

**SELECTED BLACK AFRICAN  
DRAMATISTS SOUTH OF THE ZAMBEZI**

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Dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of



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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Gulamov', written over a horizontal line.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

20-01-2003

## Abstract

Late twentieth century theatre studies has been characterised by an expansion of the notion of *theatre* to encompass an enormous variety of performance-based activities. A range of pioneering academics and practitioners have moved beyond the old European-American paradigm of the literary theatre, to recognize the unique qualities of the performance as a theatrical artefact in its own right. One of the by-products of this paradigm shift has been what some would term the death - or at least diminution - of the *dramatist* or *playwright*.

Another has been the (re-)discovery of what is vaguely referred to as "African theatre". This study had no intention of taking up the argument about the precise forms and processes that belong under that rubric, nor the many problems associated with such categorizing. It has a much more mundane aim, namely to look at one form of play creation – formal playwriting - in a specified region of the vast African continent, south of the Zambezi. The focus is very specifically on *published or written texts*, created and produced in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique. For a variety of reasons not all these countries could be studied, but enough material was found to arrive at some initial conclusions. In this respect, this is a pioneering study, since no such comparative survey has yet been done.

Based on a previous pilot study by Dennis Schaffer at the University of Durban-Westville, the study utilises a process model of the theatrical system proposed by Temple Hauptfleisch (1997) as a frame of reference and a range of four basic kinds of data to answer a number of questions to study the writers and their works. The materials utilized are:

1. Play scripts
2. Biographical data, press cuttings, video recordings, articles.
3. Interviews and interviewer's journal entries.
4. Studies of the socio-political milieu

Data was gathered on 12 writers and their works, as well as some substantial information on community theatre and related forms in the region. The primary authors discussed in some detail are Gibson Kente, Zakes Mda, Gcina Mhlope, Matsemela Manaka, Fani-Kayode Osazuwa Omoregie, Freddy Philander, Vickson Tablah Hangula, Tsokolo Muso (Tjotela mor'a Moshpela), Sonny Sampson-akpan, Andreas Mavuso, and Sipho Mtetwa.

With this data the study seeks to address a number of questions concerning playwriting in the sub-continent. These include:

1. a comparison of existing performance forms and their relationships to oral traditions
2. the influence of socio-political contexts on the works produced
3. the relationship between plays and the other media, such as film and television;
4. a consideration of audiences (or target audiences) and their impact on the form and content of works,
5. the impact of the nature of, access to and availability of venues
6. the role played by funding and relationships to state institutions;
7. language choices and their impact on the arts;
8. And finally, the interesting question of cross-cultural encounters and their influence on the forms of theatre in the region.

This set of questions provide the context for a study of the variety of theatrical and performance output generated in Africa, south of the Zambezi, and to identify some common and/or divergent cultural influences in the works of the selected black African dramatists in the southern sub-continent of Africa. As expected, one such common denominator was the oral tradition, the other was the colonial heritage of western, Eurocentric theatre and literary practices. The dynamic between these traditions proved to be a point of some interest, but also posed many methodological problems.

Two other major factors in many of the countries have proven to be the lack of a strong theatrical infrastructure and divergent audience expectations, which have led to



a proliferation of non-formal and applied theatre processes (e.g. in political theatre, popular theatre, community theatre, theatre for development, etc), which in their turn pose their own methodological problems for researchers.

In the final analysis, given the restraints under which the candidate had to work, the study could only look at some interesting but selected authors, who in their works seem to illustrate some of the variety and energy of the widely dispersed region. Hopefully in doing this it provided a few broad indications of important trends. More importantly perhaps, the study did identify a number of areas for future research. It would seem that, besides a tremendous need to do considerably more work on the collection and archiving of data on theatre and performance systems, practitioners and practice in Southern Africa, there are at least three additional areas of research that require particular attention:

1. the development of an appropriate theatre research methodology for application in the region
2. a study of the role played by foreign nationals
3. the setting up of a national and continent-wide database on theatre in Africa.

## Opsomming

Teaternavorsing word in die laat twintigste eeu gekenmerk deur 'n uitbreiding van die konsep *teater* om 'n enorme spektrum tipes aanbiedings-aktiwiteite (“performance activities”) te behels. Verskeie leidinggewende akademici en praktisyns het verby die ou Europees-Amerikaanse paradigma van literêre teater beweeg om die unieke kwaliteite van die aanbieding (“performance”) as 'n kreatiewe artefak in eie reg. Een van die nuwe-produkte van hierdie verskuiwing in paradigma is die sogenaamde “dood” – of ten minste die afskaling van die rol van - die toneelskrywer of dramaturg.

'n Ander (her)ontdekking was wat ons breedweg na verwys as Afrikateater. Die studie beoog nie om al die ou argumente oor die presiese vorms en prosesse wat onder daardie benaming behoort te behandel nie, of om noemenswaardig te spekuleer oor die menige probleme wat met sodanige kategorisering gepaard gaan nie. Die doelwit is veel eenvoudiger: om na een vorm van teksskepping (formele toneelskryf) te kyk in 'n gespesifiseerde streek van die Afrika-kontinent, suid van die Zambesi. Die fokus is pertinent op *gepubliseerde of geskrewe tekste*, geskep en opgevoer in Suid-Afrika, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland en Mozambique. Om verskeie redes is nie al die lande uiteindelik deurtastend bestudeer nie, maar genoeg materiaal kon ingewin word om tog by 'n aantal voorlopige gevolgtrekkings uit te kom. In hierdie opsig is die studie uniek, aangesien nog geen ander vergelykende studie van teater in hierdie lande onderneem is nie.

Die ondersoek is gebaseer op 'n loodsprojek wat deur Dennis Schaffer by die Universiteit van Durban-Westville onderneem is, en maak gebruik van 'n proses-model van die teatersisteem wat deur Temple Hauptfleisch (1997) ontwikkel is om as 'n raamwerk te dien waarbinne vier stelle bronne ontleed en bespreek word. Die tersake bronne behels:

1. Toneeltekste
2. Biografiese inligting
3. Onderhoude, pers berigte, video-opnames, artikels
4. Studies van die sosio-politieke milieu

Inligting is oor twaalf dramaturge en hulle werk ingewin, saam met substansiële inligting oor gemeenskapsteater en aanverwante vorme. Die hoof skrywers wat in besonderhede bespreek word is Gibson Kente, Zakes Mda, Gcina Mhlope, Matsemela Manaka, Fani-Kayode Osazuwa Omoregie, Freddy Philander, Vickson Tablah Hangula, Tsokolo Muso (Tjotela mor'a Moshpela), Sonny Sampson-akpan, Andreas Mavuso, and Siphon Mtetwa.

Met hierdie data het die ondersoeker gepoog om 'n aantal vrae oor toneelskryf op die sub-kontinent aan te spreek. Die vrae sluit in:

1. 'n vergelyking tussen bestaande aanbiedingsvorme en hulle verwantskap met orale tradisies
2. die invloed van sosio-politieke kontekste op die werke gelwer
3. die verhouding tussen toneelstukke en ander media vorme, soos film en televisie
4. 'n kyk na gehore (of teiken gehore) en hulle impak op die vorm en inhoud van werke
5. die impak, aard en toeganklikheid van speelruimtes
6. die rol gespeel deur befondsing en die verhouding met staats-instellings
7. taalkeuses en hulle impak op die kunste
8. en laastens: die interessante kwessie van kruis-kulturele kontakte en hulle invloed op die vorme van teater in die streek.

Hierdie stel vrae vorm die konteks vir 'n ondersoek na die verskeidenheid van teater- en aanbiedingsuitsette wat suid van die Zambesi gegenerer word, en die identifisering van sommige gemeenskaplike en uiteenlopende kulturele invloede in die werke van swart Afrika-skrywers in die gebied. Soos verwag, was een van die gemeenskaplikhede die orale tradisie, 'n ander die koloniale erfenis van Westerse, Eurosentirese teater en literêre gebruike. Die dinamiese interaksie tussen hierdie twee

tradities het van besondere belang geblyk te wees, maar impliseer ook an hele aantal metodologiese probleme.

Twee ander faktore wat in baie van die bestudeerde lande sleutel rolle speel is die tekort aan 'n sterk teaterinfrastruktuur en uiteenlopende gehoorverwagtinge. – wat lei tot 'n proliferasie van nie-formele en toegepaste teaterprosesse (bv. In politieke teater, populêre teater, gemeenskapsteater, teater vir ontwikkeling, ens.), wat op hulle beurt ook spesifieke metodologiese uitdagings aan die navorser stel.

Gegee die beperkinge waaronder die kandidaat moes werk, kon die studie dus slegs na 'n aantal interessante maar geselekteerde outeurs kyk, wie se werke die verskeidenheid en energie van teater in die wydverspreide streek illustreer. Hopelik het die studie op die wyse 'n aantal breë aanduidings kon gee van belangrike tendense. Terselfdertyd is 'n aantal belangrike terreine vir toekomstige navorsing geïdentifiseer. Dit wil voorkom asof daar, benewens 'n enorme behoefte aan die byeenbring en argivering van data oor teater sisteme, praktisyns en aanbiedings in die streek, drie terreine is waarop dringend gewerk moet word:

1. Die ontwikkeling van 'n toepaslike teaternavorsingsmetodologie
2. 'n studie van die rol gespeel deur buitelandse praktisyns in die ontwikkeling van inheemse vorme
3. die daarstel van 'n omvangryke nasionale en trans-kontinentale databasis oor teater in Afrika

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

One of the marvels of late twentieth century theatre studies has been the expansion of the notion of theatre to encompass an enormous variety of performance-based activities. This has occurred through the pioneering work of a range of academics and practitioners who have moved beyond the old European-American paradigm of the literary theatre, to recognize the unique qualities of the performance as a theatrical artefact in its own right. Among the by-products of this paradigm shift have been what some would term the death - or at least diminution of the playwright - and the rediscovery of numerous "alternative" performance forms, or forms of "theatre".

One of these newly re-discovered traditions has been the so-called "African theatre". What that means, what forms and processes all belong under that rubric, what problems are associated with such categorizing, and so on has been much debated over the years, by most of the luminaries of the academic and artistic world. So this study has no intention of taking up that argument again, but has a much more mundane aim, namely to look at one form of play creation in a specified region of the vast African continent.

In our own cultural endeavours as South Africans, we are becoming more and more aware of a need to recognize and to root ourselves somehow in a wider, yet

inescapable African context. Yet for so many years we have had no access to it, even within our own country. It has only been in the past two decades that authors and academics have begun to study the work of local, non-Western forms in seriousness.

### **1.1 Aims of the study**

Given the situation outlined above this study intends to begin an exploration of theatre practice, and in particular the playwriting activities in a number of countries south of the Zambezi. The focus will be on published or written texts, and the countries originally targeted were South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique. For reasons to be explained further on, not all these countries could be studied, but enough were done to arrive at enough data to come to some initial conclusions.

The study is based on a former study by Dennis Schaffer (see Appendix 1) and , utilizing a process model of the theatrical system proposed by Temple Hauptfleisch (see Appendix 2) as a frame for the study. The candidate then uses a comparative technique – which she has termed “quadulation” (see 1.4 below) - to address a number of issues of some importance in the developing inter-regional exchange of artistic output. These include:

- (a) a comparison of existing performance forms and their relationships to oral traditions
- (b) the influence of socio-political contexts on the works produced



- (c) the relationship between plays and the other media, such as film and television;
- (d) a consideration of audiences (or target audiences) and their impact on the form and content of works,
- (e) the impact of the nature of, access to and availability of venues
- (f) the role played by funding and relationships to state institutions;
- (g) language choices and their impact on the arts;
- (h) And finally, the interesting question of cross-cultural encounters and their influence on the forms of theatre in the region.

This set of questions provide a context for some tentative speculation about the extent of a shift to an Afrocentric paradigm . In addition, the study seeks to outline some of the limitations encountered by researchers, and questions of appropriate methodology and assessment criteria.

## **1.2 Community theatre, popular theatre and theatre for development**

Perhaps one of the most prominent buzzwords today is that of *community theatre* (and the reader will find references to it throughout this study). Certainly the concept is widely used in the region we are studying, and in some areas we have been studying the practice of "community theatre" it has proved to form the core of theatre activity. While it has not been the intention of this study to focus on anything except the performance of written scripts (i.e. formal plays), one cannot ignore the impact of what has variously been named community theatre, theatre for development and

popular theatre (see Steadman, Kerr, Kruger, et al.) So perhaps a few notes on community theatre may be of use in planning any further research.

In this regard an important conference took place at the Victoria Hotel in Maseru, Lesotho, from 19<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2000. This was an event coordinated by the *Market Theatre Laboratory* and it brought together representatives of community theatre organisations from most of the SADEC countries for the purposes of formalising the loose association of such groups that had been set up in Swaziland the year before. Dennis Schaffer attended this event, having been granted observer status in what effectively was an all Black African group of representatives. He also made full use of the opportunity to record interviews with many of the delegates.

In reading his reports on the formation of *SATI (Southern African Theatre Initiative)*, it seemed to me that here was an example of a kind of theatre unique to Southern Africa. The focus upon communal creation of performance using the local languages of the community and drawing upon the traditions, customs, legends, dances, and rituals of the particular society all seemed to accord well with an Afrocentric approach to the creation of theatre. The debate on directly relevant issues raised by the presentations made this form of theatre peculiarly relevant to the target audience, and the fact that the entire exercise is, in financial terms, donor-driven makes the work accessible in a way that no commercially presented piece could ever be. Community theatre is, of course, a term used all over the world but it seemed to me that in the southern sub-continent of Africa it had developed into a unique hybrid form of undeniable importance. Schaffer reports that a website is to be set up by the *Market Theatre Laboratory* listing over 3000 independent community theatre groups

known to exist in the sub-continent. Mpo Molepho who is in charge of this valuable record, and who chaired the meetings in Maseru, estimates that the total number of individuals involved in Community theatre and working under the umbrella of one or more of these groups is of the order of 45 000 with the majority being in their late teens. (Schauffer, Log.)

In America the term Community theatre refers to something completely different from the kind of theatre SATI is seeking to coordinate and promote. From the website of the American Association of Community Theatre representing the interests of over 1000 Community theatre groups ([webmaster@oact.org](mailto:webmaster@oact.org)) comes the information that amateur acting companies existed in America from as early as 1788 (the Thalian Association of Wilmington, North Carolina) which still exists today along with other very long-standing groups such as the Community Theatre (in Salt Lake City (founded in 1853) and The Footlight Club in Boston (founded in 1877). But 'Community Theatre' as a term only came into general use in America at the turn of the last century when with the advent of movies, the small-town professional playhouses closed or were converted into movie-houses - much in the same way as many theatres in South Africa were converted.

Essentially the American Community theatre practitioners do not aspire to professional status, although they may well aspire to professional standards. In South Africa they would simply be "amateurs". By comparison practitioners in Community theatre groups in the African sub-continent do receive money for their participation - which makes them professional in the strictly legal definition of the term. The levels of remuneration are of course pathetically low by comparison with some earnings

abroad but in an economically depressed region of the world low earnings are better than no earnings at all. Most participants seem to join community theatre groups after their matric or senior certificate at the end of High School education and one suspects that unlike participants in Community theatre in America or in Amateur Dramatic Associations in England or on the Continent, the Southern African Community theatre participants are driven as much by the desire to earn a meagre living as by the desire to celebrate their creative potential within the art.

Schauffer's log makes interesting reading in this regard. In the log entry dated 27/05/2000 he notes:

Tebogo quietly asked Nivashni on the way out of Ghetto Artists headquarters in Mabutho Street in the suburb of Donga in Francistown, for her contact address in South Africa. The same thing happened at Bricks in Katatura with Christie Warner. In the official recorded interviews all the community theatre workers spoke of their absolute commitment to community development through theatre, despite the lowest subsistence levels of funding for their involvement. Meanwhile I got the clear impression that if we were auditioning any of these young people for the opportunity to act in a well-paid movie, TV series, or commercial

theatre piece which was pure entertainment  
without a hint of "community development" we  
would have been killed in the rush.

(Schauffer - Log.)

All of the above notwithstanding, 45 000 underpaid professionals still make  
community theatre the largest professional grouping in the region, outnumbering  
mainstream professional practitioners by a handsome margin.

In terms of this study however, they are of no direct interest, for such groups normally  
only create scripts of communal authorship - that is if they are recorded at all. The  
motive for creating scripts appears not to be for publication nor, in practise, for  
regular re-use in subsequent productions of the same work, but for inclusion in reports  
to donors and to donor agencies as part of being accountable for donations received,  
and as indication to future donors of the nature and quality of the work capable of  
being generated by the group should they be so fortunate to receive funding in the  
future.

Long influenced by Augusto Boal's work, this notion of community theatre has  
obvious relevance here in the sub-continent of Africa and elsewhere in Africa where a  
hybrid version of community theatre is practiced, and comes close to the form created  
by the *Colway Theatre Trust* (C.T.T.) founded in 1979 by the playwright Ann  
Jellicoe. It seemed incredible that in Lyme Regis in Colway, in Southern England, an  
experiment in theatre twenty-two years ago should play itself out so effectively here

in Africa today, in a cultural milieu quite divorced from the influence of mainstream Eurocentric culture<sup>1</sup>.

But there are also differences between the British and Southern African practice. The single most important difference is that the British model uses local issues, local talent, and local human resources not only to create theatrical presentations of social relevance, but also to draw this material together in order to create a publishable script. The Southern African approach (very understandably - for the reasons discussed in this thesis) is to de-emphasize the word. Another point of major significance is that many Black African dramatists who have published play scripts also work in community theatre. Zakes Mda for example donates his time to community groups in Dobsonville (Asoka Theatre Profile Series, Zakes Mda, p.8) and he does not produce his own work 'except when we talk about theatre for development where I have produced and directed' (Asoka Theatre Profile Series, Zakes Mda, p.9). Similarly, Matsemela Manaka did community theatre work through Soyikwa (See appendix 4), John Kani has undertaken similar sort of work not only in South Africa but also abroad, and the Market Theatre Laboratory offers outstanding support and encouragement to community theatre groups not only in South Africa but throughout the sub-continent. John Ledwaba may start with a script but even this is a product of workshopping with others.

... I write a lot of stuff, but I leave the group to workshop the situations.

(S.A./J.L.)

This approach evolved out of Ledwaba's association with Sam Mangwane and Maishe Maponya's work with the *People's Theatre Association*.

Thus, whilst there are variations in approach, the Black African dramatists in South Africa seem to contribute to the theatre on three levels. (1) Through publication of their scripts they are contributing to a growing canon of South African dramatic literature. (2) Through their work in mainstream theatre both within South Africa and abroad they have brought a vibrancy to the theatre that owes much to the tradition of using theatre to tell a story in a simple and effective way. Uncluttered by the necessity to present the work within the Western presentational style of Realism, the works can move with ease from scene to scene in a swift panorama of sequential scenes, flashbacks, presentations that collapse the distinction between past and present, natural and super-natural (as in Mda's version of Magic Realism), audience space and performance space (as in Matsemela Manaka's late works), ritual and performance (as in The Asabo Tail by Sonny Samson-akpan).

(3) Finally most Black African dramatists seem to maintain strong links with community theatre groups and many involve themselves directly in 'theatre for development' as some would call it<sup>2</sup>.

It could be argued that involvement of dramatists in both workshopping and scriptwriting - in communal authorship has been the to benefit of both, with the community providing a rich range of material for facilitators, directors, or playwrights to use their skills to order and shape into a production that is then scripted or not as the case may be. The full extent of the impact of community theatre in the sub-continent is too early to assess and as a form of theatre it will always be at risk because of its funding base. Shifts in world economy impact upon the willingness of

donor countries to contribute to such initiatives, worthy though they may perceive them to be. Political unrest in the region may also negatively affect sponsorship from abroad. Only time will tell for instance, what the effect of the present Zimbabwean situation or the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York will be on donor aid to the region. Sustainability is thus a matter of major concern.

A possible solution for sustaining some groups seems to lie in attaching them to or at least associating them with parastatal institutions in the various countries. In Namibia for example, *Bricks Community Theatre* receives assistance from *NAC (Namibian Arts Council)* and *NAC* also runs its own programme of theatre for development by sending out what amounts to *ad hoc* community theatre companies, to facilitate social awareness, health awareness and to provide through theatre a problem-solving mechanism through which to address social problems in rural communities. In Botswana community theatre is also supported by the central government, and independent organisations such as *Reetsanang* in Gaborone have built up reserves over the years to be able to sustain some financial cutbacks, at least in the short term, in addition the *University of Botswana* has established a unit which uses students in a Community outreach programme. Indirect University funding through the provision of space, transport and subsistence then absorbs the cost of sustaining this small company in large measure. Lecturers who act as facilitators can do so without additional remuneration as this has been incorporated into their academic workload. The advantage of working through a University Department includes the fact that in a academic setting there is a greater likelihood of scripts being developed by these student groups under the guidance of lecturers whose mindset is perhaps closer to the printed page than the mindset of most Community Theatre practitioners. Dr.



Omoregie at the University of Botswana looks forward to developing such scripts, as does his counterpart at the University of Roma in Lesotho, Sonny Sampson-akpan who has already collected together what he regards as exciting student writing which has emerged from the Community Theatre approach.

In South Africa Theatre-in-education groups have existed for many years at Universities, and at training colleges and Technikons. Whilst this is not community theatre according to *SATI* thinking, one could envisage the possibility of these parastatal bodies one day embracing the community theatre methodology in their training of drama students. Some Universities already have established theatre for development or community theatre exercises as part of the training. So the possibility exists that community theatre could survive in some measure by being associated with, attached to, or even generated by parastatal bodies. There are no certain solutions however, as is illustrated by the fact that a programme of community development in the Umgeni Valley and an outreach programme to the Westville prison came to an untimely end with the demise of the Drama Department on the campus of the University of Durban-Westville.

We are still far too close to the situation to assess the impact of democratic rule in South Africa or to predict with any certainty trends in the development of theatre in the region but one thing is for certain and that is that the only constant factor is change. The development of the National television services in countries like Namibia, Botswana and Lesotho has come hand in hand with the movements towards the establishment of theatre unions and there is talk of a National Theatre being built in Gabarone. All this tends to shift the emphasis slightly from the ethos of

Community Theatre to that of 'professional' theatre in the western sense of the term.

In an interview with James Chitakuta, the former National coordinator for Reetsanang Association of Community Drama Groups in Gaborone, Botswana, Schaffer asks:

How is professional theatre to develop when all the  
community theatre work that you do is presented  
free of charge to the community? This means  
that in the minds of the audience, this thing  
called "theatre" is a free service to the  
community? How then are professional actors to  
be paid?

(B/JC)

Whilst community theatre practitioners are 'professional' in the strictly legal sense (they get paid something for the practice of their art) the methodology of community theatre practice does not put the focus upon individuals as playwrights, directors, critics, designers, or actors. The emphasis lies on matters such as group authorship, workshopping as a developmental method and upon collaborative consensus in creation. In this way community theatre stands in some measure in opposition to what is regarded as 'establishment theatre' in the west. For example, Chitakuta, in reply to Schaffer's question calls for a balance between professional theatre and so-called theatre for development and empowerment, making the point that the practice of 'theatre' is not foreign to the people of Africa, who have sung songs, danced, recited poetry and preserved an oral tradition for centuries. All of this was done to preserve the oral history of the tribes, and to teach, mobilise, and to organise society.

With colonialism came 'the new theatre ... which marginalized the theatre, which was already there ... when intellectuals came in they tried ... to own theatre and in other words they tried to own culture and that's where the problems began ... Theatre is created by the people and what we need to do is to promote that notion. To promote something that draws energy from the people, something that people can identify with, something that people can call "ours" not "mine". "Ours" because theatre is collective.' (B/JC)

So for Chitakuta involvement in community theatre is not driven by the motive to earn a living from it but is driven by the desire to 'inform, educate, conscientise, socialise and organise communities and to promote development communication.'

(B/JC) He argues that when the shift is from community service to employment then there is also a need to institutionalise training in professional theatre, to establish some training institutions for this purpose. But he is concerned that this should not be 'at the expense of theatre, which is meant to empower communities.' (B/JC)

To make any sense of the present situation suggested by this brief outline, one will need to rely upon follow-up studies and studies that will address neglected fields. An urgent need is for a study to be mounted, which would enquire into the situation that exists in the Portuguese speaking countries of the region - something that was precluded from consideration here. The developing history of *SATI* as a movement needs to be tracked and new faces and new names in Black African dramaturgy need to be found, consulted, and written up, whilst the new directions in which those whose work has been noted are travelling need to be monitored and recorded. It is a major task requiring the full-time involvement of a specially funded research unit. It is to be

hoped that this can be established before the material that is being developed at this exciting juncture disappears forever. Such is the nature of our art, which is both its glory and its bane.

When first proposed this thesis set out to investigate common and divergent cultural influences in the works of selected black African dramatists in the southern sub-continent of Africa. One of the possibilities for a common denominator between dramatists from this vast geographic area and from an equally vast divergence of cultures was the oral tradition, so strong in all African cultures. The writer was not aware of any study that had thus far been mounted to test this or other relevant assumptions within the scope of a sub-continental study. The possible problems raised by the subjective involvement of the researcher were to be confronted and resolved by the adoption of a non-dual approach to the analysis of material. When it came to putting the above proposals into practice however, several revisions had to be made, definitions of terms sought, delimitation's declared, sections expanded, and a more thorough cross-referencing of the content of the play scripts with the interviews was undertaken. A major revision of the methodological approach also became imperative for reasons that shall be outlined below.

As to the scope and need for this study, the sub-continental focus renders this work distinct from other studies in the field that have confined themselves to South Africa alone. See Coplan (1985), Couzens (1985), Hauptfleisch (1997), Steadman's various articles (1980-1990), Kruger (1999), Larlham (1985), Kavanagh (1985) etc. Another distinguishing feature may well prove to be the methodology that has emerged organically from the nature of the material and the needs of the study. The sub-

continental scope of the study also involves issues, such as the various forms of colonialism, cultural hegemony, the existing challenges to the integration, and possible resurgence of the Afrocentric paradigm in the performing arts. This being the case the research could contribute substantially to the current debates raised by the so-called 'African Renaissance' movement (President Thabo Mbeki; Njabulo Ndebele; Prof. Pitika Ntuli etc.) In this way, the study could claim relevance beyond pure theatre studies, while the archival records might also be of value to future researchers in this field.

In An Introduction to post-colonial theatre, Brian Crow comments:

It is easy to see the absurdity of an audience sweating its way through a stilted performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream or An Inspector Calls in an ill equipped colonial hall on a hot tropical night in Africa or India, especially when all around, unknown or unacknowledged, were indigenous theatrical riches the western avant-garde would one day set out on cultural safaris to discover.

(Crow, B.: 1996,p.13)

Whilst Peter Brooke drew inspiration from encounters with a variety of Northern African sources, the same has been happening in the southern sub-continent. Indeed there are reports from Windhoek, Gaborone, Maseru etc. that scholars from continental and American Universities are already spending their sabbatical leaves, summer vacations, and mid-term breaks on visits to this region conducting interviews, gathering hardcopy material, and filming theatrical activity - as indeed they are in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg. This has created its own problems and

Botswana has recently introduced a permit requirement for non-Botswanian researchers in order to protect the cultural and intellectual rights of the region from perceived exploitation. But resistance to particularly White researchers investigating Black theatre has a long history. During the 1970's and early 1980's Peter Larlham undertook the fieldwork, which led to the publication in 1985 of his highly informative book Black Theatre, Dance and Ritual in South Africa. In the preface he comments 'As a White researching Black performance in South Africa, I found initial contact with organisations and participants was difficult to establish.' (Larlham, P: 1985 p. i) This is hardly surprising when one considers that this period was witness to the rising influence of the Black Consciousness (BC) movement. Larlham was not alone in encountering such difficulties. In his inaugural lecture as Professor of Drama at the University of Durban-Westville, Dennis Schaffer recalls that when he sought an interview with Benji Francis and Saths Cooper.

...in order to gain insight into the development of TECON beyond the movement that I considered myself to have been an early witness to, my request was refused''. The reason given was that in their view "one of them" should research this.

(Schaffer D.: 1990, p.6)

I, myself, received an equally cold welcome from many of the members of the Indian community when I researched and wrote my thesis for my Master's degree.

Schaffer's membership of TECON (Theatre Council of Natal)<sup>1</sup> had not been renewed after the first year, as the organisation had resolved to adopt a B.C. stance. Now this raises a number of interesting questions; the membership of TECON, apart from

Schauffer's of course, was drawn from the Durban Indian Community. The question then arises: 'Is "Indian" Black?'

Schauffer recalls that in 1992 he was approached by a very confused Black African drama student who was finding great difficulty in coming to terms with the concept of 'blackness' as encountered in his movement classes. Suria Govender, a movement lecturer in the Department of Drama at the University of Durban-Westville had claimed that she was an African first and an Indian second. 'That's all very well' said the student, 'but she doesn't look very African to me!' <sup>2</sup> Clearly in the mind of the student the term 'Black person' and 'African person' were synonymous with 'Black African person'. What appears on the surface to be a self-evident term becomes a site for contestation.

Loren Kruger reminds us that in interpreting the term Black, 'the PAC had stressed the priority of indigenous Africans, whilst S.A.S.O.'s leaders included South Africans of Indian descent and its founding president, Stephen Biko, had argued for an inclusive interpretation of black consciousness "not as a matter of pigmentation" but rather as a "reflection of a mental attitude".' (Kruger, L.: 1999. p.129) <sup>3</sup>

This mental attitude must be read however as that which is characterised by the defiance of white supremacy. It was therefore in vain that Schauffer appealed to TECON for reinstatement.

I wrote what I considered at the time to be reasoned appeal to the organisation to judge membership eligibility on the basis of the member's declared political stance rather than upon the colour of the members skin, a determination which I

regarded as inverted racism ... I did not receive a reply but this in itself was a clear message to me:" You're white, so you're out."

(Schauffer, D.: 1990, p.6.)

Between Larlham's fieldwork in the 1970's and today, many major changes have occurred in the socio-political landscape of the sub-continent. This study delimits itself to a consideration of black African dramatists south of the Zambezi. Prior to 1970 three states in this region had achieved independence:

- ❖ Botswana – 30<sup>th</sup> September 1966
- ❖ Lesotho – 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1966
- ❖ Swaziland – 6<sup>th</sup> September, 1968.

Thereafter the record reads:

- ❖ Mozambique – 25<sup>th</sup> June 1975
- ❖ Zimbabwe – 18<sup>th</sup> April 1980
- ❖ Namibia – 21<sup>st</sup> March 1990
- ❖ South Africa – 27 April 1994.

Whilst Larlham has emigrated to the United States, Schauffer is still active in local theatre research and has turned his attention more recently to a consideration of black African dramatists south of the Zambezi, which is very fortunate for this researcher. The fact of the matter is that neither my health, my job, nor my family commitments, could ever see me travelling the length and breadth of the sub-continent, undertaking fieldwork for this thesis. Schauffer has on the other hand already covered much of the territory in search of material for his Theatre Profile Series <sup>4</sup>. Having spent three years of part-time involvement on this research project, he had covered most of the field in South Africa and was about to extend the study to include neighbouring territories,



when the University of Durban-Westville decided, in its wisdom, to shut the departments of Fine Art, Music and Drama together with the departments of Indian Languages, and European Languages. This cut Schauffer off from his funding base for the research exercise.

Having secured private funding through me, together we created a set of questions we felt would be pertinent to the topic being covered. We had a basic set of questions as well as a set of additional questions that could be used if the interviewee went off on a tangent. He and his research assistant then completed a tour of the sub-continent which garnered video and audio interview material, *curricula vitae* and co-lateral material, together with some valuable unpublished play scripts, covering Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Tanzania. Although Zambia and Tanzania fall outside the geographic delimitation of this study, this record provides some interesting comparative insights. Schauffer did intend ultimately to draw this material together in the form of a publication but, given the closure of the Department of Drama, his enforced early retirement and the lack of capacity in consequence to source research funding, he has agreed to give me access to copies of all his video and audio material, co-lateral material, scripts and to his researcher's journal. This alone however will not suffice to answer the key questions that this thesis sets out to investigate. Reference to a broad range of other source material will be required. The thorny matter of the methodology with which to interrogate this material also needs attention and this will be dealt with below.

### **1.3 Definition of Terms**

Turning to the title of this thesis, it is obvious that there is hardly a word in this title that may not be contested. So let us briefly consider a few working definitions for the discussion to follow.

### **Black, White, Coloured and Indian.**

The terms *Black*, *White*, *Coloured* and *Indian* resonate with meanings that derive from the use of such terms by the previous apartheid regime and its British and Dutch colonial predecessors in their differentiation of racial groupings in Southern African society. (Other such categorising terms over the course of the past century were Native, Bantu, Asian, European, Non-European, 'Brown people', etc., but they are not germane here.) Contrary to our fondest expectations, these terms have unfortunately not disappeared under the new democratic dispensation since 1996, since they now form the basis for restitution and equity moves by the government and civil society. In the discussion to follow we shall thus use them to differentiate between racial divisions which existed at the time the plays were written and will employ Ian Steadman's simplified definitions, as provided in his unpublished doctoral thesis (Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984):

... 'White' refers to European settlers and their descendants of the Caucasian group, and 'European', often used incorrectly as a synonym for white, is used here to differentiate between South African whites and native inhabitants of Europe. 'Coloured' refers to people legally categorised in South Africa as being of mixed descent, whereas 'African' refers to peoples of the Bantu group who are of Negro-African descent, and 'Indian' refers to

descendants of the Asian people, who settled in South Africa since the nineteenth century.

(Steadman, I. P.: 1985, p.51)

An important rider to this however, is the Black Consciousness Movement's politicisation and extension of the notion of 'blackness' to include all so-called 'coloureds' and 'Asians' during the struggle period (1970-1990). In Black South African Women Kathy Perkins (1998) quotes Loueen Conning as saying:

I consider myself African. But this is not a general Coloured perception. In fact a lot of Coloured people deny their African heritage. There is an aspiration towards white beauty although it is not overtly stated, but they furiously straighten their hair so that you can't see the African kink, they still consider a straighter nose, thinner lips, and lighter skin as beauty.

(Perkins, A.: 1998, p.6.)

This is a clear expression of the Black Consciousness stance, which is also revealed in the People's Educational Theatre publication the PET Newsletter no 2 (as quoted by Kruger, 1999), where it is stated that SABTU (the South African Black Theatre Union) regarded theatre as a 'means to assist Blacks to reassert their pride, dignity, group identity and solidarity' ... in part by recovering a history of 'black civilisations' ... and in part by offering 'positive representations of the needs, aspirations, and goals of Black people as seen by Blacks now' (quoted in Kruger L.: 1999, p.130).

Much of the South African writing to be discussed is a product of this period of political radicalisation and thus informed by these ideas.

## **Black Theatre/White Theatre**

From the foregoing perspective Peter Larlham (1985) viewed *Black theatre* and *White theatre* as a separate genres of theatre in his discussion of South African theatre and performance:

In South Africa there is a clear-cut distinction between White theatre and Black theatre. The division is not supported by language differences, or by the mutual agreement of all Black and White South Africans, but is maintained through the policy of apartheid and its supporting legalisation. ... It is for this reason that Black theatre, distinct and separate, can be dealt with as a genre on its own.

(Larlham. P; 1985. pp. 61-61)

Whilst the political climate has changed, the plays discussed in this study were mostly conceived and produced in the divisive and distinctive context of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this context 'black theatre' was largely defined politically (see Steadman, 1985 for example), but for our purposes it simply refers to plays written by authors outside the 'white' or 'Indian' communities and theatre practitioners working outside the formal 'white' structures in the period. The fact is the varied mindsets of the past will remain for some considerable time and the plays reflect this - despite the immense range of form and content in the work. Furthermore, if it can be accepted then that *Black theatre* could be considered as a distinct genre in South Africa, it still remains to be justified as a term in respect of the neighbouring states south of the Zambezi, Zambia, etc. Schaffer's interviews with non-South African dramatists in the sub-continent

however have tended to support the notion that the division into *White theatre* and *Black theatre* may be equally tenable throughout the region. The only difference being that *White theatre* in neighbouring territories seems often to be referred to as *expatriate theatre* instead.

## **African**

In view of the preceding thought, it became necessary to add a further delimitation to the title of this study, by adding the term *African* in order to specify the focus of the study on a category of dramatists who are specifically of the Bantu group (i.e. of Negro-African descent), in contrast to other groupings that could fall under the term *black* (as outlined above). Indeed throughout this study liberal use will be made of the term *African* in expressions such as South African, Southern African, African mindset, traditional African ritual, African renaissance, African drama, African theatre, African art, African literature, etc. However, in our post-apartheid, post-colonial present it would be naïve to ignore layers of meaning that history has heaped upon this term by simply accepting a dictionary meaning ‘ of or pertaining to the African continent.’

Yvette Hutchison in her unpublished D.Phil. thesis (Memory is a Weapon: The uses of History and Myth in selected Post-1960 Kenyan, Nigerian and South African Plays) gives an extensive account of the shift in meaning of the term ‘African’ from pre-colonial to post-colonial use. Hutchison quotes Rolf Italiaander (who in turn quotes from Das sterbende Afrika by Leo Frobenius, published in 1923) who says ‘Here one sees the representation of Africa as passive, a homogeneous continent of

one "race", that had slept until it had been awoken by colonial impact.' (Hutchison, Y.: 1999. P.30).

The term *African* would then have taken on resonances of this passivity and of the implicit meaning determined by the Eurocentric, colonialist mindset. Set against this is the dedication in black post-colonialist discourse to rediscover what remains of a neglected, and in the main unrecorded, past through the oral history, rites, myths, and legends that were marginalized at best, or totally ignored by historians in colonial times. According to Hutchison the shift in meaning was:

... partly a response to the world, with the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, the way Jews were treated in Germany, Ghandi's nationalism, and the developments in North Africa. The events shocked many of the Black intellectuals into changing their view of the West and rejecting European models, shifting towards a more aggressive assertion of the "African Personality"

(Hutchison, Y. 1999, pp. 28- 29.)

She goes on to point out that this shift coincided with the Negritude movement in black Francophone intellectuals and the impact of Marxism, the American Negro Renaissance, and Black Consciousness. Later the move was towards Pan-Africanism. The new meanings or implications inherent in the post-colonial use of 'African' arose from the desire to rehabilitate a lost pride in being African, the desire to vindicate Africa's rich but neglected past, and from the desire to offer ' an ideological rejoinder to colonial historiography ' (Hutchison, Y.: 1999, p.29 – Quoting Temu and Swai).

Similarly, in an attempt to describe the essence of African thought in her monumental work Yurugu, Marimba Ani says:

The African universe is personalised not objectified. Time is experienced. There is no infinite and abstract future; it grows organically from past to present. Value is placed on “being” rather than on “doing”. The universe is understood through phenomenal interaction, which produces powerful symbols and images, which in turn communicate truths. “Diunital” logic indicates that in African thought a thing can be both A and not A at the same time. Though Dixon does not say it explicitly, what he calls “diunital logic” can be understood as the recognition and affirmation of the ambiguity and multidimensionality of phenomenal reality.

(Ani, M.:1994, pp. 97-98)

The difficulty I have with all of this is that I have a resistance to regarding any group of persons as anything more than a collective of individuals loosely bound together by some or other, sometimes arbitrarily imposed, rubric. I am conscious therefore of an unwillingness to see black African dramatists as an homogenous unity of creative artists, with a common set of background experiences, a common response to political and social imperatives, or even a common vision of what it is to be African. A reading of Schaffer’s interviews reveals a wide range of approaches, different backgrounds, and even a few commonalities .Of these one could list the direct or indirect influence of the oral tradition. Even so, if one gathered together a group of white African dramatists and asked them whether or not their parents or grandparents told them stories, or taught them nursery rhymes, or if they encountered storytelling in one form or another at pre-primary and junior school, I should imagine that everyone would admit to experiencing this as part of their childhood .The oral tradition then is common to all cultures but is arguably more prominent in some than in others. This is not to deny the strength and importance of storytelling as a tradition in black African society, but such a tradition is not exclusive to black African society. What emerges

by degrees in this work is a tendency towards post-modern thought, and this too makes it very difficult for me to impose upon a term like 'African' a fixed, set, immutable meaning. The term 'African' has no intrinsic meaning beyond that which can be derived from the context of contemporary common use or from that which is negotiated with an audience (see for example H. Blau, 1990, Carlsson, 1996). Apart from the reasons cited earlier for the use of the adjective 'black' in the title, the above observations serve to provide further justification for such use. The addition of the word 'African' in the title simply provides a geographic delimitation.

### **Dramatist versus Playwright.**

Moving on then to the term Dramatist, it has been argued that the term Playwright would have been more apposite. 'Playwright' is indeed a most suitable word as its literal meaning is 'maker of plays' and in the African context, where so much reliance is placed upon the spoken rather than upon the written word it would seem to be the preferable term for use in this study. A dramatist is quite simply defined as a writer of plays. Why then has Dramatist been chosen in preference to Playwright? The problem that any theatre researcher faces is the sheer ephemeral nature of the subject of investigation. The act of theatre involves the negotiation of dramatic meaning with a live audience, and such negotiation is in a constant state of flux. Let alone from performance to performance, even within a single performance the actor/audience dynamic is changing all the time. On one night, let us say, a cell phone rings at a crucial moment in the play disrupting the negotiation of dramatic meaning. Some in the audience laugh some appear to be angry - who can say what the exact nature of the audience response is? On another night the same incident could produce



something that could be read as embarrassed silence but again who can say if this is in fact the case?

