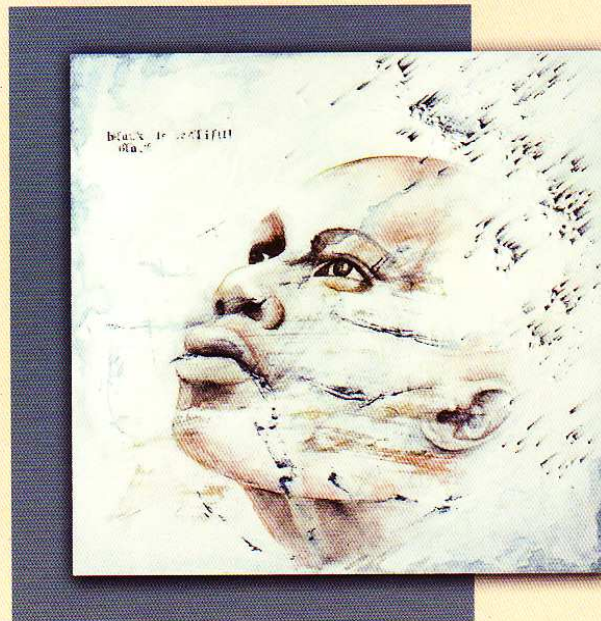


BIBLIOTECA JAVIER COY D'ESTUDIS NORD-AMERICANS

# THE BLACK THEATRE MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN SOUTH AFRICA

OLGA BARRIOS

---



**PUV**

**2008**



*To all African people and African descendants  
and their cultures  
for having brought enlightenment and inspiration into my life*



## CONTENTS

	Pág.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	6
INTRODUCTION .....	9
CHAPTER I From the 1950s through the 1980s: A Socio-Political and Historical Account of the United States/South Africa and the Black Theatre Movement.....	15
CHAPTER II The Black Theatre Movement: Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation .....	47
CHAPTER III The Black Theatre Movement in the United States. Black Aesthetics: Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, and Douglas Turner Ward .....	73
CHAPTER IV The Black Theatre Movement in the United States. Black Women's Aesthetics: Lorraine Hansberry, Adrienne Kennedy, and Ntozake Shange .....	109
CHAPTER V The Black Theatre Movement in South Africa. Black Consciousness Aesthetics: Matsemala Manaka, Maishe Maponya, Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon .....	144
CHAPTER VI The Black Theatre Movement in South Africa. Black South African Women's Voices: Fatima Dike, Gcina Mhlophe and Other Voices .....	173
CONCLUSION .....	193
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	199
APPENDIX I .....	221
APPENDIX II .....	225

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this book has been an immeasurable reward, in spite of the hard and critical moments found throughout its completion. The process of this culmination commenced in 1984 when I arrived in the United States to pursue a Masters Degree in African American Studies for which I wish to thank very sincerely the Fulbright Fellowships Committee. I wish to acknowledge the Phi Beta Kappa Award Selection Committee, whose contribution greatly helped solve my financial adversity in the completion of my work. Additional acknowledgements are due to the Institute of American Cultures and the Graduate Division and Theatre Department at the University of California, Los Angeles for offering me the possibility to accomplish my research in South Africa. I also wish to thank the Afrika Cultural Centre, the Institute of African Studies and the Department of Theatre at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg for their hospitality and immense help in my research. My special and sincere gratitude to James V. Hatch who patiently and kindly allowed me to use the materials of the Hatch-Billops Collection in New York, and who continued to support me throughout the research process.

Very special thanks must be extended to all the theatre artists I interviewed and conversed with both in the United States and in South Africa for their kindness and the time they spent answering my questions. Among these theatre artists and critics I would like to thank very sincerely the following: Amiri Baraka, Fatima Dike, Benjy Francis, John Kani, Adrienne Kennedy, Siphwe Khumalo, Phyllis Klotz, John Ledwaba, Maishe Maponya, Doris Mazibuko, Gcina Mhlophe, Aubrey M. Moalosi, Smal Ndaba, Mbongeni Ngema, Jay Pather, Kriben Pillay, Malcolm Purkey, Ian Steadman, Siphso Sepamla, Barney Simon, Mavis Taylor and Margaret Wilkerson.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Department of Afro-American Studies, its supportive and warm staff and professors, at the University of California, Los Angeles which offered me the great opportunity to be exposed to the richness of African American culture, and especially to Richard Yarborough who always offered me his support, advice and wise criticism. Very special thanks must be expressed to Mel Helstein, Beverly J. Robinson (*in memoriam*) and Carl Mueller for helping and supporting my initiation and growth in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of California, Los Angeles. I wish to thank particularly Beverly J. Robinson for having supervised my work and extend my gratitude to Edward A. Alpers, Henry Goodman and Mazisi Kunene for their continuous support, friendship, advice and availability to offer their help whenever I needed it.

In the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I wish to thank its entire staff who greatly contributed to solve my bureaucratic problems

and strengthened my weak moments with their affection. Additionally, I wish to thank Michael McLain for his support and for permitting me to attend his classes; Meg Wilbur and Lisette Rabinow and all the students with whom I shared their classes, for their spiritual and technical guidance and understanding; Anna Krajewska-Wieczorek and Edit Villarreal for their teaching, continuous support, advice, affection, friendship and concern in moments when I was tumbling down in a country which was foreign to me.

I would like to express particular thanks to the Chicano Studies Research Center staff whose warmth and continuous support throughout the process of my doctoral studies made me feel I was a member of their big family. I also want to thank many friends and colleagues, among them Bonnie Chiu, Marcela Domínguez, María Eugenia Fuenmanyor and Héctor Geffner and Miquel Huguet, for their supportive presence in difficult moments and sheltering affection; the “Gang of Four,” without whom I would not have been able to accomplish my Doctoral degree at UCLA; Batya Casper Laks, whose contagious enthusiasm, passion, generosity and friendship were always stimulating and encouraging; Yolanda García-Reynero, whose warmth, strength and forceful spirit were always cause of admiration and inspiration to me; and, Antonio Jiménez, whose friendship, love and generosity became one of the strongest foundations that supported me in difficult moments of weakness and hopelessness.





## INTRODUCTION

Theatre can't be some random exercise in finger popping. It has to represent the striving of men to try to raise themselves to a new level of thought, and it's not—I mean, we don't talk about theatre down here, or theatre up there as an idle jest but because it is necessary to pump life, blood back into our community—that's what we're talking about.

Amiri Baraka<sup>1</sup>

I am here between the voices of our ancestors  
and the noise of the planet.  
between the surprise of death and life;  
I am here because I shall not give the  
earth up to non-dreamers and earth molesters;  
I am here to say to you:  
my body is full of veins  
like the bombs waiting to burst  
with blood.

...

I am here, and my breath/our breaths  
must thunder across this land  
arousing new breaths. new life.

Sonia Sanchez<sup>2</sup>

The 1960s throughout the 1980s have been, with no doubt, the most vibrant and prolific decades in Black Theatre both in the United States and in South Africa. A great number of plays burst out like a forceful waterfall of red blood—expression of a long time-held rage and expression of life. Houston A. Baker, Jr., has observed the significance of the sixties and seventies for African Americans:

At no time in the history of black America have so many spokesmen dedicated themselves in serious and informed ways, to a particular set of meanings and values. These men and women altered the existing face of society in a way that makes it impossible to begin the journey back as though blacks have always rushed eagerly into harbors of the white world. The texts of the sixties and seventies constitute a level of discourse where functional oppositions are readily observable.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Amiri Baraka, First Pan-African Cultural Festival, 1969, in Algiers, in *Black Theatre* 5 (1969):30.

<sup>2</sup> Sonia Sanchez, "Reflections After the June 12th March for Disarmament," in *homegirls & handgrenades*, Sanchez (New York and Chicago: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1984) 68.

<sup>3</sup> Houston A. Baker, Jr., *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 1983) 131.

The Black Theatre Movement emerged after being gestated for almost three centuries and activated by the Black Power Movements in North America and by the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. The plays of the Movement were breathing and pulsating so vigorously because its authors had something important to utter as the Black community's representatives. The Black community became the protagonist of the new theatre. Audience recovered its traditional and pivotal role as part of the theatrical event—a stylistic element almost non-existent in modern Western theatre.

About two decades earlier, Western theatre artists, such as Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht, had already commenced to question the validity of Western theatre and proposed the need to include new elements, which would eventually give birth to a new aesthetics. Artaud and Brecht observed the need to create a new theatrical language and asserted the importance to engage the theatre audience in a dialectical process with the action taking place on the stage. In the same line, the artists of the Black Theatre Movement realized not only the passivity played by the audience in the past but also the passive role imposed on the Black community in a society governed by White rule. These artists initiated a double task: the restoration of theatre audience and Black culture from the death imposed on them by Western imperialism—both political and intellectual. The Black Theatre Movement exploded as a spring of life freed by a new aesthetics created by artists who were committed to and voiced their community's needs.

Geneviève Fabre accurately points out that the emergence of African American theatre is “above all a sociocultural phenomenon and must be examined as such.”<sup>4</sup> Fabre's assertion can be equally extended to the emergence of Black theatre in South Africa, and this is the approach that is ensued in this study. If, as already observed, audience/Black community and culture were enhanced by Black artists, consciousness became the main didactic goal that needed to be taken to the Black community, so that they could abandon their passive role and take action. In Fabre's opinion, African American theatre in the Harlem Renaissance did not give much attention to the African American community and “to the development of a cultural politics on its behalf,” asserting that the question of “links between theatre and community seems to have been largely ignored.”<sup>5</sup> Fabre remarks that in the sixties it was the Black community at large, the people of the streets, upon whom main attention was focused; whereas in the Harlem Renaissance, at an aesthetic level, the middle-class rejected the popular forms of expression and there was a “near absence of black audience.” Moreover, the Black elite did not offer support to the African American artist.<sup>6</sup>

Fabre believes that the Black Theatre Movement of the sixties in the United States that brought African American intellectuals back to their community is best understood

in light of the experiences of the postwar generation, the “uprooted” generation. The international climate of war left blacks without the solid, though restricted, influence of the community. They were drawn further away from ethnic concerns, cut off from the past and a knowledge of their history, and set adrift in a nationwide no-man's land where their place was poorly defined or in a minority identity that continued to elude them.

---

<sup>4</sup> Geneviève Fabre, *Drumbeats, Masks and Metaphor: Contemporary Afro-American Theatre* (Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London (England): Harvard University Press, 1983) 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

In 1965 the younger generation was caught up in an outburst of violence that hit the black community harder than any of the wars in which people had fought. Not since the Harlem riots of 1935 had such a crisis swept through northern urban ghettos. Faced with explosive discontent and the repression that followed, the young artist and intellectual was forced to reexamine the relation of his art to the community.<sup>7</sup>

It was in the sixties that the dialectical relationship of theatre with its audience was restored. The Black Theatre Movement in the United States was geared towards a specific audience, which did include neither Whites nor the African American bourgeoisie—which had assimilated the values of the dominant society. The theatre of the sixties envelops both the condemnation of bourgeois complicity with White America and the celebration of its ultimate redemption.<sup>8</sup>

African American theatre has had a long history that could be traced from the times of slavery; and the church, as a formalizing agent, has played an indelible part that has strengthened its development.<sup>9</sup> Fabre believes that the theatrical character of religious services has not been adequately analyzed, stating that “all elements of the future dramaturgy are there.”<sup>10</sup> In the past, the church had offered the shelter where African Americans were able to perform, combining improvisation and ritual. The religious services evoked audience participation and forms of theatricality that theatre could utilize.<sup>11</sup> The theatre that was performed in the plantations, the minstrels, the short-lived African Grove Theatre of the turn of the century, the musicals of the 1920s—and more concretely *Shuffle Along* in 1921, the Black theatres that were opened in Harlem during the Renaissance, the Lafayette Theatre Players and the Federal Theatre Project in the 1930s, Langston Hughes’ the Harlem Suitcase Theatre (1937) and finally Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, awarded the Critics Circle Award in 1959, offer an idea of the long tradition and development of African American theatre. Continuing with this legacy, the sixties enhanced the background necessary to witness another renaissance, this time with a more clearly political and community-oriented commitment as the goal undertaken by its artists.

Unfortunately, the history and tradition of Black South African theatre still needs wider research. It has been only recently that Tim Couzens has brought to light the contribution of H.I.E. Dhlomo, born in 1910, and his work—including his plays<sup>12</sup>—asserting its significance in South African literature written in English. Other than Dhlomo’s plays, Black theatre in South Africa commenced to occupy a prominent place in the sixties with the musicals that followed the example of *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera* in 1957. Athol Fugard’s plays took a turn from the musicals and presented a new theatre which greatly influenced the subsequent birth of the Black theatre that paralleled the Black Consciousness Movement.

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> See Beverly Robinson, “Historical Arenas of African American Storytelling,” in *Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African American Storytelling*, Goss and Barnes, eds. (New York: Simon and Schuster/Touchstone, 1989) 211-216.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Tim Couzens, *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H.I.E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985). And H.I.E. Dhlomo *Collected Works*, Visser and Couzens, eds. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985).

The political situation under which Black and Colored people are forced to live in South Africa under apartheid has definitely hindered the work to be carried out by scholars and writers to restore the history and tradition of Black South African theatre. The reconstruction of a past, of an African culture, was precisely the endeavor undertaken by the playwrights of the Black Theatre Movement, closely following the goals and ideology divulged by the Black Consciousness Movement, under Stephen Biko's leadership. Although the Black Consciousness Movement reached its peak in the seventies, it had begun to be gestated by the end of the 1960s.

The 1960s was an internationally significant decade. Carl G. Jung asserts that in the late part of this decade, the anima (or feminine side of male's personality) in the males and the animus (or masculine side of female's personality) in the female "began to accelerate with greater acceleration. At the same time the persona started to undergo a deflation, and the expansion of consciousness became an aim of the generation born during the postwar years."<sup>13</sup> Jung claims that a system of personality proceeds to individuate only when it becomes conscious.<sup>14</sup> This need to achieve an individual and collective consciousness in order to initiate a self-reflection and self-determination journey was observed in the writers of these decades. Only through personal self-reflection—closely following Frantz Fanon's theories applied to Third World cultures—could the artist reach her/his audience and help conscientize them about the situation and active role they should learn to play within the Black community.

Consequently, the artists regarded their art as a committed endeavor that needed to be taken to and help their community to stand up and abandon their submissiveness, asserting their cultural and historical values. Furthermore, in the process of the Black community's conscientization, the artists found indispensable to examine and restore their history and cultural values, which had been belittled, denied and/or suppressed by the imposition of Western cultural and artistic values. The artist, then, took a political stand that was inextricably connected to the commitment to and creation of her/his art.

Black theatre artists were determined to abandon their silenced position and voice with energy and power the beauty of Blackness. They were determined to destroy the falseness and simplicity of stereotypes created by White society and to show the complexity of their real selves. And they were determined as well to lead their community out of darkness, reassuring the history of their past; a past that needed to be examined under the light of their present historical moment in order to formulate their future. Hope and celebration of Blackness, then, together with the activation of the audience's consciousness, became pivotal elements of a new theatre aesthetics that totally rejected the demarcations dictated by Western artistic parameters. African Americans artists spoke of the creation of Black Aesthetics; Black South Africans spoke of Black consciousness and the Theatre of the Dispossessed (analyzed in Chapters four and six of this study respectively).

In contrast to the Black Theatre Movement that emerged in North America, whose targets and artistic goals were registered in a written manifesto, the targets and artistic goals of the Black Theatre Movement in South African were not transferred into a written

---

<sup>13</sup> Calvin S. Hall and Vernon J. Nordby, *A Primer of Jungian Psychology* (New York and Scarborough (Ontario): New American Library, 1973) 88.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

pronouncement. The continuous censorship and imprisonment of theatre artists—actors, directors and playwrights, has restricted any official written declaration that belonged to the Movement as such. Every single attempt to establish a theatre group or movement was continuously hampered by the South African government. This study, however, will prove that, in spite of the absence of a written declaration formulating a theatre movement, the playwrights and their works displayed an aesthetic, commitment and goals that were shared by most of the plays that appeared in the seventies and eighties.

Only a short article by Cedric Callaghan written in 1983, entitled “Black Theatre in South Africa: Links with the United States,”<sup>15</sup> has lightly questioned the possibility of a comparative analysis between the theatre of these two countries. When examining the socio-political background closely, it can be easily noticed that a very similar historical background had sowed the seed out of which the Black Theatre Movement grew and flourished in both countries. In addition, although much discussion has arisen about whether the use the term Black theatre is appropriate, Black artists have clearly demonstrated the existence of differentiated cultural attributes that characterize their community, both in the United States and in South Africa. The historical parallelisms—i.e., racism and White rule—between both countries are briefly displayed and examined in Chapter one.

This study will analyze the different elements comprised in Black plays both in North American and in South Africa. From Black theatre emerged a new aesthetics that is examined here as the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation. The Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation—examined in Chapter two—embraces a heterogeneity that expresses the unique and particular components which have shaped Black theatre in the United States and in South Africa. By self-affirmation, it is understood that a writer, as representative of her/his community, is asserting the specific characteristics that distinguish her/his culture and her/his gender. Moreover, theatre, as a public genre became precisely the appropriate catapult to make public and voice the existence of a culture that had been continuously undermined by White rule and models. Furthermore, theatre was simply the continuation of a long African oral tradition which the writers were familiar with as part of their African background. This study, however, will demonstrate not only the relationship but also the differences existing between the Black theatre works that emerged out of two different countries. Black theatre in both countries have comprised the combination of African and/or African American and Occidental components in a dialectical relationship with their historical time period—i.e., their socio-political and cultural milieu.

This study also illustrates the necessity to continue with further research to provide more theatrical theories that incorporate new formulas with which Black theatre can be analyzed. It is the genuine combination of elements expressed in the plays of the Black Theatre Movement that needs to be approached from a different critical perspective, other than the Western models created to be applied to Western works. The playwrights of the Movement proposed a new aesthetics that they tried to apply into their own works. Most theorists who examined those plays, however, did not really define the lines of their critical approach. Most of the plays were simply considered agit-prop or protest plays, without scholars having conducted a more profound investigation of the theatrical elements plunged into

---

<sup>15</sup> Cedric Callaghan, “Black Theatre in South Africa: Links with the United States?,” in *Black American Literature Forum* 17, 2 (Summer 1983).

them. Although much more expansive critical trends were developed in the eighties to approach African American literature, especially fiction, there is still an eminent need of devising new methods that help us explore the validity of African American theatre from a more theoretical stand. With regard to Black South African theatre, scholars were encouragingly challenged to find more theoretical approaches that seem to have been lightly activated by the end of the eighties.

A significant difference in the development of the Movement in both countries is acknowledged in this study. On the one hand, African American theatre included plays by men and women playwrights, even if the women were not aligned with the Black Theatre Movement. This significant factor takes us to think also of a different aesthetics developed by male and female playwrights. On the other hand, Black South African theatre contains a majority of men playwrights as well as actors and directors. Only Fatima Dike's work received considerable attention in the seventies, and Gina Mhlophe's plays began to be produced at the end of the eighties.

This study establishes the differences existing in the aesthetics developed either by male or female playwrights. Female playwrights, using their personal experiences, widened and completed a simplistic view and broke with the old stereotypes observed in the male playwrights' works of the Movement. These women playwrights offered a more complex picture of their society by voicing the female experience, absent in plays by male playwrights. It is necessary to consider this difference when approaching plays written by males that include a woman's voice. This study asserts that a feminist consciousness grew out of the parameters activated by the Black Power and Consciousness Movements. Black female playwrights manifested a double consciousness that embraced their cultural background as well as their gender. Plays written by African American and Black South African women playwrights are examined in Chapters four and six respectively under the light of a female aesthetics.

## CHAPTER I

### From the 1950s through the 1980s: A Socio-Political and Historical Account of the United States/South Africa and the Black Theatre Movement

I used to imagine South Africa somewhere hidden as deep as the most unspeakable fears that I knew as a child . . . South Africa used to seem so far away. Then it came home to me. It began to signify the meaning of white hatred here. That was what the streets and the suits and the ties covered up, not very well . . . South Africa was how I came to understand that I am not against war; I am against losing the war.

June Jordan<sup>1</sup>

For June Jordan the fundamental issue when contrasting South Africa and United States history is the war against racism. An African American writer and scholar, Jordan expresses her feelings regarding the 1980s, twenty years after the Civil Rights Movement. There are significant parallelisms and differences in the historical background of both countries. The first colonial settlement in the United States occurred in 1607 and Africans were transported to work in the southern plantations as early as 1619. In South Africa, after the first European settlement in 1652, Africans, together with a substantial importation of slaves as early as 1658, became the primary labor force to work the land and the mines. However, the system of apartheid was not firmly implemented by the South African government until 1948; and by 1961 an official Afrikaner<sup>2</sup> dominated Republic was established and maintained until 1994. The oppression of Black South Africans has been likened to the pre-Civil Rights segregation of African Americans, as examined by some historians. In fact, there are several comparative analyses on the development of North American and South African history and political thought. Among these surveys is that of George M. Fredrickson's who, like Jordan, identifies racism as a major force in the two countries' historical experiences.

---

<sup>1</sup> June Jordan, *On Call: Political Essays* (Boston: South End Press, 1985) 17.

<sup>2</sup> Afrikaners are descendants from the Dutch. The Afrikaner government was the official one during the years of apartheid, although both Afrikaans and English were the official languages at the time. During 1990 and 1991 President (Afrikaner) De Klerk and Nelson Mandela were negotiating the end of apartheid till democratic elections took place in 1994 with Nelson Mandela as South African President.

In *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, Fredrickson suggests there are several major issues contributing to racism. Among them is White supremacy which “refers to the attitudes, ideologies and policies associated with the rise of blatant forms of Whites or European dominance over ‘nonwhite’ populations.” He adds that White supremacy implies “systematic and self-conscious efforts to make race or color a qualification for membership in the civil community.”<sup>3</sup> Fredrickson asserts that the affinity between both countries lie upon large similarities that include White ideologies, policies and attitudes; and these elements have contributed to the enforcement of more rigorous and self-conscious forms of racial domination.<sup>4</sup> Fredrickson further affirms that what precipitated the slave trade in the Southern United States and the South African Cape was the “crucial assumption that nonwhites were enslavable while Europeans were not.” There are differences, however, when considering South and Central America, what Fredrickson calls “the New World.” On the one hand, “the New World” pattern of race relations developed in terms of color. On the other hand, in the United States and South Africa, a more elaborated hierarchy developed based on color and class—each subdivided into status.<sup>5</sup>

After slavery was abolished in North America and South Africa, other differences can be established between the North American and South African governments in their definition and/or legalization of the color bar. South African Whites class with any person that “can conceivably pass as White,” whereas in the United States black people class with anyone who “conceivably passes as a [Black].” On the other hand, in the United States there has not been a legalized color bar as it developed in South Africa, where anyone was explicitly forbidden from practicing an occupation or a trade because of race.<sup>6</sup> The North American color bar existed not because of a requirement from the government, but rather because of its passive role in prohibiting the discriminatory practices exercised by trade unions and private employers. In South Africa, on the other hand, the enforceability of the color bar emerged because “both employers and white workers had involved the government more actively than their [North American] counterparts.” In the United States, it was not until the significant and militant rise of the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement that legally racial separation and disfranchisement began to collapse.<sup>7</sup>

When examining the political and social situation of Blacks in both countries the “areal aspect of segregation,” too, is important. In South Africa, the areal aspect of apartheid segregation determined where people had a right to live. The nature of segregation in the United States was part of an effort to preserve social hierarchy between racial groups that were intermingling, and to separate them by distinctly designed economical, cultural and territorial boundaries.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> George Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) xi.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, xix.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, 87.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 234.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.



Black resistance against racism and struggle to obtain equal rights has impregnated the history of both North America and South Africa. Black struggle, though, achieved its culmination with the rise of numerous marches for freedom to obtain civil rights which took place during the 1950s in both countries. The black church and the preacher's voice have played a noteworthy role in this struggle. In the United States, the names of two preachers need to be mentioned: the 1963 Nobel Prize winner, Rev. Martin Luther King (supporting a non-violent fight) and Malcolm X (defending Black Nationalism). The work of Martin Luther King can be paralleled with that of Bishop Desmond Tutu (supporting a non-violent struggle) and Albert Luthuli (President of the African National Congress), the 1960 Nobel Prize winner, who, in 1952, organized a Civil Rights Crusade in which thousands of Blacks demonstrated against apartheid in South Africa.

Malcolm X's work, on the other hand, can be compared to that of two other South African political activists: Nelson Mandela and Stephen Bantu Biko. Mandela was released in February 1990 after twenty-five years of imprisonment and has been best known as the leader of the African National Congress. Biko, who became one of the leaders of the South African Student Organization (SASO), was at the front of the Black Consciousness Movement since 1968. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were assassinated in 1965 and 1968 respectively in the United States. Albert Luthuli died in 1967 and Stephen Biko died in 1977 from the wounds caused by torture being kept in prison. In both countries, Blacks have sustained a ceaseless struggle to obtain human rights which oppressive political systems denied them.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND THE BLACK THEATRE MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

### The Freedom Struggle and Black Power

Names such as Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Mary McLeod Bethune, Maria Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, Marcus Garvey, Amy-Jacques Garvey and Josephine Baker, just to cite a few, were among the men and women who had led the struggle for freedom at different moments in history, prior to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. All of them voiced their continuous opposition to a system that deprived them of their human rights. Marcus Garvey and his wife Amy-Jacques Garvey and Maria Sojourner Truth are highly respected examples who asserted Black pride and uttered the importance of their African heritage.

Marcus Garvey was a pivotal figure in the development of Black Nationalism during the Harlem Renaissance. He advocated that Blacks needed power and economic independence from Whites. He promoted an economic investment encouraging African Americans to invest in them and immigrate to Africa. His program (the Universal Negro Improvement Association—UNIA) was designed to raise pride and confidence in Blackness, away from North America.<sup>9</sup> Another key figure in the struggle for freedom was W. E. B. DuBois, well-

---

<sup>9</sup> Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (New York: Rampart Press, n.d.) 18-27.

known philosopher, writer and scholar. He was the founder of the Pan-African Congress in 1917. DuBois advocated the establishment of a planned, communal social system in Black America. According to Robert L. Allen, “implicit in DuBois’ program was a vision of a separate and largely self-sufficient black economy”; and, in addition, DuBois maintained that such a program should be born by the black community itself in North America.<sup>10</sup> The Civil Rights Movement was, then, the outcome of more than three centuries of black resistance, that had been nourished by black political leaders and thinkers such as the ones mentioned above. From 1919 to 1960, there had been a great rash of race riots across the United States. And, in the early 1960s a new black generation found another way to attract national attention: they invented the sit-ins to protest segregation in the schools, being, in Arthur I. Waskow’s own words, “more vigorous and far less violent than the generation of 1919.”<sup>11</sup>

A major move that helped the rise of the Civil Rights struggle occurred in December 1, 1955 when Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to leave her seat. The seat on a public bus was reserved for Whites only and, after her refusal to cede, she was arrested. From that moment onward, a series of marches for freedom emerged, many of which were led by one of the most charismatic and influential figures of this century: Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. King’s non-violent struggle has always been contrasted to that of another charismatic leader, Malcolm X. Although Dr. King and Malcolm X differed in their strategies of how to carry out the struggle for black liberation, by the end of their lives they approached each other’s views. King believed the struggle for freedom had to be done non-violently based on human integrity. Malcolm X, under the auspices of Black Nationalism, believed humanity and humility were different issues and defended an armed struggle as integral to a successful black revolution. A black South African minister and spokesperson against apartheid, Alan Boesak has argued that King was responsible for the “radicalization of black Christianity” and Malcolm X, for the “dechristianization of black radicalism.”<sup>12</sup> Whereas the African American novelist, playwright and philosopher James Baldwin asserts that King gave a new life to the Black church and made a revolutionary gospel to the lives of oppressed people in North America.<sup>13</sup>

The role of the church was essential in the Montgomery bus boycott. Emphasizing the important role that the church has played in the Black community throughout African American history, James A. Colaiaco alleges that the church provided “both a refuge from a hostile white society and a place for political social activities.” Colaiaco unveils the main reasons for it: “Leaders also came from the church for educated black men were often drawn to the ministry. Financially supported by a loyal congregation, the black preacher could afford to remain independent of white society. The black church spawned many leaders of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, from Martin L. King, Jr., and

---

<sup>10</sup> Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1970) 276-277.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur I. Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In, 1919 and the 1960s: A Study in the Connections between Conflict and Violence* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday and Co., 1967) 225.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Boesak, *Coming in out of the Wilderness: A Comparative Interpretation of the Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X* (Kampen, Holland: Kamper Cahiers, no. 28, Uitgegeven Door Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H.Kok, n.d.) 28, 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

Ralph Abernathy to Andrew Young and Jesse Jackson.”<sup>14</sup> The church would equally play a similar role in South Africa by this time, as will be examined later. Both Dr. King and Malcolm X were rooted out of church experiences, and towards the end of their lives, “not much was left of King’s bourgeois life: he was too true to his calling to remain that; and Malcolm did change; he was too honest a man not to admit that.”<sup>15</sup> Both leaders had sown a seed in the minds of African Americans and the struggle was going to be continued.

On the other hand, the 1960s witnessed the birth of a slogan that characterized this decade: Black Power, or the affirmation of a philosophy with strong bases on the theories of earlier African American leaders, writers and scholars. According to James A. Geschwender, Black Power was a development “intermediate between the old civil rights movement and ghetto uprisings . . . The lack of black power meant slavery.” He adds that for many “‘Black Power’ was a slogan and tactic deliberately used to increase morale and *esprit de corps*. It [aided] in the development of a sense of worth and value and [contributed] strongly to the emergence of faith.” Finally, the “Black Power Movement” was anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist.<sup>16</sup> Raymond S. Franklin alleges that Black Power was “neither a separatist nor an integrationist doctrine, and therefore it [was] not directly related to either narrow nationalist formulations of the past nor civil rights ones of the present. It [was] an answer to the Negro dilemma of neither being able to separate nor integrate.” Moreover, he adds “[in] the realm of tactics and goals . . . Black Power [was] becoming increasingly revolutionary, employing both legal and extra-legal tactics. Ultimately it [sought] to resolve the Negro problem in co-racial terms, a proposition which [warranted] serious attention and collaboration.”<sup>17</sup>

Black Power wanted to engage other non-White groups in the same struggle since they considered it a struggle for social progress. As Geschwender points out, Black Power ideology was inevitably socialist for it considered capitalism to be exploitative and any battle against oppression needed to be against capitalism.<sup>18</sup> In this line, Dr. King and Malcolm X shared with Black Power two main fundamentals. First, they saw the need to oppose and change the oppressive system of capitalism. And, second, both leaders coincided with the ideology of black pride and/or black consciousness. In this regard, it is necessary to underscore that black consciousness does not mean inverted racism, as many critics have constantly misunderstood, but a *necessary step towards self-determination*.

The Black Panthers emerged as a branch extending from Black Power. The Panthers adopted the idea of black consciousness and defended not a black nationalism, but a national consciousness. Like the French-Martinican psychoanalyst and social philosopher Frantz Fanon, Panthers also saw a “close connection between a people’s struggle and their

---

<sup>14</sup> James A. Colaiaco, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Apostle of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988) 7.

<sup>15</sup> Boesak, *op. cit.*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> James A. Geschwender, “Black Power,” in *The Black Revolt: The Civil Rights Movement, Ghetto Uprising and Separation*. Geschwender, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971) 200-201

<sup>17</sup> Raymond S. Franklin, “The Political Economy of Black Power.” Geschwender, 222.

<sup>18</sup> Geschwender, 467.

culture.”<sup>19</sup> Fanon’s theories (highly regarded among African, African American and Third World<sup>20</sup> nationalists) expanded the concept of national consciousness, professing that international consciousness lives and grows at the heart of national consciousness and “this two-fold emerging is ultimately only the source of all culture.”<sup>21</sup> He believed that the Third World should unite in the same consciousness struggle, and African Americans were part of it. However, this struggle had to create something that was not an imitation of Europe like the one which had extended itself into the United States: “Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness, and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions . . .” Instead, he proposed to try “to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing triumphant birth . . . If we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries . . . We must work out new concepts.”<sup>22</sup> Fanon actually considered the national revolution needed to be socialist.<sup>23</sup>

The Black Panthers (organized in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton) followed Fanon’s idea of a socialist and international struggle led by the people who were oppressed by imperialism and capitalism. They created educational programs that would help raise consciousness among African Americans.<sup>24</sup> Huey P. Newton, who was Minister of Defense of the Party, pointed out that their party was Marxist-Leninist because they followed “the dialectical method and [they] also [integrated] theory with practice.” And because they used the method of dialectical materialism, they did not expect things to stay the same but to change, for history is change (a concept that would also be defended in the Black Theatre Movement).<sup>25</sup> Newton asserted that his party was about *intercommunalism* “because nations have been transformed into communities of the world.”<sup>26</sup> He perceived that there was no difference between what was happening to the black community in Harlem and the black

---

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Romaric Boxill, “A Philosophical Examination of Black Protest Thought,” Ph. D. Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1971, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Understanding Third World countries as those which are economically underdeveloped and/or under colonial rule.

<sup>21</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973) 248.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 313-316.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> It is important to remember the significance of the Brazilian philosopher and educator, Paulo Freire and his revolutionary theory of education as a practice of freedom addressed towards reality which a person should not fear. Wo/man should seek to transform that reality through fraternity, a brotherhood of spirit. Freire was mainly interested in the process of alphabetization among adults in the poorest areas of Brazil. He began to practice his method on the pedagogy of the oppressed around 1947 in the Northeast of Brazil. To Freire alphabetization was a synonym for consciousness. He considered that education was a reciprocal learning/teaching process between the teacher and the student. He realized the dangers of massification”and brain washing, which was the main result of Western civilization. Wo/man needed to have an active role IN and WITH reality by always questioning it. Freire’s method was applied in South Africa by Biko and other Black Consciousness leaders in the 1970s. See Paulo Freire, *La educación como práctica de la libertad* (México: Siglo veintiuno, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Huey P. Newton, *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Random House, 1977) 16, 25-26.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

community in South Africa, or the black communities in Angola or in Mozambique.<sup>27</sup> Newton appraised the need of an international union against imperialism, as Che Guevara had proclaimed in Latin America, defending the Marxist-Leninist philosophy as well. He defended an international consciousness and fight against international imperialism. Moreover, Guevara perceived the need to transform the individual's mental structures in order to create *the New Man*, an idea that was also spread by the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.<sup>28</sup> Guevara, like Fanon, was also highly respected by the Panthers.

The Black Panthers considered that the church needed some reforms, too. Among them, the church needed particular attention for it should be a community and not an institution. Newton had also the concept that most Pan-Africanist movements aligned with the United States' imperialism, because, in his opinion, they were cooperating to accept the philosophy of *Black oppressing Black*. He supported the people of Africa, though, but in their fight against imperialism.<sup>29</sup> The Black Panthers followed Malcolm X's idea an armed struggle to defend the rights of Blacks as it was justified by Newton: "We are hooked up with the people who are rising up all over the world with arms because we feel that only with the power of the gun will the bourgeoisie be destroyed and the world transformed."<sup>30</sup> Robert Allen also finds a connection between the Third World and some of the people living in the United States, asserting that the Third World "exists just as surely within America as it does across the seas."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, he refers to the African American scholar Harold Cruse who in 1962 declared that from the beginning Blacks had existed as *colonial beings* and that their enslavement coincided with "the colonial expansion of European powers and was nothing more or less than a condition of domestic colonialism. . . Instead of the United States establishing a colonial empire in Africa, it brought the colonial system home and installed it in the Southern States. . ." However, Allen finds a slight difference with people living in Third World countries: "The only factor which differentiates the Negro's status from that of a pure colonial status is that his position is maintained in the 'home' country in close proximity to the dominant racial group."<sup>32</sup> By the end of the 1960s there seemed to be a consensus among back revolutionaries scholars and writers on the relationship between the situation of the African Americans and the peoples of the Third World. Liberation from colonization through self-determination was a common goal pursued by the two.

Among the leaders and liberation groups quoted above, the Black Panthers were probably the only ones who really appraised the need of women's and gay's liberation as part of the same struggle, which did not seem to be part of the manifestoes of the other movements of the 1960s: "We recognize the women's right to be free . . . We know that homosexuality is a fact that exists, and we must understand it in its purest form: that is, a person should have the freedom to use his body in whatever way [s/]he wants."<sup>33</sup> Newton

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Lowy, *El pensamiento del Che Guevara* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> Newton, *op. cit.*, 153.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>31</sup> Allen, *op. cit.*, 284.

<sup>32</sup> Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1968) 76-77.

<sup>33</sup> Newton, *op. cit.*, 153.

insisted that people should not use racist attitudes against people who behave or have ideas other than the established norm. In contrast to the Panthers' philosophy on gender and sexual identity, the philosophy of cultural nationalism that was developed in the 1960s and advocated by most of its very well known writers was extremely chauvinistic and conservative in their views about women. The names of women who participated in the struggle for freedom seemed to have been erased from their records. Even when the Black Theatre Movement arose, a great number of plays originated out of it that did not depict the complexity sheltered in by women. There were theories about Black Theatre and the New Black Man, but nothing was written appraising the black woman's double oppression: her color and her sex. The Black Panthers had been the only ones to identify with and support women and gay liberation movements—the fact that many White women were involved with the Panthers might have contributed to their support.

### The Black Theatre Movement

The Black Theatre Movement in the United States arose parallel to the political and freedom movements of the 1960s. Although Lorraine Hansberry had made the first great contribution with her play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), Amiri Baraka designed the formulations and became the main leader of the newborn Movement. The Black Theatre Movement practiced the philosophy of black consciousness, black liberation and self-determination by establishing new art aesthetics: Black Aesthetics. Amiri Baraka defended the idea that the new revolutionary theatre should force *change*:

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. Black arts is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black Americans. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the Western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology.<sup>34</sup>

Baraka, then, summarized in a few lines the main points established and launched by the Movement: the conjunction of art and community; the philosophy of Black Power; an art created for the specific needs of the African American community; and, a completely different aesthetic that reordered the Western theories filled with racist symbols and stereotypes in their portrayals of blacks.

In order to understand Baraka's theory, it is necessary to remember that throughout the history of African Americans in North America, they have always been depicted as perceived by the Euro-American mind, which completely distorted their image and reduced it to a simplistic portrayal or grotesque caricature. This does not mean that, as examined earlier, there was not a Blacks' resistance against these depictions. Nevertheless, due to the institutional and economic situation that African Americans have been forced to face, they needed to depend on White sponsorship to produce their own works (i.e., in order to depict themselves).

---

<sup>34</sup> Amiri Baraka: *The Kaleidoscopic Torch. A Literary Tribute*, n.a. (New York: Steppington Press, 1985) 165.

The Harlem Renaissance was the first significant period that illustrates an attempt to reconstruct African Americans' identity in the arts. The 1920s and beginning of the 1930s witnessed an explosion of African American music, literature and theatre productions. Nathan I. Huggins agrees with Alain Locke in conceding that "Harlem contributed to a maturity of racial concept" for it encouraged "the new appreciation of folk roots and culture that was part of the spirit of the renaissance."<sup>35</sup> Langston Hughes stands as one of the most important and key influential figures at the time who greatly contributed to depict a more truthful image of the Black community. Apart from the artists, other factors such as the African American immigration wave that flourished after World War I from rural to urban areas, especially to cities, also contributed to this change by shifting the Black image from rural to urban.<sup>36</sup> This immigration highly contributed to the enlargement of the African American community in Harlem that supported the development of Blacks along with Garvey's Movement based upon *Black Pride* and the motto *Black is Beautiful*.

George Fredrickson, however, asserts that it was not until the 1930s and early 1940s that stereotypes about blacks were no longer possible. At the time, for the first time, there were African American writers such as William Attaway and Richard Wright who began to present lower class African Americans "as products of an oppressive environment, discontented victims of racial and economic injustice who expressed their frustration by lashing out violently against the world around them."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Fredrickson emphasizes the importance of the liberal environmentalists that appeared after World War II and who affirmed that the apparent differences between races were the result of environment. This philosophy provided the basis for the Civil Rights and integration movements of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>38</sup>

It is clear, however, that the Harlem Renaissance operated an enormous influence in African Americans' process of self-affirmation whose culmination would be achieved by the Black Theatre Movement of the 1960s. The Black theatre of the Harlem Renaissance that was best known was more a theatre of entertainment, indirectly commenting on social, political, domestic and cultural milieu confronting African Americans.<sup>39</sup> The Black theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, on the other hand, was more committed, political and anti-White. In the 1960s Black theatre, even more than during the Harlem Renaissance, strongly insisted on and praised the existence of another culture that had grown parallel to the Anglo-American: that of African Americans.<sup>40</sup>

Self-recognition and introspection as characteristics of the Black Theatre Movement of the 1960s were necessary and extremely significant achievements in the self-determination

---

<sup>35</sup> Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 304.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>37</sup> George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: A Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972) 329-30.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>39</sup> Eg., the plays of Miller and Lyles, Lew Leslie Productions and the Lafayette Players.

<sup>40</sup> Errol Hill comments on this important fact: "Suddenly the White establishment realized, as never before, that black culture was important. . . . Foundations purses were opened to the tune of several million dollars in support of black theatre across the country. . . . Whereas up to the 1960s scholarly treatises and books about black theatre numbered no more than a score or so, that figure was soon matched in the decade of the sixties and doubled in the seventies." (Errol Hill, "Remarks on Black Theatre History," in *The Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1987): 613).

of African American cultural process. Understanding culture as a process means, according to Lawrence W. Levine in his book *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, that culture is “the product of interaction between the past and present. Its toughness and resiliency are determined not by a culture ability to withstand change, which indeed may be a sign of stagnation not life, but its ability to react creatively and responsively to the realities of a new situation.”<sup>41</sup> Levine’s pivotal point of interaction between the past and present of culture was fundamental in the formation of the new Black Arts Movement. The Movement attempted to recuperate the African American tradition and establish a dialectical relationship between their past and their present, and became the basis of cultural nationalism, of which Baraka was the major spokesperson. In spite of their reactionary views upon the African American woman, cultural nationalism comprised relevant components. A primary writer of the era, Larry Neal, pointed out that the artist needed to create a national consciousness and purpose in order to rise above the Western tradition and create a more humanistic attitude about the “relationship of art and society.”<sup>42</sup>

The aesthetics of the Black Theatre Movement envisioned art as functional. Art and life, according to Neal, were separated in the Western tradition, and for the Movement they needed to be together: “Art and life are . . . integral to each other and since life is change in this cosmological view, art must be change.”<sup>43</sup> Black theatre artists, in their search for a new aesthetic expression, adopted some of the African and African American folk traditions and philosophy—such as ritually being one with the cosmos. Robert Macbeth indicated the significance of ritual: “We’re suggesting that black people have weapons other than white people’s weapons; at that point we’re saying that guns are not necessarily the only means of dealing with difficulties; that one can deal in other things; that there are perhaps spiritual, perhaps mystic things, mystic qualities: the black magic . . .” Ritual became, then, an element intrinsic to and necessary for Black art and artist: “The ritual can not only free black people, but it *can also clarify for [them] their ultimate strengths and power*. I believe that in the ritual there’s a greater sense of power, of force, spiritual current. It is a releasing kind of experience.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Macbeth reinforced the values of ritual in regard to its communion between the audience and the actors. In the ritual there was an effort made by a group of people in using their “spiritual forces toward a kind of object, which is the togetherness, the nation, the nationhood, the Being, the realization, the recognition of the self.”<sup>45</sup> He further clarified that each individual could develop her/his own self by being part of a collective effort—which again strengthened the Movement’s position against Western individualism.

Oliver Jackson, referring to Kuntu Drama, defines the theatre play as “the ritualized context of reality” where the content is the main force. Drama derives its purpose from a cosmic source, “that is, it is defined by man’s role in the cosmos.” Moreover, Jackson

---

<sup>41</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 5. Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Larry Neal, “Cultural Nationalism and Black Theatre,” in *Black Theatre 1* (1968): 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Marvin X, “Interview with Robert Macbeth: the Black Ritual Theatre,” in *Black Theatre 3* (1969): 22. Emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



considers that ethics and aesthetics are intimately related.<sup>46</sup> This theatre, then, acquires a sacred status which reflects the African tradition of communion between religion and art, as Marvin X himself asserted at the time of the Black Theatre Movement: “We make no separation between art and religion, they are One—Everything is Everything. Art is the highest celebration of God, for whom we create, we celebrate the Creator, we acknowledge His power and glory, which is our own.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, theatre consisted of a celebration of both individuals as selves and the community they belonged to. The audience, then, at that time took a much more active role by including it as part of the theatrical experience—as it happened, for instance, in the African tradition and in the Morality plays of the Middle Ages.

A play considered a milestone in the history of the *New Black Theatre* was Jean Genet’s *The Blacks*, first staged in 1958. Mance Williams considers that Genet’s play demonstrated “the power inherent in ritual drama and showed producers that a new White audience had arrived.” *The Blacks* offered a new perspective for “the eventual birth of more radical theatre forms that were to be therapeutic and participatory.”<sup>48</sup> Williams’ assertion about Genet’s great influence on the theatre of the time is certainly true. However, he neither mentions the tremendous input and force that Hansberry (Genet’s contemporary) had in the shaping of the Movement, nor the international inspiration that later playwrights such as the Nigerian Wole Soyinka and South African John Kani, Winston Ntshona and Athol Fugard exerted on the Movement.

Black theatre was perceived as a totality, in the sense that it needed to be a combination of music, art, drama and dance, as Richard Wesley expressed when referring to the theatre performed by the Black group settled in Harlem, The New Lafayette Players.<sup>49</sup> This notion conveyed also the search of a new theatrical language. Paul C. Harrison observes that in Black theatre the “secular evocation of spirit was clearly apparent in black music, paving the way for the poets of the sixties—such as Baraka, Larry Neal, Ted Joans, Henry Dumas, Sonia Sanchez . . .—to explore the use of musical techniques in language.” Besides, Harrison adds that song, which is the “heightened expression of the word,” is implicit in poetic language.<sup>50</sup>

The writers of the 1960s assessed the necessity of a new language that could express their feelings and emotions more forcefully. Ron Karenga asserted that Black art was both form and feeling, but in order to express that feeling, they needed “to break the linguistic straight jacket of [their] master, who taught [them] [her/]his language, so [s/]he could

---

<sup>46</sup> Oliver Jackson, “Preface,” in *Kuntu Drama: Plays of the Afro-American Continuum*, Harrison, ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1974) xi.

<sup>47</sup> Marvin X, “Manifesto: The Black Educational Theatre of San Francisco,” in *Black Theatre* 6 (1969): 34.

<sup>48</sup> Mance Williams, *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s: A Historical-Critical Analysis of the Movement* (Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1985) 13.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Wesley, “On Art Collective,” in *The New Lafayette Theatre*, Folder housed in the Hatch-Billops Collection, [1972?], 1.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Carter Harrison, “Black Theatre in the African Continuum: Word/Song as Method,” in *Totem Voices-Plays from the Black World Repertory*, Harrison, ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1989) xvi.

understand [them], although [blacks] could hardly understand [themselves].”<sup>51</sup> Amiri Baraka expressed the same need in his search for a new language:

Sometimes I try to work out of a *purely emotional language* that sometimes doesn’t even have much to do with English. It has to do with sounds, and silences, and emphasis, and using rhythms in certain ways. I’ve been doing this in poetry . . . We have to get to a language that expresses the thing that we need to have expressed . . . I think it is going to move beyond this language. I think it’s going to be a combination of what we understand as being Black language—the *rhythms*—but making reference to ideas that might not be completely known to us right now . . . The most important language that I’m developing is *the language of the Black man as a conqueror*.<sup>52</sup>

Baraka clearly explains how the need for self-affirmation needs a new language as a main venue for that expression, and he had already created that language in the poetry that is reflected in and has shaped the theatricality of his plays.

It is significant to notice that most of the playwrights who belonged to the Black Theatre Movement in the United States and in South Africa were poets as well. There was a clear continuation of the African oral tradition where poetry and theatre were connected (in the Xhosa and Zulu traditions, for instance, it is customary that the poets perform their poetry).<sup>53</sup> However, even in poetry, the Black Arts Movement rejected abstractions and, consequently, poetry acquired a specific function and action: “No more abstractions. Poems are physical entities: fists, daggers, airplanes and poems that shoot guns,” affirmed Larry Neal referring to Baraka’s “Black Art” poem as a clear example.<sup>54</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, there was an expansion on the idea of Black theatre. Although still faithful to the idea of Black consciousness, it started to approach the Black Panthers’ ideology and found a clear linkage with the arts developed in Third World countries. Regarding the Black Aesthetic, Neal observed that it consisted essentially of an African American cultural tradition; however, this aesthetic “[was] finally, by implication, broader than that tradition. It [encompassed] most of the useable elements of Third World culture.”<sup>55</sup> Douglas Turner Ward believed that by 1968 Black consciousness had ascended in the United States. It was also during this time that Stephen Biko was beginning to lead the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.

The artist’s role in this consciousness movement was in Black Panther Emory Douglas’ opinion a revolutionary one. The revolutionary artist needed “to feel what the people who [threw] rocks and bottles at the oppressor [felt] when [s/]he [drew] about it—so that [s/]he [could] raise their level of consciousness . . . Without being committed to the struggle for liberation the artist could not express revolutionary art at all.”<sup>56</sup> Baraka in the Pan-African Cultural Festival held in Algiers in 1969 also defended the idea of the committed artist. At

---

<sup>51</sup> Maulana Ron Karenga: “On Black Art,” in *Black Theatre* 4 (1969): 10.

<sup>52</sup> Marvin X, “Interview with Amiri Baraka,” in *Black Theatre* 1 (1968): 20-21. Emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> SACHED, “Oral Tradition in Xhosa and Zulu Literature,” as part of a symposium held in Durban, 1985. [Video Tape].

<sup>54</sup> Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” in *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 32.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Emory Douglas, “On Revolutionary Art and Artists,” in *The Black Panther Leaders Speak: Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver and Company Speak Out through the Black Panther Party’s Official Newspaper* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1976) 31.

the same conference, Emory Douglas openly expressed the Black Panthers' rejection of the cultural nationalism defended years earlier in the Black Theatre Movement. Douglas noticed that the Panthers were revolutionary nationalists "with a revolutionary culture, which [transcended] [the African American] community."<sup>57</sup>

Baraka, on the other hand, in a succinct and clear way defined what Black art was by the end of the 1960s. He considered Black art to be collective, functional and committed, and it needed to have a national consciousness<sup>58</sup>. By collective he meant that art should originate in the collective experience of black people; by committed, that art should force change—revolutionary change; and by functional, that it needed to have a function within the black community and especially in the world. Moreover, he explained that black theatre had a nationalistic spirit for there was a need for black people "to express themselves," "for their minds to expand" and for them "to create forms" which would express the "totality of their visions." Finally, Black art needed to be "committed to the Black Revolution, otherwise [it would be] invalid." His call for the new artists was an understanding that "there [were] Black people [there] who [needed] to be touched, who [needed] the spirit that the artist [was] supposed to provide."<sup>59</sup> Consequently, Baraka placed a great responsibility upon the Black artists in connection to their community.

To end this section on the Black Theatre Movement in the United States, it is necessary to acknowledge the different theatre groups that emerged from it and the place occupied by African American women playwrights at the time. Among the theatre groups that emerged during the 1960s, the best well known were The New Lafayette Players (led by Robert Macbeth, in Harlem, New York); the Negro Ensemble Company (led by Douglas T. Ward, in New York); the Black Educational Theatre of San Francisco (whose aim was to use theatre to educate the black community);<sup>60</sup> the Aldridge Players/West (in Berkeley);<sup>61</sup> the Free Southern Theatre (led by John O'Neal, in New Orleans);<sup>62</sup> and the Inner City Group (led by Bernard Jackson, in Los Angeles). Many of these groups functioned as workshop theatres being improvisation the main venue for their theatrical creations. Colleges and universities, too, included Black theatre literature and productions as part of their curricula (i.e., Texas Southern University and the University of California at Los Angeles and Berkeley). Finally, there was also a street theatre that was performed for people who could

---

<sup>57</sup> "Pan-African Cultural Festival, 1969, Algiers," in *Black Theatre 5* (1969): 23.

<sup>58</sup> At the beginning of the century, W.E.B. DuBois had already envisioned the need of a national consciousness and he had greatly contributed to the development of Black consciousness. He believed that Blacks' ideal was "the ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of Race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so badly lack." (W.E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Scarborough and Ontario: New American Library, 1982) 52). In this quote DuBois is also aware of the lack of knowledge existing between Blacks and Whites, although living on the same soil.

<sup>59</sup> *Black Theatre 6* (1969): 27-30.

<sup>60</sup> See Marvin X, "Manifesto: The Black Educational Theatre of San Francisco," in *Black Theatre 6* (1969): 30-35.

<sup>61</sup> See Henrietta Harris, "Building a Black Theatre," in *Theatre Drama Review* 12-4 (Summer 1968): 157-58.

<sup>62</sup> See John O'Neal, "Motion in the Ocean: Some Political dimensions of the Free Southern Theatre," in *Theatre Drama Review* 12,4 (Summer 1968): 70-77.

not afford the theatre. Other types of theatre, as defined by Ed Bullins, were the theatre of serious Black writers—underground productions, and gerrilla theatre—and agit-prop theatre.<sup>63</sup>

Regarding categories of different expressions found in Black theatre plays, Ed Bullins differentiated between two types: the Black Revolutionary theatre that implied a victorious struggle; and the theatre of Black Experience that delineated familiar situations so that the Black audience could “inquire into their meanings” and which usually presented urban settings.<sup>64</sup> Mance Williams speaks of a Theatre of Reality (not to be confused with Realism), in which he includes Ed Bullin’s work; and Revolutionary Theatre, of which Amiri Baraka would be best representative.<sup>65</sup> The theatre of this period, however, aimed at one main goal: self-determination of the artists as part of their community and of African American culture.

On the other hand, the space that should have been reserved for Black women playwrights during the Black Theatre Movement was not asserted as it deserved and, with a couple of exceptions, they remained excluded from it. Furthermore, when referring to the female characters depicted by the male playwrights, Elizabeth Brown-Guillory has stated that Baraka and Bullins portrayed Blacks as sensitive, hard working and rational, but many of their plays dealt exclusively with the Black male experience in North America, while the portraits of women were simplistic and uninteresting. In contrast to the 1960s, the 1970s would grow as a different decade for Black women because, as noticed by Brown-Guillory, there was a rebirth of the Feminist Movement of the 1960s and African American writers would make “a significant gain as a result of the Black Power and women’s movement.”<sup>66</sup> Some African American women playwrights, such as Adrienne Kennedy, were not considered part of the Black Theatre Movement, because they did not present the same socio-political problems as men did. This exclusion is symptomatic for the different Black Power and Black Consciousness movements ignored the oppression Black women were suffering from the government and from Black men. The African American scholar Margaret Wilkerson affirms that the female characters depicted in the plays written by these Black women playwrights incorporated new components, creating a world in which the personal became political; a world “in which something as intimate as one’s hair [might] indeed declare one’s politics . . . Connections [were] forged between a black woman’s hips and thighs and the politics of beauty, or between a white man’s compassionate gesture and a black man’s rebellion.”<sup>67</sup> Expanding on this idea, Brown-Guillory has added that Black playwrights such as Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry and Ntozake Shange literally

---

<sup>63</sup> Hatch-Billops Collection, “Black Theatre/White Critics,” New York Cultural Center Symposium, October 17, 1973 [Audio Tape].

<sup>64</sup> Leslie Catherine Sanders, *The Development of Black Theatre in America* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) 14.

<sup>65</sup> Williams, *op. cit.*, 156.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 108, 119. Needless to say, the Black Power movement of the 1960s was of great influence on the Women’s Movement as well.

<sup>67</sup> Margaret Wilkerson, ed., *Nine Plays by Black Women* (New York: New American Library, 1986) xiii-xiv.

reshaped American theatre by including their own perceptions and visions of African Americans.<sup>68</sup>

## THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND THE BLACK THEATRE MOVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

### The Freedom Struggle and the Black Consciousness Movement

Blacks in South Africa had been governed by a White minority and remained as foreigners in their own homeland for more than three centuries. This difference needs to be kept in mind when examining the history of Blacks in the United States and South Africa. Nevertheless, like in North America, Blacks in South Africa always demonstrated a continuous resistance to the dominant regime imposed on them throughout those centuries. Nelson Mandela briefly explained the situation of Blacks during the “Treason Trial” (1964) while apartheid was still established in South Africa: “The lack of human dignity experienced by Africans is the direct result of the policy of white supremacy. White supremacy implies black inferiority. Legislation designed to preserve white supremacy entrenches this notion . . . [Africans] want equal political rights, because without them our disabilities will be permanent.”<sup>69</sup> The system of apartheid or doctrine of racial segregation was the philosophy of the National party that ruled South Africa from 1948 till first democratic elections in 1994.<sup>70</sup> Mandela had achieved the stature of a national leader for Black South Africans and a worldwide hero for his struggle in defense of Africans’ rights during the years of apartheid. His struggle, however, was the continuation of a liberation movement that had reached its height after World War II.

The Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s in South Africa was gestated and developed out of a series of important historical and intellectual antecedents that had permeated Black South African history. As early as 1918 there was a strike carried out by the African sanitation workers, and in 1919, a pass-burning movement.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, the first Black political organization originated in the 1880s and it has its basis in the Eastern Cape. Mokgethi Motlhabi claims that this organization “represented a change of strategy in the Black people’s resistance to colonialism.” After suffering repeated defeats in their military resistance in 1912 “a more nationally oriented [organization], the ANC [African National Congress]” took over as the African people’s political organization and continued as the main resistance movement until it was banned in 1964.<sup>72</sup> In this line, Anton

---

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>69</sup> Donald Woods, *Biko* (New York and London: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1978) 29.

<sup>70</sup> Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>71</sup> The pass system was introduced by the British in 1809. Similar to the South African pass system, in the United States there was a system for “presenting I.D. for public presence” occurred as part of the slavery system.

<sup>72</sup> Mokgethi Motlhabi, *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid: A Social-Ethical Analysis* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987) xix.

Muziwakhe Lembede, a Zulu schoolmaster, is considered to be the main architect of a first full designed ideology of African nationalism in the 1940s. Although he condemned capitalism as an exploitative system, he did not take Marxism as an option; instead, he vaguely defined socialism. Lembede's Africanism included the proclamation of an affirmative and self-assertive image imbued with pride in the past and a confident vision of the future. In 1949 emerged the Youth League, following Lembede's principles, with its program of civil disobedience (boycotts and strikes). This strategy was mainly based on the principle on non-collaboration. The League supported self-determination and national freedom, and its ultimate goal was "to set the basis of one-man-one-vote."<sup>73</sup>

After Lembede's death in 1947, the Youth League centered around the personality of Ashby Peter Mda, who strictly maintained the fundamental principles established by his predecessor. In the following years, the ANC appeared to be alarmed at the evident solicitation for an African race consciousness. Mda's political belief was based on the assumption that South Africa was going towards an inevitable revolution and Africans would forcibly appropriate power from Whites.<sup>74</sup> According to Motlhabi, the Youth League had its roots in the nineteenth century Ethiopian Movement,<sup>75</sup> forerunner of the subsequent African philosophies that aimed at Black unity to confront White power.<sup>76</sup> Motlhabi refers to two different sections within the ANC, the wing of the *moderates* and the wing of the

---

<sup>73</sup> Gerhart, *op. cit.*, 83.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-131.

<sup>75</sup> J. Mutero Chirenje in his book *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883-1916* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) highlights the important role that African Americans played on the rise of Ethiopianism in South Africa. His study focuses on the interaction between African Americans and Black South Africans on church independence. Chirenje states that "[African American] churchmen who went to South Africa in the 1890s arrived at a time when some African Christians were setting up churches of their own. This independent-church movement was called 'Ethiopianism' because the secessionists' aim was to plant their church across the entire African continent. The secessionists used the terms Ethiopianism and Ethiopia in the Graeco-Roman and biblical sense, namely, that Africa was the land of black people (or people with 'burnt faces')." And he continues, "[in] this sense, the reference was not confined to the Kingdom of Ethiopia alone but included all the then-known countries of Africa. . . . In time, Ethiopianism became a generic term to describe a whole range of the black man's efforts to improve his religious, educational, and political status in society." (pp. 1-2). Furthermore, Chirenje mentions that the creation of the African Methodist Episcopal church (AME) "was a sequel to a series of hostile acts by whites against Afro-American members of St. George's Church, a Methodist Episcopal church in Philadelphia," beginning by 1787 (pp. 2-3). Due to the discrimination that African Americans were suffering in St. George's church, some of them withdrew from the church and created their own Methodist church, led by Richard Allen (a former slave who had purchased his freedom from his master in 1777). AME and the National Baptist Convention sent missionaries to southern Africa, being the Reverend R.A. Jackson the first agent to South Africa in 1894. Chirenje asserts that the rise of independent African churches was in many ways rooted in southern Africa history and "flowed from the tensions that had built up between blacks and whites since Jan van Riebeck's settlement at Cape Town in 1652." (p. 7) And Rev. Allen Lea asserts that the Ethiopian Movement (whose beginning in South Africa goes back to 1884) remains in direct affinity with "the awakening all over the world of a spirit of nationalism." He underlines that the distinguishing feature of the first Ethiopian church in South Africa (in 1892) was that "of being a racial church composed of a controlled by Africans." In Rev. Lea's opinion, "Ethiopianism" was a method of "winning Africa for Christ" and a social movement of people who claimed their rights when they realized the oppression they were submitted to. (Rev. Allen Lea, *The Native Separatist Church Movement in South Africa* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: Juta and Co., Ltd., n.d.) 17-22).

<sup>76</sup> Motlhabi, *op. cit.*, 69.

*national extremists*. The PAC (Pan Africanist Congress) was a consequence of the latter.<sup>77</sup> The scission in the ANC seems to have originated due to the alliance that appeared between the Transvaal leadership of the ANC and the Indian Congress in 1951-52.<sup>78</sup> Robert Sobukwe, who took the lead of the PAC in 1959, believed that Africans' "only consciousness of oppression as a race could draw them together and inspire them to the necessary heights of sacrifice and suffering," and, therefore, "only the preaching of a blacks-only nationalism could in turn inspire this necessary level of consciousness."<sup>79</sup> The ANC was recognized for its position of non-violence, whereas the PAC "left its options open regarding methods of struggle."<sup>80</sup> The ANC included members such as Walter Sisulo (ANC secretary general in 1949), Albert Luthuli (ANC president in 1952) and Oliver Tambo (ANC president following the imprisonment of former president Nelson Mandela).

According to Motlhabi, the PAC ideology stood between the ANC and the BCM (Black Consciousness Movement). When the BCM originated in the early 1970s, its ideological stance approached that of the PAC, but the main difference between the BCM, the ANC and the PAC was on terms of strategy. Before the Movement developed a fully elaborated strategy, the White-ruled government banned the BCM in 1977.<sup>81</sup> Gerhart asserts that, after the SASO (South African Student Organization) was born in 1968, the ANC and PAC "did no longer function as organizations in South Africa" although they were still "a force to be reckoned with." The PAC had articulated SASO's same nationalist goal: "[The] reconstruction of South Africa as an essentially African society into which whites would have to fit as best as they could."<sup>82</sup> This is a crucial point in considering the differences between the situation of African Americans in the United States and that of Blacks in South Africa. Although Blacks in both countries appraised the need to fight imperialism and colonialism, *the BCM established that the creation of a society based on African cultural systems* was its fundamental and ultimate goal because they were living in Africa, not in Europe. Biko found this primal difference between Black Power in the United States and Black Consciousness in South Africa: "Black Power is the preparation of a group for participation in [an] already established society, and Black Power therefore in the States operates like a minority philosophy. Like, you have Jewish power, Italian power, Irish power and so on in the United States."<sup>83</sup> The ideology of Black Panthers, though, aimed towards the creation of a socialist-based society in the United States, as well as in the world.

At this point, it is necessary to add that, due to the constant banning of different political organizations and imprisonment of African leaders in South Africa during the years of apartheid, none of them could fully develop a philosophy and strategy that could confront the government's apartheid policy on a steady ground. The South African system of apartheid preserved a physical areal separation and repression on the Black majority. In the United States, after segregation was abolished in the Southern States and after the

---

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Gerhart, *op. cit.*, 134.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>81</sup> Motlhabi, 72, 105.

<sup>82</sup> Gerhart, *op. cit.*, 284.

<sup>83</sup> Millard Arnold, ed., *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa* (New York: Random House, 1978) 99.

proclamation of the Civil Rights Act when the law abolished racism, the color bar continued to exist in the minds of North Americans. African Americans, then, were faced with not just a physical but rather a mental segregation. Nevertheless, it is important to remark that African Americans finally succeeded in obtaining legislative protection and equal rights in the 1960s, while Black South Africans had to fight still rigorously for three more decades against the oppressive rules of White supremacy implanted by the apartheid system. Furthermore, during the years of apartheid, whenever Blacks rebelled against the South African government's brutal treatment, they received more and more violent responses with the implantation of severer measures to control the insurrections—such as different States of Emergency, Immorality Acts, and Terrorist Acts.

The Freedom Charter was an important expression of resistance whose basis was established upon the popular masses in the 1950s. People's Congress of the African National Congress created this document. Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin in their study incorporated the Charter's initial definition:

The Freedom Charter will be the Charter of the demands of all the South African people for the things that they want to make their lives happy and free. It will be a document to guide all our future work, but it will be *written by the ordinary people themselves*, through the demands that they themselves send in. It is hoped that thousands and thousands of gatherings, some small, some large, will be held where people can speak freely of their own lives, what changes they want in their way of life, in the laws they live under and in the conditions.<sup>84</sup>

The Charter claimed to be anti-imperialist and women had participated in its development in equal terms to the men (the Charter has a clause that demanded that every man and woman had the right to vote and stand as candidates). Among these women was Francis Baard, founder member of the Federation of South African Women, who has professed that women had been deeply involved in the struggle.<sup>85</sup> A clear example of Black women's struggle and activism was the 1956 march, where sixty thousand women marched in Pretoria to protest against a new law that demanded they should carry passes like the men.

Since 1948 Mokgethi Motlhabi has distinguished four significant moments of Black resistance. 1) The ANC's Defiance Campaign—a civil rights crusade in which thousands of Blacks demonstrated against apartheid—in 1952, whose organization owed much to the efforts of Albert Luthuli; 2) the PAC's positive action campaign of 1960—year of the Sharpeville massacre; 3) the 1972-73 labor strikes that, having begun in Springs, Transvaal spread to Natal and the Cape; and, 4) the 1976 Soweto uprising. Each of these demonstrations resulted in the reinforcement of more laws by the South African government.

Although Motlhabi has testified that the church did not play an active role in the struggle for liberation, he has recognized the significance of church organizations. Motlhabi has observed that the church did not only have to speak about the unjust structures that existed in the country but also “contribute actively, within its prophetic limitations, toward this goal.”<sup>86</sup> However, it cannot be denied that the church has also participated in the struggle.

---

<sup>84</sup> Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin, *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986) 17.

<sup>85</sup> Suttner and Cronin, *op. cit.*, 150. Emphasis added.

<sup>86</sup> Motlhabi, *op. cit.*, 275.



Trevor Huddleston, member of the Anglican Community of the Resurrection served as a priest in Johannesburg between 1943 and 1956 and, as Duma Ndlovu has manifested, was active and open in supporting the ANC; unfortunately, the government finally declared him a prohibited immigrant. He became the president of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, St. Chad's Anglican Church, in the famous Leopold Street, in King Williams Town, was "the spawning ground of Black Consciousness" and, as Mthobhi Mutloatse has indicated, it was once "the epitome of the Black liberation struggle as was interpreted by the Black Consciousness Movement."<sup>88</sup>

There is no doubt that the Black Consciousness Movement had a tremendous impact on Black South African population, and the Black theatre that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s is a faithful testimony of that impact. The BCM originated out of another organization, the SASO which was created in 1968 with Stephen Biko as one of its main leaders. Mosibudi Mangena recalls that SASO often quoted from the works of well-known authors such as Fanon, Nkrumah, and Malcolm X, all three were also essential in the development of Black consciousness in North America. The teaching method designed by Brazilian pedagogist and philosopher Paulo Freire—"the pedagogy of the oppressed," especially suitable for adults—was adopted for SASO's literary projects.<sup>89</sup> According to this method of education, the participants developed a political consciousness in the process. Among the trainers were Stephen Biko, Strini Moodely and Mosibudi Mangena.<sup>90</sup> In North America, the Black Panthers, as we observed earlier, had created different cultural programs for they equally considered education to be crucial in the process of liberation.

Although Black Consciousness originated after and as a separate philosophy, it adopted the SASO Policy Manifesto that was distributed in the University of Natal, "Black Section," in 1971. Mangena describes what they understood by Black Consciousness:

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.*<sup>91</sup>

Black Consciousness in South Africa, like the Black Power and Black Panthers Movements in the United States, sought Blacks' self-determination. Furthermore, it proclaimed Black pride and assertion of their African traditions. The Movement had a major impact between 1968 and 1976. In 1976 for the first time, the BCM had outlined in detail an economic and social program that was adopted at Mafeking. During this time the BCM had managed to

---

<sup>87</sup> Duma Ndlovu, ed., *Woza Afrika! An Anthology of South African Plays* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1986) 262.

<sup>88</sup> Charles Nqakula, "Leopold Street," in *Umhlaba Wethu (The Earth Is Ours)*, ed. by Mthobhi Mutloatse (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987) 15. This book of essays is especially significant in its attempt to reconstruct and bring to light Black South African culture and history.

