

Commitment and Performance in Black South African Theatre Under Apartheid

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This article examines how the sociopolitical situation of the black community under apartheid in South Africa was taken by theater artists as a committed goal and integrated part in their theatrical expression. The essay is divided in two main sections: the first discusses the sociocultural and theatrical background during the 1960s through the 1980s; and the second analyzes the various techniques chosen by theater artists to perform their plays.

Introduction

If theatre has always been considered the social genre *par excellence*, black South African theatre during apartheid, and more specifically since the late 1960s through the 1980s, has clearly demonstrated its basic function. The sociopolitical situation experienced by the black community under white rule was combined with the theatre artists' goal to reconstruct their black South African history and identity, developing different theatrical techniques—giving special emphasis to improvisation and acting techniques at some times, and to written text and structure of plays at others. In spite of the various theatrical expressions, black South African theatre artists never forgot that the audience—the black community—was the main character in their performances. By intermingling Western and traditional African techniques, they recuperated the social function of art in order to make black South Africans aware of their need to take an action in their society, reminding them they were the ones to shape to their own destinies.

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Theatre critic Peter Larlham, in his study *Black Theater, Dance, and Ritual in South Africa*, comments that since the Soweto uprising in 1976, "Black poets [have been] committed to the cause of Black consciousness." And he expands on the proliferation of the new writing that has emerged after that historical date:

Black identity and Black pride have introduced public poetry readings in churches and church halls in Soweto. Most of the poetry delivered is unpublished. It is directed at Black audiences, with a strong emphasis on audience participation. Participation is based on an acknowledgement of the common experiences of suffering and indignity of both poet and spectator. The performance, moreover, constitutes a challenge to Black South Africans to reject [the] acceptance of a status quo. Improvised exchange with the audience is an integral part of the poet's delivery. (19)

Larlham affirms that these performances are the manifestation of a common commitment of many black artists to reject the fixed and individual trends of a non-African literary tradition and embrace the more flexible and community oriented forms of traditional oral literature (19).

It is significant that during the 1960s through the 1970s there was an evident and significant exposure to African plays in general, and black South African plays in particular were brought to the United States, as there were African-American plays and plays from other African countries brought to South Africa. Plays written by Nigerian writer and Nobel Literature Prize winner Wole Soyinka and white South African playwright Athol Fugard, who wrote his plays in collaboration with black actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, were produced in both countries.¹ Curiously, the South African critic Mshengu has observed many similarities between African-American and black South African theatre. Besides, he has insisted that theatre in South Africa was quite different from the theatre in any other African country, and it was African-American theatre which had "a far greater impact than the rest of Africa" on black South African theatre productions. Both theatrical expressions, African-American and black South African, were political in subject matter and exclusively urban in idiom (Mshengu, "Tradition" 64).²

Questioning the validity of Western theatre and greatly activated by the Black Power Movement in North America and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa, black theatre emerged to capture the black community as the protagonist of this new born theatre. Western theatre artists, such as French playwright Antonin Artaud and German playwright and theatre director Bertolt Brecht, had already observed the need to create a new theatrical language and asserted the importance of engaging the theatre audience in a dialectical process with the action taking place on

the stage. In the same line, black South African artists were aware not only of the passivity played by the audience, but especially the passive role imposed on the black community in a society governed by white rule. Black artists initiated then a double task: the recuperation of a theatre audience and of black culture from the death imposed on them by Western imperialism both political and intellectual. The period of the 1970s through the 1980s launched a number of artists who were completely committed and voiced their black communities' needs. They took a political stand which was inextricably connected to the commitment to and creation of their art. In this regard, French theatre critic Geneviève Fabre refers to the emergence of African-American theatre as "above all a sociocultural phenomenon" which should be examined as such (1). And Fabre's assertion can be equally extended to the emergence of black theatre in South Africa.

The works by black South African theatre artists from the 1970s through the 1980s seemed to have been committed to expose the social situation and needs of the black community under the oppressive and racist rule of apartheid. These artists, however, chose different performance venues to launch their social statements and reach mainly black, or both black and white, audiences. These various venues could be divided into three main categories: (a) Plays created in cooperative work by means of workshop and improvisation (e.g., Workshop '71, Phyllis Klotz et al.); (b) plays written by individual playwrights with a strong emphasis on the written text and creation of complex characters (e.g., Zakes Mda, Fatima Dike); and (c) plays written by individual playwrights with strong emphasis on the performance of text. This third category includes playwrights who often have written, directed and performed their own plays (e.g., Maishe Maponya, Matsemela Manaka, Mbongeni Ngema or Percy Mtwa).

Sociocultural and Theatrical Background

Before studying these performance venues, it is necessary to examine briefly the sociopolitical milieu in South Africa at the time period analyzed in this essay, as well as the conditions under apartheid.³ Various social and political movements originated to fight against the racist system of apartheid, and it was precisely a social one, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) that had a great impact on the black theatre that was born under apartheid. The BCM, led by Stephen Biko, who died in September 1977 due to the wounds inflicted upon him during the time he was held in prison, established that the creation of a society based on African cultural systems, as opposed to Western systems, was the Movement's fundamental and ultimate goal because they were living in Africa, not in Europe.

South African activist Misibudi Mangena described what was understood by Black Consciousness in South Africa:

We understood Black Consciousness as a new way of life, an attitude of mind which would enable Blacks to rid themselves of the inferiority complex accruing out of living in a racist country that [had] brutalised them for centuries. It was a frame of mind through which Blacks would reject all value system that [made] them foreigners in a country of their birth. It was held that psychological liberation was an important component of the process of physical liberation. Thus, our African names which were hidden and were capable of sparking light, if used became the pride of the day. (12)⁴

Black Consciousness in South Africa, like the Black Power Movement in the United States, sought blacks' self-determination and proclaimed black pride and assertion of their African traditions. The Movement had a major impact within the black South African community between 1968 and 1976, among them the youth of the 1976 Soweto uprising, who were greatly influenced by Biko and the BCM's philosophy.⁵

The BCM intended to confront the fragmentation that had originated as a result of the apartheid policy by attempting to get all of them involved in the same struggle for liberation. The final aim of their struggle would be, in Biko's own words, "an open society, one man, one vote, no reference to color" (qtd. in Millard 42). Biko viewed black people as *the dispossessed* (a term that black South African playwrights Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya would adopt to define black South African theatre) because he realized that blacks were a disinherited group and historically, economically and politically dispossessed.