Research into the performative aspects of the art of theatre involves an active presence at /or in performance in order to encounter the subject. A play script, as has frequently been pointed out, is in most cases simply the skeleton in print of what must be fleshed out in performance. Aside from literary drama, which is written to be read more often than performed – or indeed, intended only to be read – there exists written dramatic scripts that are the only relics of performances that researchers can now encounter.

This dissertation limits itself to the study of such ‘relics’ as the only practicable means now remaining whereby such works can be studied. Video or television recordings are excluded, firstly because they are relatively rare, secondly the quality of the filming does not, one suspects, do justice to the production being filmed, and thirdly (and possibly most importantly) film is a distinctly different medium from live theatre. Analysis is therefore to be undertaken via methodology specific to the medium in question. Practical necessity therefore makes the term ‘dramatist’ (as a writer of play scripts for production or as a post-production record) a more appropriate choice than ‘playwright’ (a creator of plays for performance).

### **Drama vs. Theatre**

Special attention must be given to the terms 'drama' and 'theatre'. As suggested above the term *drama* is used here to refer to the text-based play written by a *dramatist*.

However *theatre* has come into use as a general term in the sub-continent to refer to all theatrical events and presentations, often used as a synonym for *drama* on the one hand and *performance* on the other.

*Theatre* indeed occurs as a term in a plethora of labels attached to an enormous variety of theatrical (performance-based) activity encountered in the sub-continent<sup>6</sup>, and comes in a huge range of interrelated forms - identified by well-known and not so well-known names - many of which have been studied separately over the years. The more familiar in the regions discussed include *Educational Theatre* (as distinct from Drama-in-Education), *Community Theatre* (an important form in Africa, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven) *Theatre for Development*, *Worker's Theatre*, *Protest Theatre*, *Theatre for Resistance*, *Theatre for Awareness*, *Outreach Theatre*, *Professional/Semi-Professional/Amateur Theatre*, *Donor-generated Theatre*, *Formal Theatre*, *Serious Theatre*, *Popular theatre*, *People's Theatre*, *Legitimate Theatre*, *Industrial Theatre*, *Agit. Prop. Theatre*, *Committed Theatre*, *Township Theatre*, *Musical Theatre*, *Ethnic Theatre*, *Traditional African Theatre*, *Indic Theatre*, *Eurocentric Theatre*, *Afrocentric Theatre*, *Dance Theatre*, *Improvised Theatre*, *Physical Theatre*, *Street Theatre*, *African Theatre* and so on. There are no doubt many more not listed, but it is not the intention here to pick through the niceties of differences between such labels - many writers have already done so (see Bibliography). Suffice it to say that any black African dramatist or collective, working in any category of live theatre that has produced scripts will be considered eligible for consideration here. The key is the existence of a script of some kind - hence the preference for the term *drama*.

One other point about the term *theatre* however, is that in European-American usage it is also used to refer to the building utilised for performance. However, in a region not noted for its quantity of structures erected for the specific purpose of presentation theatrical material, and not noted for easy access to these structures by the majority of the people, the association of the term 'theatre' with a building is not strong.

#### **1.4 Methodological issues**

##### **The audience**

An interesting point about the theatre building discussed above is that in an urban environment the younger generation now frequents 'movie-theatres' that were largely reserved for white audiences only, until comparatively recent times in South Africa. Township dwellers previously would see Kung Fu movies and old 'politically safe' movies, as determined by the Publications Control Board, in cinemas that were referred to, in the remembrance of the writer, as going to the bioscope, scopes, flicks, or films. The kind of atmosphere in such venues, in the so-called Indian, Coloured, and Black African areas was noisy and ill disciplined. The growing middle-class in such areas shunned the cinema and turned more and more to TV and VCR hire material and latterly to DSTV satellite transmission on pay-channels. And this has had an enormous impact on the role of theatre audiences in South Africa - and hence on the ultimate texts and performances produced.

Anyone who has been part of a theatre-in-education company (as the author was between 1993-1995) or in a company presenting syllabus items - inevitably drawn

from the Eurocentric canon of dramatic literature - will have encountered audiences who, quite logically transfer to the encounter with Shakespeare, learned behaviour patterns associated with attendance at Kung Fu movies - their closest experience of anything similar in their experience of witnessing performance, 'canned' or live. The audience is thus a very important aspect of African drama, theatre and performance.

However, there is a difficulty for the researcher in this, for as Herbert Blau points out in The Audience:

How we think about an audience is a function of how we think about ourselves, social institutions, epistemological processes, what is knowable, what not, and how, if at all, we may accommodate the urge for collective experience. Collective in what respects? To posit such an experience seems no more than a snare or delusion, since it must contain the slippery dialectic and discursive claims of desire, as well as the more unambiguous claims of the dispossessed who at that particular moment in history happen to be no part of the collective.

(Blau, H.: 1990, pp. 28-29)<sup>i</sup>

Without pursuing further discussion on the complex issue raised by Blau's ideas, it is obvious that - given the restrictions of this study - that it would be irresponsible to make any claims for and on behalf of the 'audience' in the following discussions, and it will be strenuously avoided - except where the term is used by others either in print or in live interviews. Whilst it is acknowledged that playscripts at various times in history have been written to be read, rather than to be performed, the kind of play script that this thesis is concerned with is that which is written and intended for a live public performance.

This position of course gives rise to a number of difficulties in methodological terms. The fact that a live performance constitutes the essence of theatre is problematic in itself (how do you 'capture' it in scientific/critical terms for example), but there is the further complication that no two live performances will ever be the same, given all the many variables that impact upon the negotiation of meaning in a theatrical context (See Hauptfleisch's diagram of *Theatre as a System of Processes*, in Appendix 1 for example). The fact is that it would be totally impracticable for any researcher to have been physically present in the audience of each and every performance of each and every play script required by a researcher for a particular study. No wonder most researchers eventually (re)turn to the (written, printed) play script itself as the most useful theatrical artefact (i.e. as a thing made by art - in this case the art of the theatre and performance). And we do so here as well, for though the text can only be considered as a performance waiting to happen, it does at least remain as a permanent relic of the ephemeral creative processes it is intended to generate, and through our study of the written/printed script we can, to an extent, imply the creative processes of actualisation. Like a palaeontologist studying a fossil it is possible to determine from the sample all manner of things. It is possible to build up a complex picture of the fossil when it was a living organism, using an assessment methodology pertinent to the field. In this way a reasonably accurate picture can be obtained. In the same way a theatre researcher (or teatrologist if you like) using methodology pertinent to the field, can build up a reasonably accurate picture of the living play script in theatrical production. This leads then to the consideration of a second aspect of the methodology utilised in this study.

## Dualism and Non-dualism

The way people see the world around them has a profound effect upon the manner in which their society functions. Western society for example, is based upon the notion of the primacy of the individual. This is profoundly different from indigenous society, where each person is first and foremost a part of the group, and the group itself is an aspect of the natural world. Rather than people insisting upon individual rights and freedoms, they acknowledge their obligations and relationship to society and to the earth.

(Peat, F.D. 1996, p47)

The "indigenous" society Peat refers to in the above extract is that of the Native American people of North America, but in essence the comment can be applied to traditional societies in the southern sub-continent of Africa as well - which is the geographic site of this study. Speaking within the context of theatrical evaluation in South Africa, Dennis Schaffer, in a paper entitled Can Blue Men Sing the Whites?, refers to 'individualist' and 'collectivist' cultures.

I must acknowledge a dualism in my thinking... because inevitably bipolar antimony is implicit in such a division. I cannot escape my own European cultural background, which has placed itself squarely in the individualist camp, ever since Plato described justice as the triumph of the rational mind over blind passion. The man of reason becomes the patriarchal ideal in Western European philosophy and by implication, systems of thought that do not foreground the individual become associated with the uncivilised rule of unreasoning mass instinct,

unquestioned ritual observed for its own sake; an order without progress, achievement, or logical command of individual destiny.

(Schauffer, 1996a, p59)

The two world views he terms *Individualist* and *Collectivist* above, play themselves out for this writer in two idiomatic expressions: Descartes's famous Cogito ergo sum ('I think therefore I am') and the Zulu maxim, Umuntu, Ngumuntu, Ngabantu, ('a person is a person because of people'). Whilst the latter is an expression drawn from Nguni culture, it seems to capture an attitude prevalent in African society in general.

To illustrate this dualist perspective, Schauffer (1996a, p.62) adapts a table of contrasting values for the two cultural worldviews from the work of L.R. Kohls:

### **Individualist Cultures**

Mastery over nature  
Personal control over environment  
Doing  
Future orientation  
Change  
Time dominates  
Human equality  
Youth  
Self-help  
Individualism/privacy  
Competition  
Informality  
Directness/openness/honesty  
Practicality/efficiency  
Materialism

### **Collectivist Cultures**

Harmony with nature  
Fate  
Being  
Past or present orientation  
Tradition  
Personal interaction dominates  
Hierarchy/rank/status  
Elders  
Birthright inheritance  
Group welfare  
Co-operation  
Formality  
Indirectness/ritual/'face'  
Idealism/theory  
Spiritualism/detachment

Later Schaffer (1996b, p.12) added to the list:

**Individualist Cultures**

Linear logic

Dualistic

**Collectivist Cultures**

Cyclic/cosmic logic

Nondual

It is this last addition that is of interest to us from a methodological perspective.

Robert Armstrong in Wellspring: On the Myth and Source of Culture points out that western culture and western thought is shot through with dualities.

Dualities abound, constituting our civilisation. Our religion is premised upon good and evil, and indeed could not exist were it not for the presence of evil, which endows it with meaning and efficacy. We analyse the unitive work of art into form and content; and we construct a logic based upon right and wrong. Our languages are of subject and object. Our science is one of the probable versus the improbable, the workable as opposed to the unworkable, matter and anti-matter - all revealing more of the nature of the scientists mind than of the actual nature of the physical universe.'

(Armstrong, R.: 1984, p. 115)

A little later in the same work Armstrong concludes:

In large measure then, the myth of the consciousness of Western Europe is the myth of bi-polar oppositions

(Armstrong, R., 1984, p.117)



To be conscious of the duality and these bi-polar oppositions is one thing of course, but what to do about it in the process of this research is quite another. In this study I am conscious of very many major dualities created by the baggage I inevitably carry with me; the inheritance of my past and architect of my approach to everything I encounter in my life. I am a white person with a Christocentric, Eurocentric background, English speaking (and not able to write, read or speak any of the indigenous languages or for that matter a colonial language like Portuguese, which is used almost exclusively by dramatists in Mozambique.) Furthermore, as a woman, I am studying a cultural phenomenon heavily dominated by males. More personally and critically though, I am by circumstance bound to Gauteng and must rely on published and unpublished literature and upon the fieldwork and observations of others to feed into this study. Thus, while being at one remove from the interviews themselves, not having participated myself, I nevertheless do have access to printed transcriptions, audio tape recordings, and video recordings of these encounters and can interrogate this material - though with a consciousness of the baggage I still carry into the exercise. This naturally sets up yet another set of dualities, of which I am only too conscious.

All of this having been acknowledged, I believe there is also an advantage to be gained by the circumstances described. By using the fieldwork data of others rather than being part of the process, it may just prove to be a useful device through which one may achieve some measure of objectivity, particularly in terms of the important *comparative* element in the study. Were I to have undertaken the interviews myself, I doubt whether I could have, ironically enough, maintained the same level of

consciousness of these dualities in the midst of arranging interview times, loading cameras, checking on focus, light levels, and the like.

However, it is important not to turn the perceived dualities into verities. To illustrate it is of interest to note that in working with the interviews with Black African dramatists conducted by Dennis Schaffer, I soon recognised that many of the interviewees made very little distinction between terms such as 'drama', 'theatre', 'script', 'musicals', 'dance' etc., but do make other kinds of distinctions. Vickson Hangula in an interview conducted in Windhoek on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2000, (N/VH) for example clearly differentiates between 'professional staged plays' and some 'church performances' he saw as a child but Enoch Siphon Mtetwa from Swaziland interviewed in Lesotho, Maseru on 22 June 2000 (S/ESM) refers to his group as a 'drama group' but he was in fact presenting 'choral singing and African dancing' without anything that would be classified in Eurocentric terms as 'drama'. In interviews with representatives from community theatre groups such as BRICKS in Katutura in Namibia, and Ghetto Artists in Francistown, Botswana, the terms 'drama', 'theatre', and 'performance' are often used as synonyms and for Andreus Mavuso interviewed in Maseru, 22 June 2000 (S/AM) regimental ritual ceremonies of the Monarchial Institution in Swaziland are 'theatre'.

In such instances it has been suggested that a more flexible approach, termed a *non-dual* approach to research by Katz, Schaffer, Pillay and others, can perhaps assist.

To illustrate the essence of it, Jerry Katz quotes from the Lankavatara Sutra, a chapter in the Buddhist Bible (see: <http://www.3nsympatico.ca/umbada/faq.htm>):

... take good heed not to become attached to words as being in perfect conformity with meaning, because Truth is not in the letters ... words ... were intended to be no more than a pointing finger ... What matters is that one attends to one's intuition ... Having done that, one may use words to point out what they intuit.'

However, as any student of drama will be aware, Ionesco and other Absurd Theatre dramatists surely made similar or related commentary on language and the use of words half a century ago, and their ideas have been followed up by the whole post-modernist movement in the arts, assisted by the philosophers and linguists of the twentieth century. Language, they all remind us, is a human construct. Yet people would still want to argue that though the divine is beyond human experience, we can use mortal (i.e. fallible, imprecise) language to 'prove' or to 'imply' the existence of the divine - which is absurd, as Beckett and co would suggest.

In place of the non-dual methodology suggested by Pile and Katz <sup>8</sup>, the strategy proposed was to borrow the action research device of *triangulation* and to adapt this concept to the present needs by adding a fourth item - making this a '*quadulation*' if you like.

### **Quadulation and the data utilised**

There seemed to be four categories of information that could inform such an exercise:

1. Play scripts
2. Biographical data, press cuttings, video recordings, articles.

3. Interviews and interviewer's journal entries.
4. Socio-political milieu

Mindful of the baggage that the researcher brings to this exercise, the object would have been firstly to examine selected play scripts in the context of the other two categories of information, secondly to place this in a regional and socio-political context and finally to assess the resulting material within a sub-continental overview. The sub-continental overview proved, however, to be more difficult to achieve than at first anticipated. In effect only a partial overview (if such a thing is possible) can be attempted here, for reasons that will be outlined. However, even a partial 'overview', could very well provide enough of an insight into the context of black African dramaturgy in the region to provide the starting point for a more extensive study to be undertaken, should funding again become available, and when political stability returns to some of the regions (notably Zimbabwe at present).

Having attempted a first draft of this dissertation, and having received feedback from my supervisors on the same, it became apparent that the objectives and approaches outlined above were more difficult to realise than was at first envisaged regarding the four categories of information suggested above, the following problems were encountered:

1. Play scripts

Whilst some play scripts of South African black African writers were accessible, far fewer play scripts seem to exist in neighboring countries since the publishing infrastructure there is less secure and the theatre practice there does not privilege

publication to the extent that it does in countries such as South Africa and Nigeria. Moreover, those writers whose work is available are, for the most part, expatriates from countries, which have a publishing culture (e.g. again Nigeria and South Africa). A conclusion that could be drawn from this is that in the non-South African sub-continent, the surviving oral tradition, the social circumstances, the education systems, and the oral culture in general is not conducive to dramatic writing or to literature in general. It also became evident from Schaffer's field notes that such texts that do exist were produced in order to demonstrate to overseas sponsors and donors that the funding had in fact been spent in a responsible manner. Again from the field notes it becomes clear that any permanent record of the ephemeral performances of community theatre work was created as an 'accounting' procedure or as co-lateral evidence to support claims made in funding proposals:

As I entered Ghetto Artists, I was surprised to see how well equipped the modest house was. At the main desk there were two computers, a scanner, a fax machine, telephones etc. In a back bedroom a videocassette machine was playing a tape of one of the rural performances given by Ghetto Artists. I was very excited and asked if it would be possible for me to get a copy. One of the Ghettoes explained that this would not be possible because the tape was about to be posted abroad. The equipment had all been funded from a previous grant which had been motivated for by arguing that this equipment was necessary to record productions so that the funding agency could see for themselves how the money was spent. I asked about scripts and was told that these too had been sent abroad. I was also told that in fact most of their work was not scripted at all. My over-all impression was that the recording of production work in any form whatsoever was undertaken for reasons other than out of a need to preserve an archival record or out of a need to use the material for training, future revival or for critical self-reflection. As is the case in Namibia no independent evaluation of donor funded community theatre seems to be undertaken.

(Schaffer, D: Journal note 28/05/2000)

2. Biographical data, press cuttings, video recordings, articles.

Whilst some biographical data was available, hardly any articles or press cuttings exist for the bulk of those interviewees in Schauffer's files. Video recordings were suspect for the reasons outlined above. It became clear to me that there was an urgent need to move beyond the valuable, but in many ways limited material that Schauffer could provide me with and upon which my first draft so heavily relied.

3. Interviews and interviewer's journal.

A reasonably extensive collection of recordings and transcriptions could be read in tandem with journal entries to provide much valuable information but here again there was need for both expansion and exclusion because Schauffer's interviewees were only asked the kind of questions that Schauffer required answers to. These are not necessarily the questions that I would have posed in view of my objectives. It is also necessary to delimit the study further by excluding Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland owing to lack of representative material. This in turn raised the question: 'to what extent is it possible to present an overview of the sub-continent when the sample of countries under consideration has shrunk so drastically? A need to revise the scope of the dissertation was therefore called for.

4. Socio-political milieu

Whilst it was possible to give a brief overview of some aspects of the socio-political background relative to the territory in which the dramatist is currently resident, this provides no insight into formative influences on the writing that derive from an entirely different socio-political background encountered in the dramatists country of origin. In addition there was in the first draft insufficient cross-referencing of socio-political details with the content of scripts that were considered. Here again a revision was called for.

### **Text and Interpretation**

Finally, the basis of this study is the play text and the evaluation of the individual works is central to the thesis as a whole. However, the evaluation of works of dramatic art in performance cannot claim to be an exact science. Today we are simply too aware of the many variables that have to be taken into account when reading and assessing a play and the expectations, prejudices and ideological-critical position of the evaluator are not by any means the least of these. Contrast current post-modernist awareness with the following comments by an informed critic writing about The Arts in South Africa seventy years ago:

Artists of World fame, on coming to South Africa, have been very generous in their praise of the standard of work acquired. On one occasion the late Mr. Arthur Bouchier, in a speech at the conclusion of a performance by Students of Dramatic Art, said that there was "no less than three performers who were they to come to England, had only to ask for an engagement, and they

would get it; their work was polished, their technique splendid, they spoke beautifully and had learned the art of standing still on stage."

(Solomon, E.: 1933/34, p.199)

This patronising view is based upon certain dated assumptions of what does and what does not constitute good performance and reveals an attitude towards evaluation and assessment of the art which sets a standard based on the cultivated, polite and restrained practice of metropolitan British theatre. Measured by these standards not a single one of the works selected for study here, or their performances, would qualify for consideration as theatre proper or as 'Dramatic Art' in Solomons's terms. And this is a critical issue for this study, for we are dealing with works created in a liminal space, a world in the throes of change.

The fact is, theories, principles and proclaimed notions of art and artistry naturally and inevitably vary from age to age, from culture to culture, and from region to region - even within the same culture. It is a rather sobering thought that, deny it though we might, in seventy years time from now some researcher is bound to tease out a statement or approach or two from our present critical methodological practice that will, to future readers, seem naïve, simplistic, parochial and just as culturally biased as any other we have rejected.

Perhaps the most useful advance in our current thinking however has been the door opened to eclecticism by the post-modernist and post-colonial thrust in arts criticism, and the resulting rejection of a prescriptive, 'universal' set of values or approaches to assessment. (For a summary of this shift, see the works of Marvin Carlsson for



example). For a long time now we have known that language and culture impose a unique way of looking at the world. Persons from different language backgrounds do not perceive phenomena in the same way, and the evaluation of phenomena depends upon the grammar of a language for the perception and formulation of key questions relative to such phenomena. More than half a century ago Benjamin L. Whorf pointed out:

... the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade.

(Whorf, 1940, p.1)

More recently David Peat has reminded us that:

Within our European language and thinking we have a tendency to group things together into categories. Thus we have generic words like *birds, fish, trees, rocks, mountains, particles, thoughts, feelings, and emotions*. Yet this form of categorizing is not an inevitable feature of the human mind, for indigenous languages support totally different forms of logic.'

(Peat, F.D.: 1996; p. 227)

Whilst it must be noted that Peat is referring to the American Indian indigenous languages, the comment holds true for the situation in South Africa as well. To quote but one example: the Zulu language divides nouns into various classes, and gender is divided into male, female, common and neuter. Is it any wonder that the mother-

tongue Zulu speakers have difficulty in accurately applying gender pronouns in communication in English? If language determines the way we perceive the world then we have to take note of the fact that in South Africa we have eleven official languages, namely, Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu. Other African, Asian, and European languages are also spoken. If then all of these languages support different forms of logic and reasoning how can there be any universally acceptable system or code of assessment for any social phenomenon including the theatre? Are we then to apply eleven or more standards of judgement in our assessment of the work of Black African dramatists, depending upon their linguistic and cultural backgrounds? Given the plethora of languages in the subcontinent, grave difficulties are presented if this conclusion was to be adopted.

What can be stated - and is illustrated by the quote from Solomons above, as well as the reviews of numerous 'major' critics of the period before 1976 and even thereafter - is that the Western, Eurocentric concept of theatre and attendant notions of excellence in terms of the Western Eurocentric model of theatre production, became entrenched in South Africa during the pre-democratic era along with a colonial education system, a colonial system of justice, western communication systems, (railway, air travel, radio, and latterly TV) and so on. What becomes problematic in this acknowledgement is the possible implication that such systems were seen as superior to those that they replaced and that they provided *a priori* models by which such earlier or alternative systems were to be judged. The European model thus became the canonized norm for all academic and artistic training, all critical discussion, all

'serious' creative endeavour and finally provided the model for the main-stream theatrical system in the country till well into the 1980's.

Whilst many current works of black African dramatists in the sub-continent conform to Western models in many ways, it is interesting that many also acknowledge the influence of traditional dramatic systems - and this begs further consideration. After discussing the complications involved in the reconstruction of the dramatic systems of traditional societies in South Africa, Robert Mshengu Kavanagh concludes that:

... there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there existed in the early societies rich and varied dramatic forms. Hottentot and Bushman communities possessed certain forms, which included mime, music, dance, costume, props, make-up and ritual. Similarly the Nguni-speaking peoples practiced the various forms of a dramatic nature, including the dramatised solo narrative, intsomi in Xhosa and inganekwane in Zulu. Other peoples had their equivalents. For instance, the Sotho praise-poems, liboko, like the Nguni, izibongo, included definite dramatic elements,'

(Kavanagh, R.M.: 1985, p.44)

How does one then deal with works which fall outside the European model somehow, or works which incorporate elements of the African and the European? In Theatre and Society in South Africa Temple Hauptfleisch presents us with a Diagram of the Theatrical System (1.1 on the inside front cover of the book), which seems to offer one way of dealing with the multitude of forms in actual practice from a more-or-less consistent point of view. It is however still based on the working principles of the imported colonial model, a point he admits when he says that a performance of Hamlet by a state-funded Performing Arts Council may provide 'a rather more

obvious example of how the model would work' by comparison with a traditional Zulu wedding ceremony, for example (Hauptfleisch, 1997, p. 4). This is an important point for our purposes in this thesis, since the model would still be feasible for such a ceremony but it would require 'a rather more free interpretation for many units and the concepts they represent...' (Hauptfleisch, T. 1997, p. 4).

Indeed Hauptfleisch is at pains to point out that the model is not inflexible in this regard. It is not:

... a rigid, fixed and somehow "given" entity, but a dynamic and organic system of processes, a general (i.e. unspecific and adaptable) and an open system, constantly changing as it interacts with the larger (or macro) systems of the society in which it is embedded.

(Hauptfleisch, T.: 1997. p. 4)

Given the fact that this enquiry concerns itself with dramatists and their dramatic works (i.e. scripts) and that many such scripts are in fact the result of workshoping processes, or are the products of *dramaturges* (in the American sense of a scribe) rather than of traditional dramatists in our sense, the possibility of a 'more free interpretation' of Hauptfleisch's system is of importance here. It would certainly require a closer link between, or even partial conflation of, what he refers to as Channel B (the performance and production processes as Theatre) and Channel A (the publication processes of the Drama Text) in order to accommodate the products of workshop creation and the resulting (unpublished) scripts, since they are the core data of this study. So, while Hauptfleisch's 'systemic' approach to theatre will be borne in

mind in the discussions to follow, it will be incorporated into a broader methodology based on the 'quadrulation' of available data, as outlined above.

### **1.5 The Structure and Organisation of Chapters**

A simple structure will be used in the organisation of chapters. Chapter One is this introduction. Chapter Two will focus on the works of selected black African dramatists from South Africa with particular reference to Gibson Kente, Gcina Mhlope, Matsemela Manaka, and Zakes Mda. Chapter Three will consider dramatists from Botswana, with particular reference to the works of Dr. F.K. Omoregie and interview with Vuyisele Otukile being considered. Namibia will be covered in Chapter Four, with specific reference to Freddie Philander and Vickson Hangula. Chapter Five discusses Sonny Sampson-Akpan together with Tjotjela Mora Mashapela and will provide an insight into dramaturgy in Lesotho. Chapter Six draws together some tentative threads of information on Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Chapter Seven discusses Community Theatre as a specific form in all the regions. Chapter Eight seeks tentative conclusions.

A number of appendices are also to be offered to provide material difficult to access.

The problems attaching to the above will be obvious. It is highly debatable whether the selection above can be seen as representing all the works of black African dramatists in this vast and fast-developing area. Some comment will be offered on the reasons for selecting particular writers and particular works but this is acknowledged as being a subjective selection and simply an attempt to outline some

of the parameters of the field. In some cases it must frankly be declared that the material dealt with was all the material that could practicably be gathered at the time. It is quite obvious therefore that a follow-up study is needed (as indicated earlier) that could make good the acknowledged shortcomings of the scope of this work. It is hoped however that this study will be seen as a pilot study in uncharted fields, and will have achieved the laying down of the foundations for such an extended study.

### **END NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.**

- 1 For a more detailed account see In the Shadow of the Shah: The Indic Contribution to our Developing South African Culture. Asoka Theatre Publications, Indic Monograph Series No. 2
- 2 Students of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Durban-Westville were required to keep a log of their responses to class work, lectures, practicals and productions. Schaffer would use this personal log material to identify problem areas in the courses offered and students were encouraged to be quite open and frank in their written responses. This anecdote is drawn from Professor Schaffer's response to one such student's entry, as narrated to the writer in 1994 at a time when he was supervising my M.A. dissertation.
- 3 The quotation uses two abbreviations:  
PAC - Pan African Congress (in its context - not to be confused with its other use as Performing Arts Council).  
SASO - South African Students Association
- 4 The Department of Drama of Durban-Westville published work under the heading Asoka Theatre Publications. Playscripts and Indic theatre monographs were published. Publications ceased with the closure of the Department and the demise of the discipline at the University of Durban-Westville at the end of 1999.
- 5 Larham also reminds us of Credo Mutwa's claim in On the Theatre of Africa that the traditional Sotho tekansto and the Zulu umlinganiso, with their own performance styles and performance spaces, have been in existence for thousands of years and certainly predate the colonial period. Just to give the pot another stir we could also refer here to a footnote to

Flockemann's article on Gcina Mhlope's Have You Seen Zandile? In the South African Theatre Journal on September 1991. In this footnote Flockemann comments on Maishe Maponya's use of 'black' and 'African' as reflected in an interview with Carola Luther which appeared in the English Academy Review 1984: '... Maishe Maponya gives a rather provocative definition when he distinguishes "Black" and "African" theatre, saying that for him, "black" theatre is the kind of theatre projected by whites. As examples he gives successful musicals like Ipi Tombi or "shows put on overseas by guys like Des Lindberg who exploits African culture." African theatre, claims Maponya, "is the theatre that I as an African create, it is my feeling from my gut." ' (Flockemann, M.: 1991, p.52)

6 The writer was part of a Theatre-in-Education Company at the University of Natal, Durban from 1993 to 1995.

7 The issue of the audience is interrogated at great length in Herbert Blau's book The Audience. Marvin Carlson, respected theatre researcher provides the following synopsis of the book.

'Frederick Nietzsche was certain that Euripides hadn't "the slightest reverence for that band of Bedlamites called the public," Bertolt Brecht discovered at one point in his career that the "sole spectator" for his plays was Karl Marx. And Virginia Woolf, writing in her diary near the end of her life, contemplated the absence of the public: "No audience - no echo. That's part of one's death."

Moving from that distressing possibility, Herbert Blau considers the questionable assumption of a commercial presence and the indeterminacy of the solitary spectator through a sort of particle physics or sub-atomic view of theatre.

No more than image itself, the audience is viewed by Blau as participant and celebrant, observer and beholder, eavesdropper and voyeur, "culinary" as in Brecht or cannibalistic as in Genet, collective or solitary or intimately separate - or, as in the conscience - catching mousetrap of Hamlet, "guilty creatures sitting at play."

8 When the thesis was first proposed, it was intended to utilise a self-declared non-dual approach to the research material. Now, on mature reflection, the writer begins to question whether a non-dual methodology can exist at all. After all this thesis has to be written in words and has to employ linguistic logic which leads right back to the Buddhist 'pointing finger' and to the danger of mistaking the finger for the thing pointed at. To employ a non-dual methodology would 'logically' involve then the presentation of this thesis in the form perhaps of an extended Buddhist Koan, the cryptic essence of which would render the work un-examinable. Whilst on a purely metaphysical level this non-examinability might well be an achievement in itself, in purely practical terms the work would not conform to the requirements for theses presented for examination at the University of Stellenbosch, or I suspect at any other 'western' University.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### South Africa

#### 2.1 Introduction

It is clear that some kind of general overview of black African dramatists working in South Africa has been attempted by a number of authors over the recent two decades or so, including Robert Kavanagh, Kathy Perkins, Ian Steadman, Temple Hauptfleisch, Peter Larlham, et al. (See Bibliography). The best general overview freely available at present is perhaps Loren Kruger's in The Drama of South Africa: plays, pageants and publics since 1910, which contains specific chapters on this (Kruger, 1999). However, in the entry on South Africa in volume 3 of the World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre (Rubin, 1997), Temple Hauptfleisch proposes a more concise, though perhaps a little artificially structured, approach for such an overview, based on four major performance forms which, according to Hauptfleisch, go to make up the broader tradition. The particular chapter concludes with a summary of the current situation, in which he says:

Essentially the same four basic traditions (spoken Eurocentric drama , western-style indigenous theatre , crossover workshop theatre and traditional indigenous performance forms ) continue to develop in the country , mostly along parallel lines . However , there are clear signs that increasing cross-fertilization may be taking place , that the individual forms are less clearly linked to specific companies and groups and that the country in the 1990's was in the midst of a search for new structures , forms and styles to suit the rainbow nation of a newly emerging South Africa.

(Hauptfleisch , 1997b. p.274 .)

The chapter utilizes this categorization of forms to provide a concise and useful summary of the socio-political history of the region, which highlights events and legislation which had an impact upon the theatrical tradition in the country (see Hauptfleisch, in Rubin, 1997, pp. 268-274). It is not the intention to repeat this whole history here, but it may be useful to take a quick look at some high points in the history, leading up to the role played by the four South African dramatists selected for study here.

Several approaches to an overview could be entertained. There is the historiographic approach, for example, which would perhaps start with the first playscript in Zulu by a black African playwright Francis Mkhize in 1920, and then chart a course through a Xhosa play of 1925 Imfene Ka Debeza by Guybon Sinxo, on to Esau Mthethwa's Lucky Stars improvised productions of Umthakati and Ukuquomisa then on to the productions of the Bantu Dramatic Society which was founded in 1933. Thereafter we could move on to H.I.E. Dhlomo and his only published play The Girl Who Killed To Save, which was published in 1935 - and so the chronology would continue.

Along the way we could comment on the claim by Albert Gerard in Four African Literatures (1971) that Father Bernard Huss, the missionary based at Marianhill Monastery in Natal, who encouraged Francis Mkhize, (who was a student of Huss's) to write the first play in Zulu, was also influenced by the style of *Commerdia dell'Arte*. In the presentation of plays Huss allowed students the freedom to improvise in and around the script. We can speculate further that this influence of free improvisation survived in the work of the Lucky Stars because its leader, Esau Mthethwa was also one of father Huss's students. One could argue the merits or

demerits of Dhlomo's play or bewail the fact that Nimrod N.T. Ndebele's play Ugubudele Namazimuzimu published in 1941 has not received enough attention, and that the plays of A.C.T. Mayekiso, published by Marionhill Mission Press have received no attention at all - and so on.

Another approach would be to argue that the records of dramatised narrative forms such as the Xhosa *intsomi*, or the Zulu *izinganekwane* should be the starting point. Alternatively that the dramatised praise poetry of the Nguni *izibongo* and the Sotho *libiko* should be this point of departure. Another argument could be that geographic boundaries were colonially imposed and Southern rather than South Africa should be the declared site of the study (which it happens to be in this instance). Whilst the colonially imposed boundaries between nations in the sub-continent may have created differences in cultural perception internalized over time, such differences would not, so the argument could go, have been all that marked in, shall we say, the nineteenth century. One could then perhaps argue that the real start to our enquiry for Southern Africa should be with what Kavanagh has called 'the earliest recorded examples ... the dramatised animal satires of Job Moteame and Azariele M. Sekese in Lesotho in the 1880's' (Kavanagh, 1985, p.45).

Another distinction could be attempted between literary drama, written to be read rather than performed, and that which functions as the startpoint for a live production, or that which is a record of what emerged from workshopping or other forms of group authorship. This is not even to enter the debate concerning the strict definition of the Oral Tradition, in order to record that every black African dramatist interviewed by Schauffer acknowledges directly or indirectly the influences of what they understand

to be the Oral Tradition. It is equally impossible to deny that publication of scripts is a major problem, for both the playwrights and researchers. The township musical tradition, inspired by King Kong and established by Kente can be seen to have its latter-day follow-through in the work of Mbongeni Ngema. Then one has to take account of Protest theatre (that appealed to the middle class and to liberals) and Theatre for Resistance (which was Agit prop and alternative in vision) bringing into focus the issues of Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism.

The most troublesome question arises as to whether or not there is anything at all that can be regarded as unique to the dramaturgy of black Africans south of the Zambezi, or north of it for that matter. What is clear from the sub-continental study as a whole is that the 'popular' movement is towards community theatre as defined by Schauffer to Vuyisele Otukile (see Chapter 7). This is so strong a tendency that it deserves separate consideration, which it will receive in Chapter Seven. As a tendency it moves away from the literary, away from scripts, away from Eurocentric expectations of theatre practice, and perforce away from dramaturgy - which is the core subject of this enquiry for reasons given in Chapter One.

## **2.2 Selection of Dramatists and Texts**

In view of the above, let me honestly admit then that I have grave difficulty in defining a specific startpoint to this study. To say that the study will start at 14h00 on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 1927, or to say that the start is with K.E. Masinga's play Intombi

Yasegoli E. Thekwini or with H. Bloom's King Kong makes no sense unless such a delimitation is informed by some overarching vision or thesis to be examined. This in turn may determine the shape and form this investigation is meant to take.

In the present case the aim is simple enough, to undertake a wide-ranging and comparative pilot regional study of form and structure in selected plays. So what emerges inevitably is a preference for an overview based on the self-declared personal selection of a few personalities and playscripts. This is pretty much what most other researchers in Southern Africa and the many researchers who tend to appear in these climes for a few months during sabbaticals, or on research grants, to produce articles, reports, and even books on theatre-related subjects relative to South Africa, have elected to do.

So the rest of this chapter will focus upon the works of four prominent South African dramatists. The choice itself is an individual viewpoint, based upon my own readings, the research findings, fieldwork reports, interviews and research log of Dennis Schaffer's work, and the socio-political statistics for the region. A comparative look at the entries on the various African countries under discussion in this thesis in the World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre, for example, will quickly indicate that the sheer output in terms of plays and performances in South Africa is not only vastly more productive than that of all five the other countries together, but that the production and publishing systems are stronger than elsewhere in the region. It follows that the published output of South African material is enormous by comparison to that of neighbouring countries, as is the volume of critical literature. The bibliography of this thesis and the cumulative index to the South African Theatre

Journal (Volume 15, 2001) also illustrate the extent to which South African writing by black African writers has received critical attention, particularly over the past twenty or more years. To select representative examples of South African dramaturgy is thus both a difficult and an easy task, in both cases because of the sheer wealth of material available. As with the rest of this thesis, the ultimate decision was dictated by the additional (and previously unutilized) material available in the data collected by Dennis Schaffer. The choice then fell, rather predictably, on the following four innovative figures: Gcina Mhlophe, Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Zakes Mda. Clearly there are many more that could have been used, but for the comparative aims of this thesis, four will suffice. So let us turn to the work of Gcina Mhlope.

### **2.3 Gcina Mhlophe.**

Gcina Mhlope is primarily known for one play (the widely published and performed piece Have You Seen Zandile?), her poetry, and her influential role as storyteller and oral poet.

The premier of the play Have You Seen Zandile? was at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg in February 1986. It earned praise from the press and enjoyed good houses, but Mhlophe received criticism from the male dominated ANC-affiliated Cultural Desk at the time, which felt that she had strayed from the 'official' line on the use of theatre for protest and as a weapon in the cultural struggle. In response Mhlophe is on record as responding:

'When I did Zandile, I was criticised a lot by political-minded people asking why was a powerful woman like me writing a play like Zandile? If I can write about the masses, I can write about me. I'm one of the masses.'

( Perkins K.A.: 1999 , P.81.)

Lliane Loots nevertheless reminds us of the strong political context of the play. She praises the play because it 'reminds audiences of social injustice not only in terms of racism but also in terms of gender and class analysis' instead of merely confronting audiences 'with a single meta-analysis' of apartheid South Africa.' (Loots, 1996, p.68). Loots goes on to offer the following discerning remark:

The story-telling narratives favoured by Mhlophe, too, are political acts in that a form of literature not generally documented or recognised is elevated as the main theatrical and structural device.

(Loots, 1996, p. 67)

This last remark leads us to what interests us more particularly here, namely the distinctive qualities of Mhlope's dramaturgy. Let us examine a few structural elements and see whether they suggest possible readings.

The first issue is Mhlope's self-conscious employment of the techniques and approaches of traditional storytelling in the structure and presentational method of Have You Seen Zandile? In many ways it is a prime example of the influence of the storytelling tradition upon the dramaturgy of contemporary Black African dramatists

and is widely studied as an example of this. However, Mhlope's own position is a little more ambiguous. In an 1987 interview with Kathy Perkins she said: 'Zandile is very much like a story and it's natural that I wrote it. After all I am a storyteller ... Yes, it's still theatre.' (Published in Perkins, 1999, p.80) It is a point Mhlope emphasises when she dedicates her play:

'To the memory of my grandmother, Gogo, who deserves praise  
for the storyteller in me.'

From this it seems as if Mhlope thus clearly affirms a self-conscious and direct use of the oral storytelling tradition and there appears to be no doubt in Mhlope's mind that storytelling was theatre. Perkins had conducted this interview in July 1987. By the time Schaffer interviewed Mhlope (in May 1990 – see Appendix 2), there seemed to have been a rethink on that subject. At one point in the interview Mhlope says:

I just don't belong in theatre. I feel very much at home in storytelling ... Everytime when I was winning awards and getting wonderful write-ups, and getting roles left and right and just having a good time, I kept saying, "I don't belong in theatre. I just don't feel right here. I'm flying with crooked wings ..." So in 1990 when I left theatre and moved into full-time storytelling ... I knew that I was straightening up and I'm flying right.

Schaffer has suggested that the distinction being made here is between the kind of Eurocentric type of theatre being done in Johannesburg in the so-called 'mainstream' theatres of the time and Mhlope's own, distinctive and more 'community' focussed type of performance. Because of this built-in ambiguity, and given the fact that Have you Seen Zandile? it is a scripted work, performed mainly in formal theatre structures,



it appears that the play falls more into the category of what Hauptfleisch has called *crossover workshop theatre* than into a category of traditional indigenous performance.

Of course the oral tradition covers a number of culture-specific oral forms such as myth, legend, praise-singing, praise-poetry, saga, epic, ritual chants, ceremonial invocations, traditional songs, fairytale, nursery tale, fable, folktale, allegory, parable etc. and it has a common factor, the fact that in their original forms all of this was transmitted orally in performance from generation to generation. Traditional storytelling is thus similar to the category 'folktale', but allows for greater innovation in the presentation of traditional themes; it provides the storyteller with the license to present old wine in new bottles<sup>1</sup>. In Mhlope's case, despite her own later reservations about her position as playwright, she takes the adaptation one step further, turning oral storytelling into theatre.

