

**THE POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE OF ATHOL FUGARD AND  
MAISHE MAPONYA: COMMITMENT, COLLABORATION,  
AND EXPERIMENT IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

**BY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

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**BEING A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS IN  
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**NOVEMBE 2016**

**APPROVAL PAGE**

The thesis has been examined and approved as having met the academic requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in English, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Zululand, Republic of South Africa.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis: “The Postdramatic Theatre of Athol Fugard and Maishe Maponya: Commitment, Collaboration, and Experiment in Apartheid South Africa” is the product of my own research, carried out under the supervision of Doctor Khaya M. Gqibithole and Professor Rob Baum, and that it has not been presented elsewhere for the award of a degree or certificate. All sources have been duly acknowledged.

.....  
Bello Shamsuddeen

## **DEDICATION**

Some souls are not meant for this world, their feathers are just too bright; and when they fly away, far and forever gone, the part of you that laments suddenly realises that they deserve a better place, somewhere more blissful and everlasting.

I therefore dedicate this work to my father, who is not here to see the flower he nurtured yield great fruits.

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Umaru Musa University, Katsina-Nigeria provided the platform for this academic endeavour. Thank you is therefore not adequate, but my gratitude is infinite. I also express my sincere appreciation to those too numerous to mention here.

## ABSTRACT

Athol Fugard and Maishe Maponya both used the postdramatic theatre, which was largely anti-elitist, anti-text, experimental and collaborative, at certain point in their literary careers. They rebelled against established conventions, and, in their own ways, produced a type of theatre that suited their context and literary and ideological leanings. The rebellion and transformation of the theatre was not peculiar to them, but was a universal phenomenon at the time this thesis examines. As such, it manifested in works of artists who appropriated the new dramatic techniques to represent their different contexts and emerging socio-political trends.

The thesis examines the collaborative process of Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona in view of the critical debates about identity, politics, role play, and Fugard's claim to primary authorship of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Collaboration is not a fixed term or practice. It depends largely on the play, play-making situation, and intention. It also changes even with the same artists involved in the collaboration. The devising process that led to *The Coat*, for example, differed from that of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Even the collaborative process of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* differs despite that the plays were produced around the same time. Fugard's collaboration with the Circle Players (late 1950s) also differs from his collaboration with the Serpent Players (1960s) and that with Kani and Ntshona (early 1970s). Collaboration meant different things at different times for Fugard. He seems to have ridden on the coattails of black actors, although he successfully toured the plays around the world. Maponya's idea of collaboration differs from that of Fugard. Although Maponya did not officially collaborate with actors, he used them as conduits into their lived experiences (*The Hungry Earth*) and professions (*Umongikazi*). This play-making technique is in many ways collaborative and similar to Fugard's collaborative pattern during his work with the Circle Players in the production of *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*. Maponya lifts up the black artist but suffers the consequences. Fugard and Maponya used the actors in different capacities and utilised fairly similar, but different, collaborative techniques. They both utilised experimental, improvisational, and workshop-based methods differently, and at different times.

The white South African playwright Fugard prepared the ground for radical experimentation with form and content in South Africa. Fugard enjoys a place of honour in the South African (and more generally African) canon. His reputation as a great writer, creative collaborator and director, and as a person who was able to create a unique theatre that blended African and Western forms of performance, has been acknowledged globally. His work with black actors, notably John Kani and Winston Ntshona, enabled this feat. He adopted a multidimensional approach to art, retained his literary leaning and identity, collaborated, and assisted in training and directing of black actors, and so contributed in his own equally potent way to the struggle against apartheid through the theatre. He promoted a belief in "the personal is political" through plays to be examined herein. *The Coat* (1966), *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973) are selected because they are Fugard's most political plays and because they were devised in collaboration with actors. *The Hungry Earth* (1979), *Gangsters* (1984) and *Jika* (1986) also pass the litmus test because they are Maponya's most radical indictment of the apartheid regime and because they were also devised through experiments with actors who provided material and acting. In contrast to most writing on Fugard and Maponya, which are anchored to either a literary interpretation of the plays or performance discourse, this study offers a literary and performative analysis of the selected plays, demonstrating that this must be done together. This thesis also offers a comparative analysis of the selected plays.

Maponya is a black artist and bitter playwright of the Struggle. His works are multifaceted, open to differing interpretations and are fairly universal and timeless because of their concern with general themes such as capitalism, subversion and containment; so also for their relation

with more universal works, and their demonstration that the local and immediate experiences can have global legs. His concern with Black Consciousness and resistance however confined his status to a black ideologue. Maponya's dramas nonetheless resist the accustomed standard of categorisation as plays by a black South African dramatist. The sharp cataloguing between white and black and major and minor playwright begins to fall apart when comparing Fugard and Maponya in terms of theatre practice and experiences. The reception of Maponya's plays – both at home and abroad – reveals that he was an equally theatrically-aware and successful artist of the struggle, although he cannot be evenly matched with Fugard in terms of literary craft and outreach. This reductionism has also affected Fugard, who many regard as a liberal white writer. His colour was a handicap and a saving grace since it allowed him to work with black actors despite the laws banning interracial relations. The discourse of commitment in the plays to be examined – as well as in the dramatists' practice of theatre – is centred on the relation between intention, context and text. The study examines the artists' contribution(s) to the struggle; and how effective that contribution is, considering the complicated context and events they wrote about. To my knowledge, no other work, specifically, examines these two quite different playwrights, particularly in the context of their writing methods, their political reception in South Africa and abroad, and their ideas about play-making.

New Historicism is chosen for the analysis of the selected plays because they are produced in history and for the theory's concern with historical situation; because it is more of a practice than a set of doctrines or theory (Greenblatt 1990); and because it is concerned with intention and choice of genre (Bressler 2000). The theory, or rather practice, is also chosen because it promotes the study of both *major* and *minor* authors, thereby blurring the distinction between them (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000); and because it accords more place for collaborative works (Greenblatt 1989) – which is one of the main concerns of this study.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### CONTEXT AND CONCEPTS

#### 1.1 Introduction

South African playwrights such as Athol Fugard (b. 1932) and Maishe Maponya (b. 1951) – the two artists chosen for analysis in this study – from the 1960s onwards (as far as this study covers) practiced the postdramatic play-making system, which differed from the conventional playwriting method and accorded actors roles as co-creators and creative agents, thus defying playwright-text imperialism. None of the plays to be examined in this study originated from a script completed prior to rehearsal. As a consequence, they (especially the collaborative plays of Fugard) constitute a record of improvisations with words and action and so were amenable to tampering by actors (play-making participants) and different realisations by audiences and readers alike. The plays also defy traditional dramatic composition and literary convention in pursuit of alternatives. The postdramatic nature of their production is thereby a testimony to a significant shift in approaches to the theatre medium in the country, and more broadly reflects artistic direction transpiring internationally at the time, one that influenced not only the ways of making theatre, but also the content (or scope) of plays. This study is concerned with both the postdramatic form and political content of the select plays.

In order to establish the intellectual frame of discussion in this study, Chapter 1 discusses the major concepts and contexts that the study deals with in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The body of the discussion (that is Chapters 3, 4 and 5) addresses the concern of this study. In Chapter 3, the postdramatic practice is discussed, with major emphasis on the playwrights' experimental-collaborative models; in Chapter 4, three selected plays (*The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, and *The Island*) by Fugard are examined for their political or apolitical content; and in Chapter 5, three selected plays (*The Hungry Earth*, *Gangsters*, and *Jika*) by Maponya are also examined for their commitment, political impact, and status. Chapter 2 is a review of related literatures and theory; while Chapter 6 offers a summary and conclusion.

#### 1.2 Concepts and framing

The history of drama from Aristotle, or, in fact, long before, to the avant-garde, *postmodern*, and *postdramatic* theatre is a history of artistic politics, subversion and transformation in the form and content of the drama. This is clear from the nineteenth-century, especially from the 1920s with the rise of avant-garde playwrights, practitioners, and theorists of drama and performance. Drama from the 1960s on is roughly categorised as *postdramatic*, *postmodern*,

experimental, and collaborative. The *post* in these terms suggests reflexivity and critique, and so does not function as an absolute historical marker, but operates as a prefix (a theory) that articulates “the link between drama and the no longer dramatic forms of theatre that have emerged since the 70s” (Lehman 2006: 1). This contemporary system of plays and play-making – also called *postmodern*, contemporary experimental, or contemporary alternative – negotiates the crisis Peter Szondi<sup>1</sup> traces between the classical (with Sophocles and Euripides as dramatists, and, of course, Aristotle as theorist) and modern drama in its varied facets. The *post* therefore takes into account the “increasing tension between the formal requirements of Aristotelian drama and the demands of modern epic social themes,” thus moving from the dramatic form as timeless to “a historical dialectic of form and content” (Lehman 2006: 3).