According to Biko, the philosophy and educational methods of Black Consciousness gave people hope, which could only be achieved by growing consciousness among them (115). In *I Write What I Like*, Biko recalled the importance of the soul rhythms by African-Americans that had been a hit in the 1960s and had excited millions of blacks all over the world, for they could read a truthful meaning in that music that proclaimed: "Say it aloud: I am Black and I am proud of it" (25).⁶ Biko, however, underscored that what had really influenced the liberation and artistic movements both in the United States and in South Africa had actually been the recent independence achieved by different African states which began in the 1950s (Mangena 54). However, it was the BCM that prompted the formation of various theatre groups⁷ in the early seventies in South Africa, which unfortunately were continuously harassed and destroyed by government action (Orkin 150–51). The Theatre Council of Natal (TECON), which functioned throughout the 1970s, published in the black theatre magazine *S'ketsh* their concept of theatre. In it they voiced pride in black culture and that black organizations should no longer "hang onto another culture for survival or growth" (qtd. in Mshengu, "New Wave" 59).

Hope and celebration of blackness, together with the activation of the audience's consciousness, became pivotal elements of a new theatre aesthetics which totally rejected the demarcations dictated by the Western canon. Black South African artists spoke of Black Consciousness aesthetics and the theatre of the dispossessed. However, the targets and artistic goals of the Black Theatre Movement in South Africa could not be transferred into a written pronouncement due to the continuous censorship and imprisonment of its artists.

In spite of the lack of a written manifesto, an examination of the plays produced from the 1970s through the 1980s reveals a clear line that connects them all: a Black Consciousness aesthetics. Although the BCM was banned in 1977, another organization created in 1978 (the Azanian People's Organization—AZAPO) inherited the ideology of the former Movement. And the best two exponents of commitment to this ideology were the playwrights Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya. Manaka explained the type of theatre they produced:

Our theatre is here to search for the truth about the history of the dispossessed and see how freedom can be accomplished. Our creative thoughts shall, all the time, focus on the life of our people, as seen through our own lives—and obviously, the politics of this country cannot be avoided because they constitute part of our lives. Our people are engaged totally by resistance struggles—the liberation of the mind and the liberation of the being. (Qtd. in Larlham 86)

To a great extent, Maponya supported Manaka's ideas: "My theatre is the theatre of the dispossessed." And, following Brecht's idea of theatre as a tool to educate people, Manaka added: "Theatre educates and enlightens—in this case heightens the awareness of Black consciousness" (qtd. in Larlham 90). The artist's active role takes a significant light in African societies: theatre, more than any other genre, encompasses a fundamental social function within them. Black Consciousness theatre artists were equally and distinctly influenced by the "didactic thrust in oral poetry performance as well as by the interaction between poet/performer and audience" (Orkin 155).

Linked to the idea of a national consciousness, black South African writer Mazisi Kunene refers to the essential part that symbol plays in the writing of African cultures. He claims that symbol is "the representation of the attitude of the community, and in fact, it is the easiest access to communal expression for it contains communal meaning" (Duerden and Pieterse 89). Among the Zulus, for instance, Kunene remarks that the performance of poetry often takes place in an open space where a large audience, sometimes numbering 100,000, can participate (xxxii). Art, artist and community are inextricably united. Actually, poetry and/or poetic

language was used in many of the plays written by black South African playwrights in the 1970s and 1980s to establish that union with their audience.

Like Kunene, Manaka observes that commitment and responsibility lie on the African artist⁸ in creating functional art. Manaka considers that the African artist "is not just making art but is also part of that art; for [her/him], art is an extension of self" (*Echoes* 9–10). Reflecting on the Black Consciousness Movement and its rejection of Western models, Manaka adds that the Movement "challenged the European arrogance of referring to African art as 'township art.' [This period was characterized by] the portrayal of the black experience as an art of defiance against the superiority complex of white people" (*Echoes* 16). Moreover, the Black Consciousness Movement has played a major role in the conceptual development of African art, in which the sociopolitical situation was revealed to the African artist and he acquired consciousness. In this regard, Manaka believes that art movements are generally shaped by political movements or events, as it happened with the Black Consciousness Movement and the art that originated from it (*Echoes* 16).

In Manaka's opinion, art under apartheid became a tool for the liberation of Africans, whom he denominates *the dispossessed*. African artists lack freedom of expression which causes them to be disarmed, disadvantaged and disabled, like an African farmer who has no right over the land (*Echoes* 17). In the same manner, he refers to black theatre in South Africa as the theatre of the dispossessed. South African theatre critic Ian Steadman adds that black drama "is that drama which promotes in positive and forceful terms the dignity and potential of black people, and does so with assertion of the independence of black people" ("Alternative Theatre" 143). It is natural then that being the most public of all literary genres and a weapon for social change, theater would become the appropriate platform used to raise consciousness, mainly among black people. Besides, Mshengu insists that theatre in South Africa is quite different from any other theatre in other Africa countries, and it has been the African-American influence which has had "a far greater impact than the rest of Africa" on black South African theatre. Evidently black South Africans identified themselves with the struggle for human and civil rights carried out by African-Americans, and they found connections to and similarities with the black social and artistic movements that originated out of them in 1960s and '70s. Both theatrical expressions—African-American and black South African—are political in subject matter and exclusively urban in idiom (Mshengu, "Tradition" 64).

Nevertheless, when analyzing black South African theatrical expressions, it is also necessary to be aware of the important role that some Euro-

pean theatre artists have played in it. Artists such as Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Erwin Piscator, as well as the Brazilian director Augusto Boal, who have been landmarks in the evolution and growth of twentieth century Western theatre, have equally served as models for some of the performance techniques utilized by black South African artists. Brecht and Grotowski in particular have exerted great influence on black South African theatre production methods.

Philosopher Herbert Marcuse and playwright Antonin Artaud had defended the liberation of the senses in art and society, imprisoned by a civilization ruled by repressive indictments of reason and speech. In more recent years, it has been the Brazilian director Augusto Boal who has proposed theatre as an effective political weapon to liberate wo/men from oppression. Boal was also greatly influenced by Brecht's political theatre, and in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* advocates that what is happening in Latin America is "the destruction of the barriers created by the ruling classes" (ix–x). In Boal's opinion, theatre might not be revolutionary in itself, but "is surely a rehearsal for revolution." The poetics of the oppressed, he declares, is mainly the poetics of liberation: "The spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself: he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action" (119, 155). Boal follows Brecht's idea of Epic Theatre, which has had a tremendous impact on the theatre of most Latin American countries.