The structure of the play involves the presentation of fourteen short scenes that trace the central character's rights of passage into womanhood over a ten-year period up until she is 18 years old. The name of the central character is *Zandile*, a name which means, 'the number of girls is growing.' As Mhlophe herself points out 'it could mean that the contribution of women in the arts is growing.' (Perkins, K.A.: 1999. P. 81)

The play is largely autobiographical and it is significant that the stages in the central character's development are marked by encounters with other important women in her life. Whilst the central character in the two-hander is played by only one performer, all the other characters (Grandmother, Mother, a schoolfriend, and finally an old

woman who is a neighbour ) are played by the another actress. In the original production the roles were taken by Gcina Mhlophe herself and Thembi Mtshali respectively. Stephen Gray calls this multiple roleplaying a 'metaphor of protean transformation' and points to the ideological nature of this structural element, which 'is a frequent visual demonstration that no-one is ever really "stuck" in society's roles. The play ... also heralds the people's ability to transform themselves.' (Gray, 1990. p.85).

The second structural element in Mhlophe's work is equally laden politically in South Africa, namely her clear interest in language *per se*. The opening speech in scene one for instance, is eighty percent in Zulu. Only towards the end do we encounter English 'I'll bring my crayons' and anglicised words "namacryons" and "iskipping rope". Commenting on the use of multiplicity of language registers, Mhlophe in an interview with Schaffer says:

I speak Xhosa and Zulu, so I use those two languages very much when I am performing. Even if I am performing in English I draw upon wonderful idioms from these languages. I'm a person who loves idioms Often I say them in the original language. I don't want to lose my audience but I want them to taste where I am coming from.

(S.A/G.M)

Later in the play, when Zandile is abducted by her mother to the rural Transkei the language moves to English with a few phrases in Xhosa. Significantly enough Zandile doesn't fully understand Xhosa at this stage. When her mother responds to her by saying, 'Sukugeza' ('don't be silly' in Xhosa) Zandile latches onto the 'geza' part

of the word (geza: 'wash' in Zulu) and assumes that her mother has told her to go and wash. The justification then for the almost exclusive use of English in this section is that it is a Lingua franca between Zandile and her mother Lulama - who can be expected to command a reasonable facility in the use of English because she was after all a cabaret singer with the 'Mtateni Queens' in Durban. Zandile's progress is also marked by her ever improved facility in the use of English and a growing love of reading. In scene one Zandile's claim to competence in English amounts to 'Was da meta be you?' by the end of the play this has shifted to a fluent command of English plus expressions like, "Hey man!" a familiarity with Barbara Cartland books, and a level of language usage appropriate to the world of the Rolling Stones, mini-skirts, and platform shoes. She is also completely in command of Xhosa as is demonstrated in her praise poem for Mr. Hlatshwayo, the retiring school teacher. John Kani, in an interview conducted by Schaffer (SA/JK) at the Market Theatre on 31/05/1996, recalls that as a young man he attended meetings on Sunday at a place called Embezweni where people would speak in public and would be judged by their ability to speak beautiful English and beautiful Xhosa. 'Learning English,' he says, 'was learning that other culture. It was embracing them in their language and culture, and accepting that we are both in that one square mile.'

In the first scene Zandile imagines Gogo putting a sweet into her mouth and she has a conversation with the imagined presence of Bongi. In scene two the second actress appears as Gogo and in later scenes she appears again as Lulama, Lindiwe, and finally as the Old Woman. In other words the play starts with a single narrator peopling the performance with imaginary presences - very much the technique used in traditional storytelling. In scene two we meet Gogo who is presented as a warm, loving, caring,

wise old lady who acts both as custodian of traditional values but also as stern critic of the chauvinism endemic to her own particular society's attitudes, and wry critic of the racism inherent in the larger South African society. She laughs when Zandile asks her about the colour of the doll she has just given her 'why do they always make them pink?' The subtle critique is gently woven into her dialogue. The old lady becomes quite strident, however, when it comes to gender prejudice in Xhosa society. Tom is Zandile's father. He has two sons who are ready to go to college. The old lady smells trouble and asks if Zandile can come and stay with her because she knows that if Tom ran short of money 'Zandile would be the first to be taken out of school. Tom thinks education is not important for a girl. Hau! Even if I have to die doing it, I'm keeping Zandile at school.' (Mhlophe, 1998. pp. 8-9)

All of this is conveyed in a monologue so that scene two again preserves the single person address to the audience which, as in the first scene, harks back to the technique of traditional storytelling. Of the fourteen scenes five are monologues and in scene seven we encounter a simultaneous setting of two monologues with Zandile writing a letter to Gogo in the sand and Gogo with a photograph of Zandile wandering in to ask the audience, 'Have you seen this child?' At the end of her appeal she delivers the 'title line', 'Have you seen Zandile?' The use of the direct address and the emphasis upon monologues, the brevity of the scenes, the swift changing panorama of locales created through the use of verbal suggestion, the movement of the second performer from character to character, even the length of the work, which is short enough to make an interval quite unthinkable, all help to preserve a sense of traditional storytelling.

Whilst the published script gives some technical instructions such as 'in a pool of light' or 'light slowly fades to black' it is quite obvious that the piece could be presented almost anywhere and it would still retain its power as theatre<sup>2</sup>. It was, in this sense, representative of some of the best peoples plays of the cultural struggle period, which used the fluid, adaptable mimetic performance techniques of the indigenous storytelling and dance traditions to tell their own contemporary stories.

Another Black African dramatist in South Africa that was heavily criticised by the Cultural Desk was Gibson Kente. Bra Gib, as he is known in Dube, a section of Soweto where he lives, is known as the father of the township musical and his influence was extensive and lives on today in the work of Mbongeni Ngema.<sup>3</sup> An overview of South African Black African dramatists would be woefully incomplete without a consideration of this major figure and his particular brand of theatre.

#### **2.4 Gibson Kente**

During the mid-years of the twentieth century a unique theatrical style was developed in the townships of South Africa by dramatists like Gibson Kente and Sam Mhangwane. The so-called 'township musical' is a hybrid form that incorporates elements of African traditional dance and music, urban jazz and other black African urban music and dance influences, into more European narrative structures that derive from early radio plays in isiZulu and from popular films rather than examples of live theatre. As Kente said in an interview (See Appendix 3):

We didn't go to theatres – we couldn't – but we all had our transistor radios and we could watch Kung Fu movies in halls . There were also some terrible movies made in South Africa - very politically safe .

(Gibson Kente . S.A./ G.K.)

As Hauptfleisch reminds us, the kickstart to the evolution of township theatre could ironically have been the founding of the Union Defence Force (UDF) Entertainment Unit.

A number of the best township jazz artists had worked for the unit and on their return to their townships some of them formed a variety company which was to pioneer black entertainment in the cities .

(Rubin, 1997, p. \*)

This move to what Loren Kruger (1999) was later to call 'African vaudeville', led directly to the 1959 production of the musical King Kong, which is generally acknowledged to mark the start of two decades of vital and successful presentation of the black urban style which became known as 'township musical' and which is inextricably associated with the work of Gibson Kente.

'King Kong was ... the immediate model and inspiration for Kente' says Robert Kavanagh in his groundbreaking work on South African popular theatre (1985, p.115), though Kente seemed to disagree with this claim in an interview with Rolf Solberg conducted during the period 1994-95 (the individual interviews are not dated):

I can't say that there has been any outside influences when it comes to writing music, because I have been indigenous in many ways. And the same goes for theatre.

(Solberg, 1999, p.82)

Of course it may be that Kente is referring to 'outside influences' in the sense of 'international influences', and not specifically the brand of indigenous theatre represented at the time by King Kong, a production much debated over the years. But given this attitude expressed by Kente, it may be of interest to take a look at some points of comparison between King Kong and Kente's own production of his play Too Late some fourteen years later.

Purely formally the plays have a number of things in common. For example, at the most elementary level both productions open with crowd scenes and both have intervals - although an interval is not marked in the published version of Too Late. In an interview with Dennis Schaffer, Kente told him:

*Kente:* My scenes are on average maybe four or five in the first half and three or so in the second half.

*Schaffer:* Do you have an interval?

*Kente:* Yes I have an interval, definitely.

(S.A./G.K.)

Both authors employed an 'American musical' format for the work, and this impacted on many aspects of the work. In the Foreword to the published playscript of King Kong for example, Harry Bloom (the play's nominal author<sup>5</sup>) tells us that of the seventy performers in the cast 'many were experienced as concert singers, ..[but]

..only three had ever acted before, and then in a single small-scale production some months earlier'. (Bloom, 1961, p.15) So the emphasis was clearly on the musical qualities of the play, rather than the dramatic, a situation certainly exacerbated by the fact that virtually no training was available at the time for black actors. Kavanagh suggests that Kente, who was more interested in the musical and melodramatic elements of the play, under these circumstances 'employed progressively less educated, less well-known and younger artistes and trained them.' (Kavanagh R.M.: 1985. p.120). He might argue that he needed a certain style of performer, which the usual channels did not supply - something like the argument for the manner in which some TV soap and sitcom artistes are 'discovered' today.

Both plays make use of a live orchestra and in terms of the structure there is once more a remarkable correspondence between the two works. King Kong uses twenty-seven musical/dance sequences over thirteen scenes. Whilst Too Late uses exactly the same number of musical/dance sequences over ten scenes.

In both productions non-conventional musical instruments popular in the townships are used as solo instruments: in King Kong it is a 'penny whistle' and in Too Late it is a mouth organ. To quote Kavanagh again there was in both:

An emphasis on episodic narrative, unified and carried by song and dance, and a more pronounced use for physical and visual expression than dialogue, made for a form that was rooted in the oral traditions of Africa, as well as being more than adequate to contain the content of Black urban culture.

(Kavanagh, 1985, p. 96)



The foregoing discussion also highlights another important matter shared by both texts, namely the extreme importance of the actual live performance. (This is of course not only true of these two scripts in particular, but also of black urban performance in general. - See for example Larlham 1985, Hauptfleisch and Steadman, 1984 and Steadman, 1985 on this.) Neither one of the scripts can really begin to record the level of energy in performance, the enlargement of emotion or the effect of the black musical genre (which runs much deeper than words), the pace, precision and frontality. These are all non-verbal aspects, which characterise the tradition of the township musical. It is ironic then that we can access nothing of this essential communication directly through the literary script - though there is substantial secondary material on King Kong, with film sequences, a recording of the music, two books and plenty of articles and reviews available

Finally, both productions were largely commercial ventures intended to appeal to their respective target audiences: predominantly white audiences in traditionally 'white' urban performance venues for King Kong and black audiences in the townships for Too Late.

The foregoing comparisons thus do suggest that - despite Kente's apparent denials - the King Kong legacy did influence the form he chose to use. And through him it would not only influence the form of protest and popular theatre in the country, but alter the nature and shape of all theatre in South Africa - even if only marginally.

Perhaps something of the style he developed and the way it occurred can be traced today in a derivative form perhaps, specifically in the productions of the flamboyant

Mbongeni Ngema, who went to Johannesburg in 1979 to audition for a Gibson Kente production. He explained his motive for this to Dennis Schaffer in May 1998.

I wasn't really there for the work, like most artistes were. In fact all of them came to work for money, but for me it was a training course, practical training.

(S.A./M.N)

After two years Ngema felt that he had mastered the Kente technique and as a musician himself he felt that he could take this much further. He and Percy Mtwa were also influenced by the work of Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona with works like Sizwe Bansi Is Dead and The Island. Ngema comments:

We knew that we wanted to follow the Sizwe Bansi kind of style so therefore we needed to develop certain parts of our bodies. We also felt that even though the Sizwe Bansi style was exciting, we saw those productions again in Johannesburg and The Island as well, and I also identified that they were very good, very polished productions but they depended a lot in talking. They didn't have the power that Kente had, so we said to ourselves, "How can we combine the two?"

(S.A./M.N.)

Ngema thus acknowledges his debt to Kente for the non-literary aspects of his presentational technique, reinforcing the claim made above that King Kong - through Kente and Mhangwane and their protégé's and followers - ultimately inspired and influenced a wide-ranging tradition of local musical-style political theatre. Important subsequent practitioners include such names as Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa, Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya, even Zakes Mda, and who in their turn were of

course influenced by other theatrical and political influences and imperatives as well, but combined those influences with the township musical roots they could not ignore. This is so, despite the fact that critics have always had problems with the use of the popular musical form for potentially critical social commentary, protest or satire. One of these is Robert Kavanagh (1985. p. 105) who goes on to discuss what he perceives as '... the contradiction between the realism suggested by the theme's political and symbolic context, and the artificiality of the American 'musical' form.' Nevertheless, one may ultimately argue that some of the most dominant and influential political work of the cultural struggle seems to have solved the problem of the contradiction and owes something to the principles underlying the township musical form and therefore to the pioneering influence of King Kong and Gibson Kente. This same influence can be seen in Kramer and Petersen's District Six: The Musical, Ngema's Sarafina, Junction Avenue Theatre Company's Sophiatown, and even the radical Afrikaans 'kabarette' (=cabarets) of writer/lyricists such Hennie Aucamp (Slegs vir Almal) and Koos Kombuis (Piekniek by Dingaan). Another kind of link is with the popular music of the townships as well as the pop stage.

In this context it is interesting to note that Kente, having attempted to appeal to the more intellectual and elite audiences in the production of I Believe, came to an important realisation after early closure of this production. He found that:

... the production only goes down well with the elite whereas I write for the man in the street.

(Kavanagh, R.M.: 1985, p.121)

Kavanagh goes on to record:

A journalist, commenting on the fact that Lifa was to play in Durban at 11:30 pm after the popular Umbhaquanga singer Mahlathini wrote: "and the people who go to see Mahlathini are usually the same people who like to see Gibson Kente shows." In other words the proletariat patronised both Mahlathini and Kente - though in actual fact it was the lower strata of the working class, migrants and domestic workers who tended to patronise Umbaquanga.

(Kavanagh, R.M.: 1985, p.121)

Kente not only saw his target audience in this specific way, but he actively created his works with this target audience in mind and in the process considerably adapted the King Kong model, making changes which would obviously influence his subsequent work either positively or negatively. Earlier we listed commonalities between Too Late and King Kong, so perhaps we may now consider some of the divergences.

As we have noted already, the first important difference is that Too Late was created by a Black playwright for Black township audiences, whereas King Kong was created by a collective of predominantly white liberals for commercial dissemination to predominantly white audiences. Both were primarily commercial ventures and this meant that for both their appeals to the respective target audiences had to be carefully orchestrated. In Too Late there is at least 50% more dramatic dialogue (by comparison with King Kong) through which character and situation can be explored. This shows a major shift towards a more flexible dramatic form, offering opportunity for social and political critique. However, it is difficult to place Kente's work in any one specific category in terms of Hauptfleisch's notion of four basic traditions, . since there is a cross-fertilization of westernized , urbanized indigenous forms , some

formal spoken drama elements , and so on. Perhaps it belongs in the category of crossover workshop theatre more than anywhere else.

In his discussion of King Kong, Robert Kavanagh (1985) has pointed out huge discrepancies between the recorded performance and the published texts of the musical. This applies equally well to Too Late, where the published script also differs fundamentally from the original script handed to the cast at the start of rehearsals.<sup>6</sup> However, while it would seem that the differences between the King Kong texts were mostly concerned with the popularization and commercialization of the musical, the extensive variations, insertions, and even total rewriting of sections of Too Late, appear to relate to an effort to introduce some political 'relevance' to the play. The many variations thus demonstrate a clear attempt to be more critical of the socio-political situation prevailing at the time. One could speculate that this might have been in response to criticism that Kente received from anti-apartheid activists for not using his theatre as a vehicle for sharper critique of the political environment.

When one compares the published version with the original, it is clear that an entire page of dialogue has been added early in act one, in order to introduce the idea of a common enemy, represented by the South African Breweries and symbolized by their prime beer label 'Castle Lager'. Labour disputes at the time would have provided a rich backdrop for reception of this label. Another thrust towards a heightened social awareness is provided by the question of access to education as a basic human right, which appears in the revised and published version of the play. There the point is made that, in the case of a black South African, a B.A. or M.A. would be of no use, for you are still perceived to be nothing more than a 'Bloody African' or a 'Mad Ape',

with no realistic hope of occupational opportunities in the apartheid dominated South Africa of the time.

Similarly Act 1 scene 5 is expanded by a page and a half of dialogue which takes place between the pass officer and the three men seeking a work permit from the Johannesburg pass office. In order to de-humanise the white officer to the maximum extent, the audience only hears his voice from behind the counter and pink gloves are used for the whiteman's hands. The officer's dialogue is peppered with Afrikaans words - and this is particularly significant when one considers that in less than a year after Too Late opened the Soweto riots occurred and that they were sparked, in part at least, by the protest at Afrikaans being used as a medium of instruction in schools.<sup>7</sup> The Black characters respond in Afrikaans in a demeaning way with expressions such as 'Eskuus, baas. [Sorry baas]' or 'Ja Baas [looking stupid and just answering]' etc. (p.109). The language is also harsher: Officer: You got a lot to say - Kaffir<sup>8</sup> (p.10) Just before he is released from prison we see how Saduva has been changed by his incarceration, a transformation mirrored in his language:

Saduva [to the other prisoner]: Fuck you! Wenzani?  
What do you think you are doing? (p.118)

In the revised version the Doctor stands up to the officer and announces that he will take matters to the officer's senior in command. There is also a shift in attitude signalled by the final solo by Mfundisi, which is changed from the hymn 'My eyes are on hills' in the original to an item entitled, 'Akukho Thixo Kulento' [There's no Godliness in this] in the published version, which one has to assume was more hard-hitting in the context of the scene.

The fact is that Kente's critics had long been accusing him of creating escapist entertainment at a time when the theatre was being absorbed more and more into the cultural struggle. Theatre at that time was regarded as a potentially powerful means of conscientising the masses. But theatre had to be committed to the struggle in order to achieve this objective. In Too Late Kente thus seems to be moving towards this commitment, but not convincingly enough for some. In Kavanagh's terms for instance, he was 'an established member of the commercial and intermediate class ... he thought predominantly in economic terms' (Kavanagh, 1985. p.118) Later Kavanagh adds, '... by the time he wrote Too Late, Kente could in economic terms be described as a Black businessman entertainer who employed cheap unskilled labour and sold his product to the black working classes and youth.' (Kavanagh, 1985. p.121)

This assessment may seem harsh, but it is born out by the working script of Can You take It? (held at the time of research in the Drama Department, University of Zululand, now closed). This bears three dates, namely:

Act One, Scene One - 5<sup>th</sup> February 1977

Act Two, Scene Three - 7<sup>th</sup> February 1977

Act two, Scene Two - 13<sup>th</sup> February 1977

This was the first play Kente wrote after the momentous event of the 1976 Soweto riots (16 June 1976). The tone is set by the overture:

#### Park Scene

It's a gay summer's day. Natures (sic) wears the best colours. In high spirits a 'fun crazy' girl sings a song.

"Free to fly (got no responsibility)" as others join the singing and enter into a dance.

While parents regret their loss of influence over their children and 'hate to think of a day when we will have lost all the finer aspects of our traditional way of life', the children challenge parental authority. Zuzu smokes and drinks in front of her mother, Mrs. Vuma, and even invites her boy-friends home. She also chews gum. Mfundisi's son Skade has brought banned books home. The comic character Natsona claims that the children have been corrupted by 'bioscope and that thing that tells-a-vision'.

Essentially this is a love story of Jiki and Skade. Interspersed in the action is the making, buying, selling, and eating of 'fat cakes'. (Now more commonly known by their Afrikaans name of 'Vetkoek'). A plea is made for parental understanding but neither parent in this case is accommodating. Letters that are intercepted and destroyed add to a plot that amounts to a domestic comedy with the usual formula of songs, dances, hymns and crowd scenes.

In fairness to Kente we do not have a published performance script of Can you take it? And, as we have seen in the case of Too Late, the performance script and the rehearsal script can differ substantially. The unpublished script of Can You Take It? is then to be regarded as a kind of scenario in an advanced, but not final, stage of development. Who knows what could ultimately have been made about the banned books issue? On present evidence however the script tends to confirm Kavanagh's assessment of Kente as a Black businessman entertainer more concerned with creating marketable commercial productions than with using these for committed political critique.



The same cannot be said for Matsemela Manaka whose work will be considered next.

## 2.5 Matsemela Manaka

Though not conservative, Barry Ronge has always been seen as something of an 'establishment' critic, so his critique of Manaka's Goree (Sunday Times of 19 February 1989) is remarkable, as he says:

... I must stress that I had a very powerful personal and subjective response to the play. After a life lived in this country this was the first time ever that I grasped, with complete comprehension, the sense of what it is to be an African.

(Ronge, 1989, p. 5)

Dennis Schaffer's own response, as recorded in his Manaka file mirrors this response:

Last night Matsemela Manaka presented Goree in the Asoka Theatre and naturally I was there. Quite what I expected I don't know, but few productions here or elsewhere have impressed me more. I feel that my understanding of the Pan-Africanist vision has been enlarged. I came out of the presentation elated and enspirited with the notion that although I am white by accident of birth, I have by virtue of being born in South Africa, a birthright to an incredibly rich African inheritance and a responsibility to myself to recover, nurture, and preserve what I can of this inheritance.'

(Schaffer file marked Manaka. M.)

In reading this I began to understand something of why Schauffer chose to undertake the study of Black African Dramatists in the sub-continent.

If Kente's work is difficult to come to terms with when one does not have the power of the music to underscore whatever impression arises from words of his scripts, then Mananka's works are almost inaccessible, for by comparison they are even more reliant upon performance aesthetics, as distinct from literary aesthetics. Of course - as pointed out in the introduction - one could argue of all plays that the scripts are only productions *in potentia*, and that it is the productions themselves that make theatrical impact - either negatively or positively. What makes this difficult for me as a researcher in the case of the Manaka's scripts for Egoli, Pula, Children of Asazi, Toro, Goree, Blues Africa Café, and Ekaya, is not that I do not have an intellectual understanding of the writing, but that I lacked opportunities for contact with the live theatrical production of such works before a real target audience.

This must limit my response to the play as a whole, yet as a 'theatre archaeologist' (as VeVe Clarke termed it) or what I prefer to think of as a 'theatreologist' ( see p.18 for explanation of this neologism), I do believe it is possible for me to pick through the pile of artefacts and bare bones - the bare words of the printed scripts - to (re)construct whatever animal I may make of them, conscious of the fact that other 'theatreologists' may very well end up constructing very different animals from the same collection of bones.

There is however a further problem in all of this. In interviews with Davis (1997) and Schaffer (1998 – see Appendix 4), Matsemela Manaka indicates that his scripts are collaborative ventures, created jointly between himself as a presenter of an initial scenario or concept and the cast, bringing their experience and expertise into play. For this reason he could not create a script without first casting a production:

I always cast my plays before I can write them. Theatre is a collaboration. We use the memory of our past with the experience of our present to project a vision of the future

(Schaffer: S.A./M.M.)

Steadman confirms this by making the point that:

Manaka must be seen, in relation to his work for Soyikwa, not so much as a writer but as a scribe of the rehearsal process. He treats his actors as creators, not merely as interpretive artists.'

(Steadman, 1986, p.3)

Even when the script has been set down this is not cast in bronze, for as Manaka points out, making an important distinction between the target audience for a published script and the audience for the performed play:

... in the performance they don't always say some of the things ... The written script is trying to satisfy readers, not viewers, so that in the performance you saw of Egoli, I don't think they did say "Uhuru Azania". '

(Davis, 1999, p.1)

This appears to be in response to the observation that Davis had made about the final line of the script, saying that Manaka had openly declared his political allegiance in the use of the expression 'Uhuru Azania.' This difference of opinion points to the danger of drawing fixed conclusions from Manaka's scripts. Steadman draws our attention to another glaring example of the misreading that can occur when the script becomes the sole source for interpretation:

Kelwyn Sole exemplifies the problem in a deficient reading of the work of Matsemela Manaka. In his essay on "Black Literature and Performance: Some Notes on Class and Populism", SA Labour Bulletin, Vol. 9, No. 8, p. 70, Sole relies on a defective review of Manaka's play Imumba for his information, and elaborates, an argument based on the misinformation given by a theatre critic. Sole's information is that in the play the, "boss-boy" swallows his pride and leads three workers to freedom ... this representing, he suggests, a 'petty bourgeois' conception of liberation. What actually happens in the performance is that the workers take the decision to admit the "boss-boy" into the struggle for liberation ... a significant difference. Sole could not have missed this had he witnessed a performance.'

(Steadman, 1986, p.4)

The fact is that Manaka experimented boldly with the presentational aspects of his plays in an attempt, one may surmise, to break the conventional actor/audience relationship as experienced in Eurocentric theatre and in an attempt perhaps to establish the kind of relationship that would accord well with the communalism in the spirit of African thought.

For instance Manaka makes use of composite settings, which allows him to present simultaneous action. So in Children of Asazi people rebuild their shacks upstage whilst downstage the character Charmaine interacts with Diliza in a busy street scene. In Toro the downstage is used as an interior of a house whilst the upstage contains musical instruments. The directions for the presentation of Egoli include the comment 'The audience should be seated around the acting area and should not exceed 200 people.' In other words the performance was envisaged as being presented in-the-round - a traditional form as well as a (slightly dated) *avant garde* form. In Pula whilst Mkhulu remains upstage holding the rope that the chorus have tied around their necks:

Inside the audience, they deliver the same monologue in unison, but in varying paces so that the effect is one of disjointed choral speaking.

(Manaka in Davis, 1997, p. 92)

Ian Steadman was witness to an early presentation of Pula and he records:

As the lights changed for the second scene, the play was no longer based on representation, but on a directly participatory format. The audience in the Balckchain Hall became co-creators of the dialogue and action. Izwe was on stage ... a platform raised above the audience ... and as the lights changed for his departure from the rural areas, he descended into the auditorium as an employee in a shebeen, selling beer to his 'customers' the audience. He addressed them directly, offering drinks and taking money (if members of the audience were prepared to part with it).

(Steadman, 1986, p. 11)

Elsewhere Steadman tells us that a second actor transformed himself (changing his costume etc) into a 'with-it' rake of the township. A third actor amused one part of the audience with his drunken behaviour in his part of the auditorium whilst a fourth actor amused another section of the audience with his impersonation of a tsotsi using trilingual dialogue. Manaka's techniques are sophisticated and innovative and his approach moves 'black theatre', as earlier defined, into eclectic, unexplored territory. That this is deliberate is borne out by such instructions as we encounter in Toro.

The surrealistic visualisation of the celebration culminates in them [i.e. the harpist, flautist, singer and dancer with rattles on her legs] being part of the celebration. (*my parenthesis*)

(Manaka in Davis, 1997, p. 155)

This is a far cry from either Mhlophe or Kente. In my opinion the apotheosis of Manaka's work was reached in Goree as directed by John Kani for the Market Theatre in 1989. Whilst I only have the printed script and this, as has been argued, is but a poor remnant of the live performances, there is still enough data available with which to determine something of the rich amalgam of cultural theatrical elements in the work. In just fourteen pages of script Manaka incorporates ten songs: 'The last boat from Goree', 'Let the drums echo on', 'the freedom of singing without being told to stop' song, a war song (acapella), 'Thembalethu', 'Thula Sithandwa', 'Untold Story' (Jazz), 'Gae Gagezo', 'Go black child', and 'Celebration Song'. In addition there were two formal poems together with many injambéd poetic sections in the dialogue. There is the use of live musical instruments - reed flutes, Kora, djembe, and violin.

Even more remarkable is Manaka's use of dance. Bob Leshoai, writing in City Press, is quoted by Davis (1997) as saying that in the programme there was a note to the effect that the dances fuse various African dance styles including: 'Venda, Tswana, Xhosa, North Sotho, South Sotho, Ndbele, Swazi, Ghanian, Nigerian, Sengalese, ballet, contemporary and jazz.' He uses them in a variety of ways, including a western ballet sequence, jazz dance, traditional African dance, an opening dance representing the experience of her search, a toyi-toyi, a traditional war dance, a satirical pseudo-traditional dance as taught to Nomsa by Mrs. Daffodils (Association with Wordsworth perhaps?) an ostrich dance, a rhythmic sequence expressing the movement of a sick person, and a spiritual dance sequence.

Interestingly though, this kind of eclectic syncretism is used as a vehicle for a surreal play which has as its central theme the notion that African culture is still imprisoned and will remain so for as long as it is dominated and misrepresented by others. As the voice of the spirit of Africa, Oba, says: 'Slavery was never abolished but polished.' (Manaka in Davis, 1997, p. 180).

In the quoted article, Leshoai makes a rather interesting comment about the performances of the 'African dance', as taught to Nomsa by Mrs. Daffodil. He says 'she makes it look like copulation' (Davis, 1997, p. 233). The image is a telling one. The reading I have of this is of the rape of African culture by the forces of Eurocentricism and the implications that Africans will never be free until they reject the misrepresentation of Black culture by others and take upon themselves the responsibility of rediscovering their true roots. Nomsa's journey to the slave island

Goree to find Oba in order to learn African dance, becomes then the symbolic journey of rediscovery.

Another performance detail only possible to gather from the live performance and not from the script is the following from Leshoai:

One of the most powerful moments is when Oba is made to sing through prison bars which are placed unobtrusively to one side of the stage and only become obvious when she stands behind them. It was a powerful statement that was said to the audience, "Your prison cells may be invisible but are just as effective as if they were real."

(Davies, 1997, 233)

Goree clearly fulfills Manaka's view of that theatre uses 'the memory of our past with the experience of our present to project a vision of our future.' (as quoted earlier from the interview with Schaffer, S.A./M.M.) Of great significance is the fact that the essential meaning of the work is revealed through the manner of performance as received by the audience, rather than through the words of the script. In this way Manaka's work confirms Richard Southern's thesis quoted earlier (See Introduction p.16) that 'the essence of theatre lies in the impression made on the audience by the manner in which you perform. Theatre is essentially a reactive art.' (Southern, 1977, p.26)

So far in this overview of South African Black dramaturgy I have dealt with Gcina Mhlophe (what one might call the the storytelling tradition) Gibson Kente (the township musical tradition ) and Matsemela Manaka ( the crossover, Africanist



tradition) , but I feel that there is a category of writing that is not represented as yet in this selection and that is the writing that is more 'literary' in its approach. I now turn to the works of Zakes Mda in order to look at this.

## 2.6 Zakes Mda

Loren Kruger regards Zakes Mda's play And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses as worthy of a place in the South African repertoire of regularly presented items, but she notes that:

..despite its merits, the play has yet to be produced in South Africa.<sup>9</sup> The cause for this neglect is not censorship, although the portrayal of the haughty "office girls" might rile some government bureaucrats accused of lack of accountability, and the critique of the gap between the newly powerful and the still oppressed may strike some directors of subsidized theatres as an outdated preoccupation with anti-apartheid paradigms. Community theatres, which have no guaranteed sources of funding, tend to prefer work written locally or in house by authors not expecting, royalty payments and strict adherence to the text.

(Kruger, 1999, p. 190)

Zakes Mda does in fact involve himself in community theatre, notably so in Lesotho whilst he was lecturing at the University of Lesotho at Roma. As he described it:

I do something which is called theatre for development which I do out there in the community in the mountains of Lesotho and so on.

(S.A./ZM)

In an interview with Mahendra Raghunath for the Asoka Theatre Profile Series he continues:

I've done things over the years for fun, for the love of it and so on - now it is time for me to get the returns for all the work, which is what I'm doing now. Of course I do donate my time to community groups in Dobsonville, for instance - I go there sometimes and work with them. That's my way of ploughing back into the community whatever experience I gained over the years

(S.A./ZM)

In his doctoral thesis, published as When People Play People, Mda records more specifically the ways in which theatre can be used in rural social development<sup>10</sup>.

Included in this publication is an appendix, which reproduces the scripts of five plays presented by the Theatre of Marotholi. The scripts are translations by Mda of video or audio recordings of presentations in rural Lesotho, that were created through facilitators interacting with the community in order to produce works of communal authorship. So through his direct practical work as one such facilitator, Mda contributed much to theatre for development. (See also chapter 8.)

On quite another level, however, Mda also contributed significantly to the literary drama tradition. He explains the origins of his interest in literature in an interview with Venu Naidoo published in Alternation (4.1.1).

I come from a family of readers. From an early age I started reading comics ... My father was a teacher and later became a

lawyer. He was reading all the time and he was writing as well.  
... So, growing up in an environment where everyone was  
reading, one developed the habit of reading. I strongly believe  
that to be a good writer you need to read.

(Naidoo, 1997, p.1)

Whilst Mhlophe, Kente and Manaka could recall their direct experience of traditional storytelling Mda had less exposure to such traditional forms, as he tells us in the interview with Raghunath:

...I was not fortunate enough like other people who might have grown up in that kind of rich environment, you know with grandmothers who had stories. My grandmother was a school teacher and my grandfather was a chief and they were involved in education and social administration. So there was never time to sit down in the evening with a real oral type of situation around the fire telling stories. They had already adopted a different culture altogether!

(S.A./Z.M)

At the same time Mda does acknowledge the influence on his work of the oral tradition. Raghunath poses the question: 'What about the influences of the Oral Tradition? Do you find that seeps into your work?' He responds:

Well that would come in automatically - without even thinking about it. Because you see orature generally, is very powerful, and our modes of story-telling, whether we are conscious of it or not, will involve that.

(S.A./Z.M)

Nevertheless Mda lists as his early influences stories that he had read (not heard) during his school years. He is quite clear on where the inspiration came from to write plays:

When it comes to the writing of plays I know exactly who and what influenced them. It was Gibson Kente ... I saw a Gibson Kente play called Sikalo, which was being performed in Maseru. At that stage I vaguely remembered watching a performance of the very first play by Kente called Manana the Jazz Prophet, a few years earlier, and it did not have any impact on me. When I saw Sikalo ... I was fascinated by the fact that it was quite a terrible play. ... I enjoyed the music and dance and so on. But even then, although I was still in High School, I thought that it was a truly awful play. I felt that I could write something better. So that's how Kente influenced me. He was so awful that I thought I could write something better.

(Naidoo, 1997, p.2)

Whilst Mda's early education was in Soweto, his high school years were spent at Peka High School in Lesotho studying for his Cambridge Overseas School Certificate. His set works would have included playscripts by Wole Soyinka, Joe Orton, and Harold Pinter, and the inevitable Shakespeare. With this kind of reading behind him one can understand Mda's reaction to Kente's work and why it is that his own plays are finely structured works that are self-consciously observant of the tradition of western dramaturgy. Between 1973 and 1976 Mda studied for a BFA (Visual Arts and Literature) at the International Academy of Arts and Letters, Zurich, Switzerland. Then after teaching English at various high schools in Lesotho he became the Lesotho Cultural Affairs Specialist at the American Cultural Centre (USIA) in Maseru. Mda's exposure as a child to a reading environment at home, his 'British' influenced high

school education and his studies abroad (later he was to undertake an MA and MFA at Ohio University, and he also holds a PhD from the University of Cape Town), lends to his dramatic writing not only a fluency and an articulateness but an educated English vocabulary.

Take for example the following expressions from one of his best known works, We Shall Sing for the Fatherland:

'I always say, never be carried away by enthusiasm. Sit down and enjoy the spoils.' (p.6)

'Was it for naught, Janabari?' (p.7)

'Let me nip down to the shop', 'nitwit' (p.8)

'I say, Jananbari ...', 'I've always known you to be a diligent policeman.' (p.9)

'... you go to great lengths extolling the virtues of Ofisiri ...', '... an upstart of a trooper', 'numbskulls' (p.10)

'... some new-fangled disease.', 'since when has my judgement been sought in our logistics?' (p.15)

'... we don't take alms' (p.16)

'Phew' (p.17)

'... political gibberish?' (p.18)

'... marked by decorum.', 'Let bygones be bygones' (p.19)

'... why the blazes ...' (p.20)

'... to harbour two wretches.' (p.21)

'... no time for recriminations' (p.22)

'... to buzz off ...', '... like a blooming warder ...' (p.23)

'... a bad precedent for my colleagues.', 'I looked for you high and low.' (p.24)

'... leave the poor wretches alone.', '... and all the trimmings?' (p.25)

In other words, on every page we encounter idiomatic expressions and phrases that create the impression of a latter day Oscar Wilde, without the aphorisms. On the other hand we also discover local reference to 'the Mataliana shop' (the Italian owned shop) and to 'mashangana polony' (polony made for African or Shangaan tastes). On page 9 Janabari says, 'It looks like beer, squo' (which is a truncation of *sqombote* or beer). Here Mda puts the English first and then the vernacular word, which is interesting, since in most black African dramatic works which feel a necessity to repeat vernacular expressions in English, it is normal usage to provide the vernacular first. On page 11 Sergeant refers to 'lishabo' (a mixture of tomato, onion and chillies). Various other expressions that are drawn from the vernacular include: 'Eke', 'Lisatane ting!', 'Hela ntate/Bo ntate', 'Ag', 'Khosto', 'Aw'.

Mda thus uses the power of English expression in combination with language and dramatic elements drawn from the Afrocentric paradigm of performance. What Mda did not admire in Kente was his script, but he confesses that he had enjoyed the dance and musical elements of the performance and he is happy to employ these elements where they are appropriate. Hauptfleisch substantiates this:

Zakes Mda's finely structured plays ... became compelling theatre through the use of performance techniques inherited from African forms, including mime, dancing and singing.'

(Hauptfleisch, 1997, p.129)

Theatre for Resistance is where most commentators place the bulk of Mda's plays. This, as Mda himself points out in an interview with Rolf Solberg and published in Alternative Theatre in South Africa, is very different from Protest Theatre. In the 1960's the township musicals were created as commercial entertainment and although they were not, as we have seen above, entirely devoid of socio-political critique, their primary objective was to entertain rather than to conscientise. The Protest Theatre in the 1970's on the other hand was political in the liberal tradition, the works bearing witness to and protesting against political and social injustice. Into this category would be placed the plays of Athol Fugard for example. Theatre for Resistance on the other hand was a by-product of the Black Consciousness movement and, as Mda points out, an instrument for the conscientization of the masses:

Theatre for Resistance, ... was quite different from Protest Theatre. Protest Theatre was a kind of theatre, which addressed itself to the oppressor, like King Kong, with a view, perhaps, to making him see how terrible his laws were. In other words it was mostly a theatre of self pity and a theatre of mourning and of

weeping ... It showed how people were oppressed - it showed also the effect of that oppression on the people, but only went as far as that. But when we came to the phase of the Theatre for Resistance, ... They created a new kind of theatre, which no longer aimed to address itself to the oppressor. It addressed itself to the oppressed, with a view to mobilizing the oppressed to fight against oppression.

(Solberg, 1999, p.33)

The move from theatre of witness and lamentation to the theatre of mobilization was not accompanied by a move from commercial interest to altruism. Mda seldom produces his own work for the formal conventional theatre and the reason for this is that it does not pay him sufficiently for him to do so. As a journalist, dramatist, novelist, and painter he finds that directing is too time-consuming. As he says in his interview with Raghunath:

... there is no money there and as a full-time writer who solely depends for his living on writing, one cannot afford to produce plays.

(S.A./Z.M)

Mda does not act either in his own plays or in others for the same reason:

Here in South African I won't do that because it doesn't pay ... you see to me, writing is a profession. I'm not doing it just for fun.

(S.A./Z.M)

Given Mda's literary approach and 'tight' scripting one should be forgiven for expecting the printed script to be a more accurate record of what was delivered in



performance, but Kruger reminds us that all performances are in fact *interpretations* of texts when she cites Horn on Mda:

While the published text blames "white" interests for the collusion between international Banker and local Businessman, the stage text was amended to "multinational" and the punchline added to the Banker's speech: "We must teach them that the only colour that matters is the colour of money."

(Kruger, 1999, p.186)

Perhaps one of the most distinctive characteristics of Mda's plays is his use of what has come to be known as 'magic realism'. Although Mda claims not to have known of the label 'magic realism' at the time of his writing this material, still less of being influenced by Latin American magic realists (see his comments in the interview with Rolf Solberg in Alternative Theatre in South Africa p.p. 39-40), it is clear that in his work the duality of the natural and supernatural is often collapsed. On the other hand, this accords well with African thought. As John Kani points out, there are certain basic notions in African thought with regard to the dead, which include:

... the respect for the dead, because being dead is a passage to becoming an ancestor, and an ancestor has an important role in my everyday reality because he or she is the link between birth, death and being an ancestor - the complete cycle of existence.

(S.A./J.K)

An interesting example is found in scene three of We Shall Sing for the Fatherland where the character Ofisiri is discovered sitting on a rock supervising a gang of

prisoners (presented in silhouette) who are digging a grave. Two 'corpes' lie in sacks nearby. Ofisiri bemoans the fact that the two characters Janabari and Sergeant froze to death in the park that he had to patrol as 'a member of the respectable police force'. Conveniently forgetting the bribe the two had to give him in order to remain in the park, he claims that 'I warned the fools to buzz off and they wouldn't listen.'

For punishment he now has to sit and watch prisoners digging graves 'like a blooming warden'. He would much rather be at another funeral at the national graveyard for Mr. Mafutha the African businessman of the post-colonial society who we meet earlier in the play and who was in cahoots with the international Banker. We learn that Mr. Mafutha is likely to have died of some 'new-fangled disease like gastric ulcers' from eating too much expensive, rich food and drinking too much alcohol. The state honours Mr. Mafutha at his funeral with a band and a gravesite in the national graveyard. By comparison the two freedom fighters and patriots are forgotten by the new society and are destined for unmarked graves. But their spirits live on. Mda's treatment of 'ghosts' is not to treat them as 'ghosts' at all.