<sup>89</sup> See Note 24 in this Chapter.

<sup>90</sup> Mosibudi Mangena, *On Your Own: Evolution of Black Consciousness in South Africa/Azania* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1989) 25. See also Note 24 in this Chapter.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 12. Emphasis added.

develop people's consciousness, among them, the youth of the 1976 Soweto uprising. Although the BCM did not organize the uprising, it did "organise the process of meeting and the final student march on June 16 and led to the conflagration."<sup>92</sup>

The BCM intended to confront the fragmentation that originated because of the apartheid policy (which maintained people separated according to the categories of Coloreds, Indians or Africans) by attempting to involve all of them in the same struggle for liberation. In Biko's words, the final aim of their struggle would be "an open society, one man, one vote, no reference to color."<sup>93</sup> Biko defended Fanon's idea that a national conscience would offer them an international dimension.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, he referred to Black people as "the dispossessed"—term that the playwrights Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya would adopt to define Black South African theatre. Biko realized that Blacks were a disinherited group and historically, economically and politically dispossessed. And in the nucleus of the BCM emphasis of Black pride, following Fanon's theory, there was what Biko designated as the "understanding by Blacks that *the most powerful weapon in the oppressor's mind is the mind of the oppressed.*"<sup>95</sup> And this was, in essence, the core of the Movement: to liberate the mind of the oppressed by making them aware of their minds' imprisonment.

Like the African American leaders and writers of the 1960s, Biko established the need to leave Western models of individualism and incorporate the values of African history that emphasized the community and the oneness of the individual with the cosmos (oneness that had been destroyed by the imposition of Western values). He also expressed the need to invalidate the stereotypes imposed by Westerners upon Blacks by reconstructing their African past, their history.<sup>96</sup> Christianity, according to Biko, had especially damaged Blacks and created a special neurosis among them. Because culture and religion are interwoven, Christianity had wiped away African culture—its beliefs, its customs. Not only did African history need to be re-written by Blacks, but there was also a need to develop a process of consciousness among the ministers who were spreading the wrongs caused by Christianity.<sup>97</sup> Curiously enough, as stated by Gail M. Gerhart, seminary students "were among the earliest and most ardent proponents of Black Consciousness and its particular application within the church under the rubric of black theology." Moreover, Black clergy were essential "in organizing the widely-publicized Black Renaissance Convention, an important all-in

---

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15. The Soweto uprising of 1976 intended to be a demonstration by Black students to protest against the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 which forced all black schools to use Afrikaans and English as languages of instruction. On June 16, between 3,000 and 10,000 thousands of students walked to demonstrate peacefully in a rally to take place in the Orlando stadium at Soweto. The protest had been carefully planned by the Soweto Students' Representative Council's (SSRC) Action Committee and backed by the Black Consciousness Movement. 1,500 heavily armed police officers were waiting for them. The police used canisters of tear gas to disperse students and soon after that shots were heard. Accounts on the number of the children shot by police differ, but most of them (in contrast to the official figures of 23 given by the Government at the time) coincide in casualties being more than 700 and more than 1000 wounded students. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soweto\\_riots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soweto_riots).

<sup>93</sup> Arnold Millard, ed., *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa* (New York: Random House, 1978) 42.

<sup>94</sup> Mangena, *op. cit.*, 57.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 53. Emphasis added.

<sup>96</sup> Steve Biko, *Escribo lo que me da la gana* (Pasadena, California: Hope Publishing House, 1989) 25-73.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-40.

conference which brought together a cross-section of black leaders and intellectuals at St. Peter's seminary,"—at Hammanskraal, North of Pretoria, in 1974. There were also links between the African Churches Association, SASO and the BPC (Black Peoples Convention), at the same time that other pressures from Black clergy "within the main white-led churches" impeded a redistribution of authority between the races regarding the established hierarchies.<sup>98</sup>

In regard on the type of struggle sought by the BCM, Biko declared this movement was not interested in an armed struggle, but in restoring Black people's hope by growing consciousness among them.<sup>99</sup> In, *I Write What I Like*, Biko recalls the importance and impact that the "soul" rhythms recorded by African Americans in the 1960s, which 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."<sup>100</sup> This international bond among Blacks is what Biko observed that was growing in Africa: a culture of solidarity, of pride, of challenge, of self-affirmation; a culture that was responsible to restore Blacks' faith, offering them hope to achieve the goal they have chosen for their future.<sup>101</sup>

Biko, however, questioned the attributed influence from the North American Black Movements, affirming that he believed it was the independence achieved by different African states in a short time what actually had influenced both Blacks in the United States and in South Africa. In addition, regarding the African American terminology that had been used to express Black South Africans' attitudes and beliefs, he assumed it was the effect of new ideas what had seemed to capture a broad publicity in the United States.<sup>102</sup> Gerhart, on the other hand, points out that, as much or more influential than writings from Africa were the works by African Americans, such as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Black Power* by Stokely Carmichael and Edridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. Furthermore, the American Supreme Court School desegregation decision of 1954 and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 had equally attracted the interest of South Africans. Nevertheless, the South African press had covered only to a certain degree the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In spite of this fact, the North American Black Power aftermath originated a broad scrutiny and search of the social and political ideas emanating from it. The ideas of organizations such as the Black Panthers were considered like an *ideological gospel* at the beginning, but, finally, the contrasting factors in South Africa and North America were more closely examined.<sup>103</sup>

There is no doubt, however, that both the United States and South Africa were influenced by the independence obtained by different African countries starting in the 1950s. And there is no doubt either that, throughout their history, African Americans have preserved African traditions that in their combination with innovativeness and trends—developed and learned outside of Africa—originated unique artistic manifestations such as

---

<sup>98</sup> Gerhart, *op. cit.*, 294.

<sup>99</sup> Biko, *op. cit.*, 115.

<sup>100</sup> 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." This latter was also the title of Lorraine Hansberry's biography.

<sup>101</sup> Mangena, *op. cit.*, 29-30.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>103</sup> Gerhart, *op. cit.*, 275-76.

the blues and jazz. Blacks in Africa, especially in South Africa, recaptured these manifestations as well as other phrases and vocabulary adopted from Black English. It seems evident, then, that an intimate connection between African Americans and Africans has been maintained throughout the centuries. Nevertheless, in spite of the influences and visible similarities in the methods employed towards a Black liberation, it is necessary to notice that distinctive surrounding circumstances have resulted in the shaping of two differentiated cultures.

After the BMC was banned in 1977 a new number of organizations emerged, being the most important AZAPO (Azanian People's Organization) and the UDF (United Democratic Front). AZAPO, although closely following the ideas of Black Consciousness, engaged in reviewing the BCM strategy in adapting them to the new situation. In 1983, AZAPO congregated a National Forum in the hope to redefine issues and spread "the representatives of Black Consciousness through the country."<sup>104</sup> The UDF was launched in 1983 and, according to Motlhabi, since its establishment, it posed a challenge to AZAPO "through its non-racial constitution and partly through the espousal of the 1956 Freedom Charter by a major part of its constituents."<sup>105</sup> After the release of ANC leader Nelson Mandela in February 1990, new solutions still needed to be found, especially on the basis of the well-known different strategies that were postulated by the ANC and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of the Zulus' Inkatha.

### The Black Theatre Movement

Peter Larlham, in his study *Black Theatre, 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.<sup>106</sup>

Larlham affirms that these performances were 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.

As examined earlier, African American artists also aligned themselves to the Black consciousness philosophy that permeated the revolutionary parties of the 1960s in a

---

<sup>104</sup> Motlhabi, *op. cit.*, 276.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>106</sup> Peter Larlham, *Black Theatre, Dance and Ritual in South Africa* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985) 19. Emphasis added.

committed effort to create new literary works that did not follow Western aesthetics. Moreover, like African Americans, Black South Africans were in search of theatrical works that were an expression of their own affirmation and of their African culture. At this point, it is essential to comment that the striking shortage of published works by Black South Africans at the time, especially of poetry and theatre, made investigation of plays for further analysis a very difficult task. Furthermore, the financial situation under which playwrights and actors were obliged to work, enormously hindered the development of a new theatre. The plays by African American playwrights could be more easily found for they had been published, and Black Theatre groups in the States received a greater financial support,<sup>107</sup> which helped in the attainment of playhouses as well as offered more technical tools inexistent or unavailable for Black South Africans. Fortunately, at least the names of plays that had not been printed, had commenced to appear in the late scholarship written during the 1980s but there are still many unpublished plays of that time period to which researchers have no access. Doing research at that time became an especially arduous endeavor, but the interviews held with an important number of artists, the viewing of some live or taped productions, and the reception of unpublished manuscripts facilitated by the artists themselves, greatly alleviated the hardships of this research.

The Black Theatre Movement in South Africa, in its desire to appraise an African past, acclaimed the thought and philosophies of Black South African writers who had contributed to shape their history. Among some of the most celebrated Black South African Scholars, Sol Plaatje (who died in 1932) occupies a place of distinction. Plaatje, a member of the South African Native National Congress that in 1912 became the African National Congress, is considered to be one of the first African nationalists. His career, in certain manner, parallels that of the well-known African American scholar W.E.B. DuBois, whom he met in New York in 1921. Plaatje had read DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk* and was also familiar with other African American scholars and writers, such as Booker T. Washington and his system of education.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, during his trip to New York, he had the opportunity to meet many of the leading figures that were part of the Harlem Renaissance—such as the novelist Jessie Fausset and the poet James Weldon Johnson.<sup>109</sup>

Plaatje's significance lies on the importance he conceded to African languages. He was very interested in the Tswana culture tradition and translated some of Shakespeare's plays into Setswana, which was his first language.<sup>110</sup> According to John L. Commaroff, Plaatje used not only his native language freely but also phrases from Sotho, Tswana, Zulu, Xhosa and Dutch, as it appears in his diary; and adds that its usage "tends to correspond in the sociological sense, to the structure of the relationships and situations described by the author."<sup>111</sup> He considers Plaatje a leading figure in the development of Black South African

---

<sup>107</sup> In an interview with a journalist from the South African theatre journal *S'kestsh*, Douglas T. Ward said that his company had obtained a grant from the Ford Foundation of \$434,000 as the first year budget, which Black South Africans could never dream of obtaining from their government. *S'kestsh* (Summer 1973): 15.

<sup>108</sup> Sol T. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa, Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion* (London: P.S. King and Son, Ltd., 1916) 16.

<sup>109</sup> Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984) 278.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>111</sup> John L. Comaroff, ed. *The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: An African at Mafeking* (Johannesburg: MacMillan South Africa, 1973) xxvii.

Literature in vernacular as well as in English.<sup>112</sup> This is a very accurate appreciation when recalling that Plaatje considered education one of his main concerns and, throughout his life, he used personal experience as his most forceful strategy.<sup>113</sup> He was tenacious in his efforts, yet, at that time, his work did not receive the recognition it deserved.

The works of another fundamental Black South African, H.I.E. Dhlomo (who died in 1956), were made available quite recently—in the 1980s—thanks to the research conducted by Nick Visser and Tim Couzens. Dhlomo’s works, including drama, poetry and prose, has begun to receive the attention he deserved but did not receive at his time. Visser and Couzens consider Dhlomo to be perhaps the first prolific African creative writer in English. His commitment to serve his people with his writing is expressed in a letter he wrote in 1941, part of which is printed in Visser’s and Couzens’ Introduction to Dhlomo’s collected works: “My creative writing is the greatest thing I can give to my people, to Africa. I am determined to die writing and writing and writing. And no one . . . can stop, fight or destroy that. It is the soul, the heart, the spirit. It will endure and speak truth even if I perish . . . I have chosen the path *to serve my people by means of literature*, and nothing will deflect me from this course.”<sup>114</sup> Dhlomo’s total dedication to his work, written for his people, did not surface again until the time of the Black Consciousness Movement, which was preceded by a wave of musicals after the tremendous success of the musical *King Kong*.

The theatre of entertainment, whose basis was established by *King Kong*, portrayed a series of stereotypes about Blacks that remind of similar shows taking place in North America especially before the Harlem Renaissance. The musicals did, however, significantly impact future theatre, for music would become an integral part of most Black South African plays. *King Kong: An African Opera*, with book and lyrics by Harry Bloom and Pat Williams respectively, was staged in 1959, and introduced the famous singer Miriam Makeba. Ndlovu points out that the play was born out of special interests accrued by White liberals who “were ‘discovering’ the beauty of African music” and wanted to further their “discoveries” by exploring theatrical avenues.<sup>115</sup> Inspired by *King Kong*, Gibson Kente<sup>116</sup> created *Manana, the Jazz Prophet*, play that especially addressed the township audience. Kente wisely traced the local musical tradition and his plays became very successful in the townships. He was criticized at the time, though, by more committed artists who regarded his plays simply as entertainment, instead of posing questions about Blacks’ social conditions. They have acknowledged, however, that Kente was a master in the portrayal of Black people’s feelings.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>114</sup> Nick Visser and Tim Couzens, eds., *H.I.E. Dhlomo Collected Works* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985) ix. Emphasis added.

<sup>115</sup> Ndlovu, *op. cit.*, xx.

<sup>116</sup> Ndlovu states that Kente has been widely regarded as the “father of theatre in South Africa.” *Ibid.* Gibson Kente, 1932-2004. In 2003 he admitted he was HIV positive and this public admission was praised by South African politicians, including Nelson Mandela.

<sup>117</sup> Opinion stated by Mrs. E. Khuzwayo, Organizing Secretary of the Y.W.C.A. in the Transvaal, in *S’kets’* (Summer 1972): 15.

Kente's work shifted to a more committed stand after he watched Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1974), which had a great impact on him. Proof of this shift are his plays *How Long?*, *I Believe* and *Too Late*. Meshengu's review highly praised *How Long?*'s achievement: "The black man heroically struggling against adversity . . . This time it is not township conditions (as in *Sikhalo* [a previous play by Kente]) but the whiteman to blame. And the ray of hope at the end of the tunnel is education."<sup>118</sup> Mshengu considered that the spectator could see in this play a man suffering but struggling at the same time. This vision would tell the spectator that education is the key to freedom.<sup>119</sup>

The 1960s equally 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 two plays he wrote in collaboration with Black South African actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona—*The Island* (1973) and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1974). However, Ndlovu has observed that at that time none of the playwrights had much success in documenting the 1960s and, besides, none of them was reaching the townships.<sup>120</sup>

With the 1970s came the Black Consciousness Movement, which brought specific demands that needed to be applied to cultural expression. Amiri Baraka, referring to the theatre that originated from the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, recalls the similarities it posed with other two African American productive periods: The Harlem Renaissance—where a rising Black national consciousness commenced to flourish—and the Black Theatre Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Baraka makes George Thomson's words his own in *Marxism and Poetry* highlighting that "drama is a form that rises to its most effective expression during periods of sharp social transformation."<sup>121</sup> This definition unquestionably applies to the Black South African Theatre and social upheavals in the 1970s and 1980s.

During the 1970s, there were three main workshop theatre groups that were totally aligned with the Black Consciousness cause: TECON (the Theatre Council of Natal), PET (Peoples' Experimental Theatre) and MDALI<sup>122</sup> (Music, Drama, Arts and Literature Institute). Anthony Akerman regarded the three groups as the ones that "spearheaded the Black Consciousness Movement."<sup>123</sup> All three movements would finally come to an end due to the continuous banning and imprisonment of their members. TECON decided to be an all-Black group because they strongly felt that its role was only within the Black community.<sup>124</sup>

TECON's decision corresponded with the aim of the Black Consciousness Movement in increasing self-reliance, self-respect and strength towards an ultimate liberation of Blacks

---

<sup>118</sup> Mshengu, "Gibson Kente '74," in *S'ketsh* (Summer 1974): 24.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Ndlovu, xxi.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>122</sup> *Mdali* in Zulu means creator.

<sup>123</sup> Anthony Akerman, "'Prejudicial to the Safety of the State': Censorship and the Theatre in South Africa," in *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 56.

<sup>124</sup> International Defence and Aid Fund, "A New Wave of Cultural Energy: Black Theatre in South Africa," in *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 58.

“through their [own] organization of necessary resources and strategy.”<sup>125</sup> One of the plays performed at the TECON drama festival in 1972 was *Requiem for Brother X*, by the African American playwright William W. Mackay—a play about survival in the ghetto. TECON’s concept of theatre was published in the Black theatre 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 . . . The whiteman likes the simple rhythm, primitivism and a gaiety of our culture and simple stories about life in the hills. That’s what he’d like to see us doing. That’s why he loves . . . an *Ipi Tombi*<sup>126</sup> but not an *uNosilimela* [a play by Credo Mutwa]. The reason is that he doesn’t understand the more complex elements of Black Civilisation and culture. Neither does he want to understand . . . [We want] to entrench the authenticity of Black culture, to bring out its subtle beauty. The beauty that will bring out the absolute being in the Black man. A complete man with pride in his civilisation and himself.<sup>127</sup>

Like TECON, PET had worked on the same line of thought and formed its theatre in the Indian group area of Lenais in 1973. One of the plays they performed was *Shanti* by Mthuli Shezi that dealt with the love between an African boy and an Indian girl, partly set in a guerrilla camp. PET’s theatre work aimed to reassert Black pride, dignity and “group identity and solidarity.”<sup>128</sup> 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, as well as mixed drama, poetry and music.<sup>129</sup>

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 theatre and evolving new theatre methods and technique.” They wanted to create original theatre that depended “on artistic co-operation and contact and to examine what [happened] to Western and African forms of theatre when they [came] together.”<sup>130</sup> They defined their work as “a poor man’s theatre”—adopting Jerzy Grotowski’s term—since they depended mainly on their productions for financial survival.<sup>131</sup> After the last play created by Workshop ‘71—*Survival*—was banned, the group dissolved. The concept and ideas conveyed in the theatrical works by Workshop ‘71 were

---

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>126</sup> Russell Vandenbroucke, referring to musicals such as *Meropa* and *Ipi Tombi*, comments that they had “drawn extensively on dance, song and spectacle” and had found large White audiences both abroad and in South Africa. And he adds: “There is a strong suspicion that they [reinforced] ‘white fantasies and the stereotypes of the happy and lively rural African born with an irrepressible sense of rhythm.’” Vandenbroucke appraises a more committed theatre such as *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, written by Fugard, Kani and Nshona, a theatre that made “ready and open use of the social conditions under which blacks must live.” (Russel Vondenbroucke, “Chiaroscuro: A Portrait of the South African Theatre,” in *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 46-54).

<sup>127</sup> *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 61.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>130</sup> “James Mthoba and Themba Ntinga - “Seventy One in Seventy Three: Two Members of Workshop ‘71 Speak Out,” in *S’ketsh* (Summer 1973): 46.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*



followed by another group which became quite active at the end of the 1980s, The Junction Avenue Theatre.

Workshop '71 acknowledged Credo Mutwa's philosophy for the creation of a new theatre as stated in Mutwa's *uNosilimela*.<sup>132</sup> 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. Focusing especially on 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.]<sup>133</sup>

He added that in ancient Africa theatre was social and didactic; and art, culture and religion were completely inseparable from each other. Mutwa blamed Christianity for destroying native African religion and, as a consequence, devastating its culture and art. He elevated theatre to a position of sacredness because actors were considered sacred people<sup>134</sup> in ancient African theatre.<sup>135</sup> Finally, Mutwa indicated the great importance that the audience also occupied in ancient theatre as part of the sacred theatrical event: the audience was deeply involved.<sup>136</sup>

The 1976 Soweto uprising initiated another phase in theatre. Most of the theatre groups that had openly aligned with Black Consciousness were banned in 1977 together with the BCM. Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya belong to the theatre that began the new phase of Black Theatre right after the banning of previous theatre groups. Both playwrights

---

<sup>132</sup> Mango Tshabangu referred to *uNosilimela*'s theatrical achievement at that time: "*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*. (Mango Tshabangu, "Credo Mutwa's amazing *uNosilimela* and Black Theatre," in *S'ketsh* (Summer 1974): 40).

<sup>133</sup> Credo Mutwa, "Umlinganiso . . . The Living Imitation," in *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973) 31.

<sup>134</sup> In the same manner, Grotowski in his poor theatre laboratory speaks of the holy actor because he must give himself completely into his work. Thus, by the actor's action of giving himself, the audience can see his authenticity and be encouraged by the actor's example, freeing themselves from their daily masks. (Jerzy Grotowski, "The Theatre's New Testament," in *Ritual, Play and Performance: The Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976) 180-195).

<sup>135</sup> *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973) 31-32.

<sup>136</sup> Credo V. Mutwa: "On the Theatre of Africa," in *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973): 38-41. Ian Steadman has noticed that in 1976, "Mutwa wrote to the Minister of Justice, Jimmy Kruger—arguably the most hated and feared person in the government—and in his letter compared Black Consciousness to a fascist Nazi ideology, which should be pre-empted by use of armed force by the government. As a consequence, Mutwa's house was destroyed and he was ostracized in Soweto by the Black community." (Ian Steadman's "Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand Until 1984." Ph.D. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1985. 243).

regarded Black theatre as the *theatre of the dispossessed*. In 1981, at a lecture in the University of Natal, Manaka spoke of this new theatre:

Today we are like seeds of flowers planted in barren soil. We have the right to be born but, unfortunately, we are born out of colonial blood . . . As Black dramatists aspiring to free our souls from colonial bondage, we have pledged to dredge ourselves out of this colonial mud by constantly redefining ourselves and relating to our cultural past. . . . *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 . . . *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 . . . Our people are engaged totally by resistance struggles—the liberation of the mind and the liberation of the being.<sup>137</sup>

Manaka's plays aimed to reach these goals. To some extent, Maponya supported Manaka's ideas: "My theatre is the theatre of the dispossessed. Theatre educates and enlightens—in this case heightens the awareness of Black consciousness."<sup>138</sup> Both playwrights considered that as artists they needed to commit completely in the struggle for liberation through their theatre work. Both Manaka and Maponya were poets who had successfully combined their theatrical skills with their poetic style. In their search for appropriation and meaningful expression of their thoughts, they chose to fuse different languages such as Sotho, Xhosa, Zulu and English.

Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa did also contribute to this new Black theatre with a famous piece that toured the United States and Europe: *Woza Albert!* (a writing collaboration with Barney Simon), in 1980. Both Ngema and Mtwa had been actors in Kente's productions until they decided to continue their work independently and develop their own skills. Special consideration is also due to the Workers Theatre which originated in the 1980s. This theatre, on the one hand, emerged as a result of the increasing militancy the 1970s evidenced among the Black working class; and, on the other hand, as part of a growing development in the trade union activity and organizations by the end of the 1970s. Kelwyn Sole points out that this trade-union theatre utilized various languages and it might seem excessively improvisatory or even crude to an audience that was not familiar with this kind of theatre. The Workers Theatre presented the problems that workers faced in their work and with their families, and, in this line, the production of their play *Ilanga Lizophumela Abasebenzi (The Sun Will Rise for the Workers)* in 1980 "marked the inception of a new type of worker drama."<sup>139</sup> The play emerged from a situation where "a white lawyer asked workers who had been fired from a foundry near Boksburg in the Eastern Transvaal to act out the story of their strike and subsequent assault by the police, because their accounts conflicted."<sup>140</sup> The Workers Theatre became another fundamental expression of liberation and self-determination in the last decade.

---

<sup>137</sup> Larlham, *op. cit.*, 86. Emphasis added

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>139</sup> Kelwyn Sole, "Oral Performance and Social Struggle in Contemporary Black South African Literature," in *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 69 (Spring/Summer 1987): 264.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

Finally, Benjy Francis, a prominent director in the 1970s, continued to develop a community oriented theatre that he calls Theatre for Growth and Development and one that he considered to be mobile in its goal to originate change. The name of his theatre group, Dhlomo Theatre, is named after the African playwright and poet.<sup>141</sup> Francis emerged from the theatre of the Black Consciousness period—but he does not align himself with the Movement. And, by the end of the 1980s, names such as Kriben Pillay (who did theatre with the students of the University of Westville, Natal), John Ledwaba and Small Ndaba (both in Johannesburg) appeared as very promising talents committed to their work and the socio-political issues of South Africa.

Since the Black Theatre Movement began in South Africa, it had to face the same problems and restrictions, as did the Black Consciousness political organizations. The continuous censorship and/or banning of plays and imprisonment of their members considerably hindered the utterance of a Black Theatre aesthetics that could epitomize a significant group of committed playwrights, actors and directors.

In spite of these limitations, if closely examined, all of the plays are a clear manifestation of the artists' unconditional commitment to their work and to their community. From the beginning of the 1970s, most of these plays continued to bear the seeds of the Black Consciousness ideology. Manaka, one of the playwrights who best represented this repercussion, explains the implications of Black Consciousness in the development of African art:

In South Africa the Black Consciousness Movement appears to have played a major role in the conceptual development of African art. African artists were made to relate more and more to the socio-political situation with a certain degree of political awareness . . . Black Consciousness artists were preoccupied with the advancement of the movement like the surrealists who were 'preoccupied with their relationship with Communism.' Such art movements are often determined by political events and movements. The decline of the political movement often threatens the advancement of the artist.<sup>142</sup>

Manaka considered that the art of the 1980s “[reflected] the struggling and resisting masses,” and added, “art [had] become a tool for liberation.”<sup>143</sup> He believed that an African artist, like a farmer, was a victim of dehumanization and dispossession. The artist, though, has an enormous social responsibility, because he is an educator, a prophet with a vision, and a historian with the task “to integrate the past, present and future.”<sup>144</sup> In Manaka's opinion, the artist's creative impulses should show his/her sensitivity to the socio-political milieu. He insisted that “being an artist [involved] a consistent continuous commitment to the quest for freedom and respect for humanity”;<sup>145</sup> a commitment that can be definitely traced in most of the works originated during and after the Black Consciousness Movement.

Still, the growth of a new Black Theatre conveyed the strongly felt absence of Black women playwrights. Only Fatima Dike's work was recognized at the time. As in North

---

<sup>141</sup> Conversation with Benjy Francis in Johannesburg (South Africa), October 1989.

<sup>142</sup> Matsemela Manaka, ed., *Echoes of African Art: A Century of Art in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987) 16.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

America, the Black Consciousness Movement seemed to have marginalized Black women artists and ignored their oppression, which Christine N. Qunta considers is four-fold:

*The enemies of African women, particularly in Southern Africa, are colonialism and imperialism, white racism, class oppression and sexual oppression. The first step towards true emancipation must be the defeat of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism. The next step is to eradicate all the effects of exploitation based on race, nationality, class and sex. This will come about through the critical examination of all political, economic, religious, educational and cultural institutions, together with the education and organization of the affected communities in an effort to wrest control of our lives from outsiders by whatever means.*<sup>146</sup>

On the same line of thought, Cheryl Carolus, an executive member of the UWO (United Women's organization) and an old member of SASO, comments on the sexism she felt when she was involved in the Black Consciousness Movement. She remembers that the movement "was very male oriented . . . Many men in BC organisations felt they had to assert themselves over everybody, and more especially over the black women in the organisations . . . Nothing was done to develop women."<sup>147</sup> The absence of Black women writers in South Africa until quite recently, as Eldred Durosimi Jones has pointed out, could be "a consequence of traditional African attitudes towards [them]."<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, poetry and drama are genres of public exposure, which conveyed an extra shackle to break in the case of Black women artists. In this regard, Carolus has observed that there was a desperate need in South African society to support and give confidence to women and this could only be possible through a women's organization.<sup>149</sup> According to Qunta, on the other hand, there was an imperative need of elaborating on the Woman Question linked to the perspective that all people "must have self-expression and self-determination."<sup>150</sup> Self-determination needed to be expressed and silence broken, as stressed by Christine Obbo: "As a result of male criticism, women assume a 'silence is golden' stance because they lack the confidence or education to deal with male dominance."<sup>151</sup>

Awa Thiam also believes that "women must break the curse of silence" and says that is "time to take the floor in confrontation. Time to take the floor in revolt and say, 'No!' To give speech the power of action. Active speech. Subversive speech. Act, linking theoretical practice with working practice."<sup>152</sup> In spite of the arduous and complex situation under which Black South African women were (and still are) forced to live in their homeland, some have been able to fight adversity and participate actively in theatre. *Imfuduso* was created in 1979. This performance was based on the experience of the women of Crossroads

---

<sup>146</sup> Christine N. Qunta, ed., *Women in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987) 15. Emphasis added.

<sup>147</sup> Sutner and Cronin, *op. cit.*, 155.

<sup>148</sup> Eldred Durosimi Jones, ed., *Women in African Literature Today: A Review* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1987) 1.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>150</sup> Qunta, *op. cit.*, 17.

<sup>151</sup> Christine Obbo, *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981) 16.

<sup>152</sup> Awa Thiam, *Speak Out, Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 1986) 4, 13.

(in Cape Town), who were removed by force from their lodgings by the authorities. Women developed and acted this play themselves.<sup>153</sup> In addition, in the late 1980s, Gcina Mhlophe commenced to attract the attention of the critics, both home and abroad, for her work as poet, story-teller, actress and playwright. Finally, *Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokotho (You Strike the Woman, You strike the Rock)*, which was created in workshop by Phyllis Klotz, Thobeka Maqutyana, Nomvula Qosha, Xolani September, Poppy Tsira and Itumeleng Wa-Lehulere, was staged in 1986 and received significant applause.<sup>154</sup> These examples were a ray of hope for future women writers in South Africa.

In summary, there is an inseparable connection between the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the theatre works by committed artists both in the United States and in South Africa. Form and content grew out of the artists' political and artistic stand against Western imperialism, colonialism and racism imbued both within its politics and within its art and aesthetics. African Americans and Black South Africans, for the first time, established a theatre that validated the artists' African American and African past, fused with the historical moments of the present, in order to enlighten a future of liberation for their respective communities. The distinctive components of each country's conditions and socio-political milieus have equally generated specific features that have shaped African American and Black South African theatre in different and unique ways. Yet, the Black Theatre Movement shares many elements and goals that are comprised under the same Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation. This category, which will be examined in the following chapter, includes the works by Black women.

---

<sup>153</sup> Lerlham, *op. cit.*, 82.

<sup>154</sup> Unpublished script. Conversation with Phyllis Klotz, Johannesburg, October 1989. This play was published later in an anthology of plays selected by John Kani, *More Market Plays* (Johannesburg: Ad Donker Publisher, 1994).



## CHAPTER II

### The Black Theatre Movement: Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation

I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. . . In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it.

I am a Negro, and tons of chains, storms of blows, rivers of expectation flow down my shoulders. But I do not have the right to bog down . . . I do not have the right to allow myself to be mired in what the past has determined.

Frantz Fanon<sup>1</sup>

#### Third World, African and African American Aesthetics

By the end of the 1950s, Frantz Fanon had established a revolutionary line of thought that African Americans, Africans and people from other Third World Countries would adopt in their political, sociological and artistic agendas. Fanon was determined to change the status, identity and history imposed upon Black people by Western culture. He advocated self-determination for his people and the peoples of the Third World against an intellectual and political imperialism that had colonized their land and their minds. He proclaimed the need of a national consciousness that could help the colonized unveil the lies by which they had been subjected to a dominant culture, which had denied and/or under-evaluated theirs. Fanon pronounced the need to look at their own past and to study and find new strategies for their present in order to build their future. He envisioned the necessity for a reevaluation of their history by breaking myths and stereotypes dictated by colonizers, and by searching and discovering their true selves. In this regard, as Joseph Campbell has observed, a “peak experience” takes place when we feel that something has come through in our experience and we are at full with ourselves.<sup>2</sup> And, Fanon was precisely urging the Third World and Black people to seek within themselves and within their cultural history in

---

<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1982) 229, 230.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Campbell in an interview by the PBS on the television series *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, September, 1990.

order to terminate their physical subjugation and mental alienation and fragmentation to find wholeness and self-affirmation.

In *The Social History of Art*, Arnold Hauser moves back to the XVII century and asserts that “from 1661 onwards political imperialism is paralleled by an intellectual imperialism . . . Art and literature lose their relationship with real life, with the tradition of the Middle Ages and the mind of the broader masses of people. Naturalism is tabooed because the desire is to see everywhere in art the picture of an arbitrarily constructed and forcibly conserved world instead of reality itself, and form enjoys a preference over content because . . . the veil is never lifted from certain things.”<sup>3</sup> Hauser clearly defines the new parameters towards where Western culture and art were turning to abandon any link with nature and to align themselves with the new age of reason. Art commenced to distance itself from people and to being appropriated by the ones in power. Consequently, political imperialism, perpetrated by the Western world upon Third World countries, paralleled the intellectual imperialism observed in the arts, as pointed out by Hauser.

Intellectual imperialism generated intellectual alienation upon the colonized, among which Africans and African Americans were included. Fanon asserts that intellectual alienation is a creation of middle-class society, defining middle-class as a society “that becomes rigidified in predetermined forms, forbidding all evolutions, all gains, all progress, all discovery.” He refers to a “closed society” in which “life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt.” In addition, he believes that, in a sense, a person who takes a stand against this kind of death becomes a revolutionary.<sup>4</sup> Amiri Baraka associated this death with Western art and aesthetics and proclaimed in the 1960s the need of a new aesthetics for the art emerging out of the Black community. In his poem “Black Art,” he states:

We want live flesh  
and coursing blood. Hearts Brains  
Souls splintering fire.<sup>5</sup>

Baraka sought a new art that poured life out of it; and Black art moved back to recover nature and life as an integral part of its formal expression.

In the same line with Baraka’s definition of Black art, Bakary Traoré highlights the social function of African traditional theatre and asserts that African theatre is “a mirror of life. Life in all its forms serves as an inspiration for the African theatre.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Traoré states that it is myth, on the one hand, conveyed in African traditional theatre, that “makes man conscious of his place in order to make him accept his social obligation”; and legend and mimed narrative, on the other, that “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

---

3 Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*. Volume II (New York: Vintage Books, 1985) 192-93.

4 Fanon, *op. cit.*, 224.

5 Amiri Baraka, *Black Magic: Sabotage, Target Study, Black Art—Collected Poetry, 1961-1967* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill, Co., 1969) 116.

6 Bakary Traoré, *The Black African Theatre and Its Social Functions* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1972) 113.



themselves. They are also a means of reconstructing the history of family, clan or tribe.”<sup>7</sup> This sense of family and community identity, in Houston A. Baker’s opinion, should be the general goal of African American scholars, that is to say, their construction of “a black, national script of empowerment.”<sup>8</sup> It is in this line that the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation needs to be explained.

The Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation must be understood as the notion of national and/or collective consciousness and identity that art, as inextricably linked to life, offers to the community out of which it originates. Consciousness becomes a key factor because cultural and self-consciousness are indispensable in the artists’ responsibility and commitment to help the growth of their community in their contribution to social change. The Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation suggests that the artist’s responsibility lies upon the reconstruction of distorted images to show the more diverse and complex gamut of characters and characteristics that are a reflection of life, such as change and movement, and not static stereotypes. This Aesthetics aims to transmit the African principle of the human being in harmony with the cosmos.

The Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation, in which complexity and cultural consciousness occupy a primary function, accentuates the differences underlined by multiculturalism and gender. The ground upon which this Aesthetics is established is precisely theatre because theatre is a public genre; and self-affirmation alludes to an endless process of self-exploration and cultural determination, enrichment and growth, that is founded on the basis of action and change. The Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation stands against the cultural homogeneity imposed by Western patterns, opening the door to the evidence of unique and determining stylist and artistic forms that distinguish each culture, community or group, within which, at the same time, distinctive gender differences are confined.

Fanon is firm in his assertion that “the consciousness of self is not the closing door to communication” for it is not nationalism but “the only thing that will give [people] an international dimension.” Moreover, he states that the problem of national culture and national consciousness “takes on in Africa a special dimension, where the birth of national consciousness . . . has a strictly contemporaneous connection with the African consciousness.” Therefore, “the responsibility of the African as regards national culture is also a responsibility with regard to African Negro culture.”<sup>9</sup> Eldridge Cleaver clearly understood that Fanon’s analysis on the colonized and on the national question was completely relevant to the situation of African Americans: “Not until we reach Fanon do we find a major Marxist-Leninist theoretician who was primarily concerned about the problems of Black people, wherever they may be found. . . It is because of the fact that Black people in the United States are also colonized that Fanon’s analysis is so relevant to us.” It was precisely after studying Fanon that “Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale began to apply his analysis of colonized people to Black people in the United States. They adopted the

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>8</sup> Houston A. Baker, Jr., “There Is No More Beautiful Way: Theory and the Poetics of Afro-American Women’s Writings,” *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*, Baker and Redmond, eds., (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) 143.

<sup>9</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973) 247-248.

Fanonian perspective, but they gave it a uniquely Afro-American content.”<sup>10</sup> That *uniquely Afro-American content* that Cleaver refers to is part of the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation that rebels against the homogeneous Euro-American and Euro-South African thought which erodes the existence of other cultures that also belong to these two countries.

Although a continuous banning and censorship implemented by the South African government on different Black writers and organizations was already mentioned, June Jordan speaks of a more subtle censorship existing in the United States:

Here [in the United States], supposedly, we do not have “dissident” poets and writers—unless they are well rewarded runaways from the Soviet Union. Here we know about the poets and writers that major media eagerly allow us to see and consume. And then we do not hear about the other ones. But I am one of them. I am a dissident American poet and writer completely uninterested to run away from my country, my home.<sup>11</sup>

Through her attitude and her work—an unequivocal proof of self-determination—Jordan, like Cleaver, rejects the homogeneity that her country tries to impose upon her.

In the same line of thought as Jordan, Tzvetan Todorov has proclaimed the dangers of universalism that “takes the form of refusing cultural differences in the name of unicity of the human species and the diversity of individuals.”<sup>12</sup> The realization of the problem—acknowledged in the 1950s just by a few critics—and the consciousness about the necessity to embrace diverse communities in any modern state largely developed in the 1980s, as stated by Reed W. Dasenbrock.<sup>13</sup> It was during the same years that the problem of universalism was strongly confronted by literary critics.

Since then, new critics have arisen as the spokespeople for “multiculturalism,” which, according to Chicano artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, is not a grant language, an art trend or “a new investment package for art *maquiladoras*,” but “the very core of the new society we are living in.” Gómez-Peña insists that this multiculturalism “must be reflected not only in the programs or publicity of an organization, but in its administrative structure, in the quality of thought of its members and eventually in the audience it serves.”<sup>14</sup> Gómez-Peña’s request for governmental institutions to reproduce a multicultural parallels one of the most urgent needs formulated by the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation of the Black Theatre Movement both in the United States and in South Africa from the 1960s through the 1980s.

If the Black Theatre Movement emerged to prove the existence of a new art (different from the imperative Western patterns), African, African American and Third World critics equally realized the need to approach the literary text under the light of new theories

---

<sup>10</sup> G.Louis Heath, ed., *The Black Panther Leaders Speak: Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver and Company Speak Out through the Black Panther Party’s Official Newspaper* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1976) 75.

<sup>11</sup> June Jordan, *On Call: Political Essays* (Boston: South End Press, 1985) 2.

<sup>12</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, “‘Race,’ Writing, and Culture,” in “*Race*,” *Writing and Difference*, Gates, ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) 373.

<sup>13</sup> Reed W. Dasenbrock, “Creating a Past: Achebe, Naipaul, Soyinka, Farah,” in *Salmagundi* (Fall 1985-Winter 1986) 317.

<sup>14</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community,” in *High Performance* (Fall 1989): 26.

capable of appreciating those differences, their contribution and uniqueness. In this sense and following the model already traced by Fanon,<sup>15</sup> Gates has considered that the critic must

analyze the ways in which writing relates to race, how attitudes toward racial differences generate and structure literary texts by us *and* about us. We must determine how critical methods can effectively disclose the traces of ethnic differences in literature. But we must also understand how certain forms of difference and the *languages* we employ to define those supposed differences not only reinforce each other but tend to create and maintain each other.<sup>16</sup>

Gates proclaims the responsibility of the critic, the importance of her/his commitment to a community whose texts s/he will analyze, and the critic's need to take an action in examining the differences that will define that specific literary text.

The call for commitment and action has impregnated Fanon's writings as well as African, African American and Third World writers since the 1960s. These writers, in a collective effort, commenced, and have continued since then, to establish the bases for the creation and analysis of their works. In the last decades and the one currently beginning, there has been a large increase in African, African American and Third World literary and film criticism, whereas there is still a large lacuna in the field of theatre criticism that urgently needs to be filled, especially in regard to the theatre of Africa and other Third World countries. Although a great portion of literary criticism can be applied to theatre—such as theme, purpose, kind of audience the text is addressed to, and so forth—there are still other non-written/physical spatial elements, that are neither present in the literary text nor in film, and whose function still needs to be more closely examined.

In spite of the limited theatre theories, it has been theatre that has played a pivotal role in different sectors of African culture, as declared by the Institut Culturel Africain (ICA): "The evolution of theatre in Africa is the result of a cultural development in all regards." Nevertheless, theatre "has not been able to develop harmoniously due to the colonial factor which has stopped and deformed the cultural content—language has been imposed, new cultural models are assigned and presented as only valuable."<sup>17</sup> In the need to liberate art, and more concretely theatre itself, the Black playwright and the theatre critic are in charge of its decolonization. Chinweizu et al., have underlined, however, that this task "cannot be carried out in the vacuum" for it "requires an atmosphere of active nationalist consciousness . . . [and] must be conducted within the guiding parameters set by those intellectuals who have upheld black consciousness through the centuries."<sup>18</sup>

In Chinweizu's line, Geoffrey Hunt recalls that Fanon had already envisioned that "the literature of the excolonial world, after assimilating foreign bourgeois values, passes

---

<sup>15</sup> In *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), Fanon asserts that racism is a cultural element to be considered when studying a culture which includes this element: "To study the relations of racism and culture is to raise the question of their reciprocal action. If culture is the combination of motor and mental behavior patterns arising from the encounter of man with nature and with his fellow-man, it can be said that racism is indeed a cultural element. There are thus cultures with racism and cultures without racism" (p. 17).

<sup>16</sup> Henry L. Gates, Jr., "Introduction," in *Writing and Difference*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Institut Culturel Africain (ICA), *Quel Theatre pour le developement en Afrique?* (Dakar, Senegal: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1985) 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> Chinweizu et al., *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Volume I (Washington: Howard University Press, 1983) 5.

through a cultural nationalist phase which romanticises the precolonial past.” This phase is followed by a *fighting phase*, which Hunt points out to be a phase “of revolutionary realism, and it seems that much of neo-colonial artistic production has already entered such phase.”<sup>19</sup> This statement is applicable to the Black Theatre Movement in the United States that firstly advocated cultural nationalism, as formulated by Baraka and Karenga, to develop into a new phase of national consciousness as defended by the Black Panthers. Similarly, the Black Theatre of South Africa predicated the urgency of a national consciousness that originated in the Black Consciousness Movement.

Hunt refers to the dynamic conception of tradition adopted by the revolutionary leader of the liberation movement in Guinea Bissau, Amilcar Cabral, as diametrically opposed to “the petrified, eternalized conception of Soyinka.” Soyinka’s conception of traditional thought, then, is in Hunt’s words “detached from its social and historical bases and makes it eternal and immutable.”<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Soyinka’s view, a dynamic concept of tradition is needed because, as Fanon argued, “the colonized man who writes for [her/]his people ought to use the past with the intention of opening the future, as an initiation to action and a basis for hope.” In order to ensure and shape hope, the writer “must take part in the action and throw himself body and soul into the national struggle.”<sup>21</sup> Following Fanon’s conception, the African American and Black South African playwrights of the Black Theatre Movement accentuated their active role and commitment to their art as an extension of their active role and commitment to their communities.

The artist’s active role takes a significant light when examining their role in African traditional societies. Jacques Maquet affirms that the closest and primary contact between an African society and its environment is action, not contemplation, that is to say, “man must obtain from nature what is necessary for the group’s survival.”<sup>22</sup> In the same way, African theatre, more than any other genre, encompasses a social function. African theatre is a committed, political, “militant theatre in the sense that was understood by Erwin Piscator: as a means to transform.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, art as a means towards change is what Teshome H. Gabriel refers to when discussing the mission of Third World filmmakers, which Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene predicates not to make but to prepare the revolution.<sup>24</sup>

Gabriel asserts that a film cannot be revolutionary if “it does not provide a clear-cut class and national perspective or aim towards greater consciousness.” Furthermore, he considers that oppression is the single theme “that unites Third World films,” and, “in dealing with the issues, class, culture, religion and sexism these films are making a call to action whether in the form of armed struggle or otherwise. Their concern is with social change and it is in this context that all the themes are taken up.”<sup>25</sup> This goal of social change

---

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Hunt, “Two African Aesthetics: Soyinka vs. Cabral,” in *Marxism and African Literature*, Gugelberger, ed. (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, Inc., 1985) 89.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Fanon, *op. cit.* 232.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Maquet, *Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) 6.

<sup>23</sup> Institut Culturel Africain, *op. cit.*, 141-142.

<sup>24</sup> Teshome H. Gabriel, *Third World Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982) 38.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

is pursued by presenting the audiences “with a rational interpretation of a historically defined reality so that a line of causation can be established which they can use in order to understand and change their condition.”<sup>26</sup> The playwrights of the Black Theatre Movement sought this same goal.

Referring to African drama in the 1980s, Biodun Jeyifo claimed, like Gabriel, that commitment “[had] taken a decisive turn. The main subject was revolution: its necessity or impossibility, its heterogeneous socio-historical context, its prospects and possible directions.” Jeyifo advocated for a radical sociology of drama that must seek “to discover the truth in the lie and the lie in the truth of the relationship between the content and form of social life and the forms and content of dramatic art.” A dialectical change should reveal when pursuing this goal.<sup>27</sup>

Both African theatre and the Black Theatre Movement goals stood far from creating art for art’s sake. Moreover, the genre of theatre is closer to oral literature because, as Mineke Schipper points out, the portrayal is dominant. In written literature, however, “the text is everything . . . , the text is permanent.”<sup>28</sup> Schipper underscores that in the narration of ancient African stories, the narrator improvised on known themes, and he might use speech or song. Consequently, 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 present take part, either by clapping in rhythm or by making music, or narrating.<sup>29</sup>

If the beginning of this chapter is examined and Hauser’s words are recalled, readers could visualize the following picture: Art and literature in Western countries during the Middle Ages were intermingled with life; and performance, to be more specific, remained in a very close contact with the audience. In the Middle Ages there were bards, minstrels, passion and mystery plays, street mimes—like the *Commedia dell’Arte* troupe. The picture shows that the audience played a very important and active role in the performance of those spectacles. Art was closer to people, as it happened in traditional African societies. After 1661, Hauser observes that “art and literature [lost] their relationship with real life [and] form [enjoyed] a preference over content,” losing their dialectical relationship. Furthermore, the audience lost its active role as protagonist.

It is the playwrights of the Black Theatre Movement who observed the aforementioned loss, the lack of harmony in human beings—totally detached from nature, from feelings, from emotions, from their soul—and wanted to stabilize again the lost balance. Consequently, they proclaimed the creation of a new aesthetics in order to fight the Western parameters of art by which people had being dehumanized and alienated from one another and from nature. This new aesthetics was denominated Black Aesthetics and is confined here within the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation. These artists attempted to reconstruct their

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>27</sup> Biodun Jeyifo, *The Truthful Lie: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama* (London: New Beacon Books, Ltd., 1985) 54, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Mineke Schipper, *Theatre and Society in Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982) 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 10, 12.

past and construct their future by analyzing their present condition, committing themselves to social change through their art.

The Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation is established through a search and affirmation of oneself and of the community to which an artist belongs. This Aesthetics restores people's protagonist and active role, as they had possessed in traditional African societies and in Europe's Middle Ages. The Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation brings back spirituality and soul to the people, and music, poetry and dance become part of this new expression.

Women's equality, however, in that search process established during the Black Theatre Movement was not acknowledged. Women's social and political equality, paradoxically and contradictorily, was not recognized and they were excluded from what became a male's almost exclusive exploration. Yet, women's eyes were wide opened by the same Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation whose endowment they realized needed to adopt in order to reconstruct their female past and construct their future by reflecting on their present condition and position in their society. Black women theatre artists in the United States and in South Africa had an extra load to cope with, for they were women under patriarchal rule and, besides, they were Black women under White-dominated regulations.

Before analyzing African and African American women's situation as artists and their aesthetics, it is necessary to examine the position and role that some Western theatre artists played prior to the Black Theatre Movement. These Western artists' efforts were geared towards the same goals pursued by the Movement playwrights. They had, though, a privilege over the African and African American playwrights: they were White male artists and they did not have to bear the weight of the physical, political, social and psychological oppression Africans and African Americans had been subjected to.

#### Western Theatre Aesthetics in the Twentieth Century

Names such as Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), Erwin Piscator (1893-1966), Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), Jean Genet (1910-1996), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) or Peter Brook (1925- ) have been landmarks in the evolution of Western theatre in the twentieth century, all of which abandoned the naturalistic style that most has distinguished Western theatre. Some of these artists' theories and styles exerted a special influence on the artists of the Black Theatre Movement in the United States and in South Africa. Robert McLaren makes some reflections on Artaud's views on an essay entitled "Antonin Artaud: The Spirit of European Theatre in the Twentieth Century."<sup>30</sup> The title is highly suggestive of Artaud's worries about Western theatre and his continuous search to find new venues for a theatre that, in his opinion, was missing something essential. He tried to infuse the spirit he realized was absent in Western theatre and that he acknowledged as the core element in some oriental cultures, such as the Balinese.

Artaud was firm in his attempt to acquire a new language that did not need words to express the individual's emotions and feelings. He found the answer in gesture, dance, sound, light, costume and so forth. As McLaren has pointed out, Artaud rejected the

---

<sup>30</sup> Robert McLaren, "Antonin Artaud: The Spirit of European Theatre in the Twentieth Century," in *S'kets*h (Summer 1972).

naturalistic theatre in which “everything proceeds from the text,” and believed the text “is not essentially a *theatrical* element.”<sup>31</sup> In order to touch life, he considered necessary to break through language and, consequently, create or recreate theatre. He was mesmerized by the Balinese theatre which drew “upon dance, song and pantomime—and a little of the theatre as we understand it in the Occident.” The Balinese spectacle restored “the theatre, by means of ceremonies of indubitable age and well-tried efficacy [*sic*], to its original destiny which it [presented] as a combination of all these elements fused together in a perspective of hallucination and fear.”<sup>32</sup> This French theatre artist realized how gesture and voice in the Balinese spectacle acquired new inflections he had never observed in Western theatre. In the Balinese spectacle, he could witness a physical language absent from words and based upon movements and signs:

The Balinese, who have a vocabulary of *gesture and mime* for every circumstance of life, reinstate the superior worth of theatrical conventions, demonstrate the *forcefulness and greater emotional value* of a certain number of perfectly learned and above all masterfully applied conventions . . . All the senses interpenetrate, as if through strange channels hollowed out in the mind itself . . . *All these sounds are linked to movement* . . . There is [in the Balinese performance] something of *ceremonial quality of a religious rite, in the sense that they extirpate from the mind of the onlooker all idea of pretense, of cheap imitations of reality.*<sup>33</sup>

Artaud observed that speech in Western theatre was “used only to express *psychological conflicts* particular to [wo/]man and the daily reality of [her/]his life,” instead of reconciling people with the universe. Furthermore, an image or an allegory became more meaningful for the spirit than the analytics and lucidity of speech. Consequently, he proposed a theatre of cruelty—a return “through theatre to an idea of *the physical knowledge of images and the means of inducing trances.*” He referred to Chinese medicine as a clear example to illustrate his theory. Chinese medicine carefully explores the spots upon which to puncture in order to regulate the body’s subtlest functions. In the theatre of cruelty, spectators not only are the center but they are surrounded by the spectacle.”<sup>34</sup>

Artaud’s conception of theatre very much approaches the idea of theatre as conceived by the playwrights of the Black Theatre Movement. It is not surprising, then, that most of the African American and Black South African playwrights during the periods examined in this research acknowledged Artaud’s works, for they were committed to the same search in order to create a theatre that could offer a new language and function for the spectator. Artaud attempted to find a new theatrical language that could remain between thought and gesture and, then, turned to myth. He believed the purpose of theatre was to create myths “to express life in its immense, universal aspect, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves.”<sup>35</sup> Artaud’s quest for emotion and liberation of the human spirit through the senses is very much in line with Herbert Marcuse’s conception of art: “The truth of art is the liberation of sensuousness through its

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958) 13, 53.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-60. Emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 70, 71, 80, 81. Emphasis added.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

reconciliation with reason.” In representing the order of sensuousness, art “invokes the tabooed logic—the logic of gratification as against that of repression.” Furthermore, the “de-sublimation of reason”, together with the self-sublimation of sensuousness, becomes an essential process in the emergence of a free culture. According to Marcuse, there is no need to arrest but liberate progress in order to have a non-repressive civilization.<sup>36</sup> Marcuse and Artaud defended the liberation of the senses in art and society for they felt imprisoned by a civilization ruled by repressive indictments of reason and speech.

Sigmund Freud, in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, asserts that civilization is “a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of [wo/]mankind.” Freud further suggests that the decisive step of civilization would be the “replacement of power of the individual by the power of a community.” Besides, hostility and ill will would disappear if private property was eradicated and all wealth kept in common.<sup>37</sup> Artaud, Marcuse and Freud, Western intellectuals, had understood the illness of Western civilization whose repressive patterns were the cause of psychological and physical oppression, which was exercised within the Western world and upon the Third World.

More recently, it has been the Brazilian theatre director, Augusto Boal, who has proposed theatre as a very efficient political weapon to liberate wo/men from oppression, by creating an appropriate theatrical form. Brecht’s political theatre has been a great influence upon his work. In *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal advocates that what has been happening in Latin America was “the destruction of the barriers created by the ruling classes. First, the barrier between actors and spectators [has been] destroyed: all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformation of society.” Boal calls this theatre “the theatre of the oppressed” whose main objective is to change the people, focusing on action itself.<sup>38</sup> 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! Theatre is action.*”<sup>39</sup> Boal follows Brecht’s idea of epic theatre that has had a tremendous impact on most Latin American theatre.

Artaud, Boal and Brecht gave the audience a protagonist position that was missing since the Middle Ages in Western culture. Brecht, like Boal, believed in a political theatre that urges the audience to play an active role by posing questions that force spectators to think and, consequently, take an action in their society. Brecht broke with the Aristotelian principles of theatre, according to which spectator plays a passive role by identifying themselves with the characters presented on the stage. He introduced the *verfremdungseffekt* or *distancing effect* to break with the spectator’s empathy. By introducing this effect, the audience can analyze the conditions of life through the interruption of happenings. In this regard, Walter Benjamin asserts that epic theatre is “by definition a gestic theatre. For the

---

<sup>36</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 184, 185, 196, 198.

<sup>37</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1961) 42.

<sup>38</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985) ix, x.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, 155. Emphasis added.



more frequently we interrupt someone in the act of acting, the more gestures result.”<sup>40</sup> Influenced by Chinese theatre, Brecht borrowed the distancing element from Chinese acting, in which, as John Willet points out, “characters are distinguished by particular masks” and the actor “never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. The actor expresses his awareness of being watched.” Furthermore, the artist’s goal is “to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work. As a result, everything put forward by him has a touch of the amazing. Everyday things are thereby raised above the level of the obvious and automatic.”<sup>41</sup>

Inspired by Chinese acting, Brecht created a new aesthetics that corresponded to the sociological situation of his time, and “neither their content nor form [could] be understood except by the minority that [understood] this.” He added that this new aesthetics “[was] not going to satisfy the old aesthetics; [it was] going to destroy it.”<sup>42</sup> In Brecht’s new conception of theatre—*epic theatre*—songs had an important function in the performance, which differed from the traditional conception of involving the actor and the audience emotionally with the musical melody. In epic theatre, the song produces a change of function on the actors when they sing, and, in Brecht’s own words,

the actor must not only sing but show a man singing. His aim is not so much to bring out the emotional content of his song . . . but to show gestures that are to speak the habits and usage of the body. . . . As for the melody, he must not follow it blindly: there is a kind of speaking-against-the-music which can have stunt effects, the results of a stubborn, incorruptible sobriety which is independent of music and rhythm.<sup>43</sup>

Brecht’s conception of epic theatre not only comprises an active role for the audience, but for the actor as well. He sought an awareness that both actor and audience should acquire when acting and when watching a play. Against blind automatism in acting, he was advocating for a more arduous mastery of technique requiring an actor’s awareness and control of the character represented by them, and not vice versa. Away from the empathy that Stanislavsky’s actors and audience feel, Brecht sought the use of the alienation element not only for the audience, but also for the actors themselves.

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*.<sup>44</sup> It is significant to notice that most African American actors remained more faithful to Stanislavsky’s method although combining it with other African and African American traditional elements, whereas in South Africa, they very closely aligned themselves with Grotowski’s method—extensively employed by Athol Fugard and the Serpent Players. At this point, a couple of questions need to be posed. Did South African theatre artists adopt Grotowski’s method of *poor theatre* (bare stage, emphasis on the actor’s skills) because they did not receive financial support from the government? Or, on the contrary, they

---

<sup>40</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 151.

<sup>41</sup> John Willet, ed., *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London: Methuen, 1986) 91-92.

<sup>42</sup> A statement made by Brecht in 1927. *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1968).

adopted Grotowski's method because it approached the African oral tradition, in which gesture, song and movement are indispensable skills in the performer? Both assumptions can be comprised as the answer to the question posed, for both factors are inextricably connected to the Black South African artist's experience during the years of the Black Consciousness and Black Theatre Movements.

Grotowski's theatre principles, as opposed to Stanislavsky's more internal/psychological method, emphasizes the actor's physical training and body expression. Jan Kott, referring to Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre, maintains that "the ultimate precision of gesture, faces transformed into masks by a simple contraction of muscle, the sounds of language" can only be compared to Japanese Noh theatre, in which "the actor's art is transmitted from generation to generation." Moreover, Kott believes that Grotowski combined the languages of sexual and social revolution of Freud and Marx, of Timothy Leary and Herbert Marcuse. This theatre of Counterculture "felt that revolution could enter the mind only through the skin, as formulated in the gospel of Artaud."<sup>45</sup> In Kott's opinion, for Grotowski, "the only sacrifice that can save the theatre is that of its actors" and their bodies "are a medium that transmit signs." In the same line, Kott mentions Peter Brook who keeps "asking his actors to look for truth in rediscovered gestures, that is, in signs existing as a language independent of a personal idiom."<sup>46</sup> Finally, the Polish critic argues that Japanese theatre has also exercised a profound impact on Brecht, Meyerhold, Eisenstein, Piscator and the entire European avant-garde movement.

Grotowski found the training techniques used in Oriental theatre very stimulating, especially the Japanese Noh theatre, the Indian Kathakuli and the Peking Opera. Under this light, he considered that the scenic and personal technique of the actor were "the core of theatre art." In his definition of *poor theatre*, he 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." Thus, for instance, an actor, by his controlled use of gesture, "transforms the floor into a sea, a table into a confessional, a piece of iron into an animate partner, etc."<sup>47</sup> Grotowski insisted that theatre is a place of provocation, where the actors, by using their roles *as a trampoline*, examine what is hidden behind their daily masks—the inner essence of their personality, so they are able to sacrifice it and expose it. As a reaction to this presentation, spectators understand, unconsciously or consciously, that such an act is "an invitation to [them] to do the same thing." This presentation often arouses indignation or opposition, because spectators' "daily efforts are intended to hide the truth about [themselves] not only from the world, but from [themselves]."<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Jan Kott, *The Theatre of Essence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984) 142-143, 144. Emphasis added.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-116.

<sup>47</sup> Grotowski, *op. cit.*, 16, 19, 21. Emphasis added. The total absence of elements such as make-up, lighting and sound effects, the direct relationship between actor-spectator and the controlled gestures of actors is certainly true of most of the artists of the Black Theatre Movement in South Africa.

<sup>48</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, "The Theatre's New Testament," in *Ritual, Play and Performance: Readings in the Social Science/Theatre*, Schechner and Schuman, eds. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976) 186.

Like Artaud, Brecht and Boal, Grotowski intended to have an active audience who, confronted with the actor, [was] stimulated into self-analysis." Grotowski's *poor theatre* has defied "the bourgeois concept of standard of living. It [proposed] substitution of material of wealth by moral wealth as the principal aim in life." In addition, any performance of the *poor theatre*, based on a contemporary theme, would be "national because it is a sincere and absolute search into our historical ego; it is realistic because it is an excess of truth; it is social because it is a challenge to the social being, the spectator."<sup>49</sup> Like Artaud's quest for a new language, the actor of the *poor theatre* is like a poet who "needs to construct his own psycho-analytic language of sounds and gestures."<sup>50</sup> Theatre can exist without the text, but cannot exist without the actor.

Artaud, Brecht and Grotowski were committed to create a new Western theatre that could offer more meaning and create a communion between the actor and the audience, reflecting on the social concerns of their times. They rejected theatre as mere entertainment, as did Jean Genet. Genet's theatre, however, presented a different approach. Unlike Brecht, observes Martin Esslin, his theatre is "profoundly a theatre of social protest . . . [and] resolutely rejects political commitment, political argument, didacticism, or propaganda."<sup>51</sup> Genet, like Artaud, was attracted to a theatre of ritual. His view of theatre was that of ritualistic and ceremonial equivalent to the theatre of ancient Greece, which, in Esslin words, "presupposes a valid and vital body of beliefs and myths. And this is precisely what our own civilization lacks." Genet's theatre is a game of mirrors through which each appearance is revealed as an illusion and this device is used "to uncover the fundamental absurdity of being, its nothingness."<sup>52</sup> Jan Kott affirms that Genet's theatre is the theatre of *liturgy and ceremony*, the "ruthless repetition of form," which is indispensable for ritual and, although the intention is not important, "the form is."<sup>53</sup> In contrast to Genet's main concern on form, the Black Theatre Movement emerged as an evident expression of the idea that content and/or intention and form are inextricably linked and must be combined in a dialectical manner. This was the African American and African playwrights' main goal.

#### The Search for a New Theatrical Language

I have already mentioned the socio-political commitment of the Black Theatre Movement playwrights with the Black community and their work. Their commitment was reflected not only on the themes selected to reconstruct their past and future history capturing the socio-political moment of the present, but also on the theatrical elements selected as the expression of a new written and non-written theatre language. Language, as proposed by John Austin, is "a mode of social action," which in Keir Elam's words "is not so much descriptive, as performative."<sup>54</sup> In the same light, the playwrights of the Movement

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 189, 190, 195.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London: Penguin Books, 1988) 233.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 223, 210, 211.

<sup>53</sup> Kott, 136.

<sup>54</sup> Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London and New York: Methuen and Co., 1984) 157, 159.

were engaged in forging a new language that could mirror their community's needs and goals. They were committed to providing a new dramatic (written) and theatrical expression (the unwritten, the unsaid; i.e., gesture, music, movement). Following this line of thought, Michael Etherton has stated that the theatre of Africa needs to discover a new dramatic form through which the theatrical pieces can be continually enhanced "by the revelation of new contradictions in each performance." Etherton refers to Brecht (who has exerted a great influence in African theatrical literature, especially in East Africa) as an example to follow. He proclaims that Brecht managed to link "both tradition and revolution in the concept of popular." This concept of popular is described by Brecht as "taking over [the people's] own forms of expression and enriching them . . . , a way that can take over the leadership . . . linking with tradition and carrying it further."<sup>55</sup> The Black Theatre Movement introduced the link with African and African American traditions combined with Western elements, and each element included in the plays served a specific function.

Moreover, language, whether written or spoken, reflects the traditions and thinking of a people. In the United States, Jordan asserts that language has been "homogenized into an official 'English' language that can only express non-events involving nobody responsible, or lies." She believes that if she were living in a democratic state, language "would have to hurtle, fly, curse, and sing, in all the common American names, all the undeniable and representative and participating voices of everybody [there]." She postulates that people in the United States do not have a democratic language, "and [they] put up with that. [They] have the language of the powerful that perpetuates that power through the censorship of dissenting views."<sup>56</sup> Jordan's complaint about an individual not being allowed to express her/himself in her/his own language, and her urge to use that language, is supported by Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o in reference to the African writer's situation: "African languages addressing themselves to the lives of the people become the enemy of a neo-colonial state."<sup>57</sup> Together with Obi Wal, Chidi Amuta observes that Ngugi "[insists] on linguistic indigenization as a minimum condition for the existence of African literature." In addition, Ngugi believes that "genuine African literature can only be written in African languages."<sup>58</sup> Although Amuta considers Ngugi's idea too radical and romanticized, it is necessary to acknowledge that self-expression conveys the assumption of expressing oneself in one's native language, which denotes self-affirmation; or, as Fanon puts it, "it is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other," while recognizing every dialect expresses a different way of thinking.<sup>59</sup>

The problem of language entails more complex implications when related to the African writer than when related to the African American one. Phaniel A. Egejuru claims that, in comparison to the writers of other parts of the world, "the position of the African writer is unique on account of language and history. [They] have for the first time a group of writers

---

<sup>55</sup> Michael Etherton, *The Development of African Drama* (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1982) 355, 234.

<sup>56</sup> Jordan, *op. cit.*, 30, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Politics of Language in African Literature," in *Frantz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought*, Turner and Alan (Chicago: A News and Letters Publication, 1986) 81.

<sup>58</sup> Chidi Amuta, *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism* (London and New Jersey: Institute for African Alternatives, Zed Books, Ltd., 1989) 112.

<sup>59</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 17, 25.

committed to dualism of audience.” Furthermore, the choice of audience is inevitably altered by the choice of language. In addition, the African writer’s audience includes Africans and Europeans “who are affiliated by language but disaffiliated by culture.”<sup>60</sup> The issue of language in African literature is the most controversial because the majority of African works are written in Portuguese, French or English. Egejuru considers that the use of foreign languages when writing African literature poses the problem of “identifying with the African continent literary works produced in foreign languages.” Even more important, though, is the fact that the African writers’ expression is practically controlled by a non-African audience whose language is being used by African writers. Besides, the problem of censorship that existed and still exists in African countries also limits the writer’s production, being forced most of the times to publish her/his works out of her/his country—usually in a European one, which, consequently, requires the use of a European language.<sup>61</sup>

In recent years, some critics have also brought to light another type of language used in African literature, called *drum language*. Kwesi Yankah observes that the word *drum* has usually been associated with music, but the drum “plays a key role in providing rhythm in poetry/son performance; it may set off one stanza of oral poetry from the other, or provide musical interlude in oral narrative performance.” In addition, the knowledge of a *drum language* dates back to the nineteenth century “when European explorers and missionaries in Africa incorporated the linguistic aspect of the African drum in their mystery accounts of the ‘dark continent.’”<sup>62</sup> Referring to drum poetry, Bekunuru Kubayanda declares: “[A] drum rhythm poem is a composition suitable for performing with the drum, or for reading aloud, reciting and simultaneously accompanied by the beat or beats of the drums.” Energetic sound units infused in its opening and closing lines usually mark these poems. In an African American context, drum poetry is “rhythm articulated,” where rhythm has to do with “the pitch alternations in African languages and speech levels: high, low, middle, rising and falling.” Finally, Kubayanda believes “the discipline required for analysis of any written poem inspired by the rhythms of any drums, or a group of them, has little to do with the conventional Western written guidelines for poetry criticism.”<sup>63</sup> It is important to acknowledge the existence of this drum language and drum rhythmic poetry when examining the plays of the Black Theatre Movement. In most of these plays, either the inclusion of poems or poetic language, together with dance and music, occupy a very significant place.

Similarly, it is important to state that poetry has been associated with freedom. Gaston Bachelard, in his *The Poetics of Space*, reflects on the poetic image as an emergence from language that

---

<sup>60</sup> Phanuel A. Egejuru, *Black Writers, White Audiences: A Critical Approach to African Literature* (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1978) 243, 14.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 52, 42-43.

<sup>62</sup> Kwesi Yankah, “Voicing and Drumming the Poetry of Praise: The case for Aural Literature,” in *Interdisciplinary Dimensions of African Literature*, Anyidoho et al. (Washington, D.C.: African Literature Association and Three Continents Press, Inc., 1985) 137.

<sup>63</sup> J. Bekunuru Kubayanda, “Polyrhythmic and African Print Poetics: Guillen, Cesaire, and Atukwei Okai,” Anyidoho et al., *op. cit.*, 156-157.

is always a little above the language of signification . . . A great verse can have a great influence on the soul of language. It awakens images that had been effaced, at the same time that it confirms the unforeseeable nature of speech. . . What delight the poetic imagination takes in making game of censors! . . . Contemporary poetry . . . has introduced freedom in the very body of language. As a result poetry appears as a phenomenon of freedom.<sup>64</sup>

Reading Bachelard's comment about the attributes of poetry, it seems applicable to the Black Theatre Movement and to African American and African poetry as well. As mentioned earlier, most African American and African playwrights of the Movement were poets who infused powerful images and rhythms in their poetry. Bachelard's suggestion of the poetic imagination eluding censors is certainly applicable to both countries, especially to South Africa, a country where banning and censorship are ceaselessly imposed on its writers, and where not only poetry but also music and songs occupied an essential part during the years of the Movement.