MacConachie, Zarrilli, Williams and Sorgenfrei (2010: 512) refer to the type of theatre that “challenges text’s primacy,” and is centred on experiments and collaborative creation of works for performance by companies, as *postmodern*. These dramas are devised or generated through actor-creation and improvisation, and so represent a shift away from “text-anchored representation” and author-imperialism (MacConachie et al. 2010: 512). This postmodern type of theatre denounces Aristotle’s privileging of *text* and *author* as primary elements of drama in the *Poetics* (c. 330 B.C.E.). Aristotle’s *Poetics*, produced almost a century after the first Greek tragedians, and modelled on their plays, is reputed to be one of the first studies into the nature of theatre. There were *non-literate* records of drama before Aristotle’s *Poetics*. There was the pyramid plays (2800-2400 BC), dramas about the ritual of sending Pharaoh off to the underworld; the Memphite Drama, which recounts the death and resurrection of the Egyptian god, Osiris, and the coronation of his son, Horus; and the Abydos Passion Plays (2500-550 BC), also about the tale of Osiris and enacted at Abydos (Osiri’s burial site), and the first ever recorded and first example of theatre (MacConachie et al. 2010: 54-6).

Aristotle’s *Poetics* is particularly prominent because it was the first systematic study of the nature of Western theatre and because of its influence on the form and content of the theatres that evolved in the later centuries. It was translated into many languages and its theories have been adopted, reviewed and variously reworked over time. Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999), Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990), Richard Schechner (b. 1934), and Peter Brook (b. 1925) – to mention a few of the modern playwrights, directors, and theorists – have looked at drama in different ways. Kantor, as an avant-garde experimental theatre director and stage designer,

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<sup>1</sup> Szondi, Peter. (1987) *Theory of the Modern Drama*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

notably revolutionised the stage by extending it out into the audience; emphasised spectacle (happenings on stage); and created real-life characters (Hatlen 1987: 187). As a performance theorist, John Louis Styan (1923-2002) also celebrated spectators, performance-communion, actors and the stage. These modern theorists and practitioners influenced artists globally.

Athol Fugard (b. 1932) and Maishe Maponya (b. 1951) explored experimental-collaborative playmaking method, which is typically actor-oriented, non-text based, improvisational, and workshop-based at some point in their literary careers (see Chapter 3). They were influenced by the theatre practices of the time and the context of their productions. The literary practice of a period usually has a vital impact on the critical and creative mind, since no idea or work can be produced in a vacuum. Their approach to theatre, and to the arts and politics of place, however, differs in ideology, leaning and influence. Fugard has a mixed descent and identity: his father, Harold (a poor and disabled former jazz pianist), was of Irish, English, and French Huguenot descent, and his mother, Marie Potgieter, was an Afrikaner. Maponya, on the other hand, is a black man, and the son of a painter who was brought up in Alexandra and Soweto. Little is known about his parents, especially his mother, who is never mentioned by critics and the dramatist himself. Fugard and Maponya are, nonetheless, not a perfect binary despite their approach to theatre, identity, and the representational politics of place and class in their plays. Their plays are, however, historical barometers since they dwell on the South African story. Styan (1975: 22) maintains that “every play and its performance fall into a recognisable time zone of human activity” (Styan 1975: 22). In this case then the time zone is the apartheid period.

The apartheid period is important to this study because it provided both Fugard and Maponya the materials with which they worked. The theatre practice of apartheid is also important for its influence on these playwrights (see Chapters 1 and 3). The plays dealt with in this study have been selected for their experimental-collaborative features and their political import and impact on audiences and readers. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona’s *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973), and the Serpent Players’ *The Coat* (1966), were chosen because they epitomise Fugard’s work with the Serpent Players (particularly with Kani and Ntshona), the experimental-collaborative workshop, and their importance as Fugard’s most political plays. Maponya’s *The Hungry Earth* (1979), *Gangsters* (1984) and *Jika* (1986) equally passed this litmus test due to their experimental play-making processes, resistance and political content, and status as radical post-Soweto black plays. The selection of these plays is crucial because most of them were unscripted in their early runs, and as such epitomise the resistance against

the state and the excesses of apartheid, although their political weights vary. The scope of this study, Fugard (1963-1974) and Maponya (1975-1986), is therefore informed by political and experimental-collaborative parameters. In comparing the dramatists, a white and black binary opposition has been avoided not only because it is simplistic, but also because the opposition between them cannot be sustained in many instances.

The context (historical period), content (political or liberal), and form (with regards to acting and the play-making process) are important to this study. Dramatists operate differently even when writing about similar events. They equally utilise different methods of exploring actors' potentials (see Chapters 1 and 3). In each play or performance, artists "alter in however slight a degree, the matrix of conventions, and thus the form of the genre and its impact" (Styan 1975: 22). Fugard and Maponya utilised different methods of artistic collaboration rather than fixed practices. Their methods changed depending on the play, situation, and intention. They also varied depending on the artists involved in the collaborations; this largely influenced the content and meaning of their plays and how they were staged (see Chapter 3). Importantly, collaborative practices change depending upon the historical period and playwright. Changes in form and content depend for the most part on the existing theatrical traditions, influences, appropriations and individual or group talent. Fugard's development as a playwright, director and collaborator, first with the Circle Players (in the 1950s) and then with the Serpent Players (1960s-1970s), reveals that his idea of collaboration is not fixed but alters for each group (see Chapter 3). Maponya also adopted different collaborative models, although the difference is not well-marked. Despite their practices, Fugard and Maponya's systems of collaboration can be compared in terms of experiment; the use of actors as conduits and creative agents; and the method of staging unscripted plays during the apartheid period (see Chapter 3).

The historical context of literary works determines a writer's psyche, which then influences a writer's choice of form and content. This is apparent in the works produced during apartheid. Fugard's and Maponya's literary leanings and anti-establishment positions differed; therefore the success of the selected plays as political works varies. Fugard battled with decisions about the content and form his art should take, ultimately producing plays that would survive the time (see Chapter 4). Maponya, on the other hand, chose to defy the state and in the process avoided self-censoring his plays (see Chapter 5). The playwrights' style and choice depended essentially on their target audiences. In drama, form and content are inextricably related by what is called "audience equation," such that "a play's style is measured from the norm of the intended audience's actual behaviour, an extension of life" (Styan 1975: 77). The expectation

of the audience has much to do with the shape a play takes – and what is achieved in the end. Examining the selected plays, therefore, requires an understanding of their original conditions of performance and history as re-lived social events. This thesis offers a close insight into the *unsaid* realm of the plays: their aporias and blanks. Drama's status as the expression of an age and a societal document is undeniable. The working condition of the writer, his status in the society, the conformity or non-conformity of the artist, his political and personal leaning, and his artistic freedom are significant barometers in any analysis (Styan 1975: 19-22).

From the late 1950s onwards, Fugard's plays document the happenings in his time. The plays also reject convenient categorisation into groups. There is an overlapping, for example, with some of Fugard's plays appearing in two or more historical categories. The 'Township Plays' (which cut across the late 1950s to early 1970s) do not necessarily suggest only plays about blacks, and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* can fit into both the 'Statements Plays' and 'Township Plays' categories as Fugard's two published collections, *Statements: three plays* (1974) and *The Township Plays* (1995), reveal. Some of Fugard's plays are grouped together based on their *subjects*, as in the 'Port Elizabeth Plays' with *The Blood Knot*, *Boesman and Lena*, and *People are Living There*; *period* and *style*, as in the 'Statements Plays' with *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* and *The Island*. Some of Fugard's other plays do not easily fit into *any* clear category. Stephen Gray offers a broader grouping of Fugard's work: i) *apprenticeship* (up to 1957) – *Klaas and the Devil* (1956) and *The Cell* (1957); ii) *social realism* (1958-1961) – *No-Good Friday* (1958) and *Nongogo* (1959); iii) *chamber theatre* (1961-1965) – *Blood Knot* (1961); iv) *improvised theatre* (1966-1973) – *The Coat* (1966), *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973); and v) *poetic symbolism* (1975 onwards) – *The Road to Mecca* (1984), *Valley Song* (1996), *Sorrows and Rejoicings* (2001) and *The Shadow of the Hummingbird* (2014).<sup>2</sup>

When compared with Fugard, it is obvious that Maponya produced few plays. His plays do not overlap in category, and so can be broadly categorised as radical and political drama. The only exception is *The Cry*, which Maponya wrote prior to the Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976. One might group his plays into the i) *pre-Soweto period* – *The Cry* (1976) and ii) *post-Soweto period* – *Peace and Forgive* (1978), *The Hungry Earth* (1978), *Umongikazi* (1982), *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* (1984) and *Jika* (1986).<sup>3</sup> Maponya's political intention is apparent from the start. He actually had an advanced education, and international theatre experience

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<sup>2</sup> *Shadow of the Hummingbird* premiered at the new Fugard Theatre in Cape Town. *The Train Driver* (2010) and *Blue Iris* (2012) – also by Fugard – also premiered there.