So, when Janabari and Sergeant-Major return to the scene of their own funeral they are not presented in a special green light or coloured light, nor do they appear in shrouds, or in a mist or in any other manner designed to signal to the audience their 'non-reality', for indeed the strict distinction between the dead and the living is not recognised. 'The supernatural is taken for granted' as Mda puts it:

In other words, my characters interact with the supernatural forces in their day-to day living - it's a natural thing to do. They don't find the supernatural problematic.'

## 2.7 Conclusion

Looking at the tendencies outlined above and thinking of where things may be headed, it is interesting to note the views of the late Matsemela Manaka<sup>13</sup> as quoted in Schauffer's log:

Matsemela was unusually passionate in his expression when he declared that nowadays the notion of protest or resistance is dead: "Today the writing either refers to things past - and therefore of no immediate concern, - or I mean to say, like to things present that don't really display the courage of commitment."

(Schauffer Log.23/03/98 )

All people want is a good laugh or escapist entertainment of one kind or another.

Manaka adds:

At least Gibson had a little bit to say here and there between the entertainment. Now it's: bring me the best from the west. Get Michael Jackson, get Madonna, get whatever, - thank God at least we can get this in a democratic South Africa and not feel guilty about watching it - meanwhile what has really changed for the masses? Where has the protest gone in theatre against social inequality?

(Schauffer Log.23/03/98 )

As Manaka and others have pointed out in their interviews, if you question the ethics, the efficiency or the integrity of the present ANC government or its representatives, you run the risk of being considered reactionary. Manaka felt that democracy was not a reality in the new social dispensation of a post-apartheid South Africa (see Appendix 4).

Perhaps it is not possible to create a meaningful overview of the work of Black African dramatists in South Africa because the work of such dramatists, published or unpublished, is only slightly more than one century old. Of this the bulk of material dates from the 70's onwards. This means that as a researcher, one is faced with the daunting task of creating an honest overview based upon, at most, a thirty-year record. One could argue that earlier material provides intimations of development and the tap-root of trends that came to later fruition, but within the delimitation's of the scope of this thesis and within the delimitation's imposed by the defined use of terms, the problem remains. John Kani recalls that he read somewhere of an answer Mao Tsetung gave to the question: 'What do you think was the effect of the French Revolution?' He is reported to have replied: 'It is still too soon to tell.' ( Schauffer . Log .31/05/96 ).

In the light of this we have perhaps to ask whether or not the attempt here to provide an overview of anything as recent as black African dramatists work South of the Zambezi is not somewhat naïve or even presumptuous? If one examines the content of contemporary young black African dramatists who have presented their work at the Windybrow Festival or at the Market Theatre Laboratory (both in Johannesburg) one

could conclude that the current tendency is to move away from politics and to move towards social issues in black Theatre in South Africa.<sup>14</sup> What is interesting however is the fact that the focus upon non-delivery , promised or anticipated social reforms, and the focus upon issues of social relevance to black communities in South Africa, presupposes a black African target audience.

One could then frame a history of South African Theatre in terms of the implicit target audience, with productions such as King Kong designed to appeal to white audiences, Gibson Kente's township musicals appealing to black township audiences, Zakes Mda and Matsemela Manaka appealing to intellectual audiences of all kinds, etc and now a new breed of writers that seem to regard their audience as the growing middle class of black urban society. The accuracy of this reading of the present situation is bedeviled by the fact this overview entirely disregards the undeniable shift towards Community Theatre. Perhaps I should accept that it is still indeed 'too soon to tell'.

To return finally to Hauptfleisch's framework of four basic traditions, i.e. spoken Eurocentric drama , western-style indigenous theatre , crossover workshop theatre and traditional indigenous performance forms. Gcina Mhlophe in Have you seen Zandile incorporates storytelling devices which derive from traditional indigenous performance forms , but she also creates a script and presents the work in formal as well as informal performance spaces . To a degree then she has also been influenced by the tradition of spoken English drama, and in presentational terms this sometimes falls within the rubric of western-style indigenous theatre . In fact if we examine any of the works mentioned here we could trace elements of all four traditions in each

work . It is simply a question of emphasis. In similar fashion, Gibson Kente employs westernized , urbanized indigenous forms , some workshop theatre influences as well as some formal spoken drama elements. Zakes Mda appears to come close to Hauptfleisch's spoken eurocentric drama, though again combined with western-style indigenous theatre , while Matsamela Manaka uses crossover techniques in pursuit of an Afrocentric vision . Thus, whilst Hauptfleisch's suggestion of four basic traditions can be seen to provide a useful basic matrix when looking at the work of black African dramatists in South Africa , it is significant that , on present evidence , no work seems to fall neatly into any one exclusive tradition . The cross-fertilization that Hauptfleisch himself refers to actually precludes this. The vitality of black African dramatists can be ascribed in part then to their eclecticism, a capacity to integrate traditional performance elements with imported eurocentric influences and traditions to create exciting new forms suitably reflective of the rainbow nation .

### **END NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO : SOUTH AFRICA.**

- 1 For a detailed discussion and presentation of debate on this and other related issues Sienart, E. Bell. and N. Lewis, 1991 (Oral Traditions and Innovations: New Wines in Old Bottles? )
- 2 See Miki Flockemann (1991, pp. 20-52), for a discussion of an example of a student presentation of Zandile in a cramped lecture theatre on the campus of the University of the Western Cape. The adaptability of this kind of work is similar to what we can deduce from the well-known B.B.C documentary on Woza Albert! which shows the famous opening 'orchestral' sequence as presented on the London stage with side lighting, top lighting, and fill

lighting in a black box set. Later it cuts to another sequence but this time we find ourselves in a township hall in Soweto with the performance presented on a slightly raised platform in a flat auditorium under non-dimmable bare light bulbs that provided general illumination for both the stage and the auditorium simultaneously. Skilful direction of the documentary ensured that we the viewers were provided with cut-aways to the lively audience participation in the Soweto production but of course no sedate audience reaction was shown for the London production.

- 4 Kente denies that Mbongeni Ngema pursues his tradition of theatre. In an interview with Rolf Solberg he replies:

No, I think diametrically opposite is the case, much as he is my protégé. Mbongeni aspired to find his own identity along the way. But I think unfortunately, he tackled that in a rather shabby way, because he was against anything that I taught ... For instance, at one stage he tried to make people speak English like they were speaking Zulu. Stick to Zulu then if you want ... the bloody thing to be Zulu ... But I think there was a drive to give up on Gibson Kente in order to have his own identity.

(Solberg, R.: 1999, p. 87)

- 5 Kavanagh notes that: 'The script is not, in fact, Harry Bloom's work. It had been evolved by an all-white team of writers in Clive Mendell's studio. This they did without apparently consulting black writers ...' (Kavanagh, 1985, pp. 101-102)

- 6 Copy in Schauffer's collection marked SA/GK/US.

- 7 Afrikaans was associated inevitably, though perhaps a little unfairly, with the language of oppressors. The dangers of such generalisation were exposed in the various debates on culture

that led up to the first democratic election. It was pointed out that Afrikaans is also the language of protest in the works of Adam Small, the Cape Flats Players, Karel Schoeman, Bartho Smit, André Brink, Hennie Aucamp, Pieter Fourie, Deon Opperman, and many others. It was indeed much more widely used than only by supporters of the Nationalist Party, and was not limited to white speakers only. In fact Afrikaans was also (and still is) the first language of many many Black Africans.

8 The term 'Kaffir' was a term used in a denigrating way in everyday common usage in South Africa. There is remarkable irony in this because the term is derived from the Arabic 'Caffre' and it was a term which was applied to non-Islamic peoples and it meant 'non-believer' Given that all the white Prime Ministers of South Africa were Christian this would have made them all 'Kaffirs' in the strict meaning of the term.

9 This is not strictly true, as drama departments at Universities have presented this play. What Kruger is referring to here is to professional productions in State Regional or commercial theatres.

10 See - Mda. Z.: 1993b When People Play People London, Zed Books

12 I am not entirely sure that I agree with Steadman's definition of 'black' but am not in a position at this time to improve upon it.

13 Matsemela Manaka was killed in a car crash in July 1998.

14 One could justify this claim by pointing out that within the last five years Sello KaNube has written on gangsterism in the townships in K'oze Kuse. Obed Baloyi critiques the non-delivery on promises made by political parties. Paul Grootboom's play Enigma explores the plight of AIDS patients. Emily Tseu in The Rain deals with what women really expect from a relationship rather than what men expect them to want. Thulani Mtshali in Weemen seeks to examine the oppressive nature of black patriarchy, Magi Williams in Kwa-Landlady draws



attention to the exploitation of female illegal immigrants, Boy Bangala in Brothers in Arts looks at family relationships, parental attitudes and the aspirations of a new generation of Black youth. Marapodi Mapalakanye in The Harvesting Season looks at the dissatisfaction and disappointment of returning exiles and returning former freedom fighters when they discover that the new society does not appear to recognise their contribution to the struggle for freedom and now seems to ignore such contribution through self-sacrifice. (For all these contemporary references see Rangoajane F., unpublished research for a proposed thesis, Black Theatre in Post Apartheid South Africa, UDW)

## CHAPTER THREE

### Botswana

From the townships like Katatura in Namibia to the crowded supermarkets near the taxi ranks in Maseru, Lesotho, the sight of a late middle-aged white man and a twenty one-year-old Indian research assistant caused many curious glances. Such curiosity came across to me as tinged with an incredulity bordering upon suspicion and mistrust. Not so in Botswana.

(DS/L)

In his researcher's logbook Schauffer goes on to explain that in his opinion in Botswana it wasn't so much that people were more tolerant necessarily but that Botswana had in the past accepted as immigrants white and Indian dissidents and refugees from South Africa. They might have felt less threatened by representatives of minorities that were so small in number in that society as to be politically irrelevant. It may on the other hand be due to the fact that the Batswana (a collective name of citizens in Botswana) have enjoyed a long and relatively stable period of independence. The 2000 Official SADC Trade, Industry and Investment Review (listed as SADC 2000 Review in references below), also notes that prior to independence in 1966 there was an absence of a 'significant indigenous national

movement ... and strong allegiances among the country's eight principal tribal groups.' (Saunders C. in SADC 2000 Review p. 203).

Linda van Buren, writing in the same review makes the point that at independence in 1966 Botswana was one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. 'During the 1980's, however, Botswana's economic performance exceeded that of all other non-

petroleum-producing countries in Africa. (Van Buren, SADC 2000 Review. p.207).

This gave Botswana one of the world's highest growth rates between 1990-1997. The main reason for this remarkable turnaround was the discovery of diamonds. In addition a substantial number of Batswana are employed in South Africa. The number is estimated by McGregor Hutchinson (SADC 2000 Review ,p.203) to be at least 50,000. This has the dual effect of easing the pressure on domestic resources on the one hand, and contributing to the countries foreign earnings through workers sending money home to their families from South Africa on the other. A high fertility rate, according to Linda van Buren (SADC 2000 Review. p. 211), will ensure that the country's population will double between 1995-2050 despite the fact that of the 29 of the 34 developing countries accounting for 91% of all AIDS deaths world-wide, Botswana was the worst with one in every four adults affected. With a rapid population growth a large proportion of the population according to Hutchinson (op.cit. p.203) is less than 15 years of age. This puts enormous pressure on the economy to provide education and jobs for the growing number of young people. It is hardly surprising therefore, given the above, that donor-driven community theatre has developed so rapidly in Botswana and in the sub-continent as a whole. (See Chapter 1)

## Theatre in Botswana

Like other colonial territories in the African sub-continent, Bechuanaland, (Botswana) attracted a number of expatriate British subjects to the region. Wherever sufficient numbers of such expatriates collected, social clubs, sporting clubs, and in many cases amateur dramatic societies were set up, replicating in organisational infrastructure and purpose, the kinds of clubs and societies such expatriates had been part of at 'home'. In Gabarone one such group was the Capital Players. This was a typical expatriate amateur theatre group. From documents in the Botswana Collection of the Botswana National Library (BP 792.0222) Schauffer was able to piece together a short history of this group. What is significant to note in the context of this thesis is the fact that all of the work presented was Eurocentric with an average of four productions or more a year ranging from Noel Coward to Shakespeare; from revue to pantomime. Schools Drama Festivals were also arranged. The programme of Sinbad the Sailor, presented in the Gabarone Town Hall On 17/18/19 December 1970 also reveals that two of the principal performers were persons of colour, together with four in the chorus and no less than twelve Batswanan children. Still heavily dominated by white proponents of the amateur theatrical tradition, a growing number of local Batswanans were yearly being clearly being introduced to this theatrical paradigm through their participation in such works as well as community theatre productions (see Chapter 7). Similar

groups would have existed in most of the former colonies and such groups often set up venues such as the Swaziland Theatre Club in Mbabane which sported theatre lighting equipment, rudimentary sound systems, some curtaining, perhaps a cyclorama, dimming facilities etc.

In contrast to the so-called 'white' theatre groups, made up predominantly - though not exclusively -, of white expatriates, however, what one might call black community theatre groups were operating mainly without access to the kind of presentational facilities required for western type theatre production. 'Community Theatre' appears to be a modern label for a much earlier form of theatre known in the 70's and 80's as 'Popular Theatre', and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7. What can be said however, is that by 1983 the Botswanan Government considered community theatre important enough to send the Minister of Sports and Culture in the Ministry of Home Affairs, a Mr. E.P. (Leppe) Kelepile, to Koitta in Dhaka, Bangladesh to attend the International Workshop on Popular Theatre (Feb 4 -16<sup>th</sup> 1983). His report still exists in the National Reference Library (9433), where the 58 participants from 19 countries (the majority from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean) in essence recommended at the conclusion of this workshop, bears a striking resemblance to the aims and objectives of the newly established Southern African Theatre Initiative (SATI) that was formalized at a conference in Maseru in June 2000. (See Chapter 7.)

Of specific interest to us here however, is a separate category of playmaking, namely the work of the Universities and of lecturers teaching drama and theatre studies, and more specifically dramatists writing formal texts for the theatre. Whilst playscripts

are obviously also generated by community theatre groups, such scripts are, by very nature of the methodology of community theatre, of communal authorship and often even undocumented, although in some instances individuals claim authorship (see chapter 4 on Namibia).

### **Fani-Kayode Osazuwa Omoregie**

In contrast dramatists that work as independent authors are few and far between in the sub-continent, outside of South Africa. One such in Botswana is Dr. Fani-Kayode Osazuwa Omoregie, a Nigerian born lecturer in English and Drama at the University of Botswana. He has written thirteen plays, eight of which are amongst the material collected by Schaffer, but all of this was written whilst Omoregie was a lecturer in Theatre Arts at the University of Zimbabwe. Using third year students in the casts four short public seasons were presented:

Hallucinations in the Alfred Beit Hall, Univ. Zimbabwe 4 -6 Sept. 1993

The Mother of all Dinners (Shingirirai) in the Reps Theatre, Harare, 27 -30 May 1996

Foreign Affairs Gweru Theatre, Gweru, 20 -27 June 1997

Foreign Affairs Township Square Cultural Centre, Bulawayo, 18/19 July 1997

Since taking up his present post at the University of Botswana Dr. Omoregie has formed a theatre group called Enigma. He also works with Travelling Theatre, a group of student performers that is funded by the University of Botswana as part of its community service programme. (B/Dr. O)

Since October 1997 Omoregie's work has changed fundamentally. Whereas the Zimbabwean work was all English and in a satirical social-realist style calling for blackout facilities and realist stage settings, realist dialogue, etc., now his technique has shifted to the use of as many languages as possible. In an interview with Schauffer he explained:

... my characters are made to speak many languages so you cannot locate the plays in any particular place. I do not believe in the concept of ethnicity. I have traveled widely and always believe I belong to whatever society I find myself. That is what I want my characters to reflect - people who have been to places and felt at home In those places ... in most of my plays now, there are characters that speak in Malawian language. Shona, French, German, Spanish, Setswana, Zambian language and so on.

(B/Dr. O)

Given the fact that the University of Botswana has no suitable theatre space and that there is a well-established community theatre movement (as mentioned above, and discussed in Chapter 7), it is hardly surprising that such a fundamental shift in approach has occurred.

In the eight unpublished scripts on hand that date from October 1997 there is not a single song or any form of dance or stylised movement sequence of any kind, now music and dance are very much part of his present output.

I try to domesticate the plays by using a lot of the art forms of the country I am currently based at the time of writing. For instance, the dominant art form in Botswana incorporates dance and a lot of singing. The one thing that is very apparent in most of the plays that I've done here is the singing and dancing.

(B/Dr. O)

Here then is a good example of a dramatist schooled in the traditions of Western dramaturgy, moving towards a new Afrocentric paradigm in his work - or is this actually the case? In the final chapter I will return to this question. As there is no record of Omoregie's current work all that can be suggested is that a follow-up study be conducted to track this talented and insightful dramatists work. What can be said of the material collected to date is that it reveals a dramatist who is prepared to tackle subject matter that is potentially contentious.

The play Infidel is a case in point. Here Omoregie offers a critique of Islamic fundamentalism. The wry comic tone of all of his works makes a journey into this material all the more hazardous. The central figure is Ali Rasheed and in scene one, which is in the living room of the Rasheed's, Ali is discovered sitting at the dining table going through his account books. He is described as a 'small, slim, bearded, a small white skull cap on his head, wearing a cream Moslem-like shirt and trousers.' The room is 'tastefully decorated with Islamic paraphernalia all over the place'. Whilst one could be forgiven for believing that stereotype is what is being exploited here, the dialogue moves swiftly and Omoregie wastes no time in introducing us to the kind of prejudice that is the quarry of the humour.



The opening exchange between Ali and his tall, fat, pretty wife Shirley runs as follows:

*Ali:* (he snorts) Not good but not bad. (Shirley looks at him with annoyance. Ali turns a page of his ledger, again snorts and nods his head in satisfaction). Not bad at all. (He snorts again).

*Shirley:* (slightly behind Ali) Could you please stop snorting like a pig?

Given the 'Islamic' setting the use of the word 'pig' is calculated. The confrontation of opposing viewpoints between Ali and Shirley is thus swiftly established. In the next few lines we learn that Ali is happy that his business is doing well, but Shirley points out that his current business has only existed for three months and that the two previous businesses have 'crumbled'. Ali claims that they failed because he hired 'infidels' (Christians). Later in the play it is revealed that Ali cannot comprehend anything more complex than simple mathematical concepts.

From the outset Ali attempts to assert himself as a male dominant figure but his chauvinism is challenged at every turn:

*Ali:* ... I'm happy because I'm blessed with a son, who listens to me. (He snorts) And a wife, you, Shirley Rasheed. That's why I'm happy because I'm a man.

*Shirley:* You call yourself a man?

*Ali:* A happy man, Shirley Rasheed. I've every right to be a man. After all the first animal Allah created was a man.

*Shirley:* I'm glad you said animal.

*Ali:* What do you mean by that Shirley Rasheed?

*Shirley:* I mean that Allah created a man first in his business, but that he put more sense in my little finger than in your big, fat head is not my fault. (She exits to the kitchen)

Challenges to Ali's position as head of what he regards as an Islamic family come thick and fast. A young neighbour Zachariah, calls to invite Shirley to an apostolic fellowship meeting. Ali throws him out unceremoniously. He feels insulted that Zachariah did not 'respect the fact that as Moslems we are not interested in attending apostolic fellowships.' As the man of the house he feels justified in answering for Shirley. The next exchange is with a Tutor who has called on the neighbour Mr. Kupe. Mr. Kupe is not in and the Rasheed's door is open. Zachariah knocks and enters the Rasheed home with the Tutor. Ali treats them rudely assuming that they are both Brothers in the Apostolic Church. His attitude changes dramatically when the Tutor introduces himself as Habib.

*Ali:* (nicely) Oh! Why didn't you say you were Moslem when you came in?

It turns out however that the tutor's full name is Habib Aaron-Mohammed. His father was Moslem, his mother was Christian and he is a Free Thinker. The neighbour Mr. Kupe is a Catholic. To Ali he is an infidel but to Kupe, Zachariah is an infidel. Ali's son Mousa ends up going to 'their' University much against his father's will at the outset instead of coming into Ali's business. Ali's attitude is summed up in the line:

'One page of the Koran is worth more than a hundred things they will teach him in their University'.

Ali's sister Audrey is completely non-conformist and is dressed in a red mini-dress. She has had four husbands to date. All of the above is explored in scene one in swift exchanges of dialogue. There is a time lapse between scene one and scene two. Mousa is now studying for his Cambridge exams and Ali's attitude towards his son's academic work has changed. In a comic turnabout Ali now says that:

... you won't find a more intelligent head than Mousa's. He is my son  
remember?

Mousa asks Ali to help him do some revision. Ali picks up Mousa's book:

*Ali:* ... What is this? What kind of language s this?

*Shirley:* What's the matter Ali?

*Ali:* (he turns to Mousa) What kind of rubbish are they stuffing  
into your head? What shit is this?

*Mousa:* It's algebra dad.

Ali can't cope with this but the Tutor is also teaching Mousa about a great deal more than Algebra. Their conversation includes reference to vasectomy, contraception of all kinds, and obliquely to homosexuality. The humour in this scene turns on the references made in the Tutor's examples of English grammar to bacon, pork and swine.

Scene three is set several years later Ali and Shirley have aged. Ali is still at his ledger complaining that the new bookkeeper (a Moslem) has been stealing from him. Shirley asks Ali to go through the Ledger again in case he overlooked something. He is insistent that he could not have overlooked anything. In a neat role reversal Shirley agrees to go through the ledger if Ali will hang the curtains. Inevitably she finds a mistake in his calculations. It appears that Shirley has been to evening school. The new curtains have been hung to prepare for a visit from Mousa who is now a medical doctor living in Egypt. After a petty dispute over garbage cans with Kupe, the neighbour and a return visit from Audrey (wearing heavy make-up and a skintight pink mini-dress). She is nearly fifty but is off to meet her new boyfriend, Rakim. She has decided to marry him because:

*Audrey:* He has money. Lot's of money. He has two houses in ...

Mousa arrives home. He now has a thriving medical practice in Cairo and works with a partner Simon Matthews - who is a Seventh-Day Adventist. He also drops a bombshell when he announces that he is already three months married to Maria who smokes, drinks wine and who is the sister of Simon Matthews. Ali wants to disown his son. Mousa confronts his father and calls him a bigot.

*Mousa:* A bigot. You're not a Moslem at all. You're simply using Islam as a weapon, a weapon of hatred. You're using the religion to further your own petty prejudices and grievances ..

In the altercation that follows Mousa asks his father the awkward question, 'When was the last time you were inside a mosque?' and later he forces Ali to confront the

possibility that the businesses have failed not because of infidels that he hired but because he was a bad businessman. All of this is hard-hitting confrontational dialogue and the logical ending arrives with the final moments described as follows:

Mousa and Maria exit. Ali stand staring fixedly at the door.  
Shirley who has dashed to the door, gently sinks to the floor,  
back to the door. Lights slowly fade out.

This melodramatic ending is problematic because despite the seriousness of the critique of bigotry which is central to the play, the style of writing right up to the final section is comic, with the usual comic devices of the running joke, expectation and so on. But the tone changes from Ali's bitter line,

*Ali:* (roaring) get the hell out of my house and take your infidel wife with you now!

It almost seems as though we have switched to a different play altogether; as though we have moved from comedy to melodrama. Omoregie also seems to be troubled by this ending because he offers an alternative ending in which Ali relents saying:

*Ali:* I never thought he would have the nerve to speak to me like that, but he spoke the truth ...

Whilst this may provide a less melodramatic ending in which Ali finally gains stature through accepting criticism from his son, and there is a happy ending presaged, the dramatic change in Ali is extraordinarily sudden and it does not seem to flow

naturally from the dramatic action immediately preceding this ending. The ending then remains problematic.

There are moments in Infidel that recall the kind of comic dialogue in Chekhov's The Bear and Omoregie employs this style to good effect in A Simple Twist of Fate which is adaptation of Gogol's The Government Inspector set in a regional town in an unspecified region of west Africa. The adaptation works well as the issue of corruption, bribery and nepotism in the civil service are universal.

The exploitation of farm labourers and the land issue is tackled in For Whom Things Do Not Change. The hypocrisy encountered in many funerals and imbedded in church services for the dead is explored in Ashes to Ashes and in Hallucinations. Omoregie deals with two freedom fighters who are rejected and neglected by the new society (rather like the two freedom fighter in Mda's And We Shall Sing for the Fatherland) or the present day politicians? The honesty of some of the custom officials and the dishonesty of others is the opening gambit of Foreign Affairs but the bulk of the play deals with prevailing attitudes and prejudices towards foreign doctors. Omoregie's penchant for farce comes to fore in Double Take, a one-act play set in a film directors office. This is the sort of material that Rex Garner would direct well. Finally The Mother of All Dinners (Shingirirai) is another farce about two friends who cannot pay their rent and who arrange a dinner to impress their boss so that they can get promotions.

In all of these plays Omoregie calls for realist settings and theatre lighting. In the last-mentioned play The Mother of All Dinners for example there is a sequence which

takes place in the dark when the lights trip out. The play is therefore written with a formal western theatre space in mind as a performance venue; a space in which a blackout can be arranged.

As pointed out above, there are in Botswana several well-established community theatre groups or organisations, and it will be most interesting to see how Omoregie's work might change to meet the demands of community theatre and the theatre for development conditions which prevail in the region.

### **Community Theatre In Botswana**

Before moving on to the next country, it may be valuable to give some sense of community theatre activity in the region. Schaffer records a visit to *Ghetto Artists* in Francistown, a group working very much in the manner described by Schaffer (as detailed in Chapter 7). Another group in Gabarone is the *Gareng-ga-Dithaba Theatre Group*. The spokesman for this group, Kellen Seretse, is a playwright who is part of the *Mambo Arts Commune*. His play Hunger and Frustrations was the product of a workshopping process. The children's rights theme was chosen because the play was created to be part of the *National Programme of Action for Children*. In a review by the journalist Raheem Hosseini mention is made of effective

'... blending and contrasting of traditional community values as a backdrop to the main child rights theme. He did this through dress, through proverbs, and traditional songs referring to "Badimo" (our actors), and background music and drums.'

(Copy of review dated June 1997 in the Schauffer collection) <sup>1</sup>

Gareng-ga-Dithaba also use playscripts written in Setswana. So for example at the Maitisong Cultural Festival in 1996 they presented L.D. Raditladi's epic Motswasele II. This drama outlines the history of the Bakwena. It is the story of the power struggle between Motswasele and Moruakgomo within Bakwena's royal house. Because it was a fifth form setwork the play toured nationally to senior secondary schools.

Undoubtedly the largest and most established community theatre group in Botswana is *Reetsanang*. The following information concerning this organisation is drawn from Schauffer's interview with former national coordinator, James Chitakuta: Founded in 1986 the *Reetsanang Association for Community Drama Groups* (to give the organisation its full title) today has a membership of about 2500 theatre artists operating in various communities throughout the country. Chitakuta also coordinates the Reetsanang Southern African Regional Cultural Exchange Programme that has similar aims and objectives to those of the newly established *Southern African Theatre Initiative (SATI)*. Both seek to establish a network of community theatre organisations in order to promote exchange of cultural activities, the sharing of ideas, the development of human skills and expertise, and to provide a forum for discussion of common problems and issues of concern.

To begin with *Reetsanang* was an organisation for young people who were interested in drama and theatre and who wanted to continue their involvement in the field after finishing school. After interaction with other theatre groups and cultural workers



from other countries<sup>2</sup>, the organisation was restructured in 1989 in order to provide a permanent home, a secretariat and professional executive staff, and physical resources that would enable it to coordinate theatre activities in the country. Funding has come from *CIDA*, a Swedish agency, *HIVUS* from the Netherlands, Norwegian Church Aid, from Germany and from the American Embassy. In addition *Reetsanang* is supported by the Botswana government through the Minister of Labour and Home Affairs, which houses the Dept. of Youth and Culture, as well as through the *Botswana National Cultural Council*. The way this works is for the official functions to include funded performances by theatre or drama groups. The use of theatre as a tool for social intervention and community development is well established in Botswana.

*Reetsanang* works closely with the *Akanani Rural Development Association* and with *Accord* that involve theatre in their community outreach programmes. It has also established links with organisations such as the *Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre*, and many others in Zimbabwe, with *Bricks Community Theatre* in Windhoek, Namibia, and with popular theatre alliances in Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique.

Video recordings have played an important part in securing funding from abroad. As Chitakuta points out:

'This is one of the ways to sell yourself and mobilise more resources.'

(B/SC)

One of the aims of *Reetsanang* is to develop a professional theatre in Botswana and to develop skills, which could enable performers to engage in professional work. This

raises the thorny issue of the tension between 'professional' community theatre work and 'professional' theatre in the western sense of 'establishment theatre'. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter Seven where views of Chitakuta on this issue are examined in greater detail. Botswana as a region can call upon the literary talents of writers such as Omoregie, the commitment to community service of Chitakuta and many others, and the support of central Government for the promotion of theatre. On the surface then it would appear that theatrical development in Botswana seems set to blossom. One area of concern however is the lack of unity amongst theatre practitioners themselves. Chitakuta was very aware of this, as was Vuyisele Otukile (V.Otukile, 31/05/2000), while Chitakuta recognises the need for theatre practitioners of all kinds to come together so that they speak with one voice when they speak to the government.

*Reetsanang* can only represent community theatre groups. Other practitioners do not want to involve themselves in community theatre and they also need to be accommodated with the framework of the developing national arts policy. Without some form of union the government does not know who to talk to. The need then is for such a union to recognise the diversity of approaches to theatre but in doing so to acknowledge a parallel need to promote at least a degree of consensus amongst theatre practitioners in negotiation with the government. According to Chitakuta there is a growing general appreciation of the need for a Union to be accommodated within this.

Theatre in Botswana is at an exciting stage in its development and the events of the next few years need monitoring closely as the impact of the building of a National

Theatre, the establishment of a Union, the setting up of SATI, the expansion of National television services, and the relative stability of the economy all point towards rich opportunities for theatre practitioners in the country.

The socio-political milieu in Botswana has produced a thriving community theatre that has produced a body of scripted material, mainly of communal authorship, for use in many cases as indirect back-up for fundraising from international donors. Much more research is needed however in this fast-developing part of the sub-continent before meaningful conclusions can be drawn. In terms of quadrulation of material in order to arrive at meaningful conclusions, the pilot study reveals that scripts do exist in categories of what Hauptfleisch would refer to as 'spoken Eurocentric drama' and in 'crossover workshop theatre', but further research is needed to determine how much 'western-style indigenous theatre' there may be and the exact nature of the contribution of 'traditional indigenous performance forms' to community theatre in Botswana.

The unique socio-political background thus seems set to produce exciting new developments in the near future. In the interim more extensive interviewing needs to take place with a wider range of theatre practitioners and with academics, particularly at the University of Botswana.

### **END NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE: BOTSWANA**

- 1 Details obtained from a press cutting from The Reporter, Vol. 13. No. 11, 22-28 March 1996.  
(Photocopy in Schauffer collection).
- 2 *Reetsanang* has worked closely with the *Market Theatre Laboratory* and with *Theatre for Africa*, for example.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Namibia**

According to the SADC Trade, Industry and Investment Review 2000, Namibia is one of Africa's three most sparsely populated countries with an average population density of 1.7 people per sq. km. About 27% of the population live in urban areas. Whilst English is the official language, Afrikaans, Oshivambo, German, Herero, Nama/Damara, Lozi, Kivangali and Tswana are the national languages. There are however a plethora of dialectal variations (see Norman Job in N/NS.) South West Africa (SWA), as the territory was called at the time, was declared a German protectorate in 1884. When the First World War broke out South African forces occupied the country and after the war the League of Nations awarded South Africa a mandate to administer the territory. In 1920, South Africa was granted a C class mandate by the League of Nations to administer Namibia. In 1945, the newly formed United Nations declared South West Africa a trust territory with the right of self-determination. Attempts by South Africa to annex the territory were refused. White voters were granted representation in the South African parliament in 1949. The dispute concerning governance went to the International Court of Justice and this ruled that South Africa was not competent to alter the legal status of the territory unilaterally. In 1966 the General Assembly voted to terminate South Africa's mandate and in 1968 it resolved to rename the country Namibia. Because of South Africa's refusal to compromise and to negotiate a trusteeship with the United Nations, an international campaign was launched to secure democratic rule in Namibia - in line with United Nations resolution 435. After many delays Namibia finally achieved

independence on the 21 March 1990 under a constitution based upon multi-party democracy. During this complex struggle for political self-determination, organised political resistance to South African administration started with the formation in 1957 of the Ovamboland People's Congress, which eventually became known as the South West Africa people's Organisation or SWAPO. The present president Sam Nujoma was one of the leaders of this organisation. It is not the intention here to chart the complex history of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, the alleged human rights abuses of the South African Territorial Force (SWATF) the issue of the Cuban troops in Angola and how this impacted on negotiations for Namibian independence, the central role in all of this of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the attempts to set up a Multi-Party Conference (MPC) and the eventual deployment of a United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) to monitor the South African withdrawal and to supervise elections. Suffice to say that the protracted conflict produced human rights abuses on both sides of the political divide and this has provided rich material for theatre groups and dramatists in contemporary Namibia. Schaffer notes in his journal that the name Groth was mentioned in discussions with a number of theatre practitioners including Vickson Hangula and Frederick Philander (N/VH and N/FP respectively). He does not comment further but Christopher Saunders tells us:

In March 1996 the publication of Namibia: The wall of Silence, a book by German Pastor Siegfried Groth, a former SWAPO supporter, describing the detention and torture of people by the organisation during the 1980's, caused much controversy ... SWAPO subsequently published a book, entitled Their Blood Waters our Freedom, listing about 8000 SWAPO supporters who had died during the war.

(Saunders: In *SADC Review*, 2000, p. 777)

Another statistic which is significant is that by 1999 an estimated 150 000 of Namibia's population of some 1.7 million were infected with the HIV virus.

Community theatre groups have in consequence been able to secure donor funding from foreign Embassies and from the Namibian Ministry of Health and Social Services to mount AIDS awareness programmes targeting both urban and rural communities. Another factor that accounts for the growth of community theatre activity is the unemployment situation and the serious concern as to how jobs will be found for recent school-leavers. Donald Sparks claims that at the end of the 1990's unemployment stood at 38% (op. cit).

Under South African administration a National Theatre was built and this was administered by the *South West African Performing Arts Council (SWAPAC)*. From Schaffer's log comes the following extract:

Wandering through the backstage corridors you encounter old posters from productions presented prior to 1990. There are works in Afrikaans, classical western musical ensembles, touring productions from *CAPAB*<sup>1</sup> and *PACT*<sup>2</sup>.

In other words the old *SWAPAC* catered for the cultural needs of the white group in that society who were mainly centred in Windhoek, which remains the administrative, legislative and judicial centre for the Government of Namibia. It also has the largest number of inhabitants of any city or town in Namibia. Since independence the

*National Theatre of Namibia (NTN)* has made some headway in the provision of community outreach programmes and in the encouragement of community theatre and theatre for development. Not everyone is satisfied with the rate of transformation however.

#### **4.1 Freddy Philander**

Perhaps the most outspoken critic of the *National Theatre of Namibia's* efforts is Freddie Philander. Schauffer's log records an amusing description of Philander:

Freddie Philander is truly a larger-than-life figure that is the sort of person who delights in calling a spade a shovel. He is a big man who speaks his mind. He is humorous, incorrigible, incisive, loud, keenly sensitive to the sufferings of the common man in his society, and boldly, honestly, exuberantly vulgar- a Rabelaisian reincarnation in Cape Coloured form who is not prepared to take shit from anyone. He attacks incompetence, lack of delivery, nepotism, hypocrisy, and all forms of corruption in the *SWAPO* government with as much passion, vigour and guts as he displayed in his criticisms of the Apartheid order.

Politically correct? ... se voet in 'n visblik!

In an interview with Schauffer (N/FP) he says with typical boldness:

I'd also like to say something ... about this *National Theatre* - it doesn't serve its mission. We are abstaining from them. There is a problem there; our expectations have not been met. A lot is happening there that is causing frustration amongst the artists and writers in this country. There is a great dissatisfaction with the

way things are being run there at the moment. It creates limited opportunities for certain people with the result that there are people there who ... shouldn't be running theatre ... They bring in the French. They stay for a month. They go. Then the actors are left. It's not an ongoing consistent programme of development. It makes a mockery of theatre.

(N/FP)

At this point a word of explanation seems appropriate. Philander's reference to 'the French' refers to the production of The Eiffel Tower Wedding Party, which was a Franco-Namibian cultural exchange production running at the *National Theatre* at the time of the interview. It was a localisation of Jean Cocteau's Wedding on the Eiffel Tower using a combination of skilled French performers and a company of local Namibian performing artistes. The exercise when viewed from the perspective of the French Government must have appeared to be a collaborative venture in cultural exchange with a relatively new state in Africa which could foster goodwill, introduce a little of the French dramatic tradition to a non-francophone part of Africa, and provide some actor training through workshops with the relatively new body of performers. Philander and other prominent theatre practitioners in Namibia look at this from quite a different perspective. Schaffer and his Indian research assistant attended the opening night of the production in question. Schaffer's log contains the following comment:

It was strange sitting in the auditorium of a *National Theatre* in a newly independent African country to witness a performance of a work by Jean Cocteau! It felt even stranger to look about and to realise that the audience was composed of white members of the diplomatic corps, Embassy staff, Field workers, and local



expatriate continentals - except for the Black African lady behind us who spoke French - and Nivashni Naidoo my research assistant. If this was being presented for the benefit of Namibian cultural development, where were the Namibians I wondered?

(Log.)

This was the kind of exercise that riled Philander.

We fought them prior to independence - we are still fighting them because the changes that have happened amount to a smokescreen ... it is a useless, toothless body and there is a lot of incompetence involved ... This new Union is now on the attack pushing for re-appointments of those who run this institution as though it were a fiefdom. ... I'm too old for all this now - I'll be dead soon.

(N/FP)

Frederick Philander is a remarkable man in a number of ways. He was born on 12 December 1949 in Beaufort West in South Africa, where his father was a railway policeman. He is a prolific individualistic scriptwriter in a part of the world where the move is towards group authorship, and work shopping with often no script being recorded at all.

He arrived in Windhoek in the late 1970's and for twenty years he has kept his organisations: *Windhoek Theatre Association* and *Committed Artists of Namibia* alive on a professional basis without accepting funding from any government or International agency in a part of the world where most theatre now tends to be donor-driven community theatre. He is to date Namibia's only published black playwright in

a part of the world where published play scripts are rare indeed (as has previously been noted). In his typical vociferous way Philander goes on:

These foreigners come with their donor money and they select and divide us. ... We refused that money from the outset. We want our dignity. We don't want to be kept hostage, culturally, for the rest of our lives. Being independent, if we want to criticise the government in a play, we do so. We owe them nothing because they give us nothing ...

(N/FP)

The Schauffer collection contains six plays by Frederick Philander, namely King of the Dump, The Railway Man, The Beauty Contest - An Adult Play, The Curse, Two Men and a Baby, and The Porridge Queen. We consider them briefly below.

4.1.1 King of the Dump was originally written in Afrikaans in 1985, translated into English in 1986, and was banned by the all-white South African government in 1988. In 1996 the *BBC* selected King of the Dump for broadcast to more than 400 million radio listeners in more than seventeen sub-Saharan English speaking African countries. It won for the BBC first prize when the recording was entered for the *New York Drama Festival*. (All of the above is taken from Background of the Play, which appears as introduction to the playscript King of the Dump.) The stage scenery called for in Philander's plays is modest in its production demands, and one imagines the work being presented in a 'black box' setting. In King of the Dump the set is a heap of garbage disposal bags and boxes. The number of performers is also modest. In this case it is a three-hander, with two central characters Pompie and Eva and a minor character (the Driver). The lighting effects called for are simple and do not rely upon

a large number of lighting units and elaborate dimming facilities. The dialogue is terse, fast moving, and gutsy in its use of language appropriate to characters and the situation. 'Shit', 'fat arse', 'panty sniffing', 'bare buttocks', 'fuck', 'fat slob', 'bastard', 'he rides me (sexual gesture)', 'arse-creeper', 'gat', 'shit-head', 'pee-pot', 'voetsek', 'kielie met 'n mielie', 'dig the thing', 'piss', 'shit-hole', 'doodle' all tumble over each other with abandon in the nine scenes of what is essentially a one-act play. One of the meta-theatrical devices that are standard in all Philander's plays is the direct address to the audience. For example when Eva and the Driver of the rubbish truck are about to have sex the Driver suddenly becomes very conscious of the audience and says: 'No not here. Look at all the people.' (Philander, F.: 1986. , P. 21).

Philander also draws heavily upon the rich, earthy expressiveness of Cape Coloured Afrikaans, which is naturally lost to a large extent in translation.

4. 1.2 The Railway Man is a one-man play in nine scenes that uses oral storytelling techniques to recall memories of childhood. Much of the play is autobiographical and the 'Actor' in the play is really Philander himself. Here, as in his other work, Philander sometimes draws us alarmingly close to the characters he portrays. In this case it is not only the tattered clothes and squalid living conditions that become real to us, but also the stinking feet, the foul breath, the body odour, and the amazing number of times farting and shit enter into the picture.

