makhulu Ledwaba remembers that the piece was 'a series of poems … and with the music background.' Ledwaba adds that this combination of 'the musical prowess and the poetry … gave us this dynamic sound and content.'[17] In the audience was M.K. Malefane who reviewed it for *Staffrider*. Commenting on the high level of audience engagement, Malefane writes that the performance was so powerful 'that I was completely spell-bound and my emotions were so worked up that tears uncontrollably rolled down my face.' Malefane continues that the content of the performance was of 'protest, social criticism and the raising of consciousness among the people.'[18]

Writing in the *Rand Daily Mail,* Raeford Daniel, a white author, captures the vitality of Allahpoets's performances in a review. The performance was 'not a sedate soiree of protest poetry,' Daniel remarks. 'Much of this vitality is rendered through the musical accompaniments, the opening shrill cry of the pennywhistle that raises the curtain, xylophone, African drums, flute and guitar add texture to the words.' Daniel's review also provides a clear sense that the Allahpoets' work was theatrical, not merely spoken. Dressed in uniform monochrome robes or at times African print attire, the performers appear 'menacing' to Daniel when they enter to the sound of the music. The author admits that the experience is unsettling

[14]Marimba is the 'thumb piano' originating in the indigenous cultures of Zimbabwe.
[15]'Allahpoets at Market,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 21 March 1980, 4. Bapubi was part of the Creative Youth Association.
[16]'Entertainment,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 21 February 1980, 13.
[17]Ledwaba, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[18]M.K. Malefane, '"The Sun will Rise": Review of the Allahpoets at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg,' *Staffrider* 3, no.2, 40.

for some audience members because the performance portrays a 'raw passion' that has hitherto been dormant. From the same review, we learn that poems recited include Duma ka Ndlovu's 'Redobakunda' by Maponya and the following original poems: 'The Guru' by Matsemela Manaka; Ledwaba's 'Black Fury' and ''The Sun Will Rise'; Madingoane's '*Izwe Lethu*', 'Behold My Son' and 'Run Africa Run'; and Maponya's 'The Ghetto'.[19]

The text of 'The Ghetto' was published in the February 1980 issue of *Staffrider*:

> Look deep into the ghetto
> And see modernised graves
> Where only the living dead exist
> Manacled with chains
> So as not to resist.
> Look deep into the ghetto
> And see the streets dividing the graves
> Streets watered with tears
> Streets with pavements
> Dyed with blood
> Blood of the innocent
> Streets used by the chained
> To manufacture more chains daily
> Look deep into the ghetto
> You will see yourself
> Silenced by a 99-year lease
> Thus creating a class struggle
> Within a struggle for survival.
> Look the ghetto over
> You will see smog hover
> And dust choking
> The lifeless-living-dead
> Look the ghetto over
> You will see pain and hunger
> Torture and oppression
> Can you hear beasts of evil
> And creatures of death
> Brawling and crying
> To devour you
> And suck the last drop
> Of blood from your emaciated corpse.[20]

[19]Raeford Daniel, '"Anger of Africa Awake": Review of the Allahpoets at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg,' *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 April 1980, 7.
[20]'Allahpoets: Two Poems by Maishe Maponya,' *Staffrider* 3, no. 1, February 1980, 9.

In this poem, Maponya describes the township homes of black people as graves and recalls the horrors of the state response to protest in Soweto and elsewhere. The description of 'Streets and pavements/Dyed with blood' evokes the killings of Soweto in 1976. He further describes the inhabitants of the ghetto as lifeless, sucked dry by those who rule over them. Interestingly, in the lines 'You will see yourself/ Silenced by a 99-year lease …,' there is an element of class analysis in this poem, departing from a purely racial analysis that has been attributed to Soweto poetry and would be expected of young poets immersed in BC philosophy. Bhekisizwe Peterson, citing a number of critics, notes that among black artists working in the 1970s there was an 'understandable emphasis on group identity and solidarity [but] an inadequate grappling with the implications of class within the black community.'[21] Critiquing *The Hungry Earth* and Matsemela Manaka's *Egoli* (*The Hungry Earth* is discussed in the next section, *Egoli* is covered in Chapter Five), Peterson notes that these Resistance plays identify 'apartheid as the primary cause of Africans' suffering'. He adds that, '[t]he historical but contingent links between apartheid and capitalism are, at best, dramatised as a seamless apartheid conspiracy. The result is a considerable silence on work-place conditions and exploitation and the potential for black workers to make profound critiques of their experiences.'[22] The lack of robust class analysis may well be a weakness of the Theatre of Resistance. In these lines, however, by noting that the reformist tendencies that intended to create an urban black middle class were creating a cleavage in the resistance movement to apartheid, Maponya reveals that he was not obsessed with racial aesthetics.

For Maponya, the 99-year lease was a key component of the apartheid state's reformist strategies to create the black middle class as a buffer between the white rulers and the black working class. Working with the civic sector, including the Urban Foundation, the government

[21]Bhekizizwe Peterson, 'Culture, Resistance and Representation', in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2, ed. S.M. Ndlovu (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2007), 184.
[22]Peterson, 'Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theatre', 240.

introduced 99-year leaseholds to create a black middle class made up of professionals (teachers, nurses, policemen and policewomen, clerks, lawyers, doctors, etc.), who could now secure bonds from banks to purchase and own houses in black townships. This saw a mushrooming of upmarket township extensions such as Diepkloof Extension, Pimville Extension, Dobsonville Extension, Orlando West 'Beverly Hills', etc. So, in "The Ghetto," Maponya is disaggregating the black community and calling upon black people to be conscious of the deceitfulness of the apartheid state in creating a thin layer of black prosperity that veiled large scale black impoverishment, exploitation and oppression.

The contradictions in Soweto Poetry—a term which is itself debated—are drawn out in the work of Tom Penfold.[23] For the purposes of the current discussion, Maishe Maponya can be considered a Soweto poet because he was part of the generation performing after the Soweto uprising and was heavily inspired by BC. Among the issues that Soweto poets dealt with include their use of the English language, to what extent they spoke only to the black majority, and whether they considered their work poetry at all. Poets such as Njabulo Ndebele and Mongane Wally Serote felt a friction between their aesthetic goals and the use of the imposed language and found the solution in writing in 'simple' English. Other poets, however, did not feel that the use of English compromised their political goals. Perhaps the most adept poet of the period to stretch the English language to his purposes was Sipho Sepamla who 'found humorous ways to embrace English and subvert its domination'. Sepamla, in poems such as "To Whom it May Concern", used 'wit, innuendo and wordplay' to maintain an aesthetic standard while delivering a political statement.[24] Maponya wrote in English. As shown in the poem above, his was not an inaccessible highbrow English but one that was spoken on the

[23]See, for example, Tom Penfold, *Black Consciousness and South Africa's National Literature* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017); 'Towards a New Public Space: Performance Culture in 1980s South Africa', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 27, no. 3 (2 September 2015): 311–25.
[24]Penfold, *Black Consciousness and South Africa's National Literature*, 71.

streets of his township. Maponya was well aware of the contradictions of using a language that was introduced by colonialism and while simple, he followed Sepamla in using poetic devices (in this case, powerful imagery) to 'Africanise' the language. In an interview with Carola Luther, he muses:

> there's also an obvious problem in this country, of a common language. If I could use an African language that would be understood by all I obviously would, because I aim most of my work at our African people. But to put on a play in Shangaan at DOCC would be ridiculous. No-one would come and it would mean, anyway, that I was writing for a segregated audience. English is still the most widely understood language. And of course the English that people like myself write in is used by people daily. It isn't Queen's English. It is creative in the African sense, and that is how I use it.[25]

Maponya's comments betray the BCM's blind spot with respect to their relative elitism. While there were genuine efforts to reach out to the working class, Black Consciousness remained for most of its heyday largely an elite, university-based, movement. The assertion that the English language allowed Maponya to reach more Africans is not entirely accurate. Njabulo Ndebele cautioned in his essay 'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa' that the English language represented imperial interests in South Africa and that efforts to indigenise it would be difficult and a long time in the making.[26] A language like Isizulu was understood by many in the township. Indeed, English allowed Maponya access to international audiences and spaces such as the Market Theatre. On his part Matsemela Manaka thought the issue of language was irrelevant. In comments published in *Staffrider*, he wrote, 'Communication is the key issue in theatre. It does not matter what language is used, what matters is whether the language communicates with the people being addressed.'[27] However, as I have noted, language was important and the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre attempted a course correction with their Rural Theatre Project, discussed in Chapter Six. Returning to the audience

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[25]Carola Luther and Maishe Maponya, 'Problems and Possibilities: A Discussion on the Making of Alternative Theatre in South Africa', *English Academy Review* 2, no. 1 (1 January 1984): 19–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/10131758485310031.
[26]'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa', in *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, by Njabulo S Ndebele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).
[27]Manaka, 'Theatre of the Dispossessed,' 29.

of Black Consciousness poetry, Penfold argues that 'Soweto Poetry was not simply white hatred. Its dedication to African identity and experience was rarely coupled with complete attacks on the white minority, nor did it exclude a white readership.'[28]

It is clear that poems such as Maishe's 'The Ghetto' are targeted primarily at black audiences. As he began to make theatrical pieces, however, he increasingly sought to speak to white audiences too consistent with a tension between his political beliefs and the practical realities of creating modern theatre, which required staging plays at venues which were primarily set up and ran by white management and attracted a mainly white audience. Recalling heated debates between Maponya and Barney Simon of the Market Theatre on this topic, Vanessa Cooke, asked him to clarify his stance on white involvement in 'black' theatre. He replied:

> I was coming from a point that said that I need to tell my own story, and for me, for us to have this kind of a revolution you know, liberation or a change in South Africa. Because I can't tell these stories to white people, I'm going to have to tell the story to my people and if, if Barney [Simon] wants, if, if Athol [Fugard] believed that we need to have change. I would like for Barney and, and Athol to do to white people and make them change their minds and things, so that the white people, more white people would be conscientised about change.[29]

Maponya's comments demonstrate that the work he was creating was meant not merely to protest but to create change, a revolution, in South Africa. Like Manaka, his work was resistance and primary audience was those who needed cultural weapons for resistance, the oppressed black majority.

In late 1980, Maishe Maponya participated in a symposium on Black Theatre held at the Nunnery on the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg where he allowed white participation in black theatre, even while emphasising the importance of self-reliance. The symposium was convened by the drama lecturer Ian Steadman and featured

[28]Penfold, *Black Consciousness and South Africa's National Literature*, 86.
[29]Maishe Maponya, interview with Vanessa Cooke 15 April 2014, Johannesburg, HPRA AG3406-A9-001+A21

papers by Maponya, Sipho Sepamla, and Ketan Lekhana from Durban. Lekhana was the founder of the Communikon Theatre.[30] The symposium was reported on by theatre critic Rina Minervini in the *Rand Daily Mail*. According to Minervini, Maponya said, 'to hell with the formalities of white theatre', adding, 'Black Theatre must go into the form in which black people want it.' Maponya's paper, 'which amounted to an impassioned declaration of theatrical independence' included what he saw as impediments to the development of a Black Theatre tradition in South Africa including: lack of theatre infrastructure in townships, critics who did not favourably review political plays, an unreceptive audience to this theatre movement, and the dominance of radio plays which, in his view, carried the 'Jim comes to Joburg' trope. At this symposium, Minervini writes, Maponya was of the view that white people could write black theatre, giving examples of the Barney Simon directed pieces *Cincinnati* and *Call Me Woman*.[31] Later in his career, Maponya became more radically aligned to BC, even while continuing to work with and through institutions that were primarily led by white people.

To conclude this discussion it is worth noting that 'Soweto Poetry', a term used by literary scholar Michael Chapman to describe the poetry that arose following the Soweto uprising and espousing a broadly Black Consciousness ideology, is a vast category that, in Penfold's estimation, has three common threads: 'a need to embrace a positive message of selfhood; a desire to look at the past and rewrite it accurately; a need to embrace the energy of Soweto's youth in order to force political change'.[32] While not immediately apparent in Maishe Maponya's poem 'The Ghetto', all three of these characteristics are present. The poem is a challenge to black people to find a way to live, rather than remain the dead in the townships; it is a historical record, hearkening back to land dispossession; and finally, it uses the image of

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[30]'Indian Theatre - ESAT', Wiki, Encyclopaedia of South African Theatre, Film, Media and Performance, accessed 26 December 2023, https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Indian_theatre.
[31]Minervini, Rina, 'Towards a stage for social change,' *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 October 1980
[32]Penfold, *Black Consciousness and South Africa's National Literature*, 85.

the youthful township revolts to remind all the oppressed, young and old, to harness that energy for resistance.

The Hungry Earth

Formation of Bahumutsi and the two early plays

Maishe Maponya did not receive early formal training in the theatre, choosing first to get employment as a clerk at an insurance company after completing high school. He eventually had opportunities to attend workshops at Donaldson Orlando Community Centre with Sam Mhangwane, the Soweto playwright who was notable for his play *The Unfaithful Woman,* which ran for more than twenty years.[33] These workshops would lead him to develop his first play. Maponya describes this first play, *The Cry,* as 'basically a kind of a collage of readings I had done in various places, and then trained myself and got friends to begin to perform this particular play.'[34] Maponya's second play, *Peace and Forgive*, was developed in 1977. It played in the township and later went to the Market Theatre. While a script does not exist for *Peace and Forgive*, a surviving programme from the Market Theatre summarised the plot. One early review of a township performance also survives, giving a sense of the themes explored in the play. The play was 'about two races who were long involved in a battle – the Ndlelas and the Tsimes. With the eventual defeat of the Tsimes, the Ndlelas then celebrate their victory and plan to destroy the Tsimes by introducing harsh, strange and oppressive laws.'[35] The programme mentions two protagonists, King Dlamini of the Ndlelas and King Moshe of the Tsime, who is exiled. Moshe returns triumphantly and forgives the Ndlela's for their ill

[33]Maishe Maponya would later make strong statements against this kind of theatre, calling it escapist and irrelevant.
[34]Solberg, 'Interview with Maishe Maponya'.
[35]HPRA, AG3005, Market Theatre Foundation, A Organisational Matters, A6 Programmes, '*Peace and Forgive* Programme.'

treatment.[36,37] In some ways, *Peace and Forgive* was prophetic. Subtle in its attack on apartheid, it escaped the dragnet of the censors. Furthermore, Maponya saw how the cleavages between Charterist groups, Black Consciousness and Africanist groups following the demise of the apartheid system would play out in the violence in the late 1980s and immediate post-1991 moments. The ANC effectively silenced dissenting and alternative liberation movements when it took hegemony over the negotiation process and, after a triumphant march from exile, formed government after the first democratic elections.

These two plays marked the birth of the group Bahumutsi. Bahumutsi, a word Maishe created from Sesotho languages that means 'those who comfort.' While not a repertory company like Soyikwa, Bahumutsi nevertheless remained active until the late 1990s in some form. Following this initial exposure to theatre, Maponya got experience in the United Kingdom. He remembers that around 1977 'I asked the British Council to sponsor me to observe the theatre in the UK, and they agreed for me to do that.' He continues, 'I attended few workshops and courses on script writing and directing. I mean, even though I did not understand much of what was being done, because it was very British, I think it gave me some kind of inkling and an opening towards the writing of *The Hungry Earth*.'[38] It is on this initial trip to the United Kingdom that Maishe Maponya first read the drama of Bertolt Brecht and he credits Brecht's *The Measures Taken* as a major influence on *The Hungry Earth*. Maponya attended these courses in 1978 at St Mary's College Cheltenham, now part of the University of Gloucestershire in the UK with the aid of the British Theatre Association.[39] Maponya later also obtained a Master's degree in Theatre Arts from the University of Leeds. Upon return from his first trip to the UK, Maponya completed *The Hungry Earth*. Before staging it, he sought legal

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[36]HPRA, '*Peace and Forgive* Programme.'

[37]Castalia Moleke, '"Peace and Forgive" has freedom message,' *The Voice*, n.d.

[38]Solberg, 'Interview with Maishe Maponya', 178.

[39]Derek Bishton, 'Apartheid's origins under an African spotlight,' *The Guardian*, 24 June 1981.

advice on the script through Bishop Desmond Tutu, who was then the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches. Tutu forwarded Maponya's script to Advocate Raymond Tucker, who replied: 'I am of the view that the play would constitute a contravention of the laws relating to racial incitement and the Publication Act and, in addition, the presentation would result in severe harassment of both the author and the performers.'[40] Maponya nevertheless chose to continue with the play, despite this advice. That he sought this advice shows how serious the threat of censorship was to black theatre practitioners in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Agitprop Theatre

At this point, it is worth briefly discussing the meaning of the term agitprop in relation to theatre, a concept deployed in this chapter. Agitprop theatre is a broad term referring to any theatre that has explicitly political goals. However, it does have historical roots, coming from the Russian word *agitatsiya propaganda.* After the Soviet Union's Communist Party (the Bolsheviks) came into power in the early twentieth century, they sought to spread their ideas many of whom were in far flung districts. Thus, an Agitation and Propaganda section was formed as part of the Central Committee. The work of this section, as the words imply, involved agitation, spurring large groups of people towards an idea primarily through speeches. Propaganda was defined by the Bolshevik theorists as spreading many ideas to limited groups of people, primarily through print. However, the Agitation and Propaganda section also relied on theatre to spread their message. Raghavan describes the transformation in the theatre as follows: 'authors were replaced by collective authorship; boxlike proscenium stage with a transparent wall on one side was replaced by a circle in a city/village square or an open stage;

[40]UNISA Archives Repository [Hereafter UNISA], 205 Maishe Maponya Papers, 'Letter from Raymond Tucker to Desmond Tutu,' 28 February 1979.

darkened auditoria gave in to broad daylight; passive, curious, peeping Tom audience got transformed into a participating, intervening, interrogating crowd.'[41]

Germany, another centre of modern theatre, had its own parallel process of development of agitprop theatre. Carol Poore traces the earliest agitprop theatre to the 1860s Germany where J.B.V. Schweitzer adapted Marx's *Das Kapital* for the stage: 'he used the form of a dialogue, or a disputation between two characters. This written debate, called "Schlingel", was not originally intended for the stage. Nevertheless, it began to be performed here and there as a piece in German workers clubs.' Poore continues: '[t]he piece nonetheless remained more … proclamations, and was intended to be read rather than to be acted on stage.'[42] By the early twentieth century, Bertolt Brecht emerged as the foremost practitioner of agitprop theatre. (Brecht, was, as discussed above, an important influence on Maponya.) Brecht's own theatre emerged before the rise of Hitler and was called Epic Theatre. In brief, Epic Theatre took as its mission to instruct rather than merely entertain. Plays such as *The Measures Taken*, written before Brecht's exile were lehrstücke, or learning plays. Through some theatrical techniques developed by Brecht such as the presence of a narrator and the actors only partially adopting their character, Brecht sought to achieve the effect of alienation. Rather than being comfortable in their seats, Brecht wanted the audience to be uncomfortable and thus spurred to thought and action. In Brecht's own words, 'the theatre became an affair for philosophers, but only for such philosophers wished not just to explain the world but also to change it.'[43]

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[41]V. Raghavan, 'Cross Continental Subversive Strategies Thematic and Methodological Affinities in the Plays of Dario Fo and Safdar Hashmi' (PhD Thesis, Thenhipalam, Kerala, Calicut University, 2006), 5.

[42]Carol Poore, 'German-American Socialist Workers' Theatre, 1877-1900', in *Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the United States, 1830-1980*, ed. Bruce A. McConachie and Daniel Howard Friedman, Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 61–68.

[43]Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthete*, ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 72.

The Hungry Earth: A Summary

What follows is a critical summary of *The Hungry Earth* based on the text of the play published in the anthology *Doing Plays for a Change*, Maishe Maponya's authoritative anthology. The play has a prologue and six scenes that, rather than follow a narrative, are 'episodes,' drawing on Brecht's style. The scenes take place in: a mining hostel, a sugar plantation, a train, an underground mine shaft, and a hostel compound. The play begins with a song before the prologue '*Wake up Mother Afrika*', whose lyrics in part read: 'Wake up Mother Afrika Wake up/Before the white man rapes you.'[44] In contrast to his earlier work in the Allahpoets, *The Hungry Earth* exhibits are more masculine in tone, consistent with Black Consciousness ideology and nationalism. Magaziner has written about how Black Consciousness thought from its inception was conceived of as an effort to reclaim the lost black 'manhood'. Black Consciousness activists believed that '[u]nder apartheid, the political liberation of black men was the preeminent concern and correct context for struggle.'[45] It is no accident that Black Consciousness rhetoric was filled with phrases such as Steve Biko's 'black man you are on your own'. In Maponya's song, this concern with emasculation is extended to the whole continent/people of Africa through the image of a 'white man' raping it.

In the prologue, in a series of poetic statements, the chorus promise to take the audience 'on a heroic voyage'. The first character after the chorus who speaks says, 'It seems as though some people are without feeling.' The goal of the play, we learn is to make the audience feel 'the pain… in the bowels, the groin, in the throat and in the breast.' This would energise them to 'go into the streets and stop the wars, stop slavery, destroy the prisons, stop detentions, stop the killings, stop selfishness ... and apartheid we would end.'[46] These statements could be understood as applying to all people of conscience in the audience, black and white. However,

[44]Maishe Maponya, '*The Hungry Earth*', in *Doing Plays for a Change: Five Works* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2021), 17.
[45]Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 36.
[46]Maponya, '*The Hungry Earth*', 2021, 18.

as the play proceeds it becomes more targeted towards speaking to the oppressed majority in agitprop, Brechtian form.

The text in Scene One names the players (although they are never actually called by name in the dialogue) as Matlhoko (sufferings), Usiviko (shield), Beshwana (loincloth) and Sethotho (imbecile). These are all African names that speak to the themes of the play, with the translations given by Maponya himself. Sethotho, as it shall be shown shortly, is portrayed as an unconscientised black person, a cautionary tale for those in the oppressed classes who refuse to wake up. In Scene One, Usiviko has a nightmare. He says that 'I dreamt I saw umlungu (the white man).' When confronted by Sethotho that he sees white men all the time, Usiviko replies, 'This umlungu was far different from them all in a way. This one has divided me against myself. He has tinted my colour. I can no longer distinguish between right and wrong.' This is followed by an oration in which Matlhoko recounts the story of European colonisation of Africa. In a few lines Maponya takes a jab at land dispossession, mining, capitalism, and religion and their negative impacts on African societies.[47] In the same scene, Beshwana flatly says, 'Umlungu deserves to die.'[48]

A few lines down the actor playing umlungu[49] asks, 'What have I done to deserve your enmity? During the two hundred years I dwelt with you I taught you to live a better life. I brought you the wisdom and fertility of Europe. Why is it then that you are after my blood, that you want to kill me and my family?' Beshwana replies that umlungu is a foreigner, Usiviko adds that umlungu is about to leave the country with all the wealth created through black labour. While in other parts of the play, Maponya unequivocally denounces violence, here he leaves Beshwana's statement hanging. It is agitprop anger not moderated by aesthetic flourish. There are also moments in the dialogue when Beshwana speaks words that make allusions to a global

[47]Ibid., 19.
[48]Ibid., 20.
[49]Umlungu means white person in several indigenous languages of southern Africa.

blackness, such as when responding to Sethotho's tirade about the African 'savages,' who are 'ungrateful for the things you got from umlungu'; Beshwana says that 'We gave culture to the world, we built the pyramids.'[50] Finally, Scene One also refers to historical battles (Isandlwana and Umgungundlovu) to emphasise African courage, stage directions state 'actors mime the battle of spears against guns.'[51]

Scene Two, which takes place at a sugar plantation, is an indictment of both migrant and child labour. The choice of the word 'plantation' to name the scene is significant as it links American slavery with low wage labour practices in South Africa. In this short scene, an inspector comes to the living quarters of the workers and discovers that they are all underage teenagers - all who come from the Transkei. It is important that Maponya chooses the Transkei as it serves as a representative of the Bantustans in general, particularly those that had accepted Pretoria-styled independence, thus rendering them foreigners with no rights in South Africa. The inspector further realises, through dialogue with them, that their working conditions are harsh. They walk six miles from their living quarters to their place of work.[52] In Scene Three, the action moves to a train portrayed by, according to the stage directions, 'four actors occupying chairs which are placed in two parallel rows - the train.'[53] This use of simple props was Grotowskian but also a necessity in the low resource environment that these playwrights were working in.[54] This scene explores the unjust laws of the 'white man'. Sethotho, smelling marijuana in the train carriage is nervous. He tries to flee to another carriage to escape

[50]Maponya, '*The Hungry Earth*', 2021, 20–21.
[51]Ibid, 22.
[52]Ibid, 23–25.
[53]Ibid, 26.
[54]Grotowski, a Polish theatre director gained renown for his 'poor theatre'. Thinking about what would make theatre unique in a world where technology could also tell stories, Grotowski's methods centred around training the body to tell the story as much as possible and not relying on external accoutrements. The ability of an actor to use his body as a vessel to express deeper ideas was what set theatre apart. In South Africa, theatre practitioners such as Athol Fugard actively used Grotowski's ideas. While Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka were aware of and read Grotowski, their theatre was 'poor' even before they encountered these ideas.

prosecution if the packet is found but returns after finding there isn't any space, much to the amusement of the other characters. He comments, ‘Hey, my father lived in the City of Gold and he told me there are so many crimes against the law of the white man of which black people might unwittingly be guilty. You will end up in jail if you are found in the streets of the city and can't produce a pass anytime and anywhere the police demand it—even in the toilet—I tell you, they sometimes hide there.’[55] Eventually, the marijuana is discovered, and all the passengers are arrested. Unlikely though it is for a migrant labourer to use the word ‘unwittingly,’ the obscenity of the apartheid system is demonstrated by Sethotho's retelling of his father’s experiences in Johannesburg, including the police apprehending people without passes in toilets.

Scene Four, which is the longest scene, has three sets of action: a mine collapse, a strike, and an anti-pass protest. The mine collapse which swallows black men is where the title of the play comes from and is also echoed in Matsemela Manaka’s *Egoli*, discussed in Chapter Three. Beginning with a gumboot dance, common on the mines of the Witwatersrand, the dance is stopped by a siren purposefully used to jar the audience. The miners descend to the depths of the mine and the dialogue underground introduces a white miner named Jannie. When the rocks collapse, Sethotho rescues Jannie while ignoring the other black miners. Again, Sethotho is shown as an unconscientised black person. The killing and trapping of black miners underground is a historical event and continues to this day. Matlhoko, who recounts this story, concludes, ‘I looked back into the tunnel where my brothers were being eaten by this hungry earth. I cursed the white man and questioned the very existence of God, for it was my sweat and bones and blood that made Egoli what it is today.’[56]

[55]Maponya, ‘*The Hungry Earth*’, 2021, 27.
[56]Ibid., 29–30.

In the second part of Scene Four, a strike takes place at the mine where Sethotho is the Induna.[57] Nevertheless, Sethotho also participates in the protest to their manager. He says, 'Haikhona baas, thina aiyazi sebenzela lo pikinini mali fana ga so (No boss, we can't work for so little money)!' A few lines below, Matlhoko says, 'Lo mali wena ga lo yipha thina, thina haikhona satisfied. Kudala lo thina sebenza lapha mgodi. Kodwa wena haikhona yipha lo thina increase. Lo room thina hlala, fana ga lo toilet (We are not satisfied with the salary. We have long been working in the mine yet you refuse to give us an increase. The room we stay in is as small as a toilet)!'[58] This strike fails and Matlhoko recounts the Sharpeville Massacre as another event when black people endured the violence of the state, many dying. The players re-enact the protest and brutality of the system: other characters stopping Beshwana from throwing stones; they protest non-violently, singing 'Senze ntoni na? (What have we done)'. According to the stage directions, Usiviko 'mimes firing at the protesters as they fall to the ground.'[59] At the end of the scene, after Usiviko explains his experience of the arrests of survivors and going to the mass funerals, the stage directions tells us: 'Saluting with a clenched fist, he stretches and flexes his body like a person who's just woken up from a sleep.'[60] This strong Africanist symbolism sums up the intention of the play.

Scene Five, another shorter scene, is lighter in tone, playful, but also makes a subtle jab at the exploitation of African culture. Here, tourists come to the hostels to view traditional dances, complete with posing for pictures and drumming and singing. Maponya makes the characters Beshwana and Usiviko mistake some tourists for Mao Tse Tung, Karl Marx and

[57]Indunas are traditional counsellors to the king in Nguni cultures. With the advent of migrancy to the mines of the Witwatersrand, the kings of the various polities would began to send men to oversee their young men in the mines, these came to be known as indunas despite their origin.
[58]Maponya, '*The Hungry Earth*', 2021, 30.
[59]Ibid., 32.
[60]Ibid., 33.

Lady Diana! The first two are revolutionary figures, and perhaps the play is mocking the popularity, at the time, of the British monarchy in South Africa.[61]

In Scene Six, also in a mine compound, we learn from the dialogue that Sethotho and Matlhoko have been working for more than a decade with little to show for it. At the last moment a woman from Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) is introduced into the fray named Chirango, played by a man in performances. Chirango has little agency of her own and carries her husband's name. However, the pan Africanist/Black Consciousness themes are portrayed through her: the separation of families and breakdown in morality due to migrant labour. She becomes a prostitute when she cannot raise enough money from her alcohol business to take care of the two children left by her husband who moved on to another mine while she was in prison. Sethotho tells us 'in a rather pathetic tone' that Chirango's husband 'was among the forty-one black miners trapped underground in a raging fire who were left to die when mine authorities gave the order to seal off the passageways.' Chirango, while lamenting, says, 'our men will never stop dying to feed this hungry earth.'[62] The scene ends in a medley of song, including Nkosi Sikelela and, finally, a song 'Where have all our men gone/They have all gone down into the mines/They will never return again/They have been swallowed by this hungry earth!'[63]

Performances of *The Hungry Earth* in South Africa and the United Kingdom

Prior to leaving for Britain, the play was performed at Dramfes '80, a festival held at the initiative of black artists including Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka. Maile Maponya remembers that the artists involved used their own resources to stage the festival. Describing the performances:

[61]Ibid., 33–35.
[62]Ibid., 37.
[63]Ibid., 38.

the shows were well attended… I remember my father used to also be involved [in publicising the festival], I think my father wanted his/he saw something in his son and he wanted him to really make it because he was really involved in helping whenever we started writing placards to advertise and so on, he would be there – you know you could see the old man trying to also help assist and make sure that it all becomes a success and so on, yeah. But Maishe and Matsemela met not so long before they came up with Dramfes ’80.[64]

Figure 3 Amazwi ACC 2008.49.3.4.3.3 Soyikwa African Theatre Productions, Dramfes 80 flyer in Steven Gray collection.

The Hungry Earth was performed in various venues across Britain from May to August 1981. The tour was organised by Steve Parry, a friend of Maponya. Apart from church venues and smaller theatres, the play was staged at the Africa Centre and Oval House in London. A surviving programme lists Maishe Maponya as director, with a three-person cast that included, apart from Maponya, Dijo Tjabane and Sydwell Yola. The programme also notes that the first

[64]Interview (a) with Maile Maponya.

performance of *The Hungry Earth* was at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre in 1979, followed by several performances in Soweto and at Wits University's Box Theatre in early May 1981. It premièred in the UK at the Old Half Moon Theatre in London on 26 May 1981.[65] Accompanying this tour, Maponya, with the assistance of Steadman, published the script of *The Hungry Earth*,[66] which is remarkably similar to the final script published in the anthology *Doing Plays for a Change*.

One review of *The Hungry Earth* in Newcastle, in the north-east of England, noted how powerful the performance was for British audiences. Phil Penfold, writing in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* was impressed with the skills of the actors while noting the 'great deal of justified bitterness' in the piece. The play 'provok[ed] one's own urge to make some gesture, protest or statement,' Penfold wrote. Penfold found some wry humour in the play, often hidden in the political statements and was impressed with the choreography and music, going so far as saying 'they have a style and vitality which I wish the British theatre would copy'. The review also comments on the ironic use of white cloth masks to portray the white characters which, according to Penfold, was 'superbly done'. Bahumutsi often used cloth masks, wigs or red noses to portray white characters (more on this below). Soyikwa's theatre, in contrast, almost exclusively featured African characters. Penfold concludes his review, 'in the space of ninety minutes and five scenes, you learn more about South Africa than one could believe possible.'[67] Maponya and the cast returned to the UK once more in 1981 to attend the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August. While the group did not win any awards, it was useful

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[65]Amazwi South African Museum of Literature Manuscripts [Hereafter Amazwi], ACC 2012.332 Maishe Maponya, ACC 2012.332.1.1 Theatre Playscript and Programs for The Hungry Earth, 'Program Britain Tour May to August 1981.'
[66]Maishe Maponya, *The Hungry Earth: A Play* (London: Polyptoton, 1981).
[67]Penfold, Phil, Fine shades of black – The Hungry Earth by Bahumutsi Theatre Company on Regional Tour,' *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 8 July 1981, 7

experience to attend such a big gathering of theatre practitioners from across the globe and a vital moment for further networking for Maponya.