If the rhythms of poetry in African literature show specific speech levels and pitch alternations, so does African music. This rhythm is organized in strict time or free meter, and rhythmic structures are of multilinear or linear design. Like poetry and song in traditional African societies, music performs a social function and, consequently, public performances usually take place on social occasions. J.H. Kwabena Nketia maintains that, although there are some individual musical expressions, more emphasis is placed on the musical activities of the community. He observes that there is a relationship between language and music: "[M]eaningful language texts or nonsense syllables are used as verbal 'scores' of musical rhythms . . . The linguistic factors that operate in vocal music, therefore, apply to some extent to text-bound instrumental music as well."<sup>65</sup> Song, too, performs a social function. The lyrics of songs usually take its themes from matters and events that are of common concern and interest to the members of a social group or community. Moreover, dance, like song, can equally be used as a form of social and artistic communication. For example, when dancing, hostile or cooperative attitudes towards a social group or appreciation to benefactors can be transmitted by choosing a certain movement, facial expression or posture. Equally, the music selected for the dance needs to "create the right atmosphere or mood to stimulate and maintain the initial urge for expressive movement" and provide a rhythmic basis to be communicated in the movement or to regulate its speed and quality.<sup>66</sup>

The integrated connection of music and dance is an inherent part of African based dramatic communication. The dramatic use of music and dance finds its more elevated expression in the dance drama, which Nketia identifies as "mimed actions incorporated into the dance or used as extensions of the dance proper. . . [Dance drama] may be *based on one or many themes, without necessarily having a single coherent story line.*"<sup>67</sup> The emphasis on this last point is a crucial one when examining African and African American plays (such as those by Matsemela Manaka, Adrienne Kennedy or Ntozake Shange) that have been admonished by Western critics for their lack of plot story line. These critics were not aware

---

<sup>64</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) xxiii.

<sup>65</sup> J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1974) 24, 188.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 189, 217.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

of the aforementioned component as characteristic of traditional African oral literature and dance drama, an important constituent that has been incorporated into contemporary African American and African theatre. Music and dance, according to Amuta, are instruments “for thematic elaboration and intensification . . . [and] become means of cultural reaffirmation.” New cultural forms emerge out of historical experience and through those forms, “the people remake themselves in the struggle.”<sup>68</sup> By means of retaking all these traditional African elements, form (music and dance) as well as content (social themes), it is asserted what Cabral acutely perceived: “[The] ethnic complexity and cultural heterogeneity of the African world.”<sup>69</sup> So often, as in the case of some societies of East Africa, song and dance can be an expression of “African resentment of or opposition to colonial rule.”<sup>70</sup>

According to Judith L. Hanna, one can observe power (in its simplest form) in dance. An individual’s body can be a symbolic medium signifying power and politics. Dance performance can be a response to “actual or potential subordination. . . [Hence dance can neutralize or release] socially produced tensions and thereby perform a politically stabilizing function.” Furthermore, dance may convey self-assertion establishing a symbolic identity as a counter to a dominating power, colonialism, or a situation that is competitively heterogeneous.<sup>71</sup> Testimonies of Hanna’s assertions are Sophie Maslow, Anna Sokolow and Jane Dudley who, in the 1930s, considered dance as a weapon for social change, against the evils of fascism.<sup>72</sup> Dance can symbolically define a group within a heterogeneous context or, like in Third World Countries, “assert their political and cultural independence,” by making use of their indigenous dance forms in festivals, schools, dance companies and so forth.<sup>73</sup> Concerning the United States, Hanna claims that in 1739, in Stono, Virginia, drum messages were used in slave insurrections. As a result, in 1740, a Slave Act prohibited the use of drums for Whites realized that African dances intertwined with traditional beliefs (i.e., religion) and consequently, these dances were proscribed as well.

Regarding the famous tap dancing, Hanna claims it has African and European roots. When drumming was forbidden among slaves in the United States, they “often let their feet take up the rhythms, and their voices, the tones.” The influence from Europe comes from the “springy Irish jig, a dance in triple rhythm performed with the upper torso held rigid, arms close to the side.”<sup>74</sup> Dances such as rhythm tap, sand and tap dancing among African Americans owes much to Africa, not only in style but also in function and purpose, for dance offers freedom in African and African American tap. Through discipline, the dancer achieves a control over her/his body to win freedom “and use it in a particular way.”<sup>75</sup> In

---

<sup>68</sup> Amuta, *op. cit.*, 165.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>70</sup> T.O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890-1970—the Beni Ngoma* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975) 164-165.

<sup>71</sup> Judith L. Hanna, *To Dance Is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 129, 130, 142.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>74</sup> Judith L. Hanna, *The Performer-Audience Connection: Emotion to Metaphor in Dance and Society* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1983) 47-48.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

South Africa, the gumboot dance has become very popular and is used in the plays created by the Workers Theatre. This dance, like the above-mentioned forms of tap, creates (if not follows) drum rhythms.<sup>76</sup>

In *Society and Dance*, Peter Brinson envisions dance like any other non-verbal acts, affirming it is a creature of climate that can “generate feelings and emotions leading to the creation of ideas for action.” As the authors examined above, he agrees that music and dance can be tools for social change and names South America as an example of a region where dance has this function today: a reinforcing resistance against authoritarian regimes. Dance and music also have equally been and are fundamental vehicles in developing African consciousness; and in many parts of the world they have contributed and contribute “to transmit and reinforce the message of Black power movements.”<sup>77</sup> Africans and African Americans have certainly left their indelible mark and great contribution in the music and dance we hear all over the world, as an evident expression of their culture and of their self-affirmation. Referring to the musical contributions by Africans and African Americans, Robert F. Thompson declares: “Listening to rock, jazz, blues, reggae, salsa, samba, bossa nova, juju, highlife, and mambo, one might conclude that much of the popular music of the world is informed by the flash of the spirit of certain people especially armed with improvisatory drive and brilliance.”<sup>78</sup>

To close the section where language, music and dance have been examined as essential components of the plays of the Black Theatre Movement, it is indispensable to mention the African organizing principles of song and dance that might abridge what has been enunciated above. Note that these components, however, are formal instruments that, in combination with their social message, form the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation. Thompson offers the following organizing principles of song and dance in ancient Africa: 1) Dominance of percussive style—with a vital aliveness in motion and sound; 2) tendency to multiple meter—competing meters sounding all at once; 3) overlapping call and response in singing; 4) inner pulse control—a “metronome sense,” keeping in mind a beat as a rhythmic common denominator in combination of different meters; 5) suspended accentuation patterning—an off-beat phrasing of choreographic and melodic accents; and, 6) songs and dances of social allusion—“contrasting social imperfections against implied criteria to perfect living.”<sup>79</sup> Thompson’s compilation of African principles needs to be kept in mind when examining the theatrical elements found in the plays of the Movement under analysis. Before concluding this chapter, it is fundamental to understand how the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation also encloses the plays written by African and African American women. They, like their male counterparts, have begun to profess their heritage, culture and gender within their society.

---

<sup>76</sup> For further information on tap dancing, check Interviews with Willie Covan, John Bubbles and Al Williams by Beverly Robinson (1981-1989). Maidie Norman African American Theatre Collection, Department of Theatre Arts, University of California, Los Angeles. [Audio Tape].

<sup>77</sup> Peter Brinson, “Epilogue: Anthropology and the Study of Dance,” in *Society and Dance*, Spencer, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 208, 207.

<sup>78</sup> Robert F. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) xiii.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*



## Feminist and Black Women's Aesthetics

The dancer of the future will be one whose body and soul have grown so harmoniously together that the natural language of that soul will have become the movement of the body. The dancer will not belong to a nation but to all humanity. She will dance not in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman's body and the holiness of all its parts. She will dance the changing life of nature, showing how each part is transformed into the other. . . She will dance the freedom of woman.

Oh, she is coming, the dancer of the future: the free spirit, who will inhabit the body of new woman; more glorious than any woman that has yet been; more beautiful than . . . all women of past centuries—the highest intelligence in the freest body.

Isadora Duncan<sup>80</sup>

With her eyes on the future, Isadora Duncan envisioned the new woman yet to come, by freeing her of past stereotypes and chains. Fanon had equally insisted that he did not want to be a prisoner of the past but to create his own ever changing present and future of freedom.<sup>81</sup> Duncan, though, used the body as the metaphor and best expression of freedom for future women, freedom of body that would help her free her spirit imprisoned by centuries of oppression, exploitation and stereotyping imposed by a patriarchal society. Black women, however, needed a double liberation: both from patriarchal rule and from White oppression.

The Civil Rights and Black Power Movements contributed greatly to the flourishing of the Women's Movement. Sue-Ellen Case has observed:

In the United States, black women have been the pioneers and foremost spokeswomen in the movement of women of colour. The movement for black independence in the 1960s had already provided them with an ethnic consciousness, a familiarity with political organization and a language of protest that could be combined with a feminist critique. In fact, these achievements of the black liberation movement aided the feminist movement at large in its articulation of oppression.<sup>82</sup>

The Black liberation movement not only helped develop the Feminist movement, but also helped Black women understand their ethnicity in their two-fold oppression: race and gender. Black women, then, commenced their wandering quest to find new venues of expression, of self-affirmation; that is to say, their shift from objects into subjects.

In *Body of Power/Spirit of Resistance*, Jean Comaroff analyzes the relationship between the human body and the social collective as "a critical dimension of consciousness in all societies. . . [The body] mediates all action upon the world and simultaneously constitutes both the self and the universe of social and natural relations of which it is part. . . [Thus,]

---

<sup>80</sup> Isadora Duncan, "Isadora Duncan," in *Women in Theatre: Compassion and Hope*, Malpede, ed. (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1983) 108-109.

<sup>81</sup> See quote, Note 1 in this Chapter.

<sup>82</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988) 101.

the body social and the body personal always exist in a mutually constitutive relationship.”<sup>83</sup> Consequently, when signs of physical discord are found, these become the signifiers for an anomalous world.<sup>84</sup> Expanding on this idea, Jacquelyn D. Hall observes that the resonant association between lynching and race is clearly portrayed in their parallelism of racial subordination. Hall argues that lynching was used as a means of psychological intimidation towards Blacks as a group. Lynchings were usually followed by sexual mutilation and/or torture. In addition, in Hall’s opinion, lynching has fundamentally contributed to the creation of hierarchies among men.<sup>85</sup>

In contrast, the violence directed at black women illustrates “the double jeopardy of race and sex.”<sup>86</sup> Comaroff’s words refer to Black South African people, whereas those of Hall refer to African Americans. Both imply the effects of physical and psychological violence used by the colonizer upon the colonized. Dale Spender expands on this point and explains the concept of colonization as applied to women’s experience in history: “A long formulated feminist principle has been that women’s minds, and women’s bodies, have been colonised under patriarchy, that women’s oppression has taken both emotional and physical forms, and as both are inextricably linked, it is no solution to try and attain one form of liberation without the other.”<sup>87</sup> In addition, regarding female culture, Sigrid Weigel points out that “[t]here seems to be more similarities with the theory of an ‘alien culture,’ or more precisely, with the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. This, too, is the product of an historical process which appears to be inevitable. Just as the ‘colonisation of minds’ (Frantz Fanon) changes and destroys the alien culture, so the vinculation of patriarchal values in woman represents to her the danger of assimilation as soon as she rises into (while still within) the male order.”<sup>88</sup> This is a real danger considering that, as observed by Virginia Woolf, women have been looking glasses for men and reflected them “twice their natural size.”<sup>89</sup>

Women have been detached from themselves, stolen from their identities, from their voices, and they need to rediscover themselves. Black feminists have also claimed their own existing colonization as Black women: “Nineteenth-century black feminists cannot be dismissed simply as ‘spokespeople for prudery in their communities.’ Their legacy to us is theories that expose the colonization of the black female body by white male power and the destruction of black males who attempted to exercise any oppositional patriarchal control.”<sup>90</sup> In order to reconstruct one’s history and one’s self, it is necessary to have the power of

---

<sup>83</sup> Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power/Spirit of Resistance: The Culture History of a South African People* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985) 6-7, 8.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> Jacquelyn D. Hall, “‘The Mind that Burns in Each Body’: Women, Rape and Racial Violence,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, Snitow et al., eds. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983) 331, 330.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>87</sup> Dale Spender, “Modern Feminist Theorists: Reinventing Rebellion,” in *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers*, Spender, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983) 374.

<sup>88</sup> Sigrid Weigel, “Double Focus,” in *Feminist Aesthetics*, Ecker, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) 63.

<sup>89</sup> Dale, 372.

<sup>90</sup> Hazel V. Carby, “‘On the Threshold of Woman’s Era’: Lynching, Empire and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory,” in Henry L. Gates, Jr., “Race,” *Writing and Difference*, 315.

speech, denied for so many centuries to women. A new language needs to be found in order to help women recover themselves. The act of speaking is in itself an act of resistance, as bell hooks has highlighted. Awareness of the need to voice the different dimensions of women's lives and of the need to speak is one way for women of color to begging the process of education for critical consciousness. hooks remarks the need for the oppressed and colonized people to move from silence into speech, for it is a gesture of defiance, making newness of both life and growth a potential reality. Moreover, the Women's Movement is women's evident expression of a liberated voice (assertion of their new role as subjects, who had left behind the role as objects imposed upon them in the past).<sup>91</sup>

Women need and women do have a different voice that they must keep delineating to express and recover themselves. As examined earlier, African American writer June Jordan has claimed that people live in homogenized nations, where they have one language, one race and one sex who dominate and conceal the existence of a heterogeneous society. In her book *In a Different Voice*, Carol Gilligan explicitly denounces this problem and solicits the acceptance of a woman's language:

As we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak. Yet in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethics of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection. The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the differences in their voices stems part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation. By positing instead two different modes, we arrive at a more complex rendition of human experience which sees the truth of separation and attachment in the lives of women and men and recognize how these truths are carried by different modes of languages and thought.<sup>92</sup>

Dale Spender supports Gilligan's statement by affirming that politics is the basis of women's assertion of anger and protest and men "may be severely discomfited by such rage and can attempt to penalise such rebellious women with counter-charges of 'unfeminine,' 'embittered' or 'neurotic.'"<sup>93</sup>

In order to begin the process of finding the place for their *new* identity, women must carry out introspection within themselves. All women, insists Elizabeth J. Natalle, need to participate actively in the process of self-discovery, which is liberating as well as painful. She adds: "[As] each individual woman is freed from the identity of the past, she contributes to the liberation of all women."<sup>94</sup> This need for a personal self-discovery is aligned with the statement made by Maryse Holder and Margaret Wilkerson that the personal is political. As expressed by Arlene Raven, women have known that "the exploration of intimate arenas can reveal both the private and public power of woman."<sup>95</sup> Feminist art theory needs to help

---

<sup>91</sup> bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Back* (Boston: South End Press, 1989) 14, 28-29, 9.

<sup>92</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 1982) 173-174.

<sup>93</sup> Spender, *op. cit.*, 373.

<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth J. Natalle, *Feminist Theatre: A Study in Persuasion* (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1985).

<sup>95</sup> Arlene Raven, et al., eds., *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology* (Ann Arbor and London: UMT Research Press, 1988) xi.

examine the past and use its analysis as the basis upon which to create strategies for today and for the future, as Hilary Robinson has proposed in an anthology of feminism and art essays compiled by her.<sup>96</sup>

Works by Black women have already commenced to examine and reconstruct their past in order to understand their actual position and create alternatives for their future. Black women's writings are the clear evidence of their awareness about their gender as inextricably linked to their people and culture. In their works, they "problematize the notion of community," remarks Susan Willis, and "rather than paying it lip service, they scrutinize the community as it existed in the past in order to question whether or not and in what form it might exist in the future."<sup>97</sup> Due to the specific ways in which Black women have been "oppressed by white-male dominated society, [they] must present a new challenge to imperialism, racism and sexism from inside and outside the established black liberation movement."<sup>98</sup> This new challenge to imperialism, racism and sexism must be expressed in the search and consequent expression of a new aesthetics.

Elaine Showalter refers to the Black aesthetics of the 1970s claiming: "[As] the black aesthetic of the 1970s celebrated a black consciousness in literature, so too the female aesthetic celebrated a uniquely female literary consciousness. . . [The female aesthetics uttered] a women's culture that had been neglected and had to be revived, of a 'women's language,' and of literary styles and forms that came out of a specific female psychology."<sup>99</sup> This new aesthetics must also study the "not-said," seeking the messages of women who have been repressed in history and in women themselves, "in the manner of Pierre Macherey, by probing the fissures of the female text."<sup>100</sup> The study of the "not-said" suggests the existence of an invisibility that all women, and especially Black women, have been subjected to throughout history. In order to make Black women visible, Barbara Smith solicits a political movement. Smith realizes the inextricability of both Black female identity and sexual racial politics, elements that are exposed in Black women's writings.<sup>101</sup>

Black women have been obliged to share a specific political, social and economic experience. Because of that experience, Black women writers manifest common approaches stylistically, thematically and aesthetically. Barbara Smith confirms the existence of different aesthetics as it is expressed in the language Black women use and culture experience they share: "The use of Black women's language and cultural experience in books *by* and *about* Black women results in a miraculously rich coalescing of form and content and also takes their writing far beyond the confines of white/male literary structures."<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, not only is there specific aesthetics that differentiates Black

---

<sup>96</sup> Hilary Robinson, ed. *Visibly Female: Feminism and Art: An Anthology* (New York: Universe Books, 1988).

<sup>97</sup> Susan Willis, "Black Women Writers: Taking a Critical Perspective," in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, Greene and Kahn, eds. (London and New York: Methuen, 1985) 214.

<sup>98</sup> Chila Burman, "There Have Always Been Great Blackwomen Artists," in Hilary Robinson, ed., *Visibly Female*, 195.

<sup>99</sup> Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* (London: Virago Press, 1986) 6-7.

<sup>100</sup> Elaine Showalter, "Toward a Feminist politics," Showalter, *op. cit.*, 141.

<sup>101</sup> Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," Showalter, *op. cit.*, 170, 174.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

women's writing from a White/male literary structure but also there is a difference between the approaches taken by Black males and Black females. In pointing out the gender difference in Black writing, Deborah E. McDowell offers as an example on the theme of journey. The journey of the Black male character, as portrayed in works written by Black men, takes him underground. This journey is mainly social and political—like Baraka's *Dutchman* or *The Slave*, or Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The journey observed in Black women's works, "though at times touching the political and social, is basically a personal psychological journey"—i.e., Adrienne Kennedy's plays. On the other hand, the journey of Black women's characters moves from their victimization to their consciousness,<sup>103</sup> and this final consciousness is the evident assertion that women's journey is political, like that of men.

By identifying the elements that differentiate their particular history, culture and gender, Black women's writings establish the existence of the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation. Through breaking with the stereotypes and/or oversimplification of women characters as generally portrayed by men, these writers exhibit the complexity and pluralism of their personal and historical personalities. Consequently, a theoretical approach to their writings needs a plurality of methods that protect them "from the temptation of so oversimplifying any text," as claimed by Annette Kolodny.<sup>104</sup>

Concerning theatre, Case points out the different dialogues employed by men and women, which are established by a different historical past and traditional position:

Since women have generally been confined to the domestic domain and denied admittance to the public arena, their performance space has often been within their houses. Their focus has been directed to the personal networks of family and friends, creating kinds of experience which did not lend themselves to articulation in the public figures of rhetoric and oratory. For this reason, some women have developed a different tradition of dialogue from that of men. These women have excelled in the personal forms of dialogue.<sup>105</sup>

These personal forms of dialogue most of the times include women's issues, such as menstrual blood, pregnancy, clitoral images of feminine body language that raise "a political consciousness of sexual difference in art."<sup>106</sup> Helen Keyssar attributes to feminist drama the unquestionability of "the most tenacious and resonant forms of discourse about sexual politics." The sexual identity portrayed and enacted on stage in feminist theatre shows that power is allocated not in a biologically defined sexual identity but in social gender roles.<sup>107</sup> When portraying her sexual identity, woman needs to reconstruct her history and deconstruct the traditional patriarchal system that has imposed on her the position of the *other* instead of herself. Not only women writers, but also critics must contribute to reconstruct women's history in a consciousness-raising process and in offering new

---

<sup>103</sup> Deborah E. McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism," Showalter, *op. cit.*, 195.

<sup>104</sup> Annette Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," Showalter, *op. cit.*, 161.

<sup>105</sup> Case, *op. cit.*, 46.

<sup>106</sup> Ecker, *op. cit.*, 18.

<sup>107</sup> Helene Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women* (New York: Grove Press, 1985) 167, 3.

strategies to approach the reading of a play and to suggest new “alternative modes of perception.”<sup>108</sup> Elisabeth Lenk observes the need for women to develop new relations to themselves through relationships with other women. Thus, “woman will become the living mirror of woman in which she loses herself in order to find herself again.”<sup>109</sup> In their search, women need to free their own movements in order to express the complexity of their own body language, as Duncan had previously foreseen.

About theatre, Case underlines the need for women to create a new body language that encode the female gender signs on the stage. Referring specifically to movement, Case underlines how on stage bolder movement is usually reserved for men, whereas movement for women has been more restricted. Consequently, “stage movement replicates the proxemics of the social order, capitalising upon the spatial relationship in the culture at large between women and the sites of power.”<sup>110</sup> Case’s observation utters the concept that form, content and context cannot be separated. Referring to dance and movement, Anya P. Royce equally claims: “Form and context cannot be understood in isolation from each other. There is meaning in form and structure, and it affects meanings derived from the contexts of the arts. Conversely, historical developments in art forms demonstrate that context implies preferred and meaningful forms.”<sup>111</sup>

The dance created and performed by African American artist Katherine Dunham clearly exemplified Royce’s view. Dunham’s introduction of African rhythms has left an indelible mark upon subsequent African American dancers and choreographers. The Black Theatre Movement, and especially some Black women playwrights—such as Shange—followed the African and African American tradition of dance and movement that became part of Black Women’s Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation. Dunham’s dances interpreted mourning and marriage ceremonies and ancient fertility rites, “blending modern and primitive dance forms.”<sup>112</sup> Hence, movement and dance appear as essential components in the plays of the Black Theatre Movement, with special intensity in the Movement that emerged in South Africa. Dance, then, Malpede affirms, shows a “wish to live”<sup>113</sup> and love that is present in the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation: A wish to express one’s feelings and emotions, which emerged from a people’s tremendous love for and desire to live, to express their anger and

---

108 Case, *op. cit.*, 113.

109 Elisabeth Lenk, “The Self-Reflecting Woman,” in Ecker, ed. *Feminist Aesthetics*, 57.

110 Case, *op. cit.*, 117-118.

111 Anya P. Royce, *Movement and Meaning: Creativity and Interpretation in Ballet and Mime* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 201.

112 Malpede, ed., *Women in Theatre: Compassion and Hope*, 122.

113 *Ibid.*, 13.

to assert themselves. These were the female and male artists of the Black Theatre Movement.





## CHAPTER III

### The Black Theatre Movement in the United States. Black Aesthetics: Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, and Douglas Turner Ward

I want anything  
you got, having nothing myself, I want What I want, what I think  
I want  
I want  
what you have, having nothing, myself,  
I want  
what you have, having nothing, myself,  
I want always to be  
where I am, and feel  
good about it. Some  
nerve.

Amiri Baraka<sup>1</sup>

#### Black Aesthetics

Amiri Baraka's poem of self-affirmation clearly reflects the breathing of Black art, in which consciousness, assertiveness and pride about being African American and having an African American heritage were a fundamental basis. Blackness in the 1960s and 1970s turned to be a symbol of pride full of new meanings. Charles T. Davis formulates what Blackness has come to mean to African American writers:

Awareness of being black is the most powerful and the most fertile single inspiration for black writers in America. It is ironic that blackness, for so long regarded as a handicap socially and culturally, should also be an artistic strength. Consciousness of blackness has brought a special intensity to the statement of theme, as in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*; a distinction and a beauty of language, evident in the poems of Langston Hughes; and unusual ways of rendering scene, as observed in the work of Jean Toomer. . . All writers arrive at a reconciliation of a sense of tradition and a sense of difference. For nearly all black writers in America that sense of difference was the recognition of

---

<sup>1</sup> Amiri Baraka, "Where Is the Romantic Life," in *Black Magic, Sabotage, Target Study, Black Art—Collected Poetry, 1961-1967* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill, Co., 1969) 83.

blackness. . . For most, blackness was the spur, the barb, or the shirt of pain, that moved the artist to achieve distinction.<sup>2</sup>

The African American artist's sense of difference and distinction is clearly established by the Black Aesthetics resulting from what African American artists of the 1960s denominated Black Art. Black Art, as previously mentioned, was "the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept" and it proposed a separate symbolism, iconology, mythology and critique, as highlighted by Amiri Baraka<sup>3</sup>. During the 1960s, African American artists were engaged in a reevaluation of the social function of art, the traditional role of the writer and Western aesthetics. They became involved in the creation of a Black Aesthetics that required a close examination of the contradictions "arising out of the Black man's experience in the racist West."<sup>4</sup> Referring specifically to African American theatre, Ed Bullins claims that the new theatre used a Third World iconology for it incorporated an African American soul ethos and an African motif that belonged to a "Black ideological expression." Moreover, he insists that African American writing at that time was in a dialectic period of evolution that included the dialectic of experience and the dialectic of change.<sup>5</sup>

Within the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation, Black Aesthetics is the frame that differentiates African American writing from that of Black South Africans, for instance. It is essential to keep in mind that the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation offers precisely freedom of expression to different groups, communities or cultures that are reaffirming their difference, the unique elements that are part of their heritage and/or gender. Kimberly W. Benston has accurately accentuated the primary aim of Black theatre as that of embracing the audience in a "collective affirmation" of certain styles, values and goals.<sup>6</sup> The consideration or disregard of Black Aesthetics has been a discursive point for theatre critics. James V. Hatch recognizes a distinctive Black style and sensibility when he states that "if an aesthetic may be defined as a dialectic of production and appreciation, there is a Black style, a Black sensibility, and it is one that [in the 1970s has] been traced directly to African philosophy and social behavior."<sup>7</sup> On the same line, Benston observes a distinguishable Black Aesthetic reflected in the Theatre Movement.

For Benston, the Movement, spiritually and technically, was one "from *mimesis*, or representation of an action, to *methexis*, or communal 'helping-out' of the action by all assembled." He adds that the Movement showed a process which shifted from drama (or the spectacle observed) to ritual ("the effect which dissolves traditional divisions between actor and spectator, between self and other"). Benston insists on the importance of a collective or

---

<sup>2</sup> Charles T. Davis, *Black Is the Color of the Cosmos: Essays on Afro-American Literature and Culture, 1942-1981*, Gates, ed. (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982) xxi.

<sup>3</sup> See Amiri Baraka's statement, Note 34, Chapter I.

<sup>4</sup> Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," in *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ed Bullins, ed. *The New Lafayette Theatre Presents: Plays with Aesthetic Comments by Six Black Playwrights* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974) 4.

<sup>6</sup> Kimberly W. Benston, "The Aesthetic of Modern Black Drama: From Mimesis to Methexis," in *The Theatre of Black Americans*. Volume I, Hill, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1980) 77.

<sup>7</sup> James V. Hatch, "Some African Influences on the Afro-American Theatre," in *The Theatre of Black Americans*, Volume I, 25.

communal effort and experience, which is also the foundation of traditional African societies.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Geneviève Fabre concludes that the emergence of Black theatre is above all a socio-cultural fact.<sup>9</sup> Prior to the Movement's development, W.E.B. DuBois had already formulated that Black theatre should be, proclaiming four points: 1) About African Americans; 2) by African Americans; 3) for African Americans; and, 4) near African Americans.<sup>10</sup> The African American playwrights of the 1960s and 1970s gave credence to what DuBois had foreseen in his early definition. Moreover, Woodie King accentuates that Black theatre is about the destruction of the traditional role that Blacks had played in White theatre. Black theatre needed to be a theatre that expressed love of one's self and "one's personal, national, and international family." The new Black theatre, King declared, was "the ritualized reflection and projection of a unique and particular way of being, born of the unique and particular conditioning of black people leasing time" in a world controlled by White men.<sup>11</sup>

The new Black Aesthetics entailed a total commitment from African American artists. According to Baraka, artists must develop and defend what their community needs (the present), in order to create a future.<sup>12</sup> The active role played by the African American writer in the 1960s was geared towards her/his audience's engagement into the same commitment and action. The new Black theatre intended to develop "an active and critical rather than passive audience," John O'Neal had declared. O'Neal was referring to the urgency for Black theatre to address the needs "of Black people and [be] grounded in their experience."<sup>13</sup> African Americans, though, like African writers, faced the problem of the double audience, which had already been identified by James Weldon Johnson. Johnson's solution to this dilemma consisted in the African American artists to stand on their *racial foundation*, and address the needs of their African American audience so that they could examine the complexity of their history and their individual selves.<sup>14</sup> Once this point was established, the African American writer would be able to reach all audiences.

Margaret Wilkerson, referring to the similarity that has been perceived between the Black church and theatre, has emphasized that the theatrical event for Black people is "at once communal, functional and participatory. . . [Theatre] serves the historical function of a place where Black people can be in the majority, away from the scrutiny of imposition of outsiders," like in the Black church. But Black theatre needs to be examined on its own

---

<sup>8</sup> Benston, *op. cit.*, 63.

<sup>9</sup> Geneviève Fabre, *Le Théâtre Noir aux États-Unis* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982) 11.

<sup>10</sup> Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 292.

<sup>11</sup> Woodie King, "Foreword," in *Black Drama Anthology*, King and Milner, eds. (New York: New American Library, 1986) 7.

<sup>12</sup> Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays Since 1965* (New York: Random House, 1971) 97.

<sup>13</sup> John O'Neal, "Motion in the Ocean: Some Political Dimensions of the Free Southern Theatre," in *Theatre Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 77.

<sup>14</sup> Adam D. Miller, "It's a Long Way to St. Louis: Notes on the Audience for Black Drama," in *Theatre Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968) 147-150.

terms by its own objectives.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Wilkerson recalls the great impact the Watts Riots had on the Black community and on theatre in 1965 in Los Angeles: “The upheaval, which left thirty-three Blacks dead, stimulated artists to use theatre as a means of collective self-assessment and a vehicle for exploring the conditions and the potential of their community.”<sup>16</sup> As already underscored, artist and community are inextricably related in the Black theatre of the 1960s. Yet, it is not only the African American artist who needs to be committed to his art and people, but the African American critic must also pay the same token. Addison Gayle describes this need: “The question for the black critic today is not how beautiful is a melody, a play, a poem, or a novel, but *how much more beautiful has the poem, melody, play or novel made the life of a single black [wo/]man.*”<sup>17</sup> Gayle’s statement underlines the need for African American critics to examine the works by African American artists on the same terms the artists need to generate their art: having their community in mind.

Still, as Richard Wesley emphasizes, every person involved in Black theatre should exercise a total commitment in the production of a play, from the actors to the people who are engaged in the artwork and back stage. Commenting on one of the performances by The New Lafayette Players, Wesley describes the feeling of togetherness established between the actors and the audience: “All the Brothers, ‘actors,’ and ‘audience’ [gathered] around, [formed] a CIRCLE and [began] to dance. Coming together, linking arms, they [shouted] chants and move in circular fashion, or they [broke] for solos. . . And all the while, the DRUM [was] exhorting them on and on. . .”<sup>18</sup> Wesley’s observation actually highlighted an essential component of the works created and produced during the Black Theatre Movement: the creation of a new theatrical language that, by combining song, music and dance, established a close bond between actors/artists and audience. In this regard, Lawrence W. Levine, referring specifically to secular music (the blues, for instance) and church in the African American tradition, has claimed that music gave a “sense of power, of control” to the participants.<sup>19</sup> Black theatre in the 1960s and 1970s recuperated the African American tradition of music, song and dance and included these elements as a means to reaffirm that tradition. Other African American writers have equally acknowledged the pivotal part that music has played in their lives and in their works. This is the case of Ralph Ellison: “I still believe that my real self was destined to be fulfilled in music, that art which had focused my ambitions from the age of eight and the only art, given my background, that seemed to offer some possibility for self-definition.”<sup>20</sup> Music has offered African Americans a fundamental basis of self-expression throughout their history.

---

<sup>15</sup> Margaret B. Wilkerson, “Critics, Standards and Black Theatre,” in *The Theatre of Black Americans*, Volume I, 122-124.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>17</sup> Addison Gayle, Jr., ed. *The Black Aesthetic* (New York: Anchor Books, 1971) xxii. Emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Wesley, “On Art Collective,” in *The New Lafayette Theatre*, Folder housed in the Hatch-Billops Collection, [1972?], 3.

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 234.

<sup>20</sup> Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964) xii.

Baraka has argued that African American music is “essentially the expression of an attitude, or a collection of attitudes, about the world, and only secondarily an attitude about the way music is made.”<sup>21</sup> The attitude that Baraka refers to is denominated “subversive” by Paul Garon: “All authentic blues and jazz share a poetically subversive core, an explosive essence of *irreconcilable revolt* against the shameful limits of an unlivable destiny.”<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, African American music possesses not only a subversive attribute and a sense of power but also the life and spirit that African American artists aimed to infuse in their art. Federico García Lorca, the Spanish poet greatly admired by Amiri Baraka and Adrienne Kennedy, rapidly understood the fundamental position occupied by Black music in the North American society: “For the spiritual axis of America has been shaped by [Blacks’s] sadness. [The Black person], living close to pure human nature, and other forces of Nature. [The Black person] spilling music out of [her/his] pockets. Apart from the art of [Blacks], the United States has nothing to show but machines and automatons.”<sup>23</sup> This was precisely the goal of African American artists: to integrate soul and spirit in a society detached from nature, from life, which consequently was annihilating people’s spirituality.

In addition, music and dance accentuate another quality that the dominant North American society lacks: that of sensuality, which is equally related to the idea of nature and life. Thus, Richard Wright, referring to the blues, has observed that, despite “the sense of defeat and down-heartedness, [Black people] are not intrinsically pessimistic. Their burden of woe and melancholy is dialectically redeemed through sheer *force of sensuality*, into an almost exultant affirmation of life, of love, of sex, of movement, *of hope*.”<sup>24</sup> Ellison, who asserts that pain is transcended when confronted, completes this definition: “The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near comic lyricism.”<sup>25</sup> Proof of Ellison’s statement can be found in the image of blood that emerges in most of the plays written during the Black Theatre Movement, for blood encloses a double connotation: one of death and outburst of rage, and one of life and rebirth.

Paul C. Harrison, reflecting on song, dance and drum as important modes of the contemporary African American experience—in which the decades of the 1960s and 1970s can be included—has observed its parallelism with traditional African life. He claims that song “has the power to transcend the static nature of literal word-meaning; . . . [dance] codifies and makes sensible the wide range of gestural signification in black life; . . . [and drums] make evident the acoustic syntax of black speech with its varying tonal choices.” Moreover, these sounds and movement convey specific meanings related to the African

---

<sup>21</sup> LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Black Music* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1969) 13.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Garon, *Blues and the Poetic Spirit* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1979) 8.

<sup>23</sup> Lorca’s statement is included in Garon, Paul. *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*, Garon (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1979) 27.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Wright’s statement is included in *New Black Voices*, Chapman, ed. (New York: NAL/Mentor Books, 1972) 42.

<sup>25</sup> Ellison, *op. cit.*, 78-79.

American experience.<sup>26</sup> In his statement, Harrison establishes how African Americans have created a new language. The spoken and written text adopts the rhythms, gestural and flowing attributes of music, dance and song. Syncopation, improvisation and repetition—jazz components—are components adopted in poetry and drama quite often. Consequently, even if a play does not include a musical piece or dance and/or song per se, the rhythm or movement and gesture might have been incorporated into the spoken and non-spoken language.

Considering the element of repetition in African American culture, Henry Louis Gates argues that it “finds its most characteristic shape in performance: Rhythm in music, dance and language. . . Repetitive words and rhythm have long been recognized as a focal constituent of African music and its American descendants—slave songs, blues, spirituals and jazz. . . [Black music] has always tended to imitate the human voice.”<sup>27</sup> His observation emphasizes the inextricability of word and music, each one including attributes of the other. Black English is an evident proof of this reciprocal influence of music and speech, and is especially vibrant in the performance arena. Theatre becomes the most appropriate vehicle for African American artists to use their language as another distinctive element that belongs to their tradition.

When referring specifically to Black English, June Jordan has highlighted three qualities she finds in it: life, voice and clarity. In contrast with other languages, there is no passive voice construction in Black English and the action happens in the present indicative. Every sentence “assumes the living and active participation of at least two human beings, the speaker and the listener.” She underlines that Black English has been constructed by a people who have constantly needed to insist that they are present and that they do exist.<sup>28</sup> Jordan’s assertion testifies that Black English conveys, as does music, song and dance, the qualities of life and self-affirmation of African American people. The plays of the Black Theatre Movement included the aforementioned elements that, together with the context from which they originated and the themes developed in them, remained in total harmony and pursued the same goal of self-determination, self-expression and self-affirmation of a community that celebrated a life of change, action and hope for a better future they needed to construct. The playwrights of the Movement were the African American spokespeople and leaders of the Black community through their artistic and socio-political struggle for freedom and recognition.

#### Amiri Baraka: The Ritual of History and the Self in *The Slave*

I believe that it is necessary to agitate the masses, to shake men and winnow them as in a sieve, to throw against one another, in order to see if in this way their shells will not break and their spirits flow forth, whether they will not mingle and unite with one another, and whether the real collective spirit, the

---

<sup>26</sup> Paul Carter Harrison, “Black Theatre in the African Continuum: Word/Song as Method,” in *Totem Voices-Plays from the Black World Repertory*, Harrison, ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 22-23.

<sup>27</sup> Henry L. Gates, Jr., “Criticism in the Jungle,” in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, Gates, ed. (New York and London: Methuen, 1984) 68, 69.

<sup>28</sup> June Jordan, *On Call: Political Essays* (Boston: South End Press, 1985) 129.

soul of humanity, may not thus be welded together. . . I do not like to rub against people but to clash against them; I do not like to approach people obliquely and glance at them at a tangent, but to meet them frontally and if possible split them in two. It is the best service I can do them. And there is no better preparation than in solitude.

Miguel de Unamuno<sup>29</sup>

In his autobiography, Amiri Baraka recalls the years of his youth in the Air Force and at University when he would spend many hours alone, thinking, reflecting, trying to go deep into himself in a journey of self-discovery: “I was stretched between two lives and perceptions (I’ve told you it was four BlackBrownYellowWhite—but actually it’s two or the real side, the two extremes, the black and the white, with the middle two but their boxing gloves).”<sup>30</sup> Caught between those two extremes, Baraka finally decided to take sides and stay only with one: the Black one.

Baraka’s period of transition and final decision to remain on the Black side is reflected in two of his plays: *Dutchman* and *The Slave*. In *Dutchman*, Clay, a whitened Black character, is killed by the end of the play; and in *The Slave*, Walker Vessels, now already on the Black side, has made his final decision to become a revolutionary (after leaving his White wife) and to fight for his people. In contrast, Adrienne Kennedy, who shared Baraka’s same dilemma and was his contemporary, did not decide for one side or the other. Her plays show her split self in an *agonic* and tragic struggle to reconcile both the White and Black selves in herself, without having to reject one for the other. While Kennedy shows her actual pain in her plays, Baraka reaches the phase in which pain has been transformed into a creative rage. However, before reaching that phase, Baraka had gone through Kennedy’s same tremendous agony as testified in *The System of Dante’s Hell*: “Shadow of a man. (Tied in a ditch, my own flesh burning in my nostrils. My body goes simple death, but what of my mind? Who created me to this pain?).”<sup>31</sup> Baraka did actually touch death in his inferno and the pain was so deep that it turned into the rage that poked him out of the ditch: “Once, as a child, I would weep for compassion and understanding. And Hell was the inferno of my frustration. But the world is clearer to me now, and many of its features, more easily definable.”<sup>32</sup> It is only through self-introspection that Baraka touched his inner self and, after doing it, he felt ready to offer his best service to his community.

Regarding Vessel’s *agonic* character in *The Slave*, Baraka has stated: “I consciously wrote as deeply into my psyche as I could go. . . [G]oing so deep into myself was like descending into Hell.”<sup>33</sup> It is this illustration of his self-introspection that Baraka took into his theatre to show his community the need for them to complete the same journey and be aware of the hell they were living in, so that they could abandon it. Baraka defined the new revolutionary theatre, as a theatre that “*must EXPOSE! Show up the insides of these human beings, look into black skulls. . . The Revolutionary theatre must teach them their deaths. It must teach them about silence. It must kill any God anyone names except common sense. . .*

---

<sup>29</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, “Solitude,” in *Essays and Soliloquies* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1925).

<sup>30</sup> Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1984) 49.

<sup>31</sup> Amiri Baraka, *The System of Dante’s Hell* (New York: Grove Press, 1965) 112.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>33</sup> Baraka, *Autobiography*, 166.

[It] should stagger through our universe correcting, insulting, preaching, spitting craziness—but a craziness taught to us in our most rational moments.”<sup>34</sup> The new theatre needed to raise consciousness in people so that they could see and understand themselves and their condition in order to make the appropriate corrections. The new theatre needed to correct the deformation of African American history. Finally, the new theatre needed to be born out of the death of past stereotypes created by a system that had undermined African Americans and their culture.

Robert H. Grant confines Baraka’s *The Slave* and Hansberry’s *Les Blancs* under the definition of “Black existentialist drama of ideas.”<sup>35</sup> Grant’s observation about the presence of a Western existentialism in Baraka’s work is combined with the African tradition—as it is revealed in the African American culture. Baraka himself exhibits this combination: “I Got. Blues. Steamshovel blues . . . Blues. I Got. Abstract Expressionism blues. Existentialism blues. I Got. More blues, than you can shake your hiney at . . . Kierkegaard blues, boy are they here, a wringing and twisting. Or, fool, the blues blues.”<sup>36</sup> Baraka and Hansberry exhibit the African American’s conflicts within the White society and their characters reveal not only the writer’s inner struggle, but also “the failure of communication between Black and White, radical and moderate, ‘liberal’ and insurgent.”<sup>37</sup> In addition, Grant asserts that *The Slave* is a *drama of the self* that can be defined as a “psychological morality tale blending realism, political allegory and the theatre of Cruelty.”<sup>38</sup> And Baraka corroborates Grant’s opinion when, referring to *Dutchman*, *The Slave*, *The Toilet* and *The Baptism*, he affirms: “I was definitely talking to myself, I was saying that I needed to get away from where I was, that the whole situation was not positive as far as I was concerned. It was a dialogue in which I was trying to clarify certain things.”<sup>39</sup> Self-introspection, then, is essential as the first step towards self-affirmation.

Baraka recalls that in the 1960s Walt Whitman and the Surrealists were their prophets, but after his trip to Cuba—when he visited just after the Cuban revolution—he was “shaken more deeply than even [he] realized. The arguments [he] had had with [his] old poet comrades increased and intensified. It was not enough just to write, to feel, to think, one must *act!* One *could* act.”<sup>40</sup> This is precisely Vessel’s awareness in *The Slave*. Vessels has decided to become a revolutionary, leave aside the talking and take an action. In Act II, Vessels tells Easley:

WALKER

---

34 Baraka, *Black Magic*, 211. Emphasis added.

35 Robert H. Grant, “‘Rebel’ or ‘Slave’: Language, Revolution, and the 1960s Black Intellectual Persona in Baraka’s *The Slave* (1964) and Hansberry’s *Les Blancs* (1964).” Unpublished paper, Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1985. 2.

36 Baraka, *The System of Dante’s Hell*, 86.

37 Grant, 6.

38 *Ibid.*, 19.

39 Amiri Baraka interviewed by James V. Hatch, 1984, in *Artist and Influence*, Hamalian and Wilson, eds. (New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc., 1985) 13.

40 Baraka, *Autobiography*, 166.



... You never did anything concrete to avoid what's going on now. Your *sick liberal lip service* to whatever was the least filth. Your high thetic disapproval of the political<sup>41</sup>

Vessels is tired of so much talking, of Western White liberals' emphasis on words (problem also presented by Hansberry in her play *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*). Vessels realizes that social protest is not enough, "right is in the act! And the act itself has some place in the world . . . it makes some place for itself." (*Slave*, 75). Time had come for him to take an action and kill his whitened past.

If Baraka is talking to himself in *The Slave*, Easley and Mrs. Easley—Vessel's White ex-wife—might be considered as "personifications of aspects of [Vessel's] past emotional life, a symbolic dyad reflecting those Western values which mesmerize him yet, in spite of the brutality of his words and actions of the play."<sup>42</sup> When Walker attacks Easley's White liberalism, it is Baraka's attack on his own "liberal integrationist stance . . . [during] his early East Village days in New York, . . . [an assertion of his] new militant black revolutionist position."<sup>43</sup> Grant maintains that both Matoseh's (in Hansberry's *Les Blancs*) and Vessels' rhetoric voices share a radicalism that approaches Black nationalist self-determination.<sup>44</sup> Vessels affirms that he will accept "no other adviser except [his] own ego." (*Slave*, 66). As claimed by the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements, self-determination was pivotal in the struggle for liberation; or as Baraka states, "the struggle against racial oppression is basically a struggle of national liberation."<sup>45</sup>

In the struggle for national consciousness, African Americans were encouraged by the new African nations to turn away from Western ideology and aesthetics. Consequently, the assassination of the Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba—who also appears as one of the characters in Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*—was a turning point which reinforced their struggle. Baraka himself has testified: "We identified especially with the new nations of Africa. Malcolm X had sounded that note clearly. And the assassination of Patrice Lumumba touched the African American intellectual and artist community at the point

---

<sup>41</sup> Amiri Baraka, *The Slave*, in *Dutchman and The Slave* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1964) 74. Emphasis added. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Slave*, page number).

<sup>42</sup> Grant, 19. In this regard, Lloyd W. Brown claims that Easley symbolizes the White enemy outside that Vessel hates; but Easley also represents the 'Whiteness' that Vessel feels within himself. (Lloyd W. Brown, *Amiri Baraka* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980) 147).

<sup>43</sup> Clinton F. Oliver, ed., *Contemporary Black Drama: From A Raisin in the Sun to No Place to Be Somebody* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971) 209. In a 1989 interview, Baraka recalled the past and how African Americans would not let Whites participate in the Movement, which he considered later a gross error: "Anybody who was progressive enough or intrepid enough would go there [East Village], but we wanted to be so revolutionary and at the same time we felt so guilty, because we had just left downtown, and many of us had been with White women and married to White women, that when we got up there we felt kind of guilty, embarrassed, so that helped" (Interview with the author at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, November 1989). And Brown asserts that Baraka's abandonment of Black nationalism and embracement of socialism confirms his actual "lifelong radicalism." (Brown, *op. cit.*, 147). It also confirms the practice of his theory of art and change; i.e., becoming, instead of remaining a static form and/or content.

<sup>44</sup> Grant, *op. cit.*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Toward Ideological Clarity* (Newark, New Jersey: Congress of African People, ALSC Conference, 1974) 20.

where nerve touched the bone.”<sup>46</sup> First, it was Lumumba’s assassination, and, then, that of Malcolm X that contributed to the burst of African Americans’ pain in the form of rage and violence reflected in the themes and the language used by the playwrights of the Movement.

Baraka’s vision on a relative failure of the Theatre Movement in the 1960s parallels Vessel’s political position presented in *The Slave*. Baraka considers that the relative failure of the Black Theatre Movement and the Black Arts Movement lied on “[their] failure to build the political bases that would ensure their continuing life. Either [they] depended on the ruler’s money, and when that failed, [they] did; or when the organizations which supported revolutionary black arts organizations split, or ran into problems, or were attacked by the state, as they constantly were, the black arts organizations suffered the same fate.”<sup>47</sup> On the same line of thought, referring to Vessels, Werner Sollors observes that “instead of developing a political concept of Black liberation, [he] merely follows the impulses of his own love-hate emotions, which he expresses with an insistent *larmoyance*. This flaw reduces Vessels’ political potential to a nihilistic form of action-for-action’s sake. However, although [Vessels] has no hopeful vision for a revolutionary future, he is fully aware of the mistakes of the liberals in the present.”<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, that action itself becomes the means of Vessels’ liberation and knowledge.<sup>49</sup>

Floyd Gaffney points out that “Black victims [in Baraka’s plays] acquire freedom through triumph of knowledge, reflected through their ritualized suffering and revolt.” In this manner, *The Slave* expresses what Baraka advocates that theatre should be, “positive in its expression of black pride, black identity and black nationhood.”<sup>50</sup> This liberation and assertiveness is implied not only in a political struggle, but also in a new aesthetics and a new language that must be searched by the artist. *The Slave* becomes the expression of a balance between content and form, which, according to Kimberly Benston, is achieved through the ritual of dialogue.<sup>51</sup> This ritualistic element is fundamental in the play, for it becomes Baraka’s affirmation of that aesthetics.

Language, as examined earlier, is essential to a culture’s own expression. The creation of a new language by the African American artists of the 1960s was one of their main goals. The effective form of culture, Baraka had proclaimed, is speech, for words have power: “The words of a language become something specific related to their individual users, but for the same reason, each culture has got its own language, because they have their own experience . . . and all cultures communicate exactly what they have, a powerful motley of experience.”<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, language needs to be infused with feeling, force and spirit in

---

<sup>46</sup> Amiri Baraka, “Black Theatre in the Sixties,” in *Studies in Black American Literature*. Volume II, Weixlmann and Fontenot, eds. (Greenwood, Florida: The Renkeville Publishing Co., 1986) 23.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>48</sup> Werner Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a “Populist Modernism”* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978) 136.

<sup>49</sup> Remember that Baraka sees his theatre as a *theatre of victims*.

<sup>50</sup> Floyd Gaffney, “Amiri Baraka,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Volume 38, Davis and Harris, eds. (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., Book Tower, 1985) 29.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted by Grant, 12.

<sup>52</sup> LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Home: Social Essays* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1971) 166, 168, 172.

order to create a theatre of world spirit, “where the spirit can be shown to be the most competent force in the world. Force. Spirit. Feeling. The language will be anybody’s but tightened by the poet’s backbone. And even the language must show what the facts are in this consciousness epic, what’s happening.”<sup>53</sup> *The Slave*, then, becomes an expression of this language of unique experience of one’s self and one’s culture. Vessels is aware that he has been speaking a language which is not his, for, although he has learnt many words, “almost none of them are [his]” (*Slave*, 53). Consequently, Vessels decides to adopt a new language: action. The spirit, force and feeling are shaped by the rage, violence and passion that originate through the ritual of dialogue.

Some scholarship suggests there are strong links between Baraka’s theatre and Artaud’s theatre of cruelty. Sanders considers *The Slave* “the pivotal play in [Baraka’s] corpus and the first of his theatre of cruelty plays because it is primarily about becoming—becoming free.”<sup>54</sup> Like Artaud, Baraka’s attempt is to find a spiritual basis for meaning through theatre, as a public genre that includes an audience. This ritual theatre becomes a ceremony more than a spectacle, where the audience, which for Baraka and Artaud is a collective, is essential to the expression of the event.<sup>55</sup> Baraka and the artists of the Theatre Movement adopted the ritual because they thought rituals were more powerful than *talking heads*. They believed that Western theatre was mainly talking in a drawing room, while life was taking place outside. African American artists wanted to get away from the drawing room model, which is what Vessels’ poetry attempted to be but is undermined by Easley who calls it Vessels’ “inept formless poetry. . . The poetry of ritual drama.” (*Slave*, 55-56). When Baraka wrote about ritual drama, he was not aware he knew and understood what he meant. It was not until after he had written *The Slave* that he realized ritual was actually history, the lives of African Americans: “We perform our lives. We live our lives every day. We might think we do different things but a lot of the things we do are the same things: we get up, we go to school, we eat, . . . and we go to sleep and, then, we get up again. The sun and the moon. The same.” However, in spite of those daily repetitions, he observed that people go through infinite changes, not in the sense of displacements, but in the sense of becoming. People have “to keep coming to keep going.” It is the constant of always the same thing, but always changing. This is what ritual means, “the constant of consciousness, and reconsciousness and re-reconsciousness.”<sup>56</sup>

The structure of *The Slave* is circular, like the seasons’ cycle, like the sun and the moon. The play is introduced by Vessels dressed as an old-field slave and is the same character that closes it. This circular ending may seemingly imply that no change has occurred, and yet there has been a change; i.e., the achievement of consciousness, in this case, a recovery of a hidden and painful identity. This first change, first step, will lead to new changes, new consciousness “and reconsciousness and re-reconsciousness.” The repetition that Baraka points out is one of the elements of ritual and an essential component of African American folk and musical tradition. Shelby Steele claims the new African American theatre ritual is

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>54</sup> Leslie C. Sanders, *The Development of Black Theatre in America: From Shadows to Selves* (Baton Rouge (Louisiana) and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) 150.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Baraka, 1989.

achieved through the repetition of symbols, values and patterns from drama to drama “rather than the traditional religious method of repeating a single ceremony until it becomes ritual.”<sup>57</sup> Besides repetition, though, there are other literary devices used by African American artists in order to attain ritual, as formulated by Steele: symbol, allegory, language style, recurring themes and characterization. Moreover, these devices appear from play to play, rather than in every play.<sup>58</sup>

The old slave figure that appears in the prologue of Baraka’s “Fable in a Prologue and Two Acts”—as Baraka denominates *The Slave*, mentions the need of a meta-language, for “your brown is not [his] brown, etc . . . We need some thing not included here.” (*Slave*, 45). Sanders asserts that this metalanguage the character speaks of is action itself. In addition, the violence which serves as the background of the play “emphasizes primarily the torment of the protagonists and reflects the more mangled communication than the uncompromising nature of the act that approaches as the dialogue comes to an end.”<sup>59</sup> Sanders believes that the child’s cry at the end represents “the basic expression to which [Vessels] is reduced” and symbolically shows that a new language must come.<sup>60</sup> In addition, Lawrence W. Levine has analyzed the ritual of insult in African American verbal art form. Insults and street language are present in most of the plays of the Movement, and those by Baraka did especially emphasize their use, as may be observed in *The Slave*. The use of ritual insult, Levine maintains, has been the perfect outlet for anger. The practice of ritual insult increased at a time when African Americans were particularly subjected to assaults and insults upon their dignity. Ritual language play (e.g., insult in the form of the dozens<sup>61</sup>) could be used “as a mechanism for teaching and sharpening the ability to control emotions and anger; an ability that was often necessary for survival.”<sup>62</sup> This is, precisely, how Vessels operates at the beginning of the play. He uses the ritual of insult, and the rhythm of the insults increases throughout the play, until he realizes that talk—e.g., insults—is not enough. Vessels does not want to use verbal devices to control his anger, so that he becomes action itself. His selected action actually redeems him.

In the new language of action, the expression of hatred becomes a significant component. Baraka uses hate as an energy force in the character of Vessels. He also uses this force in plays such as *The Baptism* and *The Toilet*. Hate, though, is not a result but a ritual means of expressing a feeling that leads to love. Glen Burns refers to Malcolm X who,

---

<sup>57</sup> Shelby Steele, “Notes on Ritual in the New Black Theatre,” in *The Theatre of Black Americans*, Volume I, 33.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Sanders, *op. cit.*, 153.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>61</sup> Some scholars have regarded the dozens as a dialect insult. Herber L. Foster asserts that the dozens possess a pattern of interactive insult and follows rules well recognized which allow an emotional outlet. At times, the dozens are rhymed couplets, other times, curses, insults and taunts. Usually, only two people participate in this verbal exchange, but more people can get involved—the participants might even play to the audience. Foster claims that the dozens has been usually referred to as a survival technique or ritualized game utilized to: “(1) express aggressive feelings; (2) develop verbal skills; (3) cut a boy free from matriarchal control; and (4) teach youths how to control their feelings and tempers.” (Herbert L. Foster, *Ribbin,’ Jivin,’ and Playin’ the Dozens: The Unrecognized Dilemmas of Inner City Schools* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1974) 211-212).

<sup>62</sup> Levine, *op. cit.*, 358.

like Baraka, understood hate as *a cleansing force*. Malcolm X discerned how to use any means that could offer African Americans a therapy to liberate their hatred. It is through the expression of that hate that Clay, in *Dutchman*, and Vessels, in *The Slave* recover their identity.<sup>63</sup> The hatred expressed by Vessels is not only against Whites but also against himself. He admits there are polluted elements comprising the pursuit of his political motives and actions—like “[dragging] piles of darkies out of their beds and [shooting] them for being in Rheingold ads” (*Slave*, 66-67). Years later, Baraka has recognized that “all the white-hating is not necessary to love oneself. Unless [one] is insecure as [he was] . . . The positive aspect of all that was clear, it represents struggle, the desire of liberation. The negative was the bashing together like children. And so, those structures could not last, the internal contradictions were so sharp. . . .”<sup>64</sup> At that time, though, language served as a liberating force, a way to relieve the rage which was boiling inside and needed to be taken out. Once that phase was burnt, new changes arose in Baraka’s work.

Spoken language as well as other literary or theatrical devices such as symbols served in Baraka’s writing as liberating instruments, not only for his characters but also for African American history itself. Harold Cruse proclaimed that the African American’s “one great and present hope [was] to know and understand his Afro-American history in the United States more profoundly. Failing that, and failing to create a new synthesis and a social theory of action, he [would] suffer the historical fate described by the philosopher who warned that ‘those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.’”<sup>65</sup> The Art and Theatre Movement of the 1960s attempted to confront and analyze African American history and, if in prior years African Americans associated slavery with a past that they did not want to be related to, slavery in the 1960s acquired a new perspective and meaning.

In this line, Larry Neal recalls the “red-mouthed grinning field slave” who is the emblem of Vessels’ army, and he explains: “The revolutionary army [took] one of the most hated symbols of the Afro-American past and radically altered its meaning. This is the supreme act of freedom, available only to those who [had] liberated themselves psychically.”<sup>66</sup> Neal asserts that Vessels demands “a confrontation with history, a final shattering of bullshit illusions. His only salvation lies in confronting the physical and psychological forces that have made him and his people powerless. Therefore, he comes to understand that the world must be restructured along spiritual imperatives.”<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the confrontation between the Black radical and the White liberal—as represented by Vessels and Easley—is a symbol of larger confrontations occurring between the Third World and Occident, between the colonizer and the colonized, between master and slave.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Glen Burns, “How the Devil Helped LeRoi Jones Turn into Imamu Amiri Baraka,” in *Amerikanishes Drama and Theatre im 20. Jahrhundert (American Drama and Theatre in the 20th Century)* (Gettingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975) 278, 277.

<sup>64</sup> Baraka, *Autobiography*, 322.

<sup>65</sup> Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: Quill, 1984) 565.

<sup>66</sup> Neal, *op. cit.*, 35.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

The reversal of an acquired racist image, as it happens with the Signifying Monkey,<sup>69</sup> is part of the African American tradition in which signifying means discourse modes of figuration themselves,” as pointed out by Gates. Signifying is synonymous with figuration and repetition is fundamental to the nature of signifying. Furthermore, signifying conveys the dwelling “at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language . . . [It is the African American] trope for repetition and revision, indeed [the] trope of chiasmus, repeating and reversing simultaneously. The use of signifying in the African American tradition implies the self-reflective nature of this tradition.”<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Gates insists that African American literature needs to be analyzed comparatively, because this literature comprises texts of “complex double formal antecedent, the Western and the black.”<sup>71</sup> In Baraka’s play, the figure of the slave connotes a double meaning. Thus, slavery literally means the enslavement of people, but in African American history it also conveys the meaning of slave rebellions in their struggle for freedom—not a passive acceptance of such condition.

Consequently, African American history has experienced two kinds of slaves: the house slave (symbol of subjection) and the field slave (a rebellious potential who would take any chance to escape from his master). The latter type opens *The Slave*. Thus, as pointed out by Brown, Vessels “represents both past and present (older and younger) militancy.”<sup>72</sup> This differentiation, not established by Sellors, proves Sellor’s statement is not perfectly applicable to the play. Sellors proclaims Vessels is shown as the old field slave and interprets this character as one who “remains the eternal entertainer, the poet, the ‘slave’ unable to liberate either himself or others.”<sup>73</sup> Although a slave at the end, he forgets that Vessels is a militant slave, which does not mean he remains in bondage, and, as such, unable to liberate others or himself. As previously stated, Baraka believes that our history, our lives, are a ritual, but even in the repetition itself, there are changes that keep us coming to keep us going.

If *The Slave* is tragic, Theodore R. Hudson affirms, its tragedy consists on Vessels being a victor at the same time he is enslaved, and he “no longer has a capacity for love and compassion: [Vessels] had gone from disaffection to specific rage against a social order to undifferentiated hate for all white people.”<sup>74</sup> Hudson is partly right in his assertion, for Vessels remains enslaved into his being forced to hate, but he has achieved self-recognition, which he did not possess at the beginning of the play. Furthermore, like the figure of the slave, hate conveys a double meaning. Hate is ritual to obtain love—consequently, a

---

<sup>69</sup>The Signifying Monkey tells the story of the monkey that uses childish devices to goad the lion into fighting the elephant. The monkey starts his signifying to getting the lion and the elephant into a fight. For a deeper and extensive analysis on this story and on the importance of signifying in African American literary works see: Henry L. Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>70</sup>Gates, *op. cit.*, 52, 51, 52.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, xxiv.

<sup>72</sup>Brown, *op. cit.*, 150.

<sup>73</sup>Sellors, *op. cit.*, 137.

<sup>74</sup>Theodore R. Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: the Literary Works* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 1973) 156.

liberating force; and, in the process of that ritual, it becomes a killing weapon—a destructive force, not only against others but also against one’s self. These two principles of life and death, it seems, are inseparable, like the cycle of life. Baraka had descended deep into his own hell, to emerge with a new self. He had killed one part in himself in order to give birth to and create another. The moment recalls an image of the circle, of cycles, of ritual in our lives.

Hudson’s assertion that Vessels no longer has a capacity for love and compassion is not entirely true. *The Slave* is neither one thing nor the other. It comprises a major complexity for it exposes contradictions that are needed in the journey of self-introspection and self-discovery leading to self-affirmation. Vessels is not completely stripped from love, for he has returned for his children in spite of risks:

WALKER

... But I tell you now that I’m not lying and that in spite of all the things I’ve done that helped kill love in me, I still love those girls.

EASLEY

You mean, in spite of all the people you’ve killed.

WALKER

... In spite of the fact that I, Walker Vessels, single-handedly, and with no other adviser except my own ego, promoted a bloody situation where white and black people are killing each other . . . despite the fact that *I am being killed in my head each day and by now have no soul or heart or warmth, even in my long killer fingers*, despite the fact that I have no other thing in the universe that I love or trust, but myself . . . despite or in spite, the respite, my dears, my dears, hear me, . . . despite all these things and in spite of all the drunken noises I’m making, despite . . . in spite of . . . I want those girls [his children], very, very much. (*Slave*, 66-67. Emphasis added).

Certainly, we see Vessels in a process of consciousness towards his liberation, but he is not liberated yet.

Baraka explains why African Americans were still slaves in the 1960s: “We are slaves now because we do not yet want to be free badly enough to take freedom. We are slaves now, niggers and slaves, because we do not yet want to be anything else badly enough to force the issue. We are controlled by white power because we do not yet want to work hard enough to fight long enough to break white power’s hold on us.”<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, he observes African Americans attempting to break from slavery, and this is what we see in Vessels’ character and his action taken:

We are self conscious now, because we are slaves trying to break from slavery. Trying to destroy slavery in the world and in our minds. If we could destroy it in our minds, our love for it, i.e., if we could see it continuously as evil, as the devil collecting and using our energies to pervert the world . . . then there would be no pause, no rhetoric, *only action* which is divine.<sup>76</sup>

This attempt to break from slavery, through action, is what Vessels symbolizes. His militancy is the assertion of his motion rather than pause, a continuous motion that conveys

---

<sup>75</sup> Baraka, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze*, 88.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 147. Emphasis added.

change. Change can only happen through action—the field slave—not through pause, passivity and acceptance—the house slave.

Slavery also comprises another connotation. It refers to a period of African American history of oppression and pain, and of creation and joy as well. Music and songs have helped African Americans combat oppression as a means of self-expression, as the outlet and cry of their pain and their joy. Baraka claims that “the one peculiar referent to the drastic change in the Negro from slavery to ‘citizenship’ is [her/]his music.”<sup>77</sup> The old slave field character, Vessels, ends his speech referring to *the blues people*:

WALKER

Or old, old blues people moaning in their sleep, singing, man, oh, nigger, nigger, you still here, as hard as nails, and takin’ no shit from nobody. He say, yeah, yeah, he say yeah, yeah. He say, yeah, yeah, . . . goin’ down slow, man. Goin’ down slow. He say . . . yeah, heh . . .

(*Running down, growing anxiously less articulate, more “field hand” sounding, blankly lyrical, shuffles slowly around, across the stage . . .*). (*Slave*, 45).

Baraka could not possibly have forgotten the reference to music, an intrinsic element to African American culture, which gives its members their identity. For this specific play, he needed to choose the blues.

The blues, Baraka insists, “was a kind of singing that utilized a language that was almost strictly American. It was not until the ex-slaves had mastered this language in whatever appropriation of it they made that blues began to be more evident than shouts and hollers.”<sup>78</sup> The blues conveys the experience of a people and of a certain time. Ellison’s definition of the blues as an “impulse to keep painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one’s aching consciousness,”<sup>79</sup> is perfectly applicable to the old-field slave/Vessels of *The Slave*. Ellison adds: “As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.”<sup>80</sup> We can without doubt envision *The Slave* as a lyrical poem oozing pain at the beginning, increasing its rhythm and ending up with the loud cry child. This cry could be actually voiced by a jazz saxophone, as in Aishah Rahman’s play *Unfinished Women Cry in No Man’s Land While a Bird Dies in a Gilded Cage*, where Charlie Parker’s music is paralleled with a child’s cry. The child’s cry at the end of *The Slave* could certainly be the cry of a saxophone. Jazz, though developed out of the blues, still became a different kind of music. Baraka asserts that in the late 1950s and 1960s music took “more ‘radical’ changes and re-evaluations of social and emotional attitudes toward the general environment.”<sup>81</sup> This more radical stand is paralleled by Vessels’ radical militancy.

To Baraka, music has always meant freedom: “Music is an emotional experience and a philosophical one . . . Moving in the blue/black streets there was *freedom*, a possibility of becoming anything I could imagine. I was completely on my own (and even more so once I

---

<sup>77</sup> LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka], *Blues People /.../ Negro Music in White America* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1963) x.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>79</sup> See Ellison’s statement, Note 25 in this Chapter.

<sup>80</sup> Ellison, *op. cit.*, 79.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.



realized it) and everything in that world began and was defined by me, in me, by music.”<sup>82</sup> Having in mind Baraka’s personal experience, music, rhythm and movement could not possibly be excluded from his play. Music infuses emotion, force, and spirit in language, as it becomes another liberating element.

Throughout his conversation, Vessels transforms, fluctuates from laughter to anger, from tenderness to cruelty, from standard English to Black English; he even dances and makes up a song (*Slave*, 59). Vessels’ fluctuation of moods and gestures transports its quality to his speeches. Vessels uses every means he can to express himself. His taking action is not only shown in his overt militancy but also implicit in his spoken and body language of gesture and movement as well. As if Vessels was himself a saxophone, crying all different notes and sounds that convey multiple moods. The play becomes a sea of musical, rhythmical sounds whose breathing commences to increase until it explodes in a final note: the simultaneous child’s cry with the sounds of the explosions outside the house.

It does not seem strange to observe Baraka’s ability using words as musical notes. Baraka was—and still is—a poet before he began writing plays. At a certain point, he realized his poetry had acquired a dramatic form composed by different voices.<sup>83</sup> Infusing the emotion that poetry and music conveys, Baraka creates a liberating process from Western form, and creates a new aesthetics, in which ritual becomes the essential means towards that goal. *The Slave* is Baraka’s transitional play towards the search of new theatrical forms, as presented in plays that followed. Among those works, special attention can be paid to *Great Goodness of Life* (1966), in which a multiple set is used; *Home on the Range* (1968), a play to be performed with the music of Albert Ayler improvised in the background; *Slave Ship, an Historical Pageant*, composed of little dialogue but mainly sounds, screams, smell effects, and instruments (including the saxophone and African drums); and, finally, his plays of scientific socialism. Baraka’s creativeness has not reached a full stop since the 1960s, for he has kept coming to keep going—trying new possibilities of expression. He has been awarded for a great part of his writings, including *The Slave* that obtained the drama prize at the First World Festival of Negro Arts held in Dakar, Senegal, in the spring of 1966.<sup>84</sup>

#### Ed Bullins’ *Goin’ a Buffalo* and Ritual Action

One can easily find me. I am on the streets of the cities. I walk and wait on streets with names like Broadway, Market, Central and Main. I stand huddled in stupor in the doorways of transient hotels, occasionally freeing myself from the shadows, and pleading for pennies from pedestrians. I am found asleep in the early morning, in the waiting rooms of bus stations, last night’s newspapers my sheets, the black-booted policemen tapping upon the soles of my shoes with nightsticks, awakening me to arrest or sending me on my unknown way...

... And at times I can be discovered inside, inside green and grey painted jails, pacing off the days and years in my dirt-colored cell.

---

<sup>82</sup> Baraka, *Autobiography*, 48-50.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Baraka, 1989.

<sup>84</sup> Hudson, *op. cit.*, 57.