<sup>3</sup> Maponya also co-wrote *The Valley of the Blind* (1987) with Amani Derrick Blackwood.<sup>3</sup>



and exposure, unlike most of the other black consciousness playwrights of his time. In 1978, Maponya was opportune to attend a course organised by the British Theatre Association in England, under the sponsorship of the British Council (Steadman 1994: xiii). He also earned an M.A. in Theatre Arts from the University of Leeds, United Kingdom – a rare feat for a black artist from South Africa (Steadman 1994: xiv). This international experience suggests that he was a theatrically informed artist. This may be the reason that Maponya did not seek the support and training of white theatre practitioners such as Fugard and Simon, which was the normal practice of his day (see Chapters 3 and 5).

The relegation of South African black playwrights to an inferior realm when compared to reputable white playwrights such as Fugard and Simon is contestable. Many black artists sought training and direction from white artists and establishments because they had no access to drama facilities and the requisite institutional training. Maponya was an exception to this, and therefore cannot be reduced to a second-rate position. (This is only one instance of the failure of a binary between Maponya and Fugard). Maponya was one of the few black playwrights who were praised for their theatrical practice, and whose plays were certified at the time as great in their own right. His mode of theatre, influenced by a sense of urgency and black consciousness ideals, gained global authenticity. The notion of universal value as a yardstick for inclusion in the canon cannot be applied to his plays. The *normalization* (to use O'Brien's word) practices of the time can be deconstructed. O'Brien (2001: 104) argues that *Gangsters* stands out from other black resistance plays of the period because it is an “instance of South African resistance integration into a global cultural economy; it is not merely a local work, but one that rereads the global discourse of theatre on its own terms; it is neither South African exceptionalism, nor a merely ‘peripheral’ example of metropolitan genre.” The notion of literary value is not all that stable. Maponya's plays blur the strict cataloguing into canonical and uncanonical on the universal parameter; and prove that immediate experiences can have global reference.<sup>4</sup>

The word *canon* is derived from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning a measuring rod or rule. It was later extended to denote a list or catalogue, and subsequently “applied to the list of books in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament which were designated by religious authorities as the genuine holy scriptures” (Abrams 1999: 28). The term finally found a place in literature and suggests the authoritative list of secular works accepted by literary scholars as genuinely

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<sup>4</sup> While some of Maponya's other plays may not have global references, *Gangsters* alone places him way up the literary ladder. *Hard Times* too was the only novel that guaranteed a place for Charles Dickens among the five great writers included in the great tradition.

written by a particular author (Ibid.). With the institutionalisation of English studies, the literary canon came to be identified with those authors who, by consensus of critics, scholars, and teachers, are great and major writers and whose works can be considered literary classics. The literary canon is a product of a “wavering and unofficial consensus; it is tacit rather than explicit, loose in its boundaries, always subject to changes in its inclusion” (Abrams 1999: 29). This implies that it is also interest bound and therefore open to inclusions and revisions (such as the later admission of some works by women and Third World writers) and that what is considered great at a given time, place, and situation continues to change. The disputable, fluid, and complex process by which certain works are included as worthy and valuable is what is referred to as canon formation.

Works of art have come to have different and ‘changing’ values over the centuries. Gallagher and Lundin (1989: 103) observe that literary scholars during the Renaissance saw “Greek and Roman Epic and drama as the best examples of good literature, modelling the qualities which other literatures should attempt to achieve.” In later years, the classics came to mean literary works of Ancient Greece and Rome, although that was to change, too, as “the classics” refers now to any literary work deemed to be of the highest rank, aesthetic, or excellence (Gallagher and Lundin 1989: 104). Great literary works, which Arnold (1978: 78) calls epochs,<sup>5</sup> thought by several scholars of Western culture to represent some of the finest literatures ever written, constitute what is called “the” literary canon. The Western literary canon – despite the flaws in its framing – exists, but so do other ‘unofficial’ and unrecognised canons. The canon is not in fact the sole preserve of the West because any culture, or country, with a body of literature can develop its own canon and set its criteria for inclusion into the list. A canon is intended to comprise the greatest or highest art, and sets its own bar for acceptance into the list. Fugard, Simon, Coetzee, Paton, and Gordimer are considered great South African writers worthy of study and inclusion in the unofficial canon of South African literature – and perhaps world literature. The criticism of most of the works produced by black artists, and black literature’s tendency to be political, has ensured that relatively few of these have found a place in the list. Black theatre in South Africa under apartheid was reduced to a second-fiddle when compared to the white and commercial theatres in the country. Steadman (1984: 301) maintains that the notion of black theatre is credible despite protestations, criticisms, and rejection by critics and

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<sup>5</sup> Mathew Arnold prefers the word *epoch* when referring to great works of art that are timeless and universal and that explore the specifics of their contexts. See: Arnold, Matthew. (1978) *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*. In: Lodge, D. and Wood, N. (Eds). *Modern Criticism and Theory: a Reader*. New York: Pearson. p. 78.

academicians as to its invalidity (or non-existence per se). Based on the black playwrights he studied, Steadman argues that the black theatre was necessary and credible.<sup>6</sup> Plays by Fugard and Simon were and are considered worthy and artistic enough to be canonized in the manner that they dealt with issues; in that they summoned readers and audiences; and have continued critical interest. Fugard is a significant and honoured South African playwright, considered among the worthy (if not the best) in the theatre canon of the country. Black playwrights such as Maponya have not easily fit into the theatre canon because as blacks and so-called victims of apartheid, their plays were regarded to be limited to the black consciousness and resistance project. Maponya's *Gangsters*, and *Dirty Work*, represent a shift in both literary composition and reception at home and abroad. In fact, O'Brien (2001: 103) maintains that the appearance of *Gangsters* in 1984 marked a new South African culture.

A literary binary was established in South Africa and the United States of America between the white professional and commercialised theatre and black political and resistance theatre, although the opposition cannot be sustained in certain cases. The experiences of colonialism affected and shaped the lives of many colonial subjects. The *postcolonial* drama (without the hyphen) developed in many former colonies as an opposition and alternative to conventional drama. These dramas notably challenged the artistic hegemony of the established theatre and canon. In South Africa, for example, black plays such as *Asinamali* by Ngema, *Egoli* (city of gold) by Manaka, and *The Hungry Earth* by Maponya are postcolonial dramas. Wole Soyinka (in Nigeria) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (in Kenya) produced postcolonial works (drama, poetry and novel) in response to the colonial and postcolonial conditions of their various countries. The *post* is used to suggest pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial experiences, and not as a historical marker of a *post-colonial* experience (with the hyphen). Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* (1960), for example, was performed on the eve of Nigeria's independence, and was a biting criticism of the new political elites. Ngugi's *Black Hermit* (1963) was also performed in the year Kenya had its independence, and Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) and Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977) are clearly post-independence plays.

Soyinka and Ngugi also wrote *against* the hegemony of the conventional form of theatre, but their plays found an easy entry into the literary canon of their countries. Unlike Soyinka and Ngugi, or even Amiri Baraka in the US, the creativity of black dramatists in South Africa was

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<sup>6</sup> Ian, Steadman. (1985) *Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. pp. 301-2.

largely limited and hampered by the harsh legislations that restricted all blacks. Individual progress was held back by opposing forces and events such that many black artists could not access reputable institutions and structures, and thus could not acquire the necessary expertise and experience that was to shape and nurture the more recognisable artists. This may not be an adequate ground, however, since there were great playwrights (such as Shakespeare himself) who produced epochs and transformed the stage without the necessary institutional training. Fugard also learnt the ropes on his own without University training, although he had access to theatre facilities in the country. All the same, reducing certain works and elevating others on the ladder of South African literature – particularly dramatic literature – is problematic as the literary canon, for all its importance and place in literary studies, is not a standard and closed entity. Hence, the question of *value*, which informs the selection of some literary works over others has limits, particularly in South Africa.