Brecht's conception of Epic Theatre not only comprises an active role for the audience but for the actor as well. Away from the empathy that Stanislavsky's actors and audience feel, Brecht employed the alienation element for both audience and actors. Coinciding with Brecht, Grotowski introduced a much more developed basis to help the actors broaden their acting skills, enunciated in his book *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Grotowski's conception and emphasis on the actor's skills was closer to the African oral traditions, in which gesture, song and movement are indispensable skills for the performer; in the black South African productions of the 1970s and 1980s, acting skills were the fundamental basis upon which most of the theatrical productions were based. Grotowski himself, away from Western patterns, found the training techniques used in Oriental theatre very stimulating, especially the Japanese Noh theatre, the Indian Kathakali and the Beijing Opera. Under this light, he decided that the scenic and personal technique of the actor were "the core of theatre art." In the definition of his *poor theatre*, Grotowski claimed that theatre can exist "without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. [But] it cannot

exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, 'live' communion." All these elements are present in most of the 1970s and 1980s black theatre productions. Grotowski insisted that theatre is a place of provocation, where the actors, by using their roles as trampolines, examine what is hidden behind their daily masks, the inner essence of their personality, and so are able to sacrifice it and expose it (16, 19, 21).

Apart from adhering to some Western performance techniques, black South African theatre artists were also eager to appraise their African history and traditions. These artists acclaimed the thought and philosophies of black South African writers who had contributed to shape their history. Among the most celebrated black South African scholars is Sol Plaatje (who died in 1932), a member of the South African Native National Congress, which in 1912 became the African National Congress. Plaatje is considered to be one of the first African nationalists, whose special significance lies in the importance he conceded to African languages. Another pivotal black South African writer is H. I. E. Dhlomo, who died in 1956. Dhlomo's work includes drama, poetry and prose. He has been considered by some scholars to be perhaps the first prolific African creative writer in English. Dhlomo's committed his life to serve his people with his writing.⁹

Moreover, at the end of the 1950s the appearance of the musical *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* exerted a great influence in shaping the future of black theatre in South Africa. *King Kong*, with book and lyrics by Harry Bloom and Pat Williams respectively, was staged in 1959, and introduced the famous South African singer Miriam Makeba. Inspired by *King Kong*, Gibson Kente¹⁰ created *Manana, the Jazz Prophet* (produced in the late 1960s) which especially addressed the township audience. Kente wisely traced the local musical tradition and his plays became very successful in the townships. He has been criticized though by more committed black artists who have regarded his plays simply as entertainment, instead of posing questions about the social conditions of black South Africans. They have acknowledged, however, that Kente was a master in the portrayal of black people's feelings.¹¹

The 1960s witnessed the rise of two important white South African playwrights: Athol Fugard and Alan Paton. Fugard became a source of inspiration to black South African playwrights after the two plays he wrote in collaboration with black South African actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona—*The Island* (produced in 1973, and whose action takes place in the prison of Robben Island, where the actors are preparing a theatrical piece based on Sophocles's *Antigone*) and *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (first staged in Cape Town, 1974, a satire against the law that obliged all blacks to carry with them a passbook, a kind of passport where information such as birth, employment, taxation, family, etc., was included; the passbook was consi-

dered the major symbol of oppression in South Africa).¹² And with the 1970s, came the Black Consciousness Movement, which brought specific demands that needed to be applied to cultural expression.

The theatre group Workshop '71, which will be examined later, acknowledged black South African writer and scholar Credo Mutwa's philosophy for the creation of a new theatre as was stated in Mutwa's *uNosilimela* (1974).¹³ Mutwa's play was a landmark in the development of black theatre in the 1970s. He had conducted an extensive research on the theatrical and cultural traditions of Africa and contemplated a need to use that tradition as a source of inspiration for a new black theatre. Regarding the call/response component of the African tradition, Mutwa explains that in ancient African plays

the players did not SPEAK their lines but rather chanted or sang them just as Whites do in their operas, and this is why you find African songs whose first line is a question and whose second line is an answer to that question. SINGING to the Africans was the highest and holiest form of expression. The songs commented on social facts [such as how to deliver a baby, how to cook certain medicinal roots, giving advice, etc.]. ("Umlinganiso" 31)

He added that in ancient Africa theatre was social and didactic, and that art, culture and religion were completely inseparable from each other.

Mutwa blamed Christianity for destroying native African religion, which, as a consequence, devastated its culture and art. He elevated theatre to a position of sacredness (similar to the idea Grotowski had about acting) because the actors were considered to be sacred people in ancient African ("Umlinganiso" 31–32). Finally, Mutwa indicated the great importance that the audience had in ancient theatre as part of the sacred theatrical event, that the audience was deeply involved ("On the Theatre" 38–41). Literary critic Bakary Traoré formulates that myth, conveyed in African traditional theatre, "makes man conscious of his place in order to make him accept his social obligation"; and that legend and mimed narrative "present to the living the lesson to be learned from the great deeds of their ancestors. Their function is to help men become more conscious of themselves. They are also a means of reconstructing the history of family, clan or tribe" (65). The artist's active role also takes a significant light in African societies. In the same way, African theatre, more than any other genre, encompasses a social function. African theatre is a committed, political artistic expression as it was understood by Erwin Piscator: *theatre can transform*. And art as a means towards change is what Ethiopian film critic Teshome H. Gabriel refers to when discussing the mission of Third World filmmakers, which Onsmame Sembene predicates: not to make but to prepare the revolution (38).

On the other hand, theatre critic Mineke Schipper stresses that in telling ancient African stories the narrator improvised on known themes, using speech or song. It is then the talent of actors and narrators upon which lie the success of theatre performance and poetry. Schipper observes an inextricable connection between oral literature and theatre. Oral literature recreates pauses, gestures, feelings, intonations and the reciprocal reactions of actors and audience towards each other, all of which is "inherent in theatre." The African performance of oral literature, in Schipper's words, is "a total event" in which the people who are present take part, either by clapping in rhythm or by making music, or narrating (7, 10, 12). Like poetry and song in traditional African societies, music is a social event and, consequently, public performances usually take place on social occasions. Like song, dance can equally be used as a social and artistic communication form.

Black Performance Techniques under Apartheid

South African theatre critic David Coplan underscores the qualities he has observed in black South African actors, who show

the vigorous, broadly gestural and rhetorically commanding style of presentation handed down from traditional oral and choreographic narration. Emotional and dramatic conflict are more often expressed through vocal quality and physical movement than in dialogue or psychologically intense posing or naturalistic action. (214)

Black South African actors have closely followed Grotowski's acting principles as well as African traditional acting techniques; playwrights and actors Percy Mtwa and Mbengeni Ngema in *Woza Albert! or Bopha!* exemplify magnificently the use of gesture and body movement to which Coplan refers. Grotowski's *poor theatre* has been compared to that of the productions of Workshop '71 by theatre critics James Mthoba and Themba Ntinga, who observe this theatre group "depended on its productions for survival [*Survival* was actually the title of one of their plays]. This [means that their] help [was] largely on technical matters and training" (46). Mthoba and Themba's comment runs parallel to traditional African performance techniques, as well as Grotowski's emphasis on the actor's own skills to fill the void that results from the lack of appropriate means. Physical action, then, becomes a key factor in most black South African theatrical productions, except in the plays of Zakes Mda and Fatima Dike.