The Hungry Earth also toured West Germany, Switzerland, and had limited seasons in some South African theatres in Cape Town and Durban, before returning to Johannesburg and Soweto. The play was staged at the Abbey Theatre in Durban, for example, where the audience was predominantly white. When confronted by the reporter for *The Graphic* about this, noting his aim to conscientise Maponya responded, 'I'm not turning to white people, but since my message is aimed at them as well, they must be exposed to our views of the harm and damage they are doing to the Black community.' The journalist also compared Maponya's work with Mongane Wally Serote. Both, the writer believed, came from a place of squalour (Alexandra) but were able to forge artistry and poetry. After commenting on the material challenges of producing black theatre in the face of competition from commercial theatre in the African community, Maponya added that he felt compelled to work with 'white' institutions like the Market Theatre and the Abbey because they still allowed his actors to gain exposure. 'I believe that through our art we can break down the walls of racism, because we want to create a humanism in this country where all people irrespective of their colour, race, creed or religion will live as one people,' concluded Maponya.[68]

Upon its return to Johannesburg, Doc Bikitsha penned a cautious review of the play in the *Rand Daily Mail*. Appearing in the Township Supplement, the review noted that the play would be playing on 11th and 12th April at the Dube YWCA. Rather than give his own critique of the play, Bikitsha quoted previous South African critics at length. Raeford Daniel had written that *The Hungry Earth* portrayed 'the despair, righteous anger and defiance of the black, indigenous people of Africa'. Daniel was impressed with how the players transformed the Laager stage into 'a vast panorama of space and time in which is encompassed the agony of a

[68]'Theatre from the squalor of Alexandra,' *The Graphic*, 30 April 1982, 7

people oppressed by discriminatory laws, exploited, killed and traduced by diminishing moral values.' Quoting another South African critic, Garalt MacLiam, Bikitsha writes that the play was a 'violent denunciation of whites and the harsh accusations laid out against them here make Maishe [Maponya]'s play more a work of propaganda than theatrical entertainment.' To be fair, Bikitsha continues, 'there is much truth in what is being said, but there is also considerable exaggeration'. Bikitsha concludes his review by relaying the complaints from readers of the *Rand Daily Mail* that such theatre was only performed in Johannesburg and Soweto and not taken to areas such as 'the East and West Rand, Vaal Complex and Pretoria'.[69]

It is not clear whether Bikitsha actually saw the play before writing this review or if he tactfully chose to quote white critics in order to avoid the charge of racism directed at Maponya. What is clear is that the Johannesburg reviews of *The Hungry Earth* were much less enthusiastic than the reviews overseas, revealing the still tense and racially charged political situation in which this theatre was made. At the same time, it is equally plausible that the reviews from the UK were simply white liberals being condescending to the 'exotic' art; the country was not without its racial tensions as exemplified in the Brixton uprising of April 1981 - precisely a month before Bahumutsi began their tour. This chapter now turns to a critical discussion of *Gangsters* and *Dirty Work*, two other important early plays of Maishe Maponya.

Gangsters and *Dirty Work*

Summaries of Gangsters and Dirty Work

In his preface to the anthology *Doing Plays for a Change*, Maishe Maponya recalls the aesthetic influences on the plays *Gangsters* and *Dirty Work*. Both plays, developed in 1984,

[69] Doc Bikitsha, '"Hungry Earth" back on SA stage,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 4 March 1982, 17

explore the same themes; *Gangsters* is a development of the monologue *Dirty Work*. Nadine Gordimer asked Maponya 'to direct [Samuel] Beckett's *Catastrophe*' while he was writing *Dirty Work* but 'After [reading the play the second time with Gordimer] and having read the play a number of times on my own, I found it totally remote from my experiences as a black person living under apartheid.'[70] Maponya nevertheless retained aspects from Beckett's play. 'In *Dirty Work*, I recreated the performance style of *Catastrophe* in which the Director (D) and his Female Assistant (A) use the Protagonist (P) as a puppet with no will of its own.' He continues, 'In *Gangsters*, the Protagonist is transformed into the poet, the Director is Major Whitebeard and the Assistant is Jonathan, a black security policeman. The idea of the poet was first inspired by my own experiences as a poet and performer but later found root in the image of Steve Biko, interrogated and tortured to death.'[71] Samuel Beckett, a leading Irish playwright of the twentieth century had a profound influence on South African playwrights, including Zakes Mda, who based his *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot.* What follows is a critical summary of *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*.

Dirty Work is a long monologue that lampoons the apartheid South African security apparatus. While Ian Steadman felt that the play was not worth a detailed analysis because it was merely a curtain raiser for the multi-character play, *Gangsters*, an analysis of the dramatic text does nevertheless point to the themes that were on Maponya's mind. The character is Pieter Hannekom, who delivers a lecture at a conference on security issues to a group of business executives. We are told that Hannekom is the head of the newly formed Department of Security. In his introduction, Hannekom states that 'they will regard this conference as a watershed in the Post-Carlton Centre'.[72] Maponya cleverly ties this fictional conference to the 1976

[70]Maishe Maponya in Maponya, *Doing Plays for a Change*, xiv–xv.
[71]Maponya, *Doing Plays for a Change*, xv.
[72]Maishe Maponya, '*Dirty Work*', in *Doing Plays for a Change: Five Works* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2021), 71.

Conference at the Carlton Centre where industry leaders came together to determine a response to the township uprisings. It is at this conference that the Urban Foundation was formed, to create an urban black ‘middle class’ through the provision of better housing, thus quelling future resistance. In *Dirty Work*, industry - led by white monopolists - now joins forces with the state to further quell black resistance. 'I am sure that you all agree that the encouragement and co-operation between industry members and security agencies will result in a better future for us all,’[73] Hannekom says.

Throughout the rest of the monologue, the tone is satirical. Hannekom pokes fun at the system in various ways such as singing an anti-apartheid song and substituting the lyrics with, ‘Boycott sabotage/Boycott sabotage/Go together like strikes and hand grenades,’[74] referring here to the ongoing sabotage campaign by the militant wings of the liberation movements such as uMkontho we Sizwe of the ANC. Through Hannekom’s words, Maponya further takes a jab at black police men, 'Union of Guards Human,' calling them unsophisticated. Hannekom and his imaginary colleagues stage a road checkpoint at which a woman who is on her way to her wedding is searched with a metal detector, the metal detector goes off. 'It's all right Geoff that's only her metal coil. Well, it doesn't look like you're concealing anything except the fact that you're no longer a virgin bride,’[75] says Hannekom. This vulgar joke may be seen as a vestige of the uneasy relationship BC and Maponya had with women. Piet explains an innovation in security, a new electronic system, which he suggests would be better suited ‘in morality surveillance and industrial control’ than humans. The system, complete with cameras in hidden areas of the workplace would prevent undesirable sexual relationships, particularly interracial and homosexual relationships.

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[73]Ibid., 73.
[74]Ibid., 75.
[75]Ibid., 77–80.

Finally, the monologue discusses the riot-pacifier, a new kind of vehicle from the USA that is an ogre of repression: 'these machines have a kind of PA system on top with which you can tell the rioters to shut up. And if this doesn't work they've got machines that fire rubber bullets and a sort of pod which farts out—I beg your pardon, it poeps, oh I'm sorry which emits a very powerful tear gas and then all the rioters run around like headless chickens.'[76] Hannekom suggests that there are communists in the businesses of those assembled, he is certain. People who read the liberal newspapers, listen to reggae music or are members of unions are particularly suspect. Piet paranoidly jumps behind a sand fortress when he hears gunfire, which turns out to be from a local Skiet Kommando, a citizen force formed to protect white communities during apartheid. Highlighting the nervousness and paranoia of the system in the closing image of the play before he collapses from a heart attack, Piet bans the blackboard he has been using. He declares 'a state of emergency and dispers[es] the 32 Battalion around the townships.' 'In times of crisis censorship must be applied,' Hannekom insists. 'Another example, I place a banning order on the use of the blackboard. *[Writes "banned" across the board. Looks around suspiciously and turns the blackboard back to front*.] The blackboard is banned! I am taking no chances. I am taking security measures.'[77]

Thematically, *Gangsters* is an exploration of both the security system and the role of the poet in resistance movements. It builds thematically and aesthetically on *Dirty Work* by creating a setting of successive interrogations of a resistance poet, Rasechaba (in some performances the poet was female, Masechaba, meaning father or mother of the nation respectively in Sesotho). The other two characters are Jonathan, a black policeman, and Major Whitebeard, who is a white security policeman. Rather than scenes, the play is episodic in

[76]Ibid., 85.
[77]Ibid., 88.

construction.[78] There are nine major episodes and the episodes that carry the main action - when Rasechaba interacts with Whitehead - are called encounters. The staging is simple: one part of stage is Whitebeard's office, the other is used for the rest of the action. Transitions are marked by blackouts. The opening vignette, referred back to at the end of the play, is a foreshadow of the death of Rasechaba at the hands of police. The stage directions indicate, 'Rasechaba's body dressed in black with a hood on his head is balanced on a cross-structure. Dead…'[79] This murder refers to the murder of Steve Biko in police custody in 1977. His hooding with a black cloak is an allusion to the black messiah, a concept in Black Consciousness ideology drawn from Black Theology.

Rasechaba goes through three interrogations, with resistance as constant theme . In spite of threats from Whitebeard and Jonathan, he keeps performing his poetry. The dramatic action is broken by Rasechaba reciting his poems, six in total, under a blue light. In this sense, *Gangsters* is autobiographical as Maishe Maponya was interrogated for his work as a playwright. It also echoes the experiences of the poet Molefe Pheto, discussed in a previous chapter. In the first interrogation, Whitebeard tells Rasechaba about a poem, 'The Spirit of the Nation.' He explains, 'All I have to do is play one of the video tapes we've made of you doing your poetry at Regina Mundi commemorative services.'[80] The Regina Mundi Catholic Church was a site of political gathering and defiance, particularly during commemorations of June 16th 1976 and a place where the Allahpoets performed. Maponya recalls the very likely presence of informers at these gatherings. Like in *Dirty Work*, *Gangsters* includes an exchange between Whitebeard and Rasechaba which is an artistic critique of the censorship system. Whitebeard tries to get Rasechaba to say his poems are inflammatory, saying to him, 'when you stand in

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[78]This was also observed in *The Hungry Earth* and other committed theatre of the decade, such as *Woza Albert* and *Born in the RSA.*

[79]Maishe Maponya, '*Gangsters*', in *Doing Plays for a Change: Five Works* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2021), 92.

[80]Ibid., 94.

front of a hall full of people, and you've just recited one of your poems and the people start screaming and waving their fists in the air… you don't feel it's your poetry that's caused them to react like that?'[81]

In response, Rasechaba explains his creative process and that his goal is to express the consciousness of his people. Whitebeard responds with what could be considered the philosophy guiding censorship in South Africa:

> So what interests us is not so much the creative process as the effect that your poetry has on ordinary people: people who don't have the insight and understanding that you and I have, and therefore there can be no doubt Mr Rasechaba that your poems have made a lot of people feel very angry, even violent and it is my job to put a stop to that sort of thing.[82]

Here, Maponya is critiquing the idea that the censors had of the likely audience and challenges these assumptions.[83]

In Rasechaba's first poem, *Who is to blame?,* the question is left unanswered: 'When a child leaves home for school never to come back/When a mother hides the cracks on her face created by years of crying.'[84] Whitebeard responds to this poem by, according to stage directions, reciting 'any Afrikaans poem about flowers or nature'. He challenges Rasechaba to recite such poems rather than those that make people feel 'violent and angry.' This exchange prefigures the 1990 debate sparked by Albie Sachs's paper 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom'. in which Sachs called for an about-turn from the priorities of committed art. He wrote:

> Can it be that once we join the ANC we do not make love anymore, that when comrades go to bed they discuss the role of the white working class? Surely even those comrades whose tasks deny them the opportunity and direct possibilities of love, remember past love and dream of love to come. What are we fighting for, if not the right to express our

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[81]Ibid., 94–95.

[82]Ibid., 96.

[83]For the idea of the likely reader, introduced with the Publications Act, 1963, see McDonald, Peter, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and Its Cultural Consequences,* (Oxford, OUP: 2009).

[84]Maponya, '*Gangsters*', 96.

humanity in all its forms, including our sense of fun and capacity for love and tenderness and our appreciation of the beauty of the world?[85]

While Sachs was speaking of the ANC, this attitude of the 'government in waiting' applied to any artists working in the 1980s. Essentially, Maponya is challenging the idea that art should only be beautiful, concerned with aesthetics. Maponya continued making theatre that was about 'ugly' things rather than the beauty Sachs hoped for.

In the third episode, after the first interrogation, Rasechaba is on a torture machine on the other side of the stage. Whitebeard and Jonathan, the black policeman, discuss Rasechaba state. The implication is that he has been brutally tortured since his head is 'red and pink'. Jonathan also has a rope which he is asked to discard in a comic way. Whitebeard tells him to get rid of the incriminating evidence and he diligently takes notes, 'Rope to discard. [*Slowly, with a sad look on his face.*] Rope to discard.'[86] After another blackout, the action moves to a church with a hymn, 'Bach or Mozart,' according to stage directions. Jonathan follows him around the church. There are no special props to indicate the scene change except for the music and Rasechaba kneeling to pray. Jonathan kneels next to him. This exchange is exaggerated, almost comedic, to drive the point home of the pervasiveness of the security system. Rasechaba, arguing with Jonathan, says that the black policeman is a 'bloodsucker'. Rasechaba continues, 'You have no conscience. You are dead inside'[87] and recites a poem in which he elaborates on Jonathan's death. He ends the poem, 'Death, is when you start to hate to be black!'[88]

In the next episode, Jonathan and Whitebeard discuss the ways Rasechaba could have died, echoing the murders in custody during the 1970s including claims that the detainee

[85]Sachs, Ablie, 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom,' in Ingrid de Kock and Karen Press, eds., *Spring Is Rebellious : Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents* (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990)
[86]Maponya, '*Gangsters*', 99.
[87]Ibid., 101.
[88]Ibid., 102.

committed suicide or slipped on a bar of soap. This episode is quick, setting up for the next interrogation/encounter between Whitebeard and Jonathan. This chat is not as friendly as the previous one, Whitebeard reads a poem of Rasechaba's, 'Ghetto', and proceeds to give the latter a lesson on black advancement within a capitalist system. These ironic words from Whitebeard: 'What is your Black Consciousness motto? "Black man you are on your own." Why then do you try and belittle the black men who are trying to go on their own by owning businesses and improving their living conditions? It seems you in your poetry attack them?'[89] Rasechaba responds with a poem about how initiatives such as the work of the Urban Foundation merely create class differences among black, oppressed people rather than leading to meaningful, revolutionary change. Rasechaba remarks on these processes leading to creating a class of 'cheese and wine drinkers/Of our struggle'. In addition to the Urban Foundation, the 'Iron Lady,' Margaret Thatcher who was the British Prime Minister at the time and a staunch supporter of the apartheid government, 'messed up our struggle'.[90] Rasechaba performs another poem called *Hoyina*, after which Whitebeard issues him with a banning order.

Defiantly, Rasechaba says 'Yes, they can ban me here but they won't ban the spirit of the nation. For as long as those millions of people are still thirsty the march will continue. I respect the convictions of my people and they respect my beliefs. I will help them carry the cross…'[91] In this exchange with Jonathan, Rasechaba speaks about land dispossession. This marks a turning point in Jonathan's psyche. Immediately Whitebeard walks back in, Jonathan says, 'Major, what he is saying to me… there is sense in his talk…'[92] Whitebeard threatens Jonathan with withdrawing some of his benefits, such as a private school education for his children in Swaziland, which silences Jonathan. In a brief episode set in the township,

[89]Ibid., 105–6.
[90]Ibid., 106–7.
[91]Ibid., 111.
[92]Ibid., 113.

Rasechaba recites a fourth poem about apartheid's evils showing that Rasechaba is unrepentant despite his banning order, and leads to the final encounter with Whitebeard, after an arrest. Rasechaba keeps reciting a poem, under a special light, which deals with the process of abducting the poet while he resists. This time Whitebeard informs Rasechaba that his poetry was found on guerilla fighters among 'AK47s, Scorpions and limpet mines; among the T5s and T7s.' Rasechaba is physically punched in the stomach this time. It is apparent that he has been followed and there is a list of places he has been, 'terrorist hideout[s].'[93] It is also revealed that Rasechaba belongs to the African Poets of Azania, a fictional version of the Allahpoets.

The play ends with some additional interrogation regarding Rasechaba's contacts. Shown documents that were intercepted, Rasechaba responds, 'I have communicated with lots of friends in the past, some of them are fellow writers. Do you expect me to live in isolation? I'm human.'[94] Whitebeard's 'clean' hands are absolved of any wrongdoing because he is doing it so that his one-year-old child, David, can continue to be happy. As he continues to torture Rasechaba, the blood 'will wash off easily,' Whitebeard insists[95]. In his final poem, Rasechaba speaks of 'the curtain fall[ing]/On the last act of your pillage.' Addressing Whitebeard, he hopes that the major will 'come to understand/How deeply/We loved this land/And cared for all its people/[Upright and facing forward.] White and black/Free and unfree.' Maponya uses this Brechtian technique to address the whole audience and it gives us a better understanding of his underlying ideology. While informed by Black Consciousness, it seems Maishe Maponya was concerned about the future of South Africa, whether black or white. Finally, Jonathan is ordered to torture Rasechaba, leading to his death. The play circles back to the beginning with Rasechaba's body on the cross-like structure. Jonathan and Whitebeard discuss covering up the murder. The lights go out to a taped poem, Rasechaba's voice about 'parricidal mania':

[93]Ibid., 116–17.
[94]Ibid., 120.
[95]Ibid., 120–21.

When the parricidal mania
That grips the uncrowned villains
Roams free
And the streets are
Dyed with blood
They would seek me out to pray together
At the altar
For they would have come to realise
That I was against their own destruction
And clung frantically
On the frail hope
That they would be brought to sanity
Perhaps finally
They would be calling me out
To rebuke the storms
But all hope and understanding
Shall have gone by then...[96]

Audience Response/ Reviews from Overseas and South African Performances of *Gangsters*

Presented as a double-bill, *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* were premièred at the Laager at the Market Theatre in July 1984. After Maishe Maponya's early drafts, John Maytham contributed to developing the script of *Dirty Work*. Piet Hannekom in *Dirty Work* was played by Charles Comyn. In *Gangsters*, Major Whitebeard was played by Comyn, George Lamola played Jonathan, while Rasechaba was played by Simon Mosikidi. The lighting designer was Andy Mabizela. Both were directed by Maishe Maponya.[97] The plays were staged again in February of the following year in slightly revised versions. Writing in the *Rand Daily Mail*, J. Ralph Draper's review of the double-bill discusses the plays in light of the restricting by the Publications Control Board (more will be said below). The Publications Board had seen the plays in 1984 and decided that *Dirty Work* could be staged anywhere. They, however, 'ruled that *Gangsters* may be performed only in tiny theatres like The [Market Theatre's] Laager,' Draper writes. The restricting of *Gangsters* to the Market Theatre came as a direct result of the

[96]Ibid., 124.
[97]Pat Schwartz, *The Best Of Company: The Story Of Johannesburg's Market Theatre* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1988), 255.

change in the Censorship Amendment Act of 1978, that replaced the concept of the 'average reader' with the 'likely reader.' After the uproar and litigation caused by the banning of Afrikaner writer Etienne Leroux's *Magersfontein, O Magersfontein!,* the censors were pressed to consider who was likely to view or read a work of art, rather than simply what effect it would have on an average citizen.[98] The news of the restricting of *Gangsters* seems to have increased its popularity. 'The racial variety of last night's closely packed audience alone was stimulating,' recalls Draper. 'What they saw was electrifying.' Charles Comyn's portrayal of the white security policemen in both plays was 'uncomfortably convincing'. Mosikidi's portrayal of Rasechaba in *Gangsters* is described as 'moving' while Lamola as Jonathan, the black policeman, is 'even more frightening than the overt brutality of Whitebeard and his ilk.'[99] While the play could not be performed in township spaces, which did not have specialised theatre facilities at the time, the restricting of *Gangsters* to The Market Theatre did not reduce its impact on the audience in attendance.

Later that year, *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* toured the UK, attending both the London International Festival of Theatre and the Edinburgh Festival. In London, the play premièred at the Lyric Theatre. Reviewing the London performance, R. B. Marriott wrote in *The Stage* that in *Dirty Work* 'fear is everywhere, even behind the curtains of the conference chamber. Maponya writes vividly, his satire is clear and pointed, and an emotional thread gives the work depth. The official is superbly played by Marcel van Heerden.' About *Gangsters*, Marriott continues: 'Shadows of the martyr leader Steve Biko hover in the work; racialism at its most cruel and unjust, the Black Cause, the inhumanity of man to man, are other elements that make the play both painfully striking and very moving. It is strongly and sensitively played by the author, Marcel van Heerden, George Lamola and Simon Mosikidi. Maponya directed.'[100] A

[98] Matteau, "Real and Imagined Readers," 87–90.
[99]Ralph J Draper, 'The cost of a man's convictions,' *Rand Daily Mail,* 14 February 1985.
[100]R B Marriott, 'Dirty Work and Gangsters Review,' *The Stage*, 25 July 1985, 9.

South African critic, summarising the reviews from London, noted that they had been highly praised there and that the plays 'express[ed] neither anger nor desperation but a chilling certainty that there is no way back for South Africa, and that morally inexcusable laws sow only the seeds of revolution.'[101]

In 1986, *Gangsters* was staged at the Woza Afrika! Festival in New York City as a double bill alongside Matsemela Manaka's *Children of Asazi*. (More about this festival in Chapter Five). Masechaba was played by Nomathemba Mdini, Major Whitebeard was played by Anthony Wilson and George Lamola returned as Jonathan. Simon Mosikidi was the stage manager. According to a programme from the performances, Nomathemba Mdini had been an actor in Gibson Kente's plays including *Laduma* and *Mama and the Load*. She had also worked on television and was part of Maponya's performance poetry piece *Busang Meropa* which had 'premiered at the Grahamstown National [Arts] Festival in July 1986.' (We return to *Busang Meropa* in the next section.) It is significant that Maponya had engaged Mdini to take on the role of Rasechaba, subverting the usual male dominance in Black Consciousness inspired theatre. Wilson was an equally experienced Afrikaans speaking actor, having worked at the Market Theatre, other venues in South Africa and in television.[102]

Mainstream American reviewers found *Gangsters* too strong. William Honan, Arts and Culture Editor of the *New York Times*, in an article entitled '"Woza Afrika!" And the Stage as Political Forum,' had this to say about Mdini's performance: 'the leading actress marched through the audience shaking her fist and denouncing both "Mr. Constructive Engagement" for having "messed up our struggle" and the "gun-toting sadists" of the white South African security police who leave "bullet-riddled babies" in their path. Later, she declaimed: "Victory

[101]Dirk de Villiers, 'Maponya's plays praised in UK,' *The Star*, 29 July 1985.
[102]Ali Khangela Hlongwane Personal Papers [Hereafter AKH], 'Woza Afrika! New Playwrights' Theatre Program for Children of Asazi and Gangsters.'

is our aim and conquest our goal!"'[103] Honan only found the portrayal of Jonathan by George Lamola occasionally convincing. Jonathan 'cockily apes his white master's manners, then with more than a hint of desperation implores his prisoner to cooperate with the authorities. Later, he fidgets nervously as he prepares to carry out his brutal orders, and at length – horrifyingly – tortures his prisoner to death,' Honan writes. *Gangsters* and the other plays (*Children of Asazi*, *Bopha*, and *Asinamali*) are, in Honan's opinion, not agitprop as this would require a level of manipulation of the audience. The plays were guileless 'in detailing the grim determination of Pretoria to ignore the facts of life,' and this made them compelling[104]. But art they were not. It is interesting that Honan glosses over some of the aesthetic choices such as the 'tribal chanting, singing and dancing' while restricting his definition of art to only that that explores the inner workings of the human mind from a strictly dramatic perspective.[105] Another reviewer in the same newspaper found *Gangsters* 'more hortatory and less effective' than *Children of Asazi*[106] These dismissive reviews might point towards something in the American psyche related to the art of the oppressed, a failure to see beyond the message that, in the United States, was heavily charged with race.

Gangsters's Censorship

We now return to a discussion of the restriction of *Gangsters*. The text of the letter sent by the Publications Board to Mannie Manim, who was at the time the manager of the Market Theatre, is worth quoting in full:

Dear Mr Manim

PUBLICATIONS ACT, 1974: PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT: 'DIRTY WORK/GANGSTERS'

[103]William H. Honan, '"Woza Afrika!" And the Stage as Political Forum,' *New York Times*, 5 October 1986.
[104]Ibid.
[105]Ibid.
[106]Gussow, Mel, 'Stage: "Asazi" and "Gangsters,"' *New York Times*, 26 September 1986, C3.

> This is to inform you that a Committee of Publications appointed under section 4 of the above Act has viewed the above play, as performed at the Market Laager Theatre and decided as follows, as provided for in section 30:
>
> 1.The play 'Dirty Work' is approved unconditionally.
> 2. In regard to the play 'Gangsters' -
> (a) it may only be performed in small intimate four wall theatres, of the experimental or avant guard [sic] type;
> (b) a request for approval of any future venue for the performance of the play must be directed via the Directorate of Publications;
> (c) the Laager Theatre in the Market Theatre complex in Johannesburg is an approved venue;
> (d) if 'Gangsters' is performed as part of a double bill (as with 'Dirty Work' in this case) or together with any other productions in the same venue, the conditions in regard to 'Gangsters' as set out in para 2 shall apply.[107]

In Ian Steadman's words, 'The restriction of the play to "experimental" or "avant-garde" theatre venues such as The Laager Theatre served, for the [Directorate of Publications], to anaesthetise the play: with The Market Theatre considered a cultural haven, its function was seen as appropriating political theatre and turning it into a harmless cultural commodity.'[108] Steadman's observation about the Market Theatre serving as a place where 'protest' theatre became harmless to the state is worth reflection. While this is partly true, it echoes the sentiment of the board itself, that in the eyes of the uneducated 'intended audience', *Gangsters* could be dangerous, whereas the relatively sophisticated attendees at the Market Theatre had a stronger grasp of literary standards and would go to the theatre to merely enjoy the piece rather than engage in a political activity. As has been discussed above, the audiences at the Market Theatre were changing in the 1980s, there were more African people in attendance. Even if these people were more educated and had more money than the average person living in the townships at the time, one cannot assume that they did not hold beliefs that were revolutionary. Nevertheless, what the restriction did succeed in doing is reduce the number of black South Africans who saw the play.

[107]Publications Control Board, quoted in Maponya, *Doing Plays for a Change*, 12–13.
[108]Steadman, Ian, 'Introduction,' in *Doing Plays for a Change*, 13.

On not Banning of the *Woza Afrika!* Anthology

As discussed above, *Gangsters* was taken to New York City as part of the *Woza Afrika!* Festival. Later in 1986, Duma Ndlovu's *Woza Afrika!* Foundation published the scripts of the plays that were part of the festival in an anthology.[109] The book was submitted to the Directorate of Publications by the Security Branch in 1987. However, the Directorate found that the book was desirable based on their deliberations, which I will outline from the extant censorship file. The reader engaged by the Director of Publications was Prof. L.B. Odendall, who completed the work on 10 November 1987. Odendall, who had been part of the original committee that restricted *Gangsters* to the Market Theatre, felt that overall the *Woza Afrika!* anthology was undesirable based on his reading of certain sections of the plays contained within, including *Gangsters*. Justifying his recommendation to ban the book, while the plays in it when they were performed in South Africa were not outrightly banned, he remarks,

> It would seem strange to recommend undesirability of the published versions of plays of which the productions were found not undesirable.' ... 'On the one hand dialogue in conjunction with action and the other technical elements of the theatre has a more powerful impact on the audience than the word on the page has on the solitary reader. On the other hand, the word on the page, seeing something in "black and white" (no pun intended!) could have a stronger impact. People also tend to endow a printed piece with a higher truth coefficient than a produced play.[110]

Odendall also maintained that some parts of the play, including Duma ka Ndlovu's preface, were untrue and could lead to civil unrest in South Africa. The rest of the censorship file provides a fascinating insight into the operations of the South African censorship bureaucracy in the late 1980s. The book was sent to the second committee of readers who had differing

[109]Duma Ndlovu, ed., *Woza Afrika!: An Anthology of South African Plays* (New York: G. Braziller, 1986).
[110]SANA WCARS, Directorate of Publications Records, 3/217, '*Woza Afrika!* Censorship File.'

views. The first two committee members largely agreed with Odendall's conclusions, recommending the book for censorship. Another committee member wrote,

> I cannot agree with the reader's conclusion. These plays certainly contain strong anti-government sentiments and are obviously one-sided and even emotional … While the reader speaks of "malignant untruths" (and I cannot wholly agree with that), unfortunate truths also abound. And, even if one accepts that there are untruths, this certainly does not incite the reader to violence etc. At the most, the reader becomes increasingly aware of the contradictions that constitute South Africa (emphasis in original.)[111]

Another committee member concluded, 'The likely reader would be a drama lover, not a revolutionary. Not undesirable.'[112]

The Director of Publications, weighing all the opinions before him, decided not to ban *Woza Afrika!* the anthology. It is likely that the chief censor's decision was also influenced by the prevailing political climate and the imperative not to embarrass the South African government at a time of increased international scrutiny. While Maponya wrote another major theatrical work in the late 1980s, *Jika*, the next and final section will focus on two works that are representative of Maponya's artistic production from the late 1980s up to the year 2000, *Busang Meropa* and *Song for Biko*.

Theatrical Works in the Late 1980s and 1990s: *Busang Meropa* and *A Song for Biko*

Busang Meropa

Busang Meropa was developed for the National Arts Festival (then called the Grahamstown Festival) in 1987. Distinguishing *Busang Meropa* from regular or dub poetry, Maponya described the work as follows: 'the approach at that stage was slightly different from the dub poets. We tried to create a kind of theme around the renditions. We created situations within that whole performance and therefore in it was the whole element of drama as drama

[111] WCARS, '*Woza Afrika!* Censorship File.'
[112] Ibid.

and, broadly, performance, and that's how *Busang Meropa* would actually differ from other poets' work.'[113] According to Maile Maponya, who was intimately involved in developing the music in *Busang Meropa*, the piece was performed at the DOCC in Orlando, at the Market Theatre, and in Mafikeng in the then Bantustan of Bophuthatswana. An album was recorded, which was sold on vinyl as well as cassette tape.[114] The piece was also performed in Britain, including at the Kajayo Festival in Birmingham in 1989, partly at the initiation of the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo.[115]

While Maishe Maponya certainly came under the influence of dub poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson, he developed his own style of performance. Many of the poems in *Busang Meropa* had already been written while others were developed specifically for the production. While the script of the production was never published in book form, the entire lyrics of the poems used in the final recorded version, translations by Maishe Maponya, and the cast of musicians were printed on the back of the vinyl case. Recorded in late 1987 in South Africa and then mixed at The Point in London, *Busang Meropa* (the record) was a multilingual tour de force in resistance poetry. Indeed, as the sleeve notes explain, 'South Africa is a country of many languages. This record uses six of these: Xhosa in Izwe Lolahleko and Hoyina! Hoyina!, Zulu in Iyeza Inkululeko, Shangaan, Sepedi, and Zulu in Manano Wee!, Sepedi in Bušang Meropa, Sesotho in Helelelelele, and English throughout.' The cast included Maishe Maponya performing the poems, Fuya Nofuya on guitar, Zenzi Mbuli on drums and Maile Maponya on piano, flute and backing vocals. Other singers were Nomathemba Mdini, Nomvuyo

[113]Geoffrey V Davis and Anne Fuchs, '"I Will Remain an African:" An Interview With Maishe Maponya', in *Theatre and Change in South Africa*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis and Anne Fuchs (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996).
[114]Maponya, Interview (b) conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[115]Ibid.