When Ed Bullins came into the Black Theatre Movement, he recalls being a “very frustrated and evil cat” that was not at peace with himself either as an artist or as a person. He has claimed that the Movement was for him “a purging experience to go through”. Moreover, he adds: “[To] start a theatre on nothing and make it work, to put all our energies and lives into it and to have our people—our Black people—appreciate it was a gas, to have *our* people, not the supposedly distinguished or knowledgeable, not the Jackie Robinsons of the world . . . but our people.”<sup>86</sup> Bullins was pursuing a theatre that was exclusively for a Black audience and about their experience, the experiences of the African Americans who lived in the ghetto, the people from the streets. Though Amiri Baraka’s plays showed a different perspective—confronting Black and White characters, which was not used by Bullins in his work, Bullins has asserted that Baraka’s plays were his most influential source. He recalls that when he went to see Baraka’s *The Toilet* and *Dutchman*, “a new world opened up to [him].”<sup>87</sup> Baraka’s *The Toilet* touched the confrontations between Black and White people, but also dealt with the issue of homosexual love; on the other hand, Bullins’ *Clara’s Ole Man* touches issues of matriarchy and lesbianism within the African American community, as acknowledged by Bullins:

until I saw THE TOILET, I didn’t realize how right I was in what I had done in CLARA’S OLE MAN. I knew CLARA was a radical departure from the work of those Black playwrights I had read. It was radical in its depiction of Black people, but I didn’t realize how right it was in a deep and profoundly revolutionary sense, until I saw THE TOILET.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, Bullins declares that Baraka changed theatre in North America and shaped him as a playwright, as well as many other African American playwrights.<sup>89</sup>

In spite of Baraka’s influence on Bullins, the latter developed his own and unique style and technique and his characters are mostly Black—like the audience he addressed—leaving Whites as outsiders. Bullins’ theatre also abandons the intellectualism and intellectual talk observed in *Dutchman* and *The Slave*. His characters are down-to-earth characters, people taken from the streets with a street language, from the ghettos and their ghetto language. Bullins gives his own definition of what Revolutionary Theatre means:

I believe as a revolutionary artist, that the revolution has to go on in the minds of the people concurrently *with the revolution going on in the field, in the street, in the community, and art should be functional, it should be for the people, and when it’s not, it’s bullshit.* And I agree with brother Emory [Douglas] that when it’s time to show a gun . . . a gun should appear on the poster, on the stage, in the film, or in your hands.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Ed Bullins, “The Enemy,” in *The Hungered One: Early Writings* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971) 9-10.

<sup>86</sup> Ed Bullins, ed. *New Plays from the Black Theatre* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964) ix.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>90</sup> Bullins’ statement in the “First Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers, 1969, in *Black Theatre* 5 (1969): 24. Emphasis added.

Bullins' theatre shares the same violence, rage and anger with that of Baraka. He promoted a Black-oriented realism,<sup>91</sup> which according to Mance Williams is necessary because "Black Experience demands unadulterated reality, and [Bullins] further contends that since Whites are afraid of reality, their writers and artists try to avoid a confrontation with it."<sup>92</sup> Many times this confrontation is violent and/or hard to swallow for his audience.

The violence that appears in Bullins' plays, however, differs from the one showed in Baraka's plays in the sense that the latter directs his hatred violently towards White society and towards himself. On the contrary, Bullins holds a mirror in front of his African American audience to show the violence and destruction they are performing against themselves within their own community, so that they can develop a consciousness about that problem and stop their self-destruction. *Goin' a Buffalo* is an example of this technique. This play displays the self-destruction or exploitation that African Americans perform to themselves and the people they love—Curt is prostituting his wife, Pandora, to obtain easily a profit without even try to find him a job. Hatch asserts that Bullins' "primary intent is to depict life as it is lived—*truthfully*. He comes close to fulfilling what Zola and the naturalists believed that drama should be—a slice of life objectively presented. . . Mr. Bullins writes about the black experience *as it is*."<sup>93</sup> However, by depicting Black experience, Bullins intends to dramatize the character's journey "through [her/]his own psyche to reach [her/]his loss of innocence, self-awareness or illumination . . . [in order to reach] what individually is called reality."<sup>94</sup> The characters portrayed in his plays, as pointed out by Williams, tell their own stories without the playwright taking sides or imposing his own point of view.<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, Bullins' plays not only examine the lives of the ordinary people who live in the ghetto, but also expose how the characters generate their own suffering. He confronts his audience by presenting them their imprisonment—enslaved by drugs, crime— or their problems regarding their growth of manhood and/or expression of love, as well as "romantic notions of machismo."<sup>96</sup> Baraka's plays deal more closely with the rhetoric of Black Power, whereas Bullins is more interested in challenging the African American community's daily problems in order to create a solid foundation upon which a political basis may be constructed. In this regard, in Bullins' *The Electronic Nigger*, there is a significant exchange between Mr. Carpentier—a student—and Mr. Jones—his teacher:

MR. CARPENTIER

. . . This is the age of the new intellectual assisted by his tool, the machine, I'll have you know!

---

<sup>91</sup> Hill, *op. cit.*, 67.

<sup>92</sup> Mance Williams, *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s: A Historical-Critical Analysis of the Movement* (Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1985) 24.

<sup>93</sup> James V. Hatch, ed. *Black Theatre U.S.A.: Forty-Five Plays by Black Americans, 1847-1974* (New York: The Free Press, 1974) 827.

<sup>94</sup> Sanders, *op. cit.*, 176.

<sup>95</sup> Williams, *op. cit.*, 24.

<sup>96</sup> Leslie Sanders, "'Dialectic Determinism': Ed Bullins' Critique of the Rhetoric of the Black Power Movement," in *Studies in Black American Literature*, Volume II, 174.

MR. JONES

(*Furious*) Carpentier! . . . That is what we are here in this classroom to fight against . . . We are here to discover, awaken, search out human values through art!<sup>97</sup>

Mr. Jones realizes the individual's alienation in a technological society and considers that artists should be responsible for helping find human values:

MR JONES

Does not the writer have some type of obligation to remove some of the intellectual as well as political, moral and social tyranny that infects this culture? What does all the large words in creation serve you for, my Black brother, if you are a complete whitewashed man?<sup>98</sup>

Clearly, Bullins rejects the talk-and-speech-based Western culture, which Lorca had already observed in North America, as the epitome of machines and automatons,<sup>99</sup> only redeemed by the spiritual side offered by African American culture.

In the portrayal of the ghetto, as backdrop of Bullins' African American characters and their lives, he accomplishes two purposes. First, by presenting a life-style, language, emotional characters and their strong-based bonds, he is asserting the existence of a culture shaped by the African American experience with its own values, beliefs and problems. Second, and as previously mentioned, he holds a mirror to raise consciousness in the audience about the destruction they are perpetrating upon their loved ones and upon themselves. Consequently, Bullins does not romanticize the glorification of that "street culture," as affirmed by Clayton Riley,<sup>100</sup> for he presents the problems that originate from within the community. As a playwright, he is totally committed to his audience, who plays a focal role in the performance of his plays.

In this regard, most of Bullins' plays, as Leslie Sanders asserts, not only invite to a dialogue with the actors, they also "challenge the audience to use the occasion of the play to extend its own sense of community to the world beyond the theatre."<sup>101</sup> Hatch equally observes the electrifying effect Bullins' work has upon the audience: "The group response is earnest, laughing, crying, commenting on the action, or sometimes talking back to the characters. . . . It is a theatre . . . emotionally involving the audience, a sharp contrast to the frigid, polite response that most [North] American theatergoers are accustomed to."<sup>102</sup> Riley claims that the playwright "manages to terrify by implication, perhaps the most effective way to do it; he weaves possibilities into the spectator's imagination, makes audiences believe in the unavoidable arrival of disaster, a crashing, all-inclusive horror dwelling somewhere behind the grim faces of the street, folks peopling the stage in his dramas."<sup>103</sup> Therefore, Sanders, Hatch and Riley consider that the audience takes an active part in the

---

<sup>97</sup> Ed Bullins, *The Electronic Nigger*, in *Five Plays by Ed Bullins* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969) 232.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>99</sup> See Lorca's statement, Note 23 in this Chapter.

<sup>100</sup> Clayton Riley, "Introduction," in *A Black Quartet*, Caldwell et al., eds. (New York: A Signet Book, 1970) xx.

<sup>101</sup> Leslie Sanders, "Ed Bullins," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 49.

<sup>102</sup> Hatch, *op. cit.*, 826.

<sup>103</sup> Riley, *op. cit.*, x.

performance of Bullins' plays. Audience participation occurs because of a specific theatrical form and language that activates the spectator, as Riley points out: "[Bullins'] form of theatrical experience is physically draining, an exhaustive encounter which allows only rare opportunities to relax, to simply be an onlooker."<sup>104</sup> This theatrical form might be denominated ritual action. In the communion of actors/characters and audience, like in the Mass, all come together and participate as one.

Most of Bullins' plays have a circular structure, like Baraka's, which imply the repetition that exists in life and in nature, in the seasons. In the Prologue of Bullins' *In the Wine Time*, Ray mentions this circle image:

Summer and Cliff and Lou and me together—all poured from the same brew, all hating each other and loving, and consuming and never forgiving—but not letting go of the circle until the earth swung again into winter, bringing me closer to manhood and the freedom to do all the things that I had done for the past three summers.<sup>105</sup>

The idea of the circle comprises a double intention. On the one hand, the idea of oneness, of bringing people together; on the other hand, it suggests an enclosed space, that is to say, imprisonment and/or oppression. Consequently, while Bullins celebrates a street and/or ghetto life and culture—its values of togetherness and sense of community—he, simultaneously, warns of the danger of repeating the same mistakes. Therefore, the African American community needs, on the one hand, to keep and nourish the values they own, and, on the other, change what causes their enslavement and keeps them away from reaching their freedom. Commitment is indispensable when taking an action to stop the self-destruction within the community. In addition, commitment also applies to the artist in the same manner. In *Goin' a Buffalo*, the play opens with Pandora living with her husband, Curt. By the end, she has no choice and, against her will—but without offering resistance—is taken by another man (Art) to another place. However, it is not place what delimits the circle but the action itself taken on the loved person by two different men whose consequence is Pandora's exploitation for those two men's own profit.

Ritual action has one more implication related to Sanders' affirmation that, without considering a physical and concrete territory, Black in itself implies geography, a culture, bondage, a way of being, and a relationship that provide a ground for the characters. Black culture exists where Black people are.<sup>106</sup> As a result, the title *Goin' a Buffalo*, which implies an action, equally implies the move of some people from one place to another, carrying with them a style and a way of life wherever they go. Similarly, Bullins is warning about the possibility of repeating the same mistakes in a different place. Repetition of mistakes, ritual action, is paralleled by Bullins' device of using the same characters in different plays, going from one *play/place* to another—device also used by Kennedy in her plays. In *Goin' a Buffalo*, we learn that Pandora was taken by Curt and remained with him in faithful bondage, as Curt himself asserts: "She and I are a team."<sup>107</sup> Both have been living in Los

---

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Ed Bullins, *In the Wine Time*, in *Five Plays by Ed Bullins*, 104.

<sup>106</sup> Sanders, *The Development of Black Theatre in America*, 185, 184.

<sup>107</sup> Ed Bullins, *Goin' a Buffalo*, in *Black Theatre U.S.A.*, 850. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Buffalo*, page number).

Angeles; but, when Art arrives and finally betrays Curt, he takes Pandora with him to Buffalo. Thus, Pandora, although moving to a different place, will continue chained to another man who will keep on exploiting her. The mistake is committed in the action itself, suggesting that action does not necessarily mean change. People need self-reflection and self-introspection before taking a blind step. This is why so many characters in Bullins' plays are wanderers presented as metaphors of blind actions performed without giving them a thought.

The expression *ritual action* has been adopted from one of Bullins' plays, *Clara's Ole Man*. In the play, Big Girl (one of the main characters), explains to Jack how medicine is exercised to cure madness. She is referring to electro-shock and insulin, which does not really cure but only helps quiet a patient:

BIG GIRL

Ya see workin' in the hospital with all the nuts and fruits and crazies and weirdos I get ideas 'about things. . . [When] the docs start shockin' them and puttin' them on insulin they quiets down, that's when the docs think they are gettin' better, but really they ain't. They're just learn'n like before to hold it in . . . just like before, that's the reason most of them come back or are always on the verge afterwards of goin' psycho again.

JACK

(*Enthusiastic*) Wow, I never thought of that! That ritual action of purging catharsis can open up new avenues of therapy and in learning theory and conditioning subjects. . .<sup>108</sup>

Big Girl's and Jack's exchange of words denote various implications. First, Bullins is attacking a technology that is acting blindly on human beings. Consequently, it is sickening more than improving health problems—specifically mental problems that are, paradoxically, the result of our modern age of technology. Second, he is attacking a society that deprives human beings from their freedom, detaching them from their culture and community and from themselves, by conductivism. In this manner, Bullins is retaking a history without hiding from it, as Steve tells Marco and Tootsie in Bullins' *The Duplex*:

STEVE

What history can we teach those who hide from history. . . , those who believe their lies and fears create history. Can we teach them their own sterility of soul that we slaves learned better than they that call it their civilization?<sup>109</sup>

Finally, Bullins is attacking a Western aesthetics as stated by Aristotle that has been applied to theatre since the Renaissance and characterized by a linear plot and by what Bullins calls "purging and catharsis." The linear plot, purging and cathartic effects conduct the audience throughout the entire performance and, as a result, excludes its participation.

The Aristotelian aesthetics, as examined earlier, was rejected by Artaud and Brecht, who equally realized the brainwashing such a technique was exercising on the audience. By the use of this technique, the audience remains passive through the emotional empathy created by the story and the characters on stage without questioning what they are watching. The

---

<sup>108</sup> Ed Bullins, *Clara's Ole Man*, in *Five Plays by Ed Bullins*, 256-257.

<sup>109</sup> Ed Bullins, *The Duplex: A Black Love Fable in Four Movements* (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1971) 122.

playwright throughout the whole performance, then, is conducting the audience. At the same time, Bullins is criticizing the ritual action or repeated action taken by Western thought upon other cultures as well as the ritual action performed by peoples under the social, political, historical and artistic indictment of Western imperialism, without ever reacting or questioning its action. Bullins exposes the need to stop blind ritual action exercised through so many different ways by outsiders and by ourselves. Self-reflection and introspection are essential in order to stop blind actions. His theory is carried into practice through the creation of a new aesthetics that shapes his plays.

Bullins reverses the meaning of ritual and action. On the one hand, the ritual portrayed by Bullins does not as reinforce communion and togetherness, but detaches people from the members of their community and from themselves. On the other hand, the action described in Bullins' plays, instead of bringing change, is blindly taken on people's minds, and repeats in the form of a ritual. Action taken by blind characters should provoke a reaction from the audience to question why those characters keep repeating the same mistakes and to find new alternatives and solutions that should be applied to their lives beyond the auditorium walls. Bullins presents the evils that are causing African Americans to take blind actions while feeling *high*, instead of being closer to and facing reality. For example, Art, in *Goin' a Buffalo* is the only one who does not smoke and he is the one who takes control over the others. The other characters do not question even once, whom they have sheltered in their own home. This lack of questioning brings them to their destruction, as is Pandora's and Mamma's case—who simply go with Art when he says so, without conceiving the possibility of shaping their own destiny. These two women become the main victims of the play. They are at the bottom of the social pyramid.

The reversal of symbols, myths and/or stereotypes, as observed in Baraka's work, is a component of signifying, as it is repetition. Bullins, like Baraka, is totally engaged in the unmasking of those stereotypes and presents them under a different light, as part of his theatre aesthetics. His play *The Gentleman Caller* seems to be a reversal of Jean Genet's *The Maids*. In Genet's play the maids—who enact their madam—ritualize the Madam's death which consequently leads to the actual death of one of themselves. In Bullins' play, the maid actually kills the Madam (not herself) and becomes the Madam herself. Similarly, a reversal is found in *Goin' a Buffalo*. Pandora's box does not contain evil things, as was established by the Greek mythology. On the contrary, Bullins recuperates the older myth of Pandora's box, which originally contained good and fertile products for the earth and its people. Yet men misuse Pandora's Box, like herself.

Mamma Too Tight symbolizes another reversal. She is the only White character of the play and, as Sanders remarks, she is "the only source of humor, thus suggesting a reversal of the stereotypical role of the black comic white drama."<sup>110</sup> There is, however, something else to this character: her language:

PANDORA

[To Mamma] When you brought your funky ass from Mississippi, woman, we couldn't even understand you . . . sheet . . . we taught you how to speak, if anything. (Act II, *Buffalo*, 845).

---

<sup>110</sup>Sanders, *The Development of Black Theatre in America*, 218.

Mamma comes from Mississippi and Pandora comments that she had to teach her how to talk when she went to live in the North. Mamma uses Black English, like the other characters, and Black English has its roots in the South. An example of her spoken language is in the scene of Act II when she is talking to Pandora:

MAMMA

Oh nothin' . . . just thought I'd ask. But the way you and ole fuzz wuzz goin' at it and lookin' at each other..." (*Buffalo*, 843)

The language she uses is the language of the ghetto, of the streets, which is already present in the titles of Bullins' plays. This essential element establishes a difference symbolizing self-affirmation of a culture that can be recognized through its own language. Moreover, at the very beginning of his plays, Bullins usually accentuates statements such as "this play is about Black people," or "the players are Black."

By introducing Black English, which is used in the ghettos, he is reversing another stereotype, and instead of devaluating this language, Bullins appropriates it for the characters' speeches and other theatrical expressions, such as movement, gesture or music. Within the language itself, he reverses the meaning of words such as *nigger* or *motherfucker*, which here offer new and positive connotations when used within the Black community. Language, like his plays, must infuse spirit and provoke action: "Language is more than words. . . [It] is *deeds* and *gestures* . . . and *silence*," as Steve asserts in *The Duplex*.<sup>111</sup> Bullins' plays are his own deed. He does not talk about Black culture, nor does he argue about it in order to convince someone about its existence. He presents it.

Bullins' use of language, as asserted by Steve in *The Duplex*, is diverse. Language is the expression of different theatrical elements, intertwined in such a way that form and content becomes one. Hatch points out that *Goin' a Buffalo* "seems to flow structurelessly from beginning to end, like modern Jazz, but the author never deviates from his theme."<sup>112</sup> Once again, Bullins appropriates an identifiable expression of African American culture, and inserts it as the existence and self-affirmation of that culture, just like signifying, as a determinant of African American writing and oral tradition.<sup>113</sup> The musical quality of Bullins' plays, Fabre observes, makes it necessary to listen to them "as if they were musical pieces and let oneself be carried by its movement: rhythms, dramatic breaks, lyrical crescendos. The piece is deciphered as a music sheet; each sequence possesses its modulation; each character his register and voice."<sup>114</sup> The play fluctuates from tenderness to violence, from submission to rage, from rebellion to passivity.

*Goin' a Buffalo* contains a fast and vivid rhythm composed by the expression of extreme emotions, which parallels Bullins' intention of presenting a dialectics of experience and reality. Every symbol, action or character is shaped by the same doubleness that confines

---

<sup>111</sup> Bullins, *The Duplex*, 122.

<sup>112</sup> Hatch, *op. cit.*, 827.

<sup>113</sup> In Bullins' *The Duplex*, in the party that takes place in the third Scene of the Second Movement, Mamma starts to sing: "Said the signifyin' monkey to the lion one day . . ." but she can't remember all the words. Bullins is recapturing African American tradition, asserting Blacks need to maintain that tradition and not let it die (*The Duplex*, 76).

<sup>114</sup> Fabre, *op. cit.*, 242.



the expression of ritual action. Art seems a gentle person at the beginning for he cannot stand a woman being slapped; by the end, however, he is more treacherous and more fiercely violent than Curt, as the stage direction in Act II, Scene II shows: “*he slaps [Pandora] viciously, knocking off her glasses, exposing her blackened eyes.*” (Buffalo, 852). Pandora’s strength is totally diminished by the end of the play. When the police apprehend Curt, in Act III, Scene 2, she follows Art’s order in a daze: “Mamma is packin’? Did Curt tell her to pack?” (Buffalo, 853). Other examples of extreme emotions and actions: While a quiet chess game is presented at the opening of the play, two minutes later Curt is slapping Pandora; or, everything seems to be fine at the Club where Pandora works, and suddenly a violent fight takes place. This rhythm constantly breathes throughout the play.

Music, like lighting, creates moods. In Act III, Scene 2, the stage direction indicates: “*The atmosphere of the first act is re-created by the lights and music.*” (Buffalo, 852). At the beginning of the play, Bullins establishes another mood: “*Within the interior of the front room [in Pandora’s and Curt’s apartment] the light is a mixture of red, blues, and violet with crimson shadows bordering the edges of the stage to create the illusion of a world afire with its pocket of atmosphere an oasis*” (Buffalo, 828). The atmosphere described here is completely different to that described at the end of the play. And, in regard to music, Bullins clearly specifies that “Delilah” and “Parisian Thoroughfare,” “*as recorded by Max Roach and Clifford Brownplay,*” should be the themes for the scenes between Art and Pandora, to emphasize altering moods. (Buffalo, 829). Music, live or broadcasted (radio), is always a fundamental component of Bullins’ plays. Nevertheless, there is a difference between Baraka’s and Bullins’ use of music, as noticed by Mance Williams: “Unlike Baraka, who insists on original, improvised scores integrated into the mise-en-scene, Bullins settles for popular recordings of the period. He seems, therefore, to seek an authenticity that only pure realism can achieve.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, Bullins, once more, faithful to his idea of theatre of Black realism is reflected in every single component that integrates form, structure and/or content of his work.

Within *Goin’ a Buffalo* there is also a language of symbols, some of which have been already mentioned. These symbols convey Bullins’ characteristic doubleness or signifying. Drugs and alcohol, for instance, are presented as two evils that exist within the community that need to be examined. Wine, beer or scotch can always be found at the homes of the characters. Alcohol is always present in their parties or meetings, in such manner that alcohol gives a sense of communion, gathering and relaxing effect; but, alcohol too, used immoderately affects people in destructive ways (i.e., men hit their women and/or they lose control of their lives). Drugs—which Art refuses to take—are also two-fold. Thus, to smoke marijuana is part of a ritual, of a gathering; but Mamma’s condition with Shaky presents its destructive side, as Pandora tells Art at the Strip Club in Act II:

PANDORA

Do you see [Mamma] givin’ up her body everyday and murdering herself every day? . . . [Killin’] herself with that needle by inches. She has her fix, and maybe a bust and she is keepin’ her man. She just takes her fixes to get trough the day and Shaky keeps her on it so she’ll need him more. (Buffalo, 843).

---

<sup>115</sup>Williams, *op. cit.*, 23.

Pandora's assertion raises another issue: love and relationships.

What is watched and/or heard in the play is Curt's and Pandora's relationship, in which they know they are a team. Yet Curt brutalizes her, abuses her physically and verbally, and Pandora does not take an action to stop the exploitation and harassment she is subjected to. The same is true of Mamma and Shaky, as Pandora's assessment just confirmed. Paradoxically, every character is hungry for love, and yet none of them is capable of expressing it with tenderness or affection; as if they were repeating behavioral patterns already learnt and adopted, without ever pondering their validity; or considering other possibilities for expressing and/or receiving love. Nevertheless, the women seem to be more aware that they are missing something they do not dare to demand. In Act I, Scene 3, Mamma exclaims: "Just give me some good lovin' ta show me where it's at." (*Buffalo*, 834). Mamma and Pandora's urgent need for love blinds them. Mamma is mesmerized by Art's manners and simply goes with him. She leaves a man, whose destructive relationship she has conformed to, for another one whose apparent gentle manners have touched her vulnerability. This is another example of blind ritual action mostly symptomatic of the oppressed.

The issue of women in *Goin' a Buffalo* takes its main symbol from Pandora's box, already mentioned. Sanders claims that Pandora's box is an image to imply male and female relationship. The box is a precious object in which Pandora and Curt guard their illusions and in which Curt's feels his masculinity is safe. However, Pandora's box is for sale, like an object, like the gun that is in it and can be handled. Curt's prostituting Pandora, whom he loves, involves the exploitation of what one most values. In addition, prostitution symbolizes how a woman has to distance herself from her body and deny herself in order to bear so often unpleasant intimacy. Finally, "the man's separating the woman he loves from the whore he has created is but a pale reflection of the woman's radical self-alienation."<sup>116</sup> As a reversal of the myth, Pandora's box is full of good things, but they are equally destructive: marijuana, savings (money she has earned through prostituting herself for Curt's sake) and a gun. Depending on how those things are used, they will be fruitful or destructive. In Act I, Scene 3, Pandora asserts that nothing bad comes out of her box, and Mamma replies:

MAMMA

Most people think that a girl's box is in other places . . .

PANDORA

People only bring evil there with them. They only look for evil. The sick . . . (*Fantasy*) Nothin' bad comes out of me from my box, baby. Nothin' bad. You can believe that. It's all what you [men] bring to us. (*Buffalo*, 239).

Pandora and her box are the clearest symbols of the play to demonstrate that women are the most enslaved members in society and they need to take an action to obtain their freedom. Besides, women have adopted men's own sexist views to abuse other women, blindly repeating the same pattern on other women. Thus, Pandora, who greatly cares for Mamma, does not think it twice before insulting and abusing her verbally—the way Curt does to her, as reflected in Act I, Scene 3:

---

<sup>116</sup> Sanders, *The Development of Black Theatre in America*, 216.

PANDORA

(*Enraged, fearful of losing control, to MAMMA*) SHUT UP, BITCH! THIS IS CURT AND OUR PLACE. WE GOT MO' TO LOSE THAN JUST OUR ASS. JUST SHUT ON UP! (*MAMMA looks most like a small girl with wide moist eyes*). (*Buffalo*, 837).

Sanders accurately states that, although Bullins' sharp eye is aware and presents the oppression of women in the African American community, he still portrays women in traditional roles, without exploring other venues, maintaining a male perspective.<sup>117</sup> Bullins' own stage direction in Act II describing Strip Club, reflects a stereotyped image of women as banal and easily impressionable: "*Seeing the set, the female audience should respond: 'gorgeous, lovely, marvelous, delightful,' and with similar banalities.*" Whereas the male audience, who seems to know how to use their brain, "*should wonder if the habitat of whores is not indeed the same region as their creations of private myth, dream and fantasy.*" (*Buffalo*, 840). Bullins, in anticipating a different perception and reaction by a female and a male audience, also discloses his own personal doubleness and contradiction between his own theory and practice. If his plays are considered as the platform for his thoughts, he realizes women's victimization by men and the need to stop their enslavement and exploitation. However, if his stage direction is closely examined, Bullins' attitude at a personal level, is that of someone who believes women are stupid as well as they are the fantasy and dream objects of men (an idealization of women than Lewis Nkosi observes as characteristic of the works written by African American men in the 1960s<sup>118</sup>).

Nevertheless, if the last issue of women is left aside, Bullins' mastery lies on his authenticity to present the African American experience which reveals the existence of its own culture, as it remains established by form, content and context intertwined with determinant and unique elements of that culture—speech, symbols and images, music and movement. Thus, Bullins, asserts the existence of his own style and aesthetics that have developed out of his African American background, different from the Anglo-American tradition. The African American tradition is a culture that has its own values and problems, which need to be solved from inside rather than from outside, through self-introspection, questioning and reflection, so that a wise and thoughtful action can be taken.

#### Douglas Turner Ward's *Day of Absence*: Humor as Signifying

It is obvious that black humor as a whole did not tend to reaffirm the outside world's opinion of blacks. On the contrary, no other mechanism in Afro-American expressive culture was more effective than humor in exposing the absurdity of the American racial system and in releasing pent-up black aggression toward it. This has been too easily ignored in the discussion of the meaning of stereotyped humor among [Blacks].

Lawrence W. Levine<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>118</sup> See Note 11, Chapter IV.

<sup>119</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 335.

Douglas T. Ward denominates his play *Day of Absence* “a Satirical Fantasy.” Moving from the serious tone and violence found in Amiri Baraka’s and Ed Bullins’ plays, Ward reverses the seriousness and painful condition of racism and segregation into humor. Instead of hatred and/or aggressive and violent speeches, Ward finds in satire his weapon to show the absurdity of racism in North America. He sets his play in a Southern city, which is an important factor to keep in mind when analyzing his work. Baraka and Bullins are Northerners, while Ward was born in Louisiana and was the only child of parents who worked the cane and sugar crops in a small plantation area by the Mississippi. Ward’s background certainly provides him with an experience and perspective that closely approaches the one lived by Black South Africans under apartheid.

Like Ward, Black South African playwrights also use satire to criticize their conditions under apartheid and usually emphasize the actor’s skills in their work as their main venue of expression to present the evils of apartheid. Ward, however, does not present African Americans as supposedly the main characters of his play, but uses their *absence* as a reversal of the situation: The characters we see in Ward’s play are Anglo-Americans missing and wanting the African American population—who has mysteriously disappeared from town—to return because they cannot manage without them.

It must be noticed that, although Ward was born in the South, he studied in Ohio and Michigan and finally moved to New York where he participated in the left-wing movement in Harlem. He became an actor, and performed in productions such as Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. Moreover, he wrote plays and subsequently became a director. Ward knew Hansberry and Lonne Elder and persuaded them to be playwrights.<sup>120</sup> He was exposed to Western theatre—Genet’s, Beckett’s, Ionesco’s plays, among others—whose trace is observed in his theatre work. Oliver in *Day of Absence*, for instance, observes some resemblance to *The Blacks*, in that it is an “expressionistic situational satire,” which is performed on a bare stage with the actors shifting in and out, a cast of fourteen African American actors performing in blonde wigs and white face.<sup>121</sup> There are also resemblances to Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* in the opening dialogue between Luke and Clem, reminiscent of Didi and Gogo’s and Chaplin’s movies style—as Ward himself points out in one of the stage directions for the scene in which three operators frantically try to put some people through the telephone line without success.<sup>122</sup>

The social issues examined in Charles Chaplin’s films are present in Ward’s play as well. As Clinton F. Oliver remarks, “Ward’s central conceit is a compelling clever one: the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the blacks from a small Southern town, the consequent consternation of the whites who go to find them, and the deepening crisis as the economy of the populace grinds to a halt.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, Ward outlines the important role played by African Americans in the North American economy, as an Announcer confirms when facing the sudden absence of the African American population:

---

<sup>120</sup> Beth Turner, “Douglas Turner Ward: Bulwark of the NEC,” in *Black Masks* (September 1985): 2, 3.

<sup>121</sup> Clinton F. Oliver, ed., *Contemporary Black Drama*, *op. cit.*, 321.

<sup>122</sup> Douglas Turner Ward, *Day of Absence*, in *Contemporary Black Drama*, 345. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Absence*, page number).

<sup>123</sup> Oliver, *op. cit.*, 321.

ANNOUNCER

. . . Factories standing idle from the loss of non-essential workers. Stores shuttered from the absconding of uncrucial personnel. Uncollected garbage threatening pestilence and pollution . . . dozens of decrepit old men and women usually tended by faithful nurses and servants are popping off like flies—abandoned by sons, daughters and grandchildren whose refusal to provide their doddering relatives with bedpans and other soothing necessities result in their hasty, nasty, messy corpus cremation . . . (*Absence*, 354).

African Americans are doing the kind of jobs Whites would not do (e.g., changing babies' diapers), as asserted by Mary in the play. Mary cannot approach her baby who cannot stop crying, because there is a horrible odor coming from him and Lula—her African American maid—used to do it for her (*Absence*, 347). The Businessman character remarks on the aforementioned issue as well: "The absence of handymen, porters, sweepers, stock-movers, deliverers and miscellaneous dirty work doers is disrupting the smooth harmony" (*Absence*, 351). Then, African Americans are missed and asked to return to town, not because Whites miss them as friends, colleagues or neighbors, but because they need them as handworkers who usually perform the *dirty* work Whites refuse to do. Paradoxically, Whites do not want to live with them as segregated laws confirm, and yet they cannot live without them either. Ward, who considers himself a working class intellectual and a natural rebel and non-conformist,<sup>124</sup> chooses satire as his most forceful weapon against social and political injustice, and masterfully achieves the exposition of "the American racial system," as Lawrence W. Levine points out.<sup>125</sup>

There is a developing line from Baraka to Bullins to Ward, regarding humor. Baraka's style is austere, does not utilize humor and it is anger what mostly permeates his plays; Bullins introduces comic relief to loose the tension that originates from his anger and violent language; and Ward adopts humor as a skillful apparent mask to disguise his indignation and rage. Ward's humor is, actually, his mainly signifying, so rooted in the African American tradition, as already examined. Humor provokes the audience's laughter that is, at the same time, undermined by the tragedy lived by African Americans in the United States. It is satire that better helps Ward achieve his goal, because "satire takes, for its province," as James Ngugi asserts, "a whole society and for its purpose, criticism." In addition, Ngugi considers that "the satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society's feelings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious laughter."<sup>126</sup> Satire is part of the African tradition, but also African playwrights such as the Nigerian Wole Soyinka or Black South African playwrights (Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon's in *Woza Albert!*, for instance) have used it as an essential components in their works.

Levine has examined the importance of humor in the African American tradition, and he indicates that humor became the best expressive form in this tradition. Humor did not change realities but altered their impact and perception. It was used as a device to

---

<sup>124</sup> "Interview with Douglas Turner Ward," by Malwine Blunck, Hamburg (Germany), May 1979. New York: Hatch-Billops Collection.

<sup>125</sup> See opening quotation in Ward's section, Note 119 in this Chapter.

<sup>126</sup> James Ngugi, "Satire in Nigeria: Chinua Achebe, T.M. Aluko and Wole Soyinka," in *Protest and Conflict in African Literature*, Pieterse and Munro, eds. (London: Heinemann, 1969) 56.

understand the situations African Americans had to face and it was also used to “mute their effect,” to minimize suffering, to release suppressed feelings, and “to assert the invincibility of their own persona against the world.”<sup>127</sup> In Ward’s play, humor is the substitute to the violence observed in Baraka and Bullin’s work, and the best way to express suppressed emotions and reach self-affirmation through the power that derives from laughter. On the other hand, Levine refers to Kenneth Burke’s analysis and suggests that the comic frame “should enable people to be observers of themselves while acting. Its ultimate [goal] would not be passiveness, but maximum consciousness.”<sup>128</sup> Consequently, humor conveys a double meaning in raising consciousness, not only in the audience but also in the performers themselves—in the manner Brecht understood epic theatre and the distancing effect on the audience and on the actors themselves. *Day of Absence* is to be played by Black actors in White face, which implies the actors have to study White types played by them. This issue leads the actors to a better understanding of their condition as African Americans, their oppression, as well as their roles in North American society and their African American cultural values in contrast to those of Anglo-Americans.

Ward’s use of satire is displayed through a reversal of the minstrel show in white face. Like Baraka and Bullins, Ward’s consciousness raising (in audience and actors) is present in his attempt to reconstruct a history filled with stereotypes and myths about African Americans that Whites have created and the playwright reverses. Baraka had first re-examined slavery and showed in his works that there always existed a rebellious spirit among African Americans against the slave system. Later, Bullins introduced White characters, such as Mamma-Too-Tight, to parody the comic relief played by an African American comic actor in White plays. And, then, Ward reversed the minstrel show and presented African American actors playing White Southern types wherein portrayal of Whites are the cause of laughter, instead of Blacks.

The minstrels, Huggins states, are a parody of formal oratory, “pointing up the importance of language.”<sup>129</sup> Ward introduces the audience to the Southern dialect that is closely juxtaposed to Black English. An example is Luke and Clem’s exchange of words in the opening scene:

CLEM  
Go’n’ be a hot day

LUKE  
Looks that way  
...

CLEM  
... How’d it go yesterday, Luke.

LUKE  
Fair.

CLEM

---

<sup>127</sup> Levine, *op. cit.*, 344.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>129</sup> Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance, op. cit.*, 266.

Same wit' me . . . Business *don't* seem to git *no* better or *no* worse. Guess we in a rut, Luke, don't it 'pear that way to you?—Morning, ma'am.

...

LUKE

... What you got in mind?

CLEM

... just that—like somp'ums outta kitter. I got a funny feeling somp'ums not up to snuff. Can't figger out what it is ...

LUKE

Maybe it's in your haid?

CLEM

No, not like that ... Like somp'ums happened—or—happening—gone haywire, loony.

LUKE

Well, don't worry 'bout it, it'll pass.

CLEM

Guess you right. (*Absence*, 343. Emphasis added).

The double negative used by Luke and Clem is often used in Black English to emphasize or underline an idea or thought to the interlocutor. Once more, the device of using the Southern dialect implies double connotations. On the one hand, Ward's decision of using a dialect in his play connotes the existence of a plurality of dialects in North America, which destroys the notion of the existence of an exclusive standard English. The playwright, then, presents a new reality. On the other hand, African American actors, by parodying White Southern speech, reverse the idea of Whites parodying African American speech, and points out there is no such thing as correct or incorrect English, but the evolvement of a language in different areas that is shaped by different cultures. Furthermore, Ward shows the proximity of Black English to the Southern dialect and, as a consequence, the absurdity of Whites laughing at a speech that is so much akin to theirs.

The closeness of Southern dialect and Black English raises another issue: the close proximity that exists between both Blacks and Whites in a segregated South. If Baraka presents violent confrontations between Black and White characters, and Bullins leaves the White world outside of his plays, Ward exposes how Blacks and Whites in the South live in closeness and know each other better than both groups do in the Northern states. Baraka displays the psychological barrier, created by racism that separates both groups; Bullins leaves Whites out of the African American world, implying the separation and lack of knowledge about each other that exists between both communities; whereas Ward shows, in a segregated South, Blacks are much more intertwined with Whites and know more about each other than do Northerners. Then, a psychological barrier exists in a non-segregated North that impedes both groups to interact, while in a segregated South there is a closer and more physical interaction between both groups.

As an example of the closeness existing between Blacks and Whites in the South, Mary affirms that her Black maid Lula has always been with her and she would not be able to live without her, up to the point that she would not have accepted her actual husband's marriage proposal, unless he accepted Lula too:

MARY

. . . I always had Lula, John. She never missed a day at my side . . . That's why I couldn't accept your wedding proposal *until I was sure you'd welcome me and her together as a package*. . . I'm lost without Lula. (*Absence*, 350. Emphasis added).

This interconnection and reciprocal dependence between both Blacks and Whites is totally absent from the plays written by Baraka and Bullins. This aspect parallels the special situation of Blacks in South Africa under apartheid.

*Day of Absence* seems to act like a boomerang by reversing the minstrel show from being performed in black face to being performed in white face, which returns to hit Whites with their own parodying device. Ward shows a full circle in the journey of this boomerang by examining the existence of a history presented only from one point of view: the Anglo-American. He reverses the process and presents White Southern stereotypes such as the typical married couple (Mary and John) who simply cannot live without their Black maid Lula, who cooks, attends their baby, etc. The couple is exposed as completely inept in dealing with their own baby and housework. Other stereotypes are the Mayor, the Industrialist and Mr. Clan—reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan. By using White Southern stereotypes, the playwright reveals the lack of complexity and character delineation conveyed in stereotyping, for it deforms real life, and, consequently, severely damage the people depicted.

Referring to Ward's *Happy Ending* and *Day of Absence*, C.W.E. Bigsby suggests "the humor of both plays is largely at the expense of a white community which is seen as insipid and stupid, unconsciously manipulated by a [Black] world it holds in contempt."<sup>130</sup> This manipulation renders the African American audience with a real potential of their power. By using African American actors in White face, Bigsby claims that Ward does not simply create ironical comments on the pretentiousness of Whites, but also proclaims a freedom in exposing the contempt Whites feel for African Americans; and, as a result, "white abuse is thus adroitly turned back on itself."<sup>131</sup> Ward achieves this creative freedom by means of devising a unique aesthetics and style whose core lies on humor. Therefore, he still maintains an Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation but through his genuine and skillful style shaped by satire.

Like Baraka and Bullins, Ward's play possesses a circular structure. The play begins with Luke and Clem realizing that they have not seen any Blacks in the entire morning, as they usually do. It ends with the same characters the next morning, but this time a little change has been introduced: the appearance of Rastus, a Black character. After Luke realizes Rastus' presence and talks to him, he asks Clem:

LUKE

Everything's same as always. . .

CLEM

---

<sup>130</sup> C.W.E. Bigsby, "Three Black Playwrights: Loftin Mitchell, Ossie Davis, Douglas Turner Ward," in *The Theatre of Black Americans*, Volume I, 162.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 165-166.



...???. . . Is it . . . Luke? (*Absence*, 363)

Once more, the idea of the circle and ritual implications is present in the structure of Ward's play, but, as observed in *The Slave*, something has changed in that ritual process. Similarly, the reversal of the minstrel show in *White face* turns back in full circle to hit Whites' assumptions and abuse with their own device. A change has occurred, though. The playwright portrays a situation—a satirical *fantasy*—that poses the question, what would happen if African Americans disappeared from North America? It is by questioning the possibility of their absence that Ward raises consciousness in the audience. Furthermore, the question is posed to both Black and White audiences. In addressing the Black audience, Ward asserts the power they actually exercise upon White society. In addressing a White audience, he is ridiculing Whites' attitudes and actions toward the African American community by placing a mirror in front of them; a mirror reflecting the abuse perpetrated upon the African American community as well as Whites' ineptness and stupidity when they are left without the help of African Americans, who usually perform their dirty/domestic jobs.

The theatrical language adopted by Ward greatly differs from the two plays examined earlier. Baraka adopts in *The Slave* an almost realistic set whose traditional idea (as presented in Western plays) was broken by focusing on what was happening outside. His focus on the external events (the continuous explosions that are heard and actually end up taking place in the house itself) illustrates his departure from the Western realistic tradition in theatre whose main weight lied upon the characters psychological development through a verbal exchange in an enclosed space, rather than centering on what was taking place beyond those walls. Consequently, Baraka responds with the device of continuous explosions as an implication of an action needed to intrude the living-room talk. Bullins, in *Goin' a Buffalo*, adopts a *realistic* set, with just one difference: the set is established in the ghetto, within the African American community, stating that African American reality exists wherever African Americans live, regardless of the location. Thus, Bullins realistically shows the existence of another *reality* not only absent but also ignored and dismissed in Western plays.

Unlike the above plays, Ward's *Day of Absence*, does not use a realistic set. He describes a bare stage and it is the actors, blackouts, lighting, color and costumes that create the set/place, mood, action and time, as pointed out in the stage directions: "*This is a red-white-and-blue play—meaning the entire production should be designed around the basic color scheme of our patriotic trinity. Lighting should illustrate, highlight and detail time, action and mood.*" (*Absence*, 341). Costuming should be orchestrated around the same scheme. Characters should be carefully defined "*through costuming which typify their identity.*" (*Absence*, 341). In addition, Ward insists that the same actor should enact different characters. He meticulously cares about the staging of this satirical fantasy, so that the staging and acting convey the same signifying that is conveyed by the content of the issues presented.

The use of a bare stage gives the actor more freedom to use their imagination and creativity as well as a better possibility to display her/his acting skills. At the same time, a bare stage poses more responsibility on the actor for it requires a total mastery in being able to perform the adequate gestures, movement and creation of imaginary objects—for there

are no props upon which the actor can rely. The bare stage is especially suitable for caricature, like the circus—as also presented in Beckett’s plays, concretely *Waiting for Godot*. Besides, by using a bare stage, Ward is faithful to the picture presented by the old minstrel. Lastly, the bare stage might imply one more connotation, also applicable to Black South African plays (most of which are performed on a bare stage): a reflection of the lack of resources which, in this case, Whites are left with when facing the absence of Blacks. Whites are left with nothing but their own ineptitude and sense of powerlessness. This device reverses the actual African American poverty and powerless condition in the South.

In Black South African plays, the same theatrical expression is often used. Black South African artists usually possess no other means than themselves, thus, strongly emphasizing actors’ skills. In the United States, not only Ward, but also many African American playwrights of the 1960s, including Baraka and Bullins, used bare stage for their plays. Margaret Wilkerson believes the simple settings used in the 1960s plays mirrored peoples’ reality, and the aesthetics goes with the people, their experiences—African Americans lived under a very precarious situation.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, Fabre observes that the scenery used in *Day of Absence* recreates the conventions of the spectacle practiced in the plantations; that is, there is a minimum of means, limited number of actors, absence of decoration, party atmosphere and farce. Furthermore, although African American history has been undermined and misinterpreted by the dominant Anglo-American culture, *Day of Absence* is a clear demonstration of how African Americans have invented all sorts of strategies to turn situations to be more favorable for them—as it is the example of the trickster.<sup>133</sup>

The bare stage in Ward’s play is filled with Black actors enacting Whites who continually talk about Blacks, and, ironically, Blacks are absent throughout the entire performance. Only Rastus appears at the end to verify their existence. Thus, this device expands in its implications, such as the total abandonment and invisibility that African Americans have played for White America. Only when Blacks disappear mysteriously, do Whites realize the important role Blacks play in their lives. Moreover, on the day of absence, through which the play unfolds, there is a complete absence of African American music, always present in African American plays. Symbolically, the absence of African American music represents the absence of spirit and soul without which White Anglo-American are left.

Apart from music, other African American elements have disappeared as well, such as dance and entertainment, which White audiences have continually enjoyed, as asserted by the Mayor when addressing the missing Blacks on television:

MAYOR

. . . Your absence has left a void in the bosom of every single man, woman and child of our great city . . . We know you like a good time and we don’t begrudge it to ya. Hell—er, er, we like a good time ourselves—who doesn’t? . . . In fact, think of all the good times we’ve had together, huh? We’ve had some real fun, you and us, yesiree! . . . Nobody knows better than you and I what fun we’ve had together. You sing us those old Southern coon songs and dancing, those Nigra jigs and us clapping, . . . spurring you on! Lots of fun, huh?! . . . OH BOY!” (*Absence*, 360-361).

---

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Margaret Wilkerson, Berkeley, December, 1989.

<sup>133</sup> Fabre, *op. cit.*, 132, 133.

This void of African American traditions and life style is what Ward is drawing the audience's attention to, for both African Americans (by asserting the existence of their culture and irreplaceable values) and Anglo-Americans (by opening their eyes, and exposing how much North America has been enriched by the contribution of African American culture).



## CHAPTER IV

### The Black Theatre Movement in the United States. Black Women's Aesthetics: Lorraine Hansberry, Adrienne Kennedy, and Ntozake Shange

I am now  
coming up for air  
Yes, I *am*  
picking up the torch.  
...  
I am the welder  
I am taking the power  
into my own hands.

Cherrie Moraga<sup>1</sup>

No Black woman even like nowadays tells you things you're familiar with, like Black women have problems. In a family situation, I'm talking about a classic, if you understand what I'm saying, a classic Black woman figure. Showing her not just surviving, yet surviving, not just being but being, but also not just being a slave but you know still being a slave, not just being a whole but just the Black woman in all her majesty. The Black woman in all her non-majesty as well. The Black woman surviving yet not surviving but being. If that makes any kind of sense.

Sonia Sanchez<sup>2</sup>

#### Black Women's Aesthetics

The need of power, the need to express themselves in their own voices, and the need of self-affirmation by presenting a complex perspective that reconstructs Black Women's history of oppression and stereotypes are the claims presented by Cherrie Moraga and Sonia

---

<sup>1</sup> Cherrie Moraga, "The Welder," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983) 220.

<sup>2</sup> Sonia Sanchez, Uh, Uh; But How Do It Free Us, in *The New Lafayette Theatre Presents Plays with Aesthetic Comments by Six Black Playwrights* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974) 163.

Sanchez. In addition, June Jordan proclaims the need for women to take out the rage and anger instead of keeping it inside hurting themselves. This is a fundamental step in the process of woman's achievement of self-determination, as Jordan underlines:

If somebody is trying to hurt you, to oppress you, you *should* be angry, and you should put that anger where it belongs—outside yourself. . . I had been raped . . . and I was trying to deal with the experience in a lot of different ways. Once the shock subsided, I wrote "Poem about My Rights" several months later. I tried to show as clearly as I could that the difference between South Africa and rape and my mother trying to change my face and my father wanting me to be a boy was not an important difference to me. *It all violates self-determination.*<sup>3</sup>

Jordan also highlights sexual oppression, another important issue to be considered when studying the history of African American women, equally noticed by Gerda Lerner.<sup>4</sup> The pattern of Black women's sexual exploitation dates back to the times of slavery. Since then, there has existed a complex system of mechanisms that has maintained the myths and stereotypes created about African American women's sexuality. African American women have been regarded as sexual objects for White men, and, rape, Lerner asserts, was employed as a weapon of terror, not only against the African American woman but against her community as well. She further emphasizes the fact that White rapists of Black women were not punished almost throughout their history. On the contrary, Black men were terribly punished for the same offence, and were prevented from defending their women, which created a symbolical castration and assault "in their essential dignity."<sup>5</sup>

African American history is marked by the indelible traces left by its women in the struggle for liberation. Most of them almost unanimously have believed that their own liberation could not be separated from that of their community. Since slavery, there have been great African American women militants and leaders, such as Harriet Tubman and Mary Mcleod Bethune or Ida B. Wells Barnett; journalists such as Margaret Murray Washington, also president of the National Association for Colored Women (NACW); lecturers, such as Maria Sojourner Truth, who asserted Black pride and self-confidence and spoke a poetic language referring to the African roots in North American soil and offered an African American interpretation of the Christian Bible; and many other women whose names have not been included neither in the books of North American history, nor in those of African American history.<sup>6</sup>

Gerda Lerner examines one of the most popular myths about African American women, the so-called *Black matriarchy*, which has historically been "commonly misunderstood." This very term "is deceptive, for 'matriarchy' implies the exercise of power by women, and black women have been the most powerless group in [North American] society."<sup>7</sup> In spite of

---

<sup>3</sup> June Jordan's comment is quoted by Alexis Deveaux in "Creating Soul Food: June Jordan," in *Essence* 82 (April 1981): 138-150. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) 73.

<sup>5</sup> Gerda Lerner, ed. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) 163-172.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on African American women's role in history, see Lerner, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Lerner, *op. cit.*, 23.

her two-fold oppression—race and gender—the African American woman was evaluated by the male artists of the Black Arts Movement as a woman who had aligned herself to a White power structure rather than to the Black man. Larry Neal declared that the Black woman’s “aspirations and values [were] closely tied to those of the white power structure and not to those of her man.” Black women were also accused of despising their men and “tearing into [Black men] at every opportunity . . . [for Black men could not provide for their family] the way white men [did].”<sup>8</sup> As observed in prior chapters, it is contradictory and paradoxical that the same men, who were aware of the need of a more complex picture of African American culture and its members, could reduce their women to such a simplistic view and to some degree stereotype them.

The Black Arts Movement promoted self-reflection in order to expose the contradictions existing within the socio-political system African Americans were living in, as well as the contradictions within themselves. The men of the Movement, however, did not deepen into themselves and examine their own contradictions regarding their conception of African American women. bell hooks concentrates on this issue by illustrating the goals pursued by the Civil Rights Movement:

When the civil rights movement began in the 50s, black women and men . . . joined together to struggle for racial equality, yet black female activists did not receive the public acclaim awarded black male leaders . . . It was an accepted fact among black people that the leaders who were most revered and respected were men. Black activists defined freedom as gaining the right to participate as full citizens in American culture; they were not rejecting the value system of that culture. Consequently, they did not question the rightness of patriarchy . . . What had begun as a movement to free all black people from racist oppression became a movement with its primary goal [being] the establishment of black male patriarchy.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, Margaret Wilkerson has asserted that the Women’s Movement “was born out of the black struggle for liberation” and had the African American woman as midwife. Wilkerson emphasizes that the presence of the African American woman in both movements was, therefore, “not only natural but inevitable.”<sup>10</sup> If some myths and stereotypes about African Americans had been reevaluated in order to destroy them, some were being replaced in describing the African American woman. Consequently, these women realized they were fighting on a double front.

On the other hand, Lewis Nkosi underscores the idealization of the Black woman, as an abstract idea, in the 1960s. Nkosi observes that in the new African American poetry of the 1960s, the African American woman was “an abstract principle of Black Power, a figure recreated to subserve a myth to replace another older myth which [was] no longer stated precisely because it [was] everywhere taken for granted.” Nkosi considers that this idealization of the African American woman emerged out of guilt: “Almost exclusively a product of male masculine imagination, it [was] an attempt to make it up to the black woman who up to [then had] not been so highly valued by her menfolk as a symbol of

---

<sup>8</sup>Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” in *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1969): 38.

<sup>9</sup>bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981) 4-5.

<sup>10</sup>Margaret Wilkerson, *Nine Plays by Black Women* (New York: New American Library, 1986) xiii.

glamour and beauty.”<sup>11</sup> As a result, African American woman’s voice either accused of castrating their men and maintaining a White establishment, or idealized upon a pedestal of beauty, continued to be buried under the most absolute silence. She continued to be the looking glass for the men of her community while imprisoned within patriarchal simplistic views that hindered the search of her true self.

Baraka himself has acknowledged the failures of becoming revolutionary and formulated the need to create new alternatives, in which the concept of womanhood must be redefined:

Part of our failure to become revolutionary is our continuing need to subjugate our women under contemporary feudalism. . . Everyone in the community must struggle . . . and help build alternative systems and institutions within our revolutionary nationalist communities. They must overthrow negro chauvinism and let our women learn and expand in the struggle by our side and stop making them be invisible in the struggle. . . Manhood must be redefined just as womanhood and indeed childhood must be redefined in collective revolutionary ways if they are going to have any more meaning to us than the old definitions.<sup>12</sup>

Baraka establishes, instead of a two-fold, a three-fold oppression in the African American working woman (like all Third World women): class, nationality and sex.<sup>13</sup> The role of the African American woman as a midwife who helped the birth of Black and women’s liberation movement, as observed by Wilkerson, needs to be examined. As a critical and perceptive observer, the African American woman had begun a self-reflection. Aware of the parameters formulated by both movements, she applied them to her genuine and particular socio-political situation of race and gender. Sandra Richards insists that “a close connection between art and society is central to black feminist criticism.”<sup>14</sup> As previously stated, theatre is the most public of all literary genres and, consequently, African American women artists would have an extra shackle to break from in order to become playwrights, directors or actresses. Before 1950, women had held full partnership in theatre protest against the living conditions for African Americans, either in historical dramas, folk plays or race propaganda. They had contributed to shape “a unique perspective of black women’s reality” as part of their protest, but only after the 1950s were their voices heard beyond their communities.<sup>15</sup> In spite of their achievements, they still had to face many obstacles for they lived in a very competitive and male-dominated world.

African American women writers, then, began to offer a very different reality that was exclusively and distinctively theirs, thus establishing the original patterns of a new aesthetics. In Mae G. Henderson’s opinion, one of the elements that has characterized their writing and empowered their works, is “precisely [their] ability to disrupt and break with conventional imagery.” Henderson emphasizes that the commitment of the Black feminist project has been the *privileging of difference*, for it is, “after all, the rhetoric of universality

---

<sup>11</sup> Lewis Nkosi, *The Transplanted Heart: Essays on South Africa* (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1975) 153.

<sup>12</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Creating a Unified Consciousness* (Newark, New Jersey: n.p., [1974?]) 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974-1979* (New York: Quill, 1984) 263.

<sup>14</sup> Sandra L. Richards, “Negative Forces and Positive Non-Entities: Images of Women in the Dramas of Amiri Baraka,” in *Theatre Journal* 34, 2 (May 1982): 233.

<sup>15</sup> Wilkerson, *op. cit.*, 19.



that has excluded gender, race and class perspectives from the dominant literary critical discourse as well as the socio-political center of power.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently, African American women initiated the process to define themselves and stop others doing it for them. Barbara Christian maintains that the African American woman, away from universalistic patterns, had to create her own definition as a means to survive:

As poor, woman, and black, the Afro-American woman had to generate her own definition in order to survive, for she found that she was forced to deny essential aspects of herself to fit the definition of others. . . It is primarily in the expressions of herself that she could be her totality. And as a result of that expression is also the articulation of the interconnectedness of race, sex and class as a philosophical basis for the pattern of dominance and hierarchy in this society.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, referring to African American women writers, Claudia Tate has observed self-esteem is a primary issue in their creative works and their heroine characters “[are] aware that [they] alone must be determined to understand the conditions of [their] life, . . . by means of intense introspection, before she can move on to establish meaningful relationships with other people.”<sup>18</sup> The introspection exercised by African American women is the goal that Baraka and Fanon proposed for oppressed, exploited and colonized people in order to find self-esteem and national consciousness. Only through consciousness and self-esteem can each individual achieve the self-affirmation of her/himself and her/his community. Once this step has been taken, each individual will be able to emerge as a whole and a real communication between people and cultures will be achieved. A sense of wholeness is fundamental in order to be present, to exist as part of the international family.

As already mentioned, the Black consciousness movement of the 1960s had a great resonance in African American women. More specifically, for Sonia Sanchez the movement continued to be “a significant component of her social and political participation . . . [Women need to] remove [themselves first] from the oppression of a man [and then] from the oppression of a country.”<sup>19</sup> She has recognized that women write differently from men. In her opinion “men write in [what she calls] an objective mood, . . . [whereas women] tend to write in a subjective mood.”<sup>20</sup> Sanchez’s plays and her female African American characters did greatly contribute to developing a theatre that reflects the complexity and perspective of the African American woman.

As it is widely acknowledged, musical and theatrical careers have been especially restricted by race barriers. The stage became the manifestation of dignified and meaningful roles, but for the Black community most of the roles they were offered to play were stereotypes of Black servants and other demeaning roles.<sup>21</sup> African American women such as

---

<sup>16</sup> Mae G. Henderson in response to Houston A. Baker’s “There Is No More Beautiful Way: Theory and the Poetics of Afro-American Women’s Writings,” in *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*, Baker and Redmond, eds. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) 161-162.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspective on Black Women Writers* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985) 161-162.

<sup>18</sup> Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work* (New York: Continuum, 1983) xxi, xxii.

<sup>19</sup> “Sonia Sanchez,” in *Black Women at Work*, 133, 134.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>21</sup> Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, *op. cit.*, 81.

Alice Childress and Lorraine Hansberry offered a new dimension to their African American women characters, and Sonia Sanchez, afterwards, enlarged that dimension. Sanchez's *Sister Son/ji* is an evident proof of the complexity that confines the African American woman. In her play, the woman character has gone through many changes and difficulties: she has lost husbands, children; she has been to college; she has been a militant and fought; she has seen death; yet she has been able to survive. Although she ages on stage, her spirit never does. "She is Harriet Tubman," in Sanchez's own words.<sup>22</sup>

In the prior chapter, the importance of dance, song and music throughout the history of and works by African Americans was examined. Music, movement and song are taken as components of speech. In addition, music is given the attributes of human voices. The inextricability of rhythm and movement with speech is a fundamental component in the plays by the African American men playwrights of the Movement. African American women playwrights highlight these elements even more. Angela Davis has stated that "Black people were able to create with their music an aesthetic community of resistance, which in turn encouraged and nurtured a political community of active struggle for freedom."<sup>23</sup> Music has definitely helped give shape African American women writer's aesthetics in their struggle for self-affirmation both as African Americans and as women. Ntozake Shange and Aishah Rahman's plays are an evident proof.

Linda Hart regards music as a powerful metaphor for the African American woman experience, in redefining and recreating herself:

The grunts and moans of the work songs and the blues, the veiled messages of the spirituals. The sassy truths of rhythm and blues tell her story with urgency and passion. Black music, born out of the need for an expressive as well as coded and private language, is as implicitly political as the lives these writers depict. And writers from Langston Hughes to Alice Walker, from Richard Wright to Lorraine Hansberry to Ntozake Shange, have attempted to emulate the efficiency and evocative qualities of that form. . . Jazz and blues and other forms of black music are inseparable from the attitudes and experiences that shaped them. The changes in pitch and time, the shifts in stress, the texture of timbre and vibrato negate European regularity and stability of tone. . . This music "speaks" the rage, the irony, the profundity of Black-American life in tonalities and colorations absent from conventional western speech. . . African drumming set the foundation through its complex, phonetic reproduction of words and its polyphonic and contrapuntal rhythmic structures. . . For the playwright, this rich musical background stimulates new ways of conceptualizing music as an element of drama. Thus contemporary black women playwrights find in music a second language that gives expression to the profound anguish and joy of their vision and experience.<sup>24</sup>

Music brings out an emotional quality that underlines subjectivity in opposition to a more *objective mood* used by men writers, as Sanchez has pointed out. Hart considers that it has been in the hands of African American women playwrights that the theatre commenced to present a new and different dimension since these women know music is as political, sensual and emotional as their lives.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Tate, *op. cit.*, 148.

<sup>23</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Culture and Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 201.

<sup>24</sup> Linda Hart, "Music as Metaphor: New Plays of Black Women," in *Making Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, Hart, ed. (Ann Arbor (Michigan): The University of Michigan Press, 1989) 62.

<sup>25</sup> Hart, *op. cit.*, 74.

Regarding contemporary literature written by African American women, Calvin C. Hernton asserts that this literature “is a dialectical composite of what is known coming out of the unknown. It is an upheaval in form, style and landscape. It is the negation of the negative. And it proffers a vision of unfettered human possibility.”<sup>26</sup> Hope, *negation of the negative*, and/or search of possibilities to recover oneself and one’s culture are, without doubt, the elements of the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation. African American men playwrights have committed to shape these elements in their plays; African American women playwrights, on the other hand, added a perspective genuine to their gender creating, thus, a difference that widened and completed Black Aesthetics. Wilkerson has noticed that the work of playwrights such as Hansberry, Childress, Kennedy and Shange has “strengthened the social consciousness of black plays, integrated the social and political with the private and personal self in new ways and validated the theatrical richness of women’s experience. Their plays pushed beyond the confines of realism to newer theatrical forms more expressive of black reality.”<sup>27</sup> Three of these playwrights are the focus of this section, beginning with Hansberry.

#### The Intellectual Spear: Lorraine Hansberry’s *Les Blancs*

The human race concern me and everything that implies . . . which is the most ambitious thing you can say. . . I happen to believe that the most ordinary human being . . . has within [her/]him elements of profundity, of profound anguish. . . Every human being is in enormous conflict about something, even if it’s how to get to work in the morning and all of that.

Lorraine Hansberry<sup>28</sup>

[I am] a fool who believes that death is waste and love is sweet and that the earth turns and men change every day and that flowers smell good and that I hurt terribly today, and that hurt is desperation and desperation is energy and energy can move things.

Sidney in Hansberry’s *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window*<sup>29</sup>

Lorraine Hansberry’s statements are distinctive of a historical moment: the Civil Rights Movement. Her concern with the human being went beyond any barriers of color, race or culture. The objective subjectivity exposed in her writings is not so definitely observed in the works by the men playwrights of the Black Theatre Movement. The latter were more preoccupied with moving completely away from Western culture and reconstructing the African American tradition. On the contrary, Hansberry often confronts Blacks and Whites and let them speak and present their strengths and weaknesses. She plunges the audience into questioning different ideologies; some times those different ideologies appear within the same family— i.e., *A Raisin in the Sun*.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin C. Hernton, *The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers: Adventures in Sex, Literature and Real Life* (New York: Anchor Press, 1987) 58.

<sup>27</sup> Wilkerson, *op. cit.*, xxii-xxiii.

<sup>28</sup> Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, adapted by Robert Nemiroff (New York: A Signet Book, 1970) 151.

<sup>29</sup> Lorraine Hansberry, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* ((New York: Random House, 1965) 142.

Hansberry's work lacks the violence and anger against Whites overtly expressed by Amiri Baraka and Ed Bullins. She prefers to remain an observer and let her characters freely express and confront each other. The active dialogue maintained by her characters generates a questioning of their actions and words that recalls Brecht's epic theatre. Nevertheless, if all throughout her work Hansberry preserved her deep belief in dialogue between wo/men, by the end of her life she had reached the conclusion that talking was not enough. She foresaw a need to take action. In this regard, and referring to Martin Luther King's leadership and the Civil Rights Movement, she confessed:

I support them and applaud them. . . At the same time I have no illusion that it is enough. We believe that the world is political and that political power, in one form or another, will be the ultimate key to the liberation of American [Blacks], and, indeed, black folk throughout the world. . . I think that Dr. King increasingly will have to face a forthcoming generation of [Blacks] who question even the restraints of his militant and, currently, progressive ideas and concepts.<sup>30</sup>

Hansberry anticipated the forthcoming generation of Black Power, Black Panthers and the Black Theatre Movement, of which she can be considered a forerunner. She understood the need for the White liberal to become radical: "The problem is we have to find some way, with these dialogues, to encourage the white liberal to stop being a liberal—and become an American radical."<sup>31</sup> She took her idea into practice by writing *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* and by creating the North American White liberal and journalist, Charlie Morris, in *Les Blancs*.

Baraka arrives at Hansberry's same conclusion, as illustrated in *The Slave: Vessels*, tired of talking, opts for a language of action and kills Easley. Hansberry herself became more radical in the last years of her life and left *Les Blancs* as her last testimony and legacy: "I think it's very simple that the whole idea of debating whether or not [Blacks] should defend themselves is an insult. If anybody comes and does ill in your home or your community—obviously, you try your best to kill [her/]him."<sup>32</sup> Her statement parallels the action taken by the African character Tshembe Matoseh, in *Les Blancs*, who finally decides to take sides and kills his brother, Abioseh, a betrayer to their people. Hansberry's last statement demonstrates her affinities with the ideology of Black Power and Black Consciousness defended by Malcolm X: "I think . . . that [Blacks] must concern themselves with every single means of struggle: legal, illegal, passive, active, violent and non-violent. That they must harass, debate, petition, . . . boycott, sing hymns, . . . and shoot from their windows when the racist come cruising their communities."<sup>33</sup> She could not admit the acceptance of the African Americans' present condition that she considered "the only form of extremism which [discredited them] before [their] children."<sup>34</sup> This is actually the struggle that Lena begins in *A Raisin in the Sun* when she decides to move with her family to a White neighborhood (or Rosa Parks when she refused to cede her seat in a segregated bus in Alabama).

---

<sup>30</sup> Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, *op. cit.*, 121.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

Baraka has insisted that Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* has been continually misunderstood and categorized as a soap opera, because people read the play very superficially, asserting that African American people could identify with the characters, as the play unfolds different ideologies within the family.<sup>35</sup> In addition, Baraka claims that Hansberry is a *critical realist* in a way that Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Margaret Walker are. That is, she *analyzes* and *assesses* reality and shapes her statement as a work of art. Her statement cannot be separated from the character she creates to embody, in their totality, the life she observes; it becomes, in short, the living material of the work, part of its breathing body, integral and alive.<sup>36</sup>

Particularly, Lena is an interesting character that encloses a reality rooted in the African American tradition. Lena is a complex character rather than a simple embodiment of the Black matriarchy myth, as has narrowly been viewed by most critics. In this regard, Gerda Lerner describes the important role Black mothers have played in the African American home as militants rather than as matriarchs:

[It] was hard for colored children to be proud of fathers who were treated like [boys or called that way or any other name in the South] and it was usually the . . . mother who had to keep a certain dignity in the family to offset the inferiority the white man inflicted on her husband. . . . When I hear people talking about communists being behind the colored students, I have to laugh. It's no Communists—it's [Black] mothers who believe it's time for their children to fight for their rights and good education.<sup>37</sup>

Lerner seems to be giving a definition of Lena's character, who is certainly a militant, as stated by Wilkerson: "Lena Younger is not the accommodating Mammy who chooses the passive, safe path, but rather the folk figure, the courageous spirit that lends credence and power to the militant struggle. In her own determined way, she gives birth to revolutionaries and is herself a progressive force."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, Hansberry had already begun to disrupt stereotypes by depicting complex characters, each of whom, represents a different ideology, as in African Americans' real lives. In addition, in her play she also reveals another fundamental principle in the African American struggle for liberation: self-determination (a component maintained as the foundation of the Black Arts Movement).

It is important to highlight the fact that in Hansberry's play it is a woman who is a militant and takes that step into the struggle, offering a fuller depiction of a gender so simplified by male playwrights of the subsequent Movement. Adrienne Rich proclaims that "obviously the most oppressed of any oppressed group will be its women. . . . Obviously, since women are oppressed in society and if you've got an oppressed group, they're twice oppressed . . . . As oppression makes people more militant . . . . then twice militant because

---

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Baraka, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, November 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Amiri Baraka, "A Critical Reevaluation of *A Raisin in the Sun*," in *A Raisin in the Sun, Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition and the Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, Nemiroff, ed. (New York and Scarborough (Ontario): New American Library, 1987) 10.

<sup>37</sup> Lerner, *op. cit.*, 585.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Wilkerson, "A Raisin in the Sun: Anniversary of an American Classic," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, Case, ed. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 129.

they're twice oppressed."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Lena, the human rights militant, exemplifies Hansberry's belief that the ghetto leaves marks and scars which the "ghettoized child carries through life." Hansberry insisted in the need for African Americans to leave the ghettos for they are killing their dreams and their bodies: "It is not an abstraction to us that the average American Negro has a life expectancy of five to ten years less than the average white."<sup>40</sup>

The same scars the ghetto leaves on African American children are equally left in Africa's landscape by colonialism and imperialism, as Matoseh tells Morris in Act I, Scene 3 of *Les Blancs*:

TSHEMBE

Did you just happen to see the hills there [through Zatembe] and the scars in them? . . . The great gashes from whence came the silver, gold, diamonds, cobalt, tungsten?<sup>41</sup>

And, again, a woman plays a fundamental role in *Les Blancs*. It is a woman warrior who first appears on an open stage, clutching a spear from the earth and holding it high. This woman warrior symbolizes the African continent and she is the one who haunts Matoseh's mind (as the ghost haunts Hamlet) for he is afraid to take an action that might require violence. Matoseh confesses he has renounced all spears (*Blancs*, Act I, Scene 3, 81). Like Lena encouraging her children to take a step, the woman warrior encourages Matoseh to take the spear and be a leader to his people to fight against the Western invader.

What is significant about Hansberry's *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* and *Les Blancs* is the fact that they present two male characters as protagonists—Sidney Brustein and Tshembe Matoseh, respectively who, paradoxically, were originally written to be female characters as found in Hansberry's notebooks. Karen Malpede raises a few questions regarding this switch of character gender: "Did [Hansberry] censor herself, knowing she would be censured? Or did the forms of a woman-centered drama still elude her because the feminist community was not yet strong enough to provide the actual examples required?"<sup>42</sup> Both questions could be answered affirmatively as well as it could be interpreted as Hansberry's concern with human beings, beyond gender, race or culture.