The play was later presented at the *Grahamstown Festival* and was described by a critic for Fringe Voice as 'a riveting, mature play that will stand its own amongst theatre audiences anywhere in the world.' (Philander, F.: 1997. Introduction). The

Afrikaans version was published by the University of Pretoria (Makro Publishers) and prescribed as a setwork in Afrikaans at the same University.

4. 1.3 The Beauty Contest - An Adult Play was first presented at *The Warehouse* in Windhoek in 1989. Subsequently the play was performed for three years running from 1989 to 1991 as a box-office hit at the *Grahamstown Festival*. Part of the reason for this is that, apart from being outrageously funny it also involves the fondling of the actress's large bare breasts and the full frontal nudity of the male performer. Philander himself took the part of the male character Klaas Geswind. (The name is derived from the Afrikaans name chosen by the poet F.W. Reitz for his Afrikaans version of Robert Burns's Tam o' Shanter.) The play tackles the issue of the exploitation of women in beauty pageants and in the play the tables are turned on the photographer who preys on apparently gullible Saartjie Sieberhagen. The nudity then is motivated by the dramatic situation and sanctioned also by the farce-burlesque style.

4. 1.4 The Curse is a four-act play which concerns the Namibian struggle for independence and self-determination. Whilst this has documentary elements, the dramatised version of the events shifts the play from the category of protest documentary to theatre of resistance. At the end of the play the white mayor of Windhoek, who is trying to persuade the township dwellers of Old Location to move, to the newly established high-density township of Katatura, is stoned by the crowd and he falls. The crowd also throw sticks and missiles at the police who retaliate with live ammunition killing eleven and wounding forty-five. The narrator is used to fill in the details. The political nature of the material is self-evident when one reads the list

of characters at the beginning and one discovers there that one of the characters in the play is Sam Nujoma (now the President).

Informing the political commentary here and elsewhere in his work was his personal experience of repression, which drove him into self-imposed exile in 1979. He arrived in Windhoek as a teacher and as a journalist and soon set up his own theatre company (see above). In keeping with the political statement the play is making, when the portrayal of the history of the removal from Old Location turns to violent resistance at the end of the play, local dominant languages of the people are used namely Herero and Nama together with Afrikaans and English, the imported languages of the oppressors in this case. The play starts however on a comic, farcical note with an aggressive white policeman Sergeant Lombard marching in with two 'Kaffir' municipality policemen or 'Bouker-Police' as they are called. Pineas and Klaas Togoma are characters that could have come straight from a pantomime production. They can't tell left from right so the sergeant has red ribbons tied around their right feet and straw around their left feet and they march to the command:

Ep Ai! Rooivoet! Strooivoet! (p. 2)

But they can't manage this because they complain:

But boss it is too dark. We cannot see! (p. 5)

This farcical opening gives Philander the opportunity to reveal the sergeant's racist attitudes in outbursts such as:

Then you have the nerve to tell me you are capable of ruling your own country!

And with reference to Sam Nujoma:

Who the hell does he think he is? The King of Kaffirland!

It is in this play that we first meet the character of 'Handjievool', a stout, middle-aged mother who emerges again as a more developed character in The Porridge Queen, a play that was first performed in 1995.

In The Curse Handjievool earns money by taking in washing for Mrs. Lombard, the sergeant's wife. When Boetie, Handjievool's husband is arrested and beaten up by the police on suspicion of his being a communist and a follower of 'that agitator Sam Nujoma', Mrs. Lombard secures his release, which on the surface appears to be a sympathetic and humane response to the plight of the Bloodstaan family, but when the released Boetie, embittered by his treatment at the hands of the police, turns on Mrs. Lombard Philander creates some mature dialogue that moves beyond stereotype:

Lombard: (Cheerily) Good morning Handjievool. Morning

Boetie. (Boetie turns his back on her) I came to fetch the washing.

Handjievool: I'll go and get it (turns around). Thank you for getting my husband from jail, *miesies* Lombard.

Mrs. Lombard: Oh, I only did my Christian duty. (Handjievool enters house).  
And how does it feel to be home Boetie?

Boetjie: (Grudgingly) You have the audacity to ask.  
Look at me.

Mrs. Lombard: I didn't want to be insulted by you. I got you out of jail and this is what I get.

Boetie: You should thank your lucky stars that you are alive because my people are fed up of you whites here in the location.

Mrs. Lombard: Since when am I not allowed to enter the location?

Boetie: Listen woman! You whites are all a bunch of exploiters...

Mrs. Lombard: What's got into you, Boetie? I don't know you like this. It must be the work of those agitators!

Boetie: That's what you Boers always say when you are confronted with the truth. You think I'm stupid. I've seen through you. My wife works for you day and night and what does she earn? Penny heypenny. That is why I say you whites only exploit us. You've never ever been honest with us.

Mrs. Lombard: I don't think I deserve to listen to you I've always treated you and your wife with respect and dignity.

Handjievoll: (Returns with the washing) Here is the washing *miesies* Lombard.

Mrs. Lombard: (Grabs washing) Thank you. And here's your money. You don't have to work for me any longer.

Handjievoll: But what's going on?

Mrs. Lombard: Ask your rude husband.

(Philander F.: 1990. pp. 34-35)

Insightful probing through a rich subtext occurs again and again in his work.

4. 1.5 Two Men and a Baby. Before we meet with more fully realised character of Handjievoll in The Porridge Queen we need to consider a play first staged at the National Theatre of Namibia as a one-act play as part of the *Youth Theatre Competition* in 1994. After revision and reconstruction Two Men and a Baby, in its re-written full-length form (the version in the Schaffer collection) was presented at the National Theatre of Namibia in 1995. The play was critically acclaimed in The Namibian (See press cuttings in the Schaffer collection). Two tramps Juba and Nelson, who - like Zakes Mda's tramps in We Shall Sing for the Fatherland - live in the public park, find a white baby abandoned in a rubbish bin that they regard as their kitchen. Having found this white baby girl they now face the problem of what on earth to do with the child. They lay out the scenes where Juba takes the child to the police and the welfare departments. In both cases their improvisation leads them to the suspicion that they would be arrested for stealing a White child. They anticipate that all manner of awkward questions would be asked like:

Nelson: Address? (Juba hesitates) Come on I haven't got all day?

Juba: Bench number five, city park sir. That's where we found the child.

Nelson: (Stern) Bullshit! You kidnapped that child!

(p. 10)

As Nelson observes earlier,

... White child in the company of two Black men? Try to explain that to any judge in this country.

(p. 10)



But the child begins to recall in them feelings of compassion and paternity - qualities, which their brutalised life-experience has suppressed in them. Even the more negative of the two, Nelson, ends up bringing the child milk and a rattle, and a tin of food, which turns out to be dog food. After spending one night with the child, arguing who should clean and change the child etc. they both realise that they cannot keep the child. In a sentimental ending Juba leaves the child covered in his coat on the park bench 'where somebody might see her.' He concludes the play with this somewhat melodramatic speech:

Juba: (After covering up the child in his coat) God bless you my child, may you be found by someone that will take care of you the way I would have if you were my own. (Turns around to Nelson) Come, Nelson. Let's go before I really start to cry. (They both leave. Juba stops and turns to child) Goodbye sweet angel from Heaven.

(Blackout. Child cries mix with fading light and sad instrumental music playing).

(pp. 34-35)

Whether sentimentally expressed or not the intention is clear, Juba has been deeply touched by the child. The greatest shift in perception occurs with Nelson however. His first physical encounter with the child is portrayed as follows:

Nelson: (Takes the child) Bye love! It feels strange. I have never touched a white person so closely in all my life!  
What a soft skin!

Juba: Yes, so tender.

Nelson: (Change in attitude) Here, take your White-by-Night child! (Hand over the child).

Juba: (Surprised) What's wrong with you now?

Nelson: I would have felt more at ease if it had been a Black child.

Juba: Are you inferior to the child or what is the problem?

Nelson: No I am not, but it is their laws that made us inferior; we had to live in homelands, carry dompasses, the Immorality Act, need I say more?

(p.13)

He also suggests that they sell the child to a childless white couple but after naming the baby girl Fiela Nongatsile Kruger, Nelson realises that the baby has 'really crept deep' into Juba's heart. After his return from the park he too seems to yearn for an emotional bond with the child - the kind of feeling that Juba reveals as he talks to the baby in Nelson's absence:

... there is no future for the two of us together. Much as I would like to keep you as my own, the odds are against us: the police, the welfare people, and this whole world with its norms and laws. We don't stand a chance. But I will always be indebted to you for bringing happiness into the heart of an old man like myself. You rekindled the passion for life and unleashed the love and care in me like the father I never could be to my own daughter. You will always live in my heart.

(p. 28)

When Nelson returns he has brought the child a rattle and he sings it nursery rhymes and plays with it. Juba is amazed at the transformation.

Juba: (Shocked) A rattle and toys! I wonder whether you have ever brought your own children such things let alone played with them?

(p. 30)

It is difficult to judge this writing because as has been noted earlier with reference to the South African material the words are just fragments of what is created in performance.

4. 1.6. In The Porridge Queen (first performed in 1995) we again meet Handjievool who now has a stall on a street corner in Katatura Township. She sells various kinds of porridge under an umbrella marked 'Handjievool's Den. The Porridge Queen'. This is Philander's longest play and its three-scene structure suggests an interval break after Act 1 because Act one contains 12 scenes. Act II contains 8 scenes and Act III contains four scenes. Selling pap on the street corner presents the dramatist with some fine opportunities for Handjievool to encounter a stream of characters as they pass by and to exchange with them comments on a wide range of subjects of general and topical concern.

It seems that politically speaking the honeymoon is over for *SWAPO* as far as Philander is concerned. Five years before writing The Porridge Queen Sam Nujoma had been valorised in The Curse, but here he is lampooned. In describing how on TV and radio Sam Nujoma urges people to work hard for the nation, Handjievool adds:

Dit is natuurlik as tate Sam nie in die lug rondjaker of met groot doenerigheid and gepaardgaande geraas soos 'n rykmanskind met

baie speelgoed, in Windhoek se strate rondjaag in vyftien karre  
en sewe motorbikes wat soos 'n stoet uit die hel ry.<sup>3</sup>

(p. 14)

The she proceeds to imitate the way he speaks. This lampoon of characters who use 'Namibian English' or 'Namlish' is reserved for those associated most closely with *SWAPO* and their former *PLAN* liberation army members like the character Oshikapepi who is described by Handjievoll as:

... a former *PLAN* fighter in the Liberation War ... was decorated for bravery for running away from the Caspirs<sup>4</sup> and the South African soldiers in the bush in a record time of 10,5 seconds! And now? Only one-man rubbish operator in the location!

(p. 20)

The image of the gallant *SWAPO* freedom fighter is given a terrible drubbing, as is the image of their gallant leader,

(Imitates Nujoma in broken English) "We, the courlages peopols of Namibia, have-a won the-a liberation struggle with our blood. Naw, we have-a to work-a hard to achieve economic independence."

(p. 14)

The Porridge Queen must surely be the most sustained critique of the Namibian Government and its incompetence of any play ever created in the country. Philander

leaps in where angels fear to tread - and with boots on! Nothing is sacred including the church! With lyrics such as the following, you know exactly where you are in that regard.:

Gentle Jesus Mickey -Mouse

Now we dance in the smokkel house.

(p. 53)

This is the play that won Philander the *Bertrams Award* in 1996. This is the version of the script which is to be found in the Schauffer collection. In 2000 Philander submitted a TV script of this play to the NBC (see interview N/FP). The script would present a few problems for a potential publisher as it is multilingual and many of the nuances of Cape Coloured Afrikaans for example would be difficult to capture in their rich expressiveness when transcoded into English.

#### 4.2 Vickson Tablah Hangula

In an interview with Philander conducted in Windhoek North on 24/05/2000, Schauffer asks him for his response to the work of Vickson Hangula and in particular to his production The Show isn't over until.... In response Philander comments:

This show ... is a latecomer to what I've been writing all these years ... If you want to know my views of the local government, it's all locked up in the three plays (The Porridge Queen, The Curse, The Known People). It's a saga of incompetence and ignorance ... So, if you compare The Show isn't over until... with The Porridge Queen it's a Sunday school picnic by comparison.

(Philander interview 24/05/2000)

Later in the same interview however he cites Hangula as one of the young playwrights with remarkable talent and great potential.

Unlike many of the younger theatre practitioners in Windhoek that were taught and encouraged by Philander, Hangula was educated at Martin Luther High School in Omaruru, a private church-run school that was one of only three independent private schools open to African students prior to political independence. After completing his high school training he came to Windhoek with the intention of studying drama at the University of Namibia. Despite good grades he was unable to secure a bursary, as drama was not considered a priority for funding in the newly independent state. Hangula, in common with many of his contemporaries spent time working as a facilitator/performer for Bricks Community Theatre group in Katatura township. He also worked for the community theatre outreach programme for the National Theatre of Namibia (NTM).

Whilst his interest in filmmaking was stimulated by attending a UNESCO sponsored Film and Video Training School in Zimbabwe in 1998, the work that has brought him most prominently into the public eye is The Show isn't over until... This won the Golden Pen Playwright of the year award in 1998 and because of this could claim government funding to tour to the Maitisong festival in Botswana. The irony of the situation was that the play is deeply critical of both SWAPO and the current Namibian Government. The performance in Gabarone was acutely embarrassing to the Namibian diplomatic representatives in that country, and those in Windhoek who had sanctioned the funding for the tour came close to being dismissed from their posts.

Naturally all of this caused a great deal of comment and debate in the local press and the issue of censorship of the Arts in the new society was raised.

The play was invited to tour to the Market Theatre in Johannesburg but on this occasion government funding, usually available for international exposure to Namibian art and culture, was not forthcoming. Testimony to the public interest in and support for this work however was demonstrated in the offer of anonymous private sponsorship, which was eagerly accepted.

So, whilst Philander jealously safeguards his artistic integrity by not accepting any form of sponsorship, Hangula pragmatically accepts the money but still keeps his independent critical vision.

Whilst Hangula has acted for Philander and has been influenced profoundly by his work, he does not follow him in the use of his typical theatrical devices. For example Hangula's characters do not address the audience directly. In The Show isn't over until... Hangula employs a meta-theatrical device of presenting rehearsal of a play as a play. This device is useful in that it enables Hangula to interrupt the flow of the 'presentation' to comment, through the character of the performers, on the content. In addition he uses a narrator figure for further comment. This inner commentary is set up early in scene one:

Karin: Well then maybe I have a solution. I happen to have a niece who has finished her Diploma in Nature Conservation eight months ago. She could not get a job up to now! Bloody SWAPO government! ... (*Stops in mid-sentence and looks at director*) I'm sorry Mr. Director. I really don't feel a little bit too comfortable with the dialogue here. People will think that I am really an anti-government racist.

Director: (irate) What is this? Where is your professionalism? Are you an ACTOR? Do you think that all those white people who portray white trash, Ku Klux Klan, psychos and murderers are like that in real life? Those are respected actors like Woody Harrelson, Robert de Niro, James Woods, Sharon Stone, the super-bitch Julia Roberts and the others. And why do people love them so much? Because they do justice to their characters.! Now, ACTION!

Karin: But honestly, right now is not an ideal time to come up with such characters. Maybe in another ten years. You know the political set-up in this country. If Peter Tshirumbu's Men in Black are in the audience, they will not differentiate between character and me! Those bunch of assholes will soon start following me wherever I'll go!

(Hangula, V.: 1998)

Philander's comment on this work is not without substance, however, when it comes to his claim to have covered this ground before in a play like The porridge Queen. One aspect of importance however must not be overlooked. Criticism of the government by an expatriate Cape Coloured writer is one thing, the same criticism from an Oshiwambo is quite another in terms of socio-political impact. Some of the issues covered, which are common ground for the two playwrights, are:

- 1) The equating of incorrect English pronunciation with low status. (e.g. President Sam Nujoma's pronunciation.)
- 2) The corruption in the Government's financial administration.
- 3) Nepotism
- 4) Criticism of the government's arts funding policy.
- 5) The issue of whose interests the NTN is serving.



- 6) The criticism that some of the leadership in exile led lives of luxury and debauchery whilst the comrades at home were risking their lives in the bush. Now those that got used to the best stick to the best in the new society whilst the former freedom fighters are forgotten and live in squalor.

Interestingly enough both playwrights see their future in television rather than in live theatre. Dr. Omoregie in Botswana contemplates moving in the same direction. As we shall see in the next chapter on Lesotho, Tjotjela Mor'a Moshapela's entire output of dramatic writing is for educational television. The development of small television production houses to feed television broadcasters with local and indigenous material seems to be opening the door to many budding playwrights to make their contribution via this medium. The long-term implications and effects of this trend will be most interesting to observe and chronicle as such developments unfold over the next few years.

The pilot study reveals that most of the elements of quadrulation are present here but there is very little evidence to date of the influence of 'traditional indigenous performance forms'. Before any conclusions can be drawn the study needs to broaden its scope to include material from regions outside of the Windhoek area.

## NOTES

- 1      *CAPAB = Cape Performing Arts Board*
- 2      *PACT = Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal*
- 3      Slang based on Afrikaans. Translation: 'That is naturally just as long as father Sam is not gallivanting around in the air [a reference to the controversial purchase of a presidential plane for his private use] or charging about the streets of Windhoek, with great bustle and attendant noise, like a rich man's child with lots of noise of fifteen cars and seven motorbikes like a procession from hell.'
- 4      An armoured military vehicle used by the South African defence force

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Lesotho

The kingdom of Lesotho is about the size of Belgium and it is entirely surrounded by South Africa. This latter fact had an enormous impact upon its political and social history. As a country it is unique in the world in having all of its territory located at more than 1000 metres above sea level. 75% of Lesotho is mountainous. Most of the population lives in the lower lands of the north and the west where the capital, Maseru, and most of the arable land are located.

Lesotho was founded as a nation by King Moshoeshe I, who established a fortress for his Basotho followers at Thaba Bosiu. In the long and complex history, which followed and which is described in detail by Richard Brown (and revised by Christopher Saunders) in Africa South of the Sahara 2000, the internal struggle for or preservation of political power saw the creation of Basotholand, as it was known at the time, as a British Protectorate in 1868. Post-colonial independence came in 1996 and was followed by states of emergency, coups, military rule, the intervention of the OAU, the commonwealth and South African Government, and the replacement, restoration and succession of monarchs. More recently in (1998) the intervention of South African troops, in an attempt to stave off a collapse of law and order and yet another military coup, led to extensive looting of businesses in Maseru and the flight of thousands of people into the countryside and into South Africa, and the setting up of an Interim Political authority. With an estimated 25% of the male population working in the mines of South Africa and an unemployment figure estimated at 40%,

this does not add up to an ideal environment in which to nurture and develop live theatre even in its popular form.

At the same time it is not surprising that the only local commercial publishers are all associated with specific religious denominations. About 70% of the population are Catholic and Mazenod, the largest of the local publishers is an Institute of the Roman Catholic Church. About 30% of the population are Lesotho Evangelical and the second largest publishing house is Morija Sesuto Books, which is owned by the Lesotho Evangelical Church. The Catholic Church also runs the third, St. Michael's Mission. It specialises in religious publications.

### **5.1 Tsokolo Muso (Tjotela mor'a Moshpela)**

Tjotjela mor'a Moshapela's real name is Tsokolo Muso. He was born at Reitz in the Free State but grew up in Natal. In the early 40's he was acting in plays produced by King Edward Masinga. He recalls in an interview with Schaffer (L./T.M.) that on weekends, dramatisations of the lives of the Zulu people were presented in the YMCA Hall in Beatrice Street. But he also recalls that as early as 1921 Hugh Tracey who was then the director of the SABC in Durban had taken a keen interest in African music, Drama and dance.

According to Tsokolo Muso, Tracey recorded short stories from wherever he went throughout the country and these he presented on radio. There was of course no television service at that time. Masinga also wrote plays for radio that were very popular. These 'plays' were dramatised stories lasting ten minutes of broadcast time.

The plays were modest in length because in those years Zulu and Indian languages were allocated only 30 minutes a day for all services in those languages. Tsokolo Muso went into voluntary exile in 1959 and established himself in Lesotho. In response to the question, 'Did you meet anybody who was doing scripted drama, who wrote their own scripts?' The answer was 'No'. (L./T.M.)

This remarkable man lived in Sweden for 19 years, and has visited America, Canada, Whales, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Russia. In Bulgaria he was asked to join a Symphony Orchestra as a singer performing in People's Concerts in the open-air, singing for two hours at a stretch to audiences of up to twenty five thousand people. Leaving Russia he was helped by an Ethiopian friend to get into the University of Lund in Sweden where he successfully completed a Bachelor of Science in two years. Tsokolo Muso was driven by a desire to return to Lesotho to found an *Academy of Arts*, which would include the performing arts, visual arts, literary arts, and ethnocraft. Such an *Academy of Arts* was registered in 1991. Muso was also inspired and influenced by the work of Zakes Mda and his drama group at the National University of Lesotho at Roma. He worked with Zakes Mda's *Marathozi Travelling Theatre* group that involved itself in theatre in education and theatre for development projects. At present he is the director of the *Lesotho Academy of Arts*, which he hopes will grow and expand into a National Technikon of Arts.

Currently he is working on Television Drama and scripts in Schauffer's collection reveal a strong theatre for development approach, as illustrated by the following selection of titles. (The scripts are all in Sesotho, so the their English translations of their titles follow): Tapol'a Thaba (Highlands potato), Kopanelo ea Boitjaro ka

Khoebe ea Tapol'a Thaba (Co-operative effort to grow highlands potatoes), Polekelo ea Lihla 'Isoa (Storage of Horticultural Products), Kotula, Pola u Thothe (Transportation of Harvest), Kopanelo ea Khoebo ka Lierekisie le Linoa (Commodification of Beans and Peas), Kopanelo ea Khoebo ka Litholoana (Commodification of Fruits), Mokopu, Maphutseng (Increased production, easily grown, easily transported, easily preserved.)

These scripts are aimed at the farming community, are simple and use five or six scenes per episode with a few characters appearing in more than one episode.

## 5.2 Sonny Sampson-akpan

From quite a different background is the Nigerian born Sonny Sampson-akpan, who at the time of writing is a Senior Lecturer in the English department at the *National University of Lesotho*, working in a way as Zakes Mda's replacement. Most of his theatre training and experience comes from Nigeria, and the United Kingdom. Indeed Nigerians appear to play a prominent role in the teaching of Drama and Theatre in the sub-continent. The work of Dr. Omoregie has already been mentioned in the Chapter on Botswana. In the interview with Schaffer from which the details here are extracted, (L/SSA) it appears that Sonny Sampson-akpan was made aware of the teaching post at Roma through a fellow Nigerian who was teaching drama in Lesotho and who then moved to the University of Swaziland, Dr. Patrick Ngewu. So Nigerians now teach drama in three SADC countries, while Prof. Kole Omotoso, highly regarded Nigerian playwright and academic, has become a naturalised South African and is teaching in the Drama Department at the University of Stellenbosch.

According to Sonny Sampson-akpan, the turning point in his life came in 1964 when he was in high school in Nigeria. A teacher, Dakwa Daluba, cast him in the first play he had ever performed in, and this was the lead role. By school standards this was a success and this so inspired him that he began to involve himself in the study and practice of drama and theatre. This interest has grown and flourished since. (Dakwa Daluba himself went on to become Professor and Head of Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan.)

Sonny Sampson-akpan has encouraged the writing of plays and told Schauffer that he was intending to edit some of the work that his students have produced which he finds highly meritorious. The proposed publication had a working title: Basotho Plays. All of the plays take folktales as their point of departure. In other words he and his students are using the oral tradition as foundation for their playwriting.

Schauffer has collected four of Sampson-akpan's own ten published plays. The complete list reads as follows:

- i) Money Palavar: This is an adaptation of Chekhov's The Proposal<sup>1</sup> produced by the Cultural Centre Board Calabar 1976.
- ii) Ima: Calabar University and National Theatre, Lagos 1977. According to the programme note, this is based upon a popular Cross River State folksong - 'Atuak Ukot'.
- iii) Ekaete<sup>2</sup> was first produced in 1979 but was revived for a season in June 1991 at the Courtyard Theatre, University of Calabar. This play deals with the

- conflict between traditional marriage customs and court or church weddings with certificates.
- iv) The Asabo Tail: This most interesting script is based upon an Ibibio folksong. It was first produced in 1981. Fortunately Schaffer's collection includes a copy, which shall be examined in some detail as it reveals an approach which could find application in Sampson-akpan's work in Lesotho.
  - v) Found and Lost: This was first presented in the Courtyard Theatre, University of Calabar in 1982. Fortunately again this is a script in the Schaffer collection which will receive some attention as it is a one act play based unusually on the only known playscript by the poet Rupert Brooke entitled Lithuania. It also incorporates an episode drawn from Chekhov's The Proposal.
  - vi) Mfon: Published by Modern Business Press, Uyo. 1987. (Revised and reprinted in 1990). The Schaffer collection has the revised edition. In this play as in Ekaete the subject is the conflict between traditional courtship customs and the influence of western notions.
  - vii) A Son in Search of a Mother: first produced in 1983. No details available.
  - viii) A Festival of Dances: first produced in 1989. The University of Calabar Performing Company conducted a nation wide tour of this production from 1987-1991.
  - ix) Comments: Published by Modern Business press, Uyo: 1992. A copy is in the Schaffer collection. This is a sequence of 34 short monologues delivered in succession by a single actor. The play was published under the general title of Two Experimental Plays and appears in print with Ossie Enekwe's The Betrayal.



Apart from the above Sampson-akpan completed an Ibibio language play Isim Asabo in 1995 and since his appointment to his position at the National University of Lesotho he has adapted Found and Lost for Lesotho conditions. This was entitled Found and Lost Again and was completed in 1998.

Before examining the scripts available it is perhaps appropriate to note that apart from African dramatists works, Sampson-akpan has acted in works by Jean Cocteau, Jean Paul-Sartre, Moliere, Anton Chekhov, Jean Anouilh, T.S. Elliot, Aristophanes, and Bertolt Brecht. Notable amongst the African writers are Efua Sutherland, Lewis Nkozi, Fugard, Kani and Ntshona. Whilst the entire corpus of his work was created outside of the geographic area that forms part of the delimitation's of this study; Sampson-akpan is now actively involved in the encouragement of the creation of dramatic works and with the encouragement of scriptwriting. His plays are then examined from the point of view of how his approach to scriptwriting could possibly be applied to his teaching in Lesotho. As in the case of Omoregie in Botswana a follow-up study is clearly called for in order to verify or refute possibilities of influence.

### 5.2.1 The Asabo Tail

The germinal stimulus for this play lies in an Ibibio song. Chris Dunton of the *National University of Lesotho* has written a foreword to the play (the play is as yet unpublished, but has been proposed for publication. The master copy is in the Schaffer collection). Dunton comments that the song in question

... hints (but only hints) at a larger - new unspoken - tale that the dramatist has (re) constructed, providing character, motivation and thematic significance to build an edifice beyond the song, while retaining the song itself, an entity that resonates, vibrant, throughout the play.'

(Dunton: Proposed Foreword p.2)

The structure of the script is remarkable in many ways. Let us consider some of the more interesting aspects.

His use of choruses for example creates a contrapuntal effect, which assists the debate on issues of adequacy, fairness, and justified action; a debate, which is central to the presentation of the storyline, based upon the traditional song. The song appears to refer to a folktale or legend, which is now lost and so we only have a fragment of the larger cultural miscellany. An important further function of the choruses is to encourage audience response and audience involvement. The audience joins the chorus in the response: 'Kpa nyoho nyoho'

This brings the performance close to the traditions of oral storytelling forms. Another remarkable aspect of this play is Sampson-akpan's self-imposed restriction of the seven-word line. This lends a disciplined poetic quality to the work. The performance space is also divided into two levels. As Sampson-akpan points out in the proposed Preface this 'split-level' operates 'first on the physical as a configuration of stage space, and then in the main storyline as a manipulation of the antagonist and

protagonist groups as they battle for supremacy. It is a psychological warfare physiologically externalised.' (Dunton: Proposed Foreword, p.8)

The title needs explanation. An 'Asabo' in Ibibio can be translated as 'python' and there is a belief in the target audience that the 'sting' of the tail of the 'asabo' can also kill the 'asabo' itself. In a way then the play also deals with an Ibibio idiom that Sampson-akpan himself draws attention to with statements like 'asabo ababaak isim omo', which translated into English means: 'The asabo dreads its own tail.'

The use of a traditional song linked to a lost legend of the community for which the play was intended, anchors this play to the oral tradition and to its performative rather than to its literary aspects. Two choruses defend the motivation and actions of Nso (the man who is 'cured' of his blindness), Nne (his wife) and Adiaha Udo (his only child), on the one hand, and on the other, the medicine man/healer Idiong and his clan.

Commenting on the self-imposed restriction of the seven-word line Chris Dunton (in the proposed foreword) observes that this,

..provides a discipline, a matrix, through which dialogue must be constructed, and the end result is a sustained intensity, a steady, even remorseless sense of forward movement ...

The Asabo Tail was written in English in 1981 and later Sampson-akpan decided to translate it in Ibibio. The exercise proved enlightening to the author as he discovered (to use his own words from the proposed Preface to the publication):

... the truth that the "English" of the "original" was really an external trapping for the inner, the essential Ibibio. Like other writers working across two languages had remarked our writings are "English words, African thoughts" as Gabriel Okara succinctly expressed it.

As in the original song the line 'Kpa nyoho nyoho' described by Sampson-akpan as a 'rhythmic folderol' is used as a refrain 'which the participating audience may sing to maintain the rhythm and remain alert' (proposed Preface p.6).

The performance is designed then in such a way as to encourage audience participation. Sampson-akpan tells us that:

In the Ibibio language hearers repeat words, phrases or sentences in order to express their surprise or anger, or to register disagreement or incredulity.

(Proposed Preface p.6)

The responsive convention is employed in the play to affirm opinions expressed by the leading characters and this affirmation is chorused for amplification. Though not perhaps as far removed from our appreciation as traditional Noh Theatre, or even early Greek theatre, there is nevertheless a strong sense of ritual performance here with the use of the choruses and the repetition of key detail, and the fixed metre of seven words per line scrupulously observed throughout. There is thus an imposed order evident here, reflective perhaps of the metaphysical order which plays itself out

in the administration of retribution in the conclusion to the work where Idiong, like Oedipus is led blind having looked upon the vine stem that he himself had bewitched in order to blind Nso, the father of Adiaha Udo whom Idiong wishes to claim as a bride for restoring Udo's sight. But as the old Ibibio saying has it:

Once we shut and bar a door no one else besides the  
contriver himself may successfully unbar and open the  
door.

(The Asabo Tail, unpublished script, p.39)

Idiong can cure Nso's blindness because he himself caused it, but here the other Ibibio idiomatic expression which is used in the play and gives the title to the play, kicks in. (As noted above the expression is 'Asabo ababaak isim omo', meaning 'The Asabo dreads its own tail'.)

Idiong looks upon the vine stem he himself has bewitched and this renders him blind. This might seem to western readers to be a case of the villain getting his just deserts, but retributive justice is, it seems, peculiarly Western in its ethos. Afrocentric concepts of justice seem to put the emphasis rather upon the restoration of order in society (see Mariba Ani, 1994). From that perspective then Idiong disrupted the natural order of Nso's family and challenged the social order by seeking a young girl for his wife when he is old enough to have fathered her. It would be interesting to compare Afrocentric notions of justice and order, human weakness, appeal to and appeasement of the ancestors, with the Greek concepts of Hubris, Ate, and the will of the Gods etc. But therein lies another thesis!

### 5.2.2 Other plays: Found and Lost, Mfon, and Comments

Found and Lost combines social realism, an adaptation of a section of Chekhov's The Proposal, and a somewhat melodramatic ending. Whether this is a successful combination or not would have to be left to the director of such a script. Reading the script one might be forgiven for recalling not only Chekhov's The Proposal but there are definite hints of Shakespeare's Macbeth in all of this. In addition Sampson-akpan acknowledges that the inspiration for this play came from Rupert Brooke's playscript Lithuania a copy that he accessed through the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library of the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. He also reveals under a heading of 'Acknowledgements' in the introductory pages to the published play script (p. iii), that Jas Amankular cast Sampson-akpan in a role in his production of Anton Chekhov's The Proposal, which clearly had a major effect upon Sampson-akpan.

In Mfon Sampson-akpan turns his attention again to the generation gap and different approaches towards the institution of marriage in different societies. By all accounts this is a similar theme to that which he treated earlier in Ekaete. For this reader however the ameliorative tone of the ending robs us of the investigation into a most pertinent issue in Black African society, namely traditional approaches to social organisation versus modern Western/Eurocentric approaches.

Comments is different again from all his other works. It is a series of 34 terse monologues, which comment on the social, political, economic and cultural life of Nigeria at the time of writing. The lively style is facilitated by the use of short lines

and clipped commentary. The monologues are caustic in tone and filled with satirical innuendo. The solo performer uses a few simple props and also enlivens the performance with short mimed sequences.

To provide a brief example, this is the Seventh Comment:

(Reads from another newspaper ...)

Sayings of the wise.

Half bread is better than none.

(To audience ... comments)

That is not true.

That is not wise.

It is a threat.

The bread is ours,

Give it to us in full,

undivided,

complete.

Why keep the other half to yourself?

I pray you,

Have we ever implored Him

(Hands clasped in prayers ...)

“... give us this day

our daily half bread?”

Any day, anytime, anywhere

The whole bread is better than half.

(Sampson-akpan: 1992, pp. 4-5)

Sonny Sampson-akpan is an innovative, versatile dramatist with a keen sense of humour that can turn caustic or wry depending upon the subject, which forms the quarry of the humour. He is clearly playing a major role in the region and one would

have to undertake a more comprehensive and evaluative study of his influence after the publication of the proposed Basotho Plays.

### 5.3 Conclusion

As had been noted often enough, theatre is a dynamic art and will always be in a state of development and flux. What this brief overview reveals is that there are new developments in the region and that a number of positive factors exist which could potentially influence the short and long-term growth and development of theatre and Drama in countries like Botswana and Lesotho. These developments need to be recorded and researched, particularly the work of the new names coming to the fore and the innovative new forms being utilised. It is thus an urgent necessity that follow-up studies be undertaken of the contribution to dramaturgy and to theatre practice in Botswana and Lesotho of the individuals we have touched on in this overview - including Zakes Mda and the Nigerians Omoregie and Sampson-akpan - as well as further studies and interviews with unpublished or 'undiscovered' local writers. (It would be interesting for example to follow up on the contribution made by Dr. Patrick Ebewo at the University of Swaziland.)

### **END NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE: LESOTHO**

- 1 What with Omoregie creating an adaptation of Gogol's Inspector General it would appear that Nigerian expatriates who are involved with the teaching of Drama have been heavily influenced by Russian dramatists.
- 2 It is interesting to note that this play is named after one of Sonny Sampson-akpan's children, his daughter Ekaete.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Swaziland, Zimbabwe and

### Mozambique

#### 6.1 Introduction

Thus far, with the material gathered from field trips, from statistical records, and from additional readings of historical and theoretical works it has been possible to enter into a reasonably detailed account of the work of selected Black African dramatists who are active in the sub-continent. It had been the aim of this study to also do the same for the three countries under discussion in this chapter. Disappointingly it turned out that, both for the professional and personal reasons of already stated in the Introduction to thesis, and more specific problems to be outlined below, insufficient primary source material was accessible to the researcher to enable her to formulate anything more than a very general and skeletal overview of the above countries. Not, of course, that such material does not exist, but texts, interviews and secondary material were simply not available to this researcher at the time of writing. Internet searches for published dramatic works in print from Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Mozambique, as well as a study of the holdings libraries in South Africa, have yet to yield significant results for example.

In the case of Swaziland the indications have been that there is virtually no published drama written specifically for theatrical presentation from that country. The scripts

that do exist are in siSwati (hence inaccessible for this study) and were specifically produced as setworks for schools - a pattern for much of the writing in indigenous languages (except Afrikaans) in the whole region, including South Africa. The South African publishing firm of Shuter and Shooter have for example published some such material, but - as in the case of the early plays of Tjotjela mor'a Moshapela in Lesotho - these had been written strictly to be read, as part of a language study course in schools and colleges, and were never intended for live presentation. In terms of the aims of this thesis they are thus of little real interest. This conclusion may however, need to be tested more thoroughly.

Zimbabwe by contrast, has a rich performance tradition, as can be seen in the literature and published material, and has produced a considerable output of plays, for many of which scripted dramas *are* obtainable. Unfortunately the volatile and racially charged political climate at the time of the fieldwork made it unsafe and impracticable for a white researcher to tour the country in search of original material and interviews, so much of what follows can only rely on secondary sources. A follow-up study is imperative therefore once more stable political conditions exist in Zimbabwe.

As far as Mozambique is concerned the national *lingua franca* is not English, as in the rest of the region (except Angola, which was not included), but Portuguese and the language barrier set up by this proved to be a more significant deterrent to both Schaffer as interviewer and to his Mozambican interviewees than he had anticipated. A follow-up study would have to be undertaken and can only be done utilizing a Portuguese-speaking interpreter or a researcher with a proficiency in the language.

Given these immense limitations, this chapter will nevertheless attempt to draw together such strands of information about the three countries that *are* to hand, and consider aspects which may be of use in a future follow-up study. These countries make up a significant part of the region and need to be considered.

## 6.2 Swaziland

One reason that could be advanced for the lack of theatrical development (in the formal western sense) in this context is the fact that Swaziland is the smallest country in the Southern Hemisphere. Its landmass is just over 17,364 sq. km according to The Official SADC Trade, industry and investment Review 2000 (p. 304). The Swazis are descendants from the Nguni people who migrated south from central Africa several hundred years ago. During the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century a group of them settled in the area, which is now known as Swaziland. These people, the Nkosi Dlamini, became known as the Swazis, and today both names are common (Nkosi means king and Dlamini is the surname of the royal family). The Swazi nation took its name, Emaswati, from Mswati 1, who reigned during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a monarchy which has survived into the twentieth century, often under difficult circumstances. Whilst this history makes for interesting reading (see for instance R. Levin in Africa South of the Sahara 2000), it is the fact that the monarchy plays an integral role in the many traditional ceremonies that form part of the rich cultural life of the nation that concerns us here.

So, whilst formal theatre may not be very prominent (the *Swaziland Theatre Club* in Mbabana has been mentioned in passing), there is an old and established tradition of presentational forms in the various rituals and ceremonies, and in dance. In Chapter

Five we also referred to the recent appointment of the Nigerian Patrick Ngewu at the University of Swaziland, who may well in future follow the trend set by his countrymen in Lesotho and in Botswana, and encourage both community theatre and scriptwriting.

In the material supplied by Schauffer there are however two interviews with Swazi theatre practitioners, namely Andreus Mavuso and Siphon Mtetwa. In the absence of scripts, we shall concentrate on those, to get some sense of prevailing conditions for playwrights.

#### 6.2.1 *Andreas Mavuso*

Mavuso originally became interested in the theatre through attending screenings of movies, but he found that there was no training institution where he could go to in Swaziland to further his interest. His family were involved with regimental ceremonial events as part of the Monarchical Institution. So, he came from a background that included ordered, formal, ritual, live presentation of choral and dance expression within the ambience of the state.

Mat Manana, who was a Swazi veteran of the South African production Sponono (Shah and Paton) which had toured the United States in 1961/62, exerted a great influence on Mavuso. When Manana returned from America he brought with him a dream of establishing a drama school. With the choral and dance skills of Mavuso, Manana eventually set up *PET (People's Educational Theatre)*. As a founder member

Mavuso worked hard and gained experience in administration, acting, poetry and drama (See S/AM)

Apart from reading books about theatre that he got from libraries, Mavuso also learned a great deal from performing artists and professional storytellers that were sent to Swaziland as part of the cultural exchange programmes of the American Cultural Centre, and the British Council. But, whilst all this training was valuable, it also served to reveal to Mavuso that what was being dealt with was essentially what he had grown up with. He found it easy then to contemporise an old story and then to add choreography, drumming, and dance, to create an effective theatre piece. Like his counterparts in Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Namibia he is now turning his attention to writing for TV as a stepping-stone towards his ultimate dream of making the first Swazi produced film. As he points out, after 32 years of independence there still no Swazi produced film.

About Mavuso's view of the relationship between the arts and the state, Schaffer records the following in his log:

Andreas is an entertaining fellow who tends to answer questions with allegorical expressions. So, when asked in conversation whether he would like to present his work at Swaziland Theatre Club he replied that if he went to swim in dirty water his friends would not join him. In his interview he puts it slightly differently. Then he said that because it is privately owned it is not of the State and therefore he could not present work there or feel comfortable about attending shows there.

(S/AM)

Schauffer also asked him about direct or indirect censorship in the arts in Swaziland to and his reply was enigmatic:

If you keep a snake in the room that people might think revives life and heat, they would stay outside because of fear. It might rot there but they would be afraid to open door...