The theatrical language employed in black South African plays comprises dance and/or movement, music and poetry, elements which are rooted in traditional South African oral literature (i.e., storytelling and poetry). Nevertheless, the combination of African and Western elements

raises the controversial and essential issue of language in Africa, and more specifically in South Africa. The question is whether to use an African or a European language. Workshop '71 was probably the first group which, using English as the unifying language, ventured to integrate in their works African languages such as Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho with Afrikaans and English. Black South Africans have integrated African and European languages into a new expression, maybe the African English referred to by South African writer and scholar Es'kia Mphahlele. Mphahlele, though, established the need of using both African and English languages, given the situation given in South Africa.¹⁴ In spite of the integration of English with African languages, the songs appearing in black theatre are performed in African languages, rarely in English.

A) Cooperative Work: Workshop and Improvisation Acting Techniques

During the 1970s three main workshop theatre groups (two of them mentioned earlier) that were totally aligned with the Black Consciousness cause: TECON (the Theatre Council of Natal), PET (Peoples' Experimental Theatre) and MDALI (Music, Drama, Arts and Literature Institute).¹⁵ All three groups would finally come to an end before the 1980s due to the continuous banning and imprisonment of their members. TECON decided to be an all-black group because they strongly felt that their role was to be played only within the black community. TECON's concept of theatre was published in the black magazine *S'ketsh*:

We say to Black theatre organizations: Our culture shall no longer hang onto another culture for survival or growth. It will stand by itself. We're concerned with the beauty of a culture that has been ravished, a culture with a beauty that Africa needs—the Black culture. And we are the Blacks, the only people who can do justice to Black culture and civilization. (qtd. in Mshengu, "New Wave" 59)

Like TECON, PET followed the same line of thought and in 1973 formed its theatre in the Indian group area of Lenasia, near Soweto, and subsequently in Natal. One of the plays they performed was *Shanti* (Soweto, 1973) by Mthuli Shezi, which dealt with the love between an African boy and an Indian girl, partly set in a guerrilla camp. PET's theatre aimed to reassert black pride, dignity and group identity. Finally, MADLI grew out of Soweto and pursued the same goals as TECON and PET and, like them, used poetry reading as a form of theatre, alongside mixed drama, poetry and music.

Another committed group of the 1970s was Workshop '71. This group used improvisation for the creation of all their productions. The aims of this group were to "experiment by examining existing theater and evolving new

theater methods and techniques." They wanted to create original theatrical expressions that depended "on artistic co-operation and contact and to examine what [happened] to Western and African forms of theater when they [came] together" (Mthoba and Ntinga 46). Their last play, *Survival*¹⁶ (Cape Town, 1976) begins with the triumphal march of the opera *Aida* and the actors in street clothes among the audience; but, a few seconds later,

The three actors run out of the audience and onto the acting area. Fourth actor tries desperately to catch all three of them at once. Suddenly the action changes gear. Becomes dreamlike. The fourth actor arrests them ritualistically, one by one, without speaking or touching them. . . . The three actors have been arrested, gagged and blindfolded. . . . [The fourth actor soon shows that he is also handcuffed]. The four prisoners move in a slow circle round their cell. . . . One by one the prisoners stop trudging round the cell and kneel, sit or stand, facing outwards. Second actor begins the "song of the people," very softly. (130-31)

Two different types of music are combined at the beginning, as we see in the stage directions. And it is also through the stage directions that we can have an idea that the play relied upon acting skills. *Survival* presents four black men in prison narrating their life experiences in South Africa. Like Grotowski, they defined their work as "a poor man's theatre," which depended mainly on their productions for financial survival (Mthoba and Ntinga 46). After *Survival* was banned, the group dissolved. Workshop '71 concept and ideas have been followed by another group which continued in the 1990s, the Junction Avenue Theatre.

Since Athol Fugard and his actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona exerted a great influence upon the 1970s and 1980s black theatre, literary critic Michael Etherton establishes some differences regarding the notion of the actors in Fugard's conception of theatre and the actors of Workshop '71. Etherton believes that "[Fugard] sees an actor's first responsibility neither to a company nor to violent protest and change, but to psychological integrity." And, although there is a commitment to a particular group of actors and to radical change, these are not the first responsibility for the actor. In contrast, Workshop '71 perceives their responsibility as actors who are essentially concerned with a political rather than psychological context, despite using methodological and theatrical forms strikingly similar to Fugard's Port Elizabeth Theatre Group (Etherton 304-05).

Referring to the performance of *Survival* by Workshop '71, which devised this play in workshop, Etherton comments on the songs they used: "The songs [made] a comment on the actions of the characters and they [summed] up the mood at a particular moment. They [had] the effect of distancing the audience from the action while drawing them into the mood

of emotions of the play" (312). Etherton's observation reflects on the African function of song which has remained in contemporary black South African theatre. But we can observe that Western theatre has exercised its influence as well, since Brecht's Epic Theatre and its alienation effect has been integrated into most plays by black South African writers (i.e., the use of songs, as Brecht himself did in his plays). This combination of African and Western elements, applied to the black South African experience, emphasizes the uniqueness of its theatre.

Another play that deserves special consideration, also created in workshop, is *Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokotho* [*You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock*] (Cape Town, 1986),¹⁷ created in workshop by Phyllis Klotz, Thobeka Maqutyana, Nomvula Qosha, Xolani September, Poppy Tsira and Itumeleng Wa-Lehulere. If Workshop '71's *Survival* presents the experience and lives of four black men while in prison, this piece is an extremely interesting exposition of black South African women's experiences, which deal with the work they are forced to perform in their daily struggle for survival and the conditions under which they perform their work. The issues raised in the play are women's active role and commitment in the liberation struggle: the performance of different jobs and tasks (at the laundry, farms, etc.); women's sexual harassment and abuse, including rape; pregnant women who are forced to work all day in spite of their advanced pregnancy and who have miscarriages as a consequence; women at home who continue to be men's slaves; women's illiteracy and lack of education, and degrading and humiliating experiences with their husbands who live in the hostels.¹⁸ For example, Mambhele, one of the women characters, recounts sleeping with her husband in a hostel: "I wouldn't like to sleep underneath while people are having smarties on top. This hostel business is making us cheap" (193). The play concludes with an assertive war-like dance and singing which seems to be a clear statement of self-affirmation in their decision to shape their fate and that of their community. They are determined to maintain an active role from which they will not be refrained.