Hansberry attempts to be as objective as possible in the creation of her characters and presentation of their problems, exhibiting their contradictions and dilemmas, which automatically excludes the possibility of stereotyping them. She creates an authentic portrait taken from the reality that surrounded her and/or, at times, the reality she actually wanted to exist. In this line, Margaret Wilkerson has observed: "Hansberry defined realism as 'not what *is* but what is *possible*.'"<sup>43</sup> In addition, Wilkerson considers Hansberry a "womanist, in

---

<sup>39</sup> Adrienne Rich, "The Problem with Lorraine Hansberry," in *Freedomways* 19, 4 (1979): 251.

<sup>40</sup> Hansberry, *op. cit.*, 63, 131-132.

<sup>41</sup> Lorraine Hansberry, *Les Blancs*, in *Lorraine Hansberry: The Collected Last Plays*, Nemiroff, ed. (New York: New American Library, 1972) 77-78. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Blancs*, page number).

<sup>42</sup> Malpede, Karen, ed. *Women in Theatre: Compassion and Hope* (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1983) 164.

<sup>43</sup> Margaret Wilkerson, "Introduction," in *Lorraine Hansberry: The Collected Last Plays*, 21.

her outlook . . . [who often] would curse supremacist males for their ignorance.”<sup>44</sup> In *Les Blancs* it is Mme. Nielsen, an old English White woman, who, like the woman warrior, reminds Matoseh that “Africa needs warriors. Like [his] father.” (*Blancs*, Act II, Scene 8, 126). Thus, Lena, the woman warrior and Mme. Nielsen play an indelible part in the lives of the ones who live close to them and in their society. These women seem to be Hansberry’s own symbols to express the need to take action in the struggle, instead of simply remaining behind the shield of intellectualism and words.

As already stated, *A Raisin in the Sun* describes a family who is comprised by members symbolizing different ideologies. With her play, Hansberry begins to build a foundation that was going to remain rooted in the subsequent Black Arts Movement: Black militancy/Women’s militancy; consciousness raising about African American political and social situation; the creation of more complex African American characters that offered a new and positive image, consequently disrupting old stereotypes; the confrontation of the problems of racism and separation between Blacks and Whites; the need of self-determination and commitment; and, a new awareness of Africa which would develop and mature in subsequent years during the time period of the Movement. On the one hand, Hansberry presents Lena’s and George’s image of Africa that, Beneatha Younger and Joseph Asagai (as Lena’s and George’s opposites) are introduced as characters with enough maturity “to actually carry out an intellectual marriage.”<sup>45</sup>

Close to her premature death, Hansberry was finally able to delineate in *Les Blancs* a deeper study of the African continent and its condition. Like in Brecht’s epic theatre plays, Hansberry exposes a problem that exists in her own country and distances the audience from it by placing the action in the African continent while posing the similarities between Africans and African Americans under imperialism and racism. This distancing creates the necessary atmosphere for the audience to question the characters’ actions and, by doing so, the members of the audience can question themselves. The implications of Western colonialism and North American imperialism upon Africans parallels African Americans as a nation also colonized and oppressed under the *device* of racism, as Matoseh tells Morris in Act II, Scene 2. Racism is a device for a few to remain on power and rule upon others:

TSHEMBE

So, in one century, men invoke the device of religion to cloak their conquests. In another, race. Now, in both cases you and I may recognize the fraudulence of the device, but the fact remains that a man who has a sword run through him because he refuses to become a Moslem or a Christian—or who is shot in Zatembe or Mississippi because he is black—is suffering the utter *reality* of the device. (*Blancs*, 92)

By discussing the issue of racism in a different continent, Hansberry is able to engage a North American audience in a problem that concern themselves.

The play presents constant allusions to the parallel situation experienced by Africans and African Americans, ironically contrasted when in Act I, Scene 3 Matoseh tells Morris:

---

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Wilkerson, “The Dark Vision of Lorraine Hansberry: Excerpts from a Literary Biography,” in *The Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1987) 645.

<sup>45</sup> Brenda F. Benian, “The Afro-American-West African Marriage Question: Its Literary and Historical Contexts,” in *Women in African Literature Today: A Review*, Jones, ed. (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1987) 154, 157.

TSEHMBE

Yes, I was in the South! [of the United States] (*With deliberate impatience*). And yes. I did find your American apartheid absolutely enraging (*Blancs*, 74).

Yet Hansberry does not punish Morris, the North American White liberal, the way Baraka does in *The Slave*. She still believes a solution must be found which she gears towards the need for the Anglo-American White liberal to become radical, as Morris seems to have done by the end of the play. It is actually the Anglo-American character, Morris, and the British lady, Mme. Nielsen, who totally support the African struggle and poke Matoseh to be part of it instead of trying to fly away to his family and television set in Europe.

Hansberry does not envision a struggle led exclusively by Africans or African against oppression, but a struggle that must be exerted by anyone (no matter what color and/or culture) who is against oppression and in favor of freedom. As previously examined, Baraka who, considered himself so revolutionary and rejected White participation in the Movement, years later has recognized his mistake. Hansberry did not commit that mistake. She criticized Blacks or Whites, African Americans or Africans who were not involved in the same struggle for freedom, without ever glorifying ones or the others.

Hansberry presents the different ideologies and attitudes that exist among the Western characters included in the play. The British Dr. Dekoven and Mme. Nielsen are aware of the damage that the Reverend has caused Africans and realize the need for them to fight; Dr. Gotterling (Marta) is almost blind to the real situation; and Reverend Nielsen has been the paternalist evil whose paternalistic attitude has kept Africans locked in time, away from progress. Similarly to slavery times in North America, Reverend Nielsen has kept Africans away from education so that they could be more easily manipulated.

Moreover, Hansberry also depicts the differences existing among the members of Matoseh's family. Matoseh's father was an admirable warrior; Matoseh's brother, Abioseh, who becomes a Christian priest, betrays his people's struggle; and his little brother Eric (half European, because his mother was raped by Major Rice) is the most militant when time comes to take the spear; and Matoseh, himself, who does not want to get involved in the struggle but subsequently does by the end of the play.

In presenting a complex variety of ideologies and personalities among Africans, Hansberry responds to Jean Genet's *The Blacks* (response already given by entitling her play *Les Blancs/The Whites*) and demonstrates that within the Black community, there are individuals with different perspectives. Blacks are not a *monolith*, as Matoseh criticizes Morris' global vision of Blacks:

CHARLIE

. . . You really can't get rid of it, can you? The bitterness. No matter how you try, we've done it to you: *you do hate white men!*

TSHEMBE

. . . Mr. Morris, have it your way! No matter what delusions of individuality infect *my* mind, to *you* I am not an individual but a tide, a flood, a monolith: 'the Bla-a-acks! (*Blancs*, 91).



With *Les Blancs*, Hansberry disrupts Genet's abstraction and his conversation "haunted by guilt [for 200 years of rape of Africa and] . . . too steeped in the romance of racial exoticism to shed much light on the real confrontation that was coming."<sup>46</sup>

In spite of Hansberry's response to Genet's play, she does not create a monolith to enclose Whites. It is rather the opposite, as previously noted. Through the characters of Morris, the Anglo-American White liberal, and Matoseh, the African intellectual, Hansberry reproaches both their attitudes and their lack of social commitment, which she believes indispensable to achieve social changes. By the end of the play, Morris and Matoseh realize that both need to take an action on the same side against oppression and colonialism. As Margaret Wilkerson states, "the brilliant inspired efforts to communicate that characterize this play dissolve in the pain and *necessity of human action—the liberating act*—that must be violent because words alone are inadequate."<sup>47</sup> Hansberry masters the presentation of the inseparable link between dialogue and action. Dialogue becomes a process that can energize and help clarify ideas and lead to action. People, however, must not sit and think too much and wait forever, as Peter tells Matoseh through the story of the wise hyena, Modingo (which means *the one who thinks carefully before he acts*) (*Blancs*, Act II, Scene 2, 95). Hansberry carefully exposes social awareness and artistic individualism.<sup>48</sup> She does not allow her criticism of Western institution to trap her into fanaticism, nor does she romanticize the image of Africans or African Americans.

If Hansberry enjoys the presentation of long and intense dialogues exchanged between her characters, she equally adopts a theatrical language that conveys elements adopted from the African and African American tradition. Like the men playwrights of the Movement, Hansberry does not forget music, dance, gesture, storytelling and the element of signifying—or double entendre. She carefully provides a combination of Western (mainly Brechtian technique) and African theatre tradition. Characters Morris and Matoseh parallel this combination.

Regarding the element of music, Linda Hart observes that both *Les Blancs* and *Toussaint* (a short play by Hansberry) reflect the playwright's approach to music as a form to show the multiple dimensions of reality.<sup>49</sup> For example, African drums are present at the very beginning of the play, with stage directions carefully noting that "*these are not at all the traditional 'movie drums,' but distinct, erratic and varied statements of mood and intent*" (*Blancs*, 41). The drum serves as a powerful assertion of an African culture that colonialists attempted to erode. Throughout the play, it is not classical music, but African music that is heard. Drums speak a language and send messages. Hence, music is presented with its social as well as its entertaining function (a double function of music that differs from that of Western culture). The drum is a fundamental presence throughout the performance, constantly reaffirming Africa's existence and Africans' self-determination not

---

<sup>46</sup>Wilkerson, "Introduction," in *Lorraine Hansberry: The Collected Last Plays*, 32.

<sup>47</sup>Wilkerson, "The Dark Vision of Lorraine Hansberry," *Ibid.*, 648. Emphasis added.

<sup>48</sup>Robert H. Grant, "'Rebel' or 'Slave': Language, Revolution, and the 1960s's Black Intellectual Persona in Baraka's *The Slave* (1964) and Hansberry's *Les Blancs* (1964)." Unpublished paper, Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1985.

<sup>49</sup>Linda Hart, "Music as Metaphor: New Plays of Black Women," in *Making Spectacle, op. cit.*, 64.

to die in the ashes. Drums bear the rhythm of life throughout the play, a life that refuses the defeat of being killed without having fought first.

*Les Blancs* starts with the drums announcing Matoseh's father's death and end announcing the beginning of a revolution; that is to say, a father and great warrior dies, and a leader is born, Matoseh. This circular structure has the ritualistic effect of life, of nature. Furthermore, it might symbolize the death of the uncommitted and detached Matoseh and the birth of Matoseh as a committed African leader. The opening of the play consists of distinctive elements that reaffirm African culture but are despised by Western *civilization*: the sounds of nature coming out from the jungle. The music of drums increases "*as the houselights go to black*" (*Blancs*, 4) and moves to the speakers on the stage to introduce the third element: the African woman dancer. Drums, then, fuse with the woman's movement into a dance.

The presentation of sounds such as crickets, birds and frogs, stresses the importance of nature in African traditions, something that is supplied by reasoning and intellectual talk in *civilized* Western countries. To the sounds of nature gather the drums and the drums finally join the woman dancer, until nature, music and dance become body and spirit inextricably linked and in harmony with the earth. The African principle of wo/man in harmony with her/his cosmos is then established. The cry of a hyena, though, disrupts this harmony and, when the woman dancer hears it, she walks towards the spear that is plunged into the ground downstage, pulls it out and raises it high. The hyena's cry foreshadows Matoseh's return from Europe to his African village, which is heard by the African woman dancer. Then, the woman dancer prepares herself to go to Matoseh and give him the spear. At the end of Act I, Matoseh feels the presence of the African woman coming towards him, but he wants to escape and forsake the struggle. Nevertheless, the African woman dancer mimes the years of slavery and slaughter, and, finally, she throws him the spear that he, instinctively, takes.

The African woman dancer symbolizes the spirit and land of Africa. The woman is Africa's outcry to be defended from rape, exploitation and scars caused by colonialism. Hansberry's symbolism of the woman warrior, the drums and the hyena folk tale, is rooted in the African American tradition of signifying. The repetition of these symbols throughout the play emphasizes self-assertiveness and self-affirmation against the danger of possible annihilation; that is to say, the danger is the arrival of the *wise* hyena who thinks and waits for too long instead of taking an action on time (i.e, Matoseh). The hyena's *terrible laughter* encloses a double meaning. It symbolizes the irony originating from the "bitter joke that was played [on the hyenas] while [Mondingo, the hyena] reasoned," while the elephants took their land (*Blancs*, Act II, Scene 2, 95). Signifying emerges out of the reversal of the hyena's reaction: instead of tears, the hyena emitted laughter, a *terrible* laughter. Humor, as examined in the previous chapter, in African and African American tradition, has been a form of survival; and the hyena's laughter originates out of pain instead of joy. The tale of Mondingo, the wise hyena, is narrated by Peter, an African (thus named by Europeans), to warn Matoseh of the dangers they are in if he does not lead his people into action to prevent the invader from robbing their African land. The tale, as part of the African tradition of stoytelling, then, parallels the theme and action of the play.

Presence and repetition of symbols contrast the absence and consequent death of the Reverend Nielsen. If the presence of nature, drums, and dance asserts and serves as premonition of Africa's rebirth, absence might mean as well the death of another force.

Reverend Nielsen is absent throughout the duration of the play—like God—and when he appears on stage he is already a corpse. Nevertheless, we learn through the other characters who talk about him and the destruction he has perpetrated in the village. The final appearance of his dead body foreshadows the African revolution that has already begun.

In conclusion, by moving beyond the North American border with *Les Blancs*, Hansberry enlarges the picture of the world, disclosing the North American imperialism and Western colonialism beyond their boundaries, implemented on African and other Third World countries. This worldview is the analogy to the African Americans' situation as prisoners, oppressed and colonized in their own country. In addition, Hansberry's concern for Africa and Third World countries predicted the same concern shared by the playwrights of the Black Theatre Movement. Nobody can deny that Hansberry was the forerunner of the Movement of the 1960s. It is unfortunate, though, that she did not live long enough to continue offering a complexity of characters—especially women's—that would have disrupted the simplified depictions and sexist views by the male writers of the Movement. Hansberry's works and vision were certainly the engine that propelled the Black Theatre Movement. Not only did she inspire the men playwrights but also became the presence needed by other African American women to identify with. Her work provided a positive image, which contributed to break women's silence, and encourage them to peak of their own experiences in their writings. Lena, Beneatha, the African woman dancer/warrior and Mme. Nielsen have already torn to pieces the stereotypes of passive, uncommitted and empty-brained Black and White women, as portrayed by male writers. These women characters would become the bulwark of power and strength in the process towards women's self-affirmation and determination goals. Like the woman warrior in *Les Blancs*, Hansberry's spirit was the spear taken by subsequent North American women playwrights in their works.

#### Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*: Defeat as a Statement of Self-Affirmation

Violence against ourselves is an expression of our atonement and penance.

Isolated, captive among the walls of our own homes, passivity and immobility, to which we are destined as inhabitants of narrow dungeons, mitigate at the same time that they accentuate our pain.

Guilt exercises a powerful gravitation in our evolution as women.

I have been sad many times in my life. I ignored or denied what I perceived, and I waited, simply waited. I think that I have spent more than half of my life misunderstanding, deducing and being silent. I was sure that our sense of existence obeyed an order, persevering in it for a long time, in an obstinate repetition of gestures and itineraries.

Liliana Mizrahi<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Liliana Mizrahi, *Las mujeres y la culpa: Herederas de una moral inquisidora* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1990) 31, 35, 43, 78.

Lorraine Hansberry's work is characterized by the use of extensive dialogue, dealing with social issues about the human race, within which Blacks as well as Whites are victims of an oppression they need to combat; and her response to Genet's abstractions and Becket's pessimism lies in her infusing the idea of seeking possibilities that can drive people to action. Hansberry's plays analyzed her present situation by considering the past and shaping a future of possibilities with hope. Adrienne Kennedy's plays, instead, are replete of visual images and, although she deals with social issues, she does not place herself outside with the others but internalizes a social problem to make it her private one. Blood and death are consistent in Kennedy's plays, whereas those by Hansberry exude life. While in Hansberry tragedy and rage produce energy and energy becomes action that can move and change things (outward action: DO), in Kennedy, tragedy paralyzes her with anguish and as a result she escapes to her inner self in search of shelter (inward action: FEEL). The different structure of their plays parallels the difference that lies on their approach to the same issues.

Hansberry constructs an active dialogue that propels to action. She is the spear, the doer in the outside world. In contrast, Kennedy internalizes the outside world that causes her pain, and has the courage to strip herself naked, exposing in front of the audience (an outside world that frightens her) the bone of her private and agonic self. The story and plot line that exist in Hansberry's plays is totally absent and suppressed by a surrealist style in those by Kennedy. Kennedy invents a new language that replaces words. The playwright's deepest feelings of pain and agony are expressed through visual images that point directly to the senses. She herself has recognized that, at a point in her life, she began to distrust language and continue to try visual images—*A Lesson in Dead Language* is a clear example of her statement.<sup>51</sup>

Kennedy recalls that it was after she saw Lorca's *Blood Wedding* when she "changed [her] ideas about what a play was. Ibsen, Chekhov, O'Neill and even Williams fell away. Never again would [she] try to set a play in a 'living room,' never again would [she] be afraid to have [her] characters talk in a non-realistic way, and [she] would abandon the realistic set for a greater dream setting. It was a turning point."<sup>52</sup> But, Lorca was not the only turning point in Kennedy's artistic life; Africa strongly influenced her work as well. Her trip to West Africa affected her deeply in two ways. While she was there, Patrice Lumumba was assassinated and had a profound impact on her personal and social consciousness; and, the same way Lorca's style influenced her, African masks provided her with the vision of new shapes and forms that she would transfer into her plays:

A few years before, Picasso's work had inspired me to exaggerate the physical appearances of my characters, but not until I bought a great African mask from a vendor on the streets of Accra, of a woman with a bird flying through her forehead did I totally break from realistic looking characters. I would soon create a character with a shattered, bludgeoned head. That was his fixed surreal appearance.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Adrienne Kennedy interviewed by James V. Hatch, New York, January 1978. Hatch-Billops collection.

<sup>52</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, *People Who Led to My Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1988) 108.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

This woman's image as well as the images of birds would be used constantly in all her plays from that moment.

Concerning animal imagery in African Theatre, Mineke Schipper claims that the animal world is a mirror of the human world.<sup>54</sup> And, in Kennedy's last work, *Deadly Triplets*, she refers to a production of *Anna Karenina* that she saw in England, and in the program of the production it was written: "She prefers to keep her real name a bit of a mystery . . . choosing to let her birds express her identity. . . If I did not have my birds I might murder."<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, Clay declares that if Bessie Smith "had killed some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors. . . Crazy niggers turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder."<sup>56</sup> Amiri Baraka and Ed Bullins, certainly, took their violence and rage out in their plays, whereas Kennedy used the images of her birds and other animals and surrealistic settings to express her inner anguish and struggle.

*Funnyhouse of a Negro*, gestated in 1961 during Kennedy's trip to West Africa, is one of the best testimonies where violence against the self is best expressed, i.e., Sarah's suicide. Alluding to surrealism and art and to the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (with whom Kennedy herself observes many resemblances<sup>57</sup>) Whitney Chadwick proclaims: "Now it is violence directed against the self, not projected onto another, violence inseparable from the physiological reality of woman's sexuality and the social construction of her feminine role. . . For Kahlo, as for other women artists associated with surrealists, painting became a means of sustaining a dialogue with inner reality."<sup>58</sup> If Kahlo used the canvas to express that dialogue with inner reality, Kennedy uses the stage. The Mexican artist affirmed that she painted herself because she was the person she knew the best.<sup>59</sup>

After reading *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Edward Albee told Kennedy: "A playwright is someone who lets [her/]his guts out on stage and that's what you've done in this play."<sup>60</sup> It seems that it was Kennedy's courageous honesty that precisely bothered the male playwrights of the Movement, for she was not considered part of it. Kennedy was creating a new language and a new style to present the contradictions existing within her self. Members of the Theatre Movement agreed that playwrights should expose those contradictions as an essential step to unveil the lies of a social and political system under which African Americans were living. Paradoxically, they did not accept Kennedy's honest exposition of the contradictions found within her self, as a metaphor of the contradictions existing in the outside world. Even Larry Neal affirmed that the new theatre was a theatre of the Spirit "that confronted the Black man in his interaction with his brothers and with the

---

<sup>54</sup> Mineke Schipper, *Theatre and Society in Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982) 38.

<sup>55</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, *Deadly Triplets: A Theatre Mystery and Journal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 45-46.

<sup>56</sup> Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*, in *Dutchman and The Slave* (New York: Morrow and Co., 1964) 35.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Adrienne Kennedy. Stanford, December 1989.

<sup>58</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society* (Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1990) 296.

<sup>59</sup> Araceli Rico, *Frida Kahlo: Fantasía de un cuerpo herido* (México: Plaza y Valdés editores, 1990) 142.

<sup>60</sup> Kennedy, *Deadly Triplets*, 101.

white thing.”<sup>61</sup> Kennedy followed this theory, presenting herself as the battleground of Black and White confrontation, but using a different style that did not adjust to the parameters established by the male writers of the Movement. The new aesthetics created by Kennedy expressed through a new language was not really understood and, consequently, not acknowledged by the African American male writers of that time.

Lindsay Patterson has defended the artist’s self-expression in her/his own language, stating that African American’s viewpoints “have been long suppressed—and who better than the playwright to air them. There are twenty-two million [African Americans] in [the United States], and each, I suspect has a different view of life.”<sup>62</sup> Kennedy not only was one of those African Americans but she was also a woman. Araceli Rico underlines the difference that gender voices in art:

Art, in a way, is linked to a sort of madness, if we consider it as something beyond the real, something piercing and revealing. This tragic path, however, through which the history of various women artists has developed, and that goes from the painful abandonment to suicide or the loss of reason, has been mainly the result of negation, of alienation from a society that even today has not been willing to accept that there is another vision, another sensitivity in the creation of art, a different way of living, a different manifestation of the spirit: woman.<sup>63</sup>

Rico analyzes Kahlo’s paintings and observes that most of them have their settings in enclosed palaces to show the painter’s tragic and agonic life. Kahlo uses her own body to show her inner pain and blood becomes the constant and most powerful image to connote her suffering. As if also painting a canvas, Kennedy uses the same images in her inner dialogue. Thus, in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* “the center of the stage works well as Sarah’s room, allowing the rest of the stage as the place for herself.”<sup>64</sup> Each self has her/his own room. Curiously, one of Kahlo’s famous paintings entitled “The Two Fridas” shows one of them dressed in a Victorian costume and the other, in Mexican attire. Similarly, Kennedy is also split between two cultures: European and African, which she confronts by using her own self as the ground upon which Sarah’s selves freely wander, until Sarah has been torn enough about the question of race to kill herself.<sup>65</sup>

Sarah cannot find a place where to live and she chooses her room as the shelter she needs:

SARAH (NEGRO)

The rooms are my rooms: A Hapsburg chamber, a chamber in a Victorian castle, the hotel where I killed my father, the jungle. These are the places myself exist in. I know no places. That is I cannot believe in places. . . . I find there are no places only my funnyhouse. Streets are rooms, cities are rooms, eternal rooms (*Funnyhouse*, 7).

---

<sup>61</sup> Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” *op. cit.*, 33.

<sup>62</sup> Lindsay Patterson, *Anthology of the American Negro in the Theatre* (New York: The Publishers Agency, Inc., 1978) 280.

<sup>63</sup> Rico, *op. cit.*, 156.

<sup>64</sup> Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, in *Adrienne Kennedy in One Act* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 1. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Funnyhouse*, page number).

<sup>65</sup> Kennedy, *Deadly Triplets*, viii.

Rico claims that most works painted or written by women are reduced to enclosed places, narrow places, little rooms. These spaces reveal women's status as someone who lives in exile, at margin, because the other, the *big space* is already occupied by the masculine world.<sup>66</sup> Fabre equally observes Kennedy's use of enclosed places in which the characters are imprisoned and "whose intimacy is violated."<sup>67</sup> The image of the house is examined by Gaston Bachelard who claims it is a symbol of intimate space and "one of the great powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. . . Past, present and future give the house the different dynamism, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another." The house can shelter memories as well as it can be the symbol of refuge, and, definitely, the symbol of a psychic state."<sup>68</sup> Kennedy herself affirms that her plays emerged out of her dreams<sup>69</sup> and that they were meant to be *states of mind*.<sup>70</sup>

Sarah's dreams lead first to madness and eventually to suicide. Sarah's mother is already in the asylum:

FUNNYMAN

And your mother, where is she?

DUCHESS [One of Sarah's selves]

She is in the asylum bald. Her father was a white man. And she is in the asylum. (*Funnyhouse*, 11)

In this regard, Elaine Showalter refers to biographies and letters written by women who suffered mental breakdowns and she points out that they "have suggested that madness is the price women artists have had to pay for the exercise of their creativity in a male-dominated culture." Showalter quotes Shoshana Felman who claims that madness is "quite the opposite of rebellion. Madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation."<sup>71</sup> In contrast, Lillian Feder refers to Lain who "conceives of madness as a struggle for liberation from false attitudes and values, an encounter with primary feelings and impulses which constitutes a possibility for rebirth of the 'true' self."<sup>72</sup> Lain's conception of madness as an act of liberation of the true self could be applied to Sarah's madness and final suicide which, like in Sophocles' *Antigone*, might symbolize a heroic act of self-affirmation.

---

<sup>66</sup>Rico, *op. cit.*, 72.

<sup>67</sup> Geneviève Fabre, *Le Théâtre Noir aux États-Unis* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982) 142. In this line, Herbert Blau mentions that Patrice Lumumba's presence in Kennedy's play constitutes an intimidating political pressure for Kennedy, "against her grain, like the surrounding Black Power, invading her privacy, her withdrawal, and calling her back to history." Herbert Blau, "The American Dream in American Gothic: The Plays of Sam Shepard and Adrienne Kennedy," in *Modern Drama* 27 (1984) 533.

<sup>68</sup>Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) 6, 8, 72.

<sup>69</sup> Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights* (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987) 254.

<sup>70</sup> *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Volume II, 3rd Edition (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1989) 2168.

<sup>71</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985) 4, 5.

<sup>72</sup>Lillian Feder, *Madness in Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) 28.

Claudia Tate claims that many African American women writers celebrate racial victory, “but they also acknowledge defeat, not for the purpose of reinforcing a sense of defeat or victimization but to insure that we all learn to recognize what constitutes vulnerability in order to avoid its consequences in the future.” Consequently, the works by African American women are statements for African Americans “to assume ultimate responsibility for their behavior, despite the racial and social contingencies they face.”<sup>73</sup> It could be added that, like Hansberry, Kennedy is not only asking African Americans but also Anglo-Americans to assume that responsibility.

The continuous KNOCKING that Sarah hears every night is essential in the play as a call of attention. The knocking symbolizes Sarah’s dead father’s spirit always returning:

(...We hear KNOCKING)

VICTORIA [One of Sarah’s selves]

(Listening to the knocking.) It is my father. He is arriving again for the night. (The DUCHESS makes no reply.) He comes through the jungle to find me. He never tires of the journey. . .

(The KNOCKING is louder.)

VICTORIA

. . . Why does he keep returning? He keeps returning forever, coming back ever and keeps coming back forever. He is my father (*Funnyhouse*, 3-4).

Her father is a Black man, Patrice Lumumba, who was assassinated. The father’s knocking on her door is especially a call of attention for African Americans to recognize and accept their African ancestry, and participate in the same struggle against colonialism. Herbert Blau identifies Kennedy’s awareness about the political turmoil of the time,

as well as the torment among blacks over the questions of religion, miscegenation, integration, black nationalism, the Muslims, the Panthers, Pan-Africanism and dubious nature of African roots later celebrated on television. These issues came up in her plays, however, as symbols by indirection, in a highly idiosyncratic expressionistic style—something like a fusion of Tennessee Williams [his sensuous helplessness] and Lorca [his theatre poetry].<sup>74</sup>

Still, her symbols reaffirm Kennedy’s political and social consciousness, even if she were not aligned with any political or art movement.

Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro* makes a call from the personal and inner struggle represented in it to African Americans to accept their Blackness. Sarah wants to have lighter skin and be surrounded by White friends who might keep her away from thinking that she is Black:

NEGRO [Sarah]

... I long to become even a more pallid Negro than I am now; pallid like Negroes on the covers of American Negro magazines; soulless, educated and irreligious. I want to possess no moral value, particularly value as to my being. I want not to be. I ask nothing except anonymity... It is my dream to live in rooms with European antiques and my Queen Victoria, . . . and to eat my meals on a white

---

<sup>73</sup> Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, *op. cit.*, xxv.

<sup>74</sup> Blau, *op. cit.*, 531.



glass table. I will visit my friends' apartments which will contain books, photographs of Roman ruins, pianos and oriental carpets. My friends will be white.

I need them as an embankment to keep me from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am a Negro. For like all educated Negroes—out of life and death essential—I find it necessary to maintain a stark fortress against recognition of myself. My white friends, like myself, will be shrewd, intellectual and anxious for death. Anyone's death I will mistrust them, as I do myself, waver in their opinion of me, as I waver in the opinion of myself. (*Funnyhouse*, 6).

In contrast, Lumumba, one of Sarah's selves, instead of mistrusting, affirms:

LUMUMBA

I will despise [my White friends] as I do myself]. For if I did not despise myself, then my hair would not have fallen (*Funnyhouse*, 13).

However, it is not only Sarah's and herself's hair, it is also "the race's hair . . . [which] fell out because [Sarah's father] left Africa" (*Funnyhouse*, 18). And Sarah rejects to embrace her father who needed Sarah's embrace as fundamental to his existence.

Sarah also possesses a strong feeling of guilt:

SARAH

[My father] wanted the black man to make a pure statement, he wanted the black man to rise from colonialism . . . [And Sarah, instead of helping him in that task, withdrew and] sat in the room with my mother, . . . and helped her comb her straight black hair and move long dreams of her beauty (*Funnyhouse*, 15).

In her purpose to incite wo/mankind into action, Kennedy uses a technique that differs from that of the playwrights examined earlier. She does not follow Hansberry's straight talk but relies on metaphors and images, and, most of all uses her own self as an example. She is an African American aware of her people's need to commit to a struggle that extends beyond North American boundaries and that needs to embrace Africa and the Third World in their fight against colonialism. Nevertheless, in order to take that action, African Americans must first embrace their own heritage and not escape Blackness. Sarah's defeat is Kennedy's own acknowledgement and awareness as the first step necessary to obtain rebirth and self-affirmation.

Kennedy herself has explained the honesty and courage observed in her plays:

I would say almost every image in *Funnyhouse* took form while I was in West Africa where I became aware of masks. . . Ghana had just won its freedom. It was wonderful to see that liberation. . . It gave me a sense of power and strength. . . I think the main thing was that I discovered strength in being a black person and a connection to Africa.<sup>75</sup>

Her statement ratifies the symbolism of Sarah's suicide that retains an enclosed doubleness. Her suicide represents the character's defeat in not being able to solve the tragic confusion established between two cultures; but it is also a victory: the death of a confused girl who has discovered strength in being Black. Kennedy achieves her self-affirmation through Sarah's madness and eventual suicide. Baraka had lived in Dante's Hell and had killed his whitened self, Clay, in *Dutchman*. Both Baraka and Hansberry had suffered in hell or in

---

<sup>75</sup> Betsko and Koenig, *op. cit.*, 248-249.

nightmares until they touched the bottom of their selves and could emerge from it as renewed selves.

Baraka had participated, had led, had been a spokesman and had written in and for the Movement—he stood in the public space. Kennedy, on the other hand, remained away from any group, either the Black Theatre Movement or the Women’s Movement, because she hates groups and because she had been “through all those struggles . . . alone. She’d been through that decade from age twenty to thirty, 1955 to 1965, trying to write with babies, trying to be a wife, and then experiencing divorce.”<sup>76</sup> Kennedy’s struggle on her own offered her the possibility to reexamine herself, not only as an African American but also as a woman, away from categories. She was just being honest about her own feelings exposing her lonely struggle that might help introduce other women to a different experience and to a different language that was probably familiar to them.

Kennedy’s personal experience, as in many other personal experiences presented by women artists—especially by African American writers—originates a subsequent political awareness, as Bomahee River Collective asserts:

Black feminists and many more Black women who do not define themselves as feminists have all experienced sexual oppression as a constant factor in our day-to-day existence. . . Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly, feminism. The political analysis and practice that we women use is to struggle against our oppression.<sup>77</sup>

Kennedy asserts that she has always struggled, as a woman, to have some identity apart from her children, apart from her husband.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, she recognizes the existence of a woman’s aesthetics: “Women writers do affect me differently than male writers. That is probably the female aesthetic at its height.” In addition, she believes that every woman needs to bring her personal experience without censoring or inhibiting it. In this respect, Alice Childress has been a great inspiration to her.<sup>79</sup> That personal experience that women should present in their works, without trying to suppress it, is regarded by Margaret Wilkerson as political. As previously observed, Wilkerson states that in the plays by African American women playwrights the characters “embody a world in which the personal is political, in which something as intimate as one’s hair may indeed declare one’s politics.”<sup>80</sup> In the same line, Herbert Blau affirms that Kennedy’s “search for authenticity was more private than that of the more militant and existential blacks.” He also asserts that *Funnyhouse of a Negro* shows the confusion not only of race but also of gender.<sup>81</sup> Kennedy, then, is giving birth to a new self-awareness and embracement as an African American and as a woman—symbolized in Sarah’s suicide that is the killing of her confusion.

Even when wrapped by fears, Kennedy is not stopped by them. On the contrary, she faces her own fears and explores them within herself. Not only race, but also womanhood

---

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>77</sup> Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, *op. cit.*, 211.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Adrienne Kennedy, Stanford.

<sup>79</sup> Betsko and Koenig, *op. cit.*, 257.

<sup>80</sup> See Margaret Wilkerson’s statement, Note 68, Chapter I.

<sup>81</sup> Blau, *op. cit.*, 531.

forms part of her exploration and is clearly established in another of her plays *A Lesson in Dead Language*, in which menstrual blood becomes the main character. In showing her fears towards menstruation, Kennedy confronts the issue and makes it public by presenting it to an audience. Thus, Kennedy confronts and makes public something scary and private as a means to overcome the fear caused by it.

Blood is a recurrent image throughout the playwright's works. Menstrual blood, however, connotes a distinctive quality for it is an exclusive attribute of women, the clear "indictment to the discovery of [women's] key anatomy. . . [But also] a sign of violence, linked to [women] through the menstrual blood,"<sup>82</sup> as well as a means of purification. Menstrual blood, though, is part of women's subjectivity, which brings "into play aspects of female sexuality . . . absent or even repressed in male art."<sup>83</sup> According to Rosemary Curb, menstrual blood is "the sign—almost the anti-sacrament—of the inherited guilt of womanhood. . . [It is also the fear of the adolescent that something] has torn loose inside of her and she is dying."<sup>84</sup> Then, blood means life but also death. Moreover, bleeding must be kept hidden from men for fear that they reject and ridicule a woman simply for being female.<sup>85</sup> By writing a play such as *A Lesson in Dead Language*, Kennedy demonstrates not only a new feminine aesthetics, but Kennedy uses a technique that differs from that of the playwrights examined earlier also her courage to face a fear she always had, something very intimate and personal. Besides, by requiring that the seven girl characters actually wear red patches on their white dresses, Kennedy makes the hidden visible; this becomes a symbol of self-affirmation of womanhood reversing and overcoming the shame of being a woman. The blood that comes out is the blood that has been hurting women inside—because of their silence—and Kennedy makes it emerging with power and strength in defiance of past fears. Consequently, the playwright is speaking out, not with words, but with her forceful and vivid images, like any of Kahlo's paintings.

The image of blood, of course, is present in *Funnyhouse of a Negro* as well. This time blood covers Lumumba's head: "A black man. His head appears to be split in two with blood and tissue in eyes" (*Funnyhouse*, 7). In this case, blood is the visible statement of the murdering of a race, as well as it is a symbol of a race's internal bleeding that is being removed. Rage and violence against patriarchal and imperialist rule must be extracted instead of letting those feelings hurt oneself. Third World and African American people, women and men, need to speak out and let their wounds open, not hidden anymore. This image becomes another symbol for recognition towards the goal of self-affirmation.

Together with the violence implied in the symbol of blood emerging from Lumumba's split head, is the issue of rape. Every woman, from the moment of her birth, faces the danger and fear of being raped. Therefore, most women writers, and especially African American women, raise this issue in her works:

MOTHER

---

<sup>82</sup> Rico, *op. cit.*, 78.

<sup>83</sup> Gisela Ecker, ed. *Feminist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985) 17-18.

<sup>84</sup> Rosemary K. Curb, "Lesson I Bleed," in *Women in American Theatre* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1981) 50.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

Black man, black man, I never should have let a black man put his hands on me. The wild black beast raped me and now my skull is shining...

NEGRO [Sarah]

... She [her mother] would not let him [her father] touch her in their wedding bed and called him black . . . Then in Africa he started to drink and came home drunk one night and raped my mother. The child from the union is me (*Funnyhouse*, 4, 14).

Rosemary Curb refers to Sarah's experiencing "her mother's rape obsession in all her multiple personalities. . . [And] taking out anger against the male oppressor/rapist on oneself and blaming oneself for being a victim is a response familiar to women under patriarchy."<sup>86</sup> In this manner, Sarah's rejection to embrace her father encloses a double meaning. She does not want to embrace her own Blackness, but she is also frightened by the sight of a man who is the symbol of that patriarchy and, consequently, by the possibility of being raped like her mother.

Yet, in the midst of all violence, cruelty and fears that torment Sarah, her soul oozes, screaming and shouting her alienation, loneliness and need for love. She realizes her life is a lie. She lies to herself in order to survive, but deep in the bottom of her heart, she knows she is alone and needs love:

SARAH

... I clung loyally to the lie of relationships again and again seeking to establish a connection between my characters. Jesus is Victoria's son. Mother loved my father before her hair fell out. A loving relationship exists between myself and Queen Victoria, a love between myself and Jesus but they are lies. (*Funnyhouse*, 7)

Sarah, however, is brave enough to drop the mask and recognize the bare and painful truth: She is alone and there is no place for her.

Parallel to Sarah's confused identity, her pain and her social experience, runs the structure of the play: non-linear and plotless. There are different levels that parallel Sarah's selves and that serve as the main device to use simultaneous action: the Queens chamber, the student's room in New York Westside and the jungle. The simultaneous action that occurs in the play recalls Martha Graham's staging, which Kennedy recalls to have remained in her mind after having seen Graham's stage work: "There were always many things happening simultaneously. And everything seemed to come out of darkness. People played many parts, [Graham] used a lot of black and white—there was a fluidity and added emphasis on the narrative."<sup>87</sup> Certainly, Kennedy deemphasizes the narrative on her work. Not only her poetic language and the use of a character's different selves and masks, but also the use of lighting and color run in harmony as poetically, vividly and powerfully as her lyrical words.

It is significant to notice that all the different characters in the play are Sarah's selves, except the Landlady and Raymond (the Funnyman). These last two characters are characterized by their continuous laughter (the Landlady possesses a mad laughter that bursts out every time she speaks). Sarah's selves open the play but the Landlady and

---

<sup>86</sup> Curb, *op. cit.*, 55-56.

<sup>87</sup> Betsko and Koenig, *op. cit.*, 257.

Raymond are the ones who close it, retelling a different version of Sarah's story. As a result, the audience does not know who is really telling the truth. There is an implication, though, that the two White characters are twisting Sarah's history, her African American history—paralleling African Americans' place in North American history and the need for African Americans to recuperate their own past and traditions.

The use of white masks for Sarah's selves functions as a reversal of the old minstrel shows. In addition, the play is not a comedy but a tragedy, in the fashion of classical Greek tragedies. In this line, William Couch observes that Kennedy's plays are "like shapes beneath a surface [that] transform the black man's social and moral tragedies into iconography of the universal quest for selfhood and identity. Satiric with crackles like live current through Mr Ward's [Douglas Turner Ward] plays, but in the plays of Miss Kennedy there is an evocative and mystical sense of being."<sup>88</sup> Kennedy's special lyrical and poetic language creates a new form of theatrical expression which makes her style unique. Wilkerson claims that Kennedy, *a poet of the theatre*, uses an imagistic, rhythmic and condensed language, therefore, symbol, image and metaphor become the most significant components of her work.<sup>89</sup> Hatch affirms that in the 1960s not everyone understood what Kennedy was saying, but "all knew it was wonderful and respected her."<sup>90</sup> Kennedy has acknowledged different influences that have contributed to the creation of her unique theatrical language, among them: African masks, Lorca, Duke Ellington's music, and Martin Luther King's and Malcolm X's speeches.

About Duke Ellington she recalls to have learnt from his music that "there was an immense poetry inside [her] life as an American [Black] if [she] could find it."<sup>91</sup> She also remembers that Martin L. King's sermons always made her cry, but, she especially recalls how much Malcolm X's speeches struck her. The way Malcolm X used language made her reevaluate everything. When Malcolm was assassinated, for the first time Kennedy was "aware of someone who had been murdered for what he thought."<sup>92</sup> His speeches made her think and they threw new light on things around her. Martin L. King used the language of the Bible, whereas Malcolm X's language juxtaposed ideas and had imagery that she had never thought of. He used animal imagery in sayings he presented as examples. Kennedy thought that Malcolm X was a tremendous hero.<sup>93</sup>

Apart from the influence of Ellington's music, Kennedy evokes listening to all kinds of music because she loves music: spirituals, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis, among others. Kennedy's ear for music has been transferred to her work, as is expressed in the musicality of her poetic language and acknowledged by many critics. In this line, Paul C. Harrison, for instance insists on Kennedy's poetic language that implicitly conveys song, "the heightened expression of the word, which dredges the invisible world for symbols that nurture our

---

<sup>88</sup> William Couch, Jr., ed. *New Black Playwrights: An Anthology* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1968) xxi.

<sup>89</sup> Margaret Wilkerson, "Adrienne Kennedy," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume II, Davis and Harris, eds. (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., Book Tower, 1985) 29.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with James V. Hatch, New York, October 1989.

<sup>91</sup> Kennedy, *People Who Led to My Plays*, 106.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Adrienne Kennedy, Stanford.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

mythic and corporeal reality. . . Song penetrates this invisible world of non-rational forces to resurrect our totemic relationship to ancestors.”<sup>94</sup> Harrison’s perception of the song quality in poetic language is accentuated in Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro* by the repeated speeches that not only Sarah’s selves, but also the Landlady, continually repeat. There is a choir chant quality throughout the entire play, explicitly indicated by the playwright in the last scene: “[the last speech] is repeated several times, finally reaching a loud pitch and then ALL [Jesus, Duchess, Queen and Lumumba] rushing about the grass. They stop and stand perfectly still. ALL speaking tensely at various times in a chant” (*Funnyhouse*, 21).

In addition, Mance Williams observes a jazz quality in Kennedy’s play: “Variations on a single theme. . . , characteristic of the play’s language calls to mind qualities of improvisational jazz.”<sup>95</sup> The same repetition and multiple meanings originating from the symbols and images used, as well as the various selves of one’s self, are characteristic of the ritual and signifying based on the African American cultural tradition. Kennedy’s complex, vivid and rich language emerges to disrupt the simplistic female characters portrayed by men. Like Hansberry, she offers a new, fresh and enriched vision, in this case, of Sarah’s own self. Thereby, she implies there are many possible readings and perspectives in the journey to find one’s self and one’s historical and cultural truth. And, all these different meanings and perspectives are required and need to be brought to light so that they can be confronted to offer a sense of totality.

Celebration of the Emotional Self: Ntozake Shange’s *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*

my work  
attempts to ferret out  
what i know and touch...

i discuss the simple reality  
of going home at nite,  
of washing one’s body,  
looking out the window  
with a woman’s eyes.  
we must learn our common symbols,  
preen them  
and share them with the world.<sup>96</sup>

i am on the other side of the rainbow / picking up the pieces  
of days spent waitin for the poem to be heard / while you  
listen / i have other work to do.

<sup>94</sup> Paul C. Harrison, *Totem Voices: Plays from the Black World Repertory* (New York: Grove Press, 1989) xviii, xx.

<sup>95</sup> Mance Williams, *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s: A Historical-Critical Analysis of the Movement* (Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1985) 143.

<sup>96</sup> Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide when/the rainbow is enuf* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981) i.

The title of Ntozake Shange's play is quite revealing. It says for colored girls who have *considered* suicide and not *committed* suicide—like Sarah actually does in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. Shange, inspired by Adrienne Kennedy's work, deviates, however, from death to restore the African American woman's life. Margaret Wilkerson points out the parallelism between the rise of the Civil Rights Movement that prepared the North American audience for a realistic portrayal of a 1950s Black family (as presented by Lorraine Hansberry), and the rise of the Women's Movement in the 1970s which helped prepare an audience ready for self-affirmation in Shange's *for colored girls* (about African American women). Shange's play not only presents the woman's experience in a poetic style with an intimacy and frankness previously unrecorded, but it also introduces a new theatrical form: the *choreopoem*. Her honesty (like Kennedy's before her) in the portrayal of African American women's need for self-affirmation and love provoked debate and discussion in Black communities, especially because of the implied criticism of Black men. Nevertheless, critics overall have agreed her plays is provocative and moving.<sup>98</sup>

Shange's blunt exposure of the African American woman's problems with men in their own community, using her personal experience, was particularly not well received by men. However, her courage to go deep into the problems that were affecting Black women's relationships with men and other women was a pivotal step for both male and female consciousness. Through the play, seven African American women display their intimate experiences and ask to be heard through their own voices while telling their men how they feel and the ill-treatment they are receiving from them. By showing African American men the woman's plea, anger and self-determination, Shange is actually addressing both groups (males and females) so that the problem is confronted and new alternatives and solutions can be discussed.

Shange insists on her need to work in alternative spaces asserting her plays are usually in space not in place. She attempts to create metaphors "using space a lot to create an area where [one] could believe those things happening, said, allowed."<sup>99</sup> She is also working towards the "development of *respect for a real feminist aesthetic*, [part of which is the personal experience]. [She] thinks the dangerous mistake that women make is to assume the personal is not political. When [she] makes a personal statement, it is to [her] a political statement."<sup>100</sup> Adrienne Kennedy's plays can be viewed in the same line. Actually, Shange has found a parallelism between Kennedy's structural plays and hers, considering Kennedy's work as private as hers.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, the way Shange presents women's issues reminds Amiri Baraka's direct and aggressive style, as both playwrights place their hurt and

<sup>97</sup> Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977) xvi. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Rainbow*, page number).

<sup>98</sup> Wilkerson, *Nine Plays by Black Women*, *op. cit.*, xvii-xviii.

<sup>99</sup> "Interview with Ntozake Shange," by Andrezej Ceynowa, August 17, 1982. New York: Hatch-Billops Collection.

<sup>100</sup> Betsko and Koenig, *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights*, *op. cit.*, 370. Emphasis added.

<sup>101</sup> Ntozake Shange interviewed by Ceynowa.

rage outside themselves. She actually acknowledges the inspiration received from Baraka, as Shange's adopted African name equally confirms. Shange's name means in Zulu *she who comes with her own things* (Ntozake) and *who walks like a lion* (Shange).<sup>102</sup> She shows a special admiration for both Kennedy and Baraka's theatre. Her poetry and imagery is similar to that of Kennedy. Equally inspirational has been June Jordan's political poetry as Shange's own political writing and awareness about Third World countries and African Americans testifies.

Shange's persistence in finding a new language in music and body movement/dance evokes also Antonin Artaud's conception of theatre. Although she does not mention Sonia Sanchez's work, it is fundamental to mention her, for she was aligned with the Black Theatre Movement and her work has been a great contribution for numerous reasons, among which are Sanchez's political commitment to African American issues and her theatre work, in her emphasis on music and movement, and in her presentation of the issues and problems that relate to the African American woman.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, in Hatch's opinion, it was Shange who in the 1970s "finished the whole view of women," since the 1960s was an extremely male-chauvinist period because of the Islamic influence.<sup>104</sup> When Shange appeared, many women were ready to hear what she had to say, including both Black and White women. Even though she received very strong criticism from men, it finally evolved to a better consideration of her work. She has been a major contributor and inspiration for other women writers when exploring the woman's point of view.<sup>105</sup>

Definitely, Shange's advocating feminism, asserts the existence of a woman's aesthetics established in the differences that exist between male and female writing: "I think that women's novels for me are more like breathing and men's novels are more like running."<sup>106</sup> Breathing is a key word in Shange's work. Breathing is a term that she borrows from Frantz Fanon's *combat breath*. She asserts that although Fanon refers to francophone colonies, he draws a sadly familiar pattern," and she quotes him from *A Dying Colonialism*: "There is no occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested disfigured, in the hope of final destruction. Under this condition, the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing."<sup>107</sup>

Sandra Richards claims that "implicit in Shange's reference to Fanon is the understanding that the struggle for liberation involves the entire community, that liberation for women necessitates a concomitant liberation or definition of the position of men." In addition, Shange's combat breath "resides in her preference for raising issues, suggesting

---

<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Brown, "Ntozake Shange," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, op. cit.*, 241.

<sup>103</sup> Among the important women's issues dealt with in Sanchez's poetry and theatre are: pregnant women abandoned by men, women's sexual fear of pregnancy (due to lack of sexual education and family planning means), search of identity, and the need for African American women to unite.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with James V. Hatch, 1989.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> "Interview with Ntozake Shange," by Brenda Lyons, in *The Massachusetts Review*, 691.

<sup>107</sup> Ntozake Shange, *Three Pieces: Spell #7, A Photograph: Lovers in Motion, Boogie Woogie Landscapes* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982) xii.



directions and daring audiences to write their own endings.”<sup>108</sup> The open endings of her plays involve the audience’s active participation in questioning the issues presented on the stage and trying to find alternative solutions to the character’s/their problems and dilemmas. Shange seems to have in mind Brecht’s political theatre, a playwright that she admires up to the point she wrote an adaptation of his play *Mother Courage*. Nevertheless, Richards argues that Shange’s protagonists are African people “raised within the Western perspective . . . [and they] tend to feel that they must opt for one mode of knowledge over the other. . . [Thus] their Western heritage teaches them to see experience as fragmented rather than holistic and to value rational over emotional systems. . . [It is in this conflict that the] dialectic of combat breath vs. will to divinity [lies].”<sup>109</sup> Richards obviously sees there is a dialectics between these two cultural backgrounds.

Shange, on the other hand, sees herself creating a completely new theatre and suggests the notion of traditional Western theatre be demolished temporarily, disallowing playwrights to work unless they use dancers and musicians. She borrows this notion from her African American tradition, wherein most Black people have “some music and movement in [their] lives. [They] do sing and dance, this is a cultural reality. This is why [she finds] the most inspiring theatre among [them] to be in the realms of music and dance.”<sup>110</sup> Consequently, in some of Shange’s plays, like *Spell #7*, music functions as another character. Besides, she insists in calling herself a poet or writer instead of a playwright because she is only concerned about the poetry of the moment and the aesthetic or emotional impact a character or line may have on the spectator. Concerning a statement she had made about her writing as “verbal gymnastic like unto a reverse minstrel show, [in] the acrobatic distortions of english,” Shange affirms this is absolutely true. “i cant count the number of times i have viscerally wanted to attack deform n maim the language that i waz taught to hate myself in / the language that perpetuates the notions that cause pain to every black child as he/she learns to speak of the world & the ‘self’,” she has asserted.<sup>111</sup> Her attack on the English language compels her to use her imagination and attempt to find her own, giving new shapes to that language that she makes her own, as an asset of self-affirmation.

Parallel to her redefinition and creation of a new language of her own is her idea of the creation of a new theatre, away from the *perfect play*. She associates the *perfect play* with a European framework for European psychology that cannot function “for [those] from [that] hemisphere,” highlighting that African American theatre has been “duped by the same artificial aesthetics that plague [their] white counterparts.”<sup>112</sup> In her fiction, for instance, Shange attempts the plot to undulate instead of going forward. She wants the plot to relate to the “flow of rivers and streams and tides and lakes,” because she relates to life more

---

<sup>108</sup> Sandra L. Richards, “Conflicting Impulses in the Plays of Ntozake Shange,” in *Black American Literature Forum* 17, 2 (Summer 1983) 74.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Shange, *Three Pieces*, *op. cit.*, x.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, ix, xii.

<sup>112</sup> Ntozake Shange, *See No Evil, Prefaces, Essays and Accounts, 1976-1983* (San Francisco: Momo’s Press, 1984) 18.

truthfully and by writing in this manner, she has the feeling it is more real.<sup>113</sup> Linked to her idea of *real*, is the importance of creating an emotional link between the characters and the audience, for which she affirms to sacrifice sets.<sup>114</sup> As already established, poetry, song, music and dance become Shange's main means of expression to establish that emotional link. This new theatre has been denominated *choreopoetry* and, under this category, Mance Williams locates Kennedy's play *Sun: A Poem for Malcolm X Inspired by His Death* and Shange's *for colored girls*—denominated *choreopoem* by Shange herself.<sup>115</sup>

*for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, is a choreopoem of women's self affirmation, in which the women characters break their silence. As Mary K. DeShazer remarks: "The women characters cross the boundary from silence to speech naming their exploitation at the hands of Black and White men and staking out a new country beyond this war, defined by nurturant female community."<sup>116</sup> These women, however, express not only their exploitations, but they also demand their voices back, as stated by *lady in green* when she address her lover:

*lady in green*  
 i want my stuff back  
 my rhythms and my voice  
 open my mouth  
 & let me talk ya outta  
 throwin my shit in the sewer  
 this is some delicate leg and whimsical kiss  
 i gotta have to give to my choice  
 without you running off wit alla my shit (*Rainbow*, 50).

In addition, *lady in blue* asserts her new attitude in her decision of speaking up from then on:

*lady in blue*  
 i will not call  
 i'm not going to be nice  
 i will raise my voice  
 scream holler (*Rainbow*, 54).

Shange's characters are her pronouncement to patriarchal society, affirming that women will not be victims any more and they will do what they want to do in and with their lives. Moreover, the image of God used by Shange's characters, as affirmed by Janet Brown, is "a process within each individual, not a guild-inducing father in heaven nor a suffering scapegoat expiating the sins of all."<sup>117</sup> Actually, these women find a she-God in themselves:

---

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Ntozake Shange, Lyons, 691.

<sup>114</sup> Ntozake Shange interviewed by Ceynowa.

<sup>115</sup> Williams, *op. cit.*, 148.

<sup>116</sup> Mary K. DeShazer, "Rejecting Necrophilia: Ntozake Shange and the Warrior Re-Visioned," in *Making Spectacle*, *op. ci*, 92.

<sup>117</sup> Janet Brown, *Feminist Drama: Definition and Critical Analysis* (Metuchen (New Jersey) and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979) 130.

*lady in red*  
i found god in myself  
& i loved her  
i loved her fiercely (*Rainbow*, 63).

The play ends with those lines repeated by all the female characters celebrating women's love for themselves.

Shange's vision of women's process towards self-affirmation establishes the need for women's togetherness. Women's liberation struggle cannot be achieved by each woman's individual struggle. Her play itself was written in a collaborative effort, which at the time was an endeavor followed by many feminist theatre groups. Subsequently, Shange incorporated her poems, her creative process, production and performance. The play itself is an example of women's collective work in art as it should be in their struggle for self-determination and freedom. This goal will be achieved by first recognizing their exploitation and oppression in their society.

The same way African Americans need to stay together in their liberation process, so do African American women for they are doubly oppressed. Shange does not forget this two-fold oppression suffered by Black women. Referring to her own dancing, she affirms: "I moved what waz my unconscious knowledge of being in a colored woman's body to my known everydayness" (*Rainbow*, xi). *lady in yellow* is aware of the dilemma that this factor creates:

*lady in yellow*  
bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical dilemma  
i havent conquered yet  
do you see the point my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of soul & gender (*Rainbow*, 45).

From beginning to end, the women in the play show the process from acknowledging distress in their lives and the meaning of being women and colored to shape their new whole selves. The doubleness reflected in the fact of being a woman and colored, like in prior analyzed plays by African American, characterizes Shange's work as well. Doubleness is concealed in the symbols, structure of the play and issues discussed which suggest two or multiple meanings and/or are presented as opposites.

Janet Brown observes that "technological hierarchy which maintains women's 'non-being,' also [maintains] its opposite, associated with music, nature, and the physical beauty of black women."<sup>118</sup> The opposites of life and death are equally significant here. Most of the women characters have considered suicide at least once in their lives—as the title of the play suggests, or have actually been killed by pain. This is the picture introduced at the beginning of the play. By the end, however, women have achieved courage, a courage conveying a desire to live and celebrate one's being. Out of the death suffered by these women portrayed in the play, emerges their celebration of life, so that life is born out of death. Here, Karen Malpede agrees that the new theatre for women needs to overcome women's "own destructive force . . . [with their] insistent wish to live, to love." To achieve

---

<sup>118</sup>Brown, *op. cit.*, 131.

this goal, women need to dance the dance of life until, by looking into each other's eyes, women can express their joy, "courage in the face of death," and wish to live.<sup>119</sup>

Shange's *for colored girls* seems to be both an illustration of Kennedy's and of Shange's own attitudes. It appears as if at the beginning of the play we were watching the characters that illustrated the Kennedys and, by the end, the characters that epitomized the Shanges. In the play the audience is confronted with women who grow and develop from wishing to die to wishing to live; from acknowledgement to actual self-affirmation and celebration of one's self as women and as African American; and, from imprisoned selves in enclosed places to free bodies in the open air. If Douglas T. Ward uses humor that emanates from satire as a means of liberation, and if Mondingo (the wise hyena) outcries a terrible laughter rather than tears for the bitter joke played on him (as collected by Hansberry in *Les Blancs*), Shange's women use and become dance and/or music to fight defeat:

*lady in yellow*  
we gotta dance to keep from crying.

*lady in brown*  
we gotta dance to keep from dyin (*Rainbow*, 15)

Dance and music, in Shange's work, serves as a way of survival, sharing the same function humor has played in African American folk tradition.

Furthermore, through dance, Shange frees women's bodies from the restrictive movement imposed on them by patriarchy; and, by achieving that freedom of movement, women can simultaneously free their inner selves. The playwright's goal is to bring women back to their harmony with nature. Isadora Duncan, as previously mentioned, was very aware of the body restrictions imposed on women and their need to recover that harmony with nature: "It is only when you put free animals under false restrictions that they lose the power of moving in harmony with nature, and adopt a movement expressive of the restriction placed on them."<sup>120</sup> Implicitly, then, is the fact that free movement provides power. In addition and in the line of Duncan, Artaud realized that Western culture was completely detached from nature and wished to recuperate that balance by creating a sensual spectacle that could bring the individual's emotional side back and keep it in harmony with the rational one. This is exactly Shange's objective.

Concerning the difference between Western/North American and African/African American dance, Rhett S. Jones quotes Diane McIntyre to underscore that Western dancers focus especially on the technical elements of this art, not as part of communication but "to show that a movement can be done." In contrast, African American dancing becomes a method to communicate something important to the audience that deals more with ideas and feelings.<sup>121</sup> This is what Shange means to transmit to her audience: the power of freedom and wish to live. Additionally, Brown points out that dancing becomes the expression of

---

<sup>119</sup> Malpede, ed. *Women in Theatre: Compassion and Hope*, *op. cit.*, 13.

<sup>120</sup> Isadora Duncan, in *Women in Theatre: Compassion and Hope*, *op. cit.*, 102.

<sup>121</sup> Rhett S. Jones, "Community and Commentators: Black Theatre and Its Critics," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 307.

African American women's struggle for autonomy, and music and dance become also "a defiance of the white hierarchical system."<sup>122</sup>

Shange's portrayal of seven different women, dressed in the colors of the rainbow, each of whom comes from a different State, symbolizes not only the togetherness that women need to maintain in order to achieve their liberation but also becomes a statement to break stereotypes about African American women. Shange presents seven *real* bone and flesh women, who are very different from each other for they bear unique and personal experiences within themselves. She disrupts established categories under which African American women have been placed, as Layla voices in Shange's play *Boogie Woogie Landscapes*:

*layla*

i'm soft graphite, i'm clumsy and reckless

i'm a hazard to definitions . . . [I like] to be unpredictable like the weather.<sup>123</sup>

Reality is like a river that fluctuates and changes, so does a person who is a real one. Women, like life, cannot be petrified or made sculptures of and still be real women. Like the different colors of the rainbow, there are infinite different women that can be depicted, and many selves than are sheltered within one's self. This is Shange's statement in her play. Each woman is a whole world and still, like the stars, all women belong to the same firmament. As such, they need to remain together if they really want to shine and illuminate their nights.

Shange's women function as a mirror for other Black and non-Black women to tell them that they need to become their own mirror rather than the mirror of men; women need to look at other women to better understand and see themselves. The playwright presents issues that are uniquely women's intimate and painful scars, like the scars of Africa's mountains observed by Matoseh in Hansberry's *Les Blancs*; and like colonialist rape performed on Africa, African American women have been suffering from the same action on their own bodies. The nature of rape, though, seem to have changed:

*lady in red*

it turns out that the nature of rape has changed . . .

[men] are suffering [now] from latent rapist bravado

& we are left wit the scars . . . (*Rainbow*, 20)

. . .

*lady in blue*

bein betrayed by men who know us . . .

we cd even have em over for dinner

& get raped in our own houses

by invitation

a friend (*Rainbow*, 19, 21)

Shange raises the issue of rape under a new light, asserting that women are not protected by the law, as stated by *lady in blue*:

---

<sup>122</sup> Brown, *op. cit.*, 126.

<sup>123</sup> Ntozake Shange, *Boogie Woogie Landscapes*, in *Three Pieces*, *op. cit.*, 115, 121.

*lady in blue*  
pressing charges will be as hard  
as keepin yr legs closed  
while five fools try to turn a train on you (*Rainbow*, 18)

Sexual abuse perpetrated through the violent act of rape presents a double connotation. It refers to the actual rape that men exercise on women, and to the rape exerted on African American culture and community. It is not necessary to go to Third World countries to see the scars, for rape may be occurring in their own homes/country. Furthermore, it is too difficult to put charges against rape, which illustrates the paradox of a civil rights act that supposedly defends everybody's rights without reference to race or sex and still there is racism and sexism.

Shange chooses slavery as the best example of rape perpetrated within the United States. She does not ignore her past, as well as she does not disregard the African American struggle for freedom throughout their history. Thus, the Haitian leader Toussaint l'Overture is presented as her illustration to establish the link between Blacks and women fighting against the same oppressive and patriarchal slavery system. African American women have continued to be enslaved within their own community and Shange presents this contradiction, asking African American men to stop exercising on them, what was exercised on the Black community in times of slavery. The playwright draws her attention to the need for African American males and females to remain together fighting on the same side against oppression carrying the same emblem of equality. Consequently, as a woman Shange reveals women's issues and personal experience and launches them as political statements. She proclaims the need for men and women to fight the same struggle in North America and in Third World countries. Colonialism perpetrated upon other cultures and/or countries parallels colonialism perpetrated on the woman's body.

Although *for colored women* is definitely a play about and for women, it also comprises another level that is addressed to men. Shange lets women speak out in order that men can hear their voices, for men have kept them silenced and they need to hear how women feel about issues that concern them as women and that they need to tell men. Shange equally makes a plea to men to stop hurting their women, for if they do not, women will not cope with more suffering and abuse and will abandon them. Shange reveals the new African American woman, self-determined and aware of her situation; a woman that is determined to fight for her rights and only remain with someone who respects her. *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* is the statement of the new-born woman, the woman who has ended victimization and has begun to celebrate and love herself in communion with music and dance:

i live in music  
is this where you live  
i live here in music  
i live on c# street  
...  
do you live here in music  
sound  
falls round me like rain on other folks  
saxophones wet my face

cold as winter in st. louis  
hot like peppers i rub on my lips  
thinkin they waz lilies  
i got 15 trumpets where other women got hips  
& a upright bass for both sides of my heart  
i walk round in a piano like somebody  
else / be walkin on the earth  
i live in music  
live in it  
wash in it  
i cd even smell it  
wear sound on my fingers  
sound falls so fulla music  
ya cd make a river where yr arm is &  
hold yrself  
hold yrself in music.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> Ntozake Shange, "i live in music," in *Nappy Edges*, Ntozake Shange (London: Methuen London Ltd., 1978) 126.

## CHAPTER V

### The Black Theatre Movement in South Africa. Black Consciousness Aesthetics: Matsemala Manaka, Maishe Maponya, Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barney Simon

You surround me with water.  
I shall not drown myself.  
I will drink the thirsty ocean  
And sweat till my skin is leprous with salt in the sun  
Whose breaks of rising and setting and noon eat out my guts, eat all of my being,  
Whose cold eye cuts the wounds of the rocks on my body; the stones  
I grind blind me.

You have stripped me completely.  
I shall not hang myself. I cannot.  
I shall not fall down the stairs of the air you have built here and have stripped bare  
Until cold wet cement clamours to claim the steps off my feet.  
I will stand forth naked in mirrors of lime pits and stand  
Unashamed in my anger. Till all is accounted.

Cosmo Pieterse<sup>1</sup>

The rigour of our life against the high stakes of apartheid, as we seek the right to self-determination is a clarion call to humanity, a cultural process to engage it in and to remind it of its duty to pursue happiness which is a normal condition of life.

Mongane Wally Serote<sup>2</sup>

#### Black Consciousness Aesthetics

Simultaneously with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s in the United States a theatre of Black consciousness emerged. This theatre, however, was not delineated in a manifesto as the Black Theatre Movement until the Civil Rights Act was signed in 1965. The Movement, then, became an outburst of plays created under the parameters of what

---

<sup>1</sup>Cosmo Pieterse, untitled poem, in *Culture in Another South Africa* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1989) 191.

<sup>2</sup>Mongane Wally Serote, "Now We Enter History," in *Culture in Another South Africa*, 13.



African American artists denominated Black Aesthetics. Similarly, Black theatre emerged in South Africa parallel to the Black Consciousness Movement, which reached its peak in the 1970s and had Stephen Biko as its main spokesperson. Yet Black theatre suffered from continuous banning and theatre artists were imprisoned most of the times.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Black South African artists were prevented from formulating in a written manifesto the principles that were already establishing the birth and subsequent development of Black Theatre. After the Soweto students' uprising in June 1976 and Biko's death in 1977, Black theatre took the torch kindled by Biko's spirit. Black artists raised their torch with a tremendous sense of power, as if the blood shed by the Soweto children and Biko had infuriated and given them an invincible strength to fight back. Nevertheless, every attempt pursued by Black South African artists in theatre was hindered. As examined in Chapter I, groups such as TECON, PET, MDALI or Workshop '71 were dissolved due to continuous censorship and/or imprisonment of their members.

Black theatre of the 1970s and 1980s is comprised in this study under the denomination of Black Theatre Movement because the playwrights of this time sought the same principles and goals although they were not written in a manifesto. Black theatre developed out of the Black consciousness concept and its artists were committed towards the same objective: to raise Black people's consciousness about their need to take an action in their liberation struggle and that of their country through the recovery of Black history and self-affirmation. Black theatre in South Africa, then, can be confined within the Aesthetics of Self-Affirmation that equally defines the African American theatre of the 1960s and 1970s. When studying the plays of the Movement, it is indispensable to examine the specific socio-political and historical situation faced by Black theatre artists in South Africa. In spite of the aforementioned restraints, theatre continued to exist and demonstrated to be a powerful weapon for action and social change, as Boal has firmly stated regarding the situation in Latin America.<sup>4</sup> The fact that theatre and poetry performances were successively discontinued by police force, confirms that theatre was a dangerous threat to the government's policy of apartheid because it conveyed the power to move masses into action.

The role that the Black writer must play in a country like South Africa, in Mthobeni Mutloatse's opinion, was quite demanding, but also worth it: "It seems to me that he is expected to be a jack of all trades—and a master of all! He has to be tradesman, docker, psychologist, nurse, miner, *matshigilane*, *tshotsa*, teacher, athlete, toddler, mother,

---

<sup>3</sup> As a result of banning and censorship, it was difficult for many years to find written scripts. The well known actor John Kani noticed that in the late 1970s there was no possibility to publish their plays, and even if they did, it would be an invitation to the Security in one's lives. Theatre artists used the workshops handbooks. Kani asserted that most of the improvisation and workshop done in theatre "[came] from the fear of presenting evidence against [them]." Some of their plays, though, crossed the frontiers and were published in England or the United States (Interview with John Kani, Cape Town, October 1989). After apartheid, the situation changed noticeably but there is still a strong need to get more black plays published as well as more theorists to write on Black South African theatre. Although African American artists equally suffered from censorship, the situation was much lighter than their Black South African counterparts, for the Civil Rights Act was finally approved while the Black Arts Movement was taken place.

<sup>4</sup> See Augusto Boal's view regarding his theatre of the oppressed, Chapter II, p. 56.

musician, father, visionary, *imbongi* and—above all—oral historian.”<sup>5</sup> Mazisi Kunene looks back to traditional Africa and asserts that among the Zulu people, the poet was traditionally a social critic. Poet and singer “defined social values, celebrating what was historically significant and acting as democratic agents to reaffirm the approval or disapproval of the whole nation.”<sup>6</sup> The African writer has always played a pivotal role in his society and has been totally committed to his community. The artist must engage in the building of a nation, when there is a demand for nation building, and create what Kunene calls a *national ethos*: “I think this national ethos must in its essence express the general experience of mankind, and that general experience I think in turn, must emphasize the oneness and unity of man.”<sup>7</sup> Like Fanon, Kunene underlines the need of a cultural national consciousness and self-affirmation that would actually contribute to the unity of wo/mankind.

Connected to the idea of a national consciousness, Kunene refers to the essential part that symbol plays in African writing. 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.”<sup>8</sup> Symbol, metaphor and/or allegory are fundamental elements in African American and African contemporary writing, including the genre of theatre. Furthermore, poetry and theatre have been usually intertwined in traditional African societies. Among the Zulus, for instance, Kunene remarks that the performance of poetry often took place in an open space where a large audience, sometimes numbering 100,000, could participate.<sup>9</sup> Art, artist and community are inextricably united.