(S/AM)

This cryptic response - taken in conjunction with the previous statements - seems to suggest a difficult context for artists involved in any kind of collective and critical work. In more concrete terms he went on to draw attention to the 1973 decree, which prohibits associations and collective representation. On the other hand Mavuso told us that he had presented a production that actually espoused the cause of collective representation. In this play there was a scene where police are shown intimidating and assaulting voters. The King saw the production and he did not have a problem with it. For this reason Mavuso says: 'I've got this artistic freedom that when I'm not happy I can speak my mind' (S/MA).

Schauffer next asked about financial assistance available for the arts from central government, to which Mavuso replied:

...in 1996 there was the introduction of the Swaziland Council of Arts and Culture, which is supposed to be a government wing. What amazes me is how the government can appoint a Council of Arts and Culture with no budget...if we ask for transport they might just sponsor the transport only...but how would you run a house if each time you wanted to buy a cabbage you have to go to the neighbour for it.

(S/MA)

Mavuso is very critical of Government officials who go all over the world to cultural conferences and, when they return do not even provide a report. He claims that they enjoy the benefits of employment but not the work:

If you are enjoying the work then you cannot sit on a council without a budget. Because it is like marrying a wife while you are not working... then what are you expecting her to eat?

(S/MA)

He points out that in Swaziland there are different perceptions about what constitutes culture. Ultimately, as he puts it, '.. if the King dances, the culture is complete.'

The thorny issue of donors to the Arts was also raised in the interview and Mavuso explained that corporate bodies in Swaziland do not have social responsibility programmes and if they are approached they turn round and ask: 'What has your government done?' His answer to this problem would be to persuade Government to offer tax incentives to those who donate to the Arts or to social development programmes.

He also complained that the University has not seen fit to set up a Drama Department. When Schauffer pointed out that in Lesotho it was the English and African Languages Departments that were promoting community theatre, Mavuso replied that at Swaziland University the English Department is alive and well when it comes to drama, but that this is primarily for teachers who, when they join service are more worried about examination results than in the use of theatre as a teaching methodology for holistic approaches to education. The University does have a hall but apart from

choral presentations it is used mainly for meeting, marriages, and for basket ball, because boys want to walk with vests showing their muscles and that type of thing. Mavuso argued that if *SATI* can get itself recognised by the *SADC Cultural Desk* in Mozambique, then it would gain enough acceptability and credibility with the Swaziland government for it to make some meaningful intervention in the promotion of theatre in Swaziland as well.

### 6.2.2 *Sipho Mtetwa*

The other Swazi person interviewed by Schaffer was Sipho Mtetwa who started out as leader of a choral music group. He soon realised that keeping such a group together was fraught with difficulties. The engagements are infrequent and the financial returns are not significant. Above all during quiet times it is difficult to keep the group together, to keep them motivated and focused. An invitation to perform at a festival in Zimbabwe led to an interaction with professional theatre practitioners and other dance groups such as the *Black Umfolozi* who regularly tour Europe and America for seven to ten months of the year. As a result of such contacts the group decided to join the *Arts and Theatre Groups Association of Swaziland*. Through this organisation they attended workshops conducted by various practitioners sent by the *Market Theatre* in Johannesburg. As result they took a production, *Ubuntu Bamuntu*, to the *Market Theatre*. This play's story line involves a father's dying instructions to his son, which are not carried out, bringing conflict between the older and the younger brother.



Mtsetwa feels that the greatest drawback to theatrical development is the topography and population distribution. Not only are facilities lacking in rural areas, even if they did exist, the problems of transport and audience numbers remain.

Whilst the problems facing development of the arts in Swaziland are many and complex, there nonetheless appear to be some hopeful signs for the future and it will be interesting to observe the progress of the arts in the region over the next five to ten years.

### 6.3 **Zimbabwe**

One gains some sense of the importance of theatrical activity in Zimbabwe when one considers the entries in a work such as The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre. Of the countries under consideration here, four (Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana) do not even rate a mention, while Mozambique is only mentioned briefly in a section on Portuguese-speaking Africa in the introduction. In contrast Zimbabwe is accorded quite a prominent entry, as is South Africa.

Another indication of the range and variety of theatrical activity in the region is provided by what Schaffer refers to jokingly as his "Hit-list for Zim", a list which contains all the known companies (and individuals) he had hoped to contact. It consists of the following: Vashandi Workers' Theatre Group, Zambuko/Izibuko (Univ. Zimbabwe), Habbakuk Musengezezi's Community Theatre Group, Chindunduma School Drama Group, Avondale Domestic Workers' Theatre Group, Amakhosi Productions Bulawayo (Cont Mhlanga), ZIMFEP (Ngugi wa Mirrii), Ministry of

Youth, Sport & Culture (S.J.Chifunyise), Children' Performing Arts Workshop.  
People's Company (still in existence?), Mthwakazi Artists & Writers Association  
(MAWA), Umzabalaza (Styx Mhlanga), Siyaya, Savuka, Mamabilela (Bulawayo),  
Over the Edge (includes Whites, Indians & Coloureds), Reps Theatre, Savannah Arts,  
ZACT

In addition Schaffer was going to attempt to collect some unpublished playscripts  
and such published works as might still be available from S. J Chifunyise, Bertha  
Msora, Cont Mhlanga, T. Damgarembga, Aaron Moyo, Andrew Whaley, Habbakuk  
Musengezi, G Mujajati, William Chigidi, Ben Sibenke, and Thompson Tsodzo.

The issue of language would clearly have arisen as a problem, since many of these  
dramatists write in Shona and in Ndebele. A further language-related issue to follow  
up on is mentioned by Styx Mhlanga in his interview with Schaffer (Z/SM). He tells  
Schaffer that the dramatist Cont Mhlanga had started writing in a language which  
became known as *Nde English*. (A mixture of English and Ndebele). It would be  
interesting to compare the dramatic use of Nde English in Zimbabwe with the use of  
what is called Namlish in Namibia (as discussed in Chapter Three).

Besides this material *in potentia*, the Schaffer documents on Zimbabwe contain only  
two interviews, one with Daves Guja, and one with Styx Mhlanga. Using these  
interviews as base, we may nevertheless point out a few specific issues current in the  
theatre industry in Zimbabwe at the end of the twentieth century.

### 6.3.1 *The theatre system*

Dave Guja is head of a very important organisation called *Rooftops Promotions*, which runs *Theatre in the Park*, the only independent theatre that has been established in Harare after independence. This is a commercial theatre, which works off a 60:40 box-office split (60% of the net profit going to the performing group).

Guja was not influenced so much by any traditional forms, but his interest and training in the theatre was based on the western models. Thus, for example, during the course of his training he went on attachment to several courses on improvisation, direction and mime (in the latter case it was with the famous French mime artiste Paul Vere, sometime assistant to Marceau). He also worked with Helge Skoeg of *Soup Kitchen* in Holland.

According to Guja theatre in Zimbabwe exists on many different levels. Alongside independent practitioners and organisations, such as *Rooftop Promotions* (which Guja runs), there is the older *National Theatre Organisation* which used to cater for the White expatriot community and which is now open to all. As an organisation it is still however associated with the production of Western and Eurocentric theatre.

Zimbabwe has a Ministry of Culture, but its funds are limited for it also has to cater for more than the arts, encompassing the needs of sport and recreation in general as well. One of the reasons then for the formation of the *National Arts Council* was to put the emphasis upon the needs of the arts alone. At present the move is to commercialise the organisation.

However, on the more negative side, according Styx Mhlanga, Zimbabwe has no National Theatre building or complex nor is there yet a Theatre Union - although the issue of setting up a Union has gained momentum with actors becoming involved in television and film work. Mhlanga told Schaffer that many performers have felt that they have been exploited by directors when working on productions and so it seems that the time is right to revisit the idea of forming a Theatre Union.

### 6.3.2 *Community theatre*

As we have shown in Chapter One, one of the most significant elements in the theatre system in many of the countries being discussed, is *community theatre*. In Zimbabwe this is represented by *ZACT (Zimbabwean Association of Community Theatre)*.

According to Schaffer (*Zimbabwean Log*), the origin of *ZACT* can be traced back to 1982, when what was then the *Ministry of Education and Culture* decided to employ two Kenyans, Ngugi wa Mirii and Kimani Gecau, and their brief was to develop a community theatre movement under the *Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production* – or *ZIMFEP* as it was more commonly known.

Styx Mhlanga however, is once more critical of the community theatre groups in Zimbabwe. Apart from the issue of breeding an attitude in the general public that theatre is “for free”, he maintains that when artists have secured donor funds, the pressure to be as creative as possible and to live up to performance standards is removed and the group becomes complacent. He claims that in Zimbabwe audiences will pay to see a reputable company that produces good work. But of course its hard work to keep up standards and it is very tempting to concentrate on themes like AIDS,

deforestation, gender issues, and even voter awareness because groups know that donor agencies are prepared to entertain funding for such work. Such groups have also become astute in their ability to draw up funding proposals and know the kind of records to keep and what feedback to give to donors (whether such record-keeping and feedback is accurate or not!).

### 6.3.3 *Thematic issues*

The present political turmoil in Zimbabwe, whilst it may put a stay on research fieldwork, may actually have a positive influence on the development of theatre in a number of ways. As shown so well in the South African experience under the so-called *Cultural Struggle*, the essence of theatre is conflict and political conflict may engender experimentation in theatre making. The conflict in Zimbabwe operates on many different levels and it is clear that there are many and exciting themes which are thus available to theatre companies and dramatists. Among those already used or mentioned as potential themes have been the race issue, the land issue, the language issue, the issue of the abuse of power, nepotism, corruption, white collar crime, the independence of the judiciary, the issue of gay rights, human rights violations in general, the powers of the president, representative versus consultative democracy, the expectations of the freedom fighters versus the constitutional rights of ownership, voting rights, the moral responsibility of the international community and the Southern African community, etc. The list is virtually endless, but we can unfortunately go little further at the present moment than to note the situation and its volatile nature.

#### 6.4 Mozambique

On beginning this section of the chapter, the researcher made the disconcerting discovery that virtually all the literature on arts and culture in pre- and post-independence Mozambique (including information on its traditions of playwriting and theatrical development in the region) has been written in Portuguese and is thus inaccessible for the purposes of this survey. Furthermore, Mozambique was the last country on the proposed field trip Schauffer and the researcher, and unfortunately had to be abandoned late in the study (see Introduction). Schauffer's material is in consequence the most scattered and disorganised and this section merely attempts to bring a semblance of order to the planning materials and accompanying notes, which might be helpful for future research. (At the moment these entries are on scraps of paper, envelopes, and in Schauffer personal diary.)

In view of the foregoing, this outline of the cultural situation is truly only an introductory exploration, based largely on the few available English sources, notably Joao Gomes Cravinho's chapter on the recent history of Mozambique in Africa South of the Sahara 2000, (pp. 746 –753) and The Cambridge Guide to African and Caribbean Theatre (p.13/14), along with two interviews and Schauffer's notes. What these sources make clear is however the very distinctive nature of the Mozambican society, its arts and its history within the Southern African context, and the need for it to be studied as part of the greater Southern African context.

Having been colonised by the Portuguese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the country gained independence in 1975. At independence the Frente de Libertacao de Mocambique (FRELIMO) came to power under President Samora Machel. Within five years the government faced armed opposition from the Resistencia Nacional de Mocambique (RENAMO). This led to a bitter civil war, which only came to an end in 1992 with the signing of the Rome Accord. General elections were held in December 1999. This is a long and complex history of socio-political development, war and change, leading to a disturbing situation by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where half the population is under twenty years of age. (see Cravinho in Africa South of the Sahara 2000, pp. 746 –753). The impact of this on forms on economic, political, social and cultural structures must be profound.

The Schaffer collection contains two interviews with Mozambicans, the one is with Jose de Conerecio and the other with Eldorado Dabula. Conerecio in particular had severe problems communicating in English, though Dabula was a great deal more confident in his use of the language. While no interview was done with him, one name stands out particularly clearly in all the material - that of Lindo Lhongo. His plays Os noivos ou onferencia dramatica sobre o lobolo and As trinta mulheres de Muzelini apparently challenged colonial ideology and emphasised the renewal and re-evaluation of African culture. In the light of efforts in South Africa to identify with, and to promote the concept and spirit of the African Renaissance, it seems that it may be advisable for us to study the work of Lhongo, alongside that of writers such as Ribeiro, Antonio Francisco, and Joao Fumane. Another playwright of interest is Olando Mendes, whose plays were used as agit-prop material by former Portuguese

government (e.g. One Minute of Silence). The names of Pedro Paulo Pereira and A. Marques also appear in connection with children's theatre.

A number of theatre organizations also seem to be worth following up. These include the *Workers Collective* (with plays such as O destino inimigo do povo -Destiny: Enemy of the People), *Grupo Cenico das Forcas Populares de Libertacao de Mocambique*, the students at the *University Eduardo Mondlane*, who also produced a number of workers' plays and many Cuban and Brazilian voluntary workers, whose dramatic activities have not been documented yet.

Though the state has a formal Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports (at the time of writing it is Jose Mateus Mauria Katupha, with offices at Avida Patrice Lumumba 1217, CP 1742, Maputo), the theatre system in Mozambique still needs to be described. Matters that must be investigated include state funding policies for the Arts, the existence of a State Theatre, formal training institutions, an actor's union, and the range of the main theatre companies and the fringe companies. And, of course the interrelationship between politics, social issues and theatre have to be explored - in the plays, the theatres and the audiences.



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion.**

This thesis set out to outline something of the variety of theatrical and performance output generated in Africa, South of the Zambezi, and to identify some common and/or divergent cultural influences in the works of selected black African dramatists in the southern sub-continent of Africa. As expected, one such common denominator was the oral tradition, the other was the colonial heritage of western, Eurocentric theatre and literary practices. The dynamic between these traditions proved to be a point of some interest, but also a problem, as will be shown below. Another major factor in many of the countries has proven to be the lack of a strong theatrical infrastructure and divergent audience expectations, which in many countries has led to a proliferation of non-formal and applied theatre processes (e.g. in political theatre, popular theatre, community theatre, theatre for development, etc) and which pose their own methodological problems.

In the final analysis, given the restraints outlined in Chapter 1 as well as sections of the various chapters, the study could merely look at some interesting but selected authors, who in their works seem to illustrate some of the variety and energy of the widely dispersed region. Hopefully it also provided a few broad indications of important trends. Finally, and most importantly perhaps, I believe we did identify a number of areas for future research. It would seem to me that, besides a tremendous need to do considerably more work on the collection and archiving of data on theatre

and performance systems, practitioners and practice in Southern Africa, there are at least three additional areas of research that require particular attention.

## **Methodology**

Perhaps the most critical insight that has emerged from this study has been the immense need for a manageable and reliable methodology for the collection, analysis and assessment of the data and materials in theatre research within the multilingual, multicultural, heterogeneous context of the African continent. In a paper delivered to the *Consortium of Human Sciences Societies of South Africa (COHSSSS)* on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1994, Dennis Schaffer points out that the etymology of the word “research” is re-search...to examine anew. The word is derived from the French *recherché* and the etymology of the French word is ‘to seek again’. He gives the example of a black African dancer creating a dance mask – not for sale as airport art but actual use in traditional dance ritual and created in the traditional way. The dancer undertakes ‘research’ into natural materials, which are sought, selected, experimented with, and finally crafted into a finished product which can be worn. He continues:

In ritual terms, the dancer is the medium through which the spirit of the dance achieves its visual manifestation in the mask, and conversely, the dancers, by subsuming themselves within the mask and costumes, become the spirit. Having participated in the dance ritual, the dancer then traditionally throws the mask away. For the dancer the mask has no value or relevance outside the context of the ritual performances, and when the ritual was performed again a new mask would be crafted, as the act of creating the dance mask and the performance of the dance were not perceived to be separate activities but part of a continuum of a ritual act.

(Schaffer, D. 1994)

Taken together with the etymology of the word 'research', Schauffer concludes:

... the Yoruba dance/artist, in a continuing attempt to create the visual embodiment of the spirit of the dance, through experimentation with wood, fibres, earth oxides, shells, hide, feathers, carving, painting, and construction techniques, etc., came a good deal closer to the meaning of research... than most of the profound theses caped, gowned and papered in the universities of this world

(Schauffer, D. 1994)

It is the person of Western European mindset, he pointed out, who gathers the mask from the African dust, studies it, photographs it, labels it, compares it with other masks and puts it in a glass case in a museum. In other words the Western researcher commodifies the mask and accords to it a value separate from that of the ephemeral act of ritual for which it was created. Finally, Schauffer asserts, the researcher 'writes or PRINTS the findings, which we then regard as research.' (Schauffer, D. 1994)

The fundamental problem identified here has become a matter of intense debate throughout the world today (see for example the work of the so-called *PARIP* project - *Practice as Research in Performance* - at Bristol University in England and the Working Group of the *International Federation for Theatre Research on Performance as Research*).

In large measure the dilemma posed by Schauffer confronted the project described in this thesis. A researcher with a self-declared Eurocentric mindset (Schauffer) has gone out and plucked from the metaphoric dust of the sub-continent a number of theatre

'artefacts' or products of the theatrical process, he recorded the testimony of artists and dramatists and photographed them. At this stage the second researcher and the author of this study became part of the process, but she was also a researcher of self-declared Eurocentric mindset, who has taken on the role of the curator – i.e. gathering up the threads of the material, 'labelling' it, comparing it, and finally writing up and *printing* the findings in display cases called 'chapters'.

Within such a process the attempt to triangulate data from different sources, or from different perspectives, (a process labelled 'quadulation' in Chapter 1) seems in retrospect no more than an intellectual exercise in naming the strands to be woven together in a larger web, but the exercise remains essentially the product of a Eurocentric mindset. Yet, given the circumstances, how could it possibly be otherwise? So, the problem of assessment remains. All we can do is to remain ever aware of the fact that there is an unresolved issue involved and to be conscious of the dangers of not taking this into account when we attempt to draw conclusions.

The foregoing issue can perhaps be illustrated with a concrete example from the study. It is a case where I feel that I have erred, along with many others perhaps. In my approach to the recent work of Mbongeni Ngema, I have judged the works (= plays) very much in accordance with western, Eurocentric standards and formal western notions of the art of the theatre. Because this ignored (or is oblivious of) contextual issues and traditions, this led me to criticise the repetitive nature of the dialogue, the frontality of performance, the use of stereotype in the characterisation, the gratuitous introduction of dances, the Kente-like boldness of delivery with exaggeration of fixed facial expression, and the tendency for constant revision of the

presentation even after opening night. The problem is compounded by the fact the musicals are presented in well-equipped Eurocentric theatre venues and use all the technical facilities available. Ngema can even incorporate the Natal Philharmonic Orchestra into his performances.

While it is hard to sit in such an environment and set aside Eurocentric expectations, a consciousness of the dynamics of the situation nevertheless may leave the door just open sufficiently for an alternative reading of the situation to emerge. The constant revisions, excisions, introduction of new material, and extension of existing material for example, could be seen to be close to the 're-searching' that Schaffer refers to above. As far as the performance style is concerned, are the so-called 'objections' that I raise here not also to be levelled at most successful Broadway musicals?

Recently Ngema became very well known through the scandal surrounding the awarding of a contract to him, involving millions of rand, to create an AIDS awareness production Sarafina 2. Criticism still rages over this production and legal proceedings are still continuing. Ngema has even become a cartoon figure in the series Madam and Eve. But looked at from another perspective the idea of incorporating an AIDS awareness message into materials that had already proved to be popular with the same target audience that the Ministry of Health was concerned to reach, was not without merit. It is frankly debatable whether all that much of a fuss would have been made of this production had there not been so much money involved, and if there were not so many other theatre groups and community theatre collectives struggling to survive in a very tough economic climate.

Whilst township musicals could incorporate socially relevant materials, as was seen earlier when Kente's Too Late was discussed, the focus for the target audience was still upon the music and the dance spectacle. Escapist entertainment and serious messaging make strange and uneasy bedfellows. Critics of the Sarafina production (myself included) looked for well-researched, sociologically pertinent material in a production whose primary focus was upon the AIDS pandemic and its repercussions.

Naturally we came away disappointed, because we are looking here at a form which cannot support exclusive focus upon such content. Without wishing to extend the debate on the merits or demerits of Ngema musical, I would have thought that it would have been logical to critique this as a musical and dance extravaganza first and foremost, with the bitter pill of the message about AIDS glossed over with lively spectacle and commercially exploitable music. For me then the issue now resides within the ambit of the form and content debate.

It is unfortunate that this whole issue has been appropriated by those who, one may be forgiven for thinking, might have other agendas. It has frequently been pointed out in the press that many of those who were most vocal in their criticism of Mbongeni's production and of the Ministry of Health for supporting it, had not actually seen the production. The criticism was therefore not so much of the production as a musical, but was based instead upon funding issues, tendering procedures, AIDS content and so on. Even if one moved from such concerns to those of dramatic criticism, one would still have to reach agreement on the parameters of judgement for township type musicals – however removed such productions might be from township performance conditions.

It is also ironic to note that in western Eurocentric material 'the musical' is an accepted form that does not seem to carry with it the expectation of highly relevant social or political content. . Broadway musicals also have their share of stereotypes and caricatures, yet audiences and critics seem to be able to take all this in their stride. When I now reflect on the criticism against the lack of pertinent messaging in Sarafina, I cannot help but think of *reductio ad absurdum* that was involved in transposing Shaw's Pygmalion into the popular musical My Fair Lady. Shaw's play, written in the style of social realism, contained a challenging critique of social class attitudes, and of the social class structure in England. Lerner and Loewe converted this into a musical with memorable songs, spectacular settings, and numerous dance sequences.

In the social realist drama Pygmalion, Shaw presents an ending, which sees Eliza, the female lead role, rise gloriously above her class and her station in life. Towards the end of the play she asserts herself in no uncertain terms:

... Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself

(Shaw, B., 1946. P.138)

Eliza rejects Higgins's (Professor Higgins, her speech tutor) vision of a future 'you and I Pickering will be three old bachelors instead of only two men and a silly girl' (Shaw, B., 1946. P.139). She leaves to set up her own speech training enterprise and to marry Freddy, leaving Higgins roaring in derisive laughter at the whole situation.

Compare this with the ending to My Fair Lady where in very short final scene the ending is transformed into a sentimental happy ending - appropriate of course for the Hollywood musical form:

Eliza: (gently) I washed my face and hands before I come. I did. (Higgins straightens up. If he could but let himself, he would run to her. Instead, he leans back with contented sigh pushing his hat forward till it almost covers his face)

Higgins: (softly) Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers? (There are Tears in Eliza's eyes. She understands.)

The curtain falls slowly

(Lerner, AJ. 1956. P.128)

This example drawn from the Eurocentric and the British musical theatre tradition demonstrates the fact that the form of a presentation can most materially affect the content. Shaw's scathing critique of British society based upon class attitudes and upon male chauvinist attitudes is entirely expunged by the saccharine sentimentality of the concluding moments of Lerner's musical.

One of the difficulties then is that critique and assessment of work by Ngema, Kente and others must be based on judgements relative to the form of the presentation.

When that form does not lie within the Eurocentric paradigm, parameters for judgement should likewise move beyond those of the Eurocentric paradigm. 'To what?' remains the question for those of a Eurocentric mindset. In vain one turns to the excellent and thorough diagram on Theatre as a system of processes (See Appendix 1) presented by Temple Hauptfleisch for some kind of guidance. Where is the system of processes that moves beyond the Eurocentric paradigm? Perhaps the



system of processes is universally applicable to all conceivable forms of theatre, including the Afrocentric.

On present evidence one can conclude that the majority of Black African Dramatists south of the Zambezi acknowledge early influences of story telling and of other forms of dramatic presentation in the oral tradition such as performance poetry, and praise singing. On the other hand it cannot be denied that the influence of western theatre and western presentational techniques extend from the most sophisticated formal theatre presentations to the simple forms of rural, donor-driven community theatre throughout the sub-continent.

The evidence also suggests that major developments appear to be on the brink of realisation. The need for unions has now emerged with the increase in local/national television production and, with the setting up of theatre unions, the commercial basis of the art will come in focus. Governments will no longer be dealing with individuals or with specific organisations but with a mandated collective that can represent the concern of theatre practitioners nationally and internationally.

### **Exchange of expertise**

One of the remarkable facets discovered by the study is the extent to which playwrights working in a particular country were often from elsewhere, and that cross fertilization of experience and training seems to be on the increase in the region. In Namibia, Botswana, and Lesotho for example theatrical development has relied largely upon the intervention of persons of colour from outside of the country in

question. In Namibia Frederick Philander has had an enormous influence on theatre in that country, and he is originally from the Cape. In Lesotho Tjotjela mor'a Moshapela was from Natal, South Africa, and Sonny Sampson-akpan is from Nigeria. In Botswana Dr. Fannie-Kayode Osazuwa Omoregie is also from Nigeria. Various initiatives from South Africa played their role too in developing theatre in the sub-continent. Prominent amongst these groups has been the *Market Theatre Laboratory*, and *Theatre for Africa*.

### **A national database**

Of all the issues and concerns that have arisen during the course of this investigation, none is more pressing than the need for urgent follow-up in a number of areas, not only to fill in the gaps, or to extend the study, but also to monitor the exciting developments as they unfold in the region. The constant revisiting of the study would certainly honour the spirit of 're-search' and, who can tell, this process may actually lead eventually to the discovery of an answer to the troublesome question of assessment methodology. In the interim, whilst the debate continues as to how to label the material, what labels to use, what the label means, whether labels should be used at all, etc. at the very least the artefacts and records should be gathered and preserved before they are lost forever. And if this is very Eurocentric, linear approach, then so be it. The alternative is for the record of much of the exciting and vibrant theatrical activities in the sub-continent to disappear irretrievably, whilst the most astute minds of very able researchers squabble over how to handle such material. Schaffer has started to gather a few artefacts and has begun the record-keeping process. It is a process that urgently needs to be followed up, expanded and documented. Indeed a

national data centre, where access may be had to the interviews, tapes, films and photographs gathered by researchers such as Schauffer, Larlham, Ian Steadman, David Coplan, Eckhard Breitingger, and many others has become an absolutely critical issue.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this thesis I have experimented with a few labels and I have tried to tease out a few of the major gaps in our knowledge of the field, gaps that now beg to be addressed in a follow-up studies. I have even attempted, perhaps rashly, to subject the material to an initial assessment. How successful this has been must remain in doubt for as long as it takes to find a better methodology. Culture is not a static phenomenon, and theatre is part of the dynamic process of cultural evolution and change. No study of theatre, drama, or performance can ever, in consequence, be definitive. This thesis then can be regard as work-in-progress and, it is suggested, this is as it always should be.

### **NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN**

- 1 The following table examines the similarities between the Colway and the Southern African forms of Community theatre.

#### COLWAY

Presented in promenade (open-air).

Presented free of charge to the community

Uses large numbers of amateur performers with professional facilitators who also take part in the show.

#### SOUTHERN AFRICAN

Many open-air presentations.

Presented free of charge to the community.

Uses large numbers of amateur performers and the skills of at least one professional facilitator.

The request for the intervention of this particular kind of theatre in the lives of a community must come, in the first instance from that community.

A full-time play officer is appointed for each production.

Proposal writing for funding is essential.

The content is of direct relevance to the target the audience.

The play officer is obliged to live in the community for at least six months.

The play officer and all professionals involved on the production side offer regular workshops.

The work actively involves the entire community, young or old.

Workshopping is the approach.

On the other hand there are some important differences that also need highlighting. The following table examines dissimilarities:

#### COLWAY

The CTT (Colway Theatre Trust) work has promoted new writing.

Intervention funded by British Council.

The work is presented only in English.

The approach is well researched and well represented in the broadcast media (e.g. BBC-2).<sup>1</sup>

The above comparative charts are drawn up using Schaffer's analysis of the approach to community theatre practice in the African sub-continent on the one hand, and the report on community theatre

Requests sometimes come from the community but drama intervention is also proposed as a means of addressing specific problems of a medical, social and political nature.

A team of performer/facilitators is sent into a community for a collaborative intervention.

Proposal writing for funding is essential.

Community theatre can hand back to ordinary people the means through which issues of relevance to themselves and their communities may be articulated and explored.

The team of performers/facilitators spends on average six weeks in the community for which the performance is intended.

Volunteers from the local community come in to be trained by the professional facilitators in a workshop situation.

The work actively involves the entire community young or old.

Workshopping is the approach.

#### SOUTHERN AFRICAN

Community theatre, as we have seen above, puts the emphasis upon the voice and upon the movement - not upon the printed word. Scripts are used for fundraising and promotion.

Whilst government agencies do provide the funding base for some of the exercises, the majority of the money comes from sympathetic foreign donors through embassy contacts.

The work is presented in local languages.

the approach in the region is under-researched and has not received much exposure in the broadcast media.

presented by Peter Reynolds in a chapter entitled Community Theatre: Carnival or Camp? in The Politics of Theatre edited by Graham Holderness).

- 2 The difference between 'community theatre' and 'Theatre for Development' is made clear for us by Zakes Mda when he quotes from a dialogue that took place between David Kerr, Stephen Chifunyise, and Andrew Horn during the 1985 International Conference on Theatre for Development in Maseru. Horn, he says, contends that plays presented as 'theatre for development' in the end come up with solutions. So as Mda goes on to say, the performances are  
'...message-orientated and exhortatory rather than focusing on a process of community analysis and decision-making' (Mda, Z., 1993, p.104) 'Popular Theatre' is a term that David Kerr introduced into the lexicon of descriptive labels currently in use in studies of African popular culture.. The term has wide application and covers both pre-colonial and post-colonial theatrical expression, which is broadly popular with black African audiences - as distinct from theatrical works that are peculiarly part of the Eurocentric, paradigm. Though in South Africa in the 1970-1980 period, the term also had a political use, see Steadman 1984 for example. See also the interesting ideas proposed by Tim Prentki and J. Selman in *Popular Theatre in Political Culture* (2000).

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## **WEBSITES**

American Association of Community Theatre ([www.aact.org](http://www.aact.org))

Katz Jerry: Nondual salon FAQ ([www.nonduality.com](http://www.nonduality.com))

**SADC 2000 Review = The Official SADC Trade, Industry and Investment Review 2000**, Southern African Marketing Co. (Pty) Ltd. [www.sadcreview.com](http://www.sadcreview.com).

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## APPENDIX 1

# Black African Dramatists: An Interim Report

by Dennis Schauffer

### **Introduction**

Some 16 years ago I became the professor of what was then known as the Department of Speech & Drama at the University of Durban-Westville. At that time the University was still part of the segregated South Africa of the Apartheid era and had been set up to cater for the needs of higher education in the Indian community. Whilst I was aware of the rich tradition of religious dance-drama, popular local farce-drama, and of protest theatre in the Indian community, I became aware of the fact that little or nothing had been written on the subject of South African Indian theatre. My first research project at U.D.W. was therefore set up to investigate this neglected area of theatre studies. My approach was to use three categories of material:

- 1) Such hard-copy records of production work and related material that still existed, such as the handwritten playscripts in Hindi in the archives of the Aryan Benevolent Home dating from 1916, the notes in pencil of a participant in the Krishna Shah workshops that he gave at the time of the Union Artists production of Tagore's King of the Dark Chamber, in 1961, press reviews, articles, programmes etc.
- 2) Interviews with theatre practitioners in the Indian community.
- 3) Theoretical works on Indian culture and performance traditions.

Of all of the above sources of information the direct person-to-person interviews with theatre practitioners proved to be, without a doubt, the most significant.

This information led to the production of a paper that was delivered as my inaugural lecture entitled In the shadow of the Shah (13 Sept. 1990) and the material was re-worked for publication in the South African Theatre Journal vol. 6, no. 2, Sept. 1992, under the title The South African Indian Contribution to the Developing Concept of an Indigenous South African Theatre. The importance of the above to the research into black African dramatists south of the Zambezi rests upon the fact that my approach to acquisition and methodology of analysis of fieldwork material has been influenced by this to a significant extent. I remain convinced of the overwhelming efficacy of the direct one-to-one live interview approach with theatre practitioners, preferably in the environment of their production work.

### **The Black Dramatists Project**

#### **The aims**

As the University of Durban-Westville began the process of transformation towards democratic governance, re-curriculum of course offerings occurred that placed greater emphasis upon South African theatre in the Drama syllabus. It was then that I discovered that there was comparatively little material in print that paid significant attention to black African dramatists in South Africa and that there was, at that time, hardly any material available on dramatists of any kind in countries such as Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, etc. Consequently I set up a research project to investigate the history and extent of black African dramaturgy in the sub-continent. The research questions were very basic:

- a) Who are the black African dramatists in the sub-continent?
- b) To what extent do they perceive indebtedness to the oral tradition in their work?
- c) How many of their works have been published?
- d) How many of their works are accessible in hard copy or on video?
- e) What are the biographic details of each dramatist and how does this record of past influences impact upon the works?

### **The pilot fieldwork project**

Because of my need to conduct face-to-face interviews with the subjects of my investigation I began with interviews of black South African dramatists as the most cost effective start to the inquiry. The ultimate intention was to publish research findings, claim research reward monies through the University and to use these funds to extend the research into neighboring territories. Interviews with twenty black African dramatists were conducted and a *Theatre Profile Series* was set up as part of *Asoka Theatre Publications* (a research publication outlet set up by the Dept. Drama U.D.W. under the general editorship of Kriben Pillay)

The first profile was on Zakes Mda and was published in November 1999, further publications were in preparation, and a list of dramatists to the North was being compiled when the University, in its infinite wisdom, shut the departments of Drama, Fine Art, Music, Romance languages and Indian languages in line with its declared intention of de-emphasizing the Arts and Humanities in favour of Science and Technology. It seemed that the entire research project and its holdings were effectively to be mothballed indefinitely.

### **Follow up fieldwork**

By a fortunate coincidence a post graduate student, Ms. Celeste Litkie, had become interested in pursuing a Doctorate in the same area of study. Unfortunately her personal circumstances precluded her from traveling to neighbouring territories to undertake the fieldwork herself, but fortunately we were able to obtain funding for her, which allowed me to continue my fieldwork. In exchange she gained first access both to the South African material I had already collected, and to the new material which I gathered in Namibia, Botswana, and Lesotho.

There were however, a number of specific problems relating to the fieldwork in some areas.

It was for example unfortunate that the political climate in Zimbabwe had deteriorated sharply by then and was not conducive to a white male researcher and his young Indian female research assistant traveling through Zimbabwe conducting interviews with dramatists, many of whom were allied with the opposition political movements.

On the other hand, working in Mozambique would have required the services of a Portuguese translator and when this was costed out, it became obvious that this part of the exercise would not fit within the constraints of a fast-dwindling budget. The pragmatic solution to the problem was to limit the study to works in English.

It so happened that a conference was being organised in Maseru on 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2000, in order to approve the constitution of the newly formed *SATI (Southern African Theatre Initiative)*. I was most fortunate to be granted observer status at the committee meetings and as the only white African present I felt most honoured. To this conference came delegates from Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia, and of course South Africa. I made full use of the opportunity to record interviews with delegates I had not already interviewed in Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, and Lesotho.

### **Initial assessment of methodology and data**

Having collected a sizeable quantity of research material, I found myself not only having to transcribe many hours of interviews recorded on video and sound tape, but also to revise my assessment methodology. The value of face-to-face interviews revealed itself in the way in which issues, questions, and problems surfaced that I could not possibly have anticipated had I been sitting at home making use of books, the internet, and the telephone. What became very apparent was that the material I had collected, however bulky it seemed to be, was in fact insufficient to answer the key questions with any degree of effectiveness, because other factors had entered into the research equation which now require urgent follow-up studies in the following areas:

- 1) The effect of the introduction of local television channels on the concept of dramaturgy. Television is a hungry medium and a new market for scriptwriting is opening up. Will this destroy the nascent theatrical dramaturgy of the region?
- 2) The problem of the sustainability of donor-driven theatrical activity in the sub-continent.
- 3) The need for a non-Eurocentric assessment methodology for works that derive from an Afrocentric paradigm. Some video recordings and written records of scripts of Community theatre work in various African languages are a case in point. These have been generated for submission to donors as a means of accounting for donations and in some instances they have been translated somewhat ineptly into English to make them accessible to foreign funding agencies. They remain however videographic or literary records of dramatic presentations.
- 4) The dilemma of researcher's access to the cultural property of African communities and the ethics of research enterprise in Africa. Theatre researchers now require a permit to undertake research in Botswana for example.

- 5) The impact of expatriate Nigerian academics and of north African dramaturgical traditions on the developing theatrical tradition in some of the countries neighbouring South Africa. ( e.g. Lesotho , Botswana , and Swaziland )
- 6) The issue of inter- and intra-cultural encounters: their potential value and their negative aspects (e.g. French cultural exchange productions in Windhoek etc.)
- 7) The impact of organizations such as SATI, the Market Theatre Laboratory, Theatre for Africa etc. upon theatrical and dramaturgical development in the sub-continent.
- 8) The fundamental problem of access to research funding for fieldwork beyond the borders of South Africa.
- 9) The effect of the move towards the establishment of theatre Unions in some of the countries under consideration.
- 10) The effect of the proposed building of a National theatre building in Gabarone. Will this be created as a clone of a typical Eurocentric proscenium arch theatre, or will a new, unique Afrocentric physical structure emerge as was being debated at the time of my visit? What will be the effect of either choice upon theatre in Botswana and, given the theatre festivals held in Gabarone to which many groups from neighbouring countries come each year, upon the region?

The list of items can go on and on.

My initial pilot research project has thus opened up for me a whole world of future research opportunities that cry out to be tackled. I am gratified that some of my fieldwork has already been taken further and that Ms.Litkie has progressed well with the completion of a thesis on the subject.

I look forward to other researchers who may utilise the material collected so far and undertaking further work in this vast and under-researched area of Southern African theatre and performance.

Prof. Dennis Schauffer.

## **APPENDIX 2.**

### **Diagram of Theatre as a System of Processes**

From: Theatre and Society: Reflections in a Fractured Mirror by Temple Hauptfleisch  
(Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, 1997)





## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEW WITH GCINA MHLOPHE

By Dennis Schauffer

**NOTE:**

**The interviews are printed here as they were initially transcribed. Inevitably typing and transcription errors, as well as gaps, will occur.**

**QUESTION:** Can you start off by telling us how you originally got involved in the theatre?

**ANSWER:** I got involved with theatre from the performance of praise poetry. I was at a high school in the Eastern Cape when I saw a traditional praise poet who inspired me to write my first praise poem.

**QUESTION:** What high school was that?

**ANSWER:** I was at Umfundi high school and I was inspired to write poetry from having seen that man. I was a voracious reader when it came to reading praise poetry. I was very impressed and my imagination was going berserk trying to imagine what they were like. And to see this guy just touched something inside me and I wrote my first poem. And always writing it especially to perform. And so in the years that I was new in Johannesburg I was performing poetry sometimes at political rallies, or some kind of get-together or when poets and other writers got together who were part of the Generation. So some of them were from Pretoria, Cape Town, Alexander and Johannesburg, different art groups got together and we performed poetry for long hours and had lots of fun. And so from that I got offered a role for my first theatre piece from Maishe Maponye play (016-name of play in vernacular) The Nurse. One of the very first theatre pieces I ever did.

**QUESTION:** Where about was that?

**ANSWER:** At the Market Theatre first and then we toured the townships.

**QUESTION:** Is there a tradition of story telling in your family?

**ANSWER:** Oh yes! I had a wonderful grandmother. I was born in Hammersdale near the Valley of a Thousand Hills and my grandmother was really a master storyteller. She told beautiful stories which are still very vivid in my memory. She would be sitting on her green chair, telling me stories, using facial expressions, her hands, her voice changing, and all sorts of things. And I remember that so vividly and it was a way of teaching my imagination to fly.

**QUESTION:** Is that the Gogo that we meet in Have You Seen Zandile?

**ANSWER:** That the Gogo. That's the one.

**QUESTION:** So you had a whole lot of rich background in traditional storytelling to start with and then the praise poetry...?

**ANSWER:** And then the praise poetry. So those two things combined in one person where very good indeed.

**QUESTION:** Yes because both of them carried with it a performance element and the vocal element.

**ANSWER:** Strangely enough all the years I was at high school mostly I hated my voice. I used to pray a lot in church that God would make a miracle and I would have a sweet woman's voice. But God was forever on holiday. But thank goodness that God was on holiday when I asked for a sweet voice, because when I finally fell in love with my voice I was very pleased that it had not changed. I've learned to use it in many ways and now I even write music, I sing most of the songs I do on stage with the radio programmes of television shows I do, all those songs I write them myself. And specifically for my voice and that's a pleasure.

**QUESTION:** After those early days in the Market what happened after that in your career?

**ANSWER:** When I performed The Nurse I was still working for Learn & Teach magazine. I was journalist from Learn & Teach magazine and I thought it was just a one off-thing. I didn't think I was moving into theatre as such. I was feeling very comfortable in journalism, because first and foremost I think if you are talking about my identity I see myself as a writer, first. Much as I love my audiences and have lots of fun with my audiences but in theatre I thought it was just a phase. I wasn't going to stay in theatre it was just one off-things and then I was going to go back to journalism and I was going to continue writing. And so when I got the next role to play in Barney Simon's Black Dog it looked like, "Oh am I staying?" And the next play came on and then the next and then I wrote Have You Seen Zandile and I did quite a lot of work with Theatre. I learned to direct and participate a lot in workshop theatre. That is something that I am very passionate about. It's something that's very empowering. Having worked with Barney Simon is something I am very grateful for. I talk about him as a man who has big breasts. He would breastfeed many people unselfishly. Barney Simon knew how to help people feel confident, that's a gift that not every director had. And when you learn to direct you wish that you have at least a little bit of what Barney Simon taught you.