Mahambehlala, Aubrey 'Ops' Motanyane, Sydwell Yola, Dan Tlouana, Julia Mathunjwa, Betty 'Boo' Mlela, and Ruby Morare.[116]

The poem 'Hoyina, Hoyina!', a version which was included in the published version of *Gangsters*, is worth reproducing in full together with an English translation. The poem is an exemplar of forceful resistance, which is the theme throughout *Busang Meropa*:

Nivile nga maculo
esizwe sintsundu e-Azania
ethetha ngokuthi asifikanga apha
We have no history of arrival

Kuya mangalisa
asihlalanga ngoxolo ezweni lethu
simile kodwa ngomlenz'omnye
siphandliwe simana siyalila
sovuthelwa ngubanina

Namhlanje siyagxothwa
Ngomso siyabotshwa
Hayi ngenyimini siyazilwela
We fight back
Unzima lomthwało womzabalazo

Abanye bayathengisa
Abanye bayathengiswa
Ku vuthumlilo
Ithayela lityumtu
Kwenze njani na sizwe'sintsundu

Aqhubeka njalo
Amaculo esizwe sintsundu e-Azania
Igcwele imigaqo ngabasebenzi
Baya zabalaza nabo
Baqhubeka phambili

Abantwana bayalishukumisa ilizwe
Baculela phezulu
Bazama ngapha na ngapha
Bayalinyikimisa
Bayalizongomisa
Ngomso agenene sophumelela

Abasetyhini
bayayiyizela

[116]UNISA, 205 Maishe Maponya, *Busang Meropa* Vinyl Sleeve.

Sengathi Kumnadi kowethu
Kanti thina siyazi
It is the African
Way of doing things
Even the revolution

(*Have you heard of the new songs of the black*
Nation of Azania that affirm our indigenous
position in the land - that we have no history of arrival

It's so strange that we've never lived
in peace in our land. We stand with one leg. Our sight
is obscured. Who will come to our rescue?

Today we are force-removed
The next day we get arrested No! The next day
We fight back
It is the heavy burden of the struggle.

People turn sell-outs
Others turn victims of sell-outs
There is too much fire
The necklace consumes human beings
What has gone wrong, black nation?

Thus continue
The songs of the Azanian nation
The toilers are in bondage in the streets
They too are in the struggle
They surge forward

The young shake the land
They sing out loud
Trying this end and that end
They rampage over the land
They vibrate it
Definitely tomorrow we shall overcome

The women ululate
As though in enjoyment
Yet we are the only ones who know
It is the African way of doing things
Even the revolution.)[117]

The poem describes the plight of the 'black nation' struggling against apartheid colonialism. It is significant that the term Azania is used to describe South Africa, the term

[117]UNISA, *Busang Meropa* Vinyl Sleeve.

preferred by the BCM and the PAC. The third stanza of the poem represents a shift from mere observers of oppression to active resistance. This leads to challenges such as sell-outs, and even death on the streets. Maponya pays homage to all the groups involved in the struggle in the 1980s, the youth, women and workers. An archival video of a performance of a 1989 production at the Black Sun, in Berea, Johannesburg survives. This performance began with a poem, I, followed by an introduction by Maishe Maponya who said that the evenings' songs and poems were taken from the production *Busang Meropa* and were presented by Sounds from Bahumutsi. The stage backdrop is of African print, a Sesotho hat, knobkerrie and the eight performers are all dressed in variations of African print. The first song, *Izwe Lolahleko*, Maponya said, was dedicated to Muziwakhe Anton Lembede, Mangaliso Sobukwe and Nelson Mandela (saying these names out loud was itself resistance). The music is gentle and soothing, with a prominent alto saxophone, drums and shaker. Maile Maponya does a solo on the flute. These instruments are accompanied by one acoustic and one bass guitar and voices in harmony singing the lyrics, 'izwe lolahleko.' A penny whistle marks the transition to the more upbeat *Iyeza Inkululeko*, (freedom is coming).[118] The other instruments used in the production at various points include a trombone and a set of African drums.

Maishe Maponya follows these two songs with the poem, *Mr. Gunslinger*, recited and accompanied by sombre sounds from the instruments and backing vocals. Maishe Maponya's voice, powerful and almost like a preacher, shakes. Furthermore, the poem is performed, he begins the poem kneeling in a circle with the three other performers before rising to continue the rest of the poem. He mimes actions such as the words 'wagon-wheels/Running' in the third stanza of the poem, referring to the settler treks into land previously occupied by indigenous peoples.[119] One of the two women on stage, Noxolo Machailanga, introduces the poem *Merry*

[118]UNISA, 205 Maishe Maponya, Video of Busang Meropa at Black Sun.
[119]UNISA, 205 Maishe Maponya, *Busang Meropa* Vinyl Sleeve.

Making, by saying, 'in the past in the townships, children played a game of hide-and-seek called Black Mampantile. Our next item simply contrasts that era with one of reasons [or causes of] stopping the game.'[120] The production *Busang Meropa* not only presents strong resistance but also nostalgia for the peaceful lives of childhood lost during the struggle. The rest of the performance continues to alternate between music and performed poetry. In the poem *Joburg City*, for example, Maishe Maponya notes that most events in the township were banned, while celebrations in Johannesburg (to mark the centenary of the encounter of gold that led to the foundation of the city, which coincided with ten years since the Soweto uprising) went on. Defiantly, Maponya intones, 'I refuse to salute you, Joooooo'burg city!' Maishe Maponya is joined by Machailanga while the rest of the cast sings along.[121]

In the poem I Maile Maponya moves to the piano and Maishe Maponya sings and performs in a recital manner, 'How many promises/In so many years/How many lies.' At the end of this poem, which concludes, 'Will there ever be hope/With so many questions? No, not in this land/ There'll never be peace/Until every toiler/Shall have won freedom,'[122] Maishe Maponya invokes a dramatic pause before ringing a school bell in his hand three times. On each ring, one performer at a time who has been behind the makeshift curtain walks on to stage to rejoin the rest of the cast before a new song begins. Another song, the title track of the recorded album *Busang Meropa* is sung rather than recited with an extended solo from the alto saxophone and electric guitar. The last poem, 'Underground Work', includes the lines, 'We only see each other by the flicker of the fireflies… we thank you for teaching us underground work.'[123] It is a very radical poem and one that reflected the heightened level of resistance in the townships at the time. Indeed, Maponya was speaking for his community. While the

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[120]UNISA, Video of Busang Meropa at Black Sun.
[121]Ibid.
[122]UNISA, 205 Maishe Maponya, Busang Meropa Vinyl Sleeve.
[123]UNISA, 205 Maishe Maponya, Video of Busang Meropa at Black Sun.

performance does include dancing, it is improvised rather than specifically choreographed from existing traditions. At no time in this performance is the musicality of the poetry compromised. In addition to the modern instruments, poetry is backed by the African drums (played by Zenzi Mbuli) at specifically chosen moments to heighten the dramatic effect. This harkens back to methods used by Mihloti (see Chapter Two) and the Allahpoets.

The music for *Busang Meropa* was composed by Maishe Maponya in close collaboration with Maile Maponya and Zenzi Mbuli. Recalling the way that the music was developed, Maile Maponya says: 'Music was mostly … composed by myself. I had a piano and mostly I would compose the songs there. And Maishe, he would come [and say], "Okay, play like this." He would sing like, "Bam, bam, bam, bam! [imitates musical notes]." And I would try to listen and then play. And then, also, Zenzi Mbuli as well.' He continues, 'Zenzi was the … percussionist… Maishe would come up with those ideas and I would go like that [compose the music on the piano.]'[124] While he still plays his piano in his leisure time at home and encourages his children to take up music (the same piano that he developed music on with his brother Maishe in the parent's Diepkloof home), *Busang Meropa* was Maile Maponya's last major involvement with Bahumutsi. He went into full time employment in a Johannesburg-based consumer electronics company and will retire in 2024. Mbuli would, in his own right, go on to win the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Drama in 1999. He had roots at the Thabisong Youth Club, whose members eventually formed the Rishile Poets/Traditional Dancers. Working with director and playwright Tale Motsepe, it is from this group that the gumboot dancers were eventually formed as a traveling ensemble.[125]

'Mbuli is a grassroots child of Soweto, whose focus, discipline and resilience was shaped over two decades of hanging around the Market Theatre Precinct and observing masters

[124]Maponya, Interview (b) conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[125]Gumboots, 'Gumboots: A History,' pdf.
https://www.toothillschool.co.uk/data/files/dept/music/y7_gumboot_history.pdf

such as the late Barney Simon at work,' Sandile Memela wrote of Zenzi Mbuli. Memela added that Mbuli had no formal theatre training but that 'he received a basic theatre education and a black-consciousness cultural conditioning that kept his love and passion for the arts alive.' Mbuli shot to fame when he staged the musical production *Gumboots* about mine workers and their gumboot dances. The production toured globally to much acclaim. The author of Mbuli's profile described *Gumboots* in a thinly veiled criticism as 'staged in a glitzy and glamorous fashion that diluted the essence of the tragedy and agony of the working class.'[126] Nevertheless, Mbuli's contribution to South African theatre has been remarkable.

In Maishe Maponya's last three decades, he increasingly returned to poetry while holding administrative posts, including on the National Arts Council and in the City of Johannesburg. Maponya also taught at the University of the Witwatersrand and directed several pieces at that university's theatre. The last section of this chapter will turn to a work that in many ways brought together many of Maponya's concerns up to the year 2000, *A Song for Biko*.

A Song for Biko

A Song for Biko was staged at Market Theatre's Laager to standing ovations from 8 - 13 September 1997 and coincided with the twentieth anniversary of Steve Biko's murder by state security agents. This was essentially a pared down version of *Gangsters* with the inclusion of newer poems. In an interview conducted by Peter Bode for the video archival project, *Theatre Lives*, Maishe said in all his work he sought to transmit the spirit of Biko.[127] *A Song for Biko* reflects this strong connection that Maishe Maponya had with Steve Biko, perhaps more overtly than his work during the 1980s as there was not the same risk of censorship. In this piece, Maponya renames Rasechaba to Frank Talk, using the pen name that Biko used in his columns

[126]Sandile Memela, 'Self-taught master a winner,' *Sunday World*, 21 November 1999, 7.
[127]*Interview with Maishe Maponya*, Theatre Lives, 2016, https://theatrelives.co.za/people/maishe-maponya/.

in the *SASO Newsletter*. So, Rasechaba and Steve Biko (Frank Talk) are one and the same. *A Song for Biko* is Maishe Maponya's most Pan-African piece, there are references to the history and politics from across the continent.

A Song for Biko started its life as *Monuments—I Read What I Like*, an experimental piece performed with Matsemela Manaka the previous year. Some critics pointedly called the play *Monument for Biko.* Interviewed by Sandile Memela for *City Press*, Maishe Maponya explained that 'My first goal with this work is to pay critical homage to one of the greatest young political figures to have emerged from the black community at the time when Nelson Mandela was in jail.' He continued, 'It would be a serious indictment on us as artists if we were to allow Biko's name to be forgotten - when he was among the few courageous men to have brought about a turning point in national politics.'[128] This not-so-thinly veiled attack on the ANC's rainbowism and their tendency to marginalise other struggle voices is discussed below in an analysis of the play. The poetry in *A Song for Biko* had originally been performed as part of *Monuments/Bambatha* and was performed as a one-hander, featuring Manaka playing the djembe drum. However, there are also elements of *Gangsters* in this earlier performance as the critic Gwen Ansell noted: the 'secret policeman [who is] a functionary belonging not to yesterday's state, but to the day after tomorrows.'[129]. Noting how effective the performance was, in spite of the poor acoustics of the Carfax, Ansell continued, 'Despite all those robes [several changes of robes worn by Maishe], the production is as close to pure sound as you'll get. It's the words, and the speaking of the words which transfix the listener, while the drum provides pace and tension.'[130] By the following year, the piece expanded to include five movements (poetry) and four encounters originally from *Gangsters.* While it remained a one-

[128]Maishe Maponya qtd. in Sandile Memela, 'Maponya returns to spotlight memory of Biko,' *City Press*, 1 September 1996, 21.
[129]Gwen Ansell, 'Play fires words like bullets,' *Mail and Guardian,* 13 - 19 September 1996, 31.
[130]Ibid.

hander, two musicians - Bheki Khoza on piano and guitar and Zenzi Mbuli on drums - replaced Matsemela Manaka. The archival script also includes a prologue.

The first movement begins with the poem: 'That's him/The man who made the speech/That's him/The man who wrote the poems/Frank Talk Biko/Frank Talk Biko.' In this play, Maishe Maponya explicitly combines the real-life character of Steve Biko and Rasechaba, who he had created for *Gangsters*. This poem continues, 'I pick up a pen/To create a monument/Scribble a poem for the unsung/The faceless heroes who had no poems/Written about them.'[131] Maponya calls upon Qamatha, the Xhosa supreme deity, to protect her people from 'the usurpers of our future'. There's a recurrent couplet, 'For when the clouds clear/We shall know the colour of the sky' signifying that when freedom has been obtained, the clouds still linger. In the same movement, Maponya seems to suggest that voting alone did not deliver these victims from their oppressed state; Maponya writes about the 'Desert of words [that] pledged to calm/Yesterday's storm delivered/On a silver plate called Vote/Vote - remember - vote.'[132]

The dramatic elements of the play, the exchanges in Whitebeard's office, are kept largely intact from their *Gangsters* versions. While the poetic elements are delivered in the auditorium, the script from the Market production states after every dramatic exchange (Jonathan is imaginary): 'exit Whitebeard's and enter into auditorium'.[133] This gives the poetry an urgency. The third poem, or third movement, emphasises how 'Yes apartheid was shit' but 'Transition now gives us headaches'. The general tone is a disillusionment with freedom/democracy. The fourth movement is a roll call of heroes, who are pan African. Cabral, Shaka, Fanon, Garvey are all mentioned, as are female heroes such as Queen Nzinga, Modjadji, and Mbuya Nehaanda, further evidence of Maponya's shift to pan- Africanism.

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[131]Amazwi, ACC 2007.10 Market Theatre, ACC 2007.10.10.162.2 *A Song for Biko* Script.
[132]Ibid.
[133]Ibid.

In an attack on neocolonialism, in the same poem Maponya accuses the United States of America of interfering in places such as Mozambique, Nicaragua and Congo in this stanza against imperialism, which is worth reproducing in full:

Oaths long standing matter no more
Revolution has become
Language of yesterday
But what can we do
You see - Coca-Cola's been calling the shots
To create a new world order
Pretending like they never bolstered Savimbi
Lent a hand to Renamo
Ferried Contras into Nicaragua
Hosted Bokassa
Buttressed Sese Seko
Cushioned Hastings Banda
Until order became a far cry on the continent
U-ass-of-A applauding in privacy
The mortification of the continent
We will know the colour of the sky
When the clouds clear.[134]

In the last (fifth) movement, Maponya pleads with the audience to 'Spare me the blues,' so that he may recall remember his heroes, Sobukwe, Tiro, Luthuli, Lembede, Lilian Ngoyi and others who suffered. He asserts: 'Let us not rest till Biko Day is proclaimed/Lest we evoke his spirits/And start all over again.'[135] And in the penultimate stanza, Maponya unequivocally rejects the rainbow nation:

I wait here
I write here
To know what happened
to the colour of my rainbow
before you call me rainbow
before you call me part of what is
Re tlare re re ke dipitsi
Ra bona ka mebala[136]

[134]Ibid.
[135]Ibid.
[136]Ibid.

From the archival record, the stage manager's report of the Market Theatre performances in the Spring of 1997 (see Figure 4), *A Song for Biko* was a resounding success. A critic who attended a performance at the Market Theatre's Laager (now Mannie Manim) stage, noted that Maponya, 'takes on the persona of Frank Talk, the poet. Clad in white flowing robes he appears above the audience next to the lighting box. In response to Bheki Khoza's emotional outpouring, on upright piano, and Zenzi Mbuli's impassioned drumming, in the centre aisle, the poet embarks on a mission.' The critic continues, 'Oratory converts into action as he climbs over the railing into the audience and embraces them with his words.'[137] The review also provides a richer perspective on the staging techniques used by Maponya. Maponya plays Whitebeard's parts in the dramatic sections of the play while Frank Talk is represented only by his words and by the visual presence of the images of Steve Biko printed on a white cloth hanging centre stage.'[138] Among the few props on stage is a crucifix that Frank Talk uses as a crutch and then 'transforms into a cross at the ballot box for a crippled democracy.'[139] While this reviewer was largely glowing in her review, she advises the cast to seek independent stage and musical direction as some of the elements of the play seemed unsynchronised.

[137]Sichel, Adrienne, 'Biko's song,' *The Star*, 11 September 1997, 4.
[138]Ibid.
[139]Ibid.

STAGE MANAGER'S REPORT

VENUE LAAGER DATE : 8 SEPTEMBER 97

ADVERTISED STARTING TIME : 20:15

SHOW : SONG FOR BIKO

	START	FINISH	DURATION
ACT 1	20:20	21:20	60 mins
INTERVAL	–	–	– mins
ACT 2			mins
INTERVAL			mins
ACT 3			mins

TOTAL ______ Mins

1/2 HUOR PRE SHOW CHECK

ITEM	LIGHTS	SOUND	PROPS
SIGNED			

CURTAIN CALLS: 2

REMARKS NO PROBLEMS, STANDING OVATION.

STAGE MANAGER

Figure 4 Stage Manager Leon Banaro's report for one of the nights of the 1997 co-production of A Song For Biko by the Market Theatre and Maishe Maponya. Source: Amazwi, 2007.10 Market Theatre, Stage Manager's Report for A Song for Biko,

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the life and work of Maishe Maponya up to the year 2000. Maponya was a highly creative playwright who came to the theatre via poetry. He was radicalised during the Soweto uprising of 1976 and became a struggle playwright who never reneged on his commitment to the Theatre of Resistance. In the 1970s and 80s, he produced work that was shown both in the townships, the Market Theatre, and abroad. One who never shied away from controversy, his work had several run-ins with the security apparatus and the censors. Maponya spoke truth to power, remaining a strong voice against oppression even after the dawn of South African democracy.

This chapter also allowed us to consider some of the contradictions in the censorship system, tracing its consideration of the play *Gangsters*. In the 1990s Maishe Maponya continued performing but focused most of his attention on teaching (in the Theatre and Performance programme of the University of the Witwatersrand), administration (in the regional/national arts councils and municipal arts department), and advocacy. He was an active member of PAWE, the Performance Artists Workers Equity, a union of artists. Nevertheless, Maponya created one major production in the 1990s, *A Song For Biko*, which carried forward some of the themes he explored in the 1980s into the post-apartheid period. Maponya died in 2021, leaving behind a powerful legacy of theatre, poetry, teaching and administration.

Chapter Five: Matsemela Manaka, the Creative Youth Association and the Foundations of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre, 1978 – 1985

Introduction

This chapter explores the Soyikwa African Theatre, initially named Soyikwa Black Theatre, and focuses on the life of Matsemela Manaka who was a founding member and de facto leader. The chapter begins with a sketch of Manaka's early life and his membership of the Creative Youth Association (CYA), then moves to a discussion of his work at the literary magazine *Staffrider* as well as briefly touching on his early work as a painter. Four plays are discussed in detail: *Egoli, Pula, Vuka* and *Children of Asazi.,* Manaka's most critically acclaimed works in this period. While he created *Egoli* and *Pula* in workshop with actors, who are acknowledged here for the first time, *Vuka* and *Children of Asazi* were written by him, refined based on audience responses and factors such as the practical realities of moving a production overseas.

The chapter adds to the literature on Theatre of Resistance by using new sources such as the records of the Publications Control Board of South Africa, oral history interviews with surviving members of the Soyikwa African Theatre group, and additional archival sources not previously used. *Egoli*, Matsemela Manaka's first major successful play created with Soyikwa (whose script was banned) is explored first, then the process of creating *Pula*, a play that followed *Egoli*, in workshop with cast members including Tshamano Sebe and Ronnie Mkwanazi. The chapter discusses the production of two versions of *Vuka*, demonstrating how an experimental theatre group adapted to a tense political situation and scarce resources.

Finally, there is a discussion about Matsemela Manaka's attempt at making a township musical in the Kente-esque style by exploring the play *Children of Asazi.* Following from previous chapters, the historical treatment of these plays demonstrates that Theatre of Resistance was thriving in the early 1980s in Johannesburg, in spite of considerable overt and covert efforts by the state to restrict artistic expression.

Manaka's Early Life and the Beginnings of Soyikwa Black Theatre in the Creative Youth Association

A Creative Milieu

Born Matsemela Cain Manaka on 20 June 1956, Manaka was a multi-talented artist, but his first serious foray into the arts was through painting. Matsemela Manaka came from a family that was steeped in the arts and took an interest in Black Consciousness politics. It is no surprise that he, a member of the 1976 generation, was drawn to politics and the use of the arts to continue a modicum of education after the near collapse of African schooling in the late 1970s. His mother was a drummer, while his father acted in township plays before landing a job on an SABC telenovela. While he was artistically inclined, Manaka took an equal interest in education and the 1976 uprising, the disruption of schooling, affected him particularly intensely. For Matsemela Manaka, participation in the Creative Youth Association was a way to continue fostering a culture of learning. After the conflagration of the Soweto uprising, 'drama as an educational tool for myself and for others became very important… it was critical for me,' Manaka said.[1] Like many others of his generation, Matsemela Manaka would never get the opportunity to go to university or a formal arts school to hone his artistic skills, he was in many respects self-taught. We will see below, however, how this concern with education was a reflection of the ideals of the 1976 generation, which included gaining access to high quality

[1]Dennis Schauffer, 'Remembering Matsemela Manaka—Some Notes and an Interview', *South African Theatre Journal* 17, no. 1 (1 January 2003): 184.

education. This was married with the methods of BCM to 'conscientise' or educate the masses on their plight. Manaka, himself briefly a teacher at his former high school, continued to see himself as an educator throughout his career.

The CYA was one of a number of school and community-based youth groups formed in the wake of the 1976 Soweto Students' Uprising that focused on the arts as a creative outlet. In Diepkloof, Soweto, students at Madibane High School - the school at which Matsemela Manaka matriculated in 1976 - formed the (CYA). Madibane High School was founded in 1939 as the Johannesburg Bantu High School in Western Native Township, which became Westbury after apartheid designated it a coloured only area. In 1962 the school moved to Diepkloof in Soweto.[2] The school's first principal was Harry Madibane, a prominent educator. In a front page tribute to Mr Madibane in the *Rand Daily Mail,* Diago Segola wrote that Madibane was a 'strict disciplinarian' and 'the first of two blacks - Mr J "Tongs" Nakene, the first principal of Orlando High School, was the other - to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of the Witwatersrand.'[3] Madibane had also been principal at St Peter's in Crown Mines and St Cyprian's in Sophiatown prior to leading Madibane High School. While it has certainly passed its heyday, the school counts among its alumni Archbishop Desmond Tutu,[4] the sculptor Sydney Kumalo,[5] the writer Miriam Tlali,[6] and several student activists who were key in organising the march from eastern side of Soweto on the 16th of June 1976.[7] In the early 1950s, Can Themba of 'The Suit' fame taught at Madibane, leaving a strong impression on his

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[2]'Making History,' *New Nation*, 14 March 1997, 30

[3]Diago Segola, 'Leading educationist dies after illness,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Extra), 28 February 1981, 1

[4]'Making History'

[5]E. J. De Jager, 'Art : Sydney Kumalo (1935 - 1988) : A Tribute', *Africa Insight* 22, no. 1 (January 1992): 29–33.

[6]Idilia Bernabeu and Brian Worsfold, 'Interview with Miriam Tlali', in *Afrikaans Literature: Recollection, Redefinition, Restitution* (Brill, 1996), 277–96, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004659056_030.

[7]Ali Khangela Hlongwane, 'The Mapping of the June 16 1976 Soweto Student Uprisings Routes: Past Recollections and Present Reconstruction(s)*', *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 19, no. 1 (1 June 2007): 7–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/13696810701485892.

students.[8] That the school attracted such illustrious teachers is evidence of its rich scholarly and creative environment, undoubtedly maintained into the early 1980s. There is sparse evidence of the actual constitution of the CYA at Madibane; however, it appears that it was a loose political confederation of young people inclined to the creative arts. According to Geoffrey Davis, Matsemela Manaka was one of its founders and secretary general.[9] Among its other members were the poet Ingoapele Madingoane, and playwright, university lecturer and poet, Maishe Maponya, both discussed in the previous chapter. The CYA included fine arts and dance groups as well as a drama group, which came to be known as Soyikwa Black Theatre, later changing its name to Soweto African Theatre and eventually the Soweto Institute of African Theatre.[10] The March 1979 issue of *Staffrider* also notes that the CYA had a music group called Babupi who performed music at the art fair of Katlehong-based Madi, another youth arts association. At the same event, 'an extract from Matsemela Manaka's play, *Egoli*, was performed.'[11] We shall return to *Egoli* later.

In several interviews, he tells us that the motivation for taking part in his very first play, a play put on by the CYA called *The Horn* in 1977, was a vehicle to display his paintings. In an interview with Rolf Solberg, Manaka said that he got into theatre 'with members of the CYA in order to try and expose the paintings on the stage, since there were no galleries in Soweto. So we used the theatre stage as a vehicle to exhibit the painting.'[12] This approach to theatre as a form that could incorporate other arts would continue throughout his career and was itself a

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[8]Siphiwo Mahala, *Can Themba: The Making and Breaking of the Intellectual Tsotsi, a Biography* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits University Press, 2022), 30–48, https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9781776147335/type/BOOK.
[9]Geoffrey V. Davis, *Voices of Justice and Reason: Apartheid and beyond in South African Literature*, Cross/Cultures : Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), 165.
[10]T. Philemon Wakashe, 'Matsemela Manaka: Human Problems That Come from a Political Situation', *TDR - The Drama Review* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1986): 48.
[11]'MADI Group (Katlehong)', *Staffrider* 2, no. 1 (March 1979): 5.
[12]Rolf Solberg, 'Interview with Matsemela Manaka', in *Alternative Theatre in South Africa: Talks with Prime Movers since the 1970s* (Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books, 1999).

form of resistance to the mainstream theatre. John Ledwaba, in his 2014 interview with Vanessa Cooke, confirms this:

> Then we had, in the group, people who, who did several kinds of things. Where people would, would do, who were painters, people who were poets. We'd also accommodate guys, stuff like that, so we did a production called THE HORN. THE HORN was an all-inclusive um... play that had in it an exhibition, dance, music, poetry. But we used THE HORN as a symbol of, of the land um... purportedly the stolen land of Africa.[13]

Manaka went on to exhibit in London with artists including Kay Hassan and later took part in the *Flames of Resistance Exhibition* in 1980 with Hassan and Philip Malumise (Germany, Sweden, Denmark). He never not stopped painting, but it took a back seat when he increased his theatrical endeavours in the 1980s.[14] Manaka would return to more active painting, and even set up a gallery, towards the end of his life. The following section discusses more of Manaka's early artistic output.

Matsemela Manaka the Visual Artist

In July 1982 Matsemela Manaka, along with other artists such as Kay Hassan, Anthony Moore and William Sibambo, had an exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute's Bhownagree Gallery in London. The exhibition, called Artimo - Art in Motion, was by artists associated with the CYA and was billed as showing 'black art from Azania, South Africa'.[15] In a review of the exhibition, Hermana Diaz notes that 'much of the frustrations and agonies of their situation [in South African townships], occasioned by political pressure is expressed in these realistic drawings, etchings and colour washes.'[16] That the post-1976 generation of South African township youth took to visual arts to express their frustrations with the political situation is

[13]John Ledwaba, Interview conducted by Vanessa Cooke, 24 April 2014, AG3406-A5-001, Market Theatre Oral History Project, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand.
[14]Geoffrey V Davis, 'Introduction', in *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 5.
[15]Johannesburg Art Gallery Manuscripts [Hereafter JAG], FUBA Collection, MNK Matsemela Manaka, MNK 0001-0001-001, 'Flyer for Artimo Exhibition.'
[16]JAG, FUBA Collection, MNK, MNK 0001-0001-002, Hermana Diaz, 'The Art of Courage.'

made clear in this exhibition. Two years later, Matsemela Manaka was part of another exhibition at the Alliance Francaise of Johannesburg. He exhibited paintings such as 'Blues for Home,' 'Mine Boy Blues,' 'Operation Hunger' and 'Blues Me.'[17] These titles suggest that Manaka continued the theme of resistance through visual arts. Geoffrey Davis argues that this visual aspect of Manaka is evident in his plays and in his ability to conjure up powerful visual images. Davis suggests that Matsemela's earlier works show this strong sense of conjuring the visual on stage, giving the example of the beginning of *Egoli*'s Act 2, where the two miners rise from sleeping with a heavy chain joining them. 'A more arresting visual image of servitude would be difficult to imagine,' Davis writes.[18] Matsemela Manaka as an well-rounded artist (including a percussionist) is shown throughout his work.

Matsemela Manaka's Time at *Staffrider*

At around the same time he was painting and making initial forays into theatre, Manaka wrote poetry and eventually joined *Staffrider*. The history of *Staffrider* magazine has been sketched by Elizabeth Le Roux in her book *Publishing Against Apartheid*.[19] Le Roux notes that *Staffrider* was a brainchild of Mothobi Mutloatse and Mike Kirkwood. Kirkwood was the publisher of the radical publishing house Ravan Press, itself started in 1972. As Le Roux notes, Ravan Press was an offshoot of the Rev. Beyers Naude's Christian Institute, particularly its Spro-cas (Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society). But it was only in 1978 that the new publisher at Ravan, Kirkwood, saw the opportunity in partnering with community-based writing groups to produce a magazine edited of them, for them, and by them.[20] The following year, Mutloatse and Kirkwood brought in Manaka and Jaki Seroke to be coordinating editors

[17]JAG, FUBA Collection, MNK, MNK 0001-0001-004, 'Alliance Francaise de Johannesburg, Painting Exhibtion, May 18 to May 25, 1984.'
[18]Davis, 'Introduction', 19.
[19]E. Le Roux, *Publishing against Apartheid South Africa: A Case Study of Ravan Press*, Cambridge Elements. Elements in Publishing and Book Culture (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
[20]Ibid., 28.

of the new magazine. 'His work was partly that of a public relations manager; he developed an informal distribution network based on the notion that writers should involve themselves in the distribution of their work (an idea which finally had to be acknowledged as a failure). With Seroke, he also conducted writers' workshops and helped establish writers' groups.'[21]

In that first issue of *Staffrider*, published in March 1978, the brief editorial noted the intention of the magazine to subvert censorship. Noting that a staffrider, the image of a fast-paced entrepreneurial urban person who rode staff on the trains coming from the suburbs and townships of the Reef to Johannesburg as 'slightly disreputable'. ('Staff riding' is South African slang for train surfing.) The editorial added, 'Our censors may not like him, but they should consider putting up with him. A whole new literature is knocking at the door and if our society is to change without falling apart it needs all the messages it can get – the bad as well as the good.' The editorial went on to note that 'Community drama, "say" poetry, an oral literature backed and often inspired by music: this is the heart of the new writing, and the signs are that prose forms are beginning to emerge in a new mould.' It should be noted that in the first issue of *Staffrider* (which was banned), the CYA had several pieces, a full six pages, published. This included a few paragraphs about the CYA by Masilo Isaac Rabothata, which outlined the history of the group from its origins at Madibane High School 'in early 1977'. The piece highlights Manaka's leadership of the group as well as the development of the theatre piece, *The Horn*, from Matsemela's poem *Soweto*. Interestingly, Rabothata switches between calling *The Horn* theatre and dramatic poetry who, much like Maishe Maponya, came to theatre from performance poetry. The theatre of the CYA, and later Soyikwa, was firmly rooted in African performance traditions of orality. Finally, the overview of the CYA belies the still strong influence of Black Consciousness among this group, whose purpose was 'to bring self-

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[21]Davis, Voices of Justice, 167–8; also Kirkwood, 'An informal discussion', 24., qtd in Le Roux, p.32.

awareness to our people, especially artists.'[22] In this issue, Matsemela wrote four poems and a tribute to musician Victor Ndlaziwane.