The major versus minor works binary therefore is not a reality since both playwrights were products of a context that is itself contradictory and complex. Maponya was not the typical black artist of the resistance; and Fugard was not so privileged – even as a white. Fugard’s collaborative plays, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, were as potent in impact and reach as Maponya’s politically-charged plays like *Gangsters* and *The Hungry Earth*. *The Island* and *Gangsters* can be compared in terms of their presentation of universal prison experiences and high-handed state containment. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *Jika* are comparable in the absurdist presentation of survival and the dilemma of transformation and existence (to be or not to be, having the necessary identity or residence papers, or not). Fugard’s *The Coat* and Maponya’s *Dirty Work* are also comparable in their staged experiment of play-making processes (in *The Coat*) and ways of managing subversion and dissent (in *Dirty Work*). Both artists utilised and appropriated Western theatrical models, and creatively merged them with traditional forms. *Gangsters*, for example, went through three crucial revisions, “marking not only a significant rethinking of gender but a strategic shift from the postmodern European dramaturgy to the indigenous political aesthetics of performance poetry” (O’Brien 2001: 103).<sup>7</sup>

As a black man, Maponya was a victim of apartheid and the capitalist system, experience that permeate his art. Fugard was also a victim of system (since the strict laws governed the lives of everybody in the country) and capitalism because he belonged to the poorer and therefore

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<sup>7</sup> The last version of the play, which appeared in 1995 in Maponya’s *Township Plays*, is the one used in the analysis in Chapter five. This version was almost entirely rewritten and appears to be more indigenous than the last two versions because the global appropriations to Beckett’s *Catastrophe* were reduced. See: Anthony, O’Brien. (2001) *Against Normalization*. London: Duke University Press. p. 123.

marginal white class. Fugard is an experienced playwright and director, although he struggled since he had never studied theatre and dropped-out of University of Cape Town to hitchhike north to the Sudan, finally spending a year working on a steamer ship called S.S. Graigaur in East Asia, adventures that constitute his autobiographical play *The Captain's Tiger* (1997). Despite his class, Maponya was a theatrically aware artist with institutional training and the right experiences. Both of these dramatists staged their plays abroad, although their impact and status as playwrights differ (see Chapters 4 and 5). Like Fugard's *The Island*, Maponya's *Gangsters* transcends the specifics of place and engages with universal themes differently. It is a "conscious and self-reflexive reworking of the European radical theatrics of Samuel Beckett and Vaclav Havel" (O'Brien 2001: 103). *The Hungry Earth*, and to some degree *Umongikazi*, also demystified the epic theatre and have associative links with Brecht's *The Measures Taken*.

Maponya is a significant and accomplished dramatist of the struggle because his plays depict a lived experience: they have a direct connection to the life of the black actors and audiences that they are about. The plays' depiction of lived-experience is one of the criteria that Leavis (1948) considers a hallmark of great art. New Historicism (which is the frame of analysis for this study) celebrates great art; it also rejects the balkanisation<sup>8</sup> of works into enclaves of the canonical and non-canonical. Gallagher and Greenblatt (2000: 10) maintain that the practice elevates non-canonical, even non-literary, to the status of good art. (All authors are important and of interest and so should be studied). van Graan (2006: 3) argues that nothing is absolute; and that the measuring rod used to elevate or relegate works in the country is often intimately connected to one's class, exposure to the arts, or lack thereof, education, and experience, and so is not conclusive. The apartheid theatre was segregationist in nature, and so the reception and coverage – in terms of academic and newspaper reviews – of the black plays performed in the townships was discouraging.

### **1.3 Apartheid, state policies and structures of compulsion**

Segregation was an old practice in South Africa. It was at first not restricted to whites versus blacks. In the 1880s and 1890s, even the *Uitlanders* (referring to English-speaking, German, Yiddish, Cantonese, and Gujarati foreigners) were refused citizenship for obvious economic and political reasons by the South African led government of Paul Kruger (Kruger 2013: 9).

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<sup>8</sup> Balkanisation is derived from *balkanise* – which means division into parts or groups. Balkanisation is used here to refer to the strict categorisation of literary works – and thus writers – into major/great (canonical) and minor/lesser (uncanonical) groups.

The situation eventually changed, resulting in the not so comfortable relations between the races. Apartheid is a Dutch and Afrikaans word meaning “apart-ness.” This physical structure was imposed in 1948 with the parliamentary ascendancy of the Nationalist Party, and then in the political system by the new South African government of D.F. Malan. It is a legal form of racial segregation entrenched in the social, political and economic structures of the state from 1948 to 1993, although racial discrimination was practiced by British colonisers in South Africa since 1795 (MacConachie et al. 2010: 506). The British created a separatist system in the nineteenth-century that restricted residence and free movement of races, thus designating certain areas for whites, coloureds, and blacks. Blacks were required to strictly observe this imperial mapping by carrying a pass card at all times. Eventually, all non-whites<sup>9</sup> were stripped of the legal right to vote, to own land, to practice certain professions, and many other basic human rights (MacConachie et al 2010: 506). These colonial policies were strengthened in 1948 and justified in the name of apartheid. Apartheid implies separate development and opportunities between the racial groups in the country. It was a race-based system “made legal through legislation, and justified in the name of defending the West from Communism” (Ngeokovane 1989: 85).

Acts and policies were formulated, promulgated, and imposed in order to maintain the white privileged status quo and to control race relations. These draconian policies included Bantu Education Act (Act 47 of 1953); Immorality Amendment Act (Act 21 of 1950); Suppression of Communism Act (Acts 44 of 1950; 24 of 1967; 2 of 1972); Group Areas Act (Act 41 of 1957); Bantu Authorities Act (Act 68 of 1951); Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (Act 49 of 1954); Terrorism Act (Act 83 of 1962); Natives Resettlement Act (Act 19 of 1954); Unlawful Organisations Act (Act 34 of 1960); and the amended Publication Act (Act 18 of 1978). These acts/policies are examined in light of their effects on the non-white population in the analysis of the select plays (see Chapters 4 and 5). Most of these laws from 1948 on are amendments of old separatist laws. There was legislation from 1856 such as the Masters and Servants Act (1856); Mines and Works Act (Act 12 of 1911); Native Affairs Act (1920); Representation of Blacks Act (Act 12 of 1936); and Electoral Laws Amendment Act (1940) (South African History Online 2016). The Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act, the Immorality Act, and the Suppression of Communism Act empowered the regime’s “racial segregation in private as well as public life while attempting to disable mass opposition” in any way the state can (Kruger 2013: 58-9).

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<sup>9</sup> The country was divided along racial lines: a) *whites*, referring to all Europeans; b) *blacks*, also called Bantus; c) *coloureds*, people of mixed race; and d) *Asians*, comprising Indians, Pakistanis and Chinese

The laws from 1948 on were so compulsive that they reversed the existing urbanisation and assimilation in the country, and consolidated economic gaps and socio-political differences – drawing a marked binary line between the whites and non-whites in the country. Townships such as Sophiatown, New Brighton, and Soweto were created to accommodate and cater for non-whites who were moved out of the big cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg. Acts such as the Group Areas Act of 1957 were created – tightened over time – and enforced to ensure compliance (see Chapters 4 and 5). Hendrik Verwoerd<sup>10</sup> considered townships such as Sophiatown as the “greatest threat to Western civilisation in Africa” (Kruger 2005: 70). This urban enclave, like many other townships around the country, was the hub of vibrant social, intellectual and cultural activities.<sup>11</sup> Sophiatown was considered as “a ‘black spot’ under the Group’s Areas Act and slated for demolition from 1955” (Kruger 2013: 60). It was a highly multiracial – thus more international and cosmopolitan than the state’s ‘big cities’ – township famous for poverty, unsanitary conditions, insecurity, rebellion, and overcrowding (Kruger 2005: 70). This (in a way) explains the forced removal of its residents and demolition of the largely make-shift houses making up the township (see Chapter 4).<sup>12</sup> In *Boesman and Lena*, Fugard re-enacts this forced-removal. It is also animated in writings by “Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, and Nadine Gordimer, among others, and music by Matshikiza ranging from bebop to the musical King Kong (1959)” (Kruger 2013: 60).<sup>13</sup>

Africans<sup>14</sup> considered not fit for the suburbs, and so without the right papers, were also moved and contained in the reserves, known later as Bantustans (Ngeokovane 1989: 87; Jibril 2015: 121). The reserves at the time served as labour pools for the mainly Boer farmers and white mining executives, thus entrenching a capitalist system that divided the people based on their roles<sup>15</sup> and contribution to the state (see Chapter 5). The draconian apartheid policies in place “aided the expansion of Afrikaner capital and an Afrikaans labour aristocracy, which depended on the labour reserve of unskilled Africans, even as it made permanent African

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<sup>10</sup> Hendrik Verwoerd was an Afrikaner ideologue, the then minister of Bantu Affairs, and later Prime Minister.