Like Kunene, Matsemela Manaka has observed that commitment and responsibility lie on the African artist in creating functional art, highlighting 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.”<sup>10</sup> Reflecting on the Black Consciousness Movement and its rejection of Western models, Manaka asserted that the Movement challenged the European arrogance of referring to African art as “township art” for this time was characterized by “the portrayal of the black experience as an art of defiance against the superiority complex of white people.” The Black Consciousness Movement played a major role in the conceptual development of African art, in which the socio-political situation was revealed to the African artist and he gained consciousness. Manaka believed that political movements or events generally shape art movements, and the Black Consciousness Movement and the art that originated from it are good proof of that.<sup>11</sup>

In Manaka’s opinion, art had become a tool for liberation, the liberation of Africans, whom he denominated *the dispossessed*, for African artists had lacked the freedom of

---

<sup>5</sup> Mthobisi Mutloatse, ed. *Forced Landing: Africa South: Contemporary Writings* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1988) 1.

<sup>6</sup> Mazisi Kunene, *Emperor Shaka the Great* (London: Heinemann, 1979) xxvi.

<sup>7</sup> “Interview with Mazisi Kunene,” in *African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews*, Duerden & Pieterse, eds. (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1972) 89.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Mazisi Kunene, *Anthem of the Decades: A Zulu Epic* (London: Heinemann, 1981) xxxi.

<sup>10</sup> Matsemela Manaka, ed., *Echoes of African Art: A Century of Art in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987) 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

expression that causes them to be disarmed, disadvantaged and disabled—like an African farmer who has no right over his/her land.<sup>12</sup> In the same manner, he referred to the Black theatre created during the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa as *theatre of the dispossessed* (as examined in Chapter I). In an attempt to define Black theatre, 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.” He asserts that Black Consciousness “determined the manifestation of social and political consciousness in the theatre.”<sup>13</sup> It is natural, then, that being the most public of all literary genres and a weapon for social change, theatre would become the appropriate platform used to raise people’s consciousness.

Piniel V. Shava considers that South African literature a literature of protest and observes that the poetry of affirmation that emerged from the Black Consciousness Movement could be related to the works that emerged under the Black Power Movement in North America. This connection with the Black Power Movements in the U.S., in Shava’s words, “inculcated a sense of racial pride in the minds of black people. . . Poets wrote for black people and they wrote about their blackness, and out of their blackness, rejecting anyone and anything that stood in the way of self-knowledge and self-celebration.”<sup>14</sup> He claims that at that historical moment, drama and poetry were sometimes inseparable (like in traditional African societies) as *instruments of politization*, becoming the main vehicle for cultural assertion. Poetry, combined with dramatization and drumming, was extremely effective during the 1970s in South Africa.<sup>15</sup>

It is significant to observe that during the 1960s and 1970s, there was a significant exposure to South African and African plays brought to the United States, as there were African American and African plays brought to South Africa. Wole Soyinka’s plays were produced in both countries. Similarly, Athol Fugard’s *The Blood Knot*, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island* were performed in the United States. In South Africa, plays by Ed Bullins and Douglas T. Ward were equally well known and taken to the stage.<sup>16</sup> South African writer Mshengu noticed that “people in the States [realized] that the theatre of Africa [was] related to the theatre of Black South America and the Caribbean.”<sup>17</sup> He also observes similarities between African American and Black South African theatre. Besides, Meshengu insists theatre in South Africa has been quite different from any other theatre in Africa, and it has been African American theatre that has had “a far greater impact than the rest of Africa” on South African theatre. Both theatrical expressions—African American and Black South African—are political in subject matter and exclusively urban in idiom.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Steadman, “Alternative Theatre: Fifty Years of Performance in Johannesburg,” in *Literature and Society in South Africa*, White and Couzens, eds. (Johannesburg: Maskew Miller Longman, 1984) 143.

<sup>14</sup> Piniel A. Shava, *A People’s Voice: Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century* (London: Zed Books, 1989) 99.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 124, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Western plays were also produced in both countries in the Black community, among them, plays by Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Artaud, Genet, Adamov and Brecht.

<sup>17</sup> Mshengu, “New York: Afro-American Theatre,” in *S’ketsh* (Winter 1975): 28.

<sup>18</sup> Mshengu, “Tradition and Innovation in the Theatre of Workshop ‘71,” in *Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 64.

David Coplan equally comments on the influence that African Americans, especially their music performances, have exercised upon Black South African culture for more than a century in an urban context:

The blending of American influence into black South African culture represents neither slavish imitation of a glamorous but foreign popular culture nor the unthinking rejection of a subjugated but precious African heritage. It is rather the result of a creative syncretism in which innovative performers combine materials from cultures in contact into qualitatively new forms in response to changing conditions, needs, self-images, and aspirations. In South Africa, stylistic elements from many sources have been recomposed into new frameworks of meaning, reflecting changing moral relations, systems of identity and value, and realities of power. . . It is in this deeper process of syncretism that we observe the complex blending of traditions in adaptation to urban life.<sup>19</sup>

Coplan's observation underscores how African American culture has enriched Black South Africans' artistic perspective, without preventing them from creating their own art forms and styles, adapted to urban life.

White South African playwright Athol Fugard and his plays have been another significant contribution in the development of Black theatre in South Africa. Fugard's theatre is not necessarily political although it deals with social conditions. He declares that his theatre is a *theatre of defiance* for he is protesting "against the conspiracy of silence."<sup>20</sup> Among his works, *The Blood Knot*, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Islands* have been probably the plays that have exerted the greatest impact on the Black community—both in South Africa and in the United States. The last two plays were actually devised by Fugard, and the Black South African actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona. In opinion of Lewis Nkosi, Fugard's *The Blood Knot* (on the relationship between two brothers one Black and the other, White) "is the first play which provides an eloquent metaphor for the South African problem while remaining primarily a work of art, an unrelenting piece of theatre, and an occasion for some insistently joyous acting."<sup>21</sup> Acting actually became one of the highest theatrical expressions during the times of Black Theatre Movement in South Africa.

Michael Etherton establishes some differences regarding the notion of the actors in Fugard's conception of theatre, and the actors of the Black South African group Workshop '71. He believes "[Fugard conceives] 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 perceived their responsibility as actors who are essentially concerned with a political rather than psychological context—in spite of their methodological and theatrical forms so similar to Fugard's Port Elizabeth Group.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> David B. Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985) 237.

<sup>20</sup> Athol Fugard comments on the political impact of his plays in *Athol Fugard*, Gray, ed. (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982) 51.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Nkosi, *The Transplanted Heart: Essays on South Africa* (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1975) 121.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Etherton, *The Development of African Drama* (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1982) 304-305.

Regarding Black South African acting, Coplan underlines the qualities he observed in actors, who showed

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.<sup>23</sup>

Coplan actually establishes a line of difference between Black theatre in South Africa and that of North America, which needs to be examined.

North America has a long tradition of Method acting training, with strong basis on Stanislavsky's acting principles, which focus on the internal and psychological. On the contrary, Grotowski's theory (focusing more on physical action, gesture and movement) was more closely followed in South Africa. On the one hand, a psychological and internal quality is combined with gesture, movement and music or a rhythmic and poetic language in African American theatre. Black South African playwrights and actors, on the other hand, have emphasized more the physical qualities of speech, through gesture and movement; and their written dialogues lack the psychological attributes found in most African American plays—like those of Baraka, Hansberry or Bullins, to cite a few. The different direction taken by the theatre artists in one or other country parallels the different conditions and situation faced by the Black community in the United States and in South Africa. Thus, the North American government finally passed an act that recognized legal equality to all citizens in 1964. However, even though the physical *apartheid* existing in the South of the United States was disrupted, racism continued to exist in the mind of North Americans. This internalized racism is exposed in the plays by African Americans for is the socio-political situation African Americans were living in.

On the other hand, in South Africa apartheid maintained a physical separation between people from different races who were forced to live in determined group areas. Besides, the Black community experiences another reality that implied physical discrimination, including imprisonment, torture and the use of other methods of violence. This reality is the expression of purely physical acts perpetrated upon Black South African people. Black South African playwrights, then, examined the diverse directions racism took at that time regarding their specific socio-political conditions, and that of their country and African culture.

As stated above, Black South African actor closely followed Grotowski's *poor theatre* acting and staging principles. The question now is to find out whether this method was followed because they were not provided with financial aid, or because it was closely related to an African tradition that highly valued gesture and movement. It may be concluded that both assumptions are linked and combined as part of the artists' theatrical experience and expression. Acting skills were strongly emphasized by Manaka's conception of theatre. He believed that "masking or non masking, 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 quoted Brecht and Grotowski to assert that there can be theatre without written text, but not without the actor. Moreover, he considered that "bad writing does make bad

---

<sup>23</sup> Coplan, *op. cit.*, 214.

theatre but it stands the chance of being made better because of good acting.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Black South African theatre artists had placed stronger emphasis on acting skills than his contemporary African Americans.

In spite of Etherton’s assertion about Fugard seeking a *psychological integrity* in his concept of acting, Athol Fugard has followed Grotowski’s principles of space and silence with his actors: “Space for [the actor’s] body, his gesture, movement; and silence to be filled by the words that the play has given him, or by silence itself.”<sup>25</sup> In a conversation maintained in 1989 with John Kani (who had been working with Fugard since the 1960s) he affirmed that many Black South African actors had approached Fugard, Ntshona and himself to receive some help on acting training. Among the people who approached, were Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, whom they helped to develop their own skills and ideas.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, Grotowski’s *poor theatre* has been clearly connected to the theatre by Workshop ‘71 by James Mthoba and Themba Ntinga who declared that this theatre group “depended on its productions for survival. This [means that their] help [was] largely on technical matters and training.”<sup>27</sup> Mthoba and Themba’s comment runs parallel to 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 the theatre of the Black South African Theatre Movement. As a result, if Western theatre places a strong emphasis on dialogue to explain the action, in Black South African theatre it is action itself that explains the meaning. The character must symbolize, as observed by Mazisi Kunene, who has insisted on the importance of external/physical action to supply the individual’s dilemma noticed in Western theatre. Furthermore, Kunene remarks the important role the audience plays in the performance of African theatre. The audience represents the critics, being the spectator who actually controls the performance.<sup>28</sup>

As previously examined, symbol and repetition, combined with acting skills, are essential components of African American theatre, which are also important components of Zulu poetry. Kunene believes repetition stresses meaning.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Manaka considered that the traditional African artist “[derived] spiritual satisfaction in repetition, especially when his art [serves] a social purpose.”<sup>30</sup> Symbolism, which in Zulu draws mostly from water, plant and animal worlds,<sup>31</sup> is an essential element in Black South African writing; needless to say that symbols could find an easier way to evade censorship during the South African times of apartheid. Consequently, as Manaka has claimed, art became a liberation tool and the language used by the artist, *a language of resistance* which transcended “the

---

<sup>24</sup> Matsemela Manaka, “Fate of Theatre Determined,” in *The Star* (August 12, 1982): 16A.

<sup>25</sup> Athol Fugard comments on Grotowski’s *Towards a Poor Theatre*, in “Keeping an Appointment with the Future: The Theatre of Athol Fugard,” by Mary Benson, in *Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 81.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with John Kani, 1989.

<sup>27</sup> James Mthoba and Themba Ntinga, “Seventy One in Seventy Three: Two Members of Workshop ‘71 Speak Out,” in *S’ketsh* (Summer 1973): 46. See also Note 130, Chapter I.

<sup>28</sup> Conversation with Mazisi Kunene, University of California at Los Angeles, July 1988.

<sup>29</sup> Kunene, *Anthem of the Decades*, *op. cit.*, xxxii.

<sup>30</sup> Manaka, *Echoes of African Art*, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Kunene, *op. cit.*, xxxiv.

barriers depending on the profound nature of the artist.”<sup>32</sup> Concerning language and theatre, Manaka noticed that theatre art possesses a universal language of communication that lies upon the actor’s ability to transform, which does not mean English or culture are universal. Manaka considered language an element of cultural identity that should not hinder the work of art from communicating beyond cultural barriers.<sup>33</sup>

The theatrical language employed in Black South African plays comprises dance and/or movement, music and poetry, elements that are rooted in traditional South African oral literature; i.e., storytelling and poetry. In the 1980s, Es’kia Mphahlele considered that poetry was “the art of establishing relationship between things, people, events, and moments of feeling and thinking.” He claimed that traditional oral poetry captured “life in flux,”<sup>34</sup> which parallels Kunene’s affirmation about change as the essence of creation.<sup>35</sup> Mphahlele asserted that symbol and metaphor are used in poetry to draw attention to what is being said, for the artist wants the audience to register vividly and take seriously what s/he is saying.<sup>36</sup> Mthobhi Mutloatse considered that poetry had become a popular medium since the turbulent days of the 1960s, especially among African Americans and Black South Africans. He comments on how poetry readings turned into theatre, in the writer’s attempt “to restore poetry to its original social setting—that of ritual enacted in public.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the performer/audience connection was reestablished.

Like poetry, music has always been a communal activity in traditional African societies. Music is a way of communication through which collective experiences, whether past or present, can be shared. Music and dance have been combined, as well as speech and music. The call-and-response performance that is reflected in traditional African poetic form is also reflected in musical form. Poet and musician were usually the same person.<sup>38</sup> If African music became integrated in Black South African theatre, the influence of African American music (which was equally influenced by African music) left an indelible mark in Black South Africans, for they relate to the same experience African Americans have lived in their country. Mphahlele comments on how he felt when he listened to jazz and the blues while he was in exile in North America:

Jazz: that was once a favourite pastime of mine in the United States. Even today my scrapbooks of those years still contain a wealth of oddments, newspaper clippings, photographs and obituaries of outstanding black musicians. The music, the blues idiom, had so much to say that was close to the bone, the pulse of my own experience and that of my people. Small wonder that I have spent countless hours in exile: me and my music.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Manaka, *op. cit.*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Manaka, “Fate of Theatre Determined,” *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Es’kia Mphahlele, *Poetry and Humanism: Oral Beginnings* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1986) 22.

<sup>35</sup> Kunene, *op. cit.*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Mphahlele, *op. cit.*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Mutloatse, *op. cit.*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1983) 14-22.

<sup>39</sup> Es’kia Mphahlele comments on his experience in the United States in *Exiles and Homecomings: a Biography of Es’kia Mphahlele*, Manganyi (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983) 284.

Taking Duke Ellington's music and gospel, spirituals and jazz as examples, Mutloatse proclaims that music is a healing force among Black South Africans. Improvisation plays a very important part in the process: "Improvising music is like being a samurai warrior, one of whom said: 'Under the sword lifted high there is hell. But go through with it gearlessly and you will find bliss.' It's just like improvisation, despite all their music knowledge." Mutloatse maintains that taking risks in front of an audience is just a means of self-discovery, and music is a healing force because it reaches the heart of human beings.<sup>40</sup>

If African American music is the expression of the African American experience, possessing the same social function as art played in traditional African societies, the songs and music integrated in the plays of the Black Theatre Movement in South Africa reinforced this function as well. Referring to the performance of *Survival* by Workshop '71—group who had devised this play in workshop, Michael 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."<sup>41</sup> Etherton's observation reflects on the African function of song that has remained in contemporary Black South African theatre; but Western theatre as well has exercised its influence—as it did on the Black Theatre Movement in the United States. Brecht's epic theatre and its *distancing effect* was an integral part of most plays by Black South Africans. This combination of African and Western elements, applied to the Black South African experience, emphasizes the uniqueness of the theatre of that time.

Nevertheless, the combination of African and Western elements raises the controversial and essential issue of language in Africa, and more specifically in South Africa. In the United States, African Americans have developed their own language: Black English; and, although Mphahlele affirms the existence of an African English language in South Africa,<sup>42</sup> the problem of language extends far beyond this fact. The question is whether to use an African or a European language. Workshop '71 was probably the first theatre group that, using English as the unifying language, ventured to integrate African languages such as Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho with Afrikaans in their works. The issue of language is another aspect that differentiates Black South Africans' experience from that of African Americans. In this line, Nkosi proclaims that the relationship between "language and national cultures cannot be too strongly emphasised. Like other peoples, black Africans possess a rich and living heritage in philosophy, ethics, religion and artistic creation, the deepest roots of which are embedded in the rich soil of African languages." He adds that this effort to repossess tradition would mean "not only the opening of the syntax rigid frame, disclosing metaphysics from proverb and poetry, . . . [but also] extracting social philosophy and habits of moral thought from the rhythms, imagery, repetitiousness, sometimes from the very

---

<sup>40</sup> Mutloatse, *op. cit.*, 63.

<sup>41</sup> Etherton, *op. cit.*, 312.

<sup>42</sup> Es'kia Mphahlele comments on the issue of language in *Towards African Literary Independence: A Dialogue with Contemporary African Writers*, Ejuru (Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1980) 46.



circumlocution of native African speech.”<sup>43</sup> Teshome Gabriel also observes the richness of rhythm, imagery, philosophical thought that is comprised in African language.

Gabriel considers the imposition of an African language to be a political act. He declares the necessity of maintaining African languages if Africa is to achieve a real independence. Gabriel does not agree with the argument which affirms that Africans would isolate themselves if they were to use African languages, which he considers a myopic political argument. Concerned with the present situation in African academics, he has claimed that “when Africa is studied in the African universities, [Africans] study much more of the past than [they] do the present. That also convinces [Africans] of the richness of [African] languages.” There is a need for Africans to find their philosophy and genius which permeate African languages.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast, Mphahlele believes the use of foreign languages that are international offers a wider publicity to African culture and the writer addresses a wider audience. He argues why, considering the specific situation in South Africa, he considers the English language should be continued to use:

I would continue to use the English language because there are two things which I consider: first, that if you are writing about your people's experiences and you are writing primarily and initially in response to oppression, you are going to be talking about ideas that operate in English which do not necessarily interpret the same abstraction in an African language. What I mean is that when you first come in contact with the words *Liberty* or *Freedom* or *Oppression*, these are abstract things that we would never have spoken about in an African Language; they come to us in English, so they have English connotations and they come heavily loaded with a culture and thought that come together with that language.<sup>45</sup>

Mphahlele underscores that when Africans use their mother tongue they infuse a feeling that goes with that language; and, when they write in English, they fall in the trap “of infusing a feeling that will not be typical of the language [spoken by Africans] but rather a feeling that comes with the English language.”<sup>46</sup> Black South Africans have integrated African and European languages into a new expression, maybe the *African English* that Mphahlele refers to. Mphahlele, though, established the need of using both African and English languages in the situation given in South Africa. In spite of the integration of English with African languages, the songs appearing in Black theatre were performed in African languages, rarely in English.

Black South African theatre might have solved the controversial problem of whether to use a European or an African language through new theatrical expressions that move and accentuate gesture, movement, music and song. This is the language that Manaka believed to cross all barriers and become internationally and universally understood. This new language has been the expression and liberating tool of Black South African theatre in its attempt to achieve self-affirmation and bring consciousness to the people.

---

<sup>43</sup> Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1981) 3.

<sup>44</sup> Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982) 114.

<sup>45</sup> Es'kia Mphahlele comments on the use of European languages in Africa, in *Black Writers, White Audiences: A Critical Approach to African Literature*, Egejuru (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1978) 93.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

The Theatre of the Dispossessed: Matsemela Manaka's<sup>47</sup> *Egoli, the City of Gold*

From five in the morning,  
My lean body is crushed against the jostling crowd,  
For pittance, I make my way among the passengers,  
Swaying coaches make my heart to jerk in fear,  
That I may not my little ones see any more  
Yet for food and rent I must work.

“A Worker’s Lament”

I am alienated from a country  
I built for three hundred years  
Roads, bridges, mines, factories  
These calloused hands built  
I’m now estranged in an undeveloped area  
‘Be explicit!’

“Estranged”

Now an artificial line  
Demands a passport  
Each time I stretch  
Across the line  
When visiting my neighbour.

“Demarcation Line”

I look forward for a day  
When I shall move freely  
Seeing the beauty of Mother Africa  
Then I will bid farewell.

“Lament”

Modikwe Dikobe<sup>48</sup>

If Amiri Baraka referred to his theatre as a theatre of victims, Matsemela Manaka denominated his, theatre of the dispossessed. Manaka’s theatre shows an evolution from his first play, *Egoli*, to his last ones, such as *Goree*. Like Maishe Maonya, Manaka enlarged his vision, moving from Black Consciousness to an African and Third World consciousness. Furthermore, in *Goree*, instead of two male actors, the play is composed exclusively by two female characters—a violinist and a dancer. The two female characters break a long run of plays where only male actors had been filling the stage, enacting female roles when required by the script. In his theatrical evolution, Manaka always kept faithful to the principle that an artist must be committed to his art and his people, as he himself had established: “Our art should therefore serve the social, educational, religious, political and economic needs of our

---

<sup>47</sup> Matsemela Manaka, 1956-1998. Manaka died in a car accident at the age of 42. This essay is my little homage to him for his short but committed life to his art and community, which has been of great inspiration to other artists and critics like me. Thanks.

<sup>48</sup> Modikwe Dikobe, *Dispossessed* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983) 40, 63, 65, 116.

people. An artist has a social responsibility.”<sup>49</sup> And, as an artist, Manaka’s goal was to reconstruct his people’s history by disrupting false myths, and to promote brotherhood among Black South Africans, as well as among Black people in the African continent and other parts of the world. In Manaka’s opinion, African Americans are *dispossessed Africans*. Consequently, in *Goree* he shows his awareness about slavery not only in the United States but also in Africa, stating that slavery was never abolished. He presents some of the consequences brought by slavery, such as separation of families, orphan children and wo/men losing their wo/manhood because of the terrible rape perpetrated upon the African continent. In *Goree*, the drum becomes the symbol that unites Africans in a spiritual celebration of their culture and history, a call to the oneness of Africans and Third World people to join efforts in the same liberation struggle.<sup>50</sup>

As one of the writers of the Black Consciousness generation, Manaka cultivated his art upon the ground of Black experience. Kelwyn Sole observes that Manaka and Maponya had “continually stressed the need to perform at venues accessible to ordinary township residents and have even performed and improvised at weddings and funerals. . . [They have attempted] to alleviate language problems by using a mixture of English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Sotho.”<sup>51</sup> This combination of languages is present in Manaka’s *Egoli*. Both Manaka and Maponya’s work attempted to be a manifestation of social commitment and art, as inseparable elements.

Manaka was unyielding in his demand for an absolute seriousness and commitment by both artists and critics. In an article published in *Drum*, Manaka expresses his indignation against German critics who raved about bad productions from South Africa, without hesitating “to label a mediocre play as a masterpiece.” He asserted that this type of attitude is patronizing, superficial and unhelpful to South African artists. Manaka had proclaimed the need of more critical approaches and attitude to creative work.<sup>52</sup> He demanded an absolute seriousness and commitment by both artists and critics. His assertiveness and rejection of patronizing attitudes towards art demonstrates his plays do not attempt to be simply protest statements against the oppression suffered by Black South Africans. Art and social commitment need to walk hand in hand under the guidance of the artist. He repudiated art that used Black South Africans’ condition to obtain success and become commercial. *Egoli* is Manaka’s most evident manifestation of his concept on art and artist’s responsibility.

During my stay in Johannesburg in 1989, I learnt that *Egoli* was banned. The play was actually banned the same year it had been published, in 1980. This fact did never stop Manaka from continuing to be committed to his artistic mission in theatre. Most of the artists I interviewed at that time asserted the great importance theatre had played in their lives. They did not only expose the Black experience to an audience to make them aware of their situations, but their work as actors, writers and directors had equally raised awareness

---

<sup>49</sup> Matsemela Manaka, *Echoes of African Art*, *op. cit.*, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Matsemela Manaka, *Goree*, unpublished script, 1989. In 1998, *Goree* was published as part of an anthology of plays by Manaka, published by Harwood Academic (Performing Arts), London.

<sup>51</sup> Kelwyn Sole, “Oral Performance and Social Struggle in Contemporary Black South African Literature,” in *TriQuarterly* 69 (Spring/Summer 1987): 261.

<sup>52</sup> Manaka’s statement is quoted by Sole, *op. cit.*, 270.

in themselves. Sipiwe Khumalo, initially a member of Workshop '71 and subsequently a member of Junction Avenue Theatre, recalled that awareness came suddenly: "I became aware of myself . . . and could stand face to face to anybody, regardless of color and race." Khumalo realized how theatre breaks the ice and "takes away the fear."<sup>53</sup> In the same line, actor John Kani claimed that theatre helps audience and theatre artists to "find themselves, their voices [by] talking about [their] feelings."<sup>54</sup> Similarly, John Ledwaba, who initially worked with Manaka, helped devise and acted in *Egoli*, and who has continued writing plays on his own, affirmed that theatre had helped him express his anger and frustration.<sup>55</sup>

Manaka's *Egoli* is one of the plays that most intensely conveys a powerful mastery of theatrical language to illustrate the conditions suffered by Black South Africans. In his attempt to reach a Black audience, as observed in Ed Bullins' work, Manaka depicts how Black South Africans were 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. He was aware that the deficiency in education under which apartheid kept the Black community induced to preserve consciousness lethargy. Consequently, his theatre became an attempt to bring some light to Black South Africans, compelling them to question and change their destiny.

It is interesting to notice Manaka's deep concern and awareness about Black South African women's issues, almost totally absent in the works by the African American men playwrights of the Movement—lightly touched by Bullins. In his plays, Manak handles issues raised by African American women playwrights such as Sonia Sanchez and Ntozake Shange and almost with the same feverish anger. Two of these issues are rape and men's irresponsibility and unfaithfulness to their wives. Thus, in *Egoli* (interpreted solely by two Black actors) John accuses Hamilton: "You raped and killed a poor woman. One of our black mothers."<sup>56</sup> Here, rape can be equally interpreted as the rape inflicted on mother Africa by her own children, symbolized by Africans' forgetting about her traditions and history and adopting Western culture instead. Hamilton, though, unfolds John's contradictions. John accuses Hamilton of his crime, whereas he spends his money on other women while his wife can barely manage to raise their children. In contrast, we see Hamilton's growing consciousness. He feels different now, whenever he is with a woman:

HAMILTON

. . . I think of the woman I raped. Of the money that [you] should send home. Your wife. Your children. But most of all I think of the women I've killed. (*Egoli*, 7)

Hamilton is also aware of John's excessive drinking and incriminates him:

HAMILTON

---

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Sipiwe Khumalo, Johannesburg, October 1989.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with John Kani, Cape Town, 1989.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with John Ledwaba, Johannesburg, 1989.

<sup>56</sup> Matsemela Manaka, *Egoli, the City of Gold* (Johannesburg: A Soyikwa-Ravan Publication, n.d., 4. This play was acted and developed by John Moalusi Ledwaba and Hamilton Mahonga Silwane. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Egoli*, page number).

I would not escape from prison to imprison myself in another poison like liquor. I pity the poor woman who gave birth to Oupa. Nobody must blame liquor. (*Egoli*, 25)

In his effort to establish communication with his community, Manaka was stating that if they wanted to build a new nation, they must stop hurting each other and their women, without forgetting their responsibility in the arms of liquor. They needed to unite: “There is no brotherly love, that is what is wrong with [South Africa],” says John (*Egoli*, 9); and this can only be achieved by helping each other and by taking anger out where it belongs instead of turning it against their community, their women and themselves.

Freedom—an essential issue throughout the play symbolized by the chain that ties John and Hamilton and that is broken by helping each other—will not come if people do not fight for it. After he manages to break the chain around John’s neck, Hamilton tells John:

HAMILTON

. . . Now that you are free, do not wait for life to happen to you but make it happen your way. (*Egoli*, 20)

Manaka was not simply making a statement but calling Black people to take an action needed in order to bring change to their lives and their future. Egoli, which is Johannesburg (or Jo’burg as most people call it there) becomes a symbol of the *valley of death*, where “life [was] floating like a champagne cork in the bath of blood,” as stated by Hamilton; and John exclaims:

JOHN

. . . Jo’burg is the place where our people have lost a sense of respect for their own culture . . . They all forget about their traditions. (*Egoli*, 19)

Egoli is also a symbol for the imprisonment, nightmares and a hungry earth that is swallowing everybody—not only Blacks: “Infants turned into gold and diamonds in the presence of their parents,” (*Egoli*, 28) are not the only victims. Whites are also victims of their own trap, as Hamilton implies in his statement:

HAMILTON

But there is something very good about this earth. It does not discriminate. It swallows every colour that lives. It swallows every race. There is no racism about it. (*Egoli*, 27)

Like in the medieval theme of the Dance of Death, death/the earth takes everybody without favoritism, without establishing any difference: all are equal to its call.

*Egoli*, in Ian Steadman’s words, “is a unique metaphor for Manaka’s vision of the social and economic ‘dispossession’ of the Black migrant worker.” He claims that Manaka’s particular focus in the play “was to present in dramatic terms the image of two black workers bound in common oppression, and to demystify the relations between gold and migrant labour.”<sup>57</sup> The playwright was aware of the need that workers had to get united and defend their rights in order to stop the abuse and fatal accidents that kept occurring in the mines (i.e., men get crippled (*Egoli*, 12); explosions for which they do not have any ear

---

<sup>57</sup> Ian Steadman, “Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984.” Ph. D. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1985, 369-370, 362-363.

protection occur continuously (*Egoli*, 22); or young people, such as John's son, die being still a teenager (*Egoli*, 26-27).

Manaka was inflexible in his conviction that every person needs to be involved in the political struggle. He presents John as the example of a worker who is not aware of his exploitation and does not like the people of Ibandla because they "don't even drink. What they know, it's mine politics," to what Hamilton responds: "That's my taste." (*Egoli*, 25). Manaka was aware of the impact theatre might have on people, as Kani himself asserts referring to the 1970s: "Theatre was the best venue to get to the poeple . . . to teach, concientize them . . . Theatre could substitute the meeting they could not hold [they would be immediately arrested if they tried]." <sup>58</sup> Manaka's writing, though presenting the issue of oppression, is symbolic and subtle rather than a descriptive and direct protest. The few critics who have commented on this play have agreed that its main emphasis lies on symbol and action. Shava adds absurdity and satire as two more elements which ensure the power of Manaka's artistic skills. <sup>59</sup>

Like Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange's plays, Manaka's *Egoli* is a plotless piece which disregards realistic dialogue. Its episodic and improvisational style reminds 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." <sup>60</sup> Similarly, Grotowski's concept of theatre is used by Manaka to bring up elements that belong to the African traditional theatre. John Ledwaba, one of the two actors who performed *Egoli*, pointed out two great influences that contributed to the development of the play. On the one hand, they were inspired by Fugard's style and helped by John Kani (in *Egoli*, like in Fugard's, Kani's and Ntshona's *The Island*, the actors' real names were kept for their characters). On the other hand, they adopted Grotowski's emphasis on opening up the theatre. According to Ledwaba, Grotowski has had a great influence in all South African theatre, mainly because of the specific circumstances Black South Africans lived in—they were not supported by the government financially and, consequently, everything that was done depended much on improvisation and workshop work. <sup>61</sup>

In Manaka's personal case, Grotowski's concept of theatre helped him develop his own technique that emphasized the traditional elements of African theatre. *Egoli* is to be performed on an almost bare and open stage, around which not more than two hundred people should be seated (*Egoli*, 2). The set creates an intimate and close relationship between audience and actors. Furthermore, the idea of the circle symbolizes togetherness, something that is underscored 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. An example of the tremendous physical effort required from the actors is John's and Hamilton's miming their work in the mine:

---

<sup>58</sup> Interview with John Kani, Cape Town, 1989.

<sup>59</sup> Piniel A. Shava, *A People's Voice*, *op. cit.*, 157.

<sup>60</sup> David B. Coplan, *In Township Tonight!*, *op. cit.*, 221.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with John Ledwaba.

... 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 (Egoli, 22).

Another example where a tremendous mastery is required from the actor occurs almost by 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. Stagger forward and finally vomits on the stage floor. He then collapses into his vomit (Egoli, 25).*

In these examples, rhythm emerges from the combination of the actors' performing sounds, movement and singing, while the shovels keep beating the bare stage when they work in the mine.

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. A clear example is the chain, which becomes a focal and pivotal symbol. There is no chain shown at the beginning of the play, for we see John and Hamilton in a hostel compound room. The suggestion is that even though they have escaped prison, they are still prisoners of another reality. Egoli is the prison and they can still feel the chain. In a flashback, we see Hamilton and John united by a long chain that is around their necks while they are sleeping. This flash back seems to stress that they are not free yet for they still dream about the chain already broken after they escaped from prison. Moreover, they wake up with the chain image in their minds. The breaking of the chain by helping each other is the most forceful and intense moment of the performance. This physical action communicates the need of brotherhood to gain their liberation and create their Black nation, as is stated in one of the songs interpreted by the actors (Egoli, 21).

Manaka manages to intertwine multiple meanings in each object or prop utilized by the actors to match their dialogues, songs and reference to their African past; i.e., African resistance to settlers and oral tradition. All these elements are enclosed within a circle upon the bare space occupied by the actors and the audience. The audience remains at the same ground level with the actors, something emphasized by Manaka in one of the stage directions: "*It is best to avoid raising the stage and to work straight off the floor*" (Egoli, 2). To act and watch at the same level implies not only togetherness and closeness but also the equal role played by the actors and the audience; i.e., stage performance and liberation struggle. The songs integrated in the play usually comment on Black South African's living conditions and/or transform into a cry for freedom. 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*" (Egoli, 21). Songs help alleviate the hardships of work while providing support and strength to accomplish their goals..

Lawrence W. Levine has examined the work songs used by African Americans which conveyed their feelings toward their White employers. They created these songs out of

improvisation and, thus, becoming a personal expression of a shared experience. Levine adds that the songs created by workers—from the time of slavery until well advanced the twentieth century—were accompanied by the rhythm the workers would create while using hammers, hoes, spades, and so forth. In his opinion, the songs would not change the workers' conditions, but they did help survive "those conditions both physically and psychically."<sup>62</sup> Levine's observation truly relates to Black South African workers, as presented in most of the plays in which song usually accompanies the workers' hard task, where work tools rhythmically accompany their singing; and out of the combination of music and rhythm comes their dance.

Other times, music may express a different quality. Thus, in Manaka's *Children of Asazi*, a saxophone is heard throughout the play, presenting the human quality of a cry (in the manner Charlie Parker's saxophone is used by the African American playwright Aishah Rhaman in *Unfinished Women* juxtaposed with a baby's cry). In *Children of Asazi* the saxophone is in the hands of a street musician who plays the blues, township style; and through his music the battle cries can be heard in the background.<sup>63</sup> In *Egoli*, Manaka manages to highlight the importance of African *ancestral songs* (*Egoli*, 3), which needed to be transmitted as part of their African history. This juxtaposition of past and present was Manaka's statement to assert they would be able to create a new future once they have learnt about their African history and traditions. A knowledge of their past can help disrupt their present blindness. Moreover, Black South Africans must abandon their present dispossession and enrich their spirits by recapturing the wealth that comprises their African history—in their languages, social values and oral tradition.

In conclusion, *Egoli* is a compound of different elements that function symbolically in the conveyance of multiple meanings geared towards the same goal: The need for Black people to create a strong bond in their effort to achieve freedom. *Egoli* is the ground that contains references to an African past and present upon which the audience needs to activate mechanisms and alternatives to construct their future destiny. In the play, Manaka presented all the means Africans possessed within themselves to bring change into their present condition of misery, oppression and dispossession. It was the audience/community who was the protagonist and, as such, had the final word and action.

#### The Redemption of Tragedy: Maishe Maponya's *Gangsters*

in the sun  
they are going to execute a man  
with his hands tied behind his back

in the sun  
a man jumped out of the window in heaven  
with his hands tied behind his back

in the sun

---

<sup>62</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 205, 207-208, 213.

<sup>63</sup> In the manner explosions and a baby's cry are simultaneously heard at the end of Baraka's *The Slave*.



a naked man hanged himself in paradise  
with his hands tied behind his back  
...  
in the sun  
they have killed a man  
with his hands tied behind his back

Essop Patel<sup>64</sup>

O! Carry me on the wings of the times  
to the site of a modern day burial

I want to sing  
I want to dance  
I want to celebrate  
Heroes of the day  
...  
Let me say it humbly  
For there is sadness in all this  
There's hope in this dying

Sipho Sepamla<sup>65</sup>

The assassination of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King and the various riot uprisings in 1968 in the U.S.—like the one occurred in Watts, Los Angeles—exerted an indelible impact on African Americans. The blood shed by these deaths infuriated the African American community, and their artists took that rage and the spirit of their dead into their artistic work. Similarly, the 1976 Soweto uprisings in South Africa—in which so many students were killed by the police forces—and Stephen Biko's death in 1977, were pivotal events, as already examined. Theatre became the means to convey the message of Black consciousness to the Black South African community. The new plays were infused with the rage and frustration originated by the innocent deaths of so many young people. Maishe Maponya belongs to this generation. His play *Gansters* is the testimony of his anger and condemnation of Biko's murder while he was in custody (those who killed Biko were not brought to trial<sup>66</sup>).

Although Maponya and Manaka belong to the same generation and share the same goals as committed artists, Leo Seligsohn asserts there is a distance between Manaka's "Soyikwa Institute and Maponya's more extremist Bahumutsi Drama group—the political theatre groups from which they spring." He also observes Maponya is more interested in facts, whereas Manaka, who equally deals with facts, is more metaphorical and lyrical.<sup>67</sup> Referring to *Gansters*, Maponya states that his play is *theatre on the fist*, like the poetry written by Rasechaba (the poet character) in *Gangsters*, about which Major Whitebeard observes:

WHITEBEARD

---

<sup>64</sup>Essop Patel, "Fragment 7," in *Fragments in the Sun* (Johannesburg: Afrika Cultural Centre, 1985) 10.

<sup>65</sup>Sipho Sepamla, "Heroes of the Day," in *From Gore' to Soweto* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1988) 21.

<sup>66</sup>Duma Ndlovu, ed., *Woza Afrika!: An Anthology of South African Plays* (New York: George Braziller, 1986) 57.

<sup>67</sup>Leo Seligsohn, "Enriching Combination of Protest Plays," in *Newsday* (September 1986) 15.

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.<sup>68</sup>

Maponya's theatre shows step by step how cruel, devious and stupid the oppressor was, for he did not leave much to the imagination. Although both Manaka and Maponya always documented their audiences, Maponya's plays emphasize to a greater degree the informative function—in a Brechtian style.<sup>69</sup>

Maponya's plays such as *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* include White characters and, in the latter one, he confronts both to show the absurdity of the apartheid system. Maponya's anger expressed in his confronting the forces of the oppressor and the oppressed is reminiscent of Amiri Baraka's presentation of racism: the opposing forces of Blacks and Whites. Manaka, however, more on the line of Ed Bullins', moves directly into the Black South African community and speaks from it, asserting the existence of another culture which needs to be maintained and whose history must be reconstructed through togetherness and brotherhood in order to overcome the evils of apartheid. In Manaka's plays, like in Bullins, Whites are outsiders; whereas in those by Maponya, there is a more direct presentation of White oppression upon Blacks, as if he needed that straightforwardness to bring out his anger. *Gangsters* is direct and aggressive, whereas Manaka's *Egoli* rather lies upon symbols, metaphors, and stage imagery.

As previously stated, there was no Theatre Movement as such and Maponya understood the need for playwrights, actors, critics and producers "to reorganise themselves as a group," and stop pointing fingers.<sup>70</sup> In most of his plays, political consciousness and education become fundamental issues. He believed that if people could not read they could not grow a political consciousness about their situation either. His writings, then, were an attempt to be not dogmatic but didactic.<sup>71</sup> Maponya's plays were an attempt to fill the political vacuum that existed in township theatre. He wished to show that theatre could depict the South African situation—the conflict of world supremacy and repossession of the land, of the ruler and the ruled—by using traditional forms and styles. Consequently, he managed to create a political theatre that could mobilize and bring awareness to the people.<sup>72</sup>

Like Manaka, Maponya considers the artist's responsibility and commitment to his community are fundamental, and believes the artist needs to seek self-definition in her/his art rather than just looking for publicity and recognition. Although his work focused on the specific issue of transmitting the principle of Black consciousness to his community, he later enlarged his vision in striving to attain an African identity that should include all the African countries. Consequently, the key word in his latter works would be Africanism.<sup>73</sup> Maponya had realized the Africans' exposure to Western cultures and forms and noticed

---

<sup>68</sup> Maishe Maponya, *Gangsters in Woza Africa!*, *op. cit.*, 63. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Gangsters*, page number).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Matsemela Manaka in "Theatre Workshops at YMCA," by Elliot Makhaya, in *Sowetan* (February 1, 1988) 10.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Maishe Maponya, Johannesburg, October, 1989.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

that both were combined in South Africa. The artist needed to use these forms in establishing her/his new identity as Maponya himself had done by acknowledging the impact Brecht's work had operated on his development as an artist. One of his plays, *The Valley of the Blind*, written in collaboration with Amami Derrick Blackwood, takes place in a valley of the Andes, in Latin America. Like in Brecht's plays of epic theatre, Maponya examines the politics of colonialism existing in Africa by transposing the situation to Latin America and the Spanish colonization. He juxtaposes African and American Indian music from the Incas to convey the message of union and brotherhood that must be created between Africans and Indians, among peoples of the Third World in their struggle against colonialism and imperialism.

On the other hand and as Manaka had done, Maponya was equally aware of the need to recuperate African people's traditions. Therefore, his plays are a combination of oral tradition and poetry while addressing the issue of maintaining African languages. Maponya's *Busang Meropa (Bring back the Drums)* (1986) is his assessment on the important role music has played in the African tradition. He has been one of the few playwrights who has not used much music in his work until the end of the 1980s. *Busang Meropa*, though, is the statement of his new awareness, where his poetry, music and dance are combined with political issues—without these latter being a *waving flag*. Maponya came to find in music and dance another venue through which he could express anger, in the manner of African traditions<sup>74</sup>

*Gangsters*, written before *Busang Meropa*, does not express Maponya's discovery and awareness about music yet. The play is focused on his own experience as a poet, writer and as an activist who had been in detention. He used that experience to dramatize Biko's imprisonment and subsequent torture and murder while still in prison.<sup>75</sup> Maponya focuses on the brutality and, simultaneously, the absurdity of the apartheid system in South Africa.<sup>76</sup> The play is a presentation not only of the White police procedures, but also a confrontation of "the problem of Blacks' commitment to change in the face of uncompromising government policy that [sought]to maintain the status quo."<sup>77</sup> Although the play was not banned, a restriction order served on Maponya in August 1984 prevented him from showing this play in the township cinemas and halls—only available spaces for theatre performances.<sup>78</sup> The censors considered the play *undesirable*, Steadman points out, for obvious reasons.<sup>79</sup>

*Gangsters* is to be performed in two different acting areas. One of the areas is used for the Security cell and the other one represents various settings. In addition, a blue light is used in different moments when the poet recites his poetry, while the other actors freeze in a

---

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Absurdity reflected as well in his play *Jika* in which one of the character is arrested for having a political dream: he dreamt they were already in Lybia in a training camp. Maishe Maponya, *Jika*. Unpublished script (produced in 1986).

<sup>77</sup> Peter Larham, *Black Theatre, Dance and Ritual in South Africa* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982) 90.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>79</sup> Ian Steadman, "Drama and Social Consciousness", *op. cit.*, 497.

blackout. A red crucifix is on a platform located in the cell, and it is of a person's size. In the very first scene, we see a man—the poet Rasechaba, dead on the cross—dressed in black, with a black hood. The biblical image of the cross and Christ's blood is used by Maponya also in *The Hungry Earth*, in which one of the characters states: "But our Black blood will flow to water the tree of freedom."<sup>80</sup> Thus, as Christ's blood redeemed men, the heroes' blood, like that of Biko, will be the Black South African banner used for their liberation. As previously observed in African American plays, blood conveys always a double meaning: death and life. The blood shed by innocent people, such as Soweto children and Biko, enraged the masses and poked them like a spear giving them the necessary energy to continue the struggle already commenced by the ones who died in the same effort. Their blood, then, had not been shed in vain. Their blood had been like water to the fields housed in their souls and spirits.

Steadman deems Maponya's work in line with the Brechtian aesthetic in that he "does not concern himself with the moral or psychological complexities of individual characters, but concerns himself rather with themes which affect the black working class in general."<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Coplan recalls that Maponya's use of Brechtian technique of destroying the "illusionary frame of drama and jolt the audience into critical appraisal of the action," had been pioneered by Workshop '71 in South Africa.<sup>82</sup> If the playwright applies the Brechtian use of elements such as songs, and actors enacting different characters or talking to the audience in some of his works, two main techniques are used in *Gangsters* to obtain a distancing effect on the audience: flashback and poetry—the poet's recitation of his own poems under a blue light. The use of flashback comprises a double function as well. On the one hand, the flashback brings the audience back and forth from present to past and vice versa, interrupting a linear action which does not leave room for the audience's empathy with the characters. On the other hand, the flashback conveys another goal: that of displaying a present that is the result of a past that needs to be understood and reconstructed in order to create a new future. Thus, Maponya attunes content and form to express the need for Black South Africans to be acquainted with and examine their history.

In addition, the use of flashback provides the playwright the opportunity to create a play of circular structure beginning and ending with the poet dressed in black clothes and hood hanging from a red cross. Like in the case of African American playwrights, the circular structure suggests a ritualistic effect that serves to display a repetitious quality within which the need for change is implied. Change is in the audience's hands to be carried out through their actions. Yet, change is also suggested in the double connotation of the red cross that appears at the beginning and the red cross that appears at the end. The man who is hanging from the red cross at the beginning suggests the idea of the blood that has been shed by so many victims, dead under a coercive and oppressive system; whereas the red cross and the man hanging from it at the end also might convey the *inflammatory* meaning which Rasechaba's poems exercise on people. At the end, the red color symbolizes the blood of the tree of life, the blood shed by martyrs of apartheid who had engendered consciousness

---

<sup>80</sup> Maishe Maponya, *The Hungry Earth*, in *South African Theatre: Four Plays and an Introduction*, Hauptfleisch and Steadman, eds. (Pretoria: HAUM Educational Publishers, 1987) 155.

<sup>81</sup> Steadman, *op. cit.*, 497.

<sup>82</sup> Coplan, *op. cit.*, 222.

in new generations. Maponya's distancing elements are presented to provoke this consciousness in the audience and ask them to initiate changes in their lives.

The recitation of the poet's poems under a blue light is another powerful element that disrupts the continuous action of the play. Rasechaba's poetry, observes Police Officer Major Whitebear, has caused many people to feel very angry and violent, to which Rasechaba responds:

RASECHABA

But you talk about violence! I think it's your frame of mind. It is guilt (*Gangsters*, 65).

The poems are used to address the audience directly—Maponya's didactic method to raise consciousness through images, metaphors and symbols. These poetic pieces reminds the audience of their situation in the ghettos:

RASECHABA

Look deep into the ghetto  
And see into the ghetto  
And see the modernized graves  
Manacled with chains  
So as not to resist . . . Look the ghetto over  
You will see smog hover  
And dust choking the lifeless living dead (*Gangsters*, 72).

The poems also comment on the lack of education and the need to break the government's strategy of *divide and rule* :

RASECHABA

... Others are under greed  
Unread, underpaid  
And deprived of the rights to quench  
Their education thirst.  
Pity they too are caught in the web.  
The motto reads thus!  
Divide and rule  
A new dispensation  
Is the name of the game (*Gangsters*, 73).

Or they express the poet's feelings about the life which is within the ones who love and are proud of their Blackness:

RASECHABA

Death is when your mouth can utter no cry.  
. . . Death is when you stop to be you!  
And above all,  
... Death, is when you start to hate to be black! (*Gangsters*, 69).

Lastly, the poems become a way to defend oneself, and a way of expression and self-assertion under a system that is eroding people's dignity and humanity. When Whitebeard asks Rasechaba why he does not write about other things which do not make people feel angry and violent, Rasechaba answers:

RASECHABA

. . . The manner in which I write my poetry is decided by the situation and inspiration at a given time . . . If the spirit of the nation moves within [the poet], he will write about the nation . . . If I don't feel anything, I don't write anything (*Gangsters*, 64).

Moreover, like humor, poetry becomes the liberating force through which the poet denounces his oppression.

Condemnation, however, is not only expressed through the poems. The playwright uses direct confrontations between the characters. The triangle formed by Major Whitebeard (White Police Officer), Jonathan (Black Security Policeman) and Rasechaba (Black poet) is symbolic of the situation created by apartheid. It is not only the oppression suffered under White rule—Major Whitebeard; it is also the problem within the Black community, Black South Africans defending the same system who oppresses them (like Jonathan) and who are called sell-outs. Rasechaba, the poet, becomes the middle point who acts as a mediator to present the whole picture of the situation in South Africa and becomes the victim of oppression.

Maponya's attempt to raise consciousness among the Black community does not only contemplate a Black/White dialectics, but a Black/Black dialectics too. Thus, Jonathan is portrayed as a traitor to his own people, symbolizing Maponya's warning of what Black South Africans may continue to do to their own community without realizing the damage they are causing themselves. The playwright is saying that everyone needs to be involved and committed to the same struggle for freedom and there are no excuses such as the one given by Jonathan to Rasechaba:

JONATHAN

Remember Rasechaba that I'm doing a job like any other person who wakes up in the morning to go to town for a white man. On Friday when that person gets his salary, I also get my salary

RASECHABA

. . . the difference is that your salary is dirty. It is enveloped with the blood of your own brothers . . . You're a sell-out. . . , a blood-sucker . . . who has no conscience, . . . who is dead inside (*Gangsters*, 68-69).

Jonathan's character, like John in *Egoli*, conveys the contradiction the apartheid system conveys:

JONATHAN

I'm also convinced that we must stand aloof from politics. We are servants of God, and God does not wish for us to enter the political arena (*Gangsters*, 69)

On the one hand, Jonathan represents the self-destruction perpetrated by a regime which brutalizes him, so that he can be manipulated and utilized for its own benefit. Moreover, Jonathan represents the Black South Africans who have been brainwashed by the regime and who blindly obey its rules because they have not had access to any type of education and political consciousness. And, on the other hand, Whitebeard embodies the contradiction of a system that believes in a Christian God who gave his own son—Christ—to redeem men but kills innocent people in the name of the same God—like Pilates did with Christ.

Jonathan, with a Christian rather than an African name, is a Judas who sells his own people to another Pilates—Whitebeard. Jonathan conveys, then, a triple contradiction for he is performing Whitebeard's contradiction not against Whites, but against his own people; i.e., against himself.

By using biblical mythology, Maponya discloses the fraudulence of the system of apartheid. Thus, people can understand the need to remove the veil (symbolized by the black clothes and hood that covers the wounds perpetrated on Rasechaba's body through torture) which has concealed the complete image not only of religion but also of African history. The playwright is revealing those wounds so that people can really see the blood/inflammatory poems that will make them wave their fists in an infuriated cry for freedom. Maponya exposes the hidden truth and opens the audience's eyes through his direct didactic techniques as well as through symbolism, imagery, reversal of myths, and Brechtian distancing devices.

In most of Maponya's plays, although there is no music, songs are always present. In *Gangsters*, however, there are neither songs, nor music. The poems have replaced these two elements to become song and music themselves:

RASECHABA

They broke one window first  
then on all windows played sounds  
Made by the drums of wars.  
Both doors joined the chorus  
The front emitting quick soprano notes  
The back a slow dub-dub-dub.  
It all happened in minutes  
The vocalists shouted  
The notes one after the other  
Like they'd never rehearsed before . . . This is the music  
That has become notorious  
It plays at the first hour of the day  
To be registered in the books  
Of those messengers of darkness . . . While you open the front  
within seconds  
the musicians spit their songs into every room  
while others guard the doors for escapers.  
Torches flashing all over!  
And the poet is TAKEN (*Gangsters*, 81-82).

Although the songs and music of freedom are put behind bars, they still continue to breath, because their spirit is transmitted from one to another, like the blood of life, like the blood of the martyrs who left their works—struggle, poems, songs, music—impressed in their people's hearts. People's minds, feelings, and their determination to be free can neither be extinguished nor imprisoned, for they escapes any corporeal form that can be apprehended. *Gangsters* is permeated by this conviction of a never-ending struggle maintained until freedom was achieved for Black South African. Freedom was in the hands of people who needed to solidify their solidarity bonds. The dead martyrs, the singers, and the poets had actually been led by *the people* (*Gangsters*, 75), not vice versa.

Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon: *Woza Albert!*  
and the Resurrection of Hope

Listen to the beat out there  
...  
It is music  
...  
Charles Parker's was like that some day  
Wailing like a jester in a way  
But this chanting that rises high  
Refuses to die in sorrow  
It strangles stubborn power  
Renders immorality impotent  
It chokes the dust  
Flays the air with clenched fists  
Celebrating the triumph of  
Life over death  
It is the freedom sound  
In the cities  
In the ghettos  
In the countryside  
Of a beleaguered people  
For the top of the mountain is in sight

Sipho Sepamla<sup>83</sup>

In Maponya's *Gangsters* the figure of Christ is the main symbol, as represented by the poet who is hanging from a red cross. He uses Christ's tragic death and martyrdom to parallel the death of Black South African leaders, more specifically that of Stephen Biko. Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon also adopted the same biblical image in *Woza Albert! (Raise Up, Albert!)*. Nevertheless, instead of contemplating Maponya's tragic perspective, they play with the possibility of a second coming of Christ and make a comic satire of it, creating an analogy of Christ's resurrection with the symbolic resurrection of Black South African leaders already dead—e.g. Albert Luthuli. Christ's resurrection stands up as a symbol for hope.

*Woza Albert!* employs the same method used by Douglas T. Ward to show the absurdities of racism as well, and in the same manner humor becomes a means of relieve. John Kani has insisted on the importance of entertainment through humor and laughter as a significant ingredient in theatre for it makes people have a good time.<sup>84</sup> In addition, Biodun Jeyifo asserts that in many of the extant folktales in the oral tradition of West Africa, "there is a tacit understanding that only a thin line separates the comic from the tragic, an understanding that . . . only the possession of a worldly-wise self-irony determines whether the negations and contradictions of life will finish the hero off (tragedy) or humanise him and reconcile him to his fellow human beings and to society (comedy)."<sup>85</sup> Jeyifo notices that comedy, though, generally presents the relationship of character to circumstance, of the

---

<sup>83</sup> Sipho Sepamla, "Freedom Way," in *From Goree' to Soweto, op. cit.*, 27.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with John Kani, Cape Town, 1989.

<sup>85</sup> Biodun Jeyifo, *The Truthful Lie: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama* (London: New Beacon Books Ltd., 1985) 65.



individual “to the real process of his *social* existence,” more penetratingly and extensively than tragedy.<sup>86</sup>

It has been previously mentioned the important role that humor and laughter have played in the African American tradition. As Lawrence W. Levine points out, there is a common need to laugh at our situation, our enemies, ourselves, but it commonly exists in the people who exercise the least power in their present environment and feel hopeless. Laughter produces a liberating effect that brings a feeling of relief, for jokes embody a rebellion against authority and, consequently, liberate from its pressure. Levine adds that humor helped African Americans to minimize their suffering and to assert themselves against an oppressive environment.<sup>87</sup> *Woza Albert!* accomplishes the same function of diminishing suffering and its comic elements serve as an excuse to expose the problems created by the absurd apartheid system.

In contrast to Manaka and Maponya, Mtwā and Ngema belong to Gibson Kente’s school and Fugard has also influenced their work. Mbongeni recalls Fugard, Kani and Ntshona’s *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and how he was interested in someone like Fugard to obtain Western training as well as he was interested in meeting Kente for his plays had some magic. Ngema addressed Kente and became one of Kente’s actors in *Mama and the Load*. During the production of Kente’s play, he met Mtwā—leading dancer of the play—and both begun to talk about the possibility of an alternative theatre. Ngema has insisted about how Peter Brook’s *The Empty Space* and Grotowski’s acting techniques had inspired their work. Mtwā and Ngema practiced Grotowski’s exercises. Furthermore, in the United States Ngema met Luis Valdez—who told him about his Teatro Campesino—and Amiri Baraka. Out of this experience, he created his next play, *Asinamali!* Ngema’s theatre attempted to educate both Blacks and Whites.<sup>88</sup>

If Mtwā 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 story-teller.<sup>89</sup> Mtwā’s and Ngema’s backgrounds are reflected in their play, where song, dance and music are an integral part. Like *Egoli*, *Woza Albert!* is firmly based on Mtwā and Ngema’s mastery of acting skills, as noticed by Manaka: “Because of good acting in Percy Mtwā 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, makes people believe the characters portrayed are White.<sup>90</sup> It is significant to highlight the fact that Ngema and Mtwā devised their play out of improvisation and Barney Simon worked with them for six weeks to help them in the directing of the play.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, like in Manaka’s *Egoli*, the characters’s names were the actors’ real names, Percy and Mbongeni. Mtwā and Ngema have followed the trajectory already established by different groups in South Africa of combining acting, playwriting and directing in the creation of their plays, which was not as strongly followed by African

---

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>87</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, *op. cit.*, 300, 321, 344.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Mbongeni Ngema, Johannesburg, October, 1989.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Manaka, “Fate of Theatre Determined,” *op. cit.*,

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Americans (although workshop was used by some African American groups such as The New Lafayette Players or Ntozake Shange when creating her plays).

While touring Kente's *Mama and the Load*, out of reading the Bible Mtwā and Ngema discussed the idea of what would happen if Jesus visited South Africa at its present political confusion during the apartheid years. They worked for seven months on the idea. Both had been put in jail as political suspects for thirty-three days and when they came out of prison, they did not have any money and they went from the house of one friend to another.<sup>92</sup> They rehearsed in kitchens, bedrooms, buses, cars, backyards, wherever they could. Finally they approached the Market Theatre in Johannesburg and were helped by Simon, giving them financial support to present *Woza Albert!* The play obtained an Obie Award in the United States (they performed in Harlem and off-Broadway in New York).<sup>93</sup>

Piniel V. Shava deems *Woza Albert!* as politically charged as *Egoli* so that it fits "into the category of contemporary drama [referring to the 1980s] in which symbolism, allegory and satire play a greater role in the criticism of the system than plain political statements," more characteristic of the plays that emerged in the Black Consciousness period.<sup>94</sup> Shava's assertion coincides with Credo Mtwā's idea of suggestive realism (to differentiate it from photographic realism) in which an actor with a real baton or a police cap may suffice to communicate the audience the idea or character the actors are portraying.<sup>95</sup> Mtwā and Ngema note that in *Woza Albert!* the actors are bare-chested, wear grey track-suit bottoms and running shoes; and around their necks there is "a piece of elastic, tied to which is half a squash ball painted pink—a clown's nose, to be placed over [their] own nose when [they] play a white man."<sup>96</sup> Similarly, to the symbolic use of the nose, a shawl is used to portray a woman; or two boxes placed on a bare stage are transformed into a train, a bus or a barbershop.

All the musical sounds, as well as other sounds of trains, sirens or helicopters are created by the two actors themselves. Lighting equally occupies an essential function in that it transforms the stage into different places, time of the day and mood. In the twenty-one scenes that the play is composed of, 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 or place to another without interruption—from a street with vendors, to a brickyard, a cell in Robben Island, a barbershop, or a train. An example of these fast pace observed through the actor's quick transformation is indicated 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, etc. At the climax of their performance, they transform into audience, applauding wildly.*

---

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Ndlovu, *Woza Afrika!*, *op. cit.*, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>94</sup> Piniel A. Shava, *A People's Voice*, *op. cit.*, 159.

<sup>95</sup> Mshengu, "Tradition and innovation in the Theatre of Workshop '71," *op. cit.*, 64.

<sup>96</sup> Percy Mtwā, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, *Woza Albert!*, in *Woza Afrika!*, *op. cit.*, 3. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Woza*, page number).

*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 (Woza, 3-4).*

These fast transformations create the rhythm of the play.

Gesture is equally important throughout the performance. The actors mime different situations, holding musical instruments or throwing stones, while, simultaneously, they make the sounds of sirens and dogs barking (*Woza*, 44). Following the African theatre tradition, they combine their social and political comment with gesture, music, storytelling, songs and dance. Among the dances included are a Towsa dance (*Woza*, 6) and a Zulu war dance, which ends with Mbongeni's "*thrusting his knobkerrie again and again at the audience in an attack,*" while both actors sing a song in Zulu announcing that Black warriors will come to chase Whites away (*Woza*, 41). The songs performed by the actors are generally traditional Zulu songs sung in Zulu (*Woza*, 17), and they usually comment on their situation under apartheid, as well as they become the means to criticize and insult Whites and call for Blacks to unite against White oppression: "Woza kanye-kanye! [Come together] / Abelungu oswayini! [Whites are swines!] / Basibiza ngo-damn! [They call us damns!]" (*Woza*, 31). This work song reminds of Levine's comment on the African American tradition in which African Americans used songs with encoded messages addressed to their White bosses.

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 were deprived of financial resources and adequate living conditions, as reflected in their *poor theatre*—to use Grotowski's terms. The emphasis and foundation of the theatrical communication is on the actor's skills to transform the stage into a rich combination of elements that create a large variety of places, characters and situations. Furthermore, the combination of traditional and Western elements parallels the issues raised in the dialogues maintained by the different characters throughout the run of the play. Past and present come together so that the audience can analyze their present situation. In his second coming, Morena—the Savior—brings with him a biblical history that had been distorted for apartheid's benefit, and he reconstructs it. This reconstruction of history and disruption of false myths, revealing the cruel reality Blacks were living in South Africa under apartheid, follows the social and artistic commitment adopted by Manaka and Maponya in their theatre work.

Like *Egoli*, *Woza Albert!* is a plotless piece but there is a device that connects all the scenes: Morena, the Savior. Morena becomes the justification to unveil and communicate the problems and conditions under which Black South Africans live in what was considered a Christian country. Like Maponya's *Gangsters*, *Woza Albert!* reveals the contradictions existing during South African apartheid. In this respect, Mbongeni describes how Morena has arrived and everybody is going to the airport to see him, and they are crying, singing, laughing, dancing and sweating while everybody was shouting:

MBONGENI

. . . Morena, give me bread for my baby. The other woman was shouting: Morena, my son is in detention. The other man: Morena, give me a special permit to work in Johannesburg city. The little girl, standing next to me: Morena, give me a lollipop. . . (*Woza*, 28)

Morena is, thus, the excuse to speak out the evils of apartheid. Even Morena himself becomes a victim of apartheid and is imprisoned in Robben Island and consequently killed because the government considers him a rebel. Nevertheless, as written in the Scripture and after three days, he resurrects and helps resurrect Albert Luthuli, Robert Sobukwe, Lilian Ngoyi and Stephen Biko, all heroes in the struggle for liberation.

The resurrection of Morena, of Black South African heroes, symbolizes the rising of African traditions and history as well. *Woza Albert!* was a call of attention to rise from their daily deaths taking an active role which implied unity against apartheid. The Soweto riots, the Black Power period, the bulldozers destroying the homes of Black South Africans are recalled; and simultaneously the audience participates of Zulu traditions as symbolized by the singing of traditional songs, dances and storytelling.<sup>97</sup>

The end of the play moves to a cemetery where the Black South African heroes are buried. When Morena (enacted by Percy) arrives, and Mbongeni (who is working there) recognizes him, “*leads Percy in a dance around the cemetery, singing,*” and together they go from tomb to tomb resurrecting all of them (*Woza*, 52-53). They talk to all the heroes that have been raised and raise their arms triumphantly. The end is a celebration of the liberation day that was coming, and towards which people needed to work together: “*Sonqoba simunye*” [together we will conquer] (*Woza*, 53).

---

<sup>97</sup> Storytelling is also present through another character, an old man who remembers what happened to Piet Retief, leader of the Afrikaners of the White men in the past, who visited Dingane, the great king of the Zulus.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Black Theatre Movement in South Africa. Black South African Women's Voices: Fatima Dike, Gcina Mhlophe and Other Voices

As a result of male criticism, African women assume a "silence is golden" stance because they lack the confidence or education to deal with male dominance.

Christine Obbo<sup>1</sup>

Living in [South Africa] has made massive cultural and historical demands on [women], so that the mere act of writing, of finding the time, let alone space to do so, is in itself an act of monumental significance.

Seriti sa Sechaba Publishers<sup>2</sup>

#### Black South African Women's Voices<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Christine Obbo, *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981) 16.

<sup>2</sup> Seriti sa Sechaba Publishers, "Foreword," in *Women in South Africa: From the Heart—An Anthology of Stories Written by a New Generation of Writers*, Tsikang and Lefakane, eds. (Johannesburg and Marshalltown: Seriti sa Sechaba Publishers, 1988) 8.

<sup>3</sup> Although not included in this study for entering a different category of Black South African *Indian* theatre, Muthal Naidoo deserves special mention. Naidoo, South African of Indian ancestry, has been an important playwright, director and actor who obtained her Doctorate in Theatre in the United States and was inspired by African American women theatre and literary artists. She became very active in theatre since her return from the States at the end of the 1970s, but her plays have been published much later. One of those plays (*Fight from the Mahabarath*) is included in the anthology of Kathy Perkins, *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays* (1998). She was politically involved in the protest movements against apartheid in the area of Durban (where she has spent most of her life teaching), and has continued to be an active feminist concerned about the situation of Black women in South Africa. As it is well known, Durban contains a majority of Black population of Indian ancestry. Parallel to the Black Theatre Movement that focused on *Black African ancestry*, there was another venue for *Black Theatre of Indian ancestry*, that specially focused on the Indian culture and traditions maintained in South Africa. At the time of apartheid, the Indian population was not categorized as Black, therefore there were two different and separate literary and theatrical expressions. However, in Perkins' anthology (1998) she includes both groups under the same umbrella of Black theatre. Apart from theatre, Naidoo has also written short stories collected in *Jailbirds and Others* (2004). Among her plays are: *Of No Account* (on the issue of racism and sexism), produced in Johannesburg Market Theatre in 1982; *We Three Kings*, about the South African Indian Council Elections (published in 1992); *Ikhaya lethu*, meaning "our home", *Nobody's Hero* and *Masks*—the latter being considered one of her most interesting plays.

The absence of Black South African women writers, especially in the genre of theatre, is remarkably striking. Only the playwright Fatima Dike's work was well known by the mid 1970s, at the peak of the Black Consciousness Movement. Black South African women have only recently begun to appear on stage as actors. Black South African actors had been impersonating women characters whenever it was required by the script or improvisational creations. The 1980s slowly commenced to witness the emergence of more women artists, actresses and playwrights among them, and they have continued to appear but still slowly in the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup> The absence of Black South African women's voices in literature hinders the development of a woman's aesthetics that has been slowly germinating in South Africa. Christine Obbo and Seriti sa Sechaba have explained the primary and essential obstacles that African women artists have had to face. A strong male dominance has preserved them from speaking out because they would receive negative criticism every time they tried to do so. Besides, most of them had not been supplied with the elementary tool of education necessary to help them develop any artistic choice they might like to pursue.

Awa Thiam, referring to the African woman, considers that "in order to win independence, one must first be conscious of one's dependence . . . [and break] the curse of silence." She adds that, in the Black African woman's struggle for liberation, there are two aspects closely linked: "[The] struggle for effective economic and political independence and the struggle for recognition of and respect for their rights and duties of men and women of all races . . . Ideally both struggles should be waged together." Thiam believes that the solution to women's problems needs to be international and collective; she defends international feminism.<sup>5</sup>

In Christine Quanta's opinion, African women are "at the bottom of the scale of humanity," claiming the need to examine the colonization and enslavement of Black people in order to be able to study any aspect of African societies.<sup>6</sup> As already mentioned in Chapter I, Quanta has described the four-fold oppression of Black Southern African women, especially during the years of apartheid: colonialism and imperialism, White racism, class oppression and sexual oppression.<sup>7</sup> Although the same number of factors should be considered when analyzing African American women's work, these factors were specially sharpened in South Africa, where Black women were not protected by an Act that recognized their rights during apartheid. Concerning Africa, Quanta blames the imposition of religions such as Christianity and Islam and Western values, institutions and morality that were brought to Africa and deprived the African woman of her position of respect, equality and prominence.<sup>8</sup>

It has already been examined how Black South African women always remained at the front of the struggle for liberation in their country. During the years of apartheid, these

---

<sup>4</sup> In 1979 a group of women (from Crossroads) who wrote and performed *Imfuduso* was one of the first theatre attempts carried out collectively by women. See statement, Note 153, Chapter I.

<sup>5</sup> Awa Thiam, *Speak Out, Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 1986) 3, 115.

<sup>6</sup> Christine N. Quanta, ed., *Women in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987) 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. See Quanta's statement, Note 146, Chapter I.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

women continued to be underground organizers and couriers, trade unionists, trained guerrillas and supportive mothers, whose names will never appear in the newspaper headlines or history books; but they have been “the cornerstones of the national independence struggle.”<sup>9</sup> Black South African women’s active struggle for liberation has paralleled that of African American women’s struggle throughout their history. Yet, Black South African women were not given an equal stand at their homes. Momfundo Luswazi believed that future Azanian women, aside from being revolutionaries and patriots, would need to create Black women’s organizations.<sup>10</sup> These organizations that existed in the United States since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would help develop women’s consciousness and self-affirmation. Fortunately, a good number of women’s associations have been organized since the last years of apartheid.<sup>11</sup>

In “Women Writers Speak,” Boitumelo defended that women’s liberation “[was] beyond the relationship between man and woman. It [was] the first phase of [their] struggle to reaffirm [their] role in the struggle for total liberation.” In addition, she believed that a woman writer must not consider herself out of her society but as a writer who originates from it.<sup>12</sup> The Black South African woman writer, then, needed to be totally committed to her community. Nevertheless, in order to pay a better service within her community, she should first achieve self-determination to liberate her own self and gain self-affirmation.