Wathint' Abafazi is performed by three actresses who enact many different roles, including male and female roles from different backgrounds, classes and ages. Most of the objects needed for the performance are mimed, as it is clearly stated in the stage directions: "*Mampompo mimes a chicken running away from her. She runs after it clucking like a chicken and shouting; she grabs the chicken by the neck; it wriggles in her hand. Mambhele laughs at her*" (167). Transformations from scene to scene and from one character to another move as fast as the scenes in Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon's *Woza Albert!*, and it is upon the actresses' acting skills where the emphasis of action lies. Like Percy and

Mbongeni in *Woza Albert!*, the actresses create all kinds of sounds: helicopters, sirens, birds singing, etc. *Wathint' Abafazi* is a plotless piece whose weight does not lie in the spoken dialogues as much as it does on song, dance and gesture and movement. The set is non-realistic, suggesting a wide dusty space and the action is played out against a triangular black sheet suspended from the ceiling with four drums scattered over the set.

B) Individual Playwrights: Emphasis on Written Text and Structure of Play

The South African theatre critic Temple Hauptfleisch considers Zakes Mda and Fatima Dike's plays more "overtly 'literary works'" than those of their contemporaries Maishe Maphonya and Matsemela Manaka, since he asserts their plays were written, created and performed "within the English system" (128). Hauptfleisch also insists on the performance of Mda and Dike's plays being "less dependant on song, movement and visual imagery than on verbal communication." However, they are extremely rich in metaphor and thematically more complex than the plays written by their contemporaries, such as Manaka, Maphonya, or Ngema and Mtwa, whose work lies strongly upon acting skills and improvisation (129). Mda and Dike's plays are finely structured. Dike's *The Sacrifice of Kreli* (written in Xhosa) combines modern day situations with African history and myth, and in Hauptfleisch's words, Mda's theatrical pieces "become compelling theatre through the use of performance techniques inherited from African forms, including mime, dancing and singing," though these elements are not present in all his plays (129).

Like his contemporary black South African playwrights and theatre artists, Mda's plays¹⁹ show his great concern with social issues and the social function of art. Mda seems to deal with prophecies and dreams for the future, and how the individual must commit to them. In *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (written in 1973 and performed in 1979), Mda presents two ex-soldiers of the Wars of Freedom who live in an unknown African country after colonial rule, where capitalism has taken over. These two freedom fighters are now forgotten and even asked to leave the park where they live at present, and they finally die frozen, a situation that they themselves tell the audience, since we see them on stage after having died. By using an unknown African country, Mda follows Brecht distancing effect to make the audience think about their own future, although the playwright has denied the fact that he refers to the future of South Africa. He has explained that when writing the play his intention was to comment "on post-colonial capitalist Africa in general—including Lesotho. The wars of Freedom need not necessarily be physical, violent wars [as] in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, etc. They represent the struggles of the people in general for

liberation" (qtd. in Horn xiii). According to South African writer Andrew Horn, *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* embodies three themes that are present in all Mda's plays: commitment, the precariousness of the poor, and betrayal (xiii). Mda seems to be concerned on two main issues in his play: the neo-colonialist situation in Africa and the human being's nature. Although the play may resemble Kenya's situation, Mda stated that "it [was his] hope that South Africa [would] not follow the path of Kenya" (Horn xiii).

If thematically speaking, Mda's play is clearly a social piece concerned with the situation of blacks in the African continent. South Africa in particular may be added; technically it reminds the reader/spectator of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955, a post-World War II play), using two clown characters, the Sergeant and Janabari, as we see in the last lines of the play, where both characters, now dead, continue their talk on stage:

SERGEANT: You look all right to me.

JANABARI: You look all right too.

SERGEANT: It's because we are now dead.

JANABARI: And you have your leg back.

SERGEANT: Funny isn't it? I didn't have it when I needed it in life.
What good will it be now that I am dead? (24)

In most of Mda's plays, he uses a small cast and his characters are often marginal or alienated people, except in *Dark Voices Ring*, in which Mda without accepting or rejecting alienation, asks to combat it (Horn xxvi). Mda has also been called the South African Brecht (qtd. in Horn, xxvi) because of his didacticism, and because he is able to simultaneously instruct and entertain, and to call the audience's attention to questioning and analyzing the problems presented in the play. Andrew Horn adds that Mda shows a "conjunction of Beckett, Brecht and the rich story-telling performance traditions in Africa" (xxvii).

Fatima Dike has also written several plays. The first one, *The Sacrifice of Kreli* (Cape Town, 1976)²⁰ was produced during the Soweto uprising and is about black resistance to colonialism. The play examines the life of a South African king who goes onto self-exile instead of being enslaved by the British. This theatrical piece not only includes African traditional elements, but it was also originally written in poetic verse in Xhosa and translated into English. Some of the passages were literally translated so that the rhythm of the Xhosa language could be maintained for non-Xhosa audiences (*Sacrifice* 28). Dike's original writing of the play in Xhosa is an important factor to be considered, for most black South African playwrights

write in English, combined with other African languages and Afrikaans. By writing in Xhosa and reconstructing a historical war which actually occurred in the Cape, Dike is not only reaffirming a historical deed but also the linguistic richness of the language of her people. In this manner, content and form are harmoniously brought together presenting alternatives for a future. This future is symbolically expressed in the sacrifice shown in the play which, according to the playwright, means "there is a way out" (message brought from their ancestors) (*Sacrifice* 24), as it is expressed in the last lines pronounced by Kreli, the King:

CREIL: Sanduela, go and tell our people that our sun is rising. (*Sanduela goes out*). Neliswa, go and tell our people to plough their burnt fields and build their fallen walls. (*Neliswa goes out*). Nonqaba, go and tell our people we will work and grow. (*Nonqaba goes out*). And now, Mevana my son, go and tell our people we will defend the honour of what we are. (79)

As a woman, Dike's social and political consciousness rising out of a child's rape and brutal murder must be noticed. Her second play, *The First South African* (Cape Town, 1977), is based on a true story which explores the issue of racial identity. It tells the story of Rooi, a white boy (but considered to be colored for his father was white and his mother black) who now lives with his black mother and her black stepfather in a black township; but, according to the Group Areas Act, a colored person cannot live in a black area, no matter whether that person is someone's close relative. In her play, Dike presents the courageous mother Freda who fights ceaselessly for her son, in spite of the problems caused by her son's skin color even within their own township. In this regard, Freda's husband, comments about her:

AUSTIN: [She] always says she will fight for the flesh of her flesh.
(*First* 3)

On the contrary, Rooi's step-father, and Rooi himself, are presented as weaker personalities. The father, Austin, is a passive figure who accepts his life condition without questioning it or trying to rebel against it.

The play commences with a presentational style in four monologues. Dike's characters are devised with a complexity not observed in plays such as Maponya's *Gangsters* or Mtwa, Ngema and Simon's *Woza Albert!*, in which the characters serve mainly as types to comment on a social situation under the system of apartheid. Dike's depiction of the township people is closer to Manaka's *Egoli*, in which Manaka exhibits the contradictions existing in the characters of John and Hamilton, so that the audience may

question their actions and deeds. The structure of Dike's play, however, approaches Mda's plays in which there is a plot line.