The poems published show Matsemela's deep involvement with music and concern about the effects of exile on those who had left and on the black community which stayed. The first of the four poems, '*Hope for Your Return*,' is a meditation on the musician and poet Lefifi Tladi's exile. It states that 'your poems and music lived on/ they never perished in the flames of your departure'. and ends with the hopeful triplet, 'I hope to see you back in your fatherland/ so sojourn and be back/ this land is yours.' The other three poems are also about music: 'Early Success' about Nomvula Ndlazilwane's (of the jazz ministers) success on the jazz piano; 'For Victor Ndlazilwane' about the musician's influence; and 'Jazz in Ghettos' which extols Dollar Brand and Zakes Nkosi, popular South African jazz musicians of the period.[23] Manaka was not the first in criticising the breakup of community due to apartheid, and was influenced by leading black poets of the previous generation such as Mongane Wally Serote and Njabulo Ndebele who also wrote about the destruction of black families in their works.[24] Mongane Serote, for instance, was deeply affected by the impact of apartheid on families as evidenced in his novel *To Every Birth Its Blood* where the young Morolong is forced to leave home after he falls prey to the vices of the streets in Alexandra, a situation brought about by the wide socioeconomic divide between Alexandra and the city of Johannesburg. After having trouble with his academic work in school,

> Morolong stuck to the street, tight as a bug sucking blood. And the street was not very friendly to him. He found it fast and tricky, and soon discovered it could be deadly, but he stuck on. He was always silent; his friends mocked him; but he stuck. Soon he was throwing dice, throwing the penny, and the flesh of his stomach got used to the blade that stuck there, hidden, covered by his clothes.[25]

[22]Masilo Isaac Rabothata, 'About the Creative Youth Association', *Staffrider* 1, no. 1 (March 1978): 32.
[23]*Staffrider* 1, no. 1 (March 1978)
[24]Tom Penfold, *Black Consciousness and South Africa's National Literature* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), 82.
[25]Serote, *To Every Birth Its Blood*, 171.

Michael Ramano, Morolong's father is a principal at a high school in Alexandra. When Morolong walks out of the door, he remains with his wife, Grace, and his two daughters Mpho and Dikeledi. Later in the story, Ramano himself is taken away from his wife and daughters when he is found guilty of involvement in the underground liberation movement. Locked up for fifteen years on Robben Island, Grace, although strong, is left distraught. 'Her Michael, her Mike, had been taken away from her, had been taken away from her, had been taken away from her. For fifteen years. The father of her children, Dikeledi, Mpho and Morolong, her husband, a father, brother, man of the house, her bed companion, her everything, her what else, was now gone. She knew now that she was going to cry.'[26] Interviewed by Jaki Seroke for *Staffrider* in 1981, Serote elaborated on his views on the impact of apartheid and colonialism on the black family: 'An issue like black family exists only in name. We are denied the benefits of belonging to a family by the oppressive and racist laws of the country. We are made to grow up in the world without our parents beside us most of the time. Social conditions take parents away from us.'[27] Later, this chapter discusses Manaka's thematic obsession with the dislocating effects of apartheid, particularly in the play *Children of Asazi*.

Egoli: City of Gold

Egoli was originally performed in 1978 by the Soyikwa Black Theatre. It was later taken to the Space Theatre in Cape Town, where the cast and initial directors workshopped the play with Rob Amato. The ultimate production was shorter than the original and this version went to the Market Theatre in Johannesburg. The play as recorded in the authoritative anthology edited by Geoffrey Davis in close collaboration with Manaka is in two acts and has two only characters, John and Hamilton. The actors play the two main characters and mime other characters. Act One is set in a room the two characters share in a mine compound. The

[26]Ibid, 195.

[27]Seroke, 'Poet in Exile: Interview with Mongane Serote', 31.

stage directions note that 'staging is extremely simple. No attempt to create walls, doors etc.'[28] This is one of several Grotowskian elements in the play. As the action proceeds, we learn that John and Hamilton have escaped from prison and are now working in one of the mines in Johannesburg. In the dialogue that ensues, Hamilton recalls a murder of their fellow prisoner. John sings a liberation song that he sang on this occasion, 'Ba bolaile moazania,' meaning they have killed an Azanian.[29] Back in his youth, John remembers, Oupa Phalaborwa 'composed songs for our people. He used to sing for us. My brothers and sisters all sat around the fire.' He continues, 'Oupa with his calabash enjoying the beer, and the tone of his voice always blending with the ancestors. Telling stories that taught us how to live. How to survive the grips of Piet Retief and fight for our liberation. He used to tell us how they fought their battles of resistance against the settlers.'[30] (Retief was one of the Boer commandoes who led a group of Afrikaners from the Cape Colony following the institution of British rule. His group encountered the Zulu nation under Dingane and he was killed on Dingane's instruction.)

In Act One, it is further revealed that John was jailed for his activism under the Terrorism Act, Hamilton for raping 'one of our black mothers.'[31] The circumstances of Hamilton's arrest and imprisonment serve as a source of some dramatic tension in this act. If Hamilton had in fact committed a legitimate crime, is there any redemption for him? Manaka answers this by giving Hamilton a conscience. Whereas John enjoys alcohol and occasionally sleeping with sex workers, Hamilton takes pause. In a rendezvous with Madinka [which Hamilton mimes, playing both roles], a sex worker with whom John facilitates a meeting, Hamilton stops short of consummating the act. 'I thought of the woman I raped. Of the money

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[28]Matsemela Manaka and Geoffrey V Davis, *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 53.
[29]Azania was the name for South Africa preferred by Africanist groups and the Black Consciousness Movement.
[30]Matsemela Manaka, 'Egoli', in *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 54.
[31]Ibid., 55.

that you should send home. Your wife. Your children. But most of all I thought of the women I killed,'[32] Hamilton says. An indictment of migrant labour, John decries the 'false hope' that leads men to the mines of Johannesburg to work. 'They were promised that on their return home they would be having gold in their pockets, all over their clothes... (*He grabs at Hamilton's shoulder, turning him so that he must listen*) Stinking gold in their bodies, vomiting gold coins. (*He comes forward*) So every one of them was looking forward to the happy golden days, brighter than the simple sunshine of long ago.'[33] Orkin notes that *Egoli* had particular resonance because it

> was written in a period when the price of gold rocketed, bringing massive increases to state income. It endeavours to suggest how the mining industry, in extracting the mineral strategically crucial to the continuing function of the South African economy, remains indifferent to the migrant labourers who are forced to serve it. In presenting the lives of migrant workers separated from their families, it counteridentifies any claim in prevailing discourse to a just economic order.[34]

A frequent technique *Egoli* uses is dreams. While the whole first two scenes of Act Two is a dream, within Act One there is a shorter dream that describes the time John arrived in Johannesburg at Park Station, where future labourers are directed to the various mines upon arrival. John begins his time in the city working for the Johannesburg City Council emptying city bins where he faces humiliation at the hands of his white supervisor, Meneer Turnbull. John fought back and ended up losing his job and returning to his home. However, he returns to Johannesburg after a year to seek employment in the mines because of the dire situation in his home village. It is at this mine where Hamilton later joins him, reuniting the two who had been in prison together. Miming a scene in which John encounters a black mine supervisor, Zwelabo, addressing fellow black workers, John calls Zwelabo a 'Meneer Turnbull in a black skin.'[35] John might as well call Zwelabo a non-white African, the term that the BCM despised

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[32]Ibid., 56.
[33]Ibid., 57.
[34]Orkin, *Drama and the South African State*, 216.
[35]Manaka, 'Egoli', 59.

during apartheid and campaigned for all racialised people in South Africa to call themselves black as an act of positive self-affirmation. The BCM used the term non-white as a pejorative term to criticise those black people who they saw as subservient to white interests. Nevertheless, the exchange culminates in a humorous moment when John (acting as Zwelabo) commands Hamilton (acting as one of the mine workers) to repeat that a Jannie Croucamp, standing at the steel cutting machine 'Yena Manager ka lo mine.' However, Hamilton says 'Yena Meneega ka lo mine.' 'Yena Manager ka lo mine, stupid!' John retorts. John, 'repeats, pushing up the rhythm and the speed, with Hammy following him until they break off the sequence in laughter and head back to their stools,' stage directions say.[36] It is on this steel cutting machine that a fellow miner, Izwe (meaning nation), while working with John, lost his hand. The symbolism here, that so many men working in the mines disabled the black nation, is palpable and must have been brilliantly acted out by John who mimes the whole episode, complete with placing the severed hand that was 'jumping on the floor' on a piece of paper.[37] The two continue to exchange banter about Hamilton's parsimoniousness (John pays for everything, even Hamilton's sex workers!) and finally they go to bed on their spare pieces of blankets which serve as beds. Hamilton is awoken by a his own coughing and gazes on the sleeping John, who is dreaming. Hamilton remarks, elegiacally: 'Poor boy. A mineworker from the living grave. Look at his face, glittering with sweat, full of dust. … Look at his sweat. … This man is tired of living. He is not enjoying the fruits of his sweat. He is praying for death to come his way. (*John mumbles in his sleep*). He is dreaming.'[38]

Although not formally broken up into scenes, Act Two goes into some detail in showing how the escape occurred, the work the two do underground. The denouement of the play shows on the moral consequences of mining on the two miners specifically but also on the African

[36] Ibid., 60.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 62.

community more generally. The beginning of Act Two is a dream, of John and Hamilton escaping from prison and the struggle that ensues to free the chain from their necks. After successfully hiding from a helicopter that is hovering above, John draws a Morabaraba game, a strategy game played in southern Africa on a board that can be drawn on the ground. The stones point to a water source where the two drink. After this, Hamilton proceeds to break the chain and ring around John's neck- - not without fear and hesitation from the latter. On the surface, John is afraid that the rock that Hamilton uses will injure him. The symbolic meaning alluded to is that John is not ready for freedom. 'Take care!,' John demands. 'You talk about "care" as if you know how to look after your freedom. I am trying to cut these chains that curse your manhood. Chains that rust your brains. And you talk about death. Stop telling me about killing you,'[39] Hamilton responds. Hamilton laments that rather than himself, it is other men who are after John's life, making unjust laws and presiding over a city like Johannesburg, a 'dusty valley of death.' 'BOTH: Egoli. Egoli. Egoli People slave, Egoli! People die Egoli!' They both then sing the song 'Thina sibanjelwe amahala' [We have been caught for nothing.] and later 'Umkhulu, umkhulu lomsebenzi/Umsebenzi we Nkululeko/uMandela u funa amajoni/amajoni we Nkululeko' [The work of liberation is great, Mandela need soldiers for this work.] During this singing, Hamilton finally breaks John's chain and ring, followed by John gaining the courage to free Hamilton.

In the second scene of Act Two, the action moves underground, the living grave. The stage directions indicate how minimal the staging is: 'The mine sequence is mimed with sound effects made by the men,'[40] . Apart from the spades, which have been on stage since the beginning of the play, and mining helmets with lamps that the actors wear, everything else is mimed, including explosions. In this scene, the shaft collapses, and John and Hamilton try

[39]Ibid., 63–64.
[40]Ibid., 66.

desperately to get help. Finally, they have to free themselves from the rubble. In the last scene of Act Two, the action returns to the room at the mine compound. John dances to music on the radio while drinking, he eventually vomits. Hamilton walks in to announce that some miners in another shaft were not as lucky as they were, among the dead is Oupa, John's son. John then collapses 'in the vomit and the horror', and in the rest of the scene deteriorates into a helpless figure as Hamilton reads a desperate letter from John's wife, Suzanne, informing him that 'your children are eating soil and tree leaves' because she has lost her job at the farm.[41] 'Oh God,' John cries, 'how could you do that to my son? He might have become the liberator of Africa!' 'Why look to heaven?' Hamilton responds, 'Face the man! Nature knows why your son died, but we must not direct all our cries to God. Face the man!'[42] The play ends with chants, conjuring a ritualistic feeling, while emphatically calling on the audience to resist. Both actors say: 'For justice, freedom and peace to prevail in the country of our forefathers, we shall all have to stand up and face the enemy without fear. We shall all have to worship the spear and drink blood from the calabash until we all sing the same song - *Uhuru—Azania Uhuru Azania*.'[43]

The earliest reviews of *Egoli* were in 1979 by Benjy Francis and Selaneng Kgomongwe. They appeared in the drama magazine *Sketsh*. *Sketsh,* edited by Robert Mshengu Kavanagh, the Oxford educated playwright and director associated with Workshop '71. From Kgomongwe, we learn that the performance happened at YMCA in Orlando. The cast included John Ledwaba, who would stay on, and Stopper Lekatalala. Ledwaba played John while Lekatalala played Daniel. For this reviewer, Ledwaba's voice projection needed some work. Kgomongwe nevertheless praised the last song, which in their opinion 'clicked well with the

[41]Ibid., 69.
[42]Ibid., 70.
[43]Ibid., 70–71.

story'.[44] On the other hand, Benjy Francis is more critical of the technical aspects of the play. Placing the work within the realm of experimental theatre, Francis states that, 'I felt the work somewhat overstated and heavily laden with symbolism (this is a common temptation - a desire to say everything and more)'.[45] Like Kgomongwe, Francis criticises the vocal range of the actors and concludes that 'It would be good if this group were to engage the services of a professional to guide them over these hurdles.'[46]

It appears that Soyikwa did indeed take heed of these reviews and got in touch with Rob Amato, an experienced theatre practitioner associated with the Imitha players from East London, then based at the Space Theatre in Cape Town.[47] Of his experience working with Amato, Manaka says in an interview:

> I was working for Ravan Press, and Rob was establishing the Space Theatre in Cape Town. The guys left, and soon also followed them. We sat down and worked on the script, and I must say the exercise I went through with Rob was very helpful for me in terms of editing. And with my experience at Ravan Press, I'd learnt not to be scared to cancel three of seven pages of your text in order to give it focus.

He adds,

> And that was very good with Rob [Amato]. We were obviously criticised being Black Consciousness artists and then working with a white person But I said, "Look, being Black Consciousness does not say that you cannot work with a white person."[48]

For John Ledwaba, interviewed more than a decade later, working with Amato at the Space 'was a beautiful experience because the Space Theatre put in a lot of money into it. To be honest, and er... the production was developed, re-workshopped and became the hit it was.' He continues, adding that problems arose because of Matsemela, 'Really, really, really not wishing to give Rob Amato er... the due, the recognition' and concludes, 'I think that was really unfair coz he really helped us. If it wasn't him, *Egoli* wouldn't have turned into what it later

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[44]Kgomongwe, Sketsh, Winter 1979, p.15
[45]Francis, Ibid, p.16
[46]Ibid.
[47]Source ESAT, Rob Amato's profile.
[48]Solberg, 'Interview with Matsemela Manaka'.

became.'[49] In spite of John Ledwaba later claiming that Manaka did not adequately credit Amato for his input, the evidence points to the contrary. It is important to note that working with white people portrayed an incredible amount of trust after what these young men had endured.

Remarkably, an original programme of an early, if not the first, production of *Egoli* at The People's Space has been preserved.[50] While there is no date on this programme, it does show the way The People's Space operated. It shows that people were bussed in from the following townships: Athlone, Langa, Manenberg/Heideveldt, Guguletu, Nyanga, Crossroads and Mitchell's Plain. A later programme, also from the Space, tells us more about the performance history of *Egoli* in Cape Town. The programme notes that 'the play ran successfully to some 60 audiences at the People's Space and in the Cape Town area.' In the same programme, we see some of Matsemela's thoughts about the direction of Soyikwa. His writer's note says:

> Through our eyes we have seen the sufferings of our people. We have seen them being moved from fertile lands to barrenness, we have seen the[m] starve in squatter camps.
>
> Through our eyes we have seen the lives of our people in various shapes of humiliation and suffering. Thus the continuous struggle to create *Egoli* could not suffer from any impediment.
>
> Together with Soyikwa Black Theatre, the drama wing of the Creative Youth Association (C.Y.A.) we feel committed to form our creative thoughts on the plight of the workers, more especially the mine migrants. Soyikwa Black Theatre was named after the well known black playwright Wole Soyinka.

The note concludes:

> The group adheres to positive art, theatre of purpose, commercial theatre, theatre of Survival and liberation, original and relevant indigenous Theatre and of course creative theatre.[51]

[49]Ledwaba, Interview conducted by Vanessa Cooke.
[50]Amazwi, ACC 2005.75 Fletcher, Jill, ACC 2005.75.19.71.26, 'Theatre Program for Egoli.'
[51]Amazwi, Grey, Stephen, ACC 2008.49, ACC 2008.49.3.4.1.3, Theatre Program for Egoli

Soyikwa's vision may seem unfocused, but these were the early years of the group and they were still seeking definition of their purpose.

Figure 5 Front page of Egoli program, early 1980s. Source: Amazwi, ACC 2008.49 Grey, Stephen, ACC 2008.49.3.4.1.3, 'Theatre Program for Egoli.'

An early review for performances of the play *Egoli* at the Space Theatre was entitled 'This play will make whites think.' One of the two actors, John Moalusi Ledwaba, is quoted as saying, 'Whites don't know what blacks think of them. Whites must know what we think of them. After our play they will know some of the problems.' In the same review, Manaka, who created the play in workshop with the actors, is quoted: 'We want whites to see our play,' adding 'It's not new to blacks. It is their way of life.'[52] The play was not made for the black community alone, but for all South Africans. This stance marked a break from the Theatre of Resistance practitioners of the previous generation, such as Mihloti Black Theatre, and represents the younger playwrights' interest in working within established institutions while promoting

[52]'This play will make whites think,' *The Reader*, 5 April 1980, 2.

political themes. Manaka, in a speech delivered to a theatre conference in Durban in 1981, elaborated on this new thinking. Claiming that theatre in Africa had been about a 'conflict of man with nature,' Manaka eloquently said:

> Today man has substituted nature - man has become the enemy to fight against. That is the story of the dispossessed. So, through this experience of life, Black Theatre shall communicate to both Blacks and Whites. Black Theatre is here to communicate with whoever is prepared to listen to our bewail and share our human experience.[53]

In a nod to resistance politics, Manaka added, 'Our people are engaged totally by resistance struggles - the liberation of the mind and the liberation of the being.'[54]

In the same review, the writer notes that in developing *Egoli*, Manaka and his cast 'first visited mines to see how miners live'. When asked how he was able to vomit every night during the play, John Ledwaba responded, 'There are no tricks …I drink some water at the interval', and continued, 'Also, there are beer cartons on the stage. These are filled with water. I drink these during the play. When the time comes for me to vomit, it just happens. I am one of the few people who have been able to do this on the stage.'[55] Such physical theatre was indeed remarkable and the writer of this review noted that the play had been seen both at the Space and at the Market Theatre, as well as in township venues by many people. But by the winter of 1981 the Directorate of Publications, the body in charge of censorship in South Africa, had declared the play undesirable and banned it under the Publications Act of 1974, making performance of the play or owning the script illegal.

Egoli Banned

Egoli was banned under the Publications Act of 1974 (see Chapter One for a discussion of the censorship system operating in South Africa during apartheid). Under this Act, interested

[53]Matsemela Manaka, 'Extract from a lecture delivered at the University of Natal, Durban (March 26, 1980) in Peter Larlham, *Black Theater, Dance, and Ritual in South Africa*, Theater and Dramatic Studies (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1985), 86
[54]Ibid.
[55]'This play will make whites think.'

parties could lodge an appeal to the Publications Appeals Board (PAB). 'While some writers—Matsemela Manaka was one—refused to submit appeals on the grounds that this would constitute a recognition of a system they rejected *in toto*, others did appeal, sometimes successfully.'[56] As Davis notes, even though *Egoli* was banned in South Africa, it still went on to be staged internationally. *Egoli*'s ban was announced in the Government Gazette, No. 7819, of 2nd October 1981. The press reported on this ban, saying: '*Egoli*'s ban has been received with disbelief in theatre circles. Many theatre-goers said it was rather ridiculous to ban a play after it has been running for three years and been seen by thousands of people.'[57] Manaka's attitude was one of defiance, 'It's one of those things that a person has to expect in South Africa,' he said. And added, 'One has to carry on working for change through any progressive means available and theatre is one of the vehicles to accomplish this.'[58] There is not a clearer statement of Matsemela's commitment to resistance through art than this, at a time when the state was trying to intimidate him. A more detailed understanding of the banning from the perspective of the state can be gained from studying the censorship records of *Egoli*'s banning, now housed in the Cape Repository of the South African National Archives.

It is interesting to read over one of the censor's reports, a P.C. Smit, who picks parts of the play that contravene the Publications Act and takes pains to consider the 'likely reader' and the impact viewing this play or reading the script would have. Unfortunately, an advanced reader's report is missing as a handwritten note on the first file says, 'Was there an AR report? Mr DuT swears to it on P82/0/138, but it is not in the file.'[59] The advanced reader would have been the first local official who read the play and forwarded it to the committee for review. Nevertheless, the actual readers reports provide a fascinating look into this bureaucracy. For

[56]Davis, 187.

[57]Mkhize, Khaba, 'Egoli banned: but Manaka pushes ahead with Vuka,' *The Natal Witness*, 13 August 1981, 7.

[58]Matsemela Manaka, qtd. in Mkhize.

[59]SANA WCARS, Directorate of Publications Records, 3/368*Egoli City of Gold* Censorship File

Smit, the use of 'fuck you' in the play is undesirable, so is the 'song meant for God where help is asked to free the black man'. He also points to the song where the actors say the work is great, Africans should persevere, and 'Mandela needs soldiers' as undesirable. Finally, the last speech from both, 'For justice…' is considered dangerous. Smit recommends that *Egoli* be banned due to it meeting clause 2(e) of Article 47 of the Publications Act, 'is prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or peace and good order.'

The reviewer adds, 'By judgement of this piece, one has to keep in mind that the apparent reader /audience would presumably be black. The fact that one has to do with a play here means that the message in the written text gets absorbed easier and with much greater effect on the relative unsophisticated and impressionable audience.' Given what Ledwaba and Manaka had said about *Egoli,* it is clear that Smit was wrong about his assumptions on the likely reader. Smit's further reflections on why it would have this effect are worth quoting in full:

> In case the apparent reader of the publication, the relative unsophisticated black mineworker and black city resident is taken into consideration is also a possession ban in terms of art 9(3). As seen with the symbolism that is intertwined throughout the whole piece and the explicit call for weaponised violence and support just for the sake of Mandela, one has to do with work that is radically unwanted which will lead to the apparent reader engaging in direct violence against the state. This influence the work has is amplified with the use of symbolism and emotional impact.[60]

Smit's assumption that African urbanites were unsophisticated and would uncritically take up arms after reading *Egoli* misses the point of this theatre. Later censors who reviewed Maishe Maponya's *Gangsters* and *Dirty Work*, as was discussed in Chapter Three, attempted to theorise the impact of the written versus the spoken word, actually contradicting Smit in claiming that the performed pieces would do more damage to the state. If anything, this shows the incoherence of the apartheid censorship apparatus in South Africa and the failed attempts at veiling political ideology. In 1986 the South African library applied for a review and Prof. Du

[60]SANA WCARS, 3/368Egoli City of Gold Censorship File

Toit, wrote the decision for the board that upheld its banning. This is remarkable, considering that many publications that had previously been banned, even James Matthews's incendiary collection of poetry, *Cry Rage!*, had their bans lifted during the mid-1980s.[61] The refusal of the PAB to unban *Egoli* is explained by the idea of the likely reader that was in place in the 1980s. *Egoli* was too dangerous to unban because the committee felt that the likely reader was an 'unsophisticated' young black militant who would be led to revolutionary acts. Other unbanned works, even in the protest genre and mostly written by white authors were not likely—in the committee's view—to make it to the townships. *Egoli* was quickly unbanned on 20 March 1992 under the new Publications Act No. 90 of 1992. The law was replaced by the Film and Publications Act in 1996.[62]

Egoli is Manaka's most critically acclaimed play and continues to resonate in modern South Africa. It has been revived at least twice in the new millennium. In 2008, director Itumeleng Motsikoe staged the play at the State Theatre in Pretoria with Phillip Tindisa playing John and Kholofelo Kola playing Hamilton. Positively reviewing the performance, Kgomotso Moncho wrote, 'yes, it is an age-old story, but it is still relevant, because the life that the play portrays is the reality for some in the country. The relevance of it says a lot about where we are.'[63] Marking its 40th anniversary in 2016, the Market Theatre revived *Egoli* with a seven-person cast. Directed by Phala Ookeditse Phala and featuring the young actors Billy Langa, Hamilton Dlamini, Lebogang Masimola, Katlego Letsholonyana, Faith Busika, Alred Mohapi, and Mahlatsi Mokgonyana, the performance was purposefully intimate in the Laager Theatre of the Market Theatre complex. According to the Arts website Creative Feel, the space was 'dimly lit,' and the audience 'had to quietly creep to their seats surrounding the carefully laid out clothes and paraphernalia. When the cast completed their mining task, they proceeded to

[61]McDonald, *The Literature Police*, 290–96.
[62] Matteau, "Real and Imagined Readers," 91.
[63]Kgomotso Moncho, 'An age-old story for our times,' *The Star*, 1 April 2008, 2.

their living space: a tiny shared square in the middle of the stage.' The review continues, 'But the performers seemed completely oblivious of the audience around them at the start of their daily chores as they washed themselves, prayed, drank and blew their noses. This was a careful choice that escalated into an obvious ignoring of the audience who became illuminated along with the performers when one actor sat in the auditorium and blew his nose with his t-shirt next to a nervously giggling group of women.' Replacing some of the songs, the performance maintained its resistance tenor, relevant for 2016 with simmering racial tensions in South Africa because it did 'not merely point fingers outward but looks inward also.'[64] Theatre of Resistance remains relevant in a South Africa where inequality remains a reality for many black South Africans.

Figure 6 Production photographs of Egoli at the Market Theatre Source: Market Theatre Facebook Page, 15 December 2015, Accessed 7 May 2024

[64]'Market Theatre's Egoli Reviewed | Creative Feel', 10 March 2016, https://creativefeel.co.za/2016/03/market-theatres-egoli-reviewed/.

Vuka

Another major theatrical work that Matsemela Manaka produced in the first half of the 1980s was V*uka*. *Vuka* had its première in Durban in August 1981.[65] The word 'vuka' literally means 'wake up' in several African languages and this belies the content of the play which is told in an African storytelling manner and takes the format, in print, of a poem. It is one of Manaka's works for which a script exists. Although, in performance, no two performances of township-based Theatre of Resistance were the same, *Vuka* was distinct because it went through a major revision in 1985, expanding it from a one-hander to a bigger cast. This also, arguably, made it less of a poem and more of a standard piece of drama. An early version of *Vuka* is preserved in *Staffrider* magazine, Volume 5, No. 2, 1982. Interestingly, *Vuka* does not appear on the table of contents of this issue. Since Manaka was a coordinating editor of the magazine at the time alongside Jaki Seroke, it is likely that hiding that *Vuka* in this issue of *Staffrider* was a deliberate decision given the radical content of *Vuka*'s text.

Vuka is essentially the story of the conscientisation, or waking up, of Nkululeko,[66] the main character. This play-poem shares characteristics with the Black Consciousness poetry discussed in the previous chapter and is a little-studied example of South African Theatre of Resistance. In the *Staffrider* version, we learn that 'The original production of the monologue with Fats Bookholane, could not take off because of the death of Fats' son, Tabang. He died in Maputo during the Matola raid.' This epigraph is significant and highly radical. It should also be noted that the Matola raid was on uMkhonto we Sizwe (the ANC's liberation army), showing Soyikwa's broad reach and non-partisan stance, reflective of the BCM in general which did not align itself to any political party before the formation of AZAPO. The play is in one act, with

[65]"Egoli" Black-Out, Natal Daily News, 3 August 1981 in Matsemela Manaka and Geoffrey V Davis, *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 203.
[66]Nkululeko translates as 'freedom.'

the actor playing no fewer than eight characters. The following is a summary of the play, taken from *Staffrider*.[67]

The story follows the life of Nkululeko and is set in a graveyard where Nkululeko is buried by his brother. It is the character of the brother who turns into Nkululeko's spirit and narrates his story to the spirit of their father (although as we shall see below in a critical review of a performance that some performances included an individual sitting in the audience, playing the spirit of Nkululeko's father). Nkululeko's spirit tells a story in an episodic manner, beginning with the story of his brother Nhlanthla, who was betrothed to a Dubula's daughter, Nokuthula. Nhlanthla and Nokuthula eloped because of the unreasonable dowry demanded by Nokuthula's father. Nkululeko faces the wrath of Nokuthula's father, who violently breaks into his home, knobkerrie in hand. This action happens in New Brighton, a location in the Eastern Cape. Dubula destroys the home of Nkululeko and the family, leaving their mother distraught. She dies from her grief, 'she could not live to witness/a continuous flow/of blood in the streets/of New Brighton.'[68]

After this episode, Nkululeko flees to Transkei on a bicycle, taking jabs at the dubulas who are a part of the bureaucracy (Manaka uses the isiZulu word 'dubula' as the name of the evil characters in this tale. 'Dubula' literally means to shoot (with a gun).) When he can no longer tolerate living in the Transkei, Nkululeko returns to Johannesburg where he becomes a street performer in Diagonal Street. Soon enough, municipal police pounce on him. He stops this business and ends up cleaning windows at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The play then takes us to the streets of Soweto during the uprising and finally alludes to the conditions in the hostels. As part of the disturbances in Soweto, Nkululeko, according to the stage

[67]Matsemela Manaka, 'Vuka' 5, no. 1 (1982): 40–43.
[68]Ibid., 41.

directions, '*becomes a student singing and distributing leaflets. Then as a worker he reacts to the leaflets in his hands.*'[69] The spirit of Nkululeko tells his father's spirit, poetically:

> I saw soweto
> the glamorous flower
> of resistance
> born of the blood
> of children
> and I saw soweto
> swimming
> in the pool of pleasure
> born of social reforms[70]

Manaka uses irony here to show how the social reformist agenda of the apartheid state at the time did little to quell unrest and division in the African community. In *Vuka*, Manaka is concerned with the factionalism in the fight for freedom and Nkululeko is seen as a Bikoesque figure who tries to unite the black community. Unfortunately, like Biko, Nkululeko is murdered at the end of the play-poem.

In an interview on the BBC African Service's *Arts and Africa*, Ledwaba reveals the freedom he had as an actor in performing this play-poem. 'The poem itself was written by Matsemela Manaka in a poetic style,' says Ledwaba, 'it just suggested situations which I had to explore on my own, right to the end of the poem.' Ledwaba, who was interviewed while in the UK to perform *Vuka* at the Edinburgh Festival, gives more detail of his process of turning *Vuka* into a theatrical piece:

> What I had to do was read the poem myself and really explore the situations and make them more lively, and I was able to do that from the experience I have of those situations he wrote about which are, in a way, obvious situations which I only see at home. I really expanded the poem to give it an element of theatre, and I think so far I have succeeded in that attempt.[71]

[69]Ibid., 42.
[70]Ibid., 42.
[71]Amazwi, ACC 2008.49 Stephen Gray, 'ACC 2008.49.3.4.3.2 Transcript of Interview with John Ledwaba by Mark Ralph-Bowman, Arts and Africa, First Broadcast 5 September 1982, BBC African Service, London.'

As Peter Larlham notes, these early Manaka plays gave actors incredible independence of interpretation but also made immense physical demands on their bodies.[72] Ledwaba had to improvise the entire script and play a number of characters using minimal props, he was also dealing with highly charged political material. That said, he noted that he enjoyed the freedom given by the writer by adapting *Vuka* to different audiences.

Myra Davis's critical review of the one-man performance of *Vuka* recounts in some detail the experience of being in the space where it was performed by Ledwaba.[73] In line with the plays that Manaka had done up to this point, the staging is simple but there is one important detail we learn from Davis: that the backdrop is of 'the Christian cross simply painted in black on a large white cloth hangs at the back of the acting space.' As Davis notes, the presence of this simple scenery 'makes ironic commentary upon the state of affairs in a nation professing Christianity. Above all, it acts as a challenge to the conscience of the audience, whether Christian or not.'[74] I would add that it is consistent with Black Consciousness's appropriation of Christianity, rejecting negative depictions of black people and replacing a white deity with a black messiah.[75] Significantly, this ironic commentary on South African Christianity during apartheid was also made in more famous productions such as Mbongeni Ngema, Barney Simon and Percy Mtwa's *Woza Albert!* At the pass office, Ledwaba wears 'a pantomime nose and spectacles' to represent the white official. This was a shared stylistic choice among Theatre of Resistance practitioners working in the early 1980s. Finally, Davis remarks on Ledwaba's considerable acting skills. 'No movement is exaggerated,' she writes, 'everything is controlled and flows from the centre of his being.' She continues:

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[72]Larlham, *Black Theater, Dance, and Ritual in South Africa*, 87.
[73]Myra Davis, 'Vuka: Sharing the Image', *Critical Arts* 4, no. 3 (1987).
[74]Ibid., 32–33.
[75]See Daniel Magaziner, 'Christ in Context: Developing a Political Faith in Apartheid South Africa', *Radical History Review* 2007, no. 99 (1 October 2007): 80–106, for a discussion of the way that a black, liberation, theology came to SASO and the BCM and how the movement made it a practical rather than theoretical phenomenon.