**QUESTION:** Have you struggled with the difference between the literary and the oral tradition in the theatre?

**ANSWER:** No. It seems to me like the right hand side and the left-hand side and it's inseparable for me.

**QUESTION:** So that powerful combination must serve you well as a director, and in your performance and in your writing? Apart from Have You Seen Zandile what other published works have you got in your name?

**ANSWER:** I wrote Sandaka in 1989 which was about a man who did not want to go to Johannesburg, about a man who refused to go to the big city, who wanted to stay in that very beautiful settings where he was born in the Eastern Cape and indeed it was a way of looking at the Eastern Cape through the eye of this young man. Sandaka was a man who really lived when I was in my early teen and he was much older than me. He had a powerful voice he used to sing all by himself walking up and down the mountains, taking care of the cattle. I didn't know him well but his face was striking and that's the strength I had to capture in this play, his face and his singing voice and the fact that he was not taken very seriously in terms of being clever or stuff like that. I looked at the gifts he had, for example, making clothes. In South Africa people talk of dressmaking as something that suits only women. He was not going to go to Johannesburg, he was making clothes, he was not exactly clever and when he got married he made the dress for his wife. And he had a very good bank account!

**QUESTION:** Was this a reality?

**ANSWER:** I made up the story but it was based on this young man who just loved his surroundings so much. I liked that. It's almost like with the migrant labour system, with a lot of things that happened during the apartheid years. It was like black people don't deserve to live in beautiful places. ....Black people can't appreciate nature you know how they are?

**QUESTION:** You must have encountered a lot of that kind of attitude. Does that spur you on to kind of redress this?

**ANSWER:** Exactly. I like to talk about things that I know for sure are the way I've seen them and experienced them but not in the way of popular knowledge.

**QUESTION:** Your other characters are they all drawn from personal experience?

**ANSWER:** Quite a lot of my writings were drawn from personal experiences. Sometimes even now I do write from personal experiences. But when I wrote Love Child it was written at a time when things were dangerously scary in my mind. I did not realize that it was so scary until I started having the same dream over and over again. I had to look at this dream and say what's going on? Am I going mad? It was during the early nineties when I wrote Love Child. It's a one-woman piece and it is written in storytelling form at a very political time in a very wonderful place that is fictitious. So for me the things that were happening in the early nineties everywhere you looked, every newspaper you read, was black on black violence on the Vaal Triangle. And my hometown Hammersdale, Mpumalanga Township was in the news all the time. And they were going on about the Zulu-Xhosa war. Now I was born from a Xhosa speaking mother and a Zulu-speaking father and I know for a fact that different language groups in this country love one another. I will testify to this because I am one of those children who were loved children, who were born because of these unions of people who speak different languages from different cultures who love one another. That is why I wrote Love Child. The reason why I made it a fictitious story was to creep in on my audience; I like to do that sometimes. To creep in on the audience, it looks so playful and so unimportant and then it hits them what I'm trying to say, and it gives me all kinds of freedom as well. Because I'm not using a language group with which they can identify, I'm not talking about places that they

can really see. And at the same time I like my work to be as universal as possible. Now I can't pretend to be extra careful and that I always succeed but sometimes I try to really reach that point of universality.

**QUESTION:** And in terms of the actual language that you use, is it English?

**ANSWER:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Are there other languages that you use?

**ANSWER:** I speak Xhosa and Zulu, So I use those two languages very much, When I'm performing, even if I'm performing in English I have wonderful idioms. I'm a person who loves idioms. Because I love languages so much I try to include the languages that I like in idioms and sayings and expressions, even though I'm speaking English. Because it's so important to capture the flavor of the background of the story. I think it's very important for me.

**QUESTION:** Are these idioms spoke in Zulu or Xhosa?

**ANSWER:** Yes. I say it in the original language. I don't want to lose my audience but I want them to taste where I'm coming from.

**QUESTION:** So this multiplicity of registers is useful?

**ANSWER:** Right. Very much. Very much so. The way I'm using storytelling now is something that illustrates what I believed but did not know how to put into words. When I talk about the wonder of the different cultures that exist in South Africa, that should not be a problem it should be a pleasure. It should be an advantage.

**QUESTION:** Do you have (135) characters at all?

**ANSWER:** I do. A lot.

**QUESTION:** Now that's one from Gogo?

**ANSWER:** Absolutely it comes from Gogo. To see animals and plants and flowers and trees and whatever that's very much alive. Having equal status as human beings. And I think that's a wonderful gift she gave me.

**QUESTION:** Where do you think you going now if you project yourself into five years down the road?

**ANSWER:** I wish to do less traveling and I'm going to speak to some General from the apartheid years to come and fetch my passport. To come and confiscate the passport. To do less traveling that's what I wish for. And to work more with the young people. I think it's a very enjoyable part of my life to work with young people. I would like to from time to time hop back into theatre, but I can't stay in full time theatre. I just don't belong in theatre. I feel very much at home in storytelling. I used to say when I was in theatre, (I don't know why I used these words at the time, but I kept saying) "I don't belong in theatre." Everytime when I was winning awards and

getting wonderful write-ups and getting roles left and right and just having a good time I kept saying, "I don't belong in theatre. I don't feel right here. I'm flying with crooked wings." I kept using that expression. And in 1990 when I left theatre and moved into full-time storytelling and with a conscious mind to do so, I knew that I'm straightening up and I'm flying right. And it's a wonderful feeling to know that you're flying right. So from time to time I visit theatre but I will stay more in storytelling. I wish to be able to write more as well.

**QUESTION:** It's interesting that you make the distinction between storytelling and theatre because in my world I don't differentiate. I regard storytelling as theatre. I think what we are talking here is a more formal western type of theatre with the stage and lights and all the trappings of that kind of kind of theatre.

**ANSWER:** Somehow I don't know if I belong there.

**QUESTION:** But surely storytelling is very much theatre? It has the common link with the one-person show. (172) Maybe that's where you fit rather?

**ANSWER:** Maybe that's where I fit. When I think of guys like AC Jordan the father of Paulo Jordan he was a novelist and a scholar and a very clever human being, when I think of the people who were born in that era who went to Lovedale what I read about those time and what I know about those times I look at it with envy and I think that I was born too late. I love books, I love words, and I love the whole era. It seems like it should have been an era where I should have been born. Now when the situation is been so horrible that people don't even like education anymore. When you've got to really reconvince people to want to learn when looking at the disadvantages in different communities where people don't even have a library. Where I come from in Hammersdale there is still no library. That is one of my greatest wishes to be able to one day have a library in Hammersdale. It is one of my greatest wishes just to know that children can visit a library in their own hometown. I never saw the inside of a library until I was twenty years old. It was like a world in a dictionary this thing called a library. And when I saw a library in Orangegrove one of the suburbs in Johannesburg, my mouth was watering; my imagination was working overtime, imagining the number of books that must be inside the library. And when I went in they told me they don't take black people there. I wanted to explain to the woman that I'm not black, I'm a book lover and I cried because I didn't know how to say it to her. Of course she was probably doing her job. And she was told not to let me in. I left and it was a horrible feeling and many children still live in places where there's still no library. Slowly that is changing and I'm hoping that is going to change even faster. So when I look at the time we are living in, it's a time when one has got to really work hard on their career. Being an artist is not about just riding it, it's about working very hard and trying to better things all the time.

**QUESTION:** At University we pick up the other end of the story that you are telling here - of the terrible deprivation of the present education system and the past of course where the lack of books, lack libraries etc. so we can't blame our students for a love of reading. For wanting to be spoon-fed all the time, for wanting notes. That is not something that we can assume because we know that those students particularly at our University come from the same background that you describe where the whole high school might have a hundred books if they are lucky.

So we can't actually expect students just to acquire it like that. Do you think that the storytelling as a performance part could possibly facilitate a better love for books?

**ANSWER:** You're going into the wish department again. I think there should be more work put into making books come alive. Television is a very powerful medium and I don't think it's used half as much as it can be used in terms of being an educational medium in this country. I think there should be a time, a programme even once a month that focuses seriously, genuinely on books. On making books come alive, books written by people of our country. Yes South African writers and writers who write things that touch us. I'm talking now about the playwright who wrote Death of A Maiden. It's an amazing piece. It's so apt for South Africa. And there are several other pieces that talk about topics that are so universal that touch us as South Africans. So what I'm saying is we should focus on South African writers but also we should look at people who are talking to us; to be able to do storytelling in terms of making the books come alive, to use the people who have got those skills, to use drama to make the books come alive, to use all kinds of things to make the books come alive, to look at poetry, to make poetry into a delicious dish, to be able to taste words. Words are beautiful and people who have got the gift to write wonderful poetry should be admired. I wish I had the financial wings to take this concept and put it on television and insist that once a month there is an important television programme that focuses on education in a very enjoyable way, in a powerful medium like television

**QUESTION:** A difficult question now. Some people would argue that if you had a programme that dramatized a novel what would then be the motive for those children to make contact with the book? Would they not use the television recording of it in the same way that people use comics nowadays to read the great classics? In other words they use it as a kind of shorthand and not bother about original which maybe difficult for them.

**ANSWER:** I think there's no way you can present on television all the wonderful books that have been written, all the wonderful plays, all the wonderful poetry that has been written so it would be a way of getting a taste; to inspire that taste because when you know that reading entails this and you meet people who love reading, who believe in the written word, who said it can come alive in this way, you are sending people straight to the library to go and read. They did not dramatize that one, you could point out, and it's by the same author. I think it's a way of inspiring people to read. I don't think it's a way of saying, "okay we've done it all for you relax now, burn the libraries, forget it" I would never condone anything like that.

**QUESTION:** What influences in the theatre or storywriting inspired you?

**ANSWER:** Well the first one was AC Jordan the novelist who wrote (269-name of novel) (271-name of poet) he was a poet who wrote in a very vivid way. He used to the fullest of his abilities the Xhosa language which is such a picture-drawing language. And then other people that I've read have been Bessie Head I like her very much. I have read people like (276-name of person) I like the way he writes. I love people, who've got a sense of humour, so I love the people who do it naturally. Another woman that I loved who lived in forties in America was Zora Neale Thurston (284) she was a storyteller and a novelist. She dared to write about love when people were writing about the struggle, slavery and whatever. Nothing wrong with that.

Give us more of that but hey people fall in love no matter what. She's amazing and one of my favourite books from her is Their Eyes Were Watching God. I feel that when she wrote that book it was, as if as she wrote the first chapter, it was the only chapter she was going to write. Then she wrote the second chapter with the same intensity and affection and wrapped it up again like a present with the ribbons and gave it to the reader. And again here you are, taste, enjoy. This is how she writes. It's amazing to read people who write like that again we go back to my love for words, enjoying the people who can just mould words and these ways that you can't imagine possible. I like Zakes Mda very much he is somebody that I admire a lot. It's hard to list the number of people that I read because I read so much. I know several friends of mine who don't know what I'm talking about when I say (name of person) is a wonderful storyteller a South American writer. She is a storyteller; her voice comes through when she writes. She takes you to places where you think a modern writer wouldn't go yet she goes there. You look at Ben Okri taking me to the years of my childhood of talking trees, wonderful flowers and the spirit world, and the world above the clouds and below the clouds, below the ocean and all over the place. I once read two books that were just a blessing. I read The Dragon Can't Dance this author just drives you to the last page. And then you've got the guy who wrote The Crippled Dancer, beautiful. I think he is super-educated because he can manipulate the English language in that way. He is from an African background so he must be very educated. Maybe he studied in England I don't know but he's from West Africa and it's a book called The Crippled Dancer. He uses the African idioms in a very effective way. He does not use them in a way that I use them in terms of storytelling.... He takes the whole book and fits in the images that are inside the African idioms. So I'm lucky indeed to travel and to end up in the bookshops I end up in. I love books!

**QUESTION:** If you were writing a theatre piece would you be happy if somebody else directed it or would you like to direct it.

**ANSWER:** I would love if somebody directed it. They would give it character, they would accentuate poems in a way that maybe I didn't think about. I believe in collaboration. I think the future of the creative arts in South Africa is in an interdisciplinary collaboration.

**QUESTION:** Have you ever done film?

**ANSWER:** I've done some acting in the movies but it's better to do it when I'm old.

**QUESTION:** Have you written for television?

**ANSWER:** I've never done that. I've been approached by a group of people who were working on the Mama Africa short film series and they asked different women to write half an hour of film scripts. Sometimes it could be a new script; it could be based on a story that you've got that maybe could have been published even. Many people who read my short story called Nogulunga's Wedding people asked, "why don't you make a movie" Slowly I started thinking in these terms and when the people from the Mama Africa short film series asked me to contribute of course I sent them the story as it was. Just the story of Nogulunga's Wedding. And the response was wonderful. And now I do not have time. It's something I'm very unskilled in doing. I'm always ready for a challenge so these days I've asked them to pass me by to



continue with other people who've got the time. But that planted a seed I thank them for that because one of these days I'm going to sit down when I have time I'm going to write Nogolunga's Wedding as a film script.

**QUESTION:** And for radio? Because there's somewhere where storytelling would work?

**ANSWER:** I've presented my stories for radio. I've performed Have you Seen Zandile for BBC World Service which was nominated for the Sony awards it was one of the three top nominees. Also Zandile went very well and I've got many letter from people saying, "Ordinarily I would never write letters to a woman writer but this was good" But I would like to one day just to try something fresh for radio and to be curious to do that.

**QUESTION:** You mentioned earlier workshoping as a process that you can very much identify with is that because of the capacity in workshoping to capitalize on the skills of so many people in concert together and at the same time the kind of spirit that goes with it? The kind of communal creativity of this property?

**ANSWER:** Those two things are very important. The fact that you capitalize on all the skills that people have and their vision and imagination and what have you. Also the fact that you can make every single person responsible for themselves when they are on stage. It's not so and so's play it's our play it's communal ownership. When you walk on that stage you are not going to mess it up. Every night you try hard to perform that role, to represent that character very well because you've got something to say. You had a role to give birth to that character.

**QUESTION:** In some versions of the product that arises in our workshop theatre one feels that there needs to be at least at some point in the process somebody to look at it dispassionately. Because sometimes what I find that it becomes self-indulgent where you see a piece that clearly doesn't fit with the rest of the ensemble of creativity. But you feel that the group is too polite to tell the individual that their work just doesn't fit inartistically with the rest of the group's work?

**ANSWER:** That's true, that can be possible. I think it's lovely to have an independent person to be able to look at it whose going to be very partial. That's one of the reasons why I would appreciate someone else directing my piece. Because it would be nice to see how they would look at it. How they would shape it. I learn in the process. So when an independent person walks into a workshop theatre and says, "okay I'll take over from here I'll try and knock it into a shape that makes sense from where I'm standing. Not that I'm going to expect all of you to accept what I'm saying but I will look at it with an independent eye." I think that is something we should work towards. And maybe let workshop theatre grow one step further.

**QUESTION:** The independent person could perhaps combine the achieved excellence with a little bit of skill that would pull it together in a more professional way in presentation. Otherwise you would be doing it for yourself and not for the audience.

**ANSWER:** Some of this has to do with the fact that a lot of workshop theatre was taking place during the time when people wanting to do political work and it was very emotional stuff. I think more and more people would be willing nowadays to take a step back.

**QUESTION:** In South Africa you've got various paradigms of theatre and various types of theatre contribution to the whole of South African Theatre and definitely there is an Afrocentric approach. There is the whole story tradition that we've been talking about. Then you've got the Eurocentric influence. Have you ever encountered anything from the Indocentric? Have you ever worked in a company where there was an Indian person contributing to the workshoping process or any other kind of other influences through literature from a person from the Indian community?

**ANSWER:** Not really, very limited. I have met Indian directors, a lovely man from Calcutta who I met in Australia. I don't know what is taking place inside the Indian community in terms of theatre but in terms of storytelling I wish to collaborate with Indian storyteller because there is a world out there of stories from the Indian culture. And I met this playwright, a very well known dramatist from Calcutta and we had long talks; we had a really wonderful time. We had a lot of commonalities in the way we think and the way we see things. I was just sad that I was meeting a man from Calcutta and not somebody who might have had a background in Calcutta but whose living in Durban or something like that. Or someone I could visit next week so that we could follow up on our conversation. So I think that is a pity. Even the amount of filmmaking that takes place in the east, take the whole of Asia there's so much going on there. And when you look at the number of American movies we watch. Hello? The world is not only the United States of America. There's a big world out there. There's so many things going on in our world. And this is a big African continent and we need to broaden our minds and open our eyes to a bigger world and look east and look north and look south. I've been working with Native American storytellers. I sit for hours on long nights with old people and I'm the youngest person in the whole room. I listen to songs and stories of the Native American people. They burn sweet grass and while I was there I kept thinking my father would feel at home here. So indeed we need to be very much aware of the bigger world as South Africans. I'm one of the lucky people who have managed to travel as much as I have.

**QUESTION:** Could that not be a first step on taking on board a consciousness that we are part of Africa? What about starting with our immediate neighbours?

**ANSWER:** There is a storyteller in Malawi he is called the national storyteller of Malawi. He sings his stories; he has gone blind he is very old. He lives on Lake Malawi, he's got a house there. I'm part of an organization called (092) we went to visit him. We traveled the whole of Malawi and then we found him. What a gift what a beautiful time we had - and how many people have actually heard of (094). I've met I've also met a guru of a storyteller last year. When he walks into a room with his people there's a reverence. At first when he came I did not know who he was because it was not pre-announced. It was at a workshop and somebody decided to invite this guy and he showed up with his brother. He is pitch black, almost blue, and he was wearing a vividly purple outfit and white shoes and a hat. He's got this aura about him. He walks into the room and he radiates reverence. He was speaking French and

I don't speak French so I didn't know what was happening. And eventually I was introduced to this man and I found out he was a guru of a storyteller and that he could sing? So I had written a song during the course of the workshop because it was a musical workshop not a storytelling workshop. And from time to time there were a few minutes of storytelling in the process of presentation because every single day at 6 o'clock we used to do presentation. And I had written a song for my voice and I was singing it at my tone this man comes in with his voice and kicks the roof off with the way only West Africans sing. The merging from our two voices was unbelievable. I was going mad. Where can you imagine something like this? That experience was like a spiritual nourishment a kind of trip. And so there is so much for us to learn and grow from in our own continent of Africa without crossing one ocean.

**QUESTION:** What about from the rest of Africa?

**ANSWER:** I have met a man who will stand out in my memory for many years to come. I don't have to see him everyday. We still write letters to each other from time to time when we get a chance. He has an impact that you can't forget if you've met him. His name is Baba Pamzoya he's from Ghana. Beautiful person, lovely writer and a very passionate dramatist. He writes both in English and his indigenous language. He travels to villages; he's into ordinary people getting the message. Doesn't matter about the fancy theatres because that's his job that's where he wants to go.

**QUESTION:** Have you met anybody from Namibia?

**ANSWER:** I've met a group from Namibia who do beautiful theatre. They use Xoisan work. I met them at the North-South workshop. I was one of the black directors there. And then there's a group called Sister Collective in Namibia. They do drama and poetry. They do different things on woman. I am very fascinated by them. I love what they do I've performed with them, I've shared a stage with them, and I've watched the work that they do and they are very hard working people.

**QUESTION:** Botswana?

**ANSWER:** In Botswana there's a festival called The Mighty Song Festival. I met a lovely group there. They do beautiful theatre and they use a lot of drums.

**QUESTION:** Do you recall who organizes that festival?

**ANSWER:** The name of the guy is Thomas. He is photographer.

**QUESTION:** Finally in your experience do you think the prophets of doom are correct and that theatre is dying in this country?

**ANSWER:** I don't think theatre is dying I think any art form has got its ebbs and the flows like the waves of the ocean and theatre has had a hard time making a comeback from the time of the wonderful protest theatre era. There's been a very hard fall but I'm not saying it's a death.

**CONCLUSION:** Thank you very much that was a wonderful interview.

## Appendix 4

### INTERVIEW WITH GIBSON KENTE

By Dennis Schaffer

**NOTE:**

The interviews are printed here as they were initially transcribed. Inevitably typing and transcription errors, as well as gaps, will occur.

**QUESTION:** How did you first get involved in the theatre? What were your earliest memories that would inspire you to enter that world? What were conditions in theatre in those early days?

**ANSWER:** You know the whole thing started with music. Originally I was not a dramatist. As a little kid my family had to move from East London to the countryside when my grandparents passed away. I grew up with my mother who decided to take over the property somewhere in the Cape. And there I got in contact with pastoral life. Looking after sheep, looking after cattle...

**QUESTION:** Sorry where about was that in the Cape?

**ANSWER:** My earliest memories go back to the wild fruit in the afternoon when the breeze was settled down. From that inspiration I would sing something. The other boys would join me and the following day the song would be gone but I got used to memorizing them because the guys would say to me, "what was that song we sang yesterday." The song is forgotten for them because it was just an inspiration for the moment, but that's where I trace my background to writing or being aware that I could write. I was pretty young at that time. I then moved to the Eastern Cape even before we went Stutterbraham I attended school out at Training College. This was the seventh day I was at school, there was so much singing there were trios and quartets and ... and my favourite moment in that school was Saturday afternoon. I can't remember what they called service but it was a choral service, and it was song, song, and song all the way. I think that's where I picked the gospel up the gospel, because the priest was from California and so we heard the hymns and gospels from America, that influenced me. Coupled with us was a family who was involved in the church. My mother had a big voice I think the two combinations sort of gave me the basis. Then when my family went to Stutterheim I encountered pastoral life. I started

actually creating songs in my head. And from there I went to Bethal Training College in Alice that was also next to Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape. I started forming my groups. I had a musical group called The Rhythm Heaters. I would write about the people who didn't comb their hair, I would write about the street children, I would write about whatever I saw around me. Now one thing I must admit at this stage I cannot claim to attach my background to any experience with, like you, said storytelling. Okay we used to occasionally have visitors from deep in the Transkei. I remember there was an old man who'd tell us some kind of story. Sometimes you would hear he was fabricating these things just to entertain the kids you know. But basically in terms of poetry, I just don't have that kind of a background. So that is more or less how I remember that era, that formative period in my life. That it was my mother, it was the church, the Lutheran; the Lutheran was coupled with a seventh day adventists. Of course there you heard the melodies from the river people with buckets on their heads and those collecting wood from the forest. I gained the traditional flavour as like someone born with this talent. They and the influence later in my life because if you listen to my music, the traditional part is strong, the gospel part is strong, these two are very, very, very strong. Then of course being in Training College there were musical videos of Louis Jordan and so on and I think that flavoured me into the township mode.

**QUESTION:** So how did you couple the musical tradition with stage presentation? Because I mean you could have set up a music group, but what made you use the drama group as a vehicle?

**ANSWER:** No let's be clear about drama. From Bethal (Training College) after passing my matric I came to Johannesburg and to Jan Hofmeyer School of Social Work. This was where I met Ray Phillips. I tried to look for people who were dramatists, my life as I say was music. I tried to look for people who were dramatists so that they could write the drama and I could write the lyrics. I went from pillar to post most unsuccessfully. Who was I? Another you know pumpkin, country bumpkin. So I said well I'd like to get this experience. And Manana The Jazz Prophet was born. This was my first play. It centered on Manana the Prophet, whose main concern was bringing everybody to the Lord. He was basically a gospel preacher. It was a very popular play and that's when I thought I could go on my own. Because the churches, the parents, the kids, supported my play. Actually even on TV I was top, I was top of the heap there. Our appeal had to be from the child to the Totsi in the street. So that's how I started writing plays otherwise originally my first love was music. That's why in my plays I have music. I had a fight with the S.A.B.C. They didn't understand how I was going to put music into the drama. It worked with my first drama, which was Mama's Love, it worked beautifully. I must admit at the beginning I had problems. The people were not used to my style. Episode one and two flopped but from episode four right up to the end I was number one all the way My production rated number one all the way. The critics were surprised because the early public slandered. They said that this was a representation of the stage on TV. But people got used to my stuff and began to believe in it, because I believe that acting must be natural but not ordinary. Now most of the Black productions are too ordinary. People are not actually living what they do. But you can be natural, relaxed and you know speak you your mind but have a feeling and a strong focus on what you doing, this is what I believe in. And I believe in artistic energy.

**QUESTION:** To what extent are your plays literary, in other words written and people learn lines or how much is the result of improvisation?

**ANSWER:** I've never had a play that was an improvised play, never. Even Manana The Jazz Prophet was a script.

**QUESTION:** And in performance you did you direct pieces?

**ANSWER:** I direct, I choreograph, I train the actors.

**QUESTION:** Did you perform in any?

**ANSWER:** No I've never performed. And I've never been involved, even in my youth, even at school in anything dramatic. Because at school I liked English and poetry and that kind of a thing.

**QUESTION:** In the early days when you found people you could work with, how did you get your groups together?

**ANSWER:** Through auditioning through the papers, the radio and so on.

**QUESTION:** And those plays did you take them on tour or did you have them in one place only?

**ANSWER:** No I would tour with them. This is actually how everyone could focus on me as a dramatist. Because mine was the first touring company.

**QUESTION:** When did the touring start at the very first production?

**ANSWER:** Yes Manana The Jazz Prophet was in 1962.

**QUESTION:** Now how were the tours organized? How did you announce that you were arriving? How did you let people know? And how did you find the venues?

**ANSWER:** You know I tell you Manana The Jazz Prophet did not tour extensively because at that stage I was under (829). And they didn't run things to my satisfaction so the tour was really in the Transvaal. Then I split with them got on my own through the blessings of Richard Maponye. That is the man who put me on my way because I was fresh out of Hofmeyer, doing social work, I didn't have money. I remember that important two hundred rands in my life because in those days you could build your set, paint and set up a show with those two hundred rand. Now my first real big production was Sikalo. It had very big advantages because we were clever enough to record the music and distribute it nationally. I tell you by the time we got to Cape Town, East London, Port Elizabeth it was a sensation already because the music was known there. It was capacity houses all the way.

**QUESTION:** Alright. What would a typical tour involve?

**ANSWER:** It would cover every sizeable town in the country.

**QUESTION:** And Natal?

**ANSWER:** Natal . Everywhere.

**QUESTION:** Now when you say "sizeable town" what do you mean? Can you give me examples?

**ANSWER:** Ladysmith, Escort, Vryheid, and Newcastle.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Did you perform in Halls?

**ANSWER:** Yes it was halls in those days. You see we weren't allowed in the cities - we were too dark to give into real theatres.

**QUESTION:** What kind of facilities did you have in township halls? What was the lighting like?

**ANSWER:** Pattern 23 would be used as a follow spot. Somebody would sit right in front of the stage with just a small follow spot to follow the action. One little spotlight and then from the windows we would hang some spots and basically we had at the most ten spotlights for our production. Now that was of course an experience, because when I started in this game TV was unknown in the country, even plays were unknown. People were saying these are sketches or a bioscope of living people.

**QUESTION:** Did you have dimming?

**ANSWER:** No where I started there was no dimming, there was no dimmer board.

**QUESTION:** And sound? Did you have amplified sound at all?

**ANSWER:** Ja, but still on stage they sang everything live.

**QUESTION:** You mentioned recording the music?

**ANSWER:** We did record an LP. There was LP that was released.

**QUESTION:** So you did not actually play to recorded music?

**ANSWER:** No, not at that stage.

**QUESTION:** Have you ever done that?

**ANSWER:** Yes I did that subsequently. With disastrous results. Duma Ndlovu slated me. I understand because he is used to that township style and approach.

**QUESTION:** Is there an intimate relationship between the musician and the action?

**ANSWER:** That is the point that is what people were missing, because you can always hear canned music I don't care what you say.

**QUESTION:** So now let's talk about costuming. You obviously made your own costumes, did you make your own sets?

**ANSWER:** Everything we made it here. Sets you name it.

**QUESTION:** Now when you did costuming did you create your costumes realistically for a character? Shall we say the policemen as a role? Did you try and get the uniforms to look like those in real life?

**ANSWER:** That's right. If one was a comic character though he would be dressed with a lot of colours in that sort of comic way.

**QUESTION:** Mbongeni Ngema's work has a lot of the elements we are talking about it surfaces there again very strongly. When you went to the halls how was the money organized? Did you have someone from your cast like a manager? If it's not rude to ask how much were your ticket prices? Just to give me an idea as to how many people would pay in those days for that experience?

**ANSWER:** You know that's going to be a very difficult question now because, like I said to you two hundred rands got me off the ground. So even 50c at that time was a hell of a lot of money when I started. Today I would charge about fifteen rands. When I started with something like fifty cents.

**QUESTION:** But people were still prepared to spend the equivalent of a couple of packets of cigarettes to come to your show?

**ANSWER:** You know there was no TV like I said when I started and the incidence of overseas stars coming into the country was still low. It was not there at all.

**QUESTION:** Tour transport. What kind of transport did you use?

**ANSWER:** We used a bus. One bus and a trailer for everything.

**QUESTION:** How big were the casts?

**ANSWER:** My casts are normally around seventeen to eighteen including the orchestra. When I say eighteen that's too big - that's okay for PACT and the theatre. My casts were never more than 15.

**QUESTION:** What did you expect from your performers?

**ANSWER:** The main factor was versatility.

**QUESTION:** So that everyone has to be versatile to get into the play?

**ANSWER:** That's right, but more than that I want a performer who's a jack of all trades.... Acting, dancing, singing.

**QUESTION:** And in terms of the structure of your dramatic work. For example you have a small scene to start with, it will start out as a discussion about something and



then this will go into a song and then go into a dance routine for the song and then out of that will come another scene?

**ANSWER:** That's right.

**QUESTION:** So the scenes themselves are relatively short, where you have a swift turnover of scenes that drives the plot along?

**ANSWER:** My scenes are on average of maybe four or five in the first half and three or so in the second half.

**QUESTION:** Do you have an interval?

**ANSWER:** Yes I have an interval definitely. Definitely because I time my plays to not more than two hours.

**QUESTION:** Did you have facilities at interval? Did you sell anything?

**ANSWER:** Occasionally people from outside would come and sell but not anything organized.

**QUESTION:** Now before SABC and all that era of your life was there any political interference in your work? Where you ever prevented from doing what you wanted to do?

**ANSWER:** Yes the first encounter with that experience was How Long. That was my first encounter but I must say even before that script censorship was there every part of the country except Natal.

**QUESTION:** Really, that's interesting.

**ANSWER:** That was the only area that was uncensored - remember Asinalmali? - that was critical of Buthelezi.

**QUESTION:** But if they wanted to stop your production would they actually prevent you from using a hall?

**ANSWER:** That's right, from coming into the hall at all.

**QUESTION:** So you got on your bus and they'd turn you away?

**ANSWER:** They would turn you away. If you were lucky they would advise you that your script had been turned down. But in many instances for example when I went to Bloemfontein and when I went to enter the location I was stopped. I was not allowed to perform that day.

**QUESTION:** Just Like that?

**ANSWER:** Just like that. But it got worse. It got to a point where they would stop me at the eleventh hour and say, "Mr. Kente the owner of the cinema has been

blacklisted so you may only perform here at your own risk." Now obviously nobody would want to enter the place. There was an incident when I had to move people from that area to another hall because people wanted to see the show a lot of them followed me. This happened just that moment before the show could start.

**QUESTION:** So you got it from both sides?

**ANSWER:** There was another play called The Hard Road. This play was saying it was a mistake to interfere with education basically. In Port Elizabeth I was told to get out with my cast and never set foot in that town. Because I said, "look we can do whatever we came to do. We all are against the oppression and the apartheid system." In that place the parents, struggling parents, you'd see them sneaking out with their children at night. They would be taking the children out of the township to some home because at least some homeless did not have that kind of problem. Even in the University of the North I was reported to the Cultural Desk there, Mzwake although he was chewing it he unfortunately could not save us. Not only me because Sello Maake KaNcube from Generations he also experienced the same thing where his play was banned.

**QUESTION:** And when you went to work for PACT you got a lot of flack there too?

**ANSWER:** I always believed in the principles of Dr. Martin Luther King. Obey a good law so that if you fight a bad law people feel it is just survival but if you are going to reject everything people are not going to know whether they are winning the struggle or if they are getting anywhere. I said if PACT theatres are open why not use them they belong to us.

**QUESTION:** And then you left PACT

**ANSWER:** No I went on. Then people got scared in the townships. They thought maybe coming back from the theatre they would be victimized.

**QUESTION:** What are your links now? Do you still operate independently? Are you allied with any particular grouping?

**ANSWER:** No I still operate independently but I put a stop now to stage productions. You see the time is not right. Because you go to the city now, people favoured the city at one stage but now with the crime being what it is, people's attendance is very poor.

**QUESTION:** And going on the road like you used to?

**ANSWER:** No. The township halls were burned during the protests where are you going to perform in the townships? Besides no one goes around after 7:30.

**QUESTION:** That's sad because I mean that is the death to the theatrical art.

**ANSWER:** that is the death to the theatre unfortunately. This is why I pray I can get the money to rekindle the interest in our own stories.

**QUESTION:** Because a lot of people like the ones we have mentioned have been influenced by that.

**ANSWER:** That's right.

**QUESTION:** It's an inspiring thing to do but if the whole township never ever sees a play.....

**ANSWER:** Even if you had to take it to the Civic. I used to go from township to township on different weekends and that is how I got people influenced in theatre in the townships. Because I took theatre to the people.

**QUESTION:** Now lets talk about the people that you know that you've influenced. What are the people that you can look back on who has made it in the theatre?

**ANSWER:** Maybe I should start counting now. In the early days the names that were very big, Margaret Singane these were the early productions now, Ndaba Mshlongo who was a very popular character you know nationally. Because from me he went on to TV and there again glorified my name. Well then from there I can't count because even Brenda Fassie is my prodigy. Her history is very interesting because she was self-taught. At an early stage she was still a kid when we visited Cape Town some of the cast members would stay at her house. Because another thing that happened was there was no hotel accommodation. We relied on relatives and friends wherever we went. So what happened during rehearsals in Cape Town in the afternoons Brenda would join the rehearsals and she would listen to the songs and this is how she picked it up. So these are some of the artists that were prominent. Then we have you know Mbongeni Ngema and so on and so forth it's a stream of them.

**QUESTION:** Is there a Gibson Kente style?

**ANSWER:** Yes. Now you are asking me the most painful question. The most excruciating question in my life really. Like I said to you earlier I base my training on artistic energy, and what I term serpent power that is all there but is not a human with muscles and all but it oozes from the inner soul. But then you get actors overacting and forcing the voice and being external. And people say your actors force their acting. Selo feels I've been misunderstood by people outside but because of people I'm going to say terrible things. I always say blacks are lazy. They are looking for short cuts. Now this is what I experience when I teach my actors here. I will actually demonstrate how to breathe sometimes. The delivery and distribution and execution of that air, in order to relax. The minute you listen to your breathing you tend to relax. We lose our cool when we lose breathing. So basically this is my teaching and this is the teaching that many kids would undermine because they want to shirk.

**QUESTION:** It is easy to overplay, exaggerate or to stereotype and fall into a portrayal of a character that they could just turn on like that without anything from inside. The people who are really inside the character stand out from all the rest.

**ANSWER:** Very interesting. Susan who is now an actress was virtually born here. She started with me in 1976 and you won't believe it only this year when I was doing

Four Way Two at Windybrow she was sitting in the audience watching the show. After the performance she said to me, "for the first time I understand what you want from you performers." And I said to her, "thank you very much." And she told me, "this is what you always wanted. You don't need a lot of movements but on small movement that is well executed that's acting. That's why I teach many white actors you know because whites are not excited like us. They are not over emotional.

**QUESTION:** Have you been influenced by any particular white actor?

**ANSWER:** No.

**QUESTION:** Because many others have worked with Barney Simon, Athol Fugard and so on.

**ANSWER:** No I've always been on my own.

**QUESTION:** There was an advantage associating with people from white Universities, white liberal English speaking Universities because there was a venue and they went into collaboration with them.

**ANSWER:** Suburban Bliss and things like that. We are out-going people we are extroverts in many ways we like expressing ourselves.

**QUESTION:** Mbogeni Ngema makes a point about white companies being a bunch of individuals all acting for themselves whereas he's trying to get a theatrical family operating as a unit in his casts and so on. To the extent of all living at his house and sharing experiences and so on as a unit?

**ANSWER:** You know when artists come here I make them know that I can give them something which they can use for the rest of their lives but they are responsible for their own. The family idea, I don't know how it comes into the picture really I've never understood that. My pride is to see them get out of here, stand on their own and to make their own way.

**QUESTION:** It's interesting because the word that has come up in interviews is Ubuntu. The idea of a kind of shared responsibility for others within the group and how that conflicts with western notions of a company and so on.

**ANSWER:** I don't know. I don't understand it. Naturally if you come to Kente's school you are going to get influenced by Kente in the same way as those who worked with Grotowski were influenced by him. I believe being black is something to be proud of because we have different backgrounds and different cultures and so on. Let's not destroy ourselves. If evolution is such that many years ahead we merge in cultures because already now we've had people from exile and when they come back their English is not quite the English we speak here but that's understandable because they have had a different experience. But to go out of you're way to try to be somebody else.....

**QUESTION:** There has been a very concerted effort at the Play House Company to transform in the sense of being more representative. Bringing in people like Mbogeni Ngema, using the community outreach programmes and educational programmes and

things like that. I've noticed that there's a concerted effort being made to use black performers in productions. At another time it would have been considered tokenism. To have if the cast is like for example there was a Black Annie and a White Annie. And the black Annie was in fact very suitable for the role. She was from a private school education. And certainly in performance skills better than the White Annie and her singing ability was much better too. But audiences had a strange response to a Black Annie. In their heads was a concept of a character a white character that they had read in their youth. It took quite a lot to make that shift. In the Royal Shakespeare Company in the sixties and seventies it was very common to have at let one black face in a cast doing Shakespeare or doing one of the classics. It always seemed odd perhaps because historically because you would not have had a black Henry the Eighth.

**ANSWER:** Let's turn it around. Let's say you have a white Shaka will that be acceptable?

**QUESTION:** People would say that for years and years Othello was "blacked" up enough So they say what is the difference between that and a black person doing the role of Annie.

**ANSWER:** You were talking about tokenism I agree with you in that way. Sometimes we take things to extremes just to conform but in terms of theatrical acceptability audiences have a problem. I mean this thing is made for audiences. I have a big problem with that again once I shied away from tokenism. And this tokenism goes even further to affirmative action you find people placed in positions they are not qualified for because it is the era for blacks now to assume certain roles. Are we going to destroy the fibre of life at the expense of affirmative action? It's not doing South Africa any good and I could go as far as saying that it is destroying the image of the ANC. Because there are not enough good people in certain positions to deliver the way delivery should be so there is a delay and the managers out there are getting fed up. At the end I'm scared 1999 is going to be quite a tough year for the ANC an extremely tough year.

**QUESTION:** If a young white actor arrived at your door and wanted to join your group what would be your response?

**ANSWER:** If the play can accommodate a white actor then I have no problem with that whatsoever.

**QUESTION:** Turning the clock back now. United Artists and the early days of Dorkay House. What was your association with them in those years in the fifties?

**ANSWER:** I fondly remember Dorkay House very fondly. That's where I and people like myself got their start. I broke away from there because of management and the way they were running the place but I fondly remember how Ian used to go out of his way to make sure there's a show. So I think Dorkay served a very important role in the history of theatre. Nobody can deny that.

**QUESTION:** Have you ever toured outside of South Africa?

**ANSWER:** Only as far as Zimbabwe otherwise Rhodesia and all those areas.

**QUESTION:** And where did you go there.

**ANSWER:** To various townships.

**QUESTION:** And was that a success? What play did you take up there?

**ANSWER:** Sicalo.

**QUESTION:** That was the only show you ever took up there?

**ANSWER:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** Were there any problems that made you not go up there again?

**ANSWER:** Yes. We did have language problems. Now again the city hall there was not easily accessible that created a bit of a problem.

**QUESTION:** What is your language?

**ANSWER:** English.

**QUESTION:** I notice you use a little bit of Afrikaans sometimes in appropriate roles, Tsotsi Taal and Zulu.

**ANSWER:** To a very little extent. Because someday we will be in Sutu terrain then the next day I'm in Zululand then I cross to the Transkei. I keep the vernacular minimal. It can be exclamations and maybe a few words.

**QUESTION:** But if you move from shall we say Ulundi to somewhere like Butterworth do you change the language.

**ANSWER:** Yes we do.

**ANSWER:** It's always an advantage if we have Zulu-Sutu speaking artists as well. Because when we enter the Free State they'll play along with the language.

**QUESTION:** Is that an instruction or do they do that quite naturally?

**ANSWER:** They do it naturally.

**QUESTION:** To what extent is the script translated? If they sensed that the audience that they were playing to were really not looking interested would they translate.

**ANSWER:** No no no! You see the dialogue that was originally Zulu in the script that is the only dialogue that they'd play along with. Otherwise you are open to dangerous improvisation by actors.

**QUESTION:** That's a very interesting point because the impression one gets is that there was a great deal of reciprocity between the performer on the stage and the audience. Shall we say there was a fight on stage and there's lively participation from the audience? Let's say the audience intervenes and advises that actor to do something and it begged a response. Would they be able to respond or would they have to stick to the script?