Dike exposes the complexity enclosed in the township characters she presents, as well as in the system that rules South Africa. She unveils the lies and exhibits the contradictions, the absurdity of the South African laws and the self-inflicting pain within the black community. Thus, when Rooi's friend Max is asked by Austin what would he say Rooi is, he shows the confusion South African system has created in people and their identities:

MAX: Well . . . I mean . . . I . . . I've never really thought of him as anything else but a person . . . well . . . in the beginning . . . I saw him as white . . . but when I got used to him . . . really I don't put any name on him now . . . well . . . I don't say he is white, and I don't say he is a Xhosa . . . he's just himself . . . but I do feel that he is a Xhosa, especially when other people say that he is white.

AUSTIN: You see, that's it! We don't say he is a Xhosa or anything, he's our son. I mean, to us he can carry a pass for all we care. Now the law wants him to pieces, to them he's stupid to remain here with us. But there's one thing that this government of Cape Town forgets, and that is, home is home, even if it is as small as a toilet. (15)

The play remains open for the audience to decide what to do about their destiny which is in their hands; they have a responsibility to which they need to commit in shaping their destiny instead of letting it be in the hands of a twisted justice or God. A reevaluation of their past and present is needed in order to take an action and to construct their future.

C) *Individual Playwrights: Emphasis on the Performance of Text*

The 1976 Soweto uprising initiated another phase in theatre. Most of the theatre groups that had openly aligned with Black Consciousness were banned with the BCM in 1977. Matsemela Manaka²¹ and Maishe Maponya belong to the theatre that originated the new phase of black theatre in South Africa. Both playwrights, as mentioned earlier, consider black theatre to be the theatre of the dispossessed. In 1981, at a lecture in the University of Natal, Manaka spoke of this new theatre: "Our theatre is here to search for the truth about the history of the dispossessed and see how freedom can be accomplished. 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" (qtd. in Larlham 86). Both Manaka and Maponya consider that as artists they need to commit completely to the struggle for liberation through their plays. Both are poets who have successfully combined their theatrical skills with their poetic

style. In their search for appropriate and meaningful expression of their thoughts; they have chosen as well to fuse different languages such as Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu and English.

Acting skills are strongly emphasized, especially by Manaka. He believes that "masking or nonmasking, an actor's life on stage should draw the audience within the writer's page of thought." In other words, "it is the actor's business to let the audience realise that acting is a language of life: that theatre of drama is drawn from life." He quotes Brecht and Grotowski to affirm that there can be theatre without written text, but not without the actor, and adds that "bad writing does make bad theatre but it stands the chance of being made better because of good acting" ("Fate" 16A). More than African-Americans, black South African playwrights and artists seem to have placed stronger emphasis on acting skills over the written text.

Manaka's *Egoli, City of Gold* (written in 1978)²² is one of the plays which most intensely conveys a mastery of theatrical language as it illustrates the conditions suffered by black South Africans. The term *Egoli* refers to Johannesburg. This piece is a presentation of the lives of two migrant workers who escape from prison through a series of scenes which range from realistic everyday experiences to dreamlike sequences, mimed work scenes and flash backs. In his attempt to reach a black audience, Manaka depicts how black South Africans are enslaving and destroying themselves and their own community by exercising irresponsible deeds (i.e., excessive drinking, rape of their own women, and lack of consciousness about their history, traditions and present situation in South Africa). However, through the only two characters that perform this piece, Manaka also shows their fiery passion for survival and liberation. He realizes that the lack of education to which blacks are forced induces them to preserve a consciousness lethargy. Consequently, his theatre is an attempt to bring some light to the black South African, compelling her/him to question and change her/his destiny.

Egoli is also a symbol for the imprisonment, nightmares and a hungry earth that is swallowing everybody, not only blacks. The play is a plotless piece which disregards realistic dialogue. Its episodic and improvisational style reminds theatre critic Coplan of Workshop '71 work, in which dream sequences, flashback and "other non-naturalistic techniques [were used] to break the physical barriers between actors and audience" (221). In Manaka's personal case, Grotowski's concept of theatre has helped him develop his own technique which emphasizes the traditional elements of African theatre. *Egoli* is to be performed on an almost bare and open stage (as is *Survival*), around which not more than two hundred people should be seated (2). The set creates an intimate and close relationship between audi-

ence and actor. Furthermore, the idea of the circle symbolizes togetherness, need that is emphasized throughout the performance.

Additionally, *Egoli* could not be done without a great mastery of acting skills. Gesture, sounds made by the actors and the miming of different situations are fundamental in the performance of the piece. As examples of the tremendous skills required from the actors is John and Hamilton's miming their work in the mine:

The mine sequence is mimed with sound effects made by the men. They make the drilling, noises and work in harmony. Each pulls the drill out. Kicks his spade into his hand using the back of the spade as a lever, clears the hole for the dynamite stick. The placing of the stick by the blaster is assumed, as the miners would do that. (22)

Another example where a tremendous mastery is required from the actor occurs almost at the end of the play. Referring to John, who is getting drunk, the stage direction specifies:

He turns on the music he really likes on his gram MbaQanga. He dances to it drinking all the time. He sings and burps. He spills some beer down his bare chest and scoops it off his chest into his mouth. He then becomes quite ill. Staggeres forward and finally vomits on the stage floor. He then collapses into his vomit. (25)

It is the accumulation of stage images, sounds, lighting, a few props transforming into different objects, dancing, singing and symbolism conveyed by all these elements, that creates a new language to transmit Manaka's political and social purpose.

The songs integrated in *Egoli* usually comment on black South African's living conditions and/or are a cry for freedom, such as the following sung in one of the South African languages that is translated in the script: "In this country of poverty / Set us free, Almighty / You are the only one who knows / That the truth heals. / . . . Chase away our enemies, / Help the black nation" (20). Music, song and dance are part of their own lives. Music helps them in their struggle for survival as a healer and the necessary support to continue towards their liberation goal. Thus, during the scene in which John and Hamilton help each other break their chain, John keeps singing and he "succeeds in freeing Hammy's end of the chain while the song is in progress" (21). Songs help alleviate the hardships of work.