> When necessary he can demonstrate a terrifying energy, filling the stage with not one but an army of the Dubula clan. Then as suddenly he magnifies the space around him, becomes a child, approaching the audience (Baba) with respect, with hope that creates a shape for response. He has also a wide vocal range. He can adopt the tone of self-assured bureaucrat, of fervent politician or optimistic priest. He can shake the house with rage or grief or jubilation and he can drop one quiet word into a space of silence to provide it maximum effect.[76]

Davis concludes that Ledwaba has 'a particular level of shared humour [which] he balances them all one against another, presenting them to the audience, even drawing them from the audience which he holds always at the centre of the event. And it is this centrality of the audience which is at the heart of Soyikwa's work.'[77]

Ledwaba says that, when performing for Western audiences, he kept the major theme of black unity 'but even going beyond that, show[ed] the involvement of multi-nationals in our struggle. We are not only oppressed by the Afrikaaners,' [sic.] he says, 'but it is also the responsibility of the multi-nationals and the powerful nations.'[78] Speaking of his experiences working on *Egoli* and *Vuka*, Ledwaba noted, 'lucky enough in 1981, during the breaks, I did *Vuka* the one man play, Matsemela's *Vuka* at the Market.' He continues, 'in'82 [he] re-rehearsed *Vuka* and took it to the Edinburgh Festival, to Denmark, to Oslo, ja a couple of countries.' For his hard-hitting theatre in *Vuka*, John Ledwaba was detained and after his release moved towards more moderate theatre, choosing to work with Barney Simon at the Market Theatre. 'When it came back I had to redo *Vuka* to finish the schedule of *Egoli*. Ja then '83 I was here. I got detained and after some months they took me out. Then I was really frustrated. Then my friend Barney (Simon) called me.'[79] There are few other details on this detention in the archive, however it is worth noting that *Vuka* began its life with the original performer Fats Bookholane

[76] Davis, 38.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Amazwi, 'Transcript of Interview with John Ledwaba by Mark Ralph-Bowman.'
[79] Ledwaba, Interview conducted by Vanessa Cooke.

unable to perform because of his son's death at the hands of the apartheid security apparatus and was painfully embroiled in repression.

Vuka was revived in 1985 with three cast members and a more elaborate set. Actors were confined to a script and the set was more elaborate with the addition of a slide projector, lighting effects and a soundtrack. The new play also included more singing and choreography.[80] By the mid-1980s, when the new *Vuka* was created, there was a new attitude of 'repressive tolerance' that Seroke earlier described. The play was performed with little interference but a more critical reception. Ali Khangela Hlongwane remembers the creation of this new version of *Vuka*: 'the three of us working with Matsemela began to read the script, identify characters in it and identify the scenarios that allowed for enactment. And I played the central narrator, Vuka himself who arises from the dead to tell the story. But, nonetheless Job and Kenneth become this character in some instances.'[81] Hlongwane played the lead role, the other two actors were Job Kubatsi and Kenneth Nkwanyana who were eventually joined by Brian Leboa.

At the end of August 1985, *Vuka* was staged at the Funda Centre. Later that year, it went to Swaziland and received favourable coverage in the *Times of Swaziland*.[82] When the play returned to South Africa, it went to the University of the Witwatersrand and even some union meetings. A critic, Garlat MacLiam, who saw the performance at Wits - which was performed by Hlongwane, Kubatsi and Mlungusi ka Mase - noted the play's lyrical nature but felt this disturbed the flow of dialogue. The critic takes issue with the number of characters that the three are required to enact, adding that this 'also contributes an element of confusion.' Noting that Hlongwane 'conveys, when required, auras of subdued violence and placid gentleness' and that ka Mase 'projects a dynamism which is hard to resist [but] frequently goes over the top in

[80] Ali Khangela Hlongwane Personal Papers [AKH], Vuka Script.
[81]Ali Khangela Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 8 June 2023.
[82]'Apartheid on Trial,' *Times of Swaziland*, 3 December 1985, 9

his enthusiasm for a particular characterisation,' MacLiam feels that Kubatsi's performance is overshadowed by that of Hlongwane and ka Mase.[83]

Pula and The Workshop Method of Playmaking

While Soyikwa did not experience direct censorship for the rest of the decade, actors continued to experience intimidation. Perhaps the attitude of repressive tolerance that Seroke noted took hold in the early 1980s on the part of the censorship apparatus. During this period, Soyikwa put on several plays both locally and overseas. Before 1985, Soyikwa African Theatre was, in effect, an experimental workshop theatre group. One of the major influences came from the group working with Ray Hlongwane, who had worked in Workshop '71. From Hlongwane, they learnt elements of physical theatre. This section will discuss the workshopping of the plays and the oral history memory of two actors who worked with Manaka at this time: Tshamano Sebe and Ronnie Mkwanazi.

The play that most epitomises this period is *Pula*. *Pula* (which means rain) was often performed as a double bill with *Imbumba*. The latter play was premièred at Blackchain Hall in Diepkloof Hall in Soweto in 1980, directed by Ray Hlongwane. Prior to this, the cast used the Moravian Church Hall for rehearsals and performances. The initial cast of *Pula* included Ronnie Mkhwanazi, David Sebe, Tshamano Sebe (then Makarious), and Dannny Moetsi. After performing in South Africa, the quartet went on to perform at Edinburgh and win the Fringe First. They also toured Europe.[84] A script for *Imbumba* does not exist, but *Pula* has been published. Davis's editor's notes point out that *Pula* was first performed in the Blackchain Hall at in 1982. The play is a metaphor for the moral drought in which apartheid South Africa found itself. Like its counterpart *Imbumba*, *Pula* is an experimental piece that has many poems. In

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[83]Garalt MacLiam, 'Three into 14 go obscurely,' *The Star* (Tonight), 14 March 1986, 9.
[84]Geoffrey V Davis, 'Introduction', in *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 6.

fact, in the stage directions the characters are called a 'chorus' and in the version published in the anthology *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto*, the acts are called 'movements'.

Pula has four movements. The first is focused on the rural area from which the main character, Izwe, comes. His home is suffering a prolonged drought and he seeks some respite by moving to the city. However, this imagery is counter-posed with the imagery of the people's need for spiritual relief through a return to a musical source. Part of a long song sequence includes the line, 'We need a drumbeat to pump life/into the dampened spirits of our people.'[85] The first movement also includes a meditation on the loss of sovereignty of African people by the colonial conquest. The second movement moves to a shebeen in the urban location, owned by Jimi Mbijana who is portrayed as a rough, no-nonsense employer. Nevertheless, Izwe is employed here but carries aspirations of being a popular musician. European colonisation is seen as the reason that African people engage in excessive drinking at shebeens. Izwe is tired of working under the law to which Jimi says, 'Uzokhathala uzeubereg. What legal business can we do without whitey having a bigger cake?'[86]

It is significant that Izwe is an aspiring musician, a constant theme in Manaka's early work is that he sees reclamation of African culture as the key to true and united emancipation. In the following movement, Izwe forms the Zion Trio after receiving a surprise amount of money. This moves into the third movement which is a single song, an ode to 'the people'. The fourth and final movement, returns to the rural area where the deprivation and suffering is much worse than before and a water source is owned by a white man named Bosswinkel, symbolic of the playwright's view of the racial oppression of his people. The main chorus of the movement goes:

> Cattle are dying
> People are starving

[85]Matsemela Manaka, 'Pula', in *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 77.
[86]Manaka, 'Pula'.

Cattle are dying
People are starving

Give us rain
Give us bread
Give us rain
Give us bread

Children are dying
People are slaving
Children are dying
People are slaving

Give us love
Give us joy
Give us love
Give us joy

Shakaman
Shakaman
Shakaman
Shakaman

Shakaman
    Shaka the man

Shakaman
    Shaka the father

Shakaman
    Shaka the son

Shakaman
    Shaka the redeemer

Give us rain
Give us bread
Give us rain
Give us bread

Give us love
Give us joy
Give us love
Give us joy[87]

[87] Ibid., 90–91.

This poem, rather than appealing to a Christian saviour, appeals to Shaka, a unifying figure of African resistance and a leader of the militarily strong Zulu nation. This gestures towards and reflects the BCM's turn towards violent resistance as a feasible means for attaining freedom as well as serving as a symbol of African unity. The movement, and play, ends on an optimistic note with Mkhulu, an old man, predicting a future birth of freedom.[88]

Figure 7 Program for Pula and Imbumba in the UK, Source: AKH

Even in text, the resistance in *Pula* is palpable. While this is far from the original version of the script penned by Manaka and workshopped with his cast, it does point to the key political themes and concerns, to which I return later in this chapter. Exploring the creation of the plays of this period reveals some salient features of the context in which it arose. According to Ronald Mkwanazi, part of the original cast, 'So we would do workshops, the process of creating a play like I said was a collaborative – we would do workshops and then Matsemela would sketch up everything you know and maybe put anything that he would bring, so we would sketch up

[88]Ibid., 92.

everything and put it on paper and give it a structure.'[89] Tshamano Sebe, also part of the original crew remembers the process as the following:

> Matsemela used to come with some scribbles and then he would give the scribbles to us and then he goes where he goes to do whatever he does 'cause he was working at Ravan Press. We would remain and investigate what he wrote and then create something from that and then when he comes and finds us we have created something yeah and then he looks at what we have created and then songs as well, I was playing guitar those days, I was using my experience of being exposed to musicals because I understood music, I understood choruses you know like voices of people singing together so I would arrange everything and I would play my guitar in songs which are not like in common songs, we had some commonly sung songs in South Africa you know the songs that are known and we would create new songs and then we would work it out and we would create the songs from the words that are written by Matsemela yeah and then those songs then became songs and I arranged and then they fit in within the story, that's how Pula was then devised.[90]

The creation of the play was highly collaborative and democratic, with input from writer and cast.

Both actors had directly and indirectly worked with Gibson Kente. Mkwanazi was on the cast of the play *Laduma* in 1978, where he played a Zulu boy. Mkwanazi remembers that the Gibson Kente 'school' was rigorous and included 'voice training, doing so-called projection, diction'. However, he feels he got into Kente's company after he had 'toned down' his theatre post the 'political' plays of the mid 1970s.[91] Sebe, on the other hand, had an indirect relationship with Gibson Kente. Born in Diepkloof, Soweto, in 1960, Sebe had most of his schooling in his Venda rural area and returned to the city as a teenager. In the late 1970s, Sebe 'teamed up with Alpheus Siebane who had worked with Gibson Kente, learned deportment, composing'.[92] With Siebane, Sebe worked on plays such as *Right is Wrong* and *The Roof* before

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[89] Ronald Mkwanazi, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 30 November 2022.
[90] Tshamano Sebe, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Telephonic, 7 December 2022.
[91] Mkwanazi, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[92] Sebe, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

joining the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre. Siebane had been a major actor in Kente's play *Can You Take It*.[93]

Tshamano Sebe contrasts the theatrical work that he encountered upon joining Soyikwa with that he received when working with Siebane:

> it was not musical, not like a musical it was a play, a political play whereby the old system is different from musicals now. It's a play of four characters only; no dancing, no singing of that type of musicals singing like the natural singing yeah so I was brought into that landscape and then I then found that it's different and I have to learn this difference.[94]

The play that Sebe first encountered was *Imbumba*. Following this, the cast rehearsed *Pula* and *Imbumba* with the director Ray Hlongwane.

According to a later programme, Ray Hlongwane had worked with Robert Kavanagh in Workshop '71 and was instrumental in founding both the CYA and Soyikwa Black Theatre. He also worked for the Open School in Braamfontein, developing street theatre. Ray Hlongwane directed numerous other plays by Soyikwa, including *The Horn*, *The Calabash*. He also directed Zakes Mda's *The Road* and Wole Soyinka's *The Trial of Brother Jero* and *Ogun Abibiman*. Hlongwane went on to become a film director, teacher at the READ project and at Soyikwa's own drama school, discussed in Chapter Six.[95] Comparing his appearance to Jonas Savimbi, a brief 1987 profile of Ray Hlongwane in *Sowetan* notes that Hlongwane had a wealth of experience on stage and was then working with Soyikwa students to stage *Siza* at the Market Theatre.[96]

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[93]'Kente poses no new problem in play,' *Rand Daily Mail* (Township Edition), 4 March 1977.
[94]Sebe, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[95]AKH, 'Program for Five Million Souls, Soyikwa Production, no date.'
[96]"Ray has his day," *Sowetan*, 25 May 1987

We will return to *Siza* below, but for now it is worth noting that Soyikwa was a workshop theatre ensemble through the influence of Ray Hlongwane, who had developed this craft within Workshop '71. Workshop '71 was a theatre movement in Johannesburg in the early 1970s started by Robert "Mshengu" Kavanagh, also known by the nome de plume Robert McLaren, with liberal support from the Institute of Race Relations. In McLaren's estimation, the group quickly drifted from the limited liberal agenda of the Institute.[97] Workshop '71 made radical plays like *Surivival* and *Crossroads* in the 1970s, adhering to a broadly Marxist ideology. Unlike the work of Soyikwa, though, these plays were protest theatre because they presented the conditions of oppression of the black majority without seeking to change the system.

Of Ray Hlongwane's experience, Tshamano Sebe maintains that 'Hlongwane had read you know the Jerzy Grotowski, Stanislavsky, everything, he was more of an intellectual so he had read theatre.' Sebe continues,

> he made us run around Moravian Hall you know like run around you know like goats or donkeys, like a cow being trained for something. You know like we were being trained to be actors you know like workshops and those workshops and the technicalities of the body, how to train the body, how to breathe and how to control the breathing how to control your breathing when we speak and everything; how to make you sensible around your environment or the environment of the story you are acting in so you should be an actor that understands those stories – it's not about shouting, it's not about being loud, it's about being articulative and sincere and as honest as possible, as emotional as possible not as like a forced cry or something no it's like something very special[98]

This was the context in which Soyikwa emerged as an ensemble, with a keen awareness of the world outside while acknowledging the limited resources available to the group. In addition to the workshop method, Ray Hlongwane introduced ideas of physical theatre and Stanislavsky's more natural ways of acting.

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[97]Robert McLaren, '"The Many Individual Wills." From Crossroads to Survival: The Work of Experimental Theatre Workshop '71', in *Theatre and Change in South Africa*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis and Anne Fuchs (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 25–48.

[98]Sebe, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

Robert Kavanagh describes the workshops that Ray Hlongwane would have participated in in the 1970s: ‘A number of actors from various theatre groups had been attending the workshops, Sam Mhangwane's *Sea Pearls*, to name but one. For them Workshop '71 was a training ground—neutral territory, so to speak, where actors from different groups could come together, learn and share skills, and criticise each other's plays.’[99] Thus, the experimental theatre workshops were open to many actors and aspiring actors. It was one of the few spaces where Africans would come and learn from each other and from facilitators such as the Oxford–educated Kavanagh. A highly generative space, Workshop ‘71 involved training in key concepts of the theatre, exercises and acting workshops. ‘For South Africa’, McLaren claims, ‘the workshop techniques of *Crossroads*, the ensemble nature of the performance, its barefoot style, its sparse use of simple representational props and costumes, were a revelation.’[100] While other groups, such as the Serpent Players, were creating theatre in workshops, this was one of the first major interventions that involved members of the working class and was open to a wide variety of black participants from Johannesburg’s segregated townships. While there is no record of Ray Hlongwane acting in one of the major Workshop ’71 productions, he was indeed part of this milieu. Furthermore, many members of Soyikwa such as Ali Hlongwane (no relation to Ray), knew James Mthoba, one of the founders of Workshop ’71.[101]

Improvisational workshops of plays emerged in South Africa because there were existing traditions of communal African theatrical practice that fused with international movements in experimental theatre. It was also a form that worked well in a country where oral performance traditions had deep roots. Finally, deliberately working in a democratic way belied the oppressive nature of the apartheid regime. Workshops in the 1980s, as Steadman has pointed

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[99]McLaren, ‘”The Many Individual Wills.” From Crossroads to Survival: The Work of Experimental Theatre Workshop ‘71’, 41.
[100]McLaren, 41.
[101]AKH, ‘“A Walk Down Memory Lane,” Ali Khangela Hlongwane Autobiographical Notes.’

out, reflected the growing popular democracy in the civics, which were returning power to the people.[102] In his MA Thesis, Mike Fleishman analyses the establishment of workshop theatre in South Africa in the 1980s as the preferred method of playmaking by the non-hegemonic classes in South Africa and argues that 'the rise of workshop theatre constitute[d] a movement away from alternative performance to oppositional practice. By reintroducing the oral tradition and the carnivalesque into theatre practice, workshop theatre challenge[d] the dominant mode of practice on a fundamental level, not in order to replace it as the dominant mode but in order to relativise its claim to truth and the absoluteness of its rule.'[103] Workshop Theatre, then, was the perfect dramaturgical method for practitioners of the Theatre of Resistance. By simply upending the traditional manner in which modern theatre was created, they were making a political statement.

Just like the practitioners of the Theatre of Resistance in the 1970s, Soyikwa also had its fair share of brushes with the security forces. In addition to the banning of *Egoli* discussed above, individual members of Soyikwa were harassed by the Security Branch and performances were shut down. Ronnie Mkwanazi remembers that, 'we had a show somewhere there at the Black Chain in Diepkloof Shopping Centre then, Zone 6, Diepkloof and then the police came while we were performing and the audience scampered and started running out jumping out of windows because we were doing the so-called political theatre you know conscientising the people, the masses.' On a trip to Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha) for theatrical activities, Mkwanazi remembers being detained and tortured by the Security Branch.[104] Hlongwane also remembers members of the special branch coming to a performance of

[102]Ian Steadman, 'Towards Popular Theatre in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 2 (1990): 208–25.

[103]Mark Fleishman, 'Workshop Theatre in South Africa in the 1980s: A Critical Examination with Specific Reference to Power, Orality and the Carnivalesque' (MA Thesis, Cape Town, University of Cape Town, 1991), 67.

[104]Ronald Mkwanazi, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 30 November 2022.

Children of Asazi and sitting in the front row, placing their feet on the stage to intimidate the cast.[105] We will discuss *Children of Asazi* below.

Experimenting with the Township Musical Form: *Children of Asazi*

The context of Soyikwa and the CYA's move to the Funda Centre is important if we are to understand the next stage of Soyikwa and Matsemela Manaka's productivity. The Funda Centre became a site of alternative education in South Africa after 1976, a point explored in more detail in the next chapter. For the purposes of the present discussion, Funda became a space for drama education and experimentation after Soyikwa moved to the Funda Centre and Manaka became its arts coordinator.

In all assessments of Manaka and Soyikwa's work produced from the mid-1980s, the importance of having a community space in the township has been virtually ignored (although Steadman paid some attention to the importance of space, particularly the township space, his important early research on Soyikwa was done before the group became fully established at the Funda Centre).[106] Although the Market Theatre grew in prominence as a space for township-based theatre practitioners such as Manaka and Maishe Maponya to show their work to a city audience in the 1980s, commentators over-emphasise the importance of the Market Theatre. 'Although Manaka refused any patronage from the Market, as Director of the new Funda Arts Centre in Diepkloof, he saw the benefit of having the plays performed at the Market, particularly for press coverage,' Hutchinson claims.[107] In fact, Manaka's association with the

[105]Ali Khangela Hlongwane, Informal Conversation with Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2 June 2023. After this particular performance, the cast members found that one of their cars had disappeared. They had no recourse to go the the police to report it as stolen.
[106]Steadman Ian Patrick, 'Drama And Social Consciousness: Themes In Black Theatre On The Witwatersrand Until 1984' (PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985).
[107]Yvette Hutchison, 'Barney Simon: Brokering Cultural Interventions', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13, no. 3 (1 August 2003): 13, https://doi.org/10.1080/10267160302722.

Market Theatre started before he was arts coordinator at Funda, beginning with *Egoli*'s staging Upstairs at the Market in December 1979 and January 1980.

Nevertheless, the Market Theatre was an important space for publicity and the exchange of ideas. For example, it was through the Market that a promoter, Maurice Roda, saw *Egoli* and took it on tour to the Vaal. Even though the tour was unsuccessful in Sebokeng township because the audience was used to the township musicals of Gibson Kente and not 'serious' theatre, in the words of John Ledwaba, these opportunities to network with other theatre practitioners and possible promoters was useful.[108] Later in the decade, Paul Slabolepszy, the actor and playwright remembers, the Market Theatre was a space that drew people with different philosophies into its orbit. Slabolepszy remembers of Manaka that:

> we used to talk 'cause he worked at The Market, I was so sad when he died 'cause you know we used to just talk stories, I know he had another whole side that he didn't discuss kind of openly, well not to me anyway but I know with his colleagues and stuff.[109]

I now turn to the making of the play *Children of Asazi*, which arguably grew out of this period of intense association with the Market. The following discussion will also show how Soyikwa experimented with adopting a musical format, hearkening back to the popularity of the theatre of Gibson Kente.

Children of Asazi opened at the Market Theatre's Laager on 2 January 1984 with a cast that included Ali Khangela Hlongwane, Dijo Tjabane, Fumane Kokome and Manaka. Khangela Hlongwane would stay with Soyikwa for the rest of the decade and became a leader in the institution, his work with the rural theatre project will be discussed in the following chapter. It was a larger and, in some ways, more ambitious project for Manaka and the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre. The play was written by Manaka and rehearsed by the cast at the yet to be opened Funda Centre in Diepkloof, Soweto. According to Ali Hlongwane, 'the text was written

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[108]Anon, Egoli for the Vaal,' *Post*, 24 Jan 1980 qtd in Fuchs, Playing the Market, 110.
[109]Paul Slabolepszy, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 14 June 2022.

as a play by Matsemela. So, we had a script that we had to memorise and bring to life. But in the process of working on that script, of course, there would be discussions and debates around certain words. Whether they were appropriate or not appropriate.'[110] As opposed to previous Soyikwa plays that were heavily improvised, Manaka lent his authorial weight to this production, thus opening a contradiction in our understanding of the Theatre of Resistance as a communally produced theatre.

It could also be argued that with slightly more elaborate props, costumes and lighting, it had departed from Grotowskian poor theatre. But, as Ali Hlongwane remembers, Manaka was open to modifying his script based on the skill and feelings of the actors, maintaining the democratic element in Soyikwa.

Children of Asazi is essentially a love story, described as a comedy by Manaka, with a backdrop of the resistance to forced removals in the township of Alexandra, north of Johannesburg. Unlike Maponya, Manaka did write about love and saw no contradiction in exploring this theme with his political commitments. Established in 1912, Alexandra was at the time the only place in Johannesburg where black people could own land. It had its own cultures of resistance which, to a large extent, saved it from being erased from the landscape of the 'white' city. Significantly, residents of Alex, as it is commonly known, resisted removals and increases in bus fares by the city in the 1940s and 1950s. *Children of Asazi* alludes to these protest movements.[111] In the final version of *Children of Asazi* preserved in the anthology *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto*, there are no fewer than eight characters. The play is one act in six scenes with an epilogue and prologue. The main characters are Diliza, a young militant poet, and his lover Charmaine, played by Fumane Kokome. Other characters include Nduna– Diliza's father, Gogo, originally also played by Fumane Kokome, and Mabu, Majika, a corrupt

[110]Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[111]For a comprehensive history of Alexandra, see P. L. Bonner and Noor Nieftagodien, *Alexandra: A History* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008).

local African official, an officer and a blind woman. It is worth noting at this point that the word 'asazi' means 'no one knows' in the isiZulu language, thus these children are in a sense parentless.

The title relates to the story in two ways, firstly Diliza's and Charmaine's mother and father respectively have been lost to the struggle, to exile and displacement. They yearn for the return of their parents. Secondly, Charmaine falls pregnant by Diliza and there is a tension around possible incest because it is suggested that Charmaine might be Diliza's half-sister. In scene four the following exchange occurs between Nduna and Diliza in their shack:

> NDUNA: I didn't mean that. What is her name?
> DILIZA: Charmaine Legadima.
> NDUNA: The daughter of Mr Lightning?
> DILIZA: Yebo. Baba. NDUNA: The one who left the country?
> DILIZA: Yebo, Baba.
> NDUNA: That's the man who stole the little happiness I had.
> DILIZA: I don't understand, Baba.
> NDUNA: Legadima is the man who got your mother involved in politics. He used to drive from Sharpeville to Alexandra just to pay her a visit. They would spend the whole evening talking about African history. For some reason or another I would join them and Legadima would always say to me: "You should know your history. It may be painful but it is worth the agony." The Sharpeville uprising happened. Then he came to Alexandra. Separated me from your mother and lived in adultery with her.
> DILIZA: Does that mean...
> NDUNA: Charmaine is your sister. It's a broken calabash, my son. She is the child of your mother. And God forbids the marriage of children who brushed in the same womb.
> DILIZA: (*After a while*). She is expecting my baby, Baba. NDUNA: Your baby?
> DILIZA: Yebo, Baba.
> NDUNA: It's a sin in her stomach. She must go away. I don't want to see her.
>
> *(Diliza exits hurriedly. It becomes dark inside the shack.)*[112]

We later learn that Charmaine is not, in fact, Diliza's half-sister. Nevertheless, this moment in the story reveals several of Manaka's complexities as an artist. While he continued to belong to the genre of Resistance Theatre, *Children of Asazi* demonstrates his ambiguous feelings

[112]Matsemela Manaka, 'Children of Asazi', in *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 144–45.

about the perils of resistance politics. Manaka refuses to lay the blame of families being torn apart only at the feet of apartheid.

It is difficult to analyse the music in *Children of Asazi* without having been to the live performances. We can rely on critics' reviews and memories of those who participated in the making of this play to get a picture of how the music was incorporated into the plotline. This music, undoubtedly enhanced the element of resistance. One critic who attended an early performance noted that 'The beginning is sheer magic - four African voices singing softly in harmony as the faces of the singers, each illuminated only by a candle, are framed in crude windows cut out of sheets of corrugated iron which they hold in front of them.'[113] The same review becomes quite scathing, and will be discussed below. The songs in *Children of Asazi* were composed specifically for the production by Matsemela Manaka, Peter Boroko and Nonhle Tokwe. Ali Hlongwane remembers that including much more music in *Children of Asazi* compared to the earlier Soyikwa plays was a direct response to audience expectations.

In the original production of 1984, Manaka played the character Mabu who says little but expresses himself through playing of the drum. In the later expanded 1986 production that returned to the Market Theatre before touring the USA, Mabu is played by the famous musician from Sakhile, Khaya Mahlangu, while Nomsa Manaka worked with the cast in developing choreography. An experienced saxophonist, Mahlangu was persuaded to join the production by Manaka who sought to expand the scope of what he called 'African theatre'.' In discussing Mahlangu's role in *Children of Asazi*, one review notes, 'The musical interludes provided by Khaya Mahlangu help add to the effectiveness of the production and make it a crowd–pleaser.'[114] As Hlongwane notes in his interview, Mabu 'was an aloof character but someone introvert, I think, who may have experienced a lot but was not keen to talk about it. As a result,

[113]Michael Venables, 'Township drama hard to assess,' *The Citizen*, 6 January 1984, p.15
[114]MacLiam, Garalt, "Truth, charm save formula play," *The Star* (TONIGHT!), 28 July 1986.

he [Manaka] then made him express himself through music.'[115] Hlongwane helps us paint a picture of the power a melancholy character, who seems to bear the weight of the violence that apartheid has inflicted on the people of Alexandra, suddenly bursting into a beautiful saxophone melody rendition like he does immediately after this chorus in the epilogue of the play:

> CHORUS: Ring the bell and blow the horn
> Let the bell toll for the bulldozer
> Blow the hell out of the bulldozer
> Blow for Afrika
> To dance to Afrika's music
> Blow, Ntate Mabu
> Ntate Mabu, blow!

Mahlangu's presence in the play helped pull audience members to the productions, especially those at Funda Centre, as he was well–known in the Soweto community. Thelma Pooe, also musically inclined, played Gogo in the second version of *Children of Asazi*. Additionally, Peter Boroko was a guitarist and this added an additional layer of musicality to the production.

The critics' reviews of the 1984 version of *Children of Asazi* were mixed, leaning towards negative. For Ralph Draper writing in the *Rand Daily Mail*, the play expressed some subtlety, portraying the best of 'African theatre'. Draper opines that 'It is as if Manaka has transmuted this ugly theme [forced removals] into something almost religious in its sincerity – an effect heightened by the extensive and generally effective use of township chants.' Draper feels that 'the cast are fully up to it,' even while chiding Ali Hlongwane for not showing enough emotion in his portrayal of the young militant poet Diliza.[116] While Mike van Niekerk also praises the play for its use of music, his review in *The Star* alleges that 'there is very little dynamic tension' and suggests that the play be edited.[117] The reviewer, Michael Venables maintains that one of the play's weaknesses is its 'stilted, over-formal, sometimes archaic

[115]Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

[116]Ralph Draper, "Manaka pulls it off again," *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 January 1984

[117]Mike van Niekerk, "Manaka's 'Children' try too hard," *The Star* (TONIGHT!), 4 January 1984

language which is so improbable in the mouths of the characters; of a jerkily episodic structure into which the musical interludes are seemingly arbitrarily inserted, bringing the storyline to stop each time.' This reviewer feels that white audiences would not benefit from seeing the play.[118]

Perhaps the review with which the cast took most issue was of the revised 1986 production by Jeff Zerbst in the *Weekend Mail*, entitled "Protest, perhaps, theatre, no."[119] This uncharitable review compares the plot to the English satirist WS Gilbert while asserting that 'The hopelessness of the plot undercuts the power of the protest, and we are left with little to admire save enthusiasm and energy.' Zerbst goes on to criticise the dialogue for being too loud, 'beyond the bounds of theatrical decency.' He nonetheless spares some kind words for Job Kubatsi's comic acting in the bribery scene and Khaya Mahlangu's saxophone playing. While this reviewer may have had fair criticisms of the aesthetic standards of the play, the assertion that one could not mix politics with theatre was a flawed premise.

The Woza Afrika! Festival

Children of Asazi was revised in 1986 in preparation for a major festival of South African theatre in New York City, the Woza Afrika festival. Manaka tightened up some of the dialogue, added music (as discussed above) and increased the number of actors. Whereas the initial version had four actors, with three of them playing two roles, the final major version had a total of eight actors. In a press cutting photo of *Children of Asazi* cast the following caption appears:

> An improved version of Matsemela Manaka's latest play, 'The Children of Asazi', is to be shown at the new Funda centre in Diepkloof early next month. During the play's run at the Market theatre Fumane Kokome (seated), who is seen here playing the part

[118] Venables, 'Township drama hard to assess.'

[119] Jeff Zerbst, "Protest perhaps, theatre, no." *Weekend Mail*

> of a grandmother confused the audience as she also had to double-up as a younger woman. Matsemela is adding an extra actor to avoid the same confusion.[120]

This demonstrates Manaka's openness to criticism and willingness to adjust to the demands of 'formal' theatre. Ali Hlongwane points out, however, that cast changes were often done in response to the resources available to the company.[121] Township–based theatre, unlike its city counterparts or that supported by the resources of the Market Theatre, had formidable hurdles to overcome before staging their plays and this is just one of them.

The reworked version of *Children of Asazi* seemed to have some teething problems. David Williams's review of a July 1986 performance at the Market Theatre suggested there were too many props on stage, there were problems with lighting, and actors had not rehearsed adequately, adding sarcastically, that the play may have been 'intensely rehearsed in the wrong way'.[122] In a letter to Barney Simon, director of the Market Theatre, David Bonbright, a programme officer with the New York based Ford Foundation expressed his disappointment at having seen the play on a recent trip to Johannesburg. Bonbright called the play 'virtually unsalvageable' and suggested that Manaka and cast try to workshop a different play.[123] Manaka and Soyikwa took this criticism in stride and made improvements to the play before leaving for New York. Indeed, a press release from the Funda Centre acknowledges that 'The play had mixed reviews during its run at the Market Theatre' and adds, 'we have responded positively to some reviews by reworking certain parts of the production.'[124] The play was staged at the Funda Centre before leaving for New York in September 1986.