<sup>11</sup> There were artists like Bloke Modisane and Lewis Nkosi, political activists and communists like the famous Dr Xuma and J.B. Marks, entrepreneurs of all sorts, vibrant shebeens, city workers, outlaws and *tsotsis*.

<sup>12</sup> The forced-removal started on 9 February 1955 and lasted for over eight years. Despite international protests, roughly 60,000 non-whites were removed by intimidating armed soldiers. The exclusively white town of Triomf (Triumph) was built on the rubble remains of Sophiatown.

<sup>13</sup> The Publication and Entertainment Control Board (1963-93) banned the circulation of Sophiatown literature in 1966, although it was partly restored in 1986. See: Loren Kruger (2013: 103) *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing and Building Johannesburg*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 60-1.

<sup>14</sup> The word is used in this context to refer to native blacks.

<sup>15</sup> In apartheid South Africa, roles were not entirely cut-off from race/colour. In fact, it was the defining factor. There were two obvious classes – the *bourgeois* (mostly whites; there were poor whites) and *proletariat* (blacks). There were sub-classes in between.

residence in the cities increasingly difficult” (Kruger 2005: 70). The pass law (an old system that predates the institutionalisation of apartheid) regulated rural-urban migration, and helped contained non-whites in designated areas. The state’s security branch was empowered under the Internal Security Act (Act 32 of 1979) and the Police Act (Act 16 of 1979) to enforce compliance and manage dissent, in the arts or political space, and to protect the interest of the whites. Apartheid categorised people and determined their place in the society, forcing them to carry identification cards specifying their race. It illegalised interracial marriages, sexual and social relations across the colour bar, and segregated in the use of amenities and facilities (restrooms, swimming pools, restaurants, hospitals, theatres, and schools), all captured by one state act or the other (MacConachie *et al.* 2010; Kruger 2005). It also shunted the blacks into homelands.

The word *homeland* has a strong resonance in South Africa. Walder (2012: 59) maintains that the homeland system is truly “one of the fundamental principles of apartheid, where indeed it differed from earlier forms of segregation, to stress the need to give the various black peoples of the subcontinent the opportunity of preserving and developing ‘national’ identities.” It is a “key part of the ideology of apartheid – proposed by thinkers like Conje – as it was gradually introduced after the 1948 elections” (Walder 2012: 59). The state believed that blacks “were to be encouraged to live in areas considered for many years their places of origin, broadly speaking those areas of African residence laid down by the Land Act (1913), and moreover that those areas should become self-sufficient, self-governing ethno-national states”(Walder 2012: 59). As feared by the natives, the system finally denied them other rights such as the basic “right to vote, work, or reside, in those parts of the country *not* their official homeland” (Walder 2012: 59).

MacConachie *et al.* (2010: 376) comment that even the so-called homelands where the blacks should ideally live a free life “had separate governing bodies and ‘anti-communist’ laws were passed to outlaw all political protests or opposition to the government and its policies.” It was clear to the masses that dissent in all shapes would not be tolerated, and so those who chose to subvert the state seem to have accepted their eventual fate. The laws were so many and so rigid that it was difficult, if not impossible, for non-whites to stay out of trouble – and trouble meant fine, jail term, exile, or death (see Chapters 4 and 5). The forced-removal of roughly over three million people from Sophiatown from 1955, the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 where 69 unarmed protesters were killed and roughly 18,000 arrested, and the reports of the



human right abuses during the Soweto Uprising of 1976, in addition to protests<sup>16</sup> at home and abroad, finally forced the United Nations to place an embargo on arms sales to South Africa (MacConachie et al. 2010: 506). The situation in South Africa reached its peak in the 1980s, and other nations participated through political, economic, and cultural boycotts. A sense of stability was attained in 1990 when the National Party formally renounced apartheid. Nelson Mandela (1918-2013), who was imprisoned on Robben Island from 1963 to 1990, eventually became the first black president in South Africa.<sup>17</sup> Experiences of apartheid manifested both in the political and literary space. South African drama, from Herbert Dhlomo (1903-1956) to for instance Fugard and Maponya, depicts these experiences and legislations, and their effect on the largely non-white population in the country. The history of the drama is one of place, cultural and class affiliation, protest, resistance, love, transcendence, and the individual's will to survive in a void.

#### **1.4 A Survey of landmark periods and figures of South African drama**

South African drama started with multiple modes of performances, which were unrecognised and begging authority, during the partial enactment of the country as a nation in 1910 (Kruger 2005: 1).<sup>18</sup> Kruger (2005: 19-20) classifies the theatre that evolved from 1910 into two broad, but influential categories: i) theatre of *testimony* (protest/resistance form) with Fugard, Kani, and Simon; and ii) *political* theatre with groups and movements such as the Communist Party (1930s-1940s), the Black Consciousness Movement (1960s-1970s), and United Democratic Front (in the 1980s).<sup>19</sup> South African drama has a distinctive form and history; it is a mighty melting pot that blends many theatrical traditions. This is argued by Walder (2003: 2) in his discussion of Fugard's theatre. The drama is so distinct that it is rooted "between and within practices, forms, and institutions variously and contentiously associated with Europe, Africa, and America, and – to complicate standard oppositions – African America" (Kruger 2005: 14).

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<sup>16</sup> In 1952, 13 newly independent Asian and African nations protested to the United Nations to help bring an end to the crisis in South Africa.

<sup>17</sup> Mandela was arrested in 1956, alongside 156 ANC members, and eventually sentenced to life imprisonment. See: Loren, Kruger (2013) *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing and Building Johannesburg*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Loren Kruger notes that there were debates as to whether these performances could be regarded as dramatic and theatrical. Similar modes of performances in other parts of Africa are not regarded as drama by theorists and ethnographers like Ruth Finnegan and Graham Furniss, since they lack (as is argued) all the elements of Aristotelian drama – especially plot. These performances, however, possess many dramatic features. MacConachie *et al.* (2010) categorise them as non-literate dramas, although they argue that these forms existed before the literate/written/western form.

<sup>19</sup> There were other sub-groups, movements and theatres, as shown in this thesis. Kruger's categorisation is not therefore exhaustive, although the groups she identifies had an exemplary impact and influence.

South African artists were introduced to the formal theatre through missionary activities and this equipped and enabled them to react to state legislations, in part by establishing the protest tradition in the country. Missionaries, particularly Reverend Father Bernard Huss, introduced black South Africans to the social and pedagogical uses of theatre (Peterson 1990: 37). Apart from instituting racist beliefs, the missionary theatre also taught Christian and civilised ideals. Significantly, it served a political and social function, and this allowed the oppressed people to appropriate and reformulate its form and content (Peterson 1990: 38). Alternative historical narratives that negated manipulation and governmental control finally emerged to promote political and radical consciousness in the theatre of the country. Boal (2008: 1-2) maintains that the relation between art and politics is an old one – dating back to Aristotle, or perhaps long before. He also maintains that art puts before us “a vision of the world in transformation and therefore is inevitably political insofar as it shows the means of carrying out that transformation or of delaying it” (Boal 2008: 2). South African black artists, from the 1930s, pursued this transformative vision.

Herbert Dhlomo (1903-1956) is recognised, and so canonised today, as the pioneer of modern black drama.<sup>20</sup> His play *Moshoeshoe* (performed in 1938, published in 1985) set the stage for black drama in the country (see Chapter 5). There were bits of performances that were part of black urban culture (concerts and sketches) and adaptations of European dramas by educated blacks since the 1920s (Kruger 2005; Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1984). English drama was common, as in Shakespeare and Shaw, and shaped the “secondary and tertiary education of white and black elites, including men like Dhlomo and Mandela, as well as Sepamla, during the relatively Anglophile period (1910-50) of Union in the British Commonwealth” (Kruger 2005: 14). Afrikaans literary theatre also operated around the same time (1920-1940). It is similar in many ways to its counterpart Anglophone theatre, and also translated and adapted plays by Ibsen, Lessing, and Shakespeare. The notable Afrikaans writers of the time were N.P van Wyk Lou, W.A. de Klerk, Bartho Smith, P.G. du Plessis and Chris Barnard.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Modern black drama in this context refers to works that are concerned with the African experience, education, ideas, and culture – a tool of propaganda. Herbert Dhlomo founded the Bantu Dramatic Society probably around 1933. The exact date it was founded remains unsettled: while Kruger (2005) says that it started in 1934, Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984) note that it started in 1933, and Peterson (1990) believes that it was founded in 1932. Peterson singles out the role of Bernard Haus in the making of black drama before Dhlomo.