One of the differences between Manaka's and Maponya's theatre is that Manaka's theatre is more lyrical and metaphorical, whereas Maponya's deals more specifically with facts (Seligsohn 15). For example, Maponya's *Gangsters* (written in 1984)²³ is focused on his own experience as a poet, writer and as an activist who had been in detention. He uses that experience to dramatize Biko's imprisonment, subsequent torture and murder (Mapon-

ya interview). Referring to *Gangsters*, Maponya stated that his play was *theatre in the fist*, like the poetry written by the poet character Rasechaba. In the play the Police Officer, Major Whitebeard, tells Rasechaba, who is held in prison: "We feel your poetry is inflammatory . . . you stand in 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" (63). This reference is reminiscent of African-American writer Larry Neal's words referring to the poem "A Black Art" by African-American writer Amiri Baraka: "Poems are physical entities: fists, daggers, airplanes and poems that shoot guns" (Neal 32). Thus, poetry becomes one of the main characters and liberating tools within *Gangsters* to reach the audience and call for their action.

Although Maponya's work focuses mainly on the specific issues of transmitting the principle of Black Consciousness to his community, he is aware of the exposure that black South Africans have had to Western cultures and forms and asserts that both Western and traditional South African forms are combined in his country. Thus, for example, Maponya himself acknowledges the impact that Brecht's political theatre has operated on his development as an artist. Like Brecht's, Maponya's plays intend to be not dogmatic but didactic in reaching the black audience and make them aware of a situation they needed to change (Maponya interview). Steadman also views Maponya's work in the line of Brecht's aesthetic, in the sense that Maponya's characters do not convey any moral or psychological complexities, "but concerns himself with themes which affect the black working class in general" (497). The characters in Maponya's plays, like those in Brecht's, are types found in their societies rather than characters with an individual and more developed psychology.

In his plays, Maponya, like Brecht, uses a clear didacticism, character types, as well as actors enacting different characters or directly addressing the audience. In *Gangsters*, though, there are two main techniques to engender the Brechtian alienation effect in the audience: flashback and poetry. The torch kindled by Stephen Biko has always been kept lit in Maponya's works. The playwright knew that freedom is in the hands of the people who need to strengthen their solidarity and brotherhood. The distinct message of *Gangsters* is, then, that the martyrs who died, the singers, and the poets are always led "by the people," as Rasechaba asserts (75), and the artist must commit to the dictums and necessities of his/her community.

Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa have also contributed to this new black theatre with a famous piece that toured the United States and Europe in 1980: *Woza Albert!* Both Ngema and Mtwa had been actors in Kente's productions until they decided to continue their work independently and

develop their own skills. Although they collaborated with Barney Simon to create *Woza Albert!*, Ngema and Mtwa have written separate pieces.²⁴ However, this piece contains the same performance techniques and plotless structure they have used in their individual work.

Introducing a new performance element, not used by Manaka nor by Maponya, *Woza Albert!* employs humor, the same method used by African-American playwright Douglas T. Ward to show the absurdities of racism. In the same manner, humor becomes a means of liberation. Black South African actor John Kani insists on the importance of entertainment—humor and laughter—as a significant ingredient in theatre for it makes people have a good time (Kani interview). *Woza Albert!* accomplishes the function of diminishing suffering and its comic elements serve as an excuse to expose the problems created by an absurd system. This theatrical piece; whose title means *Rise Up, Albert!*, refers to Albert Luthuli, a famous civil rights activist and leader who fought against apartheid, and who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1960, dying abroad in 1962. *Woza Albert!* is a satire about the Second Coming of Christ (called Morena in the play), who lands in South Africa. This piece discusses South Africa as a Christian country. The arrival of Christ becomes an excuse to voice blacks' situation in South Africa under the evils of apartheid.

Ngema insists on how Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* and Grotowski's acting techniques inspired their work. Mtwa and Ngema practiced Grotowski's exercises. Furthermore, in the United States Ngema met Chicano playwright and theatre/film director Luis Valdez,²⁵ who told him about his Teatro Campesino, and African-American writer Amiri Baraka. Out of this experience he created his next play, *Asinamali!* Ngema's attempts to educate both blacks and whites (Ngema interview). If Mtwa is a singer and a dancer, Ngema is a well-known musician, who used to play in a band in Zululand, and his father was a great storyteller (Ngema interview). Mtwa and Ngema's background is reflected in their play, in which song, dance and music are an integral part. Like Manaka's *Egoli*, *Woza Albert!* is firmly based on Mtwa and Ngema's mastery of acting skills, as noticed by Manaka: "Because of good acting in Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema's *Woza Albert!* the audience are convinced when the two actors portray two white policemen looking for Morena [Christ], who was apparently walking on the sea." In addition, their masking, combined with good acting, says Manaka, makes people believe the characters portrayed are white ("Fate" 16A).

All the musical sounds, as well as train, sirens, helicopter sounds are created by the two actors themselves. Lighting equally transforms the stage into different places, time of the day and mood. In the twenty-one scenes that compose the play, the two actors switch roles continuously, enacting

all sorts of different characters—men, women, young and old people or White characters—and, at times, they create invisible characters to whom they speak. This structure creates a fast pace, moving from one scene to another, from one place to another without interruption, from a street with vendors, to a brickyard, a cell in Robben Island, a barber shop, or a train. An example of this fast pace observed through the actor's transformation given in the stage directions at the very beginning of the play:

On the first note of their music, overhead lights come on, sculpting [the actors]. They become an instrumental jazz band, using only their bodies and their mouths—double bass, saxophone, flute, drums, bongos, trumpet, et. c At the climax of their performance, they transform into audience, applauding wildly.

Percy stands, disappears behind the clothes rail. Mbongeni goes on applauding. Percy reappears wearing his pink nose and a policeman's cap. He is applauding patronisingly. Mbongeni stares at him, stops applauding. (3–4)

These fast transformations create the rhythm of the play.

The theatrical language of mime, songs, music, lighting and bare stage are a symbolic expression of survival for black South Africans under apartheid. Their survival depended on their own personal means, for they lacked financial resources and adequate living conditions, which is reflected in their *poor theatre*, using Grotowski's term. The emphasis and foundation of the theatrical communication in most of the plays written under apartheid by black South African artists is on the actor's skills to transform the stage into a rich combination of elements which create a large variety of places, characters and situations. Furthermore, the combination of African traditional and Western elements parallels the issues raised in the dialogues maintained by the different characters throughout the plays. Past and present are combined so that the audience can analyze their present situation. In the case of *Woza Albert!*, Morena, the Savior, in his Second Coming, brings with him a biblical history that has been distorted for apartheid's benefit, and he reconstructs it. This reconstruction of history, the disruption of false myths, and exposition of the cruel reality blacks were living in South Africa during the years of apartheid follows the social and artistic commitment adopted by black playwrights in their indefatigable artistic struggle against the many different manifestations of the system of apartheid. □

Notes

¹ Western plays were also produced in both countries and performed in black communities, among them plays by Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Antonin Artaud, Jean Genet and Bertolt Brecht.