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[120]AKH Papers.
[121]Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[122]David Williams, 'Brave Stab,' *Financial Mail*, 1 August 1986.
[123]Amazwi, ACC 1995.11 Barney Simon Papers, 'ACC 1995.11.8.88 Letter from David Bonbright to Barney Simon re Matsemela Manaka's play, Children of Asazi, 19 August 1986.'
[124]AKH Papers.

Spearheaded by Duma Ndlovu, the exiled Black Consciousness poet and activist, the Woza Afrika festival was held at the Lincoln Center in New York City before moving to venues in Washington DC, from September to October 1986. A total of five plays were performed: *Gangsters* by Maishe Maponya, *Born in the RSA* by Barney Simon and the cast, *Asinamali!* by Mbongeni Ngema, *Bopha!* by Percy Mtwa and *Children of Asazi* by Manaka.[125] In New York, Diliza was played by Ali Hlongwane, Soentjie Thapedi played Charmaine (who also played the blind woman), Nduna was played by the seasoned actor Peter Boroko (who also played the officer), Gogo by Thelma Pooe, Majika by Job Kubatsi, and Mabu by saxophonist Khaya Mahlangu.[126] Judging from reviews, the performances of *Children of Asazi* had improved greatly since the Market Theatre performances two months prior. One reviewer contrasts it to *Gangsters* on the double–bill, which he calls 'extremist'. This critic, Leo Seligsohn, calls the *Children of Asazi* 'gentle and lyrical' adding that the play 'filters outrage at oppression through music, humour and the story of young love.' Seligsohn later admiringly writes of Job Kubatsi's comic portrayal of the crooked Majika and adds, 'making its points ingenuously at times, the play benefits from good acting and pleasing folk music highlighted by saxophone solos.'[127] It is clear that a lot of rehearsal and reflection had gone into the play, typical of the excellent work ethic of Manaka and his company. In spite of *Children of Asazi's* more light-hearted style, it still explored themes espoused by writers committed to Black Consciousness for the previous decade-and-a-half, such as land dispossession and family disruption.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the founding of Soyikwa Black Theatre in Diepkloof, Soweto in the wake of the Soweto students' uprising and as part of the CYA. It addressed some aspects of

[125]Duma Ndlovu (ed), *Woza Afrika! An Anthology of South African Plays*, George Braziller, NY.
[126]AKH, 'Woza Afrika! New Playwrights' Theatre, Program for the double–bill of *Children of Asazi* and *Gangsters*.'
[127]Seligsohn, Leo, 'Enriching Combination of Protest Plays,' *Newsday*, 26 September 1986.

Manaka's biography, a member of CYA who became the de facto leader of Soyikwa after his poems were turned into a string of critically successful plays. The chapter discussed the plays *Egoli*, *Pula*, and *Vuka* as well as *Children of Asazi*, works that were made in the first period of the existence and growth of Soyikwa. The chapter also touched on the impact of censorship and state repression on the work of Soyikwa and the stance of resistance that Matsemela Manaka took in his playwrighting. By looking at censorship records, the chapter introduced a new conversation into the analysis of South African theatre history and brought into sharp focus Soyikwa's work in the Theatre of Resistance. Critically, the chapter also explored the movement of workshopped theatre that took hold in the mid-1970s and was firmly the method preferred by committed theatre practitioners of the 1980s because of its democratic nature. The following chapter turns to the work the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre did as a drama school and its place in the informal education movements of the late 1980s in South Africa. The chapter then traces the challenges Soyikwa had surviving the transition to democracy.

Chapter Six: The Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre as Alternative Theatre Education, The Rural Theatre Project and The Decline of Soyikwa, 1985 - 2010

Introduction

The penultimate chapter of this thesis addresses the history of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre from 1985 to about 2010. This period saw the institutionalisation of Soyikwa at the Funda Centre and the development of a theatre diploma programme as well as a rural theatre project that was closely attached to the training programme. The chapter explores issues around alternative education in the arts and the place that Soyikwa - and the Funda Centre more generally - carved out for itself in this tumultuous decade. I explore the plays *Toro: The African Dream*, *Koma* and *The Untold Story* as productions that were developed principally through improvisational workshops with students in the diploma programme. As the previous chapter showed, Soyikwa became something of a repertory company with members actively contributing to the development of plays in workshops. The chapter touches on *Siza*, also a student production, which had the strong influence of the rural theatre project. Another rural play that the chapter discusses is *Bhambatha*, developed by Ali Khangela Hlongwane in Driefontein.

All the plays in this chapter continued to display elements of the Theatre of Resistance. However, following developments in the rest of the African continent, Soyikwa turned to Theatre for Development (TfD) which focused more on material community needs rather than political emancipation. Nevertheless, this chapter shows why Soyikwa's forays into TfD were not totally successful due to the overwhelming influence of the Resistance tradition. The

chapter sketches the biographies of some key figures in Soyikwa in this period, including individuals like Alistair Dube, Sello Motloung and Jerry Raletebele. While foregrounding the continuing contributions of Matsemela Manaka, the chapter treats him as an integral - though not central - part of Soyikwa after 1985. The chapter consciously does not address his activities after his departure from the Soyikwa Institute of African theatre, but rather focuses on the legacy of this institution in the context of declining support to the non-governmental organisation sector following the unbanning of liberation movements and preparations for the democratic transition in South Africa.

Soyikwa African Theatre Becomes an Institute: Alternative Arts Education and Student Productions, 1986 – 1991

From the mid-1980s and now firmly established at Funda Centre, Soyikwa African Theatre transformed itself into a fully-fledged institute teaching a two–year theatre diploma course. Funda remained the base of Soyikwa's operations for nine years from 1985 until 1994 when international funding bodies withdrew their support for NGOs in South Africa. This coincided with a change in strategy by Funda Centre management: rather than an open space that fostered different artistic and educational activities, Funda Centre was transformed into a community college. Soyikwa's members felt that this would limit their work and departed from the fold. During the second half of the 1980s, Matsemela Manaka continued to be a guiding force for the work of Soyikwa. He directed about half a dozen productions, working with students. Although these productions did not tour as widely as previous Soyikwa work, they exhibited further experimentation in theatrical form, incorporating elements from African performance while maintaining elements of Theatre of Resistance within the plays. The plays also increasingly incorporated dance and visual arts. The first of the productions where Manaka worked closely with students enrolled in the diploma programme was *Toro: The African Dream*.

Toro: The African Dream

Unlike Manaka's early plays, *Toro: The African Dream* was not 'poor' theatre in terms of its staging. It required an elaborate set and lighting, discussed below. However, it did carry forward a political commitment even while experimenting with different formal elements to create what one might term a ritual for the African community. What follows is a critical summary of the play, *Toro*. According to Ali Khangela Hlongwane, this play was originally titled *Malume* (meaning uncle) and was a tribute to the PAC stalwart, Zeph Mothopeng.[1] Written by Manaka and rehearsed by the cast at Funda Centre, it was performed there and opened at the Market Theatre's Laager on 29 October 1987.[2] The cast included Ali Khangela Hlongwane as Muntu, Job Lefenyo Kubatsi as Thabo with dancing and choreography by Nomsa Manaka, Matsemela Manaka's wife at the time. Rankitseng Ramela, Moss Manaka and Peter Boroko provided music. *Toro* was produced as part of the Soyikwa theatre education programme, in which Kubatsi and Hlongwane were enrolled. More will be said about this programme in the following section.

The play is set in a hideout house en route to exile and evokes aspects of experimental theatre that were prevailing in the 1980s as well as additional elements inherited from Workshop '71. The plot of *Toro* is circular, and, prophetically, begins and ends with a celebration of freedom. In this respect, *Toro* becomes a ritual for the still unfree black people. Other observers of theatre made by oppressed classes have noted that in situations where struggle is ongoing, theatre is no longer merely entertainment nor is it solely a political message.[3] While, in 1987, the end of apartheid in South Africa was far from certain, Soyikwa

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[1]Ali Khangela Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 8 June 2023.
[2]HPRA, AG3005Market Theatre Foundation, A2 Annual Reports, '1988 Annual Report.'
[3]Harry J. Elam, 'Ritual Theory and Political Theatre: "Quinta Temporada" and "Slave Ship"', *Theatre Journal* 38, no. 4 (1986): 463–72.

created this play as a meditation on what freedom might mean. Indeed, this ritual aspect of the theatre of Soyikwa is what distinguished it from its contemporaries in the testimonial theatre space.

After the initial celebration at the beginning of the play, a narrator announces the approaching end of exile: ‘In our midst we have men and women who spent most of their life-time amongst the trees. Fighting for this dream to be a reality. This song is dedicated to their homecoming.’[4] The two main characters, Thabo (which means ‘happiness’) and Muntu (which means ‘person’) debate the advantages and disadvantages of exile, all the action happens in Thabo’s uncle’s house, ‘an old veteran. He has been involved in the activities of Afrika Network since 1960.’[5] Manaka chooses to name the liberation movement to which these two young freedom fighters belong the Afrika Network, a neutral term that could refer to any of the exiled groups including the ANC or the PAC. They debate their stay in the house and Muntu manages to squeeze in a jab against imperialism: ‘Just like those who specialise in stealing lands, countries, continents and even the moon. I think we should behave like thieves who break in to stay.’[6] Two women mysteriously come to announce that the road to the north is open but are not important to the plot. Significantly, at the end of the play, Thabo and Muntu eschew exile and choose to stay in the country, proclaiming, ‘Yes, we must stay!’[7]

Unlike *Children of Asazi*, discussed in the previous chapter, the staging for *Toro* is simpler. The main piece of furniture on stage is a bench. In terms of structure, *Toro* is in one scene broken up by songs from a chorus and Nomsa Manaka’s exquisite ostrich dance. There are also many poems in the performance. The suitcase left by the women contains African traditional dress, which Thabo and Muntu wear to create a flashback to their days reciting

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[4]Matsemela Manaka, ‘Toro: The African Dream’, in *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 156.
[5]Ibid., 156.
[6]Ibid., 157.
[7]Ibid., 170.

political poetry in the township. Thabo comments, ‘This costume brings back memories of our poetry book. Those days were fire. Our poems could set the whole township on fire. Our poems were like grenades to bring about change. We also wrote tributes to ourselves, our people and our country.’[8] The two women who appear in dialogue roles in the play do so dressed in black, their faces obscured. When Muntu realises that his wife has come to join him on the route to exile, he chides her for leaving their children behind and adds, ‘To hell with Africa Network. You are not going anywhere. You remain here. This is where the real fight must happen.’ Muntu's wife responds in song, ‘love is over. Where will I go, mama?’[9] The ambiguous role of women in the broader liberation movement and specifically the BC/Africanist camp during South Africa’s liberation movement is revealed here very clearly. Acknowledging this lacuna, Ali Hlongwane commented on this, saying,

> Look, it could probably go back to us being a patriarchal society, that that particular struggle, we did not give more attention to and more theoretical reflection to. I do not remember us having debates, heated debates, the way we had about the plays and what we were doing on the question of involving women in the work we were doing.[10]

Toro as Ritual and African Theatre

In an undated press release, Matsemela Manaka describes *Toro* as ‘a search for self through a theatrical collage of drama, dance, music, mime and poetry.’[11] He goes on to describe Ali Khangela Hlongwane and Job Kubatsi portraying ‘a paranoid people’ who are seeking freedom and that the ‘music and dance are also used as effects in the story as told by the two actors'. One reviewer, who saw the 1987 performance at the Market Theatre, disagreed that the two young revolutionaries were paranoid. On the contrary, he felt that ‘their hangups - such as their fear of the knock at the door in the early hours - are fully justified'. This reviewer, however, wrote an otherwise glowing review of *Toro*, commenting on the subtlety of the political content

[8]Ibid., 166.
[9]Ibid., 164.
[10]Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[11]AKH, Matsemela Manaka, ‘Press Release: *Toro – The African Dream*, n.d.’

and 'considerable talents' of the actors. From this reviewer, we get a palpable sense of the performance space on that evening in 1987. He writes, 'the stylised Afro-décor is carried through right round the theatre, enveloping the audience' and adds on the audience response included 'cheers, whoops and ululations.'[12] By this time, black audiences could attend performances at the Laager and were, as the reviewer suggests, part of the design of this production.

Another reviewer comments on the lighting, done by Paul Abrams and Alistair Dube. The 'reds, blues, greens and yellows' add to the joyous tone of the production. This reviewer adds that Job Kubatsi used comedy to portray his message while Ali Khangela Hlongwane used melodrama.[13] What was distinctive about *Toro* compared to earlier plays by the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre was its effective use of music and dance. Peter Boroko introduced the kora, a stringed instrument from West Africa, while still playing the guitar and flute. Moss Manaka also played the flute and Rankitseng Ramela played the guitar. Both Moss Manaka and Ramela played percussion.[14] The music, 'influenced by Caribbean and western rhythms' while keeping its essential African character, reviewers tell us, added to the mood of celebration.[15] Nomsa Manaka debuted her famous ostrich dance in *Toro* and while the audience found it captivating and reviewers described her performance as embodying 'a sort of materialised spirit of Africa,'[16] and saying that her 'ostrich will live alongside much of the best work in plays like *Woza Albert* and *Asinamali* as one of the greatest impressions of the South African theatre.'[17] Nomsa Manaka herself found this successful performance challenging. She says:

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[12]Daniel Raeford, 'A dream for Africa,' *The Citizen,* 31 October 1987, 16.
[13]Garalt MacLiam, 'Brief and colourful "happening" at the Laager,' *The Star*, 2 November 1987, 12.
[14]AKH, Program for *Toro.*
[15]MacLiam, 'Brief and colourful "happening" at the Laager.'
[16]Raeford, 'A dream for Africa.'
[17]John Campbell, 'Great on song, low on substance,' *Weekly Mail,* 6 - 12 November 1987, 26.

> I remember when we were doing *Toro*, I was not used to performing – where you act and perform. I mean where you act and you dance 'cause I remember this one point I was dancing, I was dancing, I was dancing – it's a performance at the Market Theatre, people are sitting there watching and then I had to speak; I was so tired [reenacts experience] and people clapped for me shame they realised oh this poor child [laughs], I'll never forget that.[18]

In spite of this memory, Nomsa Manaka's dancing certainly helped with adding to the sense that *Toro* was a rich celebration of African life, and perhaps truly African theatre in the sense that music, dance and acting were integrated—and the audience participated with abandon, even while espousing political themes.

The following year, *Toro* was revamped and made into a larger work. Rina Minervirni, who saw both the 1987 productions and the 1988 production said in her review, 'I miss the intimacy of the "Godot"-like quality of the first "Toro", but there's generous compensation.'[19] With much more music and two additional dancers joining Nomsa Manaka on stage, Minervini called this new *Toro* a full musical. The 1988 production was staged at the larger Upstairs at the Market but even so retained its ritualistic character much to the delight of the presumably mainly African audience. Minervini writes:

> the magical guitarist, Bheki Khoza who suddenly electrifies the audience with an out-of-the-blue rap number that zaps you with its intensity even if you don't understand what is making most of the audience roar. (I couldn't even identify the language, let alone understand it.)[20]

Like all of Manaka's work with Soyikwa, *Toro* was a work in progress rather than a completed work. He allowed his performers to experiment, in this later version Peter Boroko (in addition to his role as musician) was given a larger role as a poet-orator. Like all African performance such improvised insertions into the play were designed to evoke audience participation, which they did. On the other hand, the freedom that Manaka gave his players stood in tension with mainstream theatre which was highly representational in form and had to adhere to a script.

[18] Nomsa Manaka, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 22 July 2022.
[19] Minervini, Rina, '"Toro" turns into full-scale musical,' *The Sunday Star*, 17 April 1988, 11.
[20] Ibid.

While there was a scripting process with *Toro*, actors could engage in a high level of improvisation, not least to emphasise a political message to a specific audience or alter language. After *Toro*, Soyikwa made several more productions that had the strong involvement of students. I will now turn to a discussion of some of these in the context of Soyikwa's efforts to develop an alternative arts education programme.

Alternative Arts Education during Apartheid, The Soyikwa Theatre Diploma Programme, *Siza, Koma,* and *Mdala*

Apart from *Toro*, a few other productions were made when Soyikwa African Theatre became the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre and was running as a fully fledged alternative theatre education programme at the Funda Centre. It is important to note that this was necessary because, until then, there were few other opportunities for Africans living in Soweto and surrounding areas to obtain an arts education. The Funda Arts Centre also ran a music programme, Madimba Institute of African Music, and a visual arts programme called the African Institute of Art, as well as a photography programme called Photographers for Social Documentation. These will not be discussed here as they are out of the scope of this thesis. A full study of the Funda Arts Centre would, however, be a valuable addition to the literature. The present section will discuss the content of the theatre education programme and the thinking that went into its creation.

Writing in the *Harvard Educational Review* at the moment when South Africa was undergoing tectonic transformation, the chairman of the board of Funda Centre, Professor Es'kia Mphahlele, outlined alternative education in South Africa during apartheid. He stressed that as opposed to informal education, '*Alternative* education, on the contrary, is well structured, and has a seriousness of purpose, of its ability to contribute to the progress of the

nation.'[21] Alternative education was structured, provided the learners with serious pathways to knowledge or even professions and was, by nature, innovative. On this last point, Mphahlele maintained that 'where open societies might see constructive and legitimate innovations, the South African government sees rebellion.'[22] He goes on to highlight several institutions of alternative education for the South African black population, such as Dorkay House and FUBA , which I will return to below, and additionally writes about his Council for Black Education and Research which was based at Funda Centre. Mphahlele describes the Funda Arts Centre as 'a modest but vibrant provider of alternative education'.[23]

Mphahlele, the Funda Arts Centre and Soyikwa were keenly aware of the debates on people's culture and people's education in the 1980s. Mphahlele's choice to frame Funda Centre's activities as 'alternative' education was a response to what he saw as the incoherent notions underpinning people's education. Ken Hartshorne, in his book *Crisis and Challenge: Black Education 1910 – 1990*, writes that Eric Molobi, a key member of the National Education Crisis Committee that was set up to respond to the crisis in Black Education in the 1980s and:

> gave the basic principles [of people's education] as being the democratisation of education involving a cross-section of the community in decisions on the content and quality of education; the negation of apartheid in education by making education relevant to the democratic struggles of the people; the achievement of a high level of education for everyone; the development of a critical mind that becomes aware of the world; the bridging of the gap that exists between theoretical knowledge and practical life; and the closing of the chasm between natural science and the humanities, between mental and manual labour, with emphasis on worker education. [24]

Writing in the *Funda Forum* of March 1986, Mphahlele implicitly criticised mere debates about people's education and further argued that, 'we should be working out programmes of alternative education that can be put into effect **now**, not merely as a rehearsal

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[21]Es'kia Mphahlele, 'Alternative Institutions of Education for Africans in South Africa: An Exploration of Rationale, Goals, and Directions', *Harvard Educational Review* 60, no. 1 (February 1990): 37.
[22]Ibid., 38.
[23]Ibid., 43.
[24]K. B. Hartshorne, *Crisis and Challenge: Black Education 1910-1990* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1992), 344.

for that “far-off divine event” of a Greater South Africa/Azania, because the experiments of today are bound to influence future developments.’[25] If Soyikwa’s course content and workshop way of developing theatre were democratic and thus aligned with people’s education, it nevertheless sat uneasily in Funda as an educational institution as evidenced by the group refusing to be incorporated into Funda Community College. Moreover, the overwhelming influence of Black Consciousness among the members of Soyikwa and their commitment to remain non-partisan meant that while in practice Soyikwa was propounding a people’s culture, they shied away from labelling their work as such because the ANC had appropriated the term and it was becoming politically charged. Before exploring Soyikwa’s theatre diploma at Funda Centre, this section will briefly outline just three alternative arts education initiatives that ran prior to and parallel to Funda Arts Centre: the African Music and Drama Association (AMDA) and Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA), both in Johannesburg, as well as Cape Town’s Community Arts Project (CAP). AMDA was based at Dorkay House, 1 Eloff Street, Johannesburg until the early 1970s but had its height in the period in which the Union of Southern African Artists was active. The Union of Southern African Artists grew out of the Huddleston Jazz Band, promoted by Reverend Trevor Huddleston and including artists such as Hugh Masekela and Jonas Gwangwa. Founded in 1957, the Union Artists would go on to create AMDA as a platform to train aspiring performers. The Union Artists’ greatest success would be the creation of the multi-racial musical, *King Kong*, and the inspiration of a movement of township musicals for the next generation, epitomised by Gibson Kente.[26] Following this, FUBA, founded by Sipho Sepamla in 1978, became a space for alternative arts education in Johannesburg providing initial training to, among others, Nomsa Manaka and Ali Khangela

[25] Es’kia Mphahlele, ‘Alternative Education Now’, *Funda Forum* 2, no. 1 (March 1986): 7.
[26] Coplan, *In Township Tonight*, 172–74. See also Tyler Fleming, *Opposing Apartheid on Stage: King Kong the Musical* (Rochester, NY; Woodbridge, Suffolk: University of Rochester Press, 2020) for a full length monograph treatment of the musical *King Kong*.

Hlongwane of Soyikwa. In a tribute to Sepamla, Mbulelo Mzamane writes of the contribution of Sepamla, 'FUBA was a great and unprecedented venture *by* an African in apartheid South Africa to set up a school for the arts.'[27]

Recalling how difficult it was to get a formal arts education for a township youth in the 1970s and 1980s, Nomsa Manaka notes that FUBA was one place where she could get some form of arts education. Nomsa Manaka did her initial dance training at FUBA.[28] (FUBA offered training in the visual arts, theatre and music). Additionally, Ali Hlongwane remembers the atmosphere at FUBA:

> because Sipho Sepamla had been part of the Bantu Men's Social Centre, he introduced some of similar things. For instance, FUBA had a library itself where you would find literature that you wouldn't find in public libraries or was there in public libraries but we were ignorant of its existence then.

Hlongwane adds that:

> I think FUBA had a wider influence. Or, FUBA at the time of its existence, there were already a number of similar institutions pursuing education, you know, Benjy Francis and the group at the Afrika Cultural Centre. There was also a group called Open School.[29]

A FUBA flyer from 1992 confirms that in addition to a music and fine arts programme, there was a three-year drama diploma course that consisted of 'voice, text interpretation, movement, directing, playwriting, TV acting and scriptwriting.' It adds that, 'Technical studies include set design, construction of sets and props, make-up, lighting, stage managing and front of house management.'[30] At the end of the same year, a 'Festival of Student Drama' was held at FUBA, showcasing plays such as *Dark Voices Ring* by Zakes Mda and *Happy Ending* by Douglas Turner-Ward.[31]

[27]M. V. Mzamane, 'The Life and Times of Sipho Sydney Sepamla: A Tribute', *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde* 44, no. 2 (27 September 2007): 240–46, https://doi.org/10.4314/tvl.v44i2.29804.
[28]Manaka, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[29]Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[30]JAG, FUBA Collection, FUB, 'FUB-0001-0001-031 Flyer on Fuba academy.'
[31]JAG, FUBA Archive, FUB, 'FUB-0001-0001-019 Festival of Student Drama.'

In Cape Town, a group of predominantly University of Cape Town academics offered an alternative arts education called the Community Arts Project (CAP) between 1977 and 2000. CAP held free visual and plastic arts workshops for black residents of Cape Town's townships and was supported by the facilitators themselves, although it did eventually obtain foreign funding. Apart from the visual arts, CAP also held drama courses. Entering this fray was the Funda Arts Centre, part of the Funda Centre discussed in the previous chapter. Apart from the Arts Centre, the Funda Centre included a well-stocked library, an adult education centre and an in-service maths educator's training centre. The key activities in the arts centre were fine arts, theatre and dance (Soyikwa), music and photography lessons. Additionally, the CYA continued informally giving lessons to younger children in the various arts at the weekend.

Soyikwa's Diploma Programme

Soyikwa's two–year theatre diploma programme was launched at the beginning of 1985 and marked the beginning of Soyikwa's life as an institute of African Theatre. Although it did not go on to become a huge alternative arts education programme, with only a handful of students enrolling each year, the innovations that Soyikwa developed over the course of running the programme—and the plays improvised with students—had an important impact on the development of South African theatre for the subaltern and thus is worth studying. In a letter addressed to the South African literary scholar Stephen Gray and dated 12 December 1984, Manaka requests a donation from Gray of R100.00 in order to become a patron of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre. The purpose of these funds, we learn, are to 'successfully launch a Dramatic Arts Education Project from the beginning of 1985.' Enclosed with the letter is the plan for the Dramatic Arts Diploma Programme. The course outline included the history of theatre, 'theory and practice of performance,' and 'theatre practice'. 'In addition,' the document continues, 'a Course in Theatre Workshop will be run by Wits School of Dramatic Art, in collaboration with the Centre for Continuing Education'. The course was intended to be

practical and had an emphasis on preparing students to perform. While an aspect of the course included developing a play through improvisation and performing it for the public (as shall be shown below), the students also worked on existing scripts by Wole Soyinka, Zakes Mda, William Shakespeare and Athol Fugard. In December 1984 the following were tutors for the course: Ray Hlongwane, who has already been discussed, Matsemela Manaka himself to teach African theatre, Robyn Orlin who taught movement, Jennifer Weitzman for speech and the history of theatre, Lionel Abrahams for creative writing, and Steven Sacks who taught the students set design and the creation of some props.[32]

Siza, Mdala, and *Koma* are just three of the plays produced by three different cohorts of students in the Soyikwa Institute's theatre diploma programme. These three plays will be discussed through the oral testimonies of former Soyikwa students who worked on these plays. None of the scripts for these plays survive but there is ample evidence of their impact through reviews. While *Toro* has already been discussed and was in fact performed by the first group of students in the Soyikwa theatre diploma programme, it was strictly speaking scripted by Manaka with minimal improvisation from students. *Siza*, *Koma* and *Mdala* were in a greater sense student–led plays.

An aspect of Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre which developed alongside the training course in the latter half of the 1980s is its rural theatre project. This project drew inspiration from developments in other parts of Africa such as Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi and Zambia. The two projects, the training course and the rural theatre project, wove into each other, each one influencing the other as shall be shown in the discussion of the plays produced in this period, which follows the discussion of *Siza*, *Koma* and *Mdala*. While these three plays did have a rural aspect, this is only briefly touched on.

[32] Amazwi, ACC 2008.49.3.4.3.4 Manaka Matsemela, 'Letter to Stephen Gray.'

Alistair Dube and *Siza*

By 1986, when Alistair Dube joined the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre, it was fully settled into the Funda Arts Centre. Dube was born in Soweto's Dlamini Zone 2 township on 3 May 1961 but, according to him, 'my parents bought a house in the next location called Senaoane'. Born as the third child into a family of six, he spent most of his school years in Soweto. It is in Senaoane where his love for the arts would blossom through attending youth clubs. In addition to sports and games, the youth club that he belonged to had 'activities that we were doing like dance, music, poetry.' He was particularly adept at traditional dancing and percussion, which he later taught to others when he started his own youth club called Tembekani to cater for the unoccupied youth. Interestingly, Dube came upon Soyikwa by chance through participating in a First Aid Course organised by the Red Cross at Funda Centre. A facilitator from Soyikwa came into the First Aid course to teach them some basic theatrical skills that they could use to help demonstrate First Aid concepts to their peers. It was then that Dube realised that he enjoyed acting and was interested in pursuing the full-time drama course. Dube was fortunate to get a scholarship to attend Soyikwa. As he tells it:

> I was there for three years. It was a diploma course that took three years. My first year was very tough and hectic. Because, we started with a group of seven but we dropped out until we were [only three remaining.][33]

Dube was in the Soyikwa Institute's drama programme from 1986-1988, and then continued as a tutor before leaving to work as a contract actor with Matsemela Manaka's Ekhaya Productions[34] and other theatrical outfits.

While a student at the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre, Alistair Dube worked on the play *Siza*. *Siza* is a story about self-help, essentially a social play in the style of TfD. It tells the story of a man called Mdlalose who has been fired from his manufacturing job in the city

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[33]Alistair Mbuso Dube, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Johannesburg, South Africa, 13 May 2022.
[34]Ekhaya Productions was the theatre production company Matsemela Manaka founded after leaving the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre.

only to return to the countryside and mocked by the villagers for returning empty handed. He then notices that the villagers make handicrafts which would be in high demand in the township; he learns to make these , returns with them to the township and sets up a successful trade. The play is structured by the dialogue between Mdlalose and his drunk friend Dladla, who comes to his store to seek help. There is also a woman who comes in and out of the curio store where the action happens, as well as a scene where the union helps Mdlalose. Dube worked with his classmates, director Ray Hlongwane and writer Matsemela Manaka to develop this story into a fully-fledged theatre piece that was shown not only at the Funda Centre and Market Theatre but also abroad. *Siza* started as a one-hander until Dube's two other course mates were incorporated into this work. Dube recalls that students in the Soyikwa theatre diploma course were asked to create a play from research they did in the township. Dube's classmates were not able to find a story that they could develop into a play. He says that Matsemela Manaka 'assisted us in incorporating the guys'[35] The classmates were Patience Mangwane and Sipho Buthelezi (Mangwane was replaced by Soentjie Thapedi on the European tour, the trio plus Manaka as director were later joined by Paul Abrams and Ali Hlongwane as lighting technician and stage manager respectively).

Unlike the previous plays that were developed into fully fledged productions, *Siza*, was credited as having been scripted by Manaka and the cast. However, it appears Ray Hlongwane had a significant input in the initial stages of the play's development, as part of coursework in workshopping at Soyikwa. Dube remembers that:

> I developed the script as the play was unfolding. You know, what do I mean by that? Ray Hlongwane would challenge me. I would find this information and do a scene and then… because Ray Hlongwane was asking me, 'now what about this and that and that and that?' Eish, I didn't know anything. He said, 'go and find out.' Then research, research, research. Get it. Come back, creating a scene around that. That's how even the characters came in.[36]

[35]Dube, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[36]Dube, interview.

Siza, a press release written by Ali Khangela Hlongwane in July 1987 says, 'was first performed in [1986 in] the rural areas of Driefontein and Mafikeng' before returning to the city'.[37] In 1987 the play ran at the Market Theatre, opening in mid-May on the Laager stage. A review of a Market performance noted that it was a student production and should be judged by this standard, and went on to say, 'the continuity of the play is broken by a scene about exploitation at work. Of course, it is important to highlight oppression in the workplace ... but tighter editing would have made a smoother transition.' This reviewer found the players 'effortlessly' able to 'attract audience participation' but nevertheless stresses the need for the play to be edited.[38]

Like previous plays, *Siza's* set was largely designed by Manaka, who provided a vivid backdrop to the action. When the play toured Europe in 1988, primarily going to the Lugano festival of African Arts, Dube remembers that Manaka worked with a Swiss artist to paint a brighter set compared to the Market Theatre one and adds, 'so, we brought these props along [the African figurines]. And at the end of the show, we had to auction them, we did not bring them back.'[39] Dube, a percussionist , played drums on the set that served both as potential items for 'customers' to purchase and a source of music for the play, which was accompanied by dance. Consistent with the theme of self-help and pride in African culture, Dube remembers that he demonstrated the use of the drums to customers and insisted that they be taken home and used not merely displayed. While the play was well received in Europe, even going to open the 6th Conference on Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in German-peaking countries, its greatest impact appears to have been at the different rural areas in South Africa where it was performed.

[37] AKH, 'Siza Press Release by Ali Hlongwane,' 16 July 1987.
[38] "Siza: celebrating African culture," *The New Nation*, 21-27 May 1987, 20.
[39] Dube, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

Dube remembers that after each performance, the actors would hold a discussion with the audience on the different issues raised in the play. By this time, although 'protest theatre' had become reluctantly tolerated by the state, the cast still had to be careful in the way they presented issues on stage. One reviewer of a Market Theatre performance recognised the political potential of the play, which touched on the difficulties black workers faced in factories, the history of African resistance to colonial conquest through brief recollections of Shaka and Bhambatha, and cultural alienation of urban Africans. He calls the treatment of these issues 'superficial' while recognising that the themes could be deeply addressed in the context of a frank discussion.[40] Dube, himself, opines that 'So, here in this country at that time, we had to be very subtle' even though the threat of detention would never disappear.'[41] Thus, *Siza* avoided direct political confrontation but would still lead to political discussions after performances. Dube went on to tutor at the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre before leaving to become a contract actor, including working with Matsemela Manaka's Ekhaya Productions.