<sup>21</sup> These writers celebrated Afrikaner nationalism and interest. Klerk and Smith, however, dissented by criticising the racism and policies of the day, and although they were denied production they still enjoyed more privileges than other dissenting artists in the country. Whites – mainly Jewish – political dissidents included communists such as Joe Slovo and Ruth First. See: Loren, Kruger (2005) *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910*. London: Routledge. p.p. 14, 86, 96, 97.

The black drama of the 1930s was aimed at self-representation and re-construction, as seen in the tribal sketches<sup>22</sup> that reconstructed “native custom in dramatic form” (Peterson 1990: 40). Mission schools<sup>23</sup> and churches were also used to achieve this cultural re-presentation. This allowed for the reconstruction of the conflicts, myth, cultures and history of the *tribal* people. The need to reverse this reconstruction through re-education and reorientation of the blacks was stressed by the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s. This movement drew a lot of “inspiration from international trends derived from communism, socialism, and Ghandian civil disobedience in the earlier period ... American black power movements and postcolonial African states formation in the later”<sup>24</sup> (Kruger 2013: 9). The re-construction process also had a retraditionalisation objective, and explains the government’s interest in segregation, which was “grounded in European interests, the desire of a compliant labour reserve” (Kruger 2013: 41). The tribal sketches that were part of the black drama of the 1930s allowed the blacks to come to terms with their problems, and were appropriated to serve a more conscientisation and liberation roles. The most famous groups at the time were Lucky Stars and African Own Entertainers (both two founded in 1929) and the Darktown Strutters (active by 1931) (Kruger 2005: 27). Inexperience, poor capital, and tight legislation pushed these black artists into the arms of white benefactors and impresarios like Bertha Slosberg,<sup>25</sup> who then seized control of the shows and determined their content (Kruger 2005: 31-2).

It was around this period (at the height of the Emancipation Centenary Celebration of 1934) that Dhlomo campaigned for plays for and about black suffering and aspirations – a modern black drama – but had to grapple with the “oppositions between elite and popular, imported and indigenous, literate and oral practices that traversed the terrain mapped out by New Africans” (Kruger 2005: 46). Kruger (2005: 47) states that despite these challenges, Dhlomo and his colleagues tried to “negotiate the interface between the imported and the local, European and African, urban and rural performance practices.” Dhlomo’s play *Cetshwayo* (written 1936-37 and published 1985) demonstrates his ability to manage the foreign influence and produce a historical black drama. There are records of drama before Dhlomo and the mission (and later) appropriated sketches of the 1930s with productions like Stephen

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<sup>22</sup> Short representations of customary (mostly Zulu) rituals.

<sup>23</sup> Kruger (2005) lists Lovedale, Marianhill, and Adams College as examples of the mission schools of the time.

<sup>24</sup> Mohandas Gandhi was an Indian anti-imperial dissident who lived in South Africa before the Anglo-Boer war of 1902. See: Loren, Kruger (2013) *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing and Building Johannesburg*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>25</sup> Bertha Slosberg was a talent scout who worked with the Lucky Stars and Darktown Strutters. She was the first white female *impresario* to present black artists in South Africa in the 1930s. As a Jew who experienced racism in Russia, she to a certain degree crossed the racial line by working closely with black artists and adopting a 12-year-old black street singer, Ou Bles.

Black's *Damaged Goods* (1917). Zakes Mda (in Kruger 2005: 48) argues that the credit for establishing a dramatic tradition and political theatre in South Africa should go to Stephen Black,<sup>26</sup> and not Fugard.

The rise in cultural activities in urban enclaves like Sophiatown, Soweto, and New Brighton – to mention a few of the most vibrant centres – led to the emergence of more metropolitan, culturally-aware and vibrant artists and audiences. The suburbs became rallying centres and havens for dissident activists and drama groups. Kruger (2005: 70) notes that “the syncretic performance practices that had characterised urban African culture in Johannesburg, Durban and smaller centres like Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth in the 1930s were in the 1950s concentrated in Sophiatown,” a marked shift in the history of the drama in the country. These performances were received and celebrated by a largely non-white audience, who identified more with the characters and events enacted (see Chapter 4). It was the same story with other black plays staged in townships such as Soweto, which was already a volatile political space before the emergence of black consciousness artists like Maponya and Manaka in the 1960s and 1970s (see Chapter 5).

The concern of the theatre in the 1940s and 1950s turned towards international socialism and class conflict as against the plays of the 1930s that were about urban life and culture. Kruger (2005: 71) traces that the Bantu People's Theatre of the 1940s initiated this shift, followed by the works of the communist theatre veteran, Guy Routh.<sup>27</sup> Gaur Radebe's *The Rude Criminal* (1950) also emerged and was important for two things: because it was among the first plays to deal with the infamous pass law system and because it attempted to shatter the fourth-wall, thus anticipating what was to become a normal practice with groups like Workshop '71 with *Survival* (1976) and the Serpent Players with *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972). The theatre of defiance notably emerged in the 1940s and 1950s with the African National Theatre (ANT), under whose support Dhlomo's *The Workers* (1941) and *The Pass* (1943) and Radebe's *Rude Criminal* (1950) were successfully performed (Kruger 2005: 72). The defiance theatre was somewhat subdued with the electoral victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948.

The new apartheid state could not completely end the township performances, though it made attempts to cripple the agitations in the theatre. The townships were particularly notorious for resisting state laws and policies. Instead, well-meaning liberals like Ian Bernhardt, Harry

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Black produced good farces and melodramas in early twentieth-century South Africa. See: Loren Kruger (2005) *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910*. London: Routledge. p. 47

<sup>27</sup> Guy Routh later left the country for violating the Suppression of Communism Act (1950). See: Loren Kruger (2005) *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910*. London: Routledge. p. 71.

Bloom (writer of *King Kong*), and Alfred Herbert – like Solberg in the 1930s – developed an enthusiastic interest in the theatre. The Union Artists (founded in 1952 by Alfred Herbert and Ian Bernhardt) evolved and was known for producing *King Kong* (1959). African Theatre Workshop (also known as the Circle Players) was founded in the late 1950s by Fugard, with members such as Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane, Nat Nakasa, Zakes Mokae, Stephen Moloi, Don Poho, Ken Gampu, Cornelius Mbaso, and two women, Sheila Fugard and Gladys Sibisa. The group worked collaboratively using a method-acting style<sup>28</sup> and was known for *No-Good Friday* (1958) and *Nongogo* (1959). But although The Union Artists and African Theatre Workshop did not work together, they shared the same Rehearsal Room at Dorkay House in Johannesburg.<sup>29</sup> The African National Theatre (ANT) and African Theatre Workshop (ATW) had amateur actors<sup>30</sup> and did not receive state subsidy unlike corporations such as the South African Broadcasting Commission (SABC) and National Theatre Organisation (NTO).

State-subsidised and controlled institutions like the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC, 1941-1962) and National Theatre Organisation (NTO, 1947-1962) were empowered to justify black-white binary opposition and white supremacy (Kruger 2005: 73).<sup>31</sup> And then in 1962, NTO was finally replaced by “the new provincial Performing Arts Council (PACS): Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT), Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB), Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State (PACOFs), and Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC)” (Kruger 2005: 96). PACS produced few South African English plays like Fugard’s *People are Living there* (1969) and many original Afrikaans plays such as N.P. van Wyk Louw’s *Die Pluimsaad waai ver* (The plumed Seed Blows Far, PACT 1966), P.G du Plessis’ *Siener in die Suburbs* (Seer in the Suburbs, PACT 1971), and Chris Barnard’s *Die Rebelle van Lafras Verwey* (PACT 1974) and revived<sup>32</sup> plays of the 1930s (Kruger 2005: 97-8). These institutions and artists succeeded – in a way – in promoting Afrikaner nationalism, and were able to garner governmental support unlike the non-Afrikaans protest artists and groups (Kruger 2005: 97). Afrikaans artists were also exempted from censorship. The 1960s witnessed the production of Fugard’s *The Blood Knot* (1961) and *Boesman and Lena* (1969). Generally, these plays do not nurture an Afrikaner ideology, though they “share with their

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<sup>28</sup> This method is believed to have started with Stanislavski, and sophisticated by Strasberg.

<sup>29</sup> The offices of African Musical and Drama Association (AMDA) were also at the premises of Dorkay House.