In this line, Lloyd W. Brown, who recognizes the male-oriented field in African literature and the absence left in it by the unheard voices of African women, observes that in most of the works by African women writers private growth is a prerequisite for social change:

All the major [African women] writers are preoccupied with the woman’s personal strength—or lack of it—when they analyze sexual roles and sexual inequality. In these works, the victims of inequality and male insensitivity are not only victimized by their external circumstances, they are also at a disadvantage because they lack strength, resourcefulness, and a vital sense of their own integrity as women. Their inner weaknesses often stem from the degree to which they have internalized male codes of perception—until they accept male notions about female inadequacy and about masculine privilege. . . [These women’s works] clearly imply that profound and pervasive changes can only take place when external reforms go hand in hand with fundamental, personal growth.<sup>13</sup>

By the 1980s, Brown noted that African women writers had seen the need of self-introspection as a fundamental step to participate in the African struggle for liberation. He has claimed that art and personal growth are intertwined, and already in the 1980s “the African woman writer had become her own best symbol of female achievement and growth.”<sup>14</sup> Gcina Mhlophe emphasizes that her plays are not about politics, but about

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>11</sup> For a complete list of women’s associations in South Africa, visit the website: <http://www.distel.ca/womlist/countries/southafrica.html>

<sup>12</sup> Boitumelo, “Women Writers Speak,” in *Staffrider* 2, 4 (November/December 1979): 21.

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd W. Brown, *Women Writers in Black Africa* (Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1981) 180-181.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

feelings. She recognizes the great influence her grandmother and mother have exerted on her. Her plays, which reflect her personal experiences, become universal to other women who watch her work.<sup>15</sup> However, although Mhlophe's writings are not overtly political dealing with governmental politics, through the personal experiences she narrates she encourages and transmits hope to the Black community, which actually becomes a committed stand.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie believes that "the African female writer should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and as a Third World person; and her biological womanhood is implicated in all three." She further argues the African woman writer needs to be politically conscious.<sup>16</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie formulates the need to break with the stereotypes about African women and reveal them in their full complexity. This complexity of characters is reflected in the African tradition in which women played a very important role within their societies. More concretely referring to South African women and culture, Seriti sa Sechaba Publishers stated: "Our culture and our folklore were handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth around the evening fires, in the fields as they worked, in the veldt as they herded the cattle. And in all this it was the women, the mothers and the grandmothers who did the communicating, the teaching."<sup>17</sup> Sechaba Publishers confronted the dilemma South African women writers had to face regarding language, literature and aesthetics during the years of apartheid. Their situation was totally different from what had been generally accepted in Western history and traditions. Black South African women needed to ask themselves if they wanted to develop an impeccable style in their works or if they deemed it more important to share in their own message. This did not imply that the issue of aesthetics should not be considered, since "the manner in which the message is put will greatly influence the manner in which what is said is received."<sup>18</sup> Gcina Mhlophe's work is a good example to be taken into consideration since she has integrated traditional African elements to shape their plays: songs, dance and storytelling. And, tradition, according to Adetokunbo Pearce, "is the root of a people's culture, but it becomes retrogressive if treated as an end in itself."<sup>19</sup> Black South African women writers, as proposed by the Black Consciousness Movement, must examine and use their African tradition in order to understand their present and shape their destiny.

Black South African women had lived under the pressure of a varied gamut of political and social problems (not as sharply aggravating for African American women) which need to be explored in order to achieve a better understanding of their actual conditions and the absence of their voices in literary genres, especially in theatre. These issues, some of which were equally common to the African American woman's experience, were incorporated in the plays written by Black South African women. Among the more urgent needs that preoccupied the Black South African woman writer, especially at the time of apartheid,

---

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Gcina Mhlophe, Johannesburg, October, 1989.

<sup>16</sup> Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, "The Female Writer and her Commitment," in *Women in African Literature Today*, Jones, ed. (Trenton (New Jersey): Africa World Press, 1987) 10.

<sup>17</sup> Seriti sa Sechaba, *op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-8.

<sup>19</sup> Adetokunbo Pearce, "The Didactic Essence of Efua Sutherland's Plays," in *Women in African Literature Today*, 78.



were: forced pregnancy ("from their white employers, where some of them [ended]up killing infants from that intercourse to avoid arrest for breaking the [then] repeated 'Immorality Act'"<sup>20</sup>); lack or total absence of accommodation; husbands who were indifferent or unsympathetic to the health state of their wives; washer women who were paid low wages; and women deserted by their husbands who returned home as corpses.<sup>21</sup>

It is significant to notice that *So Where to?*, play written by Smal Ndaba with some help from workshop improvisation, deals precisely with the issues of birth control and abortion, issues which are not acceptable within his culture. Ndaba felt he should write about this problem and "make a mirror to show how frustrated parents [got] . . . [and maybe] find a solution to this problem." From his own personal experience, Ndaba tried to reach a Black South African audience who was aware of many young girls facing an unwanted motherhood—for which they were not ready yet—because they were not provided with the necessary birth control means and information. Ndaba strongly believed that the youth were missing sexual education to prevent the high rate of teenagers' pregnancy that existed at the time he wrote his play in the 1980s.<sup>22</sup> In his play, Ndaba shows a man's and a parent's sensitivity towards women's issues and main concerns in South African society that is quite uncommon. He had committed himself to the same liberation struggle taking women's issues to make them his own, in the line already started by Matsemela Manaka by defending women's rights.

If Ndaba shows theatre can be a platform to reach wide audiences and bring consciousness and education to them, also does Doreen Mazibuko, one of the actors in Ndaba's production. At the time of the performance, she was a very young actress who saw herself totally committed to the struggle for the liberation of her people and her country. Mazibuko was also a member of the Junction Avenue Theatre, starring in *Sophiatown* and in *Tooth and Nail*. She confessed to have even written several unpublished plays and directed some of them, and showed her satisfaction for being part of the cast in *So Where To?* because the play addresses a very important issue which concerned women in a special manner. As a woman, though, she complained to have suffered from sexism in plays directed by men, in which women were undermined. At the time I interviewed her (1989) she thought that the Junction Avenue Theatre group (a group launched from the University of Witwatersrand), for instance, was giving more opportunities to hear women's voices.<sup>23</sup> Mazibuko felt very much inspired by Phyllis Klotz's production *Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokotho (You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock)*, for she realizes the need to have more female directors and actors. Furthermore, she believed theatre must educate people and help raise their consciousness so that they could stand up for their rights.<sup>24</sup>

At the beginning of the 1990s, coinciding with the transition from apartheid to democracy, South Africa had began to offer some sun rays of hope for Azanian women to abandon darkness and create an aesthetic of self-affirmation. Yet, this aesthetics was not completely shaped because it remained in a developing process. In this process, the writing

---

<sup>20</sup> Seriti sa Sechaba, *op. cit.*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Smal Ndaba, Johannesburg, October 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Doreen Mazibuko, Johannesburg, October, 1989.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

of African American feminists was of great inspiration to Black South African women. Mhlope, for instance, acknowledged to have read Ntozake Shange's work, which could offer essential guidance in delineating Azanian women's unique style. And, although much has been achieved by Black South African women writers in the performing arts, this section on Black South African Women's aesthetics still remains open for new voices to be heard. Some have already commenced to emerge with power, strength and determination.<sup>25</sup>

What is a South African? Scratching the Skin and Going to the Heart in Fatima Dike's *The First South African*

I have tried to depict the strength, courage, determination, fortitude and dignity of the women of the black community. They have defied hardships and barriers where there was no hope for any success.

Ellen Kuzwayo<sup>26</sup>

Who were her people? Did race mean anything? Was I not her mother? I am Indian but I am her people. I protested. I'm not familiar with legal terms or with the laws as such. . . All I could make out from what he was saying is that I was not going to have the child . . . Seeing that I was fighting a losing battle, I just stood up and went out of the office like I was in a trance.

Mercy Lebakeng, "Who Are You"<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Among these young and new voices are Magi Noninzi Williams and Malika Ndlovu (Lueen Conning), who are included in an anthology of plays edited by Kathy Perkins, *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays* (1998). This anthology includes also plays by Gcina Mhlophe and Fatima Dike. In addition, the anthology also includes several male playwrights who have chosen theatre to address their community and raise their consciousness on the violence and abuse Black women are suffering. This combination of male and female playwrights writing on women's issues, especially on male violence and abuse against women, does not really parallel the situation in the United States. Although the rate of violence is very high in South Africa, the statistics in the United States are equally alarming. In a report (2000) by Director of Amnesty International Spanish Section in a Conference held at the University of Salamanca, Spain ("Reality and Representation of Violence") he informed that in the United States, every 15 seconds a woman suffers from some kind of violent aggression at home and 700,000 women are yearly raped. And, according to another report of Amnesty International (2004), 147 women were raped every day in South Africa (as reported by the South African Race Relations in 2003) —in 1997, for instance, there were 52,159 rapes reported. Sexual violence against women in South Africa in 2007 is still one of the greatest concerns in the country: "In a country long sickened by the frighteningly high level of sexual violence, one of the greatest challenges facing South Africa is closing the gap between the rhetoric of gender equality and the reality on the ground." [http://www.devzone.org/knowledge/Gender/Violence\\_against\\_Women/index.php](http://www.devzone.org/knowledge/Gender/Violence_against_Women/index.php). The following quotation about present situation in South Africa on male sexual violence against women is quite illustrative:

Men's violence against women remains unacceptably pervasive. Government has been unable to adequately address men's violence against women. Indeed reported rates of domestic and sexual violence have increased steadily since 1994. This has led to charges that the government has not made sufficient efforts to address violence against women. Critics contend that when 90 percent of rapists and nearly two thirds of men who kill their intimate partner go unpunished, government inadvertently sends a message to perpetrators that, in all likelihood, they can commit violence against women with relative impunity (point 6 – Sonke Gender Justice Network, 2007, <http://www.genderjustice.org.za/sa-country-report-2007.html>).

<sup>26</sup> Ellen Kuzwayo, "Foreword," in *Women in South Africa: From the Heart*, op. cit., 3.

Fatima Dike's *The First South African* openly deals with the problem of race and the absurd apartheid laws that separated people according to their skin color—including children separated from their own mothers, as reinforced by the Groups and Immorality Acts. Dike raises the issue of a heterogeneous and complex society that exists in South Africa. It is important to mention the different groups living in South Africa: the Cape Colored group, the Griqua Group, the Malay group, the Chinese group, the Indian group, and other Asiatic and Colored groups. This classification was presented by Gillian Booth, who has argued that "the race of an individual affects [her/]his life chances and dictates where [s/]he may work and live, whom [s/]he may marry, what the state is willing to spend on [her/]his education and what universities [s/]he may enter."<sup>28</sup> She maintains that the issues of race and color are synonymous and interlinked with each other.<sup>29</sup>

Dike's *The First South African* poses the question of what a true South African is. The playwright has noticed that the story of her play is based on a real story of a man with blond hair and blue eyes, who grew up in Langa (in the Cape) and whose mother was Black and his father, White. He spoke Xhosa and when he was old enough was classified as Colored. Dike says she gave the story some thought and it made her question the situation under apartheid in South African society and the classification of people as Blacks, Coloreds and Whites. She realized that this specific man, who looked like a White man and felt like a Black man, was considered a Colored person. She questioned who he was: "That man is not white; he's the shadow of a black man. And he's not coloured. What is he? Under the laws of the system. And that was my question."<sup>30</sup> Dike presents the absurd logic of apartheid, which is based on an absolute confusion, equally exposed in *Woza Albert!*

In her analysis, Dike does not stop at the race/color problem; she goes beyond. The playwright examines the township life and presents different characters. We see a shoplifter, who is considered a kind of Robin Hood in their community (out of it he is considered a thief) for he robs the rich to help the poor; there is also a mother figure, a very courageous and bright woman who fights for her son; and a father, a more passive figure, who accepts the system with no critical say. Dike's intention by portraying this township picture was "to bridge . . . the cultural gap for those who [went] to see the play."<sup>31</sup> She points out she does not write uniquely for White people and admits there are things she does not like about her own community. Dike raises the issue of violence, for instance, which she does not like among her own people and which will always be brought up in her plays.<sup>32</sup> Her plays attempt to analyze situations and characters in the global situation given in South Africa.

*The First South African*, published in 1979, is not Dike's first play. In 1976 she wrote *The Sacrifice of Kreli*, a play that narrates the story and fate of the Gcalekas after the Ninth

---

<sup>27</sup> Mercy Lebakeng, "Who Are You," in *Women in South Africa: From the Heart*, op. cit., 114-115.

<sup>28</sup> Gillian Booth, "The Social Consciousness of Fatima Dike," Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1980, 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Gray, "An Interview with Fatima Dike," in *Black South African Women Writers in English: A Preliminary Checklist*, House (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, Program on Women, 1980) 29.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Frontier War (known in South Africa as the Ninth Kaffir War). Sixty-six thousand people formed this community, and the war broke out between the Gcalekas and the British over cattle. The British claimed that the Gcalekas had stolen the cattle from them and demanded it back. The play takes place seven years after the end of the war and shows the African warriors split into two groups. Dike wrote this play thinking there were eighteen million Black people in South Africa without a written past, for the past they had as a nation was oral history. She realized Blacks in South Africa had been wiped out of their past by the history written by Whites against what Africans had to say. When she understood she possessed that past, “from then onwards [she] felt that if [she] had a past and a present, [she] could also have a future.”<sup>33</sup> The play, which takes place in 1885, provided precisely a past which Black South Africans could relate to in their situation under apartheid. As commented by David Coplan, the story of *Kreli* originates as a commentary on the challenge and nature of African leadership relevant “to contemporary [referring to the 1980s] struggles for national regeneration.”<sup>34</sup> Coplan insists on the play as a model for a forceful presentation of historical and traditional resources within a modern political and cultural context.<sup>35</sup>

*The Sacrifice of Kreli* not only includes African traditional elements, but it was also originally written in *poetic verse* in Xhosa and, then, translated into English—some of the passages were translated literally so that the rhythm of the Xhosa language could be maintained<sup>36</sup>—for non-Xhosa audiences. 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 that actually occurred in the Cape, Dike is not only reaffirming a historical deed but also displaying the richness comprised in 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 that, according to the playwright, means “there is a way out” (message brought from their ancestors).<sup>37</sup>

Dike’s consciousness about the present situation in South Africa and about her need to write to communicate to her people emerged in 1974, when she learned about the rape to death of a seven-year-old child in Guguletu, Cape Town, whose body was found in the garbage bins behind some shops: “From that moment I felt very frustrated. I wanted to push the walls of those shops away, and burst out, because I had something to say to my people for that. So I left the family business, and I went to work at the Space theatre [in Cape Town] as a stage manager in 1975.” She begun to write in 1976. Dike asserts to be a person who is very much inspired by *the visual*.<sup>38</sup> Whatever strikes her visually she writes it down and works on it until she gives it a final shape.

---

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>34</sup> David Coplan, *In Township Tonight: South Africa’s Black City Music and Theatre* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), 217.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Gray, *op. cit.*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Dike's social and political consciousness rising out of a child's rape and brutal murder must be noticed, especially as a woman. She did not present any relevant women characters in her first play, though. It is in *The First South African* where Dike presents a courageous mother, Freda who fights tooth and nail for her son, in spite of the problems caused by her son's skin color even within the township itself. In this regard, Freda's husband, comments about her:

AUSTIN

. . . [She] always says she will fight for the flesh of her flesh.<sup>39</sup>

On the contrary, Rooi's stepfather, 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:

AUSTIN

. . . I hope they don't take Zwelinzima [Rooi] from us. For if they do, we will have to accept what they say. (*FSA*, 4)

And Rooi, who rebels and tries to find a way out to fit in the South African society as a human being—"Am I not a man?" (*FSA*), regardless of the color of his skin; but Rooi lacks commitment.

In a presentational style, the play introduces four of the characters through a monologue addressed to the audience. Whith this short introduction, each of them reveals the main traits of his/her character. Consequently, Zwelinzima (Rooi), considers Genesis in the Bible, the Christian idea of creation and questions his origin as a human being; Freda (Rooi's mother) explains that she does not want to give her child away, when requested that her son should live in the Colored area, therefore away from hom; Austin (Rooi's stepfather) affirms that he will accept whatever comes into their lives; and Max (Rooi's friend) narrates how he robs the rich to sell the merchandise at a cheaper price to the poor. The prologue, then, establishes the main lines that are going to lead the actions of characters.

Rooi symbolizes the *first South African* who has been born out of a multicultural family and has experienced the oppression and frustration created by the Group Areas and Immorality Acts of apartheid policies, like Sobhna Poona, poet who felt the need to express this experience in her writings:

broken sunlight  
burns my eyes  
the tiny steel bars  
my only solitude  
for civilization  
they chain my legs  
and rape my body  
with my hands tied  
behind my back  
they trap my mind

---

<sup>39</sup> Fatima Dike, *The First South African* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979) 3. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*FSA*, page number).

and echo of chains  
in my *fragmenting*  
*consciousness* ...<sup>40</sup>

Rooi's rage, solitude and confusion, and fragmented mind are impeccably described in Poona's poem.

Dike's characters are devised with a complexity not observed in plays such as *Gangsters* or *Woza Albert!*, in which the characters serve mainly as types to comment on a social situation under the system of apartheid. On the other hand, Dike's depiction of the township people is closer to Matsemela 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 Ed Bullin's *Goin' a Buffalo*, which follows a plot line and examines Black people's social problems from inside the Black community. Dike places her characters and their experiences both in the township and in the outer world as inseparable and intertwined. Rooi is the embodiment of both worlds from which he has emerged and now reject him. Dike adds the woman's perspective that contributes for the first time to illustrate a wider and more real picture of the Black South African community.

Like Lena in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Freda—Rooi's mother—has been the life force and engine of the family. She has needed to fight against all kinds of adversities to keep a son whom she willingly decided to give birth to, in spite of being aware it would bring her trouble. She has committed her life to fight for what she believes, in spite of absurd laws that oppress the lives of human beings. She fell in love with a White man and she bravely faced all the consequences. Her courage and strong spirit contrasts with her husband's conformist personality. Austin, however, did not abandon her when he learned about Freda's Colored son.

Similarly to the female depicted in many of the plays written by African American women (Ntozake Shange, Sonia Sanchez or Aishah Rahman), Dike—and also Mhlophe—disclose a variety of women who have had to fight alone and who were left pregnant by men who did not take responsibility for their actions. Rooi leaves his girlfriend Thembi pregnant but refuses to take any action to help her. When Max discovers that Rooi is involved with a White woman, he talks to Rooi:

MAX  
... What about Thembi?

ROOI  
Hey s'bari, I want to forget that part of my life (*FSA*, 27).

Rooi abandons Thembi with the excuse of not being able to find a job, abdicating any commitment or responsibility to the woman he claimed to be in love with. Thembi and Freda face hardship rather than accepting defeat. Women, then, are portrayed as the most oppressed and abandoned, and yet the most courageous and brave. Men seem to feel overwhelmed when trouble appears. They feel besieged and turn to alcohol, drugs or robbery as the easiest way out—problem presented by Bullins in his plays, as the evils that

---

<sup>40</sup> Sobhna Poona, "Solitaire," in *Women in South Africa: From the Heart*, *op. cit.*, 101. Emphasis added.

were destroying the African American community. When Freda dies, we learn that the house is in a mess and Rooi keeps drinking until he is finally put in jail.

Dike, however, does not expose the hardships lived in the township as something isolated or independent from an oppressive system, which is actually the ultimate consequence of people's tribulations. The Group Areas Act was one of the laws that kept breaking families apart. Max and Freda comment on the repercussion that such laws have even upon the people who dictate them:

MAX  
... These people are mixed up.

FREDA  
And so are their laws, mntanam. (*FSA*, 14)

Equally absurd results the fact that Austin goes to bail his son out of prison and he is arrested instead "for not having [his] pass with [him]" (*FSA*, 39). Or the harassment Thembi and Rooi receive from the police for expressing their love and emotions unreservedly against the indictments of the Immorality Act that forbids interracial relationship (even though Rooi has grown up in Langa all his life, and is the son of a Black woman).

In her play, Dike raises the issue of the individual's identity in South African. What does it mean to be South African? What is a South African? Rooi, according to Booth, is the epitome of the *first South African* "as he encompasses all three important racial groups and identities."<sup>41</sup> Austin confronts Max concerning Rooi's identity and highlights what really matters about a person:

AUSTIN  
... What would you say Rooi is?

MAX  
Well . . . 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 that 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 to cut 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.*(*FSA*, 15. Emphasis added).

Through Austin, Dike illustrates how the laws of apartheid were dealing with people as if they were machines rather than human beings with feelings and emotions. Moreover, family is the nucleus of African society and the laws was tearing it apart.

Religion is another issue "presented as an integral part of racial conflict."<sup>42</sup> The play begins with Rooi's long monologue commenting on the Christian conception of creation of man in God's image, male and female, as explained in Genesis (*FSA*, 1). Man, however, has

---

<sup>41</sup> Booth, *op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

twisted religion, as presented in *Woza Albert!* and *Gangsters*. Like the playwrights of the aforementioned plays, Dike exposes the contradictions and hypocrisy of the Christian principles exercised by the South African government under apartheid, which were actually breaking God's commandment of all people born equal. The playwright analyzes Austin's own attitude of acceptance, not only of apartheid laws, but also of a Christian God presented by the same government:

AUSTIN

I have no one to turn to but You my Lord, for You are the father of the scum of this earth . . . Watch over this house. Watch over the child You gave us to look after. Bless this country and the people who rule it. (FSA, 33)

Dike exhibits how religion has been twisted and used to keep people playing a passive role, accepting their living conditions as if they were God's will.

Parallel to the combination of Xhosa and English she introduces in her plays, Dike blends the present situation in South Africa during the years of apartheid with the values and traditions that belong to the Xhosa and that should not disappear in their lives. She does not forget about music and song throughout the play. After the four monologues introducing the play, one of the stage directions states that while Freda and Austin are at home, "*tribal music [is] in the background*" (FSA, 4). Moreover, respect for the elders is one of the traditional values Freda keeps reminding Rooi along the play. Another traditional ceremony is introduced in the play: Rooi's circumcision. This ceremony appears described in one of the stage directions, "[While the music] *grows louder and the men come in singing and doing a bit of stick fighting. A man covered with a blanket leads the group. They guide him to his sitting place. The other men sit around him in a semicircle*" (FSA, 6). Although Dike reveres tradition she also exposes the sexism which exists in some of them, taking this ceremony as an example. Thus, one of the elders tells Rooi:

OLD MAN

My son, today you're a man. With this stick protect your father's house. *With this stick, beat you mother when she forgets that she's a woman in this house* (FSA, 6. Emphasis added).

Consequently, Dike penetrates into every corner of past and present asserting the need for the audience to engage in retrospection and reevaluate the traditions of her community, as well as Western culture and values.

In conclusion, *The First South African* displays the complexity enclosed in the township characters depicted in it, as well as the apartheid system that ruled South Africa in the past. Dike unveils the lies and exhibits the contradictions, the absurdity of apartheid laws and the self-inflicting pain observed within the Black community. The play remains open for the audience to decide what to do about their destiny since destiny is in their hands. The audience is confronted and encouraged to take responsibility in shaping their future rather than remain passive in the hands of a twisted justice or religion. Dike equally highlights the importance of knowing one's history and traditions; but she equally reminds that traditions cannot be continued and repeated blindly for they also need to be reevaluated. Therefore, history, tradition and present conditions must be continually explored and adapted to people's present conditions in order to build and enjoy a healthy future.



The Legacy of Tradition: Gcina Mhlophe's *Have You Seen Zandile?*

Cry out for joy  
For your seed has multiplied  
Shout out with great joy  
For you have grown strong  
Woman  
You will bring everything to pass.

Ndlaleni Radebe<sup>43</sup>

Never knew reality until the day I woke  
to find myself in despair, hopeless and confused.

The world that I want has crumbled  
The dark sky brings pain and nightmares.

...

The reality of it all cuts deep and wide.  
Yet hope and trust must never die.

Portia Rankoane<sup>44</sup>

Although *Have You Seen Zandile?* was originally conceived by Gcina Mhlophe, based on her childhood, it was devised by the playwright in collaboration with Maralin Vanrenen and Thembi Mtshali. Mhlophe recalls she had never told the story of her childhood to anybody before. In the play, she acknowledges the great influence her grandmother and her mother had exerted on her, for they were very strong characters. It is dedicated to the memory of the playwright's grandmother, "who deserves praise for the storyteller in [her]."<sup>45</sup> The play was first staged in the Market Theatre (Johannesburg) and was not taken to Durban or to Cape Town. It opened in 1985 and run for three years. It toured through England, Scotland, Germany and the United States (in Chicago), where she obtained the Jefferson Award.<sup>46</sup>

Mhlophe has written poetry, stories and plays; furthermore, she has been an actress, a storyteller, and could even sing and dance. Although she did not go to school to learn dance, she always liked dancing for it helps her to relax. She has been involved in theatre since 1982. Mhlophe starred in *Born in the R.S.A.*, by Barney Simon; participated in another play by Maishe Maponya that attempted to teach people about trade unions; and have worked in different workshops with students and professional actors. She has claimed that the workshop is a very creative venue to develop artistic inclinations and admires the discipline

---

<sup>43</sup>Ndlaleni Radebe, "Woman," in *Women in South Africa: From the Heart*, *op. cit.*, 99.

<sup>44</sup>Portia Rankoane, "Reality," in *Women In South Africa: From the Heart*, *op. cit.*, 105.

<sup>45</sup>Gcina Mhlophe, *Have You Seen Zandile?* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1988) i. Subsequent references to this text will be indicated by (*Zandile*, page number).

<sup>46</sup>Interview with Gcina Mhlophe, Johannesburg, October, 1989.

people show in the United States. Mhlophe has acknowledged the works by African American writers Maya Angelou, Wendolyn Brooks and Ntozake Shange. In addition, she has claimed to be a strange character in her community, for nobody has been able to put her down. Mhlophe strongly believed that by writing about her own experience she could encourage other women.<sup>47</sup>

Mhlophe is one of the writers who has wished to separate politics from her writing, asserting that in her plays she does not deal with “the big politics of the world and the country,” the way Manaka or Maponya do. She has explained that her writing deals with the person and the audience might interpret that personal experience “into something bigger and relate it to the rest of the world.”<sup>48</sup> However, she has acknowledged that there is always hope in her plays, which is also a political standpoint, but always related to ordinary people, their lives, their falling in love with each other rather than using rhetoric poetry or being strictly political. Furthermore, Mhlophe has especially highlighted her concern about people’s feelings in the portrayal of her characters.

Apart from English, she speaks Zulu and Xhosa—her father is Zulu and her mother, Xhosa. After *Have You Seen Zandile?*, Mhlophe wrote *Somdaka* (1989), in which she combines Western and traditional attire. Somdaka is the name of the male and main character of the play. He lives in the countryside and does not want to go to work either in the city or in the mines, for he is an outdoor person and he decides to seek other alternatives. He likes to dress well and he sews his own clothes with a sewing machine bought by his brother. Consequently, Somdaka destroys the myth about women being the ones who dress well and sew, and he does not think he is less of a man for doing so.<sup>49</sup> With this play, Mhlophe demonstrates there are other ways of surviving.

Like Dike, in most of her works she presents on stage a woman’s experience from a woman’s perspective, which offers a wider and more complete picture of the Black South African culture. *Have You Seen Zandile?*, in contrast to Manaka’s *Egoli* and Mtwa, Ngema and Simon’s *Woza Albert!*, performed by only two male actors, is performed by two women who enact a varied number of characters. Mhlophe’s choice of this women’s world is extremely significant because it presents a personal experience that expressly relates to women’s reality and the audience’s response speaks for it. Mhlophe recalls how women of all ages, teenagers and older women, would wait after the performance to talk to her when she impersonated Zandile. These women identified themselves with the experience they saw in the play, for “it was universal and not a straight-forward political play.”<sup>50</sup>

Mhlophe’s insistence in her not writing about straight-forward political issues, confirms what Margaret Wilkerson, other women writers and feminists have asserted about the existence of a woman’s aesthetics, about a woman’s different language and expression, and about the personal becoming political—even when women are not aware of their political statements implied in their personal experiences. An example is Mhlophe’s story

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

“Nokulunga’s Wedding.”<sup>51</sup> In this story, she refers to an African woman whose marriage is arranged without her consent, describing how this woman is kidnapped, harassed and raped. Mhlophe depicts a woman’s rebellious attitude against such a treatment, even if by the end she remains with her husband. Mhlophe parallels African women’s situation with that of slaves either in South Africa or North America, where they did continually rebelled against their condition. African women also rebel against the oppression and abuse received from men. This story is clearly a political statement about women’s experience under a sexist, and oppressive reality in which a woman can be treated like cattle.

*Have You Seen Zandile?* narrates Zandile’s story from her childhood to adulthood in fourteen scenes. The performance is presented on a bare stage using only a big box and two or three props which transform into different objects depending on the scene and the place where the action evolves. The emphasis of the action lies on the two actresses’ performing skills to enact different women characters of various ages that they exert through gesture, movement and simple costumes. As in *Woza Albert!*, women actors address invisible characters, or invisible objects. For instance, Zandile is heard in the first scene “*off-stage saying goodbye to her school friends*” and continues talking to them while she enters the stage. Then she begins to sing and plays “*hop-scotch game with stones . . . [Suddenly, she hears] a little girl laughing at her. She turns and focuses her attention where the imaginary child is seated.*” (*Zandile*, 1-2). In Zandile’s conversation with her imaginary friends or when she sings, or talks to her grandmother she blends Zulu and English.

Through parallel monologues, Zandile and Gogo are introduced and the audience can quickly perceive the love they feel for each other. On the one hand, if we see Zandile imagining the sweets that her grandmother will give her when she arrives home, on the other hand, we witness how Gogo keeps thinking of her grand-daughter before she arrives home by talking with care and affection to Zandile’s little doll when she runs it on the floor. Gogo wonders if Zandile is truly happy living with her and address the audience to share with them why she decided to keep her. When Zandile was a baby, Gogo was worried that Zandile’s parents would not have financial means to send her to school:

GOGO

. . . Tom [Gogo’s son] thinks education is not important for a girl. Ha! *Even if I have to die doing it, I’m keeping Zandile at school* (*Zandile*, 9. Emphasis added).

Education is a fundamental issue in this play, as proves the very first scene of the play that shows Zandile going home after school. Moreover, through Gogo, Mhlophe dismisses the myth about “education [not being] important for a girl]. Gogo not only wants to keep Zandile at school for her to receive education; Gogo herself is a teacher for Zandile, for she gives the child “the great gift of stories and the magic to tell them,” as well as the child “gives the grandmother a purpose”—very much in the line of the relationship maintained between students and teachers (*Zandile*, 11). The relationship existing between child and grandmother is one of great respect and love for each other, staying happy together away from the outer world, as stated by Zandile:

---

<sup>51</sup> Geina Mhlophe, “Nokulunga’s Wedding,” in *LIP: From Southern African Women*, Brown et al., eds. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983).

ZANDILE

Oh, Gogo, I'm going to stay with you forever because you always have surprises (*Zandile*, 15).

Mhlophe, however, depicts the type of education Zandile gets at school. It is through Zandile's eyes that we learn how teachers give African children white names at school. Zandile improvises a class and teaches a lesson to her grandmother's flowers acting like her teacher:

ZANDILE

[She addresses the flowers] . . . The inspector is coming here today. You know the inspector does not understand our language (*she starts giggling*) and we don't want to embarrass him. (*Puts her hand over her mouth and laughs*) He cannot say our real names so we must all use white names in class today (*Zandile*, 20).

Like Dike, Mhlophe comments on the outside world but from within Zandile's community, asserting—like Bullins does in his plays—the existence of an African culture, values and tradition. The Western education that Zandile seems to be receiving at school is complemented by Gogo's African teachings through storytelling. Furthermore, Mhlophe introduces a reversal of the topic of Westerners laughing at people's African names as if Western names were to be the general norm. In this case, it is Zandile who laughs at a White person who cannot pronounce her African name which she is very proud of, a way of asserting her cultural identity.

The audience plays a fundamental role in *Have You Seen Zandile?* Their participation is requested during the performance. Zandile disappears and her grandmother is looking for her everywhere. With Zandile's picture in her hand, Gogo addresses members of the audience:

GOGO

Have you seen this child? . . . Her name is Zandile . . . She is eight years old, she disappeared on the 14th December 1966 . . . Have you seen Zandile? (*Zandile*, 34).

This scene is reminiscent of the Mayo Mothers of Chile and Argentina looking for their missing children and relatives (although this is a different situation). Simultaneously to Gogo's search for Zandile, the audience can see Zandile's writing imaginary letters to Gogo on the sand because she is not allowed to write her grandmother. She is now living with her mother and helping her work in the field, away from school.

Another issue raised by Mhlophe in her play is that of women many times separated, and at times abandoned by men. In line with Gogo's teachings, Zandile does not follow tradition without questioning it, as did her mother. She wants to have a say and not to be given away to a man she does not love. We observe how Zandile is growing up as a new woman, who appreciates and values a rich tradition of storytelling and culture, while equally rejecting other issues which might imply women's oppression. Zandile misses her father—who is not living with her mother—and keeps asking her why her father is not with them:

ZANDILE

Ma, I miss my father. You never talk about him. (*Zandile*, 53)

Zandile's mother—Lulama—tells her how due to her pregnancy she was dismissed from the jazz band where she used to sing with her father. She and her husband, then, decided she should stay in Durban until Zandile was born. Lulama complains and wishes that “men could get pregnant too.” (*Zandile*, 55). Mhlophe, once more, focuses on the issues not only of pregnant women who have to raise their children alone—as Dike, Sanchez or Shange do in their plays. She also shows the need for education and family planning. Mhlophe exposes how pregnant women are rejected under patriarchal patterns. When women get pregnant they usually lose their jobs—like Thembi in *The First South African*, who is fired from her teaching position.

Women's issues appear in the play as part of any woman's experience. Similarly, the way girls find out about their first menstruation is presented in a scene that takes place in a river between Zandile and her friend Lindiwe. Throughout this scene, we learn that sometimes there are snakes in the river that bite girls and they bleed. They also believe that blood comes out of girls when they sleep with boys and they refer to a girl who had blood in her dress at school. Kennedy had also shown this fear of the possibility of blood trespassing a girl's dress in her play *A Lesson in Dead Language*. Mhlophe, like Kennedy, presents the lack of sexual education girls suffered from in their respective communities. These girls go through puberty with fears, without being informed about how to take their step into womanhood.

Zandile, however, has received a great legacy from her grandmother: her storytelling. This legacy is now part of Zandile's reality, as presented in the praise poem she recites for Mr. Hlatshwayo, who is going on pension: “*Zandile completes the first part of Mr Hlatshwayo's family praise name, which every African family has. These names outline each family's history. She then starts a song*” (*Zandile*, 63). While she follows the whole ceremony, the audience sees Zandile's grandmother who watches Zandile's performance and leaves before her granddaughter can notice her presence.

The play ends with Zandile (now eighteen years old) who has found out the address to contact her grandmother after years of separation. When Zandile arrives at the given address, she is told by a neighbor that Gogo has just died and left a suitcase to be given to her. Zandile opens the suitcase, and she “*takes out all the little parcels her grandmother has been putting away for her through all the years*” (*Zandile*, 77). Thus, Zandile, now a woman, returns to her grandmother's place where she spent her childhood. The circular structure of the play presents a ritualistic quality observed not only in the return to the same place, but also in the cycle of life and death, for now the grandmother is dead and Zandile will continue to carry the torch that Gogo kindled in her heart.

Gogo's teaching is a flame burning in Zandile's spirit which will never abandon her. It is the memory and legacy of women like Gogo that Mhlophe attempts to bring out of the darkness for other women to be encouraged to follow. Gogo symbolizes all those women whose names will not be included in the history books, but who are at Africa's heart and will continue to beat in women's lives and lead them in their everyday courageous struggle of survival.

A Final Note: An Open Section for New Black South African Women's Voices and Women's Issues

We are all mothers,  
and we have that fire within us,  
of powerful woman  
we can laugh beauty into life  
and still make you taste  
the salt tears of our knowledge.

...

We have stripped ourselves raw and naked piece by piece,  
until our flesh lies flayed  
with blood on our own hands.  
What terrible thing can you do us  
which we have not done to ourselves?  
What can you tell us  
which we did not deceive ourselves with  
a long time ago?

...

And Yes,  
we have conceived  
to forge our mutilated hopes  
into the substance of visions beyond your imaginings  
to declare through pain our deliverance:  
. . . you shall not escape  
what we *will* make  
of the broken pieces of our lives.

Abena P.A. Busia<sup>52</sup>

Two plays on Black South African women need to be mentioned. One of the plays is written by a man, Smal Ndaba (*So Where To?*) and the other, created by a group of women in workshop (*Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokotho (You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock)*) under the direction of Phyllis Klotz. Like one of Matsemela Manaka's last plays, *Goree*, performed by only two women, Smal Ndaba's *So Where To?* includes as characters three teenagers, a nurse and the father of one of the teenagers. The play deals with the Black South African woman's issues on sexual education, pregnancy and birth control, touching Black South African women's condition more directly than Manaka's play. *So Where To?* is a word game which can also be read as SO-WE-TO. Ndaba is very much concerned about children's education and about trying to attract parents' attention to make them understand the situation under which their children are living. As an old member of the theatre group Workshop '71, he recalls how in their workshops the actors analyzed stereotypes and attempted to shatter them by offering issues that were relevant to the people in the townships. One of the main goals of this theatre group, was precisely to take theatre to the people in the townships. Ndaba recognized the Black Consciousness Movement had exercised an immense impact on him. In his work, he aims to speak from the perspective of the Black experience and compel Black audiences to think what that experience is about.<sup>53</sup>

Ndaba's play consists of a seventy per cent of written work and the rest was created in workshop. The play was co-directed by him and Phyllis Klotz. As already stated, Ndaba's

---

<sup>52</sup> Abena P.A. Busia, "Liberation," *Testimonies of Exile* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1982) 35-36.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Smal Ndaba, Johannesburg, 1989.

main concern was to educate the audience, especially children. He was preoccupied with the issue of teenage pregnancy that was emerging in a special alarming manner within the Black community. Information about birth control had not been widely disseminated and abortion was not considered an option. *So Where To?* was Ndaba's attempt to place a mirror in front of the audience to show how frustrated parents might feel. He worked out of his own experience as a parent, for he himself had gone through the experience with a teenage daughter. The play depicts how parents need to find a solution for this problem that, obviously, has an equally strong repercussion on teenagers who are not ready yet to become mothers.<sup>54</sup>

*So Where To?* takes place in the maternity section of a hospital in which three teenagers are about to give birth to their babies. Through their dialogues, we learn about how they became pregnant by accident and about their fears and lack of preparation and financial means to welcome and raise their children. Ndaba also introduces racial issues focusing on the problem of a Black girl who is giving birth a White child. The other girls reject her for considering her a traitor to the Black community. Once again, as Dike did in *The First South African*, the issue of racial identity is brought up. Through this example, Ndaba attempted to alert people about the danger and absurdity of apartheid that was making people forget about human values, even when considering babies. According to apartheid laws, this White child would not be allowed to live with her mother for being a different color. In a review appeared in the South African newspaper *Sowetan*, *So Where To?* was considered "a metaphor for the broad spectrum of political thought in South Africa . . . [It mirrors] the current situation with its many different responses to repressive laws which aggravate the effects of social transition—particularly urbanisation." The review concluded that Ndaba did not propose solutions but showed people engaged in the development of a democratic future for South Africa.<sup>55</sup>

Although Ndaba's play is the manifestation of his sensitivity towards women's issues in the Black community, his play does not deal with the complexity of characters observed in Dike's and Mhlophe's depiction of their women characters. Ndaba departed from a social problem that affected him directly as a parent, but did not deepen into the personal experience of that girl who is faced with an unwanted pregnancy. It needs to be noted, though, that part of the play was created in workshop and that a woman's touch is observed in the presentation of a woman's specific experience. Nevertheless, Ndaba's concern and presentation of a woman's problem deserves special consideration for it shows Black South African men were beginning to focus on women's issues, which were doubly problematic under apartheid and under a patriarchal and sexist society. Another actor and playwright I interviewed in October 1989 was John Ledwaba, who also was interested in examining Black women's situation in South Africa. Ledwaba asserted to be working on the issue of Black women who move to urban areas and are forced into prostitution, something that goes against the religion and values of their culture. The fact that men playwrights were being sensitive to women's oppression at that time was extremely significant for it meant there was a growing awareness that still needed to expand among both women and men.

---

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Shafa'ath-Ahmad Khan, "Edinburgh, That's Where," in *Sowetan* (August 10, 1989): 1.

*Wathint' Abafazi*, *Wathint' Imbokotho* was another interesting play created in workshop by Phyllis Klotz, Thobeka Maqutyana, Nomvula Qosha, Xolani September, Poppy Tsira and Itumeleng Wa-Lehulere. This piece was a good portrayal of Black South African women's experience, which dealt with the work they were forced to perform in their daily struggle for survival and the conditions under which they performed 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.; male violence and sexual abuse against women, including rape; pregnant women who were forced to work all day in spite of their advanced state of pregnancy and who quite often had miscarriages as a result of physical effort; women at home who continued to be men's slaves; women's degrading and humiliating experiences with their husbands when visiting them in the hostels (where these men were forced to live while working away from the township); and women's illiteracy and lack of education. The play concludes with an assertive war-like dance and singing that 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.

Only three actresses who enact many different roles (including male and female roles from different backgrounds, classes and ages) perform *Wathint' Abafazi*. Most of the objects needed for the performance are mimed. Transformations from scene to scene and from one character to another move as fast as the scenes in *Woza Albert!*, and it is upon the female actors' performing skills that the emphasis of action lies. Like Percy and Mbongeni in *Woza Albert!*, the three women actors create all kinds of sounds: helicopters, sirens, birds singing, etc. *Wathint' Abafazi* is also a plotless piece whose weight does not lie on 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.

Dike, Mhlophe, the women from Crossroads who had written and performed *Imfuduso* in 1979, and *Wathint' Abafazi* are just some scattered examples of the voices by Black South African women writers who had begun to speak out and break the silence of their oppression. In the 1980s, Black South African women had already commenced to affirm, through their personal and social experiences, the existence of a new aesthetics that was slowly but powerfully emerging—in spite of the social conditions these women had to face. The war-like dance of *Wathint' Abafazi* is the most evident statement of Black South African women's determination of their commitment to Africa's and African women's liberation by the final years of apartheid.



## Conclusion

Revolution is . . .

when a forest rises to sharpen  
its branches like pencils  
then poetry will inscribe  
the song of the river in ink.

Essop Patel<sup>1</sup>

Ngugi [wa Thiong'o] has eaten a little of this earth. And yes. We all have to eat a little earth before we die. And we who come from the earth will finally taste of ourselves. This earth. Which will seep from the corners of our mouths and make us whole.

Sonia Sanchez<sup>2</sup>

We spoke of longings/yearnings/the unknown  
we spoke in the tongue of the snake  
the hoot of the owl  
tongues of our ancestors  
dancing with the wind  
. . .  
they've made themselves a home here  
blood relatives converging  
wherever my soul is lurking  
telling me now yes now  
go to the center of the sun

Ntozake Shange<sup>3</sup>

Carl G. Jung showed his disinterest for material progress and wisely realized the sickness of the Occident, criticizing Westerner's insatiability as part of his own patrimony. This insatiability, in Jung's words, is unilateral and "such a diet for the soul will drive [the Westerner] to a severe imbalance. This is which produces the Occidental man's sickness, who on top of it does not rest until he has contaminated the whole world with his voracity and restlessness."<sup>4</sup> Africans and African Americans have been victims of the Occidental sickness pointed out by Jung. Conscious of Western political and intellectual imperialism

---

<sup>1</sup>Essop Patel, "Revolution is," in *Fragments in the Sun*, Patel (Johannesburg: Afrika Cultural Centre, 1985) 42.

<sup>2</sup>Sonia Sanchez, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o at Temple University," in *Under a Soprano Sky*, Sanchez (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1989) 87.

<sup>3</sup>Ntozake Shange, "Conversation with the Ancestors," in *Ridin' the Moon in Texas: World Paintings*, Shange (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) 13.

<sup>4</sup>"Carl Gustav Jung: La sabiduría de los sueños," in *Nueva Conciencia: Plenitud Personal y Equilibrio Planetario para el Siglo XXI*. An extra monographic issue of *Integral*, 22 (Barcelona: Integral Ediciones, 1991) 60.

upon their cultures, Black South Africans and African Americans opted for an artistic birth that would reject the political and artistic patterns of the Western world as the only valid ones.

The Black Theatre Movement operated an enormous impact both in the Western world as well as within the African and African American communities. The Movement demonstrated the existence of heterogeneity of cultures against the Western false claim for an only and homogeneous one. The Black Theatre Movement in the United States opened the door to and encouraged many other communities who shared specific and genuine characteristics to voice their equally genuine values. Furthermore, the Movement helped the development and growth of other movements—i.e., women and gay movements.

In the creation of the Black Theatre Movement, reciprocity with the African continent was established. The liberation and independence of new African countries by the end of the fifties had equally encouraged African Americans in their own struggle for liberation, and helped them assert the values that were part of their African American culture. Similarly, Black South Africans were aware of both African Americans' and other African countries' struggle for liberation. The Black Power Movements that originated in the United States during the sixties were a significant inspiration for Black South Africans and their Black Consciousness Movement; and Frantz Fanon's theories nourished both the political and artistic movements of African Americans and Black South Africans.

The artists of the Black Theatre Movement in the United States and in South Africa shared the same social-political goals and aesthetic patterns. They were committed theatre artists who believed their community to be at the center of their art. Consequently, these artists continued the African traditional principle of art and life being intertwined as well as art and the artist performing a social function and responsibility within their community. Black theatre comprised a clear social function, suggesting new avenues to be pursued in Blacks' struggle for freedom both in the United States and in South Africa. As Maponya had asserted regarding his theatre, Black theatre was not dogmatic but didactic, for it attempted to reach a Black community and raise awareness among their people of the evils of oppression and alienation under which they are forced to live.

Within the Black Theatre Movement of both countries, a militant theatre and a theatre of experience have been observed, sharing a common goal: hope for liberation. The theatre of Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka Baraka, Ntozake Shange and Maishe Maponya may be included in the former. Baraka speaks of *poems like fists* and Maponya of *theatre on the fist*. These playwrights of the militant theatre deemed necessary a liberation of the mind from oppression in order for them to be able to liberate a nation and/or a group—i.e., women. In the theatre of experience, on the other hand, Ed Bullins, Douglas T. Ward, Adrienne Kennedy, Percy Mtwa/Mbongeni Ngema/Barney Simon, Matsemela Manaka, Fatima Dike, and Gcina Mhlophe focused on the Black experience, asserting the Black community's strengths and weakness as separate body from the dominant culture.

African American and Black South African women playwrights have been comprised within a woman's aesthetics that shares the militancy and experience observed in the aforementioned theatre classification, characterized though by a double factor: race and gender. These women playwrights created a militant theatre and/or theatre of experience that applied to both the Black community and African and African American women. Black women playwrights have made of their personal experience—as Black and female—a

political statement that widens the artistic and socio-cultural perspective offered by their male counterparts. Even Sarah's suicide in Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* becomes the acknowledgement of a defeat necessary in a process of introspection to achieve self-affirmation. Sarah's suicide can also stand for the death of an insecure and fragmented person—like Clay's death in *Dutchman* refers to the death of Baraka's whitened self; or the crucified poet in Maponya's *Gangsters*, in which the blood shed by martyrs grows like trees of life. The plays might equally celebrate womanhood, such as Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*.

Black women have chosen among their main theme, women as warriors or militants; women who have been raped, who are pregnant or abandoned by their men; and women and menstruation, to cite a few examples. Black women's thematic choices display a feminine array specifically and genuinely related to women's experience, which is practically non-existent in the plays written by Black males. African American and Black South African women have then annihilated false and humiliating stereotypes created around them.

It is significant to observe that Black women playwrights used a different language to present the issues originating from their feminine and societal reality. Hansberry, for instance, although a militant and revolutionary, did not use the violent language and radicalism observed in Baraka's militant and revolutionary plays. Moreover, when Mhlophe claimed that she did not write about *big politics* as men playwrights such as Maponya did, she was not fully aware that she was actually doing so. Mhlophe's plays affirm the existence of an African legacy and culture that had survived and existed within a dominant culture that was denying African values at the time of the apartheid. By presenting her own experience and deepening inside herself, Mhlophe exposed a perspective that was denied by the system of apartheid. From the moment she disclosed a different reality, confronting the government's assumption of a homogeneous culture, she was making a political statement.

Plays by Black women uttered a Black experience that was taken from their inner personal experience, whereas plays by Black men mainly focused on social issues from a more outward perspective. Jung has acknowledged this difference claiming that

the conscious attitude of woman is in general far more exclusively personal than that of man. Her world is made up of fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, husbands and children. . . . The man's world is the nation, the state, business concerns, etc. His family is simply a means to an end, one of the foundations of the state, and his wife is not necessarily the woman for him (at any rate not as the woman means in when she says "my man"). The general means more to him than the personal: his world consists of a multitude of coordinated factors, whereas her world, outside her husbands, terminates in a sort of cosmic mist.<sup>5</sup>

Jung's statement is partly true when referring to Black women. Black women speak of their personal experiences, yet they do not forget nor do they see the world outside their families *in a sort of cosmic mist*. Black women playwrights speak from their personal experience and reach to the outside (Hansberry and Shange are two of the most evident examples). Baraka and Hansberry might be the only ones who have used an inner journey to reach an outward perspective, being both perspectives present in their plays. Black women and men playwrights have adopted components that belong to both Western and African and/or African American tradition, which make them representatives of a unique and distinctive

---

<sup>5</sup> Carl G. Jung, *The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung*, S. de Laszlo, ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1959) 180.

theatre. In this line and referring to African American theatre, Geneviève Fabre has observed:

It creates dialectical relationships between what it destroys and what it creates. On one side is the West, kingdom of rationality and technology. On the other is the spirit, called soul or blackness, which breaks away from reason in order to save the world. On one side domination and the restrictive law of the oppressor; on the other side liberation, freedom, and an enduring reconciliation among blacks. The theatre stages repeated confrontations between these two orders.<sup>6</sup>

Fabre's assertion is equally applicable to Black South African theatre. Additionally, Black theatre has brought into balance through a dialectical relationship the creation of an aesthetics/form and social issues/content to demonstrate the existence of a different culture. This culture possesses different artistic expressions and values, away from Western parameters, the aesthetics of self-affirmation.

Among the components that are encompassed by the aesthetics of self-affirmation are:

1) Awareness of and request for audience participation. The audience is placed in an active position from which it can question the action on stage while opening the possibility to them of taking another action beyond the theatre walls within their community.

2) Related to the first point, ritual is adopted as a necessary component. Ritual helps understand the mysterious and hostile forces around people. It equally creates a sense of togetherness and unity as a group, the Black nation. As in church services (whose tradition has operated a tremendous influence on Black theatre), rituals suggest sequences rather than a story line, something that has been adopted into the plays.

3) Incorporation of essential elements that belong to the oral tradition, such as the art of storytelling (i.e., Hansberry's inclusion of Mandingo's story in *Les Blancs*). Parallel to the integration of these components is the social function they represent, thus, enunciating strategies for survival (i.e., signifying or playing the dozens in the African American tradition; the use humor and satire, part of both the African and African American traditions, like in Ward's *Day of Absence* or Mtwa/Ngema/Simon's *Woza Albert!*).

4) The blend of musical tradition with the written text, in which the drum occupies a central place. Drum rhythms are incorporated into poetry, and poetry is equally incorporated into the plays. Dance is equally integrated, which specially offers the spirit force and movement that at times is complemented by the prominent expressiveness of gestural language. Consequently, a theatrical language develops away from the limits imposed by the written text, for written language adopts the rhythms and gestures of movement, music and dance. The dramatic structure is shaped by the blending of elements that generate from the folk, religious and musical traditions. The plays offer multiple levels of reading and hearing, in the manner music raises multiple levels of—aesthetics, emotional, mental—consciousness. The playwrights of the Black Theatre Movement quite often include simultaneous action sequences—Manaka's *Egoli*, Kennedy's *Funnyhouse* or Shange's *for colored girls*.

The combination of the aforementioned elements demonstrates the existence of a different theatre that reveals a particular and differentiated reality from that presented by the

---

<sup>6</sup> Geneviève Fabre, *Drumbeats, Masks, and Metaphor: Contemporary Afro-American Theatre* (Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London (England): Harvard University Press, 1983) 25.

White dominant culture. Fabre, however, claims that African American theatre has become “isolated from the audience on which it had based its existence and validity.”<sup>7</sup> She further argues that reconciliation with the dominant society, after the dynamism that emphasized separatism, has distanced African American theatre from the African American community. In Fabre’s opinion, African American theatre will survive “only if a dialogue with the groups is maintained and if the forms that support that dialogue are constantly renewed.”<sup>8</sup> The same cannot be applied to Black South African theatre for, after apartheid ended, playwrights are still struggling to reach the Black South African audience who continues to be the main protagonist. The significance of the Black Theatre Movement, though, needs to be strongly acknowledged both in the United States and in South Africa.

If the Black Theatre Movement in the United States and in South Africa opened the door to new artistic possibilities, asserting and encouraging heterogeneity of cultures, much is still needed in the field of criticism. It is true the eighties and nineties and the new century seem to have erupted with force and new scholars of African and African American literature have begun to propose new critical patterns and to offer new perspectives. Nevertheless, in the field of Black theatre, either in the United States, Africa or Latin America, there is still an urgent need to develop new theories or guidelines that help analyze and open new perspectives of approaching it. Jung stated that “theory-building is the outcome of discussion among many,”<sup>9</sup> and I totally agree with him. Consequently, I hope that this study may generate additional questioning and further discussion; and that further discussion may culminate in the delineation of new theories that help readers and audiences unveil hidden meanings beyond the written and/or performed word.

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>9</sup> Jung, *op. cit.*, 182.



# Bibliography

## I. GENERAL REFERENCE

- African Books in Print*, by Hans Zell. London: Mansell Information, 1978.
- The Black Resource Guide*. Library of Congress. Ben Jonson Publisher. Catalog card no.82-83692, May 1983.
- Dictionary of Black African Civilization*, by George Balandier and Jacques Maquet. New York: Leon Amiel, Pub., 1974.
- Dictionary of Black Culture*, ed. by Wade Baskin and Richard Runes. New York: Philosophical Library, 1973.
- Directory of Afro-American Resources: Race Relations Information Center*, ed. by Walter Schaltz. New York and London: R. R. Bowker, 1970.
- Larousse World Mythology*, ed. by Pierre Grimal. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965.
- McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia World Drama*, ed. by Stanely Hochman. New York, 1984.
- Modern World Drama: An Encyclopedia*. New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1972.
- New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*, introd. by Robert Graves. London; New York: Paul Hamlyn, 1968.
- A New Reader's Guide to African Literature*, by Hans M. Zell and C. Coulon.
- The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, ed. by Phyllis Hartnoll. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- The Oxford History of South Africa*, ed. by Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.

## II. BOOKS

### A. African Cultures

#### 1. General sources on AFRICA and POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETIES: History, Politics, Sociology, Music, Literature, Women Studies and Criticism, Theatre, Drama—including Plays

- Abrash, Barbara. *Black African Literature in English since 1952*. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1967.
- African Literatures in the Twentieth Century: A Guide*. New York: Ungar Pub. Co., 1986.
- Amuta, Chidi. *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*. London and New Jersey: Institute for African Alternatives, Zed Books Ltd., 1989.
- Anyidoho, Kofi et al. eds. *Interdisciplinary Dimensions of African Literature*. Washington, D.C.: African Literature Association and Three Continents Press, Inc., 1985.
- Asein, S. O., ed. *Comparative Approaches to Modern African Literature*. Ibadan (Nigeria): Department of English, University of Ibadan, 1982-1985.
- Banham, Martin. *African Theatre Today*. London: Pitman, 1976.
- , Errol Hill and George Woodyard, eds. *The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994.
- , James Gibbs and Femi Osofisan, eds. *African Theatre in Development*. Oxford: James Currey, 1999.
- *African Theatre: Playwrights and Politics*. Oxford: James Currey, 2001.

- Beier, Ulli, ed. *Black Orpheus: An Anthology of African and Afro-American Prose*. London: Longman, 1979.
- *Introduction to African Literature: An Anthology of Critical Writing from Black Orpheus*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1967.
- Benson, Peter. *Black Orpheus, Transition and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Boas, Franziska. *The Function of Dance in Human Society*. New York: The Boas School, 1944.
- Brown, Lloyd W. *Women Writers in Black Africa*. Westport, (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1981.
- Burness, Mary Lou, ed. *Wanasema Conversations with African Writers*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, African Studies Program, 1985.
- Busia, Abena P.A. *Testimonies of Exile*. Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, Inc., 1982.
- Chinweizu, et al. *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*. Vol. I: "African Fiction and Poetry and Their Critics." Washington: Howard University Press, 1983.
- Clarke, Matthew. *Músicas del Mundo: África*. Madrid: Celeste Ediciones, 1995.
- Cook, David. *African Literature: A Critical View*. London: Longman Group Ltd., 1977.
- Cortés López, José Luis. *Arte negro africano*. Madrid: Editorial Mundo Negro, 2000
- *Historia contemporánea de Africa (desde 1940 hasta nuestros días): De Nkrumah a Mandela*. Madrid: Editorial Mundo Negro, 2001.
- Cosentino, Donald. *Defiant Maids and Stubborn Farmers: Tradition and Invention in Mende Story Performance*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Courlander, Harold. *A Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdom Sayings and Humor of Africa*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1975.
- Drachler, Jacob, comp. *Black Homeland/Black Homeland/Black Diaspora: Cross-Currents of the African Relationship*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975.
- Duerden, Dennis and Cosmo Pieterse, eds. *African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews*. New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1972.
- East, N. B., ed. *African Theatre: A Checklist of Critical Materials*. New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1970.
- Egejuru, Phaniel Akubueze. *Black Writers, White Audiences: A Critical Approach to African Literature*. Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1978.
- *Towards African Literary Independence: A Dialogue with Contemporary African Writers*. Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1980.
- Etherton, Michael. *The Development of African Drama*. London: Hutchinson, 1982.
- Gilbert, Helen, ed. *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology*. London & New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Graham-White, Anthony. *The Drama of Black Africa*. New York, Hollywood: Samuel French, Inc., 1974.
- Gugelberger, Georg M. *Marxism and African Literature*. Trenton New Jersey: African World Press, 1986.
- Harding, Frances, ed. *The Performance Arts in Africa: A Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Institut Culturel Africain (ICA). *Quel theatre pour le developement en Afrique?* Dakar Senegal): Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1985.
- Jeyifo, Biodum. *The Truthful Lie: Essays in Sociology of African Drama*. London: New Beacon Books Ltd., 1985.
- Jones, Eldred Durosimi, ed. *African Literature Today*. London: Heinemann, 1983.
- *Women in African Literature Today: A Review*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1987.
- July, R. W. and Peter Benson, eds. *African Cultural and Intellectual Leaders and the Development of the New African Nations*. New York: Rockefeller Foundation, Ibadan (Nigeria): University of Ibadan Press, 1982.
- July, Robert W. *An African Voice: The Role of the Humanities in African Independence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1987.
- *The Origins of Modern African Thought*. New York: Praeger, 1967.
- Kennedy, Scott. *In Search of African Theatre*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973.
- Kerr, David. *African Popular Theatre from Pre-Colonial Times to Present Day*. London: James Currey, 1995.
- Kidd, Ross. *From People's Theatre for Revolution to Popular Theatre for Reconstruction: Diary of a Zimbabwean Workshop*. The Hague, Netherlands: Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (CESO) and Toronto, Canada: International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), 1984.
- *The Popular Performing Arts, Non-formal Education and Social Change in the Third World: A Bibliography and Review Essays*. The Hague, Netherlands: Centre for the Study of Education and Developing Countries, 1982.
- Kimua, T. H. *Let Socialism Come of Itself: A Message to the Black African Continent*. Nairobi, Kenya: Gideon S. Were Press, 1968.



- Lindfors, Bernth. *Black African Literature in English: 1977-1987. Supplement*. New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1986.
- Litto, Fredric M. *Plays from Black Africa*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1968.
- Manuel, Peter. *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World*. New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Maquet, Jacques. *Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Martin, Phyllis M. and Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977.
- Mbele, Majola, ed. *Viewpoints: Essays on Literature and Drama*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1980.
- Meredith, Martin. *The First Dance of Freedom: Black Africa in Africa in the Postwar Era*. New York and Cambridge: Harper and Row Publishers, 1984.
- Moore, Clark D. and Ann Dunbar. *Africa Yesterday and Today*. Toronto (Canada) and New York: Bantam Pathfinder Editions, 1972.
- Ngara, Emmanuel. *Art and Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing*. London: Heinemann, 1985.
- Nketia, Kwabena J. H. *The Music of Africa*. New York; London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974.
- Nurse-Bray, Paul F. *Aspects of Africa's Identity: Five Essays*. Kampala, Makerere: Institute of Social Research, Makerere University, 1973.
- Obbo, Christine. *African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981.
- Ogunba, Oyin and Abiola Irele, eds. *Theatre in Africa*. Ibadan (Nigeria): Ibadan University Press, 1978.
- Okpewho, Isidore. *Myth in Africa: A Study of Its Aesthetic and Cultural Relevance*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Osahon, Naiwu. *Black Power: The African Predicament*. Lagos, Nigeria: Di Nigro Press, 1976.
- Oyono-Mbia, Guillaume. *Faces of African Independence: Three Plays*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988.
- Owomoyela, Oyekan, ed. *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993.
- Pereyra, Verónica y Luis María Mora. *Literaturas africanas: De las sombras a la luz*. Madrid: Editorial Mundo Negro, 1998.
- Pieterse, Cosmo and Donald Munro, eds. *Protest and Conflict in African Literature*. London and Ibadan (Nigeria): Heinemann, 1982.
- Priebe, Richard K. and Thomas A. Hale, eds. *Artist and Audience: African Literature as a Shared Experience*. Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press and Africa Literature Association, 1977.
- Ranger, T.O. *Dance and Society in East Africa, 1890-1970—The Beni Ngoma*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975.
- Rubin, Don, Ousmane Diakhaté & Hansel Ndumbe Ehoh, eds. *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre: Africa*. London & New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Scheub, Harold. *African Oral Narratives, Proverbs, Riddles, Poetry and Songs*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1977.
- Schipper, Mineke. *Theatre and Society in Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982.
- *Théâtre et Société en Afrique*. Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1984.
- Senghor, Leopold Sedar. *On African Socialism*. New York: Praeger, 1964.
- Shelton, Austin J., ed. *The African Assertion: A Critical Anthology of African Literature*. Indianapolis and New York: The Odyssey Press, 1968.
- Smith, Rowland, ed. *Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature*. Longman: Dalhousie University Press, 1976.
- Soyinka, Wole—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT WOLE SOYINKA:
- Gibbs, James et al. *Wole Soyinka: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*. Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Jones, Eldred D. *Wole Soyinka*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973.
- *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*. London and Ibadan (Nigeria): Heinemann, 1978.
- Katrak, Ketu H. *Wole Soyinka and Modern Tragedy: A Study of Dramatic Theory and Practice*. New York and Westport (Connecticut): Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*. In *Collected Plays 1*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- *A Dance of the Forests*. In *Collected Plays 1*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- *Jero's Metamorphosis*. In *Collected Plays 2*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

- *The Lion and the Jewel*. In *Collected Plays 2*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Thiam, Awa. *Speak Out, Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa*. London: Pluto Press, 1986.
- Traore, Bakary. *Theatre Negro-Africain: The Black African Theatre and Its Social Functions*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1972.
- Vansina, Jan. *Art History in Africa: An Introduction to Method*. London and New York: Longman, 1987.
- Vaz, Carlos. *Para um conhecimento do teatro africano*. Lisboa: Ulmeiro, 1978.
- Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi and Micere Githae Mugo. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. London and Nairobi: Heinemann, 1976.
- *Writers in Politics: Essays*. London: Heinemann Ed. Books, 1981.
- Wanjala, Chris L., ed. *Standpoints on African Literature: A Critical Anthology*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973.
- Warren, Lee. *The Theatre of Africa: An Introduction*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1975.
- Wiredu, K. *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Wright, Edgar. *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1973.

## 2. General Sources on South-Africa: History, Politics, Philosophy

- Adam, Herbert. *Ethnic Power Mobilized: Can South Africa Change*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977
- African Perspectives on South Africa: A Collection of Speeches, Articles and Documents*. Claremont, California: D. Philip Publisher and Stanford: Hoover, n.d.
- Biko, Stephen. *Escribo lo que me da la gana*. Pasadena, California: Hope Publishing House, 1989.
- *I Write What I Like*. Aelred Stubbs. London: HEB, 1979.
- The Black Consciousness Movement of Azania*. Black Consciousness Movement of Azania plays tribute to Steve Bantu Biko.
- Brooks, Alan. *Whirlwind Before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa from June to December*. London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980.
- Burchett, Wilfred G. *Southern Africa Stands Up: The Revolution In Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa*. New York: Urizen Books, 1978.
- Campschreur, Willen and Joost Divendal, eds. *Culture in Another South Africa*. New York: Olive Branch Press, 1989.
- Chirenje, J. Mutero. *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883- 1916*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University, 1987.
- Comaroff, Jean. *Body of Power/Spirit of Resistance: The Culture History of a South African People*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Comaroff, John L., ed. *The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: An African at Mafeking*. Johannesburg: MacMillan South Africa, 1973.
- Davenport, T.R.H. *South Africa: A Modern History*. Bergville, South Africa: Southern Book Publishers, 1987.
- Denson, Donald et al. *Southern Africa Since 1800*. Essex: Longman, Ltd., 1972.
- Derrida, Jacques and Mustapha Tlili, eds. *For Nelson Mandela*. New York: Seaver Books, Henry Holt and Company, 1987.
- Fatton, Robert Jr. *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986.
- Gerhart, Gail M. *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Godwin, June. *Cry Amandla!: South African Women and the Question of Power*. New York and London: Africana Publishing Co., 1984.
- Horrell, Muriel. *The African Homelands of South Africa*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1973.
- Lea, Rev. Allen. *Native Separatist Church Movement in South Africa*. Cape Town and Johannesburg: Juta and Co., Ltd., n.d.
- Leenhardt, Maurice. *Le Mouvement Éthiopien au Sud de l'Afrique de 1896 à 1899*. Paris: Académie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer, 1976.

- Makhoba, Mandlenkosi. *The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers (Ilanga Lizophumela Abasebenzi)*. Johannesburg: Ravan Workers Series, Ravan Press, 1984.
- Mangena, Mosibudi. *On Your Own: Evolution of Black Consciousness in South Africa/Azania*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1989.
- Mashabela, Harry. *Townships of the PWV*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1988.
- Millard, Arnold, ed. *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa*. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Mothlabi, Mokgethi. *The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid: A Social-Ethical Analysis*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987.
- Mutwa, Credo Vusamazulu. *Indaba, My Children*. London: Kahn and Averill, 1982.
- *Let Not My Country Die*. Pretoria: United Publishers International (Pty) Ltd., 1986.
- Nolutshungu, Sam C. *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982.
- Pifer, Alan. *South Africa in the American Mind*. Johannesburg: The South African Institute of International Affairs, 1981.
- Plaatje, Sol T. *Native Life in South Africa, Before and Since the European War and the Boer Rebellion*. London: P.S. King and Son, Ltd., 1916.
- Sizwe, N. One Azania, *One Nation: The National Question in South Africa*. London: Zed Press, 1979.
- Smith, David M., ed. *Apartheid: Aspects of Urbanization and Social Change in South Africa*. London and Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1982.
- Soweto Uprising*. Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soweto\\_riots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soweto_riots).
- Sundermeir, Theo, ed. *Church and Nationalism in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1975.
- Suttner, Raymond and Jeremy Cronin. *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986.
- Swan, Maureen. *Ghandi: The South African Experience*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985.
- Walshe, Peter. *Black Nationalism in South Africa: A Short History*. Johannesburg: Spro-Cas Publications, 1973.
- Webster, Eddie, ed. *Essays in Southern African Labour History*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986.
- Woods, Donald. *Biko*. New York and London: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1978.