Thulane Gxubane and *Koma*

Another student who attended the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre's drama diploma programme was Thulane Gxubane. Gxubane was born in Diepkloof Zone 5 in 1969, a location that is adjacent to Diepkloof Zone 6 where the Funda Centre is located. Gxubane, like many other black young people growing up in apartheid South Africa, did not have a rich arts education growing up. Instead, he came to the arts accidentally through informal participation at school. As he remembers it, 'at high school, I was one of the youngest in class. I was passing, passing all the way, but I loved acting, we called it uhh, the strange names we had for it, we called it sketch.'[42] Thulane attended the nearby Madibane High School, where a

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[40]Gunene, Vusi, "A Brave attempt by beginners," *Weekly Mail*, 22-28 May 1987, 22.
[41]Dube, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[42]Thulane Gxubane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Cape Town, South Africa, 5 July 2023.

decade before the CYA had been founded. After high school Gxubane was invited to Soyikwa by a friend, the now late Thulani Masemola. Masemola had already started lessons at Soyikwa and thought Gxubane would find them interesting as he knew that his friend was interested in the arts. Upon enrolling in the diploma programme, Gxubane found that he had a passion and aptitude for acting.

When asked how he remembered his experience at Soyikwa, Gxubane shared his fond memories:

> I loved everything! It was home for me. I enjoyed every moment of it, you know, uhm, you know, because I was very young. I think I was 18, did my matric when I was 17, then 18 that's when I started at Funda. And then, you know, meeting people, and … okay, most of the things were like, new, like, you know, new experience, so, I enjoyed everything. Meeting people and doing something that you love, and then getting taught, and also that you don't have to pay.[43]

Soyikwa was able to subsidise its students through grant funding, which made it easier for Gxubane, who came from a low-income household, to attend.

The production that Gxubane and his cohort worked on during their three years was *Koma.* The play was performed at the Funda Centre, in community spaces such as churches, at the Market Theatre, and in rural community spaces including shop verandas, under trees, and school grounds. *Koma* was also taken to Lesotho at the invitation of the British Council. Gxubane was cast as the lead actor in this play about 'the importance of literacy'. Rather than teaching literacy, the play's purpose was to 'motivate [rural audiences] to participate in literacy programmes'.[44] Like *Siza*, it was workshopped, but unlike *Siza* it drew from existing short texts from poems and stories, woven together into a loose storyline and accompanied by music from the music school at Funda Arts Centre, the Madimba Institute of African Music. Manaka 'came with ideas and then as students we would fly with them in terms of improvising scene by scene

[43]Ibid.
[44]Zakes Mda, 'Politics and the Theatre: Current Trends in South Africa', in *Theatre and Change in South Africa*, ed. Geoffrey V Davis and Anne Fuchs (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1996), 209.

and then borrowing from different writings, uhh, authors such as Don Mattera, Es'kia Mphahlele, and different other black scholars.' He continues, 'we would borrow excerpts from those different [authors] but the production itself was improvised by all of us the actors and then later the musicians joined us'.[45]

Zakes Mda provides the most complete surviving summary of the structure of *Koma*.[46] The play is structured around the love story between Ntombifuthi and Thulani's character, whose looming departure for West Africa causes a conflict between the two. As will be discussed shortly, the play is mostly in English but does include significant words, phrases and songs in Southern Sotho, Pedi and Zulu. The version Mda saw began with a poem, 'When Africa was Africa/Black was the only colour/And all was perfect.'[47] This poem, though espousing a *Merrie Africa* view of the past, sets the tone for the play. A conversation between the two lovers follows. A larger conflict that carries the action of the play is when Ntombefuthi is faced with the choice of whether to continue teaching adult literacy or go to the rural areas and count her uncle's cattle. She chooses the former, much to the dismay of her mother. Ntombefuthi teaches the hostel dwellers how to read and write in spite of the noisy hostel environment, this is seen as a triumph. The band is brought in when Ntombefuthi thinks that music would aid the hostel dwellers to learn. They join in with their African instruments and dance. While no complete text of *Koma* survives, Mda's summary complemented by Gxubane's recollections help us paint a picture of the form and style of this musical play.

A programme for a *Koma* performance,[48] however, exists and places the play squarely within the movement called Theatre for Development, which will be discussed further below. It is worth noting that the programme tells us that *Koma* was devised alongside not only

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[45]Gxubane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[46]Mda, 'Politics and the Theatre: Current Trends in South Africa', 209–12.
[47]qtd in Mda, 210.
[48]AKH, '*Koma* programme,' n.d.

Madimba but also the LM Foundation for Literacy which was ‘an educational agency established in 1985, embrac[ed] the vision of Muziwakhe Lembede and Ashby Mda in an effort to transcend ethnic/regional boundaries and to grapple with the philosophy of self-reliance, against the background of rural resettlement communities and the migrant labour system.’ The Foundation achieved these aims ‘through hostel based literacy programmes; literacy tutors’ training and materials development unit; and rural based self-help projects'.[49] The LM foundation was also based at Funda Centre and ultimately worked under Mphahlele’s Council of Black Education and Research. The programme gives us some more details on the play. The set, for example, was designed by Manaka. Gxubane remembers that ‘Matsemela himself was a painter, so he used some of his [paintings] on the stage, so the stage would be beautiful. You know, before the scene, the stage was beautiful.’[50]

According to *Koma*’s programme, Thulane Gxubane played a hostel dweller and a priest, Dudu Khubeka played Ntombifuthi, Anny Chesale was the mother, Saint Kgatle played a villager, hostel dweller and interpreter, Tshite Molete was the hostel musician while Thulani Masemola played a villager, hostel dweller and preacher. The action was accompanied by a six-piece band from Madimba and broken up into seven musical scenarios, not quite scenes, which included the following: an ‘Unknown’ tribute to the band Sakhile; songs that portrayed ‘a lost generation which neither knows its history nor its heroes'; ‘a surrealist reflection on two lovers living apart, portrayed through poems by Es’kia Mphahlele, Nthambeleni Phalandwa and extracts from Jimmy Mojapelo’s book *The Unknown Hero'*; an unnamed poem by Don Materra recited by the character MaZondi; and the finale were the songs ‘Swing,’ ‘Kanondoda, an arrangement of a Shona topical song,’ ‘Kugug’othandayo,’ ‘S’yothinina,’ ‘Thuto ke koma (Koma is education in essence).’[51]

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[49]Ibid.
[50]Gxubane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[51]AKH Papers, Koma programme.

Figure 8 Picture of the cast of Koma reading scripts: Thulane Gxubane on left, Masemola is second from right, on the right is Anny Chesale. Source: Amazwi, Market Theatre ACC 2004.30, ACC 2004.30.5.49 Note the instruments for the band in the background.

Koma opened at Upstairs at the Market Theatre on the 17th of March 1988. It was performed alongside *Sego - The African Calabash*, about which more will be said below, and a revival of *Toro - The African Dream* as part of Soyikwa's 10th Anniversary celebrations. *Koma* was the only Soyikwa production in which Gxubane acted. The Market Theatre performance included eleven cast members, six musicians and five actors and ran at one hour. Reviews of these performances note the warm reception that the audience gave to the play, a 'mainly black' audience which responded 'with hoots of appreciation and much sustained clapping and cheering'.[52] In fact, due to the involvement of the LM Foundation the performances at the Market were attended by 'several bus-loads of hostel-dwellers.'[53] The dialogue was in English, isiZulu, Southern Sesotho andSepedi, making it truly multilingual. However, Manaka, interviewed during a rehearsal before previews, was conflicted about this aspect of reclaiming African culture through performance, especially since white audiences

[52] Garalt MacLiam, 'A celebration of African life,' *The Star*, 21 March 1988, 8.
[53] Adrian Hadland, 'Learning to read Africa's wisdom,' *Weekly Mail*, 25 - 30 March 1988, 27.

would attend performances at the Market. He commented, 'an inability to communicate is another form of tyranny and oppression. We have to create a new South Africa, and that means establishing a new way of relating to one another.'[54] Manaka did not have answers to these issues, but a reviewer felt that in spite of the language barriers even white audience members responded to the play. 'Music, poetry and practical examples of life make up the content of the work and the inherent humour becomes an infectious thing which sweep[ed] its way across the audience despite possible language difficulties for whites.'[55]

In addition to music, poetry and costume, the set design also contributed to the ritualistic feel of the piece. According to the same critic, *Koma* was 'down to earth in many aspects and Manaka … imposed restraints on his cast which [were] reflected even through the sandy, muddy colours of his set design—itself a thoughtfully artistic, visually satisfying and impressive work.'[56] Before and after its successful run at the Market Theatre, *Koma* was taken to rural areas. Detailed recollections from two students who were part of the *Koma* cast survive in the form of handwritten notes. According to Duduzile Kubheka's notes the play went to Mafikeng in the North-West Province (then the Bantustan of Bophuthatswana), Driefontein in Mpumalanga, and Virginia in the Free State. One of Kubheka's most striking recollections is that the cast and director adapted the language of the play to match the audience. While a mostly Isizulu play worked in Mafikeng and Driefontein, in Virginia, the language was 'Sotho and easy English because we were performing for children but … their respond (sic) was good.'[57] *Koma* also went to Kroonstad, Kubheka remembers. At all these rural performances, the cast held a question-and-answer session with audience members after the show and elicited comments on the play. Kubheka remembers that at the Market Theatre, 'the language was

[54]Hadland, 'Learning to read Africa's wisdom'
[55]MacLiam, 'A Celebration of African life.'
[56]Ibid.
[57]AKH, 'Kubheka, Duduzile, Koma as Theatre Performance, Handwritten recollections,' n.d.

changed to be more in English because of [the] type of audience'.[58] Another student notes that the rural environment was challenging because 'I learned many thing[s] there like performing without stage and lights.'[59]

Koma was revived later in the year at the Funda Centre's 10 year celebrations of Soyikwa at an event called Soyikwa '88: Festival of African Theatre. The festival drew large crowds from Diepkloof and other parts of Soweto. According to a surviving programme, the festival took place on the afternoon of 29 October 1988.[60] In addition to *Koma* (using the same cast, joined by musicians Ronnie Nkosi, Thami Khemese, Sandile Hlubi, Jabu Dube and Mzwandile Khali, under the musical direction of Motsumi Makhene), the following productions were staged: *Mdala*, directed by Job Kubatsi with first year students in the Soyikwa Drama Diploma course; Zakes Mda's classic *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* directed by Walter Chakela; and *Sego: The African Calabash*, a dance piece choreographed by Nomsa Manaka. Chakela headed a theatre company in Mafikeng that had strong ties to Soyikwa and featured at several annual African theatre festivals held at Funda Centre in the late 1980s. A reviewer who saw the *Koma* production in late 1988 emphasised its strong political message for education in spite of the liberation struggle and some young comrades who were calling for 'liberation before education'. The reviewer wasn't entirely pleased with the technical aspects of the production at Funda Centre's auditorium stage. In his view, the play was 'sloppy and underdirected'. Furthermore, the stage seemed crowded with all the players and musicians. 'The lighting was not used innovatively enough to set the sombre tone that is required if this piece is to work,' he insisted.[61]

[58]AKH, 'Koma as Theatre Performance.'
[59]AKH, 'Unrecorded Author, Koma.'
[60]AKH, 'Soyikwa 88, Festival of African Theatre, 29 October 1988 (program).'
[61]Phil Mbele, 'Credit for a new concept,' *The Star*, 27 October 1988, 11.

After working on *Koma*, Thulani Gxubane continued to work in theatre briefly but eventually left the industry to become an academic. Before leaving theatre, he acted in the play *Big Boys* directed by Gerrit Schoonhoven opposite Jamie Bartlett at the Market Theatre. He is now an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Cape Town.

Mdala

According to a programme of the event that celebrated ten years of Soyikwa, Soyikwa '88, *Mdala* was a piece about 'the plight of pensioners.' With a cast of twenty-one, it was the largest of Soyikwa's experimental pieces and included several women who had enrolled in the Soyikwa drama diploma programme. *Mdala* and *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* were taken to the Market Theatre as a double bill in early 1989opening on the 29th of March. *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* featured actors from Walter Chakela's theatre workshop in Mafikeng while *Mdala* was directed by Job Kubatsi. Kubatsi, who had joined Soyikwa alongside Ali Khangela Hlongwane in 1985, was a tutor at Soyikwa who went on to work in television including on the popular South African soap opera *Generations*. According to a profile of Kubatsi published in the *Sowetan* in 1999,[62] he was born in Fietas, a previously mixed-race neighbourhood of Johannesburg. His family was forcibly removed to Meadowlands, Soweto, when he was only three weeks old. His only early theatrical experience was acting in sketches at church in his youthful years. Kubatsi would later enrol for his high school at Madibane, the same school attended by Matsemela Manaka. He was part of the group that formed the Creative Youth Association after the Soweto uprising of 1976. He then studied at FUBA before joining the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre where he performed in *Vuka* and *Children of Asazi*, before becoming a tutor and directing *Mdala*. Reflecting on his career on stage in the *Sowetan* interview, Kubatsi said, 'stage can be fun. It's on stage that you can hone your skills and can

[62]Eddie Mokoena, 'TV Star Still Prefers the Stage', *Sowetan*, 9 April, 1999, 6.

develop your character in depth. On stage you have to deliver the goods on the spot - there is no room for mistakes.'[63]

Essentially a social commentary play, *Mdala* showed how difficult life was for pensioners and echoed the themes addressed in Zakes Mda's *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland*, the plight of former guerilla soldiers in a post-independence African country. It could in some ways be seen as a version of *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* made for a South Africa still under a minority government. Reviews of *Mdala,* for which a script does not survive, were positive. The play was staged at the Market Theatre in April 1989. Kubatsi, who was skilled at conveying comedy, seemed to have effectively directed the play. Reviewers noted that the serious topic was treated in a comedic style. Victor Metsoamere, writing in the *Sowetan*, noted the depth of portrayal of the characters by the Soyikwa students. 'The 21 second-year drama students of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre and their director Job Kubatsi,' Metsoamere writes, 'dramatise a painful reality of the suffering of old ones, who are made to lead lives of people who have committed unpardonable sins.'[64] The old pensioners are treated badly at the hands of black government officials, echoing a similar scene in *Children of Asazi*. Another critic notes of the action, '[t]he clerk reads a newspaper while pensioners wait to be served. Later, he accepts a bribe in return for quick service.'[65] As with other Soyikwa plays, *Mdala* went beyond the protest genre and interrogated the corrupting influence of apartheid on the black majority. Prophetic, it is interesting that such scenes are typical of government service in South Africa today - a generation after the country achieved independence.

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[63]Job Kubatsi qtd in Mokoena, 'TV Star Still Prefers the Stage', *Sowetan*, 9 April, 1999, p.6
[64]Mdala: Metsoamere, Victor, "Soweto Students Excel," *Sowetan*, 3 April 1989, p.15/17
[65]Kamase, Mlungusi, 'The young Playing the old', *Weekly Mail*, February 1989, p.26

The Rural Theatre Project

The rural theatre project was an integral part of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre from its inception in 1985. However, while some impressive theatre was produced, the true definition and purpose of the rural theatre project was never fully defined and remained largely experimental. From the mid-1980s Soyikwa was under pressure to raise funds for its operation at Funda Centre. Stan Kahn, Director of the Funda Centre at this time, recalls that the different projects at Funda each had to raise their own money while getting free space. The project directors of the different programmes were on salary but operational costs were to be covered by the projects. Soyikwa was generally exempted from this tacit rule, and Kahn remembers paying for more staff than he did in the other projects.[66] This NGO world Soyikwa found itself in had the indirect effect of pushing it towards Theatre for Development, a movement in vogue at the time and could get the attention of funders. Zakes Mda describes 'the main objective' of TfD as:

> to use the people's own performance modes … to create community dialogue particularly in the rural areas (which have been ignored and neglected even by the liberation movements) and in the marginalised urban slums, so that participants may, through theatre, create their own messages on the issues that concern them, and possibly work out their own solutions.[67]

He adds, 'this type of theatre is anti-agitprop since its emphasis is on utilizing theatre as a vehicle for critical analysis, which in turn will result in critical awareness, or conscientization.'[68] In this sense, TfD had an overlapping mission with Theatre of Resistance, to educate audiences. While Theatre of Resistance focuses on being and identity in relation to the body politic, TfD addressed material needs often without making explicit political statements.

[66]Stan Kahn, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Telephonic, 19 August 2021.
[67] Mda, Current Trends.
[68]Mda, 'Politics and the Theatre: Current Trends in South Africa', 208.

In the recollections of surviving members of Soyikwa, this developmental discourse does not make an appearance. Emphasised, however, are cultural goals, primarily to connect rural areas with urban areas and create a new 'African' theatre. In this sense, Soyikwa's Rural Theatre workshops were more in line with 'popular' (in the sense that theatre is politically relevant rather than merely entertainment) of Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's Kamiriithu experiment in Kenya than the truly TfD projects of the University Travelling Theatres of Zambia, Nairobi and Malawi. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who worked with his colleague Ngũgĩ wa Mirii and the Kamiriithu community to develop the play *Ngaahika Ndeenda—I Will Marry When I Want*, the Kamiriithu Theatre project was inspired both by The University of Nairobi Travelling Theatre and by indigenous forms like muthirigu, Kikuyu dances against colonialism in the 1930s.[69] It is important to note here that Kamiriithu started as a colonial era concentration camp built by the British for Kikuyu/Gikuyu freedom fighters in the 1950s in 'an attempt to cut of[f] the guerrillas' lines of support'. The community was made permanent by government in the late 1950s after the suppression of the armed struggle. [70]

The community of Kamiriithu started projects to reclaim this space as their own and solve pressing social issues like alcoholism. They did this by reviving a community centre, called the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre (KCECC), in 1976. The projects were headed by subcommittees, including a literacy committee. Ngũgĩ wa Mirii was invited to be an adult literacy coordinator and introduced 'role play and satirical sketches' as part of the literacy programme. This eventually led to the community deciding to create a play that incorporated many of their concerns. While Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and wa Mirii scripted the play, the community suggested the themes and scenarios. They developed the choreography and built an open-air theatre of their own. The themes which were adopted in play *Ngaahika*

[69]David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial Times to the Present Day* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), 241.
[70]Kerr, 242.

Ndeenda included the role of women in independence, drugs, the nefarious effects of Western religion, and ethnic cleavages. Unsurprisingly, the neocolonial black government of Kenya found the free expression of an oppressed community threatening to the status quo that protected the interests of the landed wealthy elite, a small proportion of the Kenyan population. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was banned and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o was arrested in December 1977; he remained in detention for a year.[71]

Zakes Mda's critical appraisal of *Koma,* which he saw in Lesotho, concludes that the play did not meet the standards of TfD but was good theatre if judged by Western standards. While the play was targeted at rural communities, Mda insists it 'did not give the target audiences the means of production of the theatre, since they were not involved in its creation..[72] While there was loud applause at performances of *Koma*, as shown above for the performances at the Market Theatre, this did not equate to audience conscientisation. The words of the play that carry the main message are by 'intellectual authors such as Don Mattera, Njabulo Ndebele and Es'kia Mphahlele.. Not only did these authors write in English, but their sociopolitical context was also quite removed from rural communities. Apart from one scene when Ntombefuthi is drawn away from teaching hostel dwellers how to read towards counting her uncle's cows, there is little that relates to rural life in *Koma*. Was it enough to simply gain literacy skills, as *Koma* promoted, without considering what particular 'literacy' skills were relevant for rural communities?[73] Mda asks.

Zakes Mda's own recollections of the highly developed TfD project he was involved in developing in Lesotho put Soyikwa's rural theatre project into perspective.[74] Established in

[71]Kerr, 243–46.
[72]Mda, 'Politics and the Theatre: Current Trends in South Africa', 209.
[73]Ibid., 212.
[74]Zakes Mda, 'When People Play People in (Post) Apartheid South Africa: The Theories and Practices of Zakes Mda (Interview with Denis Salter)', in *I'm still here*, ed. Maarten Van Dijk, The Brecht yearbook (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 283–303.

1982 at the University of Lesotho at Roma by Andrew Horn who had worked in Zambia prior to this, the TfD project eventually came to be known as the Marotholi Travelling Theatre. According to Mda, this Marotholi was an offshoot of the original TfD project and 'became a permanent company based at the university and then in 1988 it became an autonomous TfD project, based outside the university.'[75] The group was 'registered as a non-profit society, and made up of university students, rural teachers, civil servants, adult educators who worked for agencies other than the university, and community-based groups including women's organisations and village health workers.'[76]

In the period in which Mda was heavily involved in the Marotholi Travelling Theatre, it underwent a transformation. Initially, the players went to rural communities and presented their ideas on issues such as 'hygiene, human rights, nutrition, family planning' without listening to the views of the audience. This, he felt, was rather condescending. Around 1986 Marotholi began to consult community leaders. In his words, 'Our developmental objective was no longer to come in as problem-solving experts but to function as *facilitators*… ready to create problem-solving theatre for development *with* them.'[77] This new perspective had an impact on the way Marotholi's rural project was carried out. For one thing, several visits to a village were arranged. A first visit involved listening carefully to the problems that villagers wanted to solve. On a second visit:

> we would sketch out a particular problem that they had proposed by enacting a short dramatic scene. We would then leave, travelling to another village to initiate a similar process. In our absence, the villagers were meant to continue discussion of the problem, identify some possible practical solutions, and come to a preliminary agreement about what and how they wanted us to proceed.[78]

[75] Ibid., 290.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 290–91.

Upon returning the TfD workers had in-depth discussions with the community before enacting what they interpreted as the community's solution. At this point, villagers were free to interrupt a performance and suggest changes. They could even step into the fictional world of the play to make their point, interrupting the traditional performer-audience divide.

In his 1993 handwritten notes from his archival papers, Ali Khangela Hlongwane noted that the rural theatre programme went through several stages of development before Soyikwa decided that it was best for students to visit the rural areas first to learn from them rather than imposing their own ideas of what 'the theatre' should be. The initial ideas about the Soyikwa rural theatre project were 'ill informed with a tinge of urban arrogance'. He continued, 'The rural community has always had a performance culture which may not be similar to that developing in urban areas.'[79] Hlongwane remembers that in the first group of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre's drama diploma programme, of which he was part, three groups were sent out to develop plays with rural communities. These plays were meant to solve community problems. The approaches taken did not meet the standards of TfD. 'One took an easy path and did a scripted play with College of Education students. The two who went to Mafikeng did not produce a play as the group they worked with lost steam and fizzled out. The third created a play "Bhambatha."' Hlongwane notes that although *Bhambatha'*s 'story was based on the experiences of the community where the performers were [drawn], only a few members of the community participated, no discussions of the problems reflected in the play were ever discussed with the community.'[80]

The following years, Soyikwa began to adopt the ideas of TfD more systematically. Even so, Soyikwa students and their tutors developed a theme for the plays they took to rural areas *before* consulting with communities, developed through improvisation with students and

[79]AKH, Ali Hlongwane, 'Six years of trial and error: Soyikwa's Rural Theatre Project.'
[80]AKH, 'Six years of trial and error.'

then toured rural communities. Time for discussion was allowed at the end of the performances. While this approach attracted big audiences and inspired the creation of community theatre companies in those rural areas Soyikwa visited, the plays usually 'had little to do with the immediate problems of these communities'.[81] By 1990 the thinking had evolved to allow for an initial visit to the rural areas before the creation of a play back in Johannesburg. This play would then be taken to rural areas for performances and discussion. While this ideal was never achieved, as will be shown in the discussion of *The Untold Story* below, in early 1991 Hlongwane and the team of tutors at Soyikwa hoped that 'with time, the playmaking workshops run in those areas will reach a stage where the oppressed masses will create and act in ways that mirror their problems.'[82]

The first half of the 1980s were Manaka's and Soyikwa's period of making resistance plays, in the second half Manaka was preoccupied with making plays that, in his own words, focused on human experience. 'People say I'm changing,' Manaka mused, 'that my plays are no longer as radical as before.' To this sentiment his response was, 'No, I say, my plays are now focusing on human experience. They deal with the human problems that come out of a political situation.'[83] In another interview, which is worth quoting at length, Manaka elaborated:

> When I first met [Wole Soyinka], he made a very strong statement about the problems of theatre in South Africa, saying that there was too much emphasis on protest, on resistance, on challenging the system. There was a need to integrate, or to fuse, protest and tradition. We had lost the sense of tradition. We never created tradition, plays that deal with the celebration of the South African cultural heritage. And for me that was a confirmation of the path I was following.[84]

[81]Ibid.
[82]Ibid.
[83]Matsemela Manaka in Wakashe, 'Matsemela Manaka'.
[84]Matsemela Manaka in Rolf Solberg, *Alternative Theatre in South Africa: Talks with Prime Movers since the 1970s* (Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda Books, 1999), 194.

It is not clear when Manaka met Wole Soyinka, however, this interview was done in the early 1990s with a lot of hindsight on Manaka's part. Manaka still insisted on continuing to create Theatre of Resistance even while experimenting with reinventing traditional forms. David Kerr sees this as a stage in the development of African theatre which starts from imitation of the European forms to resistance and finally a theatre of 'popular struggle' which eschews entertainment in favour of politically relevant theatre.[85]

As discussed in the previous chapter, Ali Khangela Hlongwane joined Soyikwa African Theatre in 1983 with the production *Children of Asazi* and remained with Soyikwa to become a tutor. Born in Diepkloof on 26 October 1965, Khangela Hlongwane's first encounter with theatre were through the sketches at Sidlamafa High School, a boarding school in Hectorspruit he attended before returning to Junior [later called Bopa Senatla] School in Diepfloof for the pre-matric years. In this school, Khangela Hlongwane gradually became politicised but continued to have a keen interest in drama and theatre. At Bopa Senatla, he saw performances that were 'musical, this type of acting would have been a lot of exaggerated gestures then there would be some typical characters that you always find, either a clown, or a drunk, which made them slightly comical but not within what people would call comedy.'[86] This school also had a newsletter with committed poetry.

Khangela Hlongwane remembers that at Bopa Senatla, 'that's where I also did my first play but at that school there was a group that dramatized poetry and dramatized historical events. One of them was the French Revolution' This group was called Bana ba Afrika. He continues on his first play:

> the play was written by a colleague called Buti Moleko. Buti Moleko was much older than me. ... Buti Moleko was both a playwright, he was also a poet. And, strange enough, not published, but was very productive. He also had a massive collection of reggae music. So, as I was working with him I got composed to different reggae music. He was also a composer and, I think, he played a guitar. … And the title of the play was

[85]Kerr, *African Popular Theatre*.

[86] Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

> *A Broken Calabash*, it was what would have been referred to as a one–person play, those days we called it a one–man play and were to play different characters, which was performed at our school at the end of year function. We had these end of year functions at our school.[87]

Khangela Hlongwane was also drawn to reciting poetry while in high school at debates during the breaks, 'Mainly it was the work of Ingoapele Madingoane,' he remembered. 'Particularly his famous book, *Africa My Beginning*. But also I was already familiar with *Staffrider* and getting copies of *Staffrider* which were easily accessible because Matsemela [Manaka] was part of *Staffrider*.'[88] He adds that some copies were bought from a bookstore in Diepkloof Zone 6, where a store owner hid copies among other materials and sold them clandestinely. While at Namedi High School, he enrolled in the theatre section of FUBA under James Mthoba (between 1980 to 1982). Hlongwane performed an improvised play under Mthoba and Minky Schlesinger, this performance was at the Market Theatre and Temple Emmanuel. It was at FUBA that Hlongwane met Matsemela Manaka and began his decade–long work with Soyikwa.

By the late 1980s, Ali Khangela Hlongwane was intimately involved with Soyikwa's rural theatre project first as a student then, until 1993, as a tutor. He remembers:

> Part of the rural [theatre] programme was probably three-fold. One, we always had conversations that our struggles, our arts and our literature was too urban based. That there was a need to learn from rural communities. But there was also a need to break the divide between the so–called urban and rural.

Hlongwane continued:

> So, consequently, the idea was that we're not just going to take plays to the rural areas and impose on them but was that people would be sent to different areas, interact with the communities there and see whether there is a possibility of developing expression that would end up being a play.[89]

[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.

Hlongwane developed the play *Bhambatha* with the rural community of Driefontein, which was written and performed in Isizulu. A summary of the rural theatre project, written by Hlongwane for use by the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre as a promotional document, exists.[90] In a subsection entitled 'Making Theatre with Rural Communities,' the document outlines the process leading up to the creation of *Bhambatha*.

Hlongwane recalls that he arrived in Driefontein in June 1985, in the then Eastern Transvaal,[91] with an already completed script of the play *Bhambatha*. Driefontein was an area that was owned by African farmers surrounded by white-owned farms. The government had been attempting to institute grand apartheid in the area from the 1960s by removing the farmers and relocating them the ethnic homelands. An ethnically diverse community, there were Zulu, Sotho and Swati speakers in the area. Resistance was high, culminating in the 1983 murder of Saul Mkhize by government forces.[92] This did not dampen the spirit of the people, and they continued resisting removal from land they had owned for generations. It is against this backdrop that Hlongwane developed *Bhambatha*. He spent the first week getting acquainted with the area and recruiting potential participants in the acting workshops. He recruited six people in total, five male and one female. Unfortunately, two of them eventually dropped out, the man to seek work in Johannesburg and the woman because her lover became jealous. When Khangela Hlongwane presented to the workshop, they were perplexed because they had not learned to read. Undeterred, he tossed the scripts and worked from verbal synopses of scenes and then encouraged the participants to improvise scenes after teaching them some acting concepts such as development of character. Eventually, the group, working with Hlongwane, developed the play into a storytelling play based on their own experience of storytelling

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[90]AKH, Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre Rural Theatre Project (Project brief)

[91]The Eastern Transvaal is now predominantly in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa following changes to the political map after 1994.

[92]South African History Archive, 'Driefontein', Online Exhibition, Masibuyele Emasimini Legacies of the 1913 Land Act, 22 April 2024, https://www.saha.org.za/landact1913/driefontein.htm.

traditions. The original script of the play, as seen below, drew from Zulu storytelling traditions. When working with the Driefontein Community, Hlongwane built on this aspect of his script. The play was brought to Funda Centre where it was performed at Soyikwa's annual festival after further work with Ray Hlongwane and Matsemela Manaka.[93]

While the extant script of *Bhambatha*, in Hlongwane's personal archive, served as a scenario for the play that was later improvised with the rural community, it nevertheless points to thematic concerns that Hlongwane felt were pertinent at the time of its writing. The following critical appraisal of the plot is based on a translation I was able to obtain working with a native Isizulu speaker.[94] At its core, *Bhambatha* is a dramatisation of the story of Bambatha ka Mancinza who was the leader of the Zondi clan (in the Greytown area of the current KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa) which revolted against British rule and taxation in Natal colony in 1906. The script is replete with idiomatic expressions and songs that do not easily translate into English. The play is in two acts. Act One, Scene One, sets the scene as a traditional storytelling under the moonlight. A narrator, umxoxiwendaba, promises to tell a story 'yobuqhawe emlandwini womuzi ompisholo. Lendaba yami ikhuluma ngoBhambatha, umfo ka Mancinza.' [a story of great bravery in war, a story about Bambatha of Mancinza.][95]Two characters, King Bhambatha and Chakijane, a nobleman, discuss the new law brought about by colonial rule, the new poll tax. Bhambatha is deeply disturbed by the developments and asks all the men in the country to meet at his palace in a few days. In Scene Two, the action moves to Colonel Mensel, a fictionalised colonial officer. Mensel sends his assistant, Msomi, to go around and deliver a letter announcing the law to the citizens of the area. Msomi obliges and is portrayed as an obsequious character, using terms such as nkosana and mnumzane, terms of great respect, to address Mensel. In Act Two, Scene One, Chakijane goes around the country

[93]AKH Papers, 'Rural Theatre Project'
[94]Gratitude to Lerato Myaka for spending several hours with me translating *Bhambatha*.
[95]AKH, *Bhambatha* Script

announcing the meeting with the king. He runs into Msomi, on his way to deliver Mensel's message. The two exchange greetings, Chakijane lamenting that so many young men have already left seeking employment in the diamond mines to pay existing taxes, 'Abonomzane namakhosikazi bahihla esika Nandi isililo, isingane Zishiya makhaya sithi siyosebenza imali emadayimanini, kube ukunyamalala kwazo.'[96]This expression refers back to mourning in Queen Nandi's house, who was Emperor Shaka's mother. After further exchange of coded language, Msomi finally reveals his mission to deliver a letter on the new tax to Bhambatha.