<sup>30</sup> The players in the groups were amateur because they had to combine acting with domestic and menial jobs in order to make ends meet.

<sup>31</sup> SABC and NTO accommodated indigenous slots and programmes using African languages.

<sup>32</sup> The Commission of Inquiry (1977) observes that the revival of the plays was part of an attempt to absorb the private groups that had been in operation since the 1930s. Loren Kruger (2005) *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910*. London: Routledge. p. 98.

Afrikaans counterparts the sentimental garrulity and the underdog types of melodrama” and merely sympathise with the underdog without “indicting the agents causing the suffering” (Kruger 2005: 98).

A new and vociferous anti-apartheid theatre that was shaped by developments in the country evolved from the 1960s. Playwrights and theatre practitioners as varied as Zakes Mda, Gcina Mhlophe, Mbongeni Ngema, Barney Simon, and Matsemela Manaka, as well as Groups like the Serpent Players, Handspring Puppet Company, Junction Avenue Theatre Company, and Workshop ’71 then emerged (MacConachie et al. 2010; Kavanagh 1985; Hauptfleisch *et al.* 1984; Walder 2003).<sup>33</sup> These playwrights, practitioners, and troupes set the stage for the more radical black consciousness plays of the 1970s and 1980s (see Chapter 5). Percy Mtwa, Duma Ndlovu, Mbongeni Ngema, Zakes Mda, Mzwandile Maqina, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya (especially Maponya and Manaka) were so explosive that they were hardly seen beyond community halls such as Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) in Soweto (see Chapter 5). Playwrights from the 1960s on created anti-establishment plays that openly criticised the state, thereby disrupting the stability of the regime (MacConachie *et al.* 2010: 507). Anti-apartheid plays such as Workshop ’71’s *Survival*<sup>34</sup> endured censorship and played at the University of Witwatersrand and Soweto before and briefly after the Soweto uprising (Kruger 2013: 118). The play was received by “audience and the police as part of the uprising with the latter claiming that the play had the power to incite revolution” (Kruger 2013: 118-9).

Like *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* – from which the Workshop ’71 players partly drew their methods – *Survival* was created in “workshops out of the life narratives of black male workers” (Kruger 2013: 119). *Survival* is a large scale “politicization in response to everyday life under apartheid” and was the “most powerful piece of testimonial theatre from the period immediately before and after the uprising, but it is not the only one” (Orkin, in Kruger 2013: 119). Anti-apartheid resistance also featured prominently in fictional works such as Miriam Tlali’s *Muriel at Metropolitan* and *Amandla* (power), Junction Avenue Company Theatre’s *Sophiatown*, and Sipho Sepamla’s *Mzi* and *Ride on the Whirlwind* (Kruger 2013). The post-Soweto period (after 1976) heralded “the uprising not only of a new generation of political

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<sup>33</sup> These groups worked collaboratively and experimentally through the workshop system used by Fugard in the late 1950s. Dennis Walder (2003) recounts that most of the active theatres used improvisation, mime, dance, and document.

<sup>34</sup> The play was developed in workshop by Fana Kekana, Selaelo Don Maredi, Themba Ntinga, Seth Siband, and Robert McLaren (aka Robert Mshengu Kavanagh). See: Loren, Kruger (2013) *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing and Building Johannesburg*. New York: Oxford University Press.

activists but also... cultural institutions that would play an important role in resistance against apartheid” (Kruger 2013: 93). The Space Theatre in Cape Town (although it emerged in the early 1970s, before the uprising) and Market Theatre in Johannesburg (from the 1980s on) provided safe havens and support for politically dangerous plays such as Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona’s *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972) and *The Island* (1973), Fugard’s *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (1972), Simon, Ngema, and Mtw’a’s *Woza Albert!* (1980), and Simon’s *Born in the RSA* (1985) (see Chapters 3, 4, and 5). The Market Theatre became Johannesburg’s prominent anti-apartheid cultural institution by 1986. The theatre’s reputation “at home and abroad rested on its staging of immediate and urgent responses to the apartheid present” (Kruger 2013: 146). The notion of *urgency* – which is common in the black dramas staged in the townships and the political plays performed in the liberal confines of the Market Theatre – hinged on the idea of using theatre as a political vehicle.

### **1.5 Art, social responsibility and politics**

As representatives of their age, artists are expected to depict their contexts by taking part in the making of their societies or periods or risk irrelevance. Representation, as a form of social responsibility, is expected in the arts since it is a site of protest and social action. Artists are usually at their best when they commit themselves and utilise materials from their societies (Arnold 1978: 81). Arnold believes that the critical mind, one that utilises materials from the society, is better than the creative, which relies on creativity and the romantic representation of events without recourse to historical materials.<sup>35</sup> The urge to write about societal needs and travail is in fact not new to the arts, and diverse artists have written about events differently. The theatre for example was and is used to politically incite the people, what Marxist literary criticism terms a weapon for the liberation of the proletariat, as well for a pedagogical, liberal and humanistic role. Its function depends on a writer’s focus, literary and political leanings.

The social perception of every society reveals two conflicting forces at work: the oppressor and oppressed, bourgeois and proletariat, ruler and ruled, rich and poor. The artist takes a side depending on the dynamics and workings of his society. He/she writes about what he sees, his take on events, and, more importantly, his place within his culture. His importance as an element of change cannot be overemphasised. The rational artist chooses his image and ideas carefully depending on his ideology, aware that there is certainly another side to a story and that there is no absolute truth in writing. The ideology he espouses determines the impact of

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<sup>35</sup> Matthew Arnold (1978) prefers the term *epochs* when referring to great works of literature that are timeless and produced through the interaction of the critical and creative mind.

his work and his place in history. The context of his writing and production is a crucial factor in this exercise. He either conforms to the status quo and survives the dangerous time – at the expense of ‘uplifting’ the people – or defies the ominous possibilities of opposing the state: ban, incarceration, exile, or even death. Fugard conformed because he wanted to get his plays performed, and not banned; aware that it is only when a play reaches its audience that it can have any political impact. Critics have misread his conformity for lack of strong commitment despite the success of his plays at home and abroad as political plays of great value. It is this misinterpretation that reduces his plays to the humanistic and universal (see Chapter 4).

Hodgins (1967: 28) queries his detachment and liberal position. The claims by commentators and critics such as Mphahlele (1967) that he committed an act of omission by identifying that a situation is bad without suggesting ways out of the man-made problem came a bit early, and cannot apply to Fugard’s collaborative political plays of the early 1970s. Fugard’s plays were rejected by several blacks for not being committed enough. They were also misunderstood by whites who felt betrayed and unable to identify with the characters he (and his collaborators) created. Recent studies of the plays, and his work in the theatre, show that they were at least potent because they generated the right political result as alternative anti-establishment works despite their evasive political statements (Olaiya 2008; Cima 2007; Diala 2006; Burns 2002; Davis 2013; Walder 2015). The reception and interpretation of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* cannot therefore be compared with those of, say, *The Blood Knot*, *Boesman and Lena*, or *Nongogo* – which are clearly less politically-charged.

Maponya, on the other hand, has been applauded for his committed and radical use of theatre; he was one of the prominent anti-apartheid black voices (Steadman 1994; Kavanagh 1985; Moorosi 1997). His theatre of resistance (not protest this time around) emphasise redirection, mobilisation and radical action. Maponya’s message was direct, almost always talking about the oppressed class and the forces keeping it down. Influenced by both the American version of the Black Consciousness Movement and the South African Black Consciousness model, many black artists in South Africa tried to conscientise the people – to reorient the proletariat and suggest ways out of the prevailing situation. These black dramatists used the theatre more politically and ideologically than their white counterparts like Fugard and Simon. The post-Soweto black plays of Maponya and Manaka were also more resistant and urgent than Gibson Kente’s works. Kente was an exception among black artists because most of his musicals and plays – especially the early ones – were geared towards entertainment and commercialisation rather than politics (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1984: 144).



Maponya – as most of his critics and commentators reveal – explored the politico-economic relations of social life, and through that painted the problems of racism, apartheid, and black life in general. His plays are a refraction of his society: the structures of apartheid, history, social institutions, and the class system. A general study of literature over the centuries shows that artists chose what to write about; and at times hardly represented their own social classes. Maponya’s social class has largely determined his allegiance and ideology. With Fugard, his own social class plays a far less prominent role because some of his plays, *No-Good Friday*, *Nongogo*, *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, for example, reveal that he has put himself to the service of poor, downtrodden blacks rather than his own class of poor whites. He has also written about poor whites – thus staying in his own social class – as in *Hello and Goodbye* and *People are Living There*; and about coloureds in *Boesman and Lena*. Fugard, Simon, Paton, Gordimer, and Coetzee all championed the cause of the common man – white, black or coloured – in his or her own way. Liberation from the grip of colonialism and unjust laws forms the basis for protest writing worldwide; this was the preoccupation of writers under apartheid. Some anti-apartheid writers were satisfied with a gesture of protest, while others, particularly the black writers, stopped at nothing to attain their desired goals.