### 3. Sources on South African Literature, Women Studies, Criticism. Theatre and Drama—including Plays

- Barnett, Ursula A. *A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980)*. London and Amherst (Massachusetts): University of Massachusetts Press, 1983.
- Black Theatre in South Africa*. London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1976.
- Bloom, Harry. *King Kong: An African Jazz Opera*. Lyrics by Pat Williams. London: Fontana Books, 1961.
- Cook, Mercer and Stephen E. Henderson. *The Militant Black Writer in South Africa and in the United States*. Madison (Wisconsin): University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.
- Coplan, David Bellin. *In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*. London and New York: Longman, 1985.
- Dike, Fatima—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT FATIMA DIKE:
- Dike, Fatima. *The First South African*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1979. 1-48.
- *Glass House*. In *African Theatre: Women*, ed. By Martin Banham, James Gibbs & Femi Osofisan. Oxford: James Currey, 2002. 132-153.
- *The Sacrifice of Kreli*. In *Theatre One: New South African Drama*, ed. by Stephen Gray. Johannesburg and London: AD. Donker, Ltd., 1978.
- *So What's New?* In *Four Plays*, ed. By Zakes Mda. Florida Hills, South Africa: Vivlia, 1996.
- Gray, Stephen. "An Interview with Fatima Dike." In *Black South African Women Writers in English: A Preliminary Checklist*, by Amelia House. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, Program on Women, 1980.
- Dhlomo, H.I.E. *The Girl Who Killed to Save*. In *H.I.E. Dhlomo Works*, ed. by Nick Visser and Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985.
- *The Living Dead*. In *H.I.E. Dhlomo Works*, ed. by Nick Visser and Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985.
- *The Workers*. In *H.I.E. Dhlomo Works*, ed. by Nick Visser and Tim Couzens. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985.
- Fugard, Athol—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT ATHOL FUGARD:

- Fugard, Athol. *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- *The Coat and The Third Degree Don Maclennan - Two Experiments in Play-Making*. Cape Town: Albany Series, 1971.
- “*Master Harold*” . . . and the Boys. New York: Penguin Books, 1984
- *No-Good Friday*. In *Dimetos and Two Early Plays*. Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- *Nongogo*. In *Dimetos and Two Early Plays*. Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- *Orestes*. In *Theatre One: New South African Drama*, ed. by Stephen Gray. Johannesburg and London: AD Donker Publishers, Ltd., 1978.
- , John Kani and Winston Ntshona. *Statements: Three Plays*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Gray, Stephen, ed. *Athol Fugard*. Johannesburg; New York: McGraw-Hill Books Co., 1982.
- Govender, Ronie. *The Lahnee's Pleasure*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, n.d.
- Gray, Stephen, ed. *Theatre One: New South African Drama*. Johannesburg and London: AD Donker Publishers, Ltd., 1978.
- Griesel, Hanlie. *Sibambene: The Voices of Women at Mboza*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987.
- Hauptfleisch, Temple. *Towards a Methodology for Theatre Research: A South African Perspective*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1984.
- Junction Avenue Theatre. *The Fantastical History of a Useless Man*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978.
- *Randlords and Rotgut*. In *Theatre Two*, ed. by Stephen Gray. Johannesburg: AD Donker Publishers, Ltd., 1981.
- *Sophiatown*. Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988.
- *Tooth and Nail*. Unpublished Work in Progress. (Produced in 1989).
- Kani, John. *More Market Plays*. Johannesburg: Ad Donker Publisher, 1994.
- Kavanagh, Robert. *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*. London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1985.
- Kente, Gibson—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT GIBSON KENTE:
- Coplan, David. “Interview with Gibson Kente, at D.O.C.C., Orlando.” June 1975. Unpublished.
- Kente, Gibson. *Too Late*. In *South African People's Plays*, selected by Robert Mshengu Kavanagh. London: Heinemann, 1981.
- Klotz, Phyllis, et al. *Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokotho (You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock)*. In *More Market Plays*, ed. By John Kani. Johannesburg: Ad Donker Publisher, 1994. 163-204.
- Kruger, Loren. *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910*. London & New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Kunene, Mazisi. *Anthem of the Decades: A Zulu Epic*. London: Heinemann, 1981.
- *Emperor Shaka the Great*. London: Heinemann, 1979.
- Larlham, Peter. *Black Theatre, Dance and Ritual in South Africa*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985.
- Ledwaba, John. *Township Boy: When the Rain is Tears*. Unpublished Script. (Produced in 1987-1988.)
- Lelyveld, Joseph. *Move Your Shadow: South Africa, Black and White*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985.
- Maimane, Arthur. *The Opportunity*. In *Ten One-Act Plays*, ed. by Cosmo Pieterse. London: Heinemann, 1987.
- Manaka, Matsemela. *Children of Asazi*. In *Woza Afrika! An Anthology of South African Plays*, ed. by Duma Ndlovu. New York: George Braziller, 1986.
- , ed. *Echoes of African Art: A Century of Art in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987.
- , acted and developed by John Moalusi Ledwaba and Hamilton Mahonga Silwane. *Egoli: A City of Gold*. Johannesburg: A Soyikwa-Ravan Publication, n.d.
- “Fate of Theatre Determined.” *The Star* (August 12, 1982): 16A.
- *Goree*. Unpublished script. (Produced in 1989).
- *Pula*. In *Market Plays*, ed. by Stephen Gray. Craighall: AD Donker Publishers, Ltd., 1986. 51-74.
- *Toro, the African Dream*. Unpublished script. (Produced in 1987.)
- *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays by Matsemela Manaka* (includes *Egoli, Pula, The Children of Asazi, Toro* and *Goree*). London: Harwood Academic Publishers (Performing Arts), 1998.
- Manganyi, N. Chabani. *Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983.
- Maponya, Maishe. *Gangsters*. In *Woza Afrika! An Anthology of South African Plays*, ed. by Duma Ndlovu. New York: George Braziller, 1986.
- *The Hungry Earth*. In *South African Theatre: Four Plays and an Introduction*, ed by Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman. Pretoria: HAUM Educational Publishers, 1987.
- *Jika*. Unpublished script. (Produced in 1986.)

- *Umongikazi/The Nurse*. In *Four Plays*, ed. By Zakes Mda. Florida Hills, South Africa: Vivlia, 1996. 49-76.
- and Amam Derrick Blackwood. *The Valley of the Blind*. Unpublished script. (Produced in 1987.)
- *Doing Plays for a Change*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995.
- Mda, Zakes. *The Plays of Zakes Mda*. Introd. By Andrew Horn. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990.
- *The Road*. In *The Plays of Zakes Mda*, introd. by Andrew Horn. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990.
- *Dark Voices Ring*. In *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland and Other Plays*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987.
- *Dead End*. In *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland and Other Plays*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987.
- , ed., *Four Plays*. Florida Hills, South Africa: Vivlia, 1996.
- *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland*. In *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland and Other Plays*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987.
- Mekgoe, Shimane Solly. *Lindiwe*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987.
- Mhlophe, Gcina. *Have You Seen Zandile?* Braamfontein, Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1988.
- “Nokulunga’s Wedding.” In *LIP: From Southern African Women*, ed. by Susan Brown et al. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983.
- Mphahlele, Es’kia. *Afrika My Music: An Autobiography, 1957-1983*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984.
- *Poetry and Humanism: Oral Beginnings*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1986.
- Mqayisa, Khayalety. *Confused Mhlaba*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1974.
- Mtsaka, Makwedini Julius. *Not His Pride*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978.
- Mtwa, Percy, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon. *Woza Albert!* In *Woza Afrika! An Anthology of South African Plays*, ed. by Duma Ndlovu. New York: George Braziller, 1986.
- Mtwa, Percy. *Bopha!* In *Woza Afrika! An Anthology of South African Plays*, ed. by Duma Ndlovu. New York: George Braziller, 1986.
- Mutloatse, Mothobi, ed. *Forced Landing: Africa South: Contemporary Writings*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988.
- , *Umhlaba Wethu [The Earth Is Ours]* Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987.
- Mutwa, Credo. *uNosilimela*. In *South African People’s Plays*, sel. by Robert Mshengu Kavanagh. London: Heinemann, 1981.
- Ndaba, Smal. *So Where To? (Soweto)*. Unpublished script. (Produced in 1989.)
- Ndlovu, Duma, ed. *Woza Afrika! An Anthology of South African Plays*. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1986.
- Ngema, Mbongeni. *Asinamali!* In *Woza Afrika! An Anthology of South African Plays*, ed. by Duma Ndlovu. New York: George Braziller, 1986.
- *Sarafina!* Unpublished script. (Produced in 1989.)
- Nkosi, Lewis. *The Rhythms of Violence*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature*. Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1981.
- *The Transplanted Heart: Essays on South Africa*. Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1975.
- Patel, Essop, Bhekizizwe Peterson and Benjy Francis. *The Mountain of Volcano: A Poetic Struggle for the the Stolen Homeland with Liberation Songs, Dances and Visuals*. In *Fragments in the Sun: Poems and Performance Text*, by Essop Patel. Johannesburg: Afrika Cultural Centre, 1985.
- Paton, Alan and Krishna Shah. *Sponono*. Cape Town and Johannesburg: Africasouth Paperbacks, 1983.
- Perkins, Kathy A. *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Pereira, Ernest, ed. *Contemporary South African Plays*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1977.
- Pillay, Kriben. *Learning to See: Self-discoveries through Theatre*. Durban: Asoka Theatre Publications, 1988.
- *A Mind in Revolt: Essays and Poems*. East London: Kriben Pillay, 1986.
- Quanta, Christine N., ed. *Women in Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1987.
- Rich, Paul B. *Tradition and Revolt in South African Fiction: The Novels of Andre Brink, Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee*. York: University of York, Centre for Southern African Studies, 1981.
- SACHED Trust, Educational Resource Center. “Signals: Singing the Changes.” BBC, Channel 4, 1989. [Video Tape].
- Shava, Pniel Viriri. *A People’s Voice: Black South African Writing in the Twentieth Century*. London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1989.
- Shezi, Mthuli. *Shanti*. In *South African People’s Plays*. Selected by Robert Mshengu Kavanagh. London: Heinemann, 1981.
- Simon, Barney. *Born in the RSA*. In *Woza Albert! An Anthology of South African Plays*, ed. by Duma Ndlovu. New York: George Braziller, 1986.

- Sonke Gender Justice Network (HIV, Gender, Equality, Human Rights), South Africa Country Report 2007 <http://www.genderjustice.org.za/sa-country-report-2007.html>
- Tomaselli, Keyan G. *The Semiotics of Alternative Theatre in South Africa*. York, England: University of York, Center for Southern African Studies, 1981.
- Tsikang, Seageng and Dianah Lefakane, eds. *Women in South Africa: From the Heart—An Anthology of Stories Written by a New Generation of Writers*. Johannesburg and Marshallton: Seriti sa Sechaba Publishers, 1988.
- Vaughan, Michael. *Literature and Politics: Currents in South African Writing in the 70s*. York, England: University of York, Centre for Southern African Studies, 1981.
- Violence against women in South Africa. [http://www.dev-zone.org/knowledge/Gender/Violence\\_against\\_Women/index.php](http://www.dev-zone.org/knowledge/Gender/Violence_against_Women/index.php)
- Von Kotze, Astrid. *Organise and Act: The Natal Workers Theatre Movement*. Durban: Culture and Working Life Publications, University of Natal, 1988.
- White, Landeg and Tim Couzens, eds. *Literature and Society in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Maskew Miller Longman Ltd., 1984.
- Willan, Brian. *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1984.
- Women's Organisations in South Africa. <http://www.distel.ca/womlist/countries/southafrica.html>
- Workshop '71. *Survival*. In *South African People's Plays*, sel. by Robert Mshengy Kavanagh. London: Heinemann, 1981.

## B. African American Culture

### 1. Sources on African American History, Politics, Sociology, Rhetoric and Philosophy

- Abraham, Kinfe. *From Race to Class: Links and Parallels in African and Black American Protest Expression*. London: Grassroots, 1982.
- Allen, Robert L. *A Guide to Black Power in America: An Historical Analysis*. London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1970.
- *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1970.
- Blackwell, James. *The Black Community: Diversity and Unity*. New York: Harper and Row, Pub., 1975.
- Betts, Raymond F., comp. *The Ideology of Blackness*. Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1971.
- Boesak, Allan Aubrey. *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1977.
- *Coming in out of the Wilderness: A Comparative Interpretation of the Ethics of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X*. Kampen Cahiers No. 28. Kampen, Holland: Uitgegeven Door Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok, n.d.
- Bormann, Ernest G., comp. *Forerunners of Black Power: The Rhetoric of Abolition*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971.
- Bosmajian, Haig A. and Hamida Bosmajian, comp. *The Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Random House, 1969.
- Broderick, Francisc L. and August Meier, eds. *Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965.
- Butler, Johnella E. *Black Studies—Pedagogy and Revolution: A Study of Afro-American Studies and the Liberal Arts Tradition through the Discipline of Afro-American Literature*. Washington, D. C.: University Press of American, 1981.
- Carlisle, Rodney. *The Roots of Black Nationalism*. Port Washington (New York) and London: National University Publications, Kennikat Press, 1975.
- Carmichael, Stokely and Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Cleaver, Eldridge. *Soul on Ice*. New York: A Delta Book, 1968.
- Colaico, James A. *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Apostle of Militant Nonviolence*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

- Cronon, E. David, ed. *Great Lives Observed: Marcus Garvey*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973.
- Cruse, Harold. *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*. New York: Quill, 1984.
- *Rebellion or Revolution?* New York: William Morrow and Co., 1968.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Culture and Politics*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- *Women, Race and Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.
- DuBois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: New American Library, 1982.
- Foster, Herbert L. *Ribbin, ' Jivin, ' and Playin' the Dozens: The Unrecognized Dilemmas of Inner City Schools*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1974.
- Franklin, John H. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.
- Fredrickson, George M. *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History*. London, 1971.
- Geschwender, James A. *The Black Revolt: The Civil Rights Movement; Ghetto Uprising and Separatism*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971.
- Glenn, Robert W. *Black Rhetoric: A Guide to Afro-American Communication*. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1976.
- Heath, G. Louis, ed. *The Black Panther Leaders Speak: Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver and Company Speak Out through the Black Panther Party's Official Newspaper*. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1976.
- Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Jordan, June. *On Call: Political Essays*. Boston: South End Press, 1985.
- Kofsky, Frank. *Black Nationalism and the Revolution in Music*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970.
- Lamar, Howard and Leonard Thompson, eds. *The Frontier in History: North American and Southern Africa Compared*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981.
- Lester, Julius. *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama*. New York: The Dial Press, 1968.
- Levin, Harry. *The Power of Blackness*. New York: Knopf, 1958.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. by George Breitman. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965.
- Meier, August and Elliot Rudwic, ed. *Black Protest in the Sixties*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970.
- Mintz, Sidney W. *Slavery, Colonialism and Racism*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974.
- Newman, Richard. *Black Power and Black Religion: Essays and Reviews*. West Cornwall, Connecticut: Locust Hill Press, 1987.
- Patton, Sharon. *African-American Art*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Paris, Peter J. *Black Leaders in Conflict: Joseph H. Jackson, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* New York and Philadelphia: The Pilgrim Press, 1978.
- Pinkney, Alphonso. *Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Roach, Hildred. *Black American Music: Past and Present*. Malabar [Florida]: R. E. Krieger Pub. Co., 1985.
- Scott, Robert L. and Wayne Brockriede. *The Rhetoric of Black Power*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969.
- Scott King, Coretta, sel. by. *The Words of Martin Luther King*. New York: Newmarket Press, 1983.
- Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1983.
- Thompson, Robert F. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.
- Turner, Lou and John Alan. *Frantz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought*. Chicago: New and Letters, 1986.
- Vincent, Theodore G. *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*. New York: Ramparts Press, n.d.
- Waskow, Arthur I. *From Race Riot to Sit-In, 1919 and the 1960s: A Study in the Connections between Conflict and Violence*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967.
- Williams, Juan. *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1988.

Wortham, Anne. *The Other Side of Racism: A Philosophical Study of Black Race Consciousness*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981.

## 2. Sources on African American Literature, Women Studies and Criticism, Theatre, Drama —including Plays—and Dance

- Abramson, Doris E. *Negro Playwrights in the American Theatre*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.
- Ahmad, Dorothy. *Papa's Daughter*. In *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 139-146.
- Baker, Houston A., Jr. *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- *The Journey back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Baker, Houston A., Jr. and Patricia Redmond. *Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- Baldwin, James—SOURCES ABOUT JAMES BALDWIN:  
Bloom, Harold, ed. *James Baldwin*. New York: Chelsea House Pub., 1986.  
Kinnamon, Keneth. *James Baldwin: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974.
- Baraka, Imamu Amiri—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT AMIRI BARAKA/LEROI JONES:  
*Amiri Baraka: The Kaleidoscopic Torch: A Literary Tribute*, n. a. New York: Steppingstones Press, 1985.  
Baraka, Amiri. *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka*. New York: Freundlich Books, 1984.  
— *The Baptism and The Toilet*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966.  
— *Black Art/LeRoi Jones*. Newark: Jihad, 1966.  
— *Black Magic: Sabotage, Target Study, Black Art: Poetry, 1961-1967*. Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969.  
— *Black Music*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1969.  
— *Black People and Imperialism*. S. L.: s. n., 1974.  
— *Bloodrites*. In *Black Drama Anthology*, ed. by Woodie King and Ron Milner. New York and Scarborough (Ontario): New American Library, 1986.  
— *Blues People / . . . / Negro Music in White America*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1963.  
— *Creating a Unified Consciousness Among the Leadership and Putting the Value System and Ideology in Control*. Newark, New Jersey: n.e., 1973.  
— *Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974-1979*. New York: Quill, 1984.  
— *The Dead Lecturer: Poems*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964.  
— *The Death of Malcolm X*. In *New Plays from the Black Theatre: An Anthology*, ed. by Ed Bullins. New York: Bantam Books, 1969.  
— *Dutchman and The Slave*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1964.  
— *Four Revolutionary Plays: All Praises to the Black Man*. Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969.  
— *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University, 1973.  
— *Great Goodness of Life (A Coon Show)*. In *Black Quartet: Four New Plays*, by Ben Caldwell et al. New York: New American Library, 1970.  
— *Home on the Range*. In *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 106-111.  
— *Home: Social Essays*. New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1971.  
— *Junkies Are Full of (SHHH . . .)*. In *Black Drama Anthology*, ed. by Woodie King and Ron Milner. New York and Scarborough (Ontario): New American Library, 1986.  
— *Kawaida Studies: The New Nationalism*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1972.  
— *The Motion of History and Other Plays*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1978.  
— *In Our Terribleness (Some Elements and Meaning in Black Style)*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.  
— *Police*. In *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 112-116.  
— *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays Since 1965*. New York: Random House, 1971.  
— *Revolutionary Party, Revolutionary Ideology*. Newark: Congress of African People, 1974.  
— *Selected Plays and Prose of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones*. New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1979.  
— *The System of Dante's Hell*. New York: Grove Press, 1965.  
— *Toward Ideological Clarity*. Congress of African People. Newark, New Jersey: ALSC Conference, May 1974.



- Brown, Lloyd W. *Amiri Baraka*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.
- Burns, Glen. "How The Devil Helped LeRoi Jones Turn into Imamu Amiri Baraka." *Amerikanishces Drama and Theatre in 20. Jahrhundert (American Drama and Theatre in the 20th Century)*. Gettingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1975.
- Haizlip, Ellis. "Interview with Imamu Amiri Baraka." Channel 13 "Soul," New York, November 8, 1972. New York: Hatch-Billops Collection. [Audio Tape].
- Hatch, James. "Interview with Amiri Baraka." (March 30, 1984). In *Artist and Influence 1985*, ed. by Leo Hamalian and Judith Wilson. New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc., 1985.
- Harris, William J. *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985.
- Lacey, Henry C. *To Raise, Destroy, and Create: The Poetry, Drama and Fiction of Imamu Amiri Baraka*. Troy, New York: Whitston Pub. Co., 1981.
- Sollors, Werner. *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism."* New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
- X, Marvin. "Interview with Amiri Baraka." In *Black Theatre* 1 (1968): 16-23.
- The Black Theatre Network, comp. *Dissertations Concerning Black Theatre*, ed. by Rhonnie Washington. Albany, New York: New York African American Institute, June 1988.
- Boesak, Allan Aubre. *Coming in out of the Wilderness: A Comparative Interpretation of the Ethics of Martin L. King and Malcolm X*. Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1976.
- Bond, Frederick W. *The Negro and the Drama: The Direct and Indirect Contribution which the American Negro Has Made to Drama and the Legitimate Stage with the Underlying Conditions Possible*. Washington, D. C.: McGrath Publishers, 1969.
- Bontemps, Anna. *Anthology of the American Negro in the Theatre: A Critical Approach*. New York: Publisher Co., 1969.
- Branch, William B., ed. *Black Thunder: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Drama*. New York: Penguin, A Mentor Book, 1992.
- Breitman, George. *Malcolm X, the Man and His Ideas*. New York: Merit Publishers, 1965.
- Brown-Guillory, Elizabeth. *Their Place on Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Bullins, Ed—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT ED BULLINS:
- Bullins, Ed. *The Corner*. In *Black Drama Anthology*, ed. by Woodie King and Ron Milner. New York and Scarborough (Ontario): New American Library, 1986.
- *Death List*. In *Black Theatre* 5 (n.d.): 38-43.
- *The Duplex: A Black Love Fable in Four Movements*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1971.
- *The Fabulous Miss Marie*. In *The New Lafayette Theatre Presents Plays with Aesthetic Comments by Six Black Playwrights*, ed. by Ed Bullins. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1974.
- *Five Plays: Goin' a Buffalo, In the Wine Time, A Son, Come Home, The Electronic Nigger and Clara's Ole Man*. Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merril Co., 1969.
- *The Gentleman Caller*. In *A Black Quartet: Four New Black Plays*, by Ben Caldwell et. al. New York: New American Library, 1970.
- *How Do You Do: A Nonsense Drama*. New York: An Illumination Press Books, 1965.
- *The Hungered One: Early Writings*. New York: Morrow, 1971.
- *In New England Winter*. In *New Plays from the Black Theatre: An Anthology*, ed. by Ed Bullins. New York: Bantam Books, 1969.
- , ed. *The New Lafayette Theatre Presents: Plays with Aesthetic Comments by Six Black Playwrights*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974.
- , ed. *New Plays from the Black Theatre*. New York: Bantam Books, 1969
- Hatch, James. "Interview with Ed Bullins." November 8, 1979. New York: Hatch-Billops Collection.
- Lloyd, Sandra. "Interview with Ed Bullins." March 22 and May 4, 1972 at the New Lafayette Theatre, New York: Hatch-Billops Collection.
- Caldwell, Ben et al. eds. *A Black Quartet: Four New Black Plays by Ben Caldwell, Ronald Milner, Ed Bullins and LeRoi Jones*. New York: New American Library, 1970
- Caldwell, Ben. *The King of Soul or the Devil and Otis: A One Act Musical Tragedy*. In *Black Theatre* 3 (n.d.): 28-35.
- Campbell, Jane. *Mythic Black Fiction: The Transformation of History*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1986.

- Chapman, Abraham, ed. *New Black Voices*. New York: NAL/Mentor Books, 1972.
- Childress, Alice. *Wedding Band*. In *Nine Plays by Black Women*, ed by Margaret B. Wilkerson. New York: New American Library, 1986.
- Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspective on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1985.
- Cook, Mercer and Stephen E. Henderson. *The Militant Black Writer: in African and in the United States*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.
- Cooke, Michael G. *Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The Achievement of Intimacy*. New Haven (Connecticut) and London: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Couch, William, Jr., ed. *New Black Playwrights: An Anthology*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University, 1968.
- Daniel, Walter C. *Images of the Preacher in Afro-American Literature*. Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1981.
- Davis, Charles T. *Black Is the Color of the Cosmos: Essays on Afro-American Literature and Culture, 1942-1981*, ed. by Henry L. Gates, Jr. New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1982.
- Davis, Thadious M. and Trudier Harris, eds. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Volume 38, "Afro-American Writers after 1955: Dramatists and Prose Writers." Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., Book Tower, 1985.
- DeFrantz, Thomas F., ed. *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.
- De Veaux, Alexis. *The Tapestry*. In *Nine Plays by Black Women*, ed by Margaret B. Wilkerson. New York: New American Library, 1986.
- Emery, Lynne Fauley. *Black Dance: From 1619 to Today*. With a Foreword by Katherine Dunham. Princeton, New Jersey: A Dance Horizons Book, Princeton Book Co., Publishers, 1988.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Shadow and Act*. New York: Random House, 1964.
- Fabre, Geneviève. *Drumbeats, Masks, and Metaphor: Contemporary Afro- American Theatre*. Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London (England), 1983.
- *Le Théâtre Noir aux États-Unis*. Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982.
- Fowler, Carolyn. *Black Arts and Black Aesthetics: A Bibliography*. [Georgia?]: First World, 1981.
- Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972.
- Garon, Paul. *Blues and the Poetic Spirit*. New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1979.
- Garrett, Jimmie. *And We Own the Night*. In *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 61-69.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., ed. *Black Literature and Literary Theory*. New York and London: Methuen, 1984.
- *Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the "Racial" Self*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- *"Race," Writings and Difference*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Gayle, Addison, Jr., ed. *The Black Aesthetic*. New York: Anchor Books, 1971.
- Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. Toronto (Canada) and New York: Bantam Books, 1988.
- Gordon, Charles. *Out of Site*. In *Black Theatre* 4 (n.d.): 28-31.
- Goss, Linda and Marian E. Barnes, eds. *Talk That Talk: An Anthology of African American Storytelling*. New York: Simon and Schuster/Touchstone, 1989.
- Hansberry, Lorraine—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT LORRAINE HANSBERRY:
- Baraka, Amiri. "A Critical Reevaluation of *A Raisin in the Sun*'s Enduring Passion." In *A Raisin in the Sun, Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition and the Sign of Sidney Brustein's Window*, by Lorraine Hansberry; ed. by Robert Nemiroff. New York and Scarborough (Ontario): New American Library, 1987.
- Bigsby, C. W. E. "Lorraine Hansberry." *Confrontation and Commitment: A Study of Contemporary Drama, 1959-1966*. Macgibbon and Kee, n.d.
- Cheney, Anne. *Lorraine Hansberry*. Boston: Twayne, 1984.
- Grant, Robert. "'Rebel' or 'Slave': Language Revolution, and the 1960's Black Intellectual *Persona* in Baraka's *The Slave* (1964) and Hansberry's *Les Blancs* (1964)." Unpublished Paper. Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1984-1985.

- Hansberry, Lorraine. *The Collected Last Plays: Les Blancs, The Drinking Gourd and What Use Are Flowers?* New York and Scarborough (Ontario): New American Library, 1972.
- *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964.
- *A Raisin in the Sun*. New York: Signet Book, 1966.
- *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window: A Drama in Three Acts*. New York: Random House, 1965.
- *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words*, adapted by Robert Nemiroff. New York: New American Library, 1969.
- *Toussaint: Excerpt from Act I of a Work in Progress*. In *Nine Plays by Black Women*, ed. by Margaret B. Wilkerson. New York: New American Library, 1986.
- Harris, Trudier. *From Mummies to Militants: Domesticity in Black American Literature*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.
- Harrison, Paul Carter, ed. *Kuntu Drama: Plays of the African Continuum*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1974.
- *Totem Voices: Plays from the Black World Repertory*. New York: Grove Press, 1989.
- , Victor Leo Walker II, and Gus Edwards, eds. *Black Theatre: Ritual Performance in the African Diaspora*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002.
- Haskins, James. *Black Theatre in America*. New York: Crowell, 1982.
- Hatch-Billops Collection. "Black Playwrighting Symposium." New York, August 21, 1973. Hatch-Billops Collection. [Audio Tape].
- "Black Theatre/White Critics." New York Cultural Center Symposium, October 17, 1973. [Audio Tape].
- "The New Lafayette Theatre." Folder housed in the Hatch-Billops Collection, New York, [1972?].
- Resource Catalog in African American Theatre History. New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc., 1989.
- Hatch, James V. *Black Theatre, U.S.A.* New York: Free Press, 1974.
- Hernton, Calvin C. *The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers: Adventurers in Sex, Literature and Real Life*. New York: Anchor Press, 1987.
- Hill, Errol. *The Theatre of Black Americans: Critical Essays*. Two Volumes. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1980.
- and James V. Hatch. *A History of African American Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press, 1981.
- Hull, Gloria T. et. al., eds. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. New York: Feminist Press, 1982.
- Jackson, Bernard and James V. Hatch. *Fly Blackbird*. In *Black Theatre U.S.A.: Forty-Five Plays by Black Americans, 1847-1974*, ed. by James V. Hatch. New York: The Free Press, 1974.
- Johnson, Abby Arthur. *Propaganda and Aesthetics: The Literary Politics of Afro-American Magazines in the Twentieth Century*. Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979.
- Johnson, Charles. *Being and Race: Black Writing Since 1970*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Jones, Walter. *Jazznite*. In *Scripts 2* (n.d.): 71-92.
- Kennedy, Adrienne—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT ADRIENNE KENNEDY:
- Binder, Wolfgang. "A MELUS Interview: Adrienne Kennedy." *MELUS* 12, 3 (Fall 1985): 99-108.
- Curb, Rosemary K. "Lesson I Bleed." In *Women in American Theatre*, ed. by Helen K. Chinoy and Linda W. Jenkins. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1981.
- Hatch, James. "Interview with Adrienne Kennedy." New York: Hatch-Billops Collection, January 1978. [Tape].
- Kennedy, Adrienne. *Adrienne Kennedy in One Act*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- *A Beast Story*. In *Kuntu Drama: Plays of the African Continuum*, by Paul Carter Harrison. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1974.
- *Deadly Triplets: A Theatre Mystery and Journal*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.
- *People Who Led to My Plays*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1987.
- Wilkerson, Margaret. "Adrienne Kennedy." In *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Volumen 38. Detroit, Michigan: A Brucoli Clark Book, Gale Research Company, 1985.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. *King, Malcolm, Baldwin: Three Interviews*. Interviewed by Kenneth B. Clark. Middletown, Connecticut: Harper and Row, 1985.
- King, Woodie and Ron Miner, eds. *Black Drama Anthology*. New York: A Meridian Book, New American Library, 1986.
- Lerner, Gerda, ed. *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973.
- Milner, Ronald. *The Monster*. In *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 94- 105.

- *The Warning: A Theme for Linda*. In *A Black Quartet: Four New Black Plays*, by Ben Caldwell, et al. New York: New American Library, 1970.
- Mitchell, Loftin. *Voices of the Black Theatre*. Clifton, New Jersey: J. T. White, 1975.
- Mpondo, Simon. *From Independence to Freedom: A Study of the Political Thinking of Negro-African Writers in the 1960's*. 1971. [Microform].
- Oliver, Clinton F., ed. *Contemporary Black Drama: From A Raisin in the Sun to No place to Be Somebody*. New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1971.
- Patterson, Lindsay. *Anthology of the Afro-American in the Theatre: A Critical Approach*. Cornwells Heights, Pennsylvania: The Publishers Agency, Inc., 1978.
- *Anthology of the American Negro in the Theatre*. New York: The Publishers Agency Inc., 1978.
- Povey, John. *Afro-American and African Literature in English: Discipline and Theme*. Los Angeles: African Studies Center, University of California at Los Angeles, 1971.
- Rahman, Aishah. *The Mojo and the Sayso*. In *The Massachusetts Review* 27, 4 (Winter 1987): 561-608.
- *Unfinished Women Cry in No Man's Land While a Bird Dies in a Golden Cage*. In *Nine Plays by Black Women*, ed. by Margaret B. Wilkerson. New York: New American Library, 1986.
- Ricard, Alain. *Theatre and Nationalism: Wole Soyinka and LeRoi Jones*. Ile- Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1983.
- Rich, Andrea L. and Arthur L. Smith. *Rhetoric of Revolution: Samuel Adams, Emma Goldman, Malcolm X*. Durham, North Carolina: Moore Publishing Co., 1970.
- Richards, Beah. *A Black Woman Speaks*. In *Nine Plays by Black Women*, ed. by Margaret B. Wilkerson. New York: New American Library, 1986.
- Sanchez, Sonia. *The Bronx Is Next*. In *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 78-84.
- *Dirty Hearts*. In *Scripts* 1 (n.d.): 48-50.
- *Homegirls & handgrenades*. New York and Chicago: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1984.
- "Malcolm/Man Don't Live Here No Mo'." In *Black Theatre* 6 (n.d.): 24-27.
- *Sister Son/ji*. In *New Plays from the Black Theatre: An Anthology*, ed. by Ed Bullins. New York: Bantam Books, 1969.
- *Uh, Uh; But How Do It Free Us?* In *The New Lafayette Theatre Presents Plays with Aesthetic Comments by Six Black Playwrights*, ed. by Ed Bullins. New York: Anchor Books, 1974.
- *Under a Soprano Sky*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1989.
- Sanders, Leslie Catherine. *The Development of Black Theatre in America from Shadows to Selves*. Baton Rouge (Louisiana) and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.
- Shange, Ntozake—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT NTOZAKE SHANGE:  
Ceynowa, Andrezej. "Interview with Ntozake Shange." August 17, 1982. New York: Hatch-Billops Collection.
- Lyons, Brenda, "Interview with Ntozake Shange." *The Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1987): 687-696.
- Shange, Ntozake. *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977
- *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.
- *Nappy Edges*. London: Methuen, 1987.
- *Ridin' the Moon in Texas*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.
- *See No Evil: Prefaces, Essays & Accounts, 1976-1983* San Francisco: Momo's Press, 1984.
- *Three Pieces: Spell #7, A Photograph: Lovers in Motion and Boogie Woogie Landscapes*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Smith, Edward G. "Black Theatre." In *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. by Maxine Seller. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983.
- Southern, Eileen. *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. New York & London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1983.
- Tate, Claudia. *Black Women Writers at Work*. New York: Continuum, 1983.
- Ward, Douglas Turner—SOURCES BY AND ABOUT DOUGLAS TURNER WARD:  
Blunck, Malwine. "Interview with Douglas Turner Ward." Hamburg, Germany, May 1979. New York: Hatch-Billops Collection.
- "Interview with Douglas Turner Ward." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973): 14-22.
- Ward, Douglas Turner Ward. *Brotherhood*. In *Black Drama Anthology*, ed. by Woodie King and Ron Milner. New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1986.

- *A Happy Ending and Day of Absence*. In *Contemporary Black Drama from A Raisin in the Sun to No Place to Be Somebody*, ed. by Clinton F. Oliver. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971.
- Weixlmann, Joe and Chester J. Fontenot, eds. *Studies in Black American Literature*. Volume II, "Belief vs. Theory in Black American Literary Criticism." Greenwood, Florida: The Penkevill Publishing Co., 1986.
- Wesley, Richard. *Black Terror*. In *The New Lafayette Theatre Presents Plays with Aesthetic Comments by Six Black Playwrights*, ed. by Ed Bullins. New York: Anchor Books, 1974.
- White, Joseph. *Old Judge More Is Dead*. In *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 151-156.
- Wilkerson, Margaret. *Nine Plays by Black Women: the Black American Woman as Playwright*. New York: A Mentor Book, New American Library, 1986.
- Williams, Mance. *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s: A Historical-Critical Analysis of the Movement*. Westport (Connecticut) and London: Greenwood Press, 1985.
- Woll, Allen. *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.
- X, Marvin. *The Black Bird*. In *New Plays from the Black Theatre: An Anthology*, ed. by Ed Bullins. New York: Bantam Books, 1969.
- *The Resurrection of the Dead: A Ritual*. In *Black Theatre* 3 (n.d.): 26-27.
- *Take Care of Business*. In *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 85-92.

### III. DISSERTATIONS AND THESES

#### 1. South African

- Booth, Gillian. "The Social Consciousness of Fatima Dike." Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980.
- Dickey, Jerry R. "The Artist as Rebel: The Development of Athol Fugard's Dramaturgy and the Influence of Albert Camus." Ph. D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1987.
- Fatton, Robert Jr. "Class and Nationalism in South Africa: A Study in the Radicalization of Black Politics (1925-1976)." Ph.D. Diss., University of Notre Dame, 1981.
- Gerhart, Gail Margaret. "Black Nationalism as a Theme in African Political Thought in South Africa, 1943-1973." Ph. D. Diss., Columbia University, 1974.
- Larlham, Peter F. "Black Performance in South Africa." Ph.D. Diss., New York University, 1981.
- Long, Kathryn L. "The Past and Future with Apartheid: The Function of Temporal Elements in Eight Plays by Athol Fugard." Ph. D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1985.
- Ranuga, Thomas K. "Marxism and Black Nationalism in South Africa (Azania): A Comparative and Critical Analysis of the Ideological Conflict and Consensus Between Marxism and Nationalism in the ANC, PAC and the BCM, 1920-1980." Ph.D. Diss., Brandeis University, 1983.
- Raymer, John D. "Eight Recent Plays by South African Dramatist Athol Fugard: His Method, His Development as a Playwright, His South African Context, and the Major Influences on Him." Ph. D. Diss., Ohio University, 1975.
- Pelser, A. J. "Gospel Drama with the Emphasis on Drama and Films." M.A. Thesis, University of Pretoria, 1983.
- Sandoval, Enrique. "The Metaphoric Style in Politically Censored Theatre." Ph.D. Diss., 1985.
- Schmidt, Leoni. "Aspects of South African Art Criticism." M.A. Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1977
- Steadman, Ian Patrick. "Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes to Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984." Ph. D. Diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1985.
- Tomaselli, Keyan Gray. "Ideology and Cultural Production in South African Cinema." Ph.D. Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1983.

#### 2. African American

- Aaron, Jules L. "The Audience in the Mirror: The Role of Game Ritual in Contemporary Theatre." Ph. D. Diss., New York University, 1970.
- Annan, Adaku T. "Revolution as Theatre: Revolutionary Aesthetics in the Works of Selected Black Playwrights." Ph. D. Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1987.

Baraka, Imamu Amiri—SOURCES ABOUT AMIRI BARAKA:

- Brady, Owen E. "This Consciousness Epic: LeRoi Jones' Use of American Myth and Ritual, in 'The Baptism,' 'The Toilet,' 'Dutchman,' 'The Slave' and 'A Recent Killing'." Ph. D. Diss., University of Notre Dame, 1973.
- Fisher, Edward James. "Radical Black Thought in the Dramatic Work of Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)." Ph. D. Diss., University of California, 1980.
- Haley, Elsie G. "The Black Revolutionary Theatre: LeRoi Jones, Ed Bullins, and Minor Playwrights." Ph. D. Diss., University of Denver, 1971.
- Hart, Madelyn Elaine. "Analysis of the Rhetoric of LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka) in his campaign to Promote Cultural Black Nationalism." Ph. D. Diss., North Texas State University, 1976.
- Shannon, Sandra Garrett. "Baraka, Black Ethos Arts Movement: A Study of Amiri Baraka, Black Ethos, and the Black Arts Movement: A Study of Amiri Baraka's Drama During the Black Arts Movement from 1964 to 1969." Ph. D. Diss., University of Maryland, 1986.
- Bekka, Abu. "The Black Theatre Movement in the United States: 1960-1975." M. A. Thesis, California State University, Long Beach, 1984.
- Boxill, Bernard Romanic. "A Philosophical Examination of Black Protest Thought." Ph. D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1971.
- Brown, Joseph A. "Harmonic Circles: Afro-American Religious Heritage and American Aesthetics." Ph. D. Diss., Yale University, 1984.
- Chinosole. "Black Autobiography: A Comparative Approach." Ph. D. Diss. University of Oregon, 1986.
- Choonoo, R. Neville. "Parallel Lives: Black Autobiography in South Africa and the United States." Columbia University, 1982.
- Clark, Norris B. "The Black Aesthetic Reviewed: A Critical Examination of the Writings of Imamu Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Toni Morrison." Ph. D. Diss., Cornell University, 1980
- Dieke, Ikenna. "Archetypal Patterns in Africa, Afro-American and Caribbean Literature." Ph. D. Diss. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1983.
- Dorson, Frank Edward. "The Use of Oral Tradition and Ritual in Afro-American Fiction." Ph. D. Diss., Bowling Green State University, 1985.
- Elam, Harry J. "Theatre for Social Change: The Artistic and Social Vision in Revolutionary Theatre in America, 1930-1970." Ph. D., Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1984.
- Fisher, Lester Allen. "The Uses and Effects of Violence in the Fiction and Drama of James Baldwin." Ph. D. Diss., Brown University, 1976.
- Grant, Robert H. "Lorraine Hansberry: The Playwright as Warrior-Intellectual." Ph. D. Diss., Harvard University, 1982.
- Hurd, John C. "The Meaning of Movement on the Contemporary American Stage." Ph. D. Diss., Michigan State University, 1966.
- Nama, Charles A. "Aesthetics and Ideology in African and Afro-American Fiction: Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Toni Morrison and Richard Wright." State University of New York at Binghamton, 1984.
- Nash, Rosa Lee. "Characterization of Blacks in the Theatre of the Sixties." Ph. D. Diss., Yeshiva University, 1971.
- Ogunbiyi, Yemi. "New Black Playwrights in America (1960-1975): Essays in Theatrical Criticism." Ph. D. Diss., New York University, 1976.
- Robertson, Cosby W. "The Theatre as a Vehicle for Community Action." Ph. D. Diss., Florida State University, 1972.
- Simana, Jabari Onaje. "Black Writers Experience Communism: An Interdisciplinary Study of Imaginative Writers, Their Critics, and the CPUSA." Ph.D. Diss., 1978.
- Warren, Merbyn Alonzo. "A Rhetorical Study of the Preaching of Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr., Pastor and the Pulpit." Ph. D. Diss., Michigan State University, 1966.
- Williams, Debra Joyce. "Images of the Black Actress: Past and Present." M.A. Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1976.
- Williams, Roosevelt J. "Modes of Alienation of the Black Writer: Problem and Solution in the Evolution of Black Drama and Contemporary Black Theatre." Ph.D. Diss., McGill University (Canada), 1974.
- Wood, Deborah J. "The Plays of Lorraine Hansberry: Studies in Dramatic Form." Ph. D. Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1985.

#### IV. JOURNAL AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

- Akerman, Anthony. "Prejudicial to the Safety of the State: Censorship and the Theatre in South Africa." *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 54-57.
- Alvarez-Pereyre, Jacques. "Black Committed Theatre in South Africa." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 7, 1 (Autumn, 1984) 80-93.
- Atkins, Thomas R. "A Theatre of Possibilities." *The Kenyou Review* 30, 119 (1968): 274-281.
- Benson, Mary. "Keeping an Appointment with the Future: The Theatre of Athol Fugard." *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 77-82.
- Black Theatre* 3 (1969).
- Blau, Herbert. "The American Dream in American Gothic: The Plays of Sam Shepard and Adrienne Kennedy." *Modern Drama* 27 (1984): 250-539.
- Boitumelo. "Women Writers Speak." *Staffrider* 2, 4 (November/ December 1979): 19-21.
- Brown, Lloyd W. "Lorraine Hansberry as Ironist: A Reappraisal of *A Raisin in the Sun*." *Journal of Black Studies* 4, 3 (March 1974): 237-246.
- Bullins, Ed. "The King Is Dead." *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 23-25.
- "A Short Statement on Street Theatre." *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 93-94.
- Callaghan, Cedric. "Black Theatre in South Africa: Links with the United States?" *Black American Literature Forum* 17, 2 (Summer 1983): 82-83.
- Cardullo, Bert. "Patterns of Opposition in *People Are Living There*." *Notes on Contemporary Literature* 16, 1 (January 1986): 3-4.
- Chidi, Amuta. "The Ideological Content of Wole Soyinka's War Writings." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 8, 2 (Spring, 1986): 102-112.
- Coplan, David B. "Ideology and Traditions in South African Black Popular Theatre." *Journal of American Folklore* 99, 392 (April-June 1986): 151-176.
- Correa, Charles. "The Public, The Private and the Sacred." *Dedalus* (Fall 1979): 93-113.
- Dasenbrock, Reed Way. "Creating a Past: Achebe, Naipaul, Soyinka, Farah." *Salmagundi* (Fall 1985/Winter 1986): 312-332.
- Ellerman, Evelyn. "Asinamali: Theatre of Emergency." *African Literary Association Bulletin* 12, 4 (Fall 1986): 21-24.
- "Feature: New York: Afro-American Theatre." *S'ketsh* (Winter 1975): 27-31.
- Feuser, Willfried. "Alain Ricard, theatre et nationalisme: Wole Soyinka et LeRoi Jones." *African Literature Today* 8: 124-130.
- "First Pan-African Cultural Festival, 1969, in Algiers." *Black Theatre* 5 (1969): 18-30.
- "From South Africa: New Writings, Photographs and Art." Special Issue of *TriQuarterly* 69 (Spring/Summer, 1987).
- "Fugard on Acting, Actors on Fugard." *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (Winter 1977- 78): 83-87.
- Gaffney, Floyd. "Black Drama and Revolutionary Consciousness: What a Difference a Difference Makes." *Theatre Annual* 41 (1986): 1-19.
- Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. "The Multicultural Paradigm: An Open Letter to the National Arts Community." *High Performance* (Fall 1989): 18-27.
- Gussow, Mel. "Stage: *Asazi* and *Gangsters*." *THB New York Times* (September 26, 1986): 63.
- Hamilton, C.A. "A Positional Gambit: *Shaka Zulu* and the Conflict in South Africa." *Radical History Review* 44 (1989): 5-31.
- Harris, Henrietta. "Building a Black Theatre." *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 157-158.
- Hatch, James V. "Retrieving Black Theatre History of Mouth to Mouth Resuscitation." *The Black Scholar* 10, 10 (July/August 1979): 58-61.
- Hill, Errol. "Remarks on Black Theatre History." *The Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1987): 609-614.
- Honegger, Gitta. "An Interview with Athol Fugard." *Theatre* 16, 1 (Fall/Winter 1984): 33-39.
- Horn, Andrew. "South African Theatre: Ideology and Rebellion." *Research in African Literatures* 17, 2 (Summer, 1986).
- Howe, Desson. "The Strong, Insistent Voices of *Woza Afrika!*." *Washington Post* (September 19, 1986).
- Igalden, J. "Building Bridges with Nomvula Mtetwa." *Odyssey* 3, 5 (September/October 1979): 16-17.
- International Defence and Aid Fund. "A New Wave of Cultural Energy: Black Theatre in South Africa." *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 57-63.

- Jackson, Caroline. "South African Zakes Mokae: An Actor Against All Odds." In *Black Masks* (October 1985): 2-3.
- Karenga, Maulana Ron. "On Black Art." *Black Theatre* 4 (1969): 9-10.
- Kennedy, Adrienne. "A Growth of Images." *The Drama Review* 21, 4 (December 1977): 43-48.
- Khan, Shafa'ath-Ahmad. "Edinburgh, That's Where." *Sowetan* (August 10, 1989): 1.
- King, Woodie, Jr. "Black Theatre: Present Condition." *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer, 1968): 117-125.
- Kock, Leon de. "Big Dramatists Should Get Bigger." *The Star* (December 1982) 12.
- Kotze, Astrid von. "Workshop Plays as Worker Education." *South African Labour Bulletin* 9, 8 (July 1984): 94-95.
- Larson, Charles R. "Protest: The South African Way." *World Literature Written in English* 15: 42-45.
- Lee, Harold. "The Literary Situation in South Africa." *Southern Review* (1972): 371-77.
- McLaren, Robert. "Antonin Artaud: The Spirit of European Theatre in the 20th Century." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1972): 43-45.
- Makhaya, Elliot. "Theatre Workshops at YMCA." *Sowetan* (February 1, 1988): 10.
- "The Mdali Black Arts Festival. D.O.C.C. (Soweto)." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973): 43-44.
- "The Mdali Festival of the Black Arts II." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1974): 33-34.
- Metsomere, Victor. "Smal's Play Hitting it Big." *Sowetan* (October 2, 1989)
- Miller, Adam David. "It's a Long Way to St. Louis: Notes on the Audience for Black Drama." *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 147-150.
- Mshengu. "Gibson Kente '74." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1974/75): 24-25.
- "Kente." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1972): 6-7.
- "New York: Afro-American Theatre." *S'ketsh* (Winter 1975): 27-31.
- "Political Theatre in South Africa and the Work of Athol Fugard." *Theatre Research International* 7, 3 (Autumn 1982): 160-179.
- "Tradition and Innovation in the Theatre Workshop '71." *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977): 63-67.
- Mthoba, James and Themba Ntinga. "Seventy One in Seventy Three: Two Members of Workshop '71 Speak Out." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973): 46.
- Mutwa, Credo. "On the Theatre of Africa." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973): 38-41.
- "Umlinganiso . . . the Living Imitation." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1974-75): 30-32.
- Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 29-39.
- "Cultural Nationalism and Black Theatre." *Black Theatre* 1 (1968): 8-10.
- Nicholar, Xavier. "The Way the Afro-Americans Criticize Each Other: *What the Wine Sellers Buy* by Ron Milner." *S'ketsh* (Winter 1975): 30-31.
- O'Neal, John. "Motion in the Ocean: Some Political Dimensions of the Free Southern Theatre." *The Drama Review* 12, 4 (Summer 1968): 70-77.
- Rich, Adrienne. "The Problem with Lorraine Hansberry." *Freedomways* 19, 4 (1979): 247-255.
- Richard, Rene. "The Stage Directions in Wole Soyinka's Plays: Suggestions for an Interpretation." *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 7, 1 (Autumn 1984): 1-19.
- Richards, Sandra. "Conflicting Impulses in the Plays of Ntozake Shange." *Black American Literature Forum* 17, 2 (Summer 1983): 73-78.
- "Negative Forces and Positive Non-Entities: Images of Women in the Dramas of Amiri Baraka." *Theatre Journal* 34, 2 (May 1982): 233-240.
- Riley, Clayton. "We Will Not Be 'a Negro Form of White Art in Blackface'." *New York Times* (June 14, 1970).
- Seligsoh, Leo. "Enriching Combination of Protest Plays." *Newsday* (September 26, 1986): 15.
- "The Theatre of South Africa's Black Spirit." *Newsday* (September 9, 1986): 7, 10.
- Sepamla, Sidney. "*Happy Ending* by Douglas Turner Ward." *S'ketsh* (Winter 1975): 14.
- "Review of *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead*." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1972): 24-25.
- "The Urban Cultural Scene—Theatre Extracts from a Winter School Talk." *S'ketsh* (Winter 1979): 17-19.
- Shava, Piniel V. "South Africa: Popular Theatre and the Political Ferment of the 1960's and the 1970's." *Presence Africaine* 136 (1985) 124-149.
- Sofola, Zulu. "The Theatre in Search of African Authenticity." *MLA AN* 80-2- 290, 126-36.
- Sole, Kelwyn. "The Graveyard and the Massacres." *S'ketsh* (May/ June 1978): 7-12.
- "Oral Performance and Social Struggle in Contemporary Black South African Literature." *TriQuarterly* 69 (Spring/Summer 1987): 254-271.
- Staslo, Marilyn. "*Woza!*: In the Heart of Blackness." *New York Post* (September 12, 1986): 20.
- Thema, Derrick. "*I Believe*: A Call for Black Unity." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1974/75): 28-29.



- Tshabangu, Mango. "Credo Mutwa's Amazing *uNosilimela* and Black Theatre." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1974): 40.
- "Interview with Kente." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1972): 8-11.
- "Interview with Sam Mhangwane." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973): 8-10.
- "Against." *S'ketsh* (Summer 1973): 19.
- Turner, Beth. "Beyond *Funnyhouse*: Adrienne Kennedy." *Black Masks* 1, 4 (December 1984).
- "Douglas Turner Ward: Bulwark of the NEC." *Black Masks* (September 1985): 2, 3, 9.
- Vanderbroucke, R. "Chiaroscuro: A Portrait of the South African Theatre." *TQ-Theatre Quarterly* 28 (1977) 46-54.
- Vilsser, N. W. "South Africa: The Renaissance that Failed." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 11, 1 (1976): 42-57.
- Wallace, Michelle. "The Politics of Location: Cinema/Theory/Literature/Ethnicity/ Sexuality/Me." *Framework* 36 (1989): 42-67.
- Wallach, Allan. "Angry Skirmishes Against a Police State." *Newsday* (September 19, 1986)
- Wilkerson, Margaret. "The Dark Vision of Lorraine Hansberry: Excerpts from a Literary Biography." *The Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1987): 642-650.
- "Redefining Black Theatre." *The Black Scholar* 10, 10 (July/August 1979): 32-42.
- X, Marvin. "Interview with Robert Macbeth." *Black Theatre* 3 (1969): 21-24.
- "Manifesto: The Black Educational Theatre of San Francisco." *Black Theatre* 6 (1969): 30-35.

## V. OTHER SOURCES FOR A CRITICAL APPROACH, INCLUDING POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

- Adamson, Walter L. *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, by Louis Althusser. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Amkpa, Awan. *Theatre and Postcolonial Desires*. London & New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958.
- Arvon, Henri. *Marxist Aesthetics*. Ithaca (New York) and London: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
- Balme, Christopher B. *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*, rd. by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Betsko, Kathleen and Rachel Koening. *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights*. New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987.
- Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985.
- *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Bouchard, Donald F., ed. *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michael Foucault*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Brown, Janet. *Feminist Drama: Definition and Critical Analysis*. Metuchen (New Jersey) and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979.
- Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. Worcester and London: The Trinity Press, 1968.
- *The Shifting Point, 1946-1987*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1987.
- Brustein, Robert. *The Theatre of Revolt: An Approach to the Modern Drama*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1964.
- Bulhan, Hussein. *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*. New York: Plenum Press, 1985.
- Case, Sue-Ellen. *Feminism and Theatre*. New York: Methuen, 1988.
- , ed. *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Chadwick, Whitney. *Women, Art and Society*. New York: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1990.
- Chinoy, Helen K. and Linda W. Jenkins, eds. *Women in American Theatre*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1981.
- Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century, Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Cohn, Ruby. *New American Dramatists: 1960-1980*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1982.

- Crow, Brian & Chris Banfield. *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Davis, Miranda, comp. *Third World-Second Sex: Women's Struggles and National Liberation. Third World Women Speak Out*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1983.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. London: NLB, 1976.
- *Exiles and Emigres: Studies in Modern Literature*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1970.
- *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.
- *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976.
- Ecker, Gisela. *Feminist Aesthetics*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.
- Elam, Keir. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London and New York: Methuen, 1984.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. London: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skins, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1982.
- *Towards the African Revolution*. New York: Grove Press, 1988.
- *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1973.
- Feder, Lillian. *Madness in Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Fisher, Dexter, ed. *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers in the United States*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1980.
- Fleshman, Bob, ed. *Theatrical Movement: A Bibliographical Anthology*. Metuchen (New Jersey) and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1986.
- Foster, Hal, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1987.
- Freire, Paulo. *La educación como práctica de la libertad*. México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1989.
- *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1987.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1961.
- *The Future of an Illusion*. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1961.
- Gabriel, Teshome. "Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetics." In *Questions of Third Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 1989.
- *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982.
- "Thoughts on Nomadic Aesthetics and the Black Independent Cinema: Traces of a Journey." In *Blackframes*, ed. by Mbye B. Cham and Claire Andrade-Watkins. London and Cambridge: The Mit Press, 1988.
- "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films." In *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. by Jim Pines and Paul Willeman. London: British Film Institute, 1989.
- Gainor, J. Ellen, ed. *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance*. London & New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1973.
- Gilbert, Helen. *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. London & New York: Routledge, 1996.
- , ed. *(Post)Colonial Stages: Critical & Creative Views on Drama, Theatre and Performance*. London: Dangaroo Press, 1999.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge (Massachusetts) and London: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Gornick, Vivian and Barbara K. Moran, eds. *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*. New York: New American Library, 1971.
- Greene, Gayle and Coppélia Kahn, eds. *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Grossberg, Lawrence, et al. *It's a Sin: Essays on Postmodernism, Politics and Culture*. Sydney (Australia): Power Publications, 1988.
- Grotowski, Jerzy. "The Theatre's New Testament." In *Ritual, Play and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/Theatre*, ed. by Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman. New York: The Seabury Press, 1976.
- *Towards a Poor Theatre*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1968.
- Hanna, Judith Lynne. *To Dance Is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- *The Performer-Audience Connection: Emotion to Metaphor in Dance and Society*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1983.
- Hart, Linda, ed. *Making Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1989.

- Hartman, Geoffrey H., ed. *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.
- Hauser, Arnold. *The Social History of Art*. Volume II, "Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque." New York: Vintage Books, 1985.
- Hedgepeth, Chester. *Theories of Social Action in Black Literature*. New York: P. Langa, 1986.
- Hooks, Bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Back*. Boston: South End Press, 1989.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Ionesco, Eugene. *Notes and Countermotes*. London: John Calder Ltd., 1964.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Aesthetics and Politics: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukacs*. London: Verso, 1986.
- *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Jung, Carl G. *The Basic Writings of C.G. Jung*, ed. by Violet S. de Laszlo. New York: The Modern Library, 1959.
- "Carl Gustav Jung: la sabiduría de los sueños." *Nueva Conciencia: Plenitud Personal y Equilibrio*. An extra monographic issue of *Integral*, 22. Barcelona: Integral Ediciones, 1991.
- ed. *Man and His Symbols*. New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1988.
- *A Primer of Jungian Psychology*, by Calvin S. Hall and Vernon J. Nordby. New York and Scarborough (Ontario): New American Library, 1973.
- Keyssar, Helene. *Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women*. New York: Grove Press, 1985.
- Kott, Jan. *The Theatre of Essence*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984.
- Kowzan, Tadeusz. "El signo en el teatro: Introducción a la semiología del arte del espectáculo." In *El teatro y su crisis actual*, by Theodor W. Adorno et al. Caracas: Monte Avila, 1969.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Lowy, Michael. *El pensamiento del Che Guevara*. México: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1989.
- Malpede, Karen, ed. *Women in Theatre: Compassion and Hope*. New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1983.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.
- Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- Mizrahi, Liliana. *Las mujeres y la culpa: Herederas de una moral inquisidora*. Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1990.
- Moraga, Cherrie and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983.
- Natalle, Elizabeth J. *Feminist Theatre: A Study in Persuasion*. Metuchen (New Jersey) and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1985.
- Newton, Judith and Deborah Rosenfelt, eds. *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture*. New York and London: Methuen, 1985.
- Newton, Kenneth M. *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.
- Nochlin, Linda. *Women, Art, Power and Other Essays*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988.
- Olaniyan, Tejumola. *Scars of Conquest / Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Cultural Identities in African, African-American and Caribbean Drama*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Volume II. Third Edition. By Nina Baym et al. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1989.
- Peterson Rocyce, Anya. *Movement and Meaning: Creativity and Interpretation in Ballet and Mime*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Raven, Arlene et al., eds. *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*. Ann Arbor (Michigan) and London: UMT Research Press, 1988.
- Rico, Araceli. *Frida Kahlo: Fantasía de un cuerpo herido*. México: Plaza y Valdés Editores, 1990.
- Robinson, Hilary, ed. *Visibly Female: Feminism and Arts: An Anthology*. New York: Universe Books, 1988.
- Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- , ed. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. London: Virago Press, 1986.
- Simonson, Rick and Scott Walker, eds. *The Graywolf Annual Five: Multi-Cultural Literacy*. Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1988.

- Snitow, Ann et al., eds. *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989.
- Spencer, Paul, ed. *Society and the Dance*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Spender, Dale, ed. *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Key Women Thinkers*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.
- Spivack, Gayatri Chakravorty. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.
- Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder (Colorado) and San Francisco: Westview Press, 1989.
- Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca (New York) and London: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.
- Unamuno, Miguel de. *Essays and Soliloquies*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1925.
- Willet, John, ed. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

## VI. INTERVIEWS

- Baraka, Amiri. Interviewed at the University of Rutgers, New Brunswick, New Jersey. November 1989.
- Dike, Fatima. Conversation with her at Langa, Cape Town. October, 1989.
- Francis, Benjy. Conversation with him at the Afrika Cultural Centre, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Hatch, James V. Interviewed at the Hatch-Billops Collection, New York, November 1989.
- Kani, John. Interviewed at the Baxter Theatre, Cape Town. October 1989.
- Kennedy, Adrienne. Interviewed at Stanford, California. December 1989.
- Khumalo, Shipiwe. Interviewed at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Klotz, Phyllis. Conversation with her at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Kunene, Mazisi. Conversation with him at the University of California at Los Angeles. June 1988.
- Ledwaba, John. Interviewed at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Maponya, Maishe. Interviewed at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Mazibuko, Doreen. Interviewed at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Mhlophe, Gcina. Interviewed in Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Moalosi, Aubrey Molefi. Interviewed in Los Angeles, California. October 1988.
- Ndaba, Smal. Interviewed at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Ngema, Mbongeni. Interviewed at Committed Artists, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Pather, Jay. Conversation with him in Cape Town. October 1989.
- Purkey, Malcolm. Interviewed at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Simon, Barney. Interviewed at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Sepamla, Siphon. Interviewed at FUBA, Johannesburg. October 1989.
- Taylor, Mavis. Conversation with her in Cape Town. October 1989.
- Wilkerson, Margaret. Interviewed at the University of Berkeley, California. December 1989.

## Appendix I

### SYNOPSIS OF PLAYS

#### THE UNITED STATES

Baraka, Amiri. *The Slave* (1964)

The play is described as “A Fable in a Prologue and Two Acts.” An old field-slave, Walker Vessels, briefly introduces the play in the Prologue. As this character abandons the stage, while singing some blues, he transforms into the Black revolutionary Walker Vessels. Vessels returns to confront Grace, his former wife (a White woman) and to take their children with him. Throughout the play, sounds of explosions are continuously heard in the background. Vessels kills Grace’s husband (Easley) and one of the explosions reaches Grace. At the end of the play a child’s cry is heard and the spectator does not know whether the children have been killed or not. The play concludes with Vessels who again becomes the old field-slave who appeared in the Prologue.

Bullins, Ed. *Goin’ a Buffalo* (1968)

A full-length play in three acts “about some Black people,” as the playwright himself asserts in the script. Only Mamma-Too-Tight is White but completely integrated in the African American community of the ghetto. Mamma serves as the comic release like Black characters did in White comedies. The play is about the appearance of Art, an old friend that Curt met while he was in jail and who helped him in the past. Curt is married to Pandora, who carries a box in which she keeps marijuana, a gun and the savings obtained through prostitution—which she is obliged to exercise under Curt’s pressure. Art brings the destruction of his friends’ dreams, causes Curt’s return to prison and steals Pandora from Curt.

Hansberry, Lorraine. *Les Blancs* (1964)

Play written as a response to Jean Genet’s *The Blacks*. The play was left unfinished due to Hansberry’s premature death. Robert Nemiroff, Hansberry’s ex-husband, completed the script with the notes left by the playwright. It takes place in an unnamed country in Africa where those in power to justify oppression and exploitation use racism. The play depicts the radicalizing of a White North American reporter, Charlie Morris, and that of an African intellectual, Tshembe Matoseh, educated in Europe, where he actually lives with his wife and son. Matoseh returns to his homeland for his father’s funeral and is obliged to decide

whether to take part in a rebellion. He is caught between his African roots and his loyalty to his family. Matoseh's first reaction is rather to remain uninvolved and detached from their people's struggle; but by the end of the play he realizes that talking is not enough and there is a need to take sides.

Kennedy, Adrienne. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964)

An expressionistic and surrealistic presentation of Sarah's psyche, an English-major student whose various selves—Queen Victoria, hunchbacked Jesus, Patrice Lumumba and Duchess of Hapsburg—run the motif of her Black father's search for identity. Her father's search is transmitted to his daughter. The play shows an agonizing picture of the inner torture suffered by Sarah, who cannot bear the pressures of being Black in North America.

Shange, Ntozake. *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* (1975)

In Shange's words, this play, which took her six years to give shape, is a documentation of emotional history. It is a celebration of the self in the portrayal of seven Black women and their need for self-affirmation. This theatrical piece is a *choreopoem* where poetry and movement become the means for women to express their hurt and anger towards White and Black men they have been related to. It is also a call and plea to these men to stop hurting their women, for women will not bear their abuse and mistreatment any longer.

Ward, Douglas Turner. *Day of Absence* (1965)

This is a satirical farce narrating the disappearance of the African American population from a Southern community only for a single day. Their disappearance reveals how dependent Whites are on the presence of African Americans. The play is conceived to be performed by a Black cast, a reverse minstrel show done in white face.

## SOUTH AFRICA

Klotz, Phyllis; Thobeka Maqutyana; Nomvula Qosha; Xolani September; Poppy Tsira, and Itumeleng Wa-Lehulere. *Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokotho (You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock)* (1986)

This play presents a rich display of Black South African women's experience. Three women who enact all different kinds of characters perform the play: old and young White and Black female and male characters that belong to the various society strata. The women present women's issues as well as the different works they are obliged to perform in their struggle for survival. The play is a clear presentation of Black South African women's self-determination to continue in the struggle for Africa's and women's liberation.

Dike, Fatima. *The First South African* (1979)

This piece tells the story of Zwelinzima, Rooi, and the problems that his skin color creates for him and his family. Rooi's father was White and her mother, Freda, is Black. He lives with his mother and Black stepfather, Austin. Both the White and the Black community reject Rooi. The Bantu Administration Office tries to take Rooi away from his mother, for

he looks White, and still he is not White. Rooi cannot find a job. Thus, the play shows the victimization of people under the absurd laws of Group Areas and Immorality Acts, which attempts to keep people in separate areas according to their skin color as well as to forbid interracial relationships. Furthermore, the play presents the township life and examines Black people's lives, including contradictory or passive characters such as Rooi's step-father; or courageous characters, such as Freda, Rooi's mother.

Manaka, Matsemela. *Egoli, the City of Gold* (1978)

This piece is a presentation of the lives of two migrant workers through a series of scenes which range from realistic everyday experiences to dream sequences, mimed work scenes and flash backs. The play contains lucid physical stage imagery rather than a realistic dialogue. The performance heavily relies on the actors' skills to expose, on the one hand, the humiliation, suffering, and abuse which Blacks face in South Africa; and, on the other hand, the character's fiery passion for survival and liberation.

Maponya, Maishe. *Gangsters* (1984)

The play is a dramatization of Stephen Biko's death in the character of the poet Rasechaba. The play consists of a series of short scenes in which a Black poet and two security police officers (one White and one Black) act out the events that led to the poet's death. Maponya's play is an impassionate attack on oppression and the oppressor.

Mtwa, Percy; Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon. *Woza Albert! (Raise Up, Albert!)* (1980)

This piece is a plotless comic satire in twenty-one scenes about the Second Coming of Christ (Morena, the Savior). The play discusses South Africa as a Christian country, fusing a strong basis of theatrical and acting skills with an urgent political message. The coming of Christ becomes the excuse to voice the South African situation under the evils of apartheid.

Mhlophe, Gcina. *Have You Seen Zandile?* (1985)

The play consists of fourteen scenes in which two women enact different female characters to narrate Zandile's childhood and her entrance into womanhood. Zandile's story is told from a child's point of view. Her grandmother has left an indelible and valuable mark in her life—the richness of oral tradition and storytelling. When the grandmother dies, Zandile is already eighteen years old and the spectator realizes her grandmother's spirit and legacy has been transmitted to Zandile.

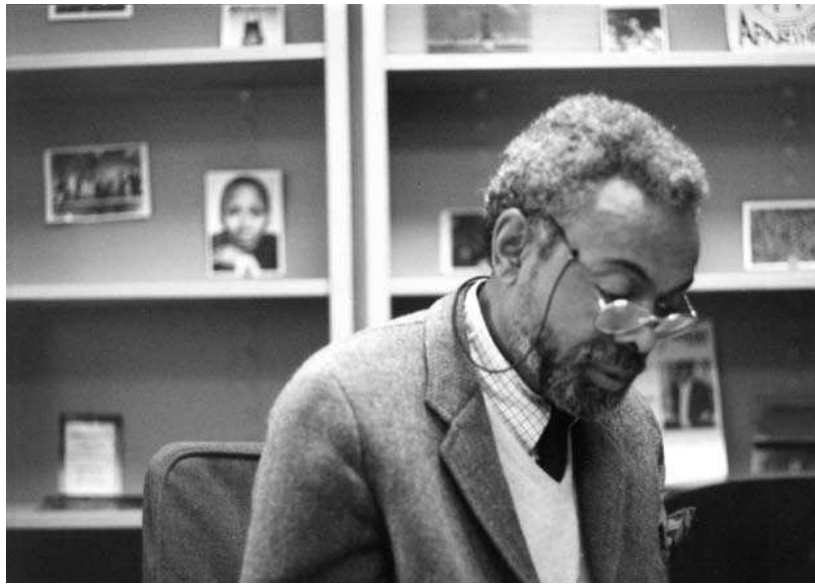
Ndaba, Smal. *So Where To? (Soweto)* (1989)

Ndaba's piece attempts to present a mirror in front of the Black community by exposing the problems that parents face when their children get pregnant due to the lack of birth control information. The play consists of three teenagers, a nurse and the father—a teacher—of one of the girls. The three girls are in a maternity room and their dialogues show their fears and unreadiness to a motherhood they did not plan.





APPENDIX II  
PHOTOGRAPHS



Amiri Baraka, University of Rutgers, New Brunswick, New Jersey, U.S.A., 1990.



Adrienne Kennedy, Stanford, California, U.S.A., 1990.



Margaret Wilkerson, University of Berkeley, California, U.S.A., 1990



James V. Hatch, Hatch-Billops Collection, New York, U.S.A., 1990



Maishe Maponya, University  
of the Witwatersrand,  
Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



Market Theatre, Johannesburg, South  
Africa, 1989



Doreen Mazibuko, Market Theatre,  
Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



Smal Ndaba, Market Theatre, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



John Ledwaba, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1988.



Siphosiso Sepamla, Director FUBA School of Arts,  
Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



FUBA, Arts School, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



FUBA, Arts School, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



Aubrey M. Moalosi, MarketTheatre, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



Mbongeni Ngema, Committed Artists, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



Malcolm Purkey, University of  
the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South  
Africa, 1989



YMCA, Orlando, Soweto, South Africa, 1989





Hostel Compound, Soweto, South Africa, 1989



FUNDA Centre, Soweto, South Africa, 1989



Gcina Mhlophe & Sphiwe Khumalo, FUNDA Centre, Soweto, South Africa, 1989



Hostel Compound, Alexandra, South Africa, 1989



Alexandra, South Africa, 1989.



Alexandra, South Africa, 1989



Sphiwe Khumalo, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1989



John Kani, Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, South Africa, 1989



Jay Pather, Cape Town, South Africa, 1989



Langa, Cape Town, South Africa, 1989



Jazzart (Dance School), Cape Town South Africa, 1989



Jazzart (Dance School), Cape Town South Africa, 1989



Fatima Dike and Friends, Langa,  
Cape Town, South Africa, 1989



Fatima Dike and Friends, Langa, Cape Town, South Africa, 1989