Chakijane is incensed and sends Msomi off with insults, saying the men of the Zondi clan will fight against this imposition. Throughout this exchange, the subtext is that Msomi is betraying his people and his ability to perform his masculinity correctly. This makes Msomi reflect on his mission, choosing instead to return to Mensel's office in Scene Two. Gaining some courage, he tells Mensel that if he wants the letter delivered to Bhambatha, he should do it himself and adds a foreboding warning that the colonial officer has set a fire he may not be able to extinguish. [Uwuthungule umlilo mfokazana, kazi uyowatholaphi amataki okuwucima.][97] In the final scene of the play, the meeting at the King Bhambatha's palace occurs. The group sings a song (ihubo):

> Bayawusukela!
> Bayawusukela umuzi onsundu [They are taunting the brown country]
> Niyezwake!
>
> Asinayo imali yamakhanda
> Asinayo imali yamakhanda
> Asinayo imali yamakhanda [We do not have money for poll tax][98]

This is followed by a war cry and Bhambatha appears on the scene to give a stirring speech detailing the newly introduced unjust laws. The men collectively decide to go to war and the

[96]Ibid.
[97]Ibid.
[98]Ibid..

play ends with Bhambatha pointing the impi to Nkandla Forest, the historical site of the rebellion. When the play was brought to Funda Centre for the African Theatre Festival in August 1985, it was heavily improvised. As Hlongwane noted in his project brief at the time,

> Whilst we were working on the play, the actors could not memorize the lines they had improvised. Every performance had different lines, whilst the plot and storyline was maintained.

The play had a successful run at Funda. Hlongwane concluded that 'the play [disproved] the myth that one cannot present a play in any African language because places like Soweto are cosmopolitan. People who saw the play said they understood and followed the story.'[99]

The Untold Story and the Decline of Soyikwa

The Untold Story

Around 1988 or 1989 Matsemela Manaka left The Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre to found his own production company, Ekhaya Productions. This section will address one major production that was developed by Soyikwa after Manaka's departure under the directorship of Jerry Raletebele - *The Untold Story*. One student who participated in this production is Sello Motloung, now an actor of considerable stature. Motloung was born in Meadowlands, Soweto, on the 4th of November 1970. Motloung represents a post-1976 generation of performers who grew up after the explosion of student protest in the mid-1970s but during the state of siege in townships during the 1980s. Raised by a single mother in a Catholic home, Motloung matriculated at Mokgome Secondary School in Meadowlands in 1987 and spent a year at home while seeking tertiary education opportunities. Motloung had an innate interest in the arts, he was in fact a part time fine arts student at the FUBA academy in downtown Johannesburg while still a student at Mokgome Secondary School. At FUBA, he remembers working with esteemed painters such as Durant Sihlali and David Koloane.[100] Motloung's only experience

[99]AKH, 'Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre Rural Theatre Project (Project brief).'
[100]Sello Motloung, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde, Telephonic, 12 September 2023.

of drama or theatre before eventually joining the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre in 1989 was directing a June 16 commemoration sketch at his church, St Michael's. He was, however, exposed to developments in township-based theatre through reading *The Star Tonight* 'religiously'. He recalls, 'I got taken by the love of theatre, by acting, because I read quite a lot about your Zakes Mda, Mbongeni Ngema, John Kani, the Zakes Mokae, the Job Kubatsi, the Ali Hlongwanes, Matsemela Manaka. I read about these people in that newspaper.'[101]

Sello Motloung's journey to Soyikwa was a gradual drift towards the theatre arts. His interest in acting, however, was long held. He remembers watching a play, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, by students from the FUBA academy while in high school. On community screens he watched 'whatever that was offered there, whether it was kung fu movies, Westerns.' He adds, 'and there was very little South African movies then.'[102] However, on television he saw the famous actor Zakes Mokae in *Knight Rider* who he later encountered at the Market Theatre during the run of the Soyikwa play, *The Untold Story*.[103] Prompted to join Soyikwa by a relative who was already a student at Funda Centre, under the African Institute of Art, and supported by his parish priest, Sello Motloung formally enrolled in the course and applied himself to his studies with gusto. He remembers the rich environment he found at Funda:

> You know, you are at an at an institution where there are artists, there are people who are doing music and there's other people who are doing fine art. So as a student, you are motivated to do your best. I mean, I was… when I was there, Ali Hlongwane was one of the staff members, Job Kubatsi, Alistair Dube, the late Peter Boroko who was amazing as an actor, as a musician, or he could play all kinds of instruments, including the kora and so on. You know, it's an institution that was initiated by the likes of Matsemela Manaka and, you know, he had a… already Matsemela was a name that was known.

He adds,

> And when it came to the other institutions, you had fine arts it was a whole lot of other people who, today, they are quite big, quite well-known. In the music institution, there Sis

[101]Ibid.
[102]Ibid.
[103]Ibid.

> Sibongile Khumalo, Mogale Mothopeng, a whole lot of other people. Nomsa Manaka was also there doing dance and so on. So, one was around those kinds of people. And there was also for Funda Centre there was also Professor Es'kia Mphahlele, a scholar of note. So that was quite motivating.[104]

Over the next two years, Motloung and his classmates studied the full course of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre under tutors such as Ali Khangela Hlongwane and Peter Boroko. Boroko, the multi-talented musician and actor, had been part of a band called the *Sea Pearls Vocal* Quartet which included Sam Mhangwane, Godfrey Maluka, Jackie Malesela, and Boroko himself. He also got involved in acting, featuring in Sam Mhangwane's *Unfaithful Woman* (co-creator), as well as Matsemela Manaka's *Domba –The Last Dance* and *Toro—The African Dream*. Boroko and Mhangwane participated in workshops under Workshop '71 'where our knowledge of theatre was enriched'.[105] According to an undated programme for *Toro*, Boroko recalls that he 'started acting in high school. We came with ideas and conceived a play entitled *Crime Does Not Pay*.'[106] In 1986 Boroko joined the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre as a full-time employee, working as a full-time projects coordinator. This involved intimate work with the rural theatre project.[107]

After Manaka had left, the de-facto leader of Soyikwa became Jerry Raletebele. Bra Jerry, as he was affectionately known, had been a core member of the Soyikwa team for more than half a decade initially as 'coordinating tutor'.[108] Ali Khangela Hlongwane remembers,: 'Bra Jerry was a playwright in his own right. Part of the generation of Gibson Kente, Sam Mhangwane and had done plays then.' Hlongwane claims that the West Rand Administration Board, the local government institution that enforced apartheid 'at some point approached him to give [Jerry Raletebele] a scholarship to go to the UK and study drama, he rejected it. Because

[104]Ibid.
[105]AKH, 'Toro The African Dream Programme.'
[106]Ibid.
[107]Peter Boroko, 'How I Got Committed to the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre', *Isivivane* 5 (1992): 24–25.
[108]Amazwi, ACC 2008.49 Stephen Grey, 'ACC 2008.49.3.4.3.3 Soyikwa African Theatre Productions, Letter from Jerry Raletebele to Friends of Soyikwa, regarding Soyikwa African Theatre Festival, 1985.'

he picked up that they were. First, he didn't want to collaborate with them but secondly, they wanted to have some kind of an informed censor.'[109]

With Soyikwa, Jerry Raletebele did the play *The Eve* in 1984. The play addressed the Soweto uprising. Little record exists of this play except that it was performed at the Market Theatre, opening on the 18th of September, with actors Sabata Sesiu, Margaret Williams and George Lamola.[110] *The Eve* was a financial liability to Soyikwa. Records show that during the week ending 29 September 1984 the play did not make any money. In fact, after rentals to the Market Theatre and a 15 per cent commission Soyikwa *owed* The Market R36.98![111] There could be various reasons for this, including the difficulty of African people accessing evening shows at the Market Theatre (located in the city) late at night and poor publicity. Raletebele had also earlier presented a play at DramFes '80. DramFes '80, held at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre, was a festival of black plays held over the course of three days from the 25th to the 27th of January. An extant programme lists a dozen performances, worth reproducing to show the context in which politically relevant theatre operated at the beginning of the decade: *Isandlwana* by Khuvangano, an extract of *Amen* by Boykie Mohlamme, Matsemela Manaka's *Imbumba*, a performance by the Allahpoets, Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*, an extract of Boykie Mohlamme's *Mahlomola*, *Khumbula My Child* by Ingoapele Madingoane, *I Saw as a Child* by the Zamani Arts Association, an extract of *Ma-In-Law* by Sam Mhangwane, Peter Ngwenya's *Save the Children,* and Jerry Raletebele's *One Child Play*.[112] Unfortunately, like *The Eve,* no script of *One Child Play* survives.

By 1989 Raletebele had the huge responsibility of carrying forward the Soyikwa brand with much reduced forces. Manaka had left, leaving a huge gap in the creative potential of

[109]Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[110]*The Star*, 20 September 1984.
[111]Fuchs, *Playing the Market: The Market Theatre Johannesburg, 1976, 1986*, 168.
[112]Amazwi, ACC 2008.49 Stephen Grey, 'ACC 2008.49.3.4.3.3 Soyikwa African Theatre Productions, Dramfes 80 Program.'

Soyikwa. That notwithstanding, with Bra Jerry at the helm, Soyikwa continued to run for about a decade. Apart from the intense activity in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the evidence suggests that, after the production of *The Untold Story*, Soyikwa declined and became, to use Motloung's description, a 'fly-by-night' operation. The project left Funda Centre and was based first at a school in Diepkloof and then in Newtown, Johannesburg. The following paragraphs, below, will discuss the few activities Raletebele was able to put together in spite of a loss of staff and funding. The chapter will now discuss the creation of *The Untold Story* by the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre students from 1989 and 1990, including Sello Motloung.

Following from previous tradition, Soyikwa first- and second-year drama students developed *The Untold Story* in workshops and performed it at the Market Theatre in 1991. They also conducted theatre workshops in the rural areas, although, as shall be discussed below, the rural theatre project was a shadow of its former self. Sello Motloung describes the storyline of *The Untold Story:*

> the story it was about a musician who came to Johannesburg and he had challenges and it was played, that lead role was played by a guy who unfortunately passed on a couple of years ago, Mzwandile Skosana, a very interesting and fantastic actor.' He adds, 'Tsitsiri, unfortunately, the character Tsitsiri came across a number of people who, you know, some of them were good and some of them were not so good to him because he came to Johannesburg, the big lights and so on and, yeah, he was... He met all kinds of people.[113]

The play was more social commentary than politics, a play that 'makes you forget about your, whatever, your everyday challenges for a moment. And, yeah, it made one feel good for that time,'[114] Motloung maintains.

Sello Motloung's recalls the character of the priest he played in *The Untold Story*, was a mischievous character that also indicated that Soyikwa was still pushing the boundaries of theatre by including audience participation. He recalled, with great humour, 'one of the things

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[113]Motloung, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[114]Ibid.

that I enjoyed about the character is at some point we used to involve the audience as a congregation. So, I would go around with a mug where the audience would have to put in their tithes, you know. So, I used to make money.'[115] Motloung remembers that he had the opportunity to keep the larger notes from this 'collection', only sharing coins with his fellow cast members. The fondness of Motloung's recollections from this time shows the power of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre and the impact that this theatre experiment had on the life of just one actor, who remains active and successful up to the time of the writing of this chapter.

The Market Theatre reviews of *The Untold Story* were negative. Critics felt that the community theatre format of the play 'did not work' on the Market's Laager stage. To one reviewer, the story was too predictable and even though there was song and dance these 'rarely [rose] above the forgettable; the story is relentlessly played - and spelt out - out, unalleviated by either the music or choreography.'[116] The reviewer felt that there were some humorous moments in the play and suggested that more of these would improve it. Another critic, while noting the play's potential to criticise the capitalist system felt that it did not go far enough, relying on the protagonists' (Tshitsiri and Funky) own initiative to save themselves from the unfortunate circumstances they found themselves in. Echoing other reviewers, this critic felt that even the song and dance, traditionally Soyikwa's strong suite was not satisfying.[117] What reviewers failed to acknowledge was that this was a student production with very few resources. Soyikwa, while always straddling the line between community theatre and the modern stage, often succeeded in translating to the latter, even while being heavily improvised by actors and director alike. Unfortunately, with the departure of Nomsa and Manaka from involvement in the productions, this crossing over did not go as well as previously.

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[115]Ibid.
[116]Accone, Darryl, 'The Story that Should Have Remained Untold,' *The Star* (Tonight!), 18 October 1991, 4.
[117]'The story of "Eat or be eaten,"' *New Nation*, 25 October 1991.

As discussed above, the rural theatre project had its strengths and weaknesses. However, by 1990 the project did not have enough resources to effectively engage rural communities. Sello Motloung remembers that his group went to Limpopo, then known as the northern Transvaal, to conduct theatre workshops with students at a rural school. They spent between two weeks and a month. Even so, Motloung feels:

> if we were to do it again or if they wanted you to know, how can they go about doing it, I would have advised them to do it twice a year. Where you go the first time you immerse yourself into that community, you do a little bit of workshops and so on research. And then later you come back with more tools, with a far more better knowledge of or an idea of what to do specifically and why, even if you're going there to, you know, have them or introduce them to theatre, but you would go the far more prepared.[118]

There is no record of how effective the rural theatre workshops in 1990 were but, according to Motloung, there simply was not enough preparation. It is interesting to note the feeling of lack of focus in the project, was its purpose to learn from rural communities or introduce them to theatre? Was it to exchange ideas? The impact of Soyikwa's shrinking staff was felt by the students in its programme.

Final Decades of Soyikwa

This drop in Soyikwa's forces can be seen in the broader context of declining support for non-profit initiatives in South Africa that presaged the commercialisation of the arts space. Writing in *Staffrider* in 1991, Mike van Graan, who was associated with CAP, lamented: 'International funding which has been the backbone of many community-centred cultural educational programmes is fast coming to an end. Local funding sources i.e. the state and business are gearing their resources to projects which are consistent with current (limited) definitions of development and/or which bring the most political kudos.'[119] Stan Kahn recalls

[118]Motloung, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

[119]Mike van Graan, 'Community-based Cultural Education in the Nineties: Problems and Possibilities', in "Culture in Transition," ed. Andries Walter Oliphant, Barbara Schreiner, Paul Weinberg and Matthew Krouse, special issue, *Staffrider* 9, no. 4 (1991): 108.

feeling pressure to transform the Funda Centre into a Community College in order to keep it relevant to the community but also find a sustainable funding model in this context of dwindling international donor funding. After a tour of the United States Kahn felt that the community college model would best suit Funda Centre. 'There wasn't a discernible educational thread that ran through it,' he recalls of the diverse activities happening at Funda Centre. Kahn continues, 'everybody wanted somebody to keep the doors open, the place clean and the lights switched on but wasn't prepared to concede some authority to someone who would give them this educational thrust.'[120] Kahn recalls going around formal institutions to advocate for them to accept the qualifications from Funda Centre, which would, following the American model, accept people who had lower scores in their tertiary education and provide a platform for some development of skills without the high exit exams that characterise universities and technical colleges. Very few institutions were keen to accept students from the Funda Centre. And, on the other hand, the different groups at Funda Centre did not feel inclined to adjust to this new set-up.

The Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre was one of these groups that did not stay when Funda Centre was transformed into Funda Community College. 'We did express reservations with the idea of the college that it wasn't quite clear but also, I think, we had a feeling that there was too much formalisation that was going to come into being,'[121] Khangela Hlongwane recalls. This period of crisis for independent alternative arts education centres also affected FUBA, the centre which had operated in the city since 1978. FUBA, records show, was under pressure from its funder to streamline operations. An assessment commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on FUBA (erroneously calling FUBA 'the only performing arts institution for black students in South Africa') nevertheless provides

[120]Kahn, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.
[121]Hlongwane, Interview conducted by Kasonde Mukonde.

us a rich record of the transformations that were occurring in funding for alternative and community arts education in the early 1990s.[122] The assessment carried out from August 1991 covered six areas: 'management and supervision, curriculum and instruction, examinations and assessment, advertising and publicity, student and faculty recruitment, and funding and support'.[123] Among the recommendations to improve management at FUBA was to appoint or employ an operations manager, under curriculum and instruction the evaluator felt that FUBA needed a stronger focus as an arts school rather than letting academic subjects creep in. Many black students who had been pushed out of school during the upheavals of the 1980s found that spaces such as FUBA gave them the opportunity to take extra classes needed for enrolment into university.

The USAID report found that there were different examining standards in use at FUBA in 1991 including the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB), the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music from London, and the Department of Education and Training, formerly the Department of Bantu Education, which had 'little credibility'.[124] Noting the difficulty of assessing students from disadvantaged backgrounds by universal standards, the report nevertheless felt that having some standard to measure student progress was an advantage overall. Notably, however, none of the external examination boards were appropriate to assess the drama students at FUBA. Emphasised in other parts of the report, but pertaining to the ability of students to take external examinations - including those for entering university - was the need to improve the levels of English comprehension among students.[125] 'Minimum English proficiency should be required of all students,' the author insisted.[126] Connected to this

[122]JAG, FUBA Collection, FUB, 'FUB-0001-0001-013 An Assessment of The Federated Union of Black Arts (FUBA), 66 Wolhunter Street Johannesburg, South Africa.'
[123]JAG, 'An Assessment of FUBA,' iii.
[124]Ibid., 12.
[125]Ibid., 13-14.
[126]Ibid., 14.

was the author's recommendation that instruction in all subjects be carried out in English in order 'to better prepare its students to function articulately in a world in which English is the predominant language'.[127] The report went on to make recommendations for improving the advertising of FUBA and student and faculty recruitment. On the latter, it noted the difficulties FUBA had in retaining and paying qualified staff due to the difficult financial situation. Among the recommendations to improve the dire funding situation was involving the board of directors more, systematising its donation solicitation, and establishing an alumni association.[128] Finally, and most egregiously for a context where many students were struggling financially, the report recommended that school fees should be increased to cover 50 per cent of FUBA's operating costs.[129] It is not clear how many of these recommendations were adopted by Sipho Sepamla but they do indicate the dire straits that alternative education institutions found themselves in in the early 1990s. Within that decade, FUBA ceased to exist.

That Jerry Raletebele continued to run Soyikwa for another decade or so, albeit as a much-reduced entity, within this difficult context is heroic. In 1994 USAID, which had been giving Soyikwa some funding, pulled out, leaving a gaping hole in the finances of Soyikwa and essentially marking the end of the Institute. At the end of that year, Soyikwa left Funda Centre and 'the office was moved to [Jerry Raletebele's] house and certain teaching operations continued at the Diepkloof Tennis Courts.'[130] For a few years Raletebele continued to work using his own resources with little, if any, outside sponsorship. In 1995 Raletebele, along with George Lamola and Pauline Seleke, worked with a Salvation Army children's home for girls in Orlando West, Soweto, called Bethany, to develop a holiday performance. Seleke, who had been part of the Soyikwa dance programme, taught the young girls different dance styles,

[127] Ibid., 10.
[128] Ibid., 19-21.
[129] Ibid., 21.
[130] Sichel, Adrienne, 'Lighting the way through arts education,' *The Star*, 11 Dec 1995.

lamenting that, ‘they only know “Sarafina”, Mango Grove and how to jive. Doing plies and traditional dance was a whole new experience for them.’[131] The showcase featured music, dance, the Salvation Army’s brass band, a youth group from the Windybrow Centre for the Arts in the city, and a play by George Lamola. At the turn of the millennium, fortunes were slightly improved when Raletebele got some funding from the South African National Lottery to hold rural theatre workshops. Following a slightly different format from that of the original Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre, one newspaper article noted that Raletebele worked with urban students at a place called Career’s Centre in Soweto and rural students at Ga-Rakgwadi in Limpopo.[132] The students from Limpopo were awarded the opportunity to develop their skills in theatre while being encouraged to address local problems. One of these problems, Raletebele is quoted as noticing in this community, was witchcraft. He saw theatre as a means through which to address this issue, hearkening back to Soyikwa’s TfD days.[133]

The last major record of Soyikwa in the archive was the musical *Scenes from Soweto*, also funded by the National Lottery, between 2010 and 2012. Raletebele seems to have played merely a facilitating role in this musical, which was composed and directed by Jennifer Logan, a musician based in Los Angeles, USA. It is not clear how Logan became involved with Soyikwa, an issue which requires further research. The story of the musical was loosely about life in Soweto and according to one review lacked a clear focus. Reviewing an April 2012 run at Sandton’s Theatre on the Square, one critic called the musical two dimensional and lacking in wit, particularly pointing at a scene portraying gay life in Soweto as too reliant on stereotypes and clichés.[134] Another critic who saw the same show, however, felt inspired by the musical because it showed how dynamic, peaceful and vibrant Soweto was through music and dramatic

[131]Pauline Seleke qtd. In Sichel, ‘Lighting the way.’
[132]Eddie Mokoena, 'Helping country folk take stock,' *Sowetan*, 27 Feb 2004, 7.
[133]Mokoena, ‘Helping country folk.’
[134]Robyn Sassen, ‘Soweto deserves a more joyous celebration,’ *Sunday Times*, 1 April 2012, 3.

scenes. In this critic's view, *Scenes in Soweto* showed 'life in Soweto today, but it also acknowledg[ed] that the township has survived through tough times.'[135] The common thread through these reviews was the lack of political fervour in this last Soyikwa piece.

By the time *Scenes of Soweto* was staged, Soyikwa was called a 'production company' and employed the choreographer Patrick Mdlalose and Potlaki Mokhethi.[136] Actors and vocalists included Zizipho Mposula, Lesego Semete, Tiisetso Mohlamme, Moeketsi Tapisi and Glen Gabela.[137] That the production went to a venue such as Sandton's Theatre on the Square, the very heart of South African capitalism, symbolises the story of South African township theatre. If Soyikwa started as a group of committed young artists trying to make sense of their place in apartheid South Africa, and bravely developing a Theatre of Resistance, it was now fully neo-liberalised. The mixed legacy of *Scenes from Soweto* notwithstanding, like Matsemela Manaka, Walter Chakela, Ray Hlongwane, and many others, Jerry Raletebele had made immense contributions to theatre in South Africa. His contributions, however, remain largely unknown because of the format in which he worked. Largely workshopped and community focused, Raletebele's contributions both within Soyikwa and outside of it, were nevertheless substantial. Unfortunately, Raletebele passed away in 2020 before I could interview him.

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[135]Khulani Aubrey Dhlamini, 'Funky Soweto,' *Sunday Independent,* 1 April 2012, 2.
[136]'Musical Township Tour,' *The Citizen*, 25 October 2011, 1.
[137]AKH, 'Soyikwa's Scenes from Soweto: Musical Soundtrack, CD Liner Notes.'

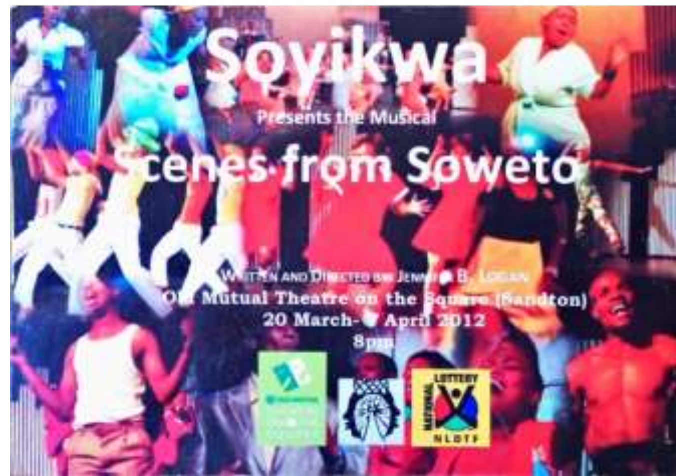

Figure 9 Flyer for Scenes from Soweto Source: AKH Papers

Conclusion

This chapter explored the history of the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre from 1985 to 2010. Based at Funda Centre, Soyikwa became a significant force in alternative theatre education in the township. During this period, plays were produced with students as workshopped pieces. The productions addressed in this chapter include *Siza, Toro: The African Dream*, *Koma*, and *The Untold Story*. In addition to going into some detail about the two-year drama diploma programme pioneered by Soyikwa, the chapter also addressed the rural theatre project in the context of similar projects on the African continent. Critical in approach, it was found that while the rural theatre project was innovative in the South African context it faced some limitations due the Theatre of Resistance having a strong influence on the work of Soyikwa. Thus, TfD, as practised in other parts of Africa, was never fully realised in South Africa. Another issue the chapter grapples with is the challenges of funding alternative arts education in South Africa and how the end of transition from apartheid to democracy challenged a movement. Global neoliberal pressure is seen exerting its influence on Soyikwa, which declined in spite of continued dedication from one of the original members of Soyikwa who continued to pursue community theatre efforts, Jerry Raletebele.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions – Towards a Theatre of Resistance

At a symposium held on 15 September 1986 alongside the *Woza Afrika!* Festival in New York City, Matsemela Manaka, by then with already more than half a dozen plays to his name, reflected on his life in the theatre. 'I never fooled myself that I'm a playwright. Even up to now I see myself as a student. I'm learning. I'm not going to stop learning about theatre.'[1] Manaka was not content with being called a struggle playwright; he wanted to be judged on the merits of his art. Manaka added: 'I want to be able to write plays even when [South Africa] is free. [I want to say to the outside world] that we do not write plays simply because we are oppressed. People have to understand that. We write plays because we celebrate our lives.'[2] Even though Manaka became a pioneer of the Theatre of Resistance, he sat uneasy in this genre. As I show in Chapters Five and Six, he never dismissed bad reviews of his work without thinking about how to improve, how to make better art that stayed true to his convictions. In this discussion, Manaka expressed a deep dissatisfaction with liberal supporters who excused bad art because it came from a place of struggle. For Manaka, politics and art could coexist.

This thesis has traced the influence of the BCM and the Soweto poetry movement in particular on the development of the Theatre of Resistance. Not interested merely in political sloganeering, the practitioners of the Theatre of Resistance strove to make theatre that spoke to their condition of oppression and that was aesthetically pleasing. Apartheid had sought to contain the imaginations of black South Africans but the Theatre of Resistance movement shows how culture was a source of vitality and strength. While this study has focused on the

[1] Amazwi, ACC 1995.11 Barney Simon Papers, 'ACC 1995.11.19.62 Ndlovu, Duma. Rising above absurdity. Transcript of discussion between Duma Ndlovu, Percy Mtwa, Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya, Mongeni Ndema and others.'

[2] Ibid.

work of some key individuals and groups, they all explored similar themes. These included: the violence of migrant labour and urban segregation; a concern with presenting a heroic view of black history; and calls for black solidarity.

I argue that the practitioners of the Theatre of Resistance were creating a genre that, according to Karin Barber, is 'a "kind". It is a concept by which we group texts into categories or families … the idea of genre is constitutive of the texts themselves. The conventions of a genre are tools or templates for giving specific forms to utterance.'[3] Just as the BCM did not reach its full expression, the theatre movement that Black Consciousness inspired, the Theatre of Resistance, did not fully become a genre. Artists such as Maishe Maponya took from other genres, such as socialist agitprop or African oral performance, to inform their own work making the plays they created formally and stylistically varied. 'Some genres are strongly bounded and insulated from each other, while in others the distinctions are much fuzzier, and it is a mark of artistry to incorporate or allude to other genres, or move in and out of several genre frames.'[4] My hope is that this thesis will inspire further work into the Theatre of Resistance as a genre.

A strong influence on Resistance Theatre was the performance poetry of the 1970s, exemplified by the Allahpoets. This form of poetry drew on African performance traditions while incorporating modern instruments to increase its emotional affect. Maishe Maponya's career, covered in depth in Chapter Four, shows in microcosm how Soweto poetry drew directly from Black Consciousness while having its own internal divisions. After seeing the Reverend Mzwandile Maqina's play, *Give Us This Day*, based around the events around Black Consciousness leader Onkgopotse Abram Tiro's murder, Maponya founded the Bahumutsi players and launched a critically acclaimed career in Resistance Theatre. In fact, even though Maponya continued to make theatre that was uncomfortable to many liberal theatregoers, he

[3]Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 32.
[4]Ibid., 43.

was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year for Drama in 1985. Maponya's career shows how the boundaries of Resistance Theatre are fuzzy; for his play *The Hungry Earth*, he drew liberally in form from Brecht's *The Measures Taken* while *Gangsters* and *Dirty Work* were based on Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe*.

Writing as late as 1992, the critic Martin Orkin wondered: 'Few critics have been interested in pursuing and interrogating [Matsemela Manaka's and Maishe Maponya's] privileging of an essentialist form of interiority either, in terms of what it may have to suggest to us, more extensively, about "popular" culture and current preoccupations of theatre practitioners coming from the oppressed.'[5] Many critics, indeed, found the Theatre of Resistance difficult to assess, coming as they did from schools of thought that privileged a rigid view of 'popular' or 'oppressed' culture. My contention is that this thesis contributes a new understanding to the work of Maponya and Manaka by adopting a historical approach. Looking at the socio-political context in which Theatre of Resistance arose, this thesis provides a fresh perspective and challenges established frameworks of the history of protest theatre in South Africa. Black Consciousness saw as its primary goal the restoration of the humanity of black people and those artists who answered its call, drawing from African humanist traditions, global black thought as well as from their own organic experiences in the townships where they were based and had grown up. By demonstrating that practitioners of the Theatre of Resistance were heirs to a tradition that consolidated itself in the 1960s, the thesis enables us to approach criticism with a more informed understanding.

The thesis has also shown how historical methods can advance our understanding of what seemed to be established fields of knowledge. A case in point is the use of improvisational workshops in adversarial theatre in South Africa in the 1980s. The chapters on Soyikwa show

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[5]Martin Orkin, 'Whose Popular Theatre and Performance?', *South African Theatre Journal* 6, no. 2 (1 January 1992): 34.

how there was not one way of doing workshops in the creation of theatre during that decade. As interviews and documentary evidence I have drawn on show, Soyikwa worked in a peculiar way with director and playwright (despite his statement above) Matsemela Manaka. For some plays like *Toro*, he wrote scripts from scratch while for others - particularly the early works covered *Pula* and *Egoli* - he served as scribe for an ongoing rehearsal process. Manaka never saw his work as complete and would change scenes moments before a performance. The oral testimonies of the actors he worked with add a rich perspective on the creative processes involved in the creation of Theatre of Resistance. The study of Soyikwa also shows how Theatre for Development never quite took root in South Africa because of the overwhelming influence of the protest and Resistance genres. Nevertheless, the theatre practitioners at Soyikwa, working in the late 1980s out of Funda Centre, experimented with rural theatre, developing plays that further extended the stylistic and formal qualities of Resistance Theatre.

This thesis charts a new course in apartheid historiography by revealing subtle forms of oppression through surveillance and censorship. Drawing evidence from the declassified files on the Security Branch and the Directorate of Publications, I show how the state understood that cultural production was a viable threat to its hegemony. While previous scholars have discussed the open confrontation at political trials, such as the SASO/BPC trial of 1975 and 1976, where cultural activists were charged alongside others, I drew on previously unused documents to show that after 1976 repression did not end. It took on subtler forms such as surveillance of performances leading to artists adjusting their work or censorship that led to the banning or restriction of plays such as *Egoli* and *Gangsters*. The deliberations of the various censorship committees, which I recount in some detail, show the ideological biases and restricted view of artistic consumption among black populations that some apartheid ideologues possessed.

Maishe Maponya continued to work in the Theatre of Resistance after the cut-off date of this thesis, almost until his death in 2021. A new generation of black theatre practitioners, inspired by Maponya and Manaka's generation, are writing plays that adopt some of the forms and styles developed during the height of Theatre of Resistance. Playwrights such as Kgafela oa Magogodi and Monageng 'Vice' Motshabi ask whether the lives of black people in South Africa have met the hopes of liberation. If Theatre of Resistance did not fully take hold in South Africa, the themes and concerns it dealt with remain relevant today, whatever genre these new playwrights choose to use. As I have attempted to show in this thesis, in South Africa, art and politics were not mutually exclusive in the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s. It remains the same today as a new generation attempts to create their own artistic legacy.

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