**ANSWER:** Very strictly to the script.

**QUESTION:** So there would not be the opportunity for them to actually open it out because again as you said they would lead it to maybe even an extended improvisation?

**ANSWER:** You see there are those workshop productions without a well-formalized script. This is why my productions have been respected. Instead of actors remarking aloud I always work on their emotions and their artistic approach. They must respect the group.

**QUESTION:** All your actors are professional then in the sense that they get paid?

**ANSWER:** That's right.

**QUESTION:** Is it based on the proportion of your takings, do they become shareholders in the enterprise?

**ANSWER:** No it's on the takings, we agreed on that. But then I've been very lucky because my actors have always had faith in me. Simple to understand why because it's the actors themselves on top who look after the books? So they are open to the takings. They are open to what comes to the production and the expenses on it. I did this when I started because I had no money but along the way I realized it's healthy because the actor can't say, "he owes me money" when there's no money they get to know there's no money.

**QUESTION:** So everyone is a shareholder?

**ANSWER:** That's right.

**QUESTION:** That's a good idea because then they will want to keep the production as good as possible and the standards up?

**ANSWER:** You would imagine that to be so but it never worked out that way. I am so disenchanted with my people.

**QUESTION:** But surely they could see the advantages to keeping a tight show?

**ANSWER:** When you go and watch Ipitombi there is a little girl there Velapi. That kid started here. We had this play, there was a song there I tell you she never finished that song without the audience being on its feet, never. Then they slipped out of my hands. After four weeks I joined them somewhere in Cape Town she had lost the feel

of the song. The basic technique of internalizing the song up to the close of the show was gone. Can you believe that?

**QUESTION:** Well in a way yes. People get complacent and they think they're too good and they don't have to try anymore. It happens I think in all companies in a way as soon as the director leaves. That's the danger.

**ANSWER:** No. You are going to find me a bit unsympathetic towards my own people. But I attribute that to one thing and nothing else, the politics. Black politics. I attribute this to that. You must take a quick snap survey of these informal traders here. They are from outside South Africa. Invariably these guys watching my car here are from outside South Africa. You go to the spaza shops; they are from outside South Africa. You go to the street vendors, watches and everything they are from outside South Africa.

**QUESTION:** What accounts for that?

**ANSWER:** Politics. I go back to what I said earlier I've had a lot of respect for Martin Luther King and the Black American struggle because they were taught to walk tall, never walk in another man's shadow. We were taught here that we were made inferior. We are oppressed. We were not taught to get up and say be ready, fight positively not destructively. This is why immediately after our emancipation or our freedom we were groping now because we were expecting handouts.

**QUESTION:** The culture of entitlement?

**ANSWER:** That is right. There was this play that was banned called Now Is The Time. What was he saying in that play? He was saying adapt or die - we must adapt or otherwise we are finished. These people are going to take over. There's a black president in our future. I was as serious as the Black Panthers. I was attacking the way the black person was viewing the struggle. We were not preparing for the future instead we are destroying ourselves left right and centre. Prominent people in the struggle were saying, "we will destroy the economy" Can you accept that? What are we fighting for? We were not fighting for political power. I am not interested; the man on the street is not interested in power. He wants to gain from freedom, like jobs, and a better life. That's all we are interested in. This is what every struggle is about to get a raise, economical empowerment. This was my argument in the play. That we are not focusing on the day but we're taking over this country. Now is the time that is why the play was called Now Is the Time, now is the time for us to get ready. Those people are saying adapt or die then let's also adapt and try. Do you know my play wasn't accepted by the forces of the day? Black forces. Actually it's one of the reasons I've stopped stage work. I've done this several times. But artists always came back saying their had no jobs, promising me they would work hard, that kind of stuff. Then I'll be trapped and I'd go back to stage work. I've done this three times. You know Selo understood where I was coming from. Selo understood me very well.

**CONCLUSION:** Thank you very much for a very important interview.



## APPENDIX 5

### INTERVIEW WITH MATSEMELA MANAKA

23<sup>rd</sup> MAY 1999,

Fordsburg, Johannesburg.

Interviewer : Prof.D.Schauffer

#### **NOTE:**

**The interviews are printed here as they were initially transcribed. Inevitably typing and transcription errors, as well as gaps, will occur.**

D.S. : First of all Matsemela , thank you for giving up some of your valuable time to give us this interview . There is much ground that I would like to cover : how you got started in the theatre , what drew you to it as an art form , who influenced your work ... many contemporary black African dramatists in South Africa acknowledge the influence of Gibson Kente for example ... . Then I would like you to comment on what you regard to be the contribution of black African dramatists to the art of the theatre . To start with then : How did you get started ?

M.M Well, basically I started out looking at theatre and at work by people like Gibson Kente , Nelson Mungwane and of course there were a number of plays at school . We would dramatize historical material at school . At the time , I mean , I was sort of getting involved with theatre as an academic exercise to interpret certain historical events . Then came '76 you know , and some of us ended up in institutions not knowing whether we would ever see University or even complete our studies . So drama as an educational tool for myself and for others became very important ... it was critical for me .

I started as a painter and I also worked on poetry but we couldn't exhibit one's work within one's living environment so I started seeing the theatre as a vehicle to exhibit my paintings and poetry on stage . We battled , but we grew up . Because of '76 we started to grow up with the notion that the type of theatre we were seeing produced by people like Gibson , Nelson Mungwane , and Boykie Mashwane , it was good theatre but we saw there was something lacking . That came with Sizwe Banzi is Dead , I remember seeing John Kani and Winston Ntshona doing Sizwe Banzi at the Diepkloof Hall at the Diepkloof Hotel . For me being into theatre as something that enriches you

intellectually , I could relate to that type of theatre . It raised issues that we felt were important to raise . When we saw Shanti done by the People's Theatre Association with Victor Modise we started to see a different type of theatre that was beginning to make political statements . It raised political issues, and it wasn't just dealing with social issues . We slowly got exposed to a lot of stuff and that is how I think Egoli came about . It was very much influenced by what Athol , John and Winston were doing . What we tried to do was to marry the two genres , that of Gibson Kente , and that of some serious drama ... to find something in between .

D.S Are you implying that what you were looking for was a Gibson Kente type of theatre in terms of form , but informed by more solid political statement ?

M.M Gibson dealt with political statements in a different way . He uses a human perspective , showing what the human being goes through . You have to find the statement in his work . For me his work is more within the storytelling tradition ... somebody always tells a story . In my own work I work a lot through dreams . There are things that you dream about that appear to have happened before in your life but you struggle to remember exactly when.. I also listened a lot to my grandmother telling me lots of stories and this was like theatre . Then when I started writing and telling stories people would say I was Brechtian . I used to take offence because when I wrote I had never heard of Brecht , I didn't know about Grotowski . It was because of the poor conditions in which we lived that led us to create theatre similar to what Grotowski was doing .But because sometimes we also wanted to sound a little academic or a little informed , we would buy the idea that we were Brechtian .In fact we never knew about Brecht . You know , it just happened . It was the way we told our stories .

D.S. That is a very important statement . Your theatrical devices such as flashbacks and dream sequences , and perhaps even Zakes Mda's magic realism , has it's origin then not so much in the European world of Brecht , Grotowski , Boal and so on , very powerful influences that they are , but yours come from a storytelling base , within the African paradigm.

M.M People all over the world like to tell stories . I came to Durban so now I want to tell you about this ... that I went to the beach and this or that happened .Theatre just shows you a reenactment of what happened – I mean its like a flashback , right ? You know when the elderly person or grandparent tell stories there is a moment when they break away from just telling the story and they show you exactly what happened .. This reenactment is a very powerful theatrical tool and obviously it is to be found in African traditions it is to be found in Europe , you find that all over the world . Old people in traditional societies tell stories . They are the custodians of our past .

What I had a problem with – obviously it's the old problem of colonialism – was that some academics and historians did not want to recognize that certain African traditions were similar to groupings in Europe and elsewhere – Similar living conditions could produce similarities in traditions . If you come from a poor background then the poverty of that background begins to shape your thinking and it shapes the way you create . So , someone in a similar

environment somewhere far away from you , could produce similar work . Like when you look at sculptures , you don't find many wooden sculptures in urban areas because there are fewer trees , but go to rural areas and you find a lot of sculptors who create in wood . In terms of theatre when you look at what is called 'traditional Africa' you find a very strong element of song and dance . Here in the cities we seem desperate to make a statement through the theatre and we tend to use a lot of words , we tend to write more text and not to use the 'traditional' elements as much . In fact in South Africa we grew up with an anti attitude towards the Ipi Tombi type of production but this is a very important element in African Theatre .Gibson transformed this into an urban form . As for me I wouldn't do a play without a drum in it , without dance , without song . Theatre is a celebration of life .At the end of the day even if you complain about what is going on on a socio-political level you are still celebrating life .We need to revisit some of the traditions, like baptism, you know the strengthening of a child . We spend too much time reacting to politics and not enough time celebrating our traditions and rituals . You don't see enough South African theatre celebrating South African rituals . It seems that our ritual was Apartheid all the time .

It was interesting for me when I was at Durban-Westville we had Indian students and African students , and so-called coloured students and you ask how do you bring these cultures together in the theatre ? What is common to performance in all of these cultures ? So, an African actor sings a song in an African language and an Indian student recognizes a certain pattern , a certain part of a melody that is common to a song in the Indian language . Then you maybe add a tabla and you begin to see the merging of the cultures without your imposing it . If I go to Senegal , and I listen to them sing , they sing like my people in Pietersburg , because they have small voices and their music is like a ballad . Same like Indian music . I think colonialism is such a painful phenomenon that it denies people the understanding and the richness of all different cultures .It makes one culture want to dominate over the other cultures and as a result we do not enrich ourselves .South Africans have denied themselves this possibility for so long .In a way this is also mirrored in my career . I started with the influence of John Kani , Winston Ntshona ,Athol and it was all heavy political statements .and we didn't have much respect for Gibson Kente .But then you begin to see that Gibson actually made much stronger political statements because he showed the human experience and that reflected a political reality . As a result too he could speak to a much broader audience . We would speak to a very limited audience because people at that time , I remember them well , they used to watch our shows looking at the back door whether the police were gonna come in. This stopped the ritual of experiencing theatre . The theatre is a ritual and you cant , I mean , go for your sacrament and still be worried that the police will come in . This is probably why I stopped for some time even to write or produce for the stage . South Africans were also denied the opportunity to see much of the theatre from outside of South Africa . When I went to a theatre festival in Germany we were celebrities because we were black from South Africa . So, we became celebrities , but our work was not up to standard .When I looked at the work by theatre companies from Belgium and from Italy , I said ' Our work is a joke' You go to Edinburgh and you see every year a South African work on the Fringe , but when you look at the quality of some of the other productions

there you realize that you are being colonized further . We had the advantage of coming from an oppressed situation . South Africa was on the map I mean. Okay but let them for a change review my work without thinking of me as a South African . Let this person just come and sit there and look at this piece , without even knowing it's South African . Just look at it and tell me honestly about it's quality as a drama . Our actors became more and more lazy because they were celebrities wherever they went . When they came back from overseas you could see they were lazy ... they were lousy ! They did not learn from that European or American experience . Now when you go to Nigeria , to Senegal or to Ghana , theatre there is rooted in their own traditions . When Wole Soyinka writes you can feel that cultural resonance , its there .. With us it's a battle . We have very few writers in this country . Okay we have Zakes Mda , he knows how to write for the stage . Others battle to make a piece of theatre and you cannot sit in an office and write a play and say 'I've completed the script , it's done , I'm giving it to a producer . '

D.S. The use of traditional song and dance is all very well but sometimes , like the use it is put to in some of Mbongeni Ngema's work , I wonder quite what it is celebrating ?

M.M. Ya . No . It's true , I mean we see a lot of musical drama , and we call it musical drama , but it's musical extravaganza . Somebody comes onto the stage singing and dancing and you don't even know why there is a dance there . Suddenly in the middle of a very strong sequence five young girls are on stage dancing and then the whole cast... And you in the audience are trying to connect the dance with the text . Song and dance must be in context like it is in a production like Death and the King's Horsemen . But you are right there are dangers and one can become obsessed with throwing in dance and song into every show .. For some of us though our obsession was with words . We wanted to write well. We wanted to write the type of English using all the idiomatic expressions so that your drama was almost poetry . Then people say you can't use poetry on stage , people don't speak that way . But Shakespeare used poetry in his writing . Ultimately it's the actor's challenge to colonize my words and to make those words his own . I haven't for some time seen any piece of theatre in this country that has moved me . I think that in a post-apartheid situation the challenge is to recognize that our writing does not have to change because the situation has not changed . The socio-political environment is just the same . We have more freedom of expression in some ways but less freedom now to challenge the government . If you write about the Ministers you are called a reactionary . Look at all the corruption , look at what happens to the pensioners ... it was easy when it was a white government , we would be quick to write about that . Today you don't really see any piece that really challenges the guys in power today . It's very unfortunate .

South Africans have seen what happened in Kenya , in Nigeria and in Somalia . Ngugi and Wole Soyinka had to move into exile – exiled by their own people . that they helped to put in positions of power . Theatre is also based on power and politics . As dramatists we are always coming down to the people's level and challenging those in power . or should be . We should deal with the ills of society and if they are governing badly then we should raise this issue immediately . Here today you can't really do this .

D.S. Do you suppose that when the present government has been in power long enough to make them feel more secure , when being in power is no longer a novelty , that this will improve?

M.M. Very soon people will start to raise significant issues . . .like the Weekly Mail, that doesn't carry shit . The Weekly Mail just hits out at these guys left , right , and center .but The Weekly Mail is not as powerful as a theatre piece .In social circles today you hear 'Are you still going to vote for the same party in the next election?' But if you did a theatre piece that looked into people's expectations , whether they were realistic or not , into the promises that were made to them and the promises that have been broken . . . Those guys up there would obviously think you were reactionary . Apart from the political situation there is also the economic situation . It's becoming more and more expensive to go and see a theatre piece . Unfortunately too , I mean , as much as we make a noise that we need more black people in positions of power , they can abuse that power . I mean , in the Jo'burg scene you have these brothers who are running theatres , the John Kani's , the Walter Chakela's , the Allan Joseph's . Go to them for assistance in getting your theatre piece on stage and you don't have any joy with them .It's becoming a kind of cocoon. You must still struggle , like we were struggling during the days of apartheid , to get a venue for your work. In Durban I could easily call you or Kriben and say "Hey man , I'm in Durban can I have the Asoka Theatre to perform in ?" I can do that in Durban but I can't do it at the Market Theatre .This frustration makes you think that we are making the same mistake as they made in some communist countries like Cuba where artists were fully funded by the state . That makes them lazy . So people who make theatre through structures like Performing Arts Councils they're lousy .The actors don't put effort or energy into making sure that they do well.. All they know is that they have a salary for so many months . They don't develop themselves .

D.S. You were saying that you can't get a theatre space , but that presupposes that you want a theatre space of a particular kind . In other words with lighting , seating , management , sound system , ticket sales , printed programmes and so on . But there is nothing to prevent theatre from happening out there on the grass .

M.M. That's exactly what I am doing now .I do a different kind of theatre .but then people say Matsemela is no longer doing any theatre because my work has not been seen on the mainstream.. I create theatre every day of my life , you see . I'm fine with that . I'm happy with this approach and I'm not going to find myself trapped in mainstream theatre again . It is hard though because these days we no longer have theatrical performances as we used to do at all kinds of gatherings , commemorations and so on .

D.S. Would you regard a funeral as theatre ?

M.M. Yes.

D.S. A wedding ?

M.M. Yes.

D.S. Theatre is endemic to life because ceremonies go on whether the Market Theatre , State Theatre , Playhouse , Baxter etc. existed or not .

M.M We buried a friend of mine in Witbank recently . It was a very emotional funeral. He was a poet and did poetry performances . At the graveyard we said 'No, not ashes to ashes . We want to celebrate this man's life ' . We offered praise poetry . It was a pretty emotional theatrical experience .. You could hear the people crying out loud because they were totally involved . So, you are right . A wedding is a theatrical experience . In church the priest is a performer. ... so is the teacher in the classroom . There is formal and informal theatre . In professional theatre obviously they strive to get some payment for the theatrical performances and what with the whole theatre management structure and all that being paid very well and everyone asking for more payment , it becomes difficult for you as a producer . I'll never make that kind of money with my kind of theatre unless I had a sponsor. I don't have a sponsor but I don't care about that .But I end up working for the actors . Theatre managements don't say 'Let's look at this play by Matsamela and produce it .'

D.S. Like the Playhouse Company has given up being a production house , it's a venue . They still provide a kind of infrastructure but in the end you , the producer , hire the venue with some facilities . It's up to you to provide or to find funding . The old idea was that the Performing Arts Councils were there to promote the performance arts by , for example , taking one of your plays and producing it , injecting into it technical and performance expertise that would raise the presentational standard of the work and encourage further writing and the honing of your craft . We can sit here and regret this but where do we go from here ?

M.M. I foresee a situation in this country where there will be a revolution . The mainstream values will just die a natural death .Practitioners will begin to use new spaces . We'll transform our garages into theatre spaces and charge people just enough to sustain you and the actors . Theatre will be taken into the neighbourhood . I mean the pace of building theatres in the townships was moving faster before '94 After '94 it's gone !

It's very ironic . I look at these black brothers in charge and I say 'Something is wrong here ' There's a scramble now for what the people thought the Performing Arts Councils had . The people thought that the Performing Arts Councils had a lot of money and that this money could help them realize their dreams that people talked about before '94 . Then it stopped when all the people in charge were replaced . They used to talk about a theatre in Soweto . It's gone ... not even the talk remains . So ,you become a voice in the wilderness . But if you have a vision then you say to yourself 'Anyway let me rather be an island , because this mainstream nonsense is not going to survive . If we got the Market Theatre infrastructure for nothing , and then create a corporate body with the actors – no employer/employee relationship – all equally important members of the same company . If we make a little money we split that money , and prepare for the next production . If we lose we all lose . That spirit is gone . There is no longer that solidarity spirit . When

actor's look at you today they look at you as an employer . No longer do you say 'Hey , man , I have this vision , can we get it together and do this production ?'

D.S. Is that why Bra Gib has given up ?

M.M. To some extent but he also tasted television , he tasted film , and there's too much money in there – probably shocked him . So he wen't through a culture shock economically . That's my feeling .

D..S. When we were interviewing him he said he had lost faith in the performers themselves and their 'wrong attitudes ' Even when you try a profit share basis they still complain that there is not enough for them .

M.M. Ya . I think it has very much to do with survival . People don't go to the theatre as often because there is too much television , too much entertainment at home . We see the same problem in football in this country , people don't go to the stadium . But also you can't bullshit people . If the production is not good , it's not good . I'm not gonna get out of my room at night to come and see nonsense on stage . Even new young actors must be good . We've got to respect the stage , so that we can have audiences , If you know that the producer has a good reputation and the actors you know are good and the group has a tradition of producing good work , then something drives you to get out of your house and go there . Going out to see a piece of theatre is a ritual in itself . You need this intellectual and spiritual satisfaction . You need it as an audience , you're part of the performance . You can only get to this kind of theatre when you can be sure that the performers respect the performance , not just the pay . Performers today put their emphasis on the pay . That's why I'm saying that since '94 things have really changed . There is a need for a revolution . The people who feel that they have been shunned by the mainstream need to create their own revolution . That's what Spike Lee did with what he called Spike's Joint . He had to grow a certain group of actors , performers , film practitioners – grow with them from scratch . Now that he has gone very big he still uses the same people that he struggled with . It takes you back to how the Serpent Players started , how Soyikwa started . Today the actors just look at who has the money . They end up not having a 'home' and they don't build up a group tradition . Some you could say have a sense of tradition . The New Theatre Company has this tradition , Soyikwa has this tradition , Ronnie Govender has this tradition . Theatre , it's like life , it's like a marriage . It's something that evolves , that you develop . There is struggle and conflict but these are solved as a team . Now actors just hang around the Market Theatre and Albert street looking for a job . They see a producer and they run for you . 'Hey what play are you doing ?' They want a job but they don't know my tradition . I mean a Gibson Kente actor , if he's going to come and work for me , I will have to break him first from the Gibson Kente approach . I have to break that link so that I can bring him to what I want him to do . You see this on television too , actors think they're still on stage . They don't any longer seem to understand that if I'm going to be directed by Dennis , and he tells me in good time , I study his work , I study the way he works for six months , a year , I condition my mind to be able to work with Dennis . We

don't have that today . Such preparation is non-existent . If I said to John Kani 'I want you to play Steve Biko ' , John being a disciplined actor would say ' I need six to eight months to develop the muscle and the mind for this character because I'm old now , and he was young then . So, you begin to prepare yourself . You read about the person , you research the person .By the time you say 'Who's going to direct ? ' and they say 'Gibson Kente ' you can say 'no , I can't be directed by Gibson because his style of direction and my style that I want to use to play this part are miles apart .' The actor should prepare his mind to face the particular ritual of direction . The same thing happens in America . Louis King , my American producer will say to me ' There's a brother whose doing a show and he's looking for an African .' Now the African American actors all want to go as 'Africans' So, we went to this restaurant and from nowhere this guy came up to me and he asks Louis King ' Is the brother from home ? ' and Louis King says 'Ya ' Then the man says : 'I'm doing this show man and I'm looking for an African type , you know .' What was funny was the scramble of the other actors that were hanging about because they know that most of the producers go there . They could have almost killed me ! So I said in a loud voice so that they all could hear : ' Look I'm not an actor , I'm a producer , I just write , direct and produce . I would gladly help you but I'm not an actor .' They don't audition formally . They audition you everywhere – even in restaurants . But with these African American actors if the guy gets a role , he goes home to sort himself out , and he works hard to crack the role .

D.S. Is it not also our different educational backgrounds . Ours is not a literate society in the sense that our children are not encouraged to read enough .Some of the students who come to University to do a degree with Drama as a major have read maybe only two playscripts in their lives and both of these would have been setworks for matric .They want to do Drama , or Theatre Studies , or Speech and Drama but they have read no plays , have read no theory . They have not prepared their minds for the course . So, John Kani will go off and prepare his mind to undertake a role , but we have to force our students to read . Reading and research are just not part of the student's mindset .

M.M. It's not part of the mindset , they don't prepare . I mean you see this when you travel around with actors . I have traveled a lot with actors all over the world . We went to Berlin and I said to John and Hamilton 'Let's go to East Berlin. Lets go see the grave of Brecht. They say we work like Brecht so lets go find out about this man . We have the good fortune of being where the man was creating his work . ' They will choose to go to a disco . Next day I tell them 'I was in East Berlin , I smuggled myself in – I needed to go and see the grave of Brecht . I saw his tombstone . It's an ordinary stone just written BRECHT and where born and when dead . I saw the National Assembly and the bullet holes in the walls . I saw what East Berlin looks like .and I understand better why this man wrote the way he wrote . Now when I read Brecht I understand his environment .' If you say to an actor today ' Look this is a very important role , I want you to prepare yourself for this part . Go away and bring it back in eight months time .' The guy says ' Eight months ! I need a job right now !' Instead of getting another job in between and saying 'Look I'm already booked in October , so I can only do something else between now and say September ,



these guys just jump in . Then what also happens is you cast the guy and the next day when he's supposed to start rehearsals he says ' No, man , I'm going to Cuba . I have this wonderful show ... ' ' But I booked you ... !!!'

D.S. We've just had that happen.

M.M. Look at Denzel Washington . He waited for very good roles .He refused to play a lot of roles. He always said ' I want to read the script first and see whether I fit the role . If I don't think it's right for me I'm not gonna do it . He waited and waited and then came the role of Steve Biko . He says : ' I went to Africa a couple of times to see if I could play the role ...I couldn't come to South Africa but I went to Zimbabwe They were going to film in Zimbabwe . I came back home for the first time and I looked like everybody but I couldn't speak like everybody .They spoke differently . and I said are you going to be able to handle this ? Biko had this Xhosa accent . ' Then he said he had to prepare his mind by saying 'I'm not just dealing with this man .I could be that man . This man could be American , he could be anything . It's the ideas of the man that I want to put into the performance . ' So, he didn't bother with the accent .

As writers too we need to be prepared to stand outside my theatre and look at myself . You have to stand back because you may not be aware that you are creating shit theatre . In the same way that when you do get a chance to publish your work and you look at it again twenty years down the line . When you read it you say : 'Is this me ? How could I have possibly written this ? The characters don't gel .You begin to crit yourself . Most writers in this country don't get the chance to do this and as a result we don't see the critics as partners in the business of making art . We see them as enemies .

D.S. ...and I will only take the review seriously if it improves my box office returns or ruins the show financially .

M.M. Exactly . They never say : ' Hey that's true , this man has helped me '

D.S. But many critics just seem to tell the story in their own words and offer precious little critical commentary good or bad .How does that help?

M.M. Ya. Ya. Critics should say : ' Now I'm going to write a review , an honest review of this piece , and if the man is angry with me , I don't give a shit ! There's an audience out there that also saw the piece and they also have an impression about that piece . '

D.S How many black African critics do you know .

M.M. There are some reporters – I don't call them critics . They read the press releases and the press releases come out as reviews .. We once called a meeting with Agrey , you know with the newspapers , Agrey wasn't there . We phoned the newspapers as representing the African Writers Association .and said: ' You are dealing with reviews of books by we do not find people who review the works of black African writers .Can we help? Can we bring people in as freelancers to write for your newspaper ? ' The point was misunderstood . Reporters are inundated with so many jobs – sports writing ,

crime reporting , - go to this funeral – go to this court case , oh and then go and do a review of this theatre piece . I mean the guy doesn't specialize in anything . Sometimes they even review 'by remote ' The guy is given tickets to go to the theatre . He goes to the shebeen. He listens to what people say who were at the show . Then he takes the press releases and he writes as though he had been there . There is one white critic here who falls asleep five minutes after every show starts . Then five minutes before the end he watches again . Then he comes with this brilliant review ... then you get worried .

D.S. There seems to be a great need to train theatre and literary critics . There also seems to be a need to train black directors ( as distinct from those who create and direct their own shows ) . The art of direction per se is not being developed

M.M. Yes. It is not being developed . As writers we , you know , direct our own pieces . I mean someone like Zakes Mda doesn't really direct that much . I would like to direct his work . If you direct the work of other people you also develop your own writing , because you begin to see what other people do, what devices they use . We don't direct enough like we don't read enough . I mean today we don't read , a lot of writers don't read . They hardly have a chance to proofread their own writings . You see this reading thing , let me say , is a challenge particularly amongst us black folks .

D.S. Not only amongst black folks I can assure you .

M.M. No . But you are right . There is a need to train black directors , black critics. We need people who will say 'I'm going to get my drama degree , and I'm gonna specialize in the critical analysis of playscripts and performances . We need this skill . People go and watch a piece of theatre and they come out and say ' brilliant ' or ' nice ' or ' nonsense ' They can talk about it but they couldn't put words on paper to review the performance . Which is why when we started Soyikwa we had a course in Analysis . It was compulsory for every student . All students must see five plays and review them . They must also read five plays and review them . If they don't do that they don't qualify . People said I was sick or crazy and that I was pushing my line as a writer , as an intellectual. They would say ' We are into performance – not into this shit . ' I said ' If you don't analyze and research how do you read scripts as an actor ? ' If you are in a play about Chris Hani you go and read about Chris Hani's life . You don't only read the play about Chris Hani , you study the entire life of Chris Hani – his background , everything . By the time you play the role you are fully informed and prepared . You can even say to the director ' No. Chris would not say it like that . ' That's a good actor . Today students don't give any teacher a challenge . So , the teachers don't worry . They don't even prepare a lesson . The teacher can walk into class and just run down the kids because they don't even know what the teacher is talking about in class because they haven't read anything .

D.S. And this problem you tried to address at Soyikwa?

M.M. Yes . But we also said to the Market Theatre that when independent producers come in we expect the Market to make sure that the craft is good . Instead of just joining in the chorus of criticisms . We said 'You have the infrastructure . You're part of us , we're doing this thing with you . If you see there is something wrong , you should come earlier in the rehearsals and say so .. That's why you need to give our production companies the space for at least two or three weeks of rehearsals . Then call in your Artistic Director ' . What is an Artistic Director ? What is his role in the company? He should see the productions in rehearsal and not tell us what to do , but offer constructive criticism to improve them . I mean, some productions were bad . I said to John ' How do you actually allow this to be put on? Because I take it that what goes on stage here , you approved . ' Then he would laugh and I'd say : 'No John , this is serious . If we are partners in making this business work by increasing audiences , we have got to create responsibly . '

D.S. How do you answer the point that film and television and even the printed media reach audiences numbered in the hundred's of thousands and even millions on occasion whereas you put on a show for three weeks and if you are very lucky you play to an average of two hundred a night . So , the power of theatre cannot lie only in the number of people who witness the work live .

M.M. No. It's not in numbers . For me it's the immediacy of the thing . To see a performer sustain a character , every day , every night for three hours on the stage . You know that every night the performance will be different . It's not 'canned ' . You can go and see the piece again and say 'No. man , this thing has improved . '

D.S. Yes. As you say in theatre we never get the same performance twice .because of the living interaction between a performer and the audience ; an audience that is also always changing in character . There is also the living and changing relationship between performers on stage . The audience and the performance inter-react in an organic way to create meaning .

M.M. But so that this can happen we need neighbourhood venues . Theatre needs to happen within the environment where people live . But such venues should also be used for social functions and gatherings as well so that it becomes a vibrant living space for the community – not just for mainstream theatre .

D.S. Yes and of course your Union meetings , rallies etc do also have elements of dance , singing and theatrical pieces woven into the events .The strict divisions between theatre and funeral , performance and protest rally , simply disappear . The divide seems to come about when you become professional and have to earn a living from performance .

M.M. Yes . When you are young you are energetic , you're angry , you're radical , you feel you are creating a revolution through this particular art form. You perform for peanuts in township halls or in community halls and then maybe you become big and hit the front page of newspapers . You join mainstream theatre with its lighting , sound , air conditioning . For me it doesn't mean you should not be part of the mainstream but performers there tend to forget where

they come from Even if you are in mainstream you are still part of the community that makes theatre informally as part of the struggle Again we would say to John Kani : ' Look you won't perform in a venue without lights in Soweto because you use light as part of your acting ... but you come from a tradition of no spots !'

D.S. Woza Albert! . Could perform anywhere .

M.M. Exactly Woza Albert! Could go anywhere . Sizwe Banzi is Dead could go anywhere . The Island could go anywhere . John will say : 'I will perform , but don't invite me and say you are producing a work off mainstream . Then you put me in a situation where I may jeopardize my whole career . ' So he needed to balance the two .

When you reach the stage where theatre is no longer like a ritual , a vehicle for liberation , you are trained , you've studied , you are experienced , you're a professional . It's almost like a doctor . You can't say I'll just go anywhere and treat patients anywhere . You need a surgery with suitable instruments and so on . Of course if someone is ill on a bus you are still able to help that person and this is the connection for me . Sure , look at the professional theatre as a way of life , as a way of enriching yourself but don't forget the connection . I think you can enrich yourself even in informal theatre . I believe in a return to informal theatre and that there are more possibilities in rural theater than urban areas .

D.S. In Britain , America and on the continent , as you know , it is the amateur dramatic movements that in many ways sustain mainstream theatre . Do you think that the encouragement of amateur dramatics in the form of High School play festivals , eisteddfods , amateur dramatic societies would help . As an amateur performer pay is not the motive for participation . There are other dynamics involved here .

M.M. Yes it would . You see if a guy is working for a living and doing theatre , theatre for him is an important tool , it's not just for generating income . And it's true , amateur theatre is the work that sustains professional theatre . But again you need a neighbourhood community venue for this . A lot of amateur groups do operate like social clubs . Like a society of women will meet every Sunday to do a theatrical presentation but they are not working at this full time . Out of this group someone may develop the skill and be so good at it that they see an opportunity to move into it full-time .

D.S The Department of Arts and Culture puts money into Performing Arts Councils to encourage the growth of professional theatre , don't you think that they should also put money into regional festivals of the arts for amateur participation ?

M.M. This is theatre for community development that we have spoken about so much in the past . You see the Market Theatre is not a theatre for community development . It's a professional theatre space . If you are talking about developing a community move into a school classroom . Create a theatre tradition there and when they begin to realize that performance is possible even in informal venues you become strong to survive and you create works

like Sizwe Banzi is dead , Egoli , and Woza Albert . In this kind of theatre you arrive anywhere , you perform anywhere , you don't even need the script . You are a group of six , maybe three are not there . The three that are there take over the roles of those who are not . Thirty minute performance and it's a theatrical experience . Now if you have a budget of three million you are not gonna develop any community . You are just going to chow that money . You will create amazing sets , expensive unnecessary costumes . It can still be a good production of its kind but the only way for us to return to the kind of theatre we want is for them to freeze funding for all Performing Arts Councils . Freeze it altogether . If you want to do that kind of theatre , go find the money for it and see whether you can survive . There was far more exciting theatre with no money . When there is too much money , for me , that's when theatre becomes decadent . Like the painter whose works sell for a hundred-thousand no longer wishes to know people like he knew when his paintings sold for a couple of hundred .

D.S. And he begins to paint for his market .

M.M. Exactly .. He begins to paint for his market and then painting becomes self-imposed censorship of your creative imagination .

D.S. ...and he does this because it sells .

M.M. You begin to develop a formula . You start with the budget . You say for this piece I will need about a hundred and fifty thousand .because Winston Ntshona is going to cost me so much per week . In the past you would say : 'Okay guys this play is very important , Heritage day is around the corner . We've got to make this statement . We have a motive .' Today so much theatre is made without a motive . That's why we have actors who are so useless that they take on any script – they say : 'It's a job.' Theatre is no longer dealing with the challenges of our immediate lives . It is separated from life.. They can go on stage and do this shit even if I don't agree with it . They say ; ' I'm working , It's a job.'

Just look at the state of television drama in this country . It is so bad and that is because to get good television drama we need good stage actors . They are the ones who can be directed well for television .. Right now you can't tell the difference between television acting and stage acting . It's the same for Gibson Kente . We were very happy that at long last there was a man in television production who has been part of our theatre for years . He has all this experience . Now let's see what he can do for the television medium . It was disappointing . I think the problem is that theatre is a collective effort.. It is not an individual effort . You work as a group and use all the expertise in the group . That is where good actors can help you as a director . But of course you must have the time and space in which to work and that's not how its done where time is money and space is costed out by the minute . That's why for me there's a need for a revolution . Fire all the workers , PACT workers , all who are full-time with the Performing Arts Councils . Let them struggle to find money for their productions . You look at Pieter Tourien . How does he sustain his theatre without any funding ? He has to work hard and he has to

make sure that anybody who moves into his theatre space works so hard to make sure that they can generate more money . We need to impress funders , impress the sponsors , impress the audiences so that they come more and more to support us , and this is the way to sustain ourselves .

D.S. Yes. It took a great effort to transform the Board at NAPAC for example but now that it is racially representative we find that the Board members don't even come to see their own shows .

M.M. Why have a Board that don't care about professional involvement ? Some of them I know don't even attend Board meetings regularly ., just like some of our ministers who fall asleep in parliament . Why are they ministers ? Some will even skip a parliamentary session . I mean people have lost a sense of respect and motivation . Why are they doing it ? Money . I mean , if I say I want to be a lecturer in Dramatic arts , ...for Christ's sake ... every time I go into that lecture room I must be prepared . I must be ready to deliver for these kids because I have a motive . I want to train these children , I want to prepare them for the future .For me theatre was preparing us in terms of social and political transformation , in terms of empowerment , in terms of saying we are a changing society here . We are taking society through the endless process of transformation and development .and theatre is our tool for understanding this

D.S. So then there is a constant need for revolution. ?

M.M. Society is always in a state of transition because culture is dynamic .So for example , when I started writing I used a lot of words .Then when I did Pula I said : 'No , not more than eight pages of text . I want to use physical expression and combine it with verbal expression because audiences are too lazy to listen and can't concentrate in a theatre space for more than forty five minute ' I mean , why don't we do thirty minute theatre pieces , or ten minutes for that matter .?

D.S. Zakes Mda's pieces are short .

M.M. They are very short because people don't read today . As that Italian dramatist Dario Fo says : ' Even in our dreams there are commercials . ' People's concentration span is so low now that if you come with a strong international piece people say : 'No , man – What's on at Kippies lets have a few shots and listen to some jazz.' But our whole life has changed . I want to do a piece on black society today .What we don't seem to understand is that when you give people certain freedoms and rights the whole pattern of our lives changes and we meet a whole lot of challenges .The old traditional life changes . But of course traditions also protect and empower people . Without this we see what we see today in black society , black divorce , suicide In place of tradition we put democracy . Before this interview you were talking about Human Rights Day . I think we need a Human Responsibility Day . People mustn't shun their responsibilities and in art we have lost that sense of responsibility . We must take responsibility and be brave if we are going to make a brave statement . In theatre you are gonna shit on someone , you are gonna shit on yourself . You

are gonna say things that other people are not gonna like . That's why I like Terror Lekota when he was sitting on those guys who were not going to this provincial council meeting . He said : 'What the hell are you employed for ? As a minister you are here to demonstrate your responsibilities , not your rights . You have no right to sleep in parliament ' It's like actors who forget their lines and then say : 'It's my democratic right to improvise '

D.S. Do you see a distinctive genre that you could label ' Black Theatre ' in South Africa ?

M.M. Yes and no. As Steve would say ,historically we would want to call ourselves black because of the oppressive situation we come from . We refer to black theatre , black music because it is created by people with Black Consciousness . But it's difficult . If a white person writes a play that reflects very accurately the black experience and it is performed by black people , do you still call it black theatre ? What do you call that kind of theatre ? You also get into shit with the brother who says : 'I'm a theatre artist not a township theatre artist . I live in the suburbs , so now what do you call me ?' I mean I call this African Theatre because it comes from Africa in the same way that we call it European Theatre because it comes from Europe . But if I learn about the European experience , and I am living in Europe and I write a play about this , is that European Theatre ?

D.S. It seems very difficult to pin this down. Fugard is a white African and is part presumably of African Theatre .

M.M. I think this brings us to the concept of the African Renaissance; the need for the reawakening of Africa and the need to redefine ourselves within a space which is not as oppressive as it was in the past .What is an African? That is a critical question . Some people think that this refers exclusively to native Africans. But no ... there are white people as well in this country who see themselves as African . They were born here and will define themselves as African. If you see a black player in a British soccer team , you say he's British because he lives there . In terms of what is or isn't black theatre we should look at the form rather than the content . You know when you read Soyinka you call it African theatre because you know or you were told it's by Soyinka but if you just read it without knowing you may think : 'This is a European piece ' Sometimes academic definitions can be very frustrating and problematic.

D.S. Definitions can be restrictive and problematic and maybe that's the problem . Maybe we are too young experientially to define exactly what we mean by African Theatre or black theatre .

M.M. Ya. First must come what Ngugi talks about – de-colonizing the minds of African people both black and white . That civilization did not begin Europe . Civilization began all over the world . People developed in different ways and at different paces in different directions . But whilst the European world developed into an academic and literary world , Africa did not . So now it still has a problem of defining itself and understanding itself. Even the African

classics , stories by African writers in our own mother tongues , in our own African languages , we never had respect for these . I even made an effort at school to produce a play in my own mother tongue . We were studying African Drama but we could not relate to the course . We even grew up with the idea that African writers were not revolutionary because to be a revolutionary writer you were supposed to write in English for Staffrider . But as we grew up and grew closer to the struggle we began to say ; ‘ Hey , when I write a book I can use these elements that these guys used . ’ You know like the descriptive elements about the mountains , the rivers , the weather, understanding your country, understanding the place you live in . We as ‘African’ writers who were revolutionary in political terms had a low sense of description , almost zero . We were top of the agenda when it came to complaining , but not to describe Durban so that someone who doesn’t know the place can see it when he or she reads your words or watches your play . There is this white writer who is paraplegic...

D.S. Lionel Abrams .

M.M. Yes. I used to call him in to do literary sessions with Soyikwa students. It was difficult because you need the tools of language. You must read and study the language first . you must really understand the language . As professor Mpahlele says : ‘ You cannot break English if you don’t know it ‘ . How do you experiment if you don’t know the form? You cant break with tradition if you don’t know the tradition . If I want to divorce there is a tradition in my culture . I have to go to my uncle and say ,; ‘ Look you arranged for me to marry this wife , now I have had enough , I want a divorce . Can you go to the family and say : ‘Look it didn’t work ‘ I don’t rush to the courts and sign documents .It wasn’t a document that led us to marry , it was the meeting of families . so let the families meet to solve or to adjust the situation . Of course you can say : ‘Fuck the families ! I’ll go straight to court , I have the right , you’re an adult. You signed the piece of paper , that’s it .’

D,S, It’s your democratic right .

M.M. It’s your democratic irresponsibility ! No, education is in crisis . We have very few black writers and its an effort to read Gibson Kente , or Mbongeni .

D.S. I find the writing very repetitive ... but there are reasons for this .

M.M. Ya, repetitive . If you talk writers , I would want to read Zkes Mda ,as you know . But I’m sorry I have to run now . You Dennis and Mahendra must keep up the work you are doing . This too is all part of the Renaissance movement .

D.S. Thank you Matsemela for a most valuable interview .