² For further information on similarities and differences regarding the Black Movement in the United States and in South Africa, see Olga Barrios, *The Black Movement in the United States and in South Africa: A Comparative Approach*. Diss. U of California—Los Angeles. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1992.

³ Apartheid in Afrikaans means "separation." This term was adopted to refer to the political system that ruled South Africa since 1948. By apartheid, the South African government meant racial segregation in public facilities (Mixed Amenities Act), segregation of suburbs (Group Areas Act), prohibition of interracial marriages (Immorality Act), the establishment of the homelands—to which a large percentage of the black community was restricted—and the registration of people by racial group (Population Registration Act). Individuals were classified as Black, Colored, Indian or White, considering and imposing the supremacy of whites upon the rest of the people living in the country. In 1990 Nelson Mandela, member of the National African Congress (NAC), was released after having been held in prison for more than twenty years, and in 1994 blacks voted in South Africa's first non-racial election; the same year, Mandela became South Africa's President.

⁴ Something similar occurred in the United States during the 1960s through 1970s when many African-Americans decided to reject their Christian names and adopt African ones, such as playwrights Amiri Baraka and Ntozake Shange.

⁵ In June 1976, the youth of Soweto demonstrated against the South African government's intention to establish Afrikaans as the official language in the country. During the demonstration and due to the police shooting against them, a large number of children were killed.

⁶ Two important recordings were James Brown's "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud," and Nina Simone's "To Be Young, Gifted and Black."

⁷ Groups such as the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON), founded in 1969 and aborted in 1973; People's Experimental Theatre (PET), founded in 1973 in the Indian location of Lenasia, outside Johannesburg, ended with the assassination of the author of *Shanti*, performed by the group; or Workshop '71, whose members decided to remain abroad after worldwide tour, due to continuous persecution by the Police Security. For further information on these groups, see Orkin.

⁸ Playwrights Manaka and Maponya, as many of the black artists of that time, referred to the South African black community as *Africans* in order to differentiate themselves from whites and white rule, and to vindicate a culture that was different from that of Occident.

⁹ For further information on this playwright, see Nick Visser and Tim Couzens's introduction, *H.I.EDhlomo: Collected Works*, ed. by Visser and Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan P, 1985.

¹⁰ Gibson Kente was perhaps the most popular black South African playwright during the 1970s. Duma Ndlovu states that Kente has been widely regarded as the "father of theater in South Africa" (xx). Among his first political plays are *I Believe* and *How Long* (1973)—the latter one being a great success, but soon banned from the performances that were taken place in Soweto. Another successful play by Kente was *Too Late*, first performed in 1975, and also banned a month after it opened.

¹¹ Opinion stated by Mrs. EKhezwayo, Organizing Secretary of the Y.W.C.A. in the Transvaal, in *S'ketsh* (Summer 1972): 15.

¹² Among some of the most well-known plays written by Fugard are *No-Good Friday* (South Africa, 1958), *Hello and Goodby* (Johannesburg, 1965), *The Blood Knot* (BBC Television production, United Kingdom, 1967), *Boesman and Lena* (South Africa, 1969), *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (Royal Court Theatre, London, 1974), and *Master Harold and the Boys* (Yale Repertory Theatre, 1982).

¹³ Mango Tshabangu referred to *uNosilimela's* theatrical achievement in the following terms:

uNosilimela has transcended the gulf of centuries into a twentieth century sensibility. It has shown that myths and legends can be used to back up plays of the moment. If *uNosilimela* has really succeeded, then black theatre of today is on the edge of entrenching a great concept. This is the kind of theatre that can galvanise the people into participation and action. A theatre whose originality makes blacks proud of their origins. This is one of the main aims of Black theatre. If this aim is to be realised, then Black Theatre will have to be fashioned after the theatre of *uNosilimela*. (Tshabangu)

Incomplete performances of *uNosilimela* had been given in Soweto early 1973, when Mntwa contacted Workshop '71 for assistance. This theatre group showed great enthusiasm for Mntwa's theatrical piece and collaborated in later productions of the play. Then, the play—as it appears published—was staged at the Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1974. Due to the great difficulties that implied the staging of the play (hire of timber and scaffolding and a large cast), the play stopped being performed by early 1975.

¹⁴ See Es'kia Mphahlele's comments (during an interview) on the use of European languages, in Egejuru 92–96.

¹⁵ *Mdali* in Zulu means creator.

¹⁶ *Survival* was performed in many black areas in South Africa, and in 1977 it toured the United States, being staged in colleges and African-American Centers

production presented by Workshop '71 in 1975 was *uHlanga*, which ended its run at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London, 1977. *Survival* was performed in 1976 at the Space Theatre (Cape Town), and then toured the black areas of Cape Town; later, it was performed at the Window Theater, East London, and opened in July 1976 in Soweto.

¹⁷ The title of this play was taken from a protest slogan associated with the women's protest march of 1956, to demonstrate peacefully against the imposition of pass laws on South African black women. This was one of the largest mass gathering of women in South African history.

¹⁸ Hostels are special places where black working men were accommodated in large bedrooms shared with many other mates while they were working away from home. When their wives visited them, they had to sleep with their husbands with no privacy at all.

¹⁹ Among some of the plays written by Mda are *Dark Voices Ring* (Cape Town, 1979), *Dead End* (Soweto, 1979), *The Hill* (Cape Town, 1980) and *The Road* (Ohio University, 1982).

²⁰ Among other plays written by Fatima Dike are *The Crafty Tortoise* (1978), based on an African folk story; *Glass House* (1979), inspired by the 1976 students' uprising in Langa (Cape Town); and *So What's New* (Johannesburg, 1991).

²¹ Matsemela Manaka died recently in a car accident in 1999.

²² Among the plays written by Manaka are *The Horn* (1977), *The Children of Asahi* (1980?), *Pula and Imbumba* (1983), *Toro*, *The African Dream* (1987), and *Goree* (1989).

²³ Among the plays written by Manaka are *The Cry* (1976), *Peace and Forgive* (1977), *The Hungry Earth* (1978), *Umongikazi [The Nest]* (1982), *Umongikazi [The Nurse]* (1983), *Dirty Work* (1984), and *The Valley of the Blind* (1987).

²⁴ Percy Mntwa also wrote *Bopha! [Arrest him!]* in the mid-1980s, about the idea of a black policeman arresting his own people. Mbongeni Ngema wrote *Asinamali!* (1985), and *Sarafina* (1988), a musical that toured the United States. The title of *Asinamali!* was taken from a slogan for a rent strike in Lamontville township in 1983, led by Msizi Dube, that read "ASINAMALI! We have no money and cannot afford high rents" (Ndlovu xxv).

²⁵ Luis Valdez was the founder of El Teatro Campesino in the 1960s in the U.S., created to vindicate the rights of Mexican immigrant workers in the United States.

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