The literary culture of resistance generally applies to black artists. Resistance works produced by black artists in South Africa were/are thought of as political works parading socio-political woes and not as successful literature utilising the form of theatre. Generally, many literary works (novels, plays and poems) from South Africa have been criticised for their lack of creativity despite the limiting contexts of their production and content. Ndebele (1991; 1984), Coetzee (1992), Nkosi (1967) and Attwell (1993), however, have different positions and arguments. In “Turkish Tale and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction,” Ndebele maintains that during apartheid, black South African writers wrote political statements instead of great literatures. He singles out Sipho Sepamla, Miriam Tlali and Muthobi Mutloatse as examples of black writers who harmed the reputation of South African literature. And in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991), Ndebele emphasises that these writers (such as the three he listed in his earlier work) sacrificed the aesthetics that define the literary in pursuit of political ends (Ndebele 1991 85).

Literature appears not to have found a place in the development of contemporary African culture in South Africa. Instead... literature has located itself in the field of politics. And it has done so without discovering and defining the basis of its integrity as an art form. Its form, therefore, has not developed, since to be fictional or poetic was to be political. (Ndebele 1991: 85)

Mukhuba (n.d), in his “a Critique of Njabulo Ndebele’s Criticism of Protest Fiction,” argues that Ndebele’s accusation is “largely unfair because his own fictional works cannot really be differentiated from those which he criticises for their overtly political content.” He also notes that the distinction on theoretical grounds alone cannot hold because there is no standard rule, or school, that literary composition must adhere to. Nkosi (in Reckwitz 1999: 150) maintains that works by black South African authors fall short of the literary position because they are filled with “journalistic facts” paraded as fiction. (Nkosi was not, however, referring to drama in this context). Coetzee (in Reckwitz 1999: 150) also stresses the journalistic mode of these literatures, arguing that the works do not possess a “structure in which there is some sense of intelligence,” thereby pointing to what Ndebele (1991: 35) refers to as a “literature of surface meaning,” one where roles (justice and injustice, right and wrong, black and white) are given a priori. Coetzee further echoes Ndebele (1984) by singling out Sipho Sepamla’s *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (1981) and Wally Serote’s *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981) as apt examples of poor novelists.

Soyinka (n.d) also criticises the apartheid era works for their lack of depth, but observes that artistic fineness was actually achieved in consolation with a strident socio-political concern. Attwell (1993: 11) argues that the need, then, to bear witness and tell the South African story informed the writers’ style. He observes that this was the common practice in both the white liberal tradition, with Olive Schreiner and Nadine Gordimer, and the black tradition, from the protest works of Sol Plaatje to the radical works of the sixties and seventies (Attwell 1993: 12). Attwell however argues that these works possess elements of modernist experimentalism and so should not be reduced to flat forms of realism, without a complex structure. For Watts (1989: 17), the bearing witness syndrome determined the shape and content of South African literature. Reckwitz (1999: 152) believes that it applies to both prose and poetry. Sepamla and Serote wrote alongside dramatists such as Maponya and Manaka and so the pattern of *writing about place* equally applies to them. Sachs (in Reckwitz 1999: 152) generalises the damage caused by the political limitation of the literatures (prose, drama and poetry) to a “weapon in the struggle” when he argues that their concern with politics led to their poor quality and the impoverishment of the arts, thus leading to mere solidarity from critics rather than standard criticism. South African writers at the time were rated as “politically correct” instead of urged to “improve the quality of their work” (Sachs, in Reckwitz 1999: 152).

These harsh, and sometimes unwarranted, criticisms did not stop the writers from engaging in the protest project. Sachs’ claim (in Reckwitz 1999: 152) that the works have a narrow theme

and are about “the old and the new” cannot apply to all the writers. Fugard is an exceptional playwright who balanced the artistic and political. Many anti-apartheid artists in the country had to deal with the choice of style and the dilemma of crafting either overtly political works or potent fiction. They were put in a spot where their thoughts and what they produced were subject to the dictates of the state. The country’s legislation threatened, and often limited, the writers’ sense of commitment. It also hampered the production of both artistic and politically woven works. Tsiga (2010: x-xi) maintains that artists were put in a tight position:

Writers normally require the necessary climate to harness their experiences and give voice to their inner perception and belief. As an individual in South Africa, however, any writer, especially the black writer, is perpetually locked within the confines of his colour as decreed by the country’s laws. This creates for him unique realities whose daily nagging not only impinge on his consciousness, but also engages him ceaselessly... Any attempt he makes to produce a balanced work is summarily impaired, since the craft is itself subject to the dictates of the intimidating circumstances, and to which it must respond [...].

Fugard’s and Maponya’s literary compositions and performances were threatened by these limiting forces. Their plays are not, however, found to be artistically wanting. The lives that they depict are records of pain, destitution and despair, which make serious moral indictment against the regime. They are records of the horrid situations to which non-whites and activists were subjugated under apartheid. Their staging and publication were not smooth considering the laws put in place to scuttle politics and resistance in the arts (although a bit of protest was overlooked). The Publication Act of 1975, for example, stipulated i) decent content, ii) lack of ridicule, and iii) respect for intersection relations as prerequisite before a work could be staged or published (Coetzee 1992). Artists in the country literarily subverted the regime by using the pen/stage as potential weapon in the cause for liberation. They undermined the laws and policies that would have stalled their artistic protest. The subversive tendencies in Fugard – as in many other artists – had long been there because to choose to write indicting plays and remain in the country at a time as explosive as apartheid is, in itself, not far from expressive rebellion and subversion (see Chapters 3 and 4). His skin colour and leaning was actually not much of a handicap.

The most common theme at the time was race relations; a problem no writer in the apartheid period could fail to depict. Paton (1975: 140) argues that race was “the very stuff of our lives and it is life that is the making of a story.” Black artists were, however, more concerned about liberation and total onslaught of the regime. Their target township audiences were interested

in first “getting their freedom before they [could] even think of non-racialism” (Ndlovu 1987: 6).<sup>36</sup> They tailored their art away from the usual gestures of protest and interracial depiction. Art, for black artists, should serve a singular role – that of the interest of the revolution. This strict political view will be examined in the selected plays, in light of the *call* at the time for art to play a more political, committed, and immediate role in the struggle. Artists who failed to reduce their works to these political parameters were criticised and labelled apolitical. The key tenet at the time was *commitment* – a term which evolves from Marxist criticism. There are many shades of commitment if the word is to be reduced to its literal meaning. It is used in this thesis to refer to the allegiance to a collective cause. In the arts, it is most common to theatre because of theatre’s established role in revolutionary activities; and since it is a genre that easily reaches the common man at the centre of the struggle. The notion of commitment as a political ideology dates back to nineteenth-century Germany and Russia.<sup>37</sup>

Marx and Engels believed that literature should serve the revolutionary cause: rally and speak for the exploited proletariat (Eagleton 1976; Bennet 1979; Frow 1990; Gagnier 2000; Milne 1995). Commitment is considered by African artists such as Soyinka, Mugo and Ngugi as the antithesis of alienation – which is the writer’s detachment from pressing societal needs in pursuit of trivialities (Moorosi 1997: 7). Achebe (1975: 262) also believes that detachment is detrimental to literary creativity.<sup>38</sup> Commitment suggests that the artist has a choice of either aligning with the people or detaching himself, but there is no middle ground during a period of struggle. Micere Mugo (in Moorosi 1997: 7) submits that the artist commits an abominable sin of *commission* when he alienates himself and blames the society for its ills by presenting it negatively; and a sin of *omission* when he wilfully directs his creativity away from societal needs. Artists who chose escapism and alienation battle with the thought of how far they can detach themselves from historical events and prevailing issues. It remains that no work can be produced in a vacuum: the artist must feed from his period, or at least from nature, or ceases to be one. Soyinka (in Moorosi 1997: 9) states that art should reflect, expose, and magnify the decadence and corruption in the society.

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<sup>36</sup> A symposium involving four playwrights, Maishe Maponya, Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Matsemela Manaka, on “South African dramatists and the anti-apartheid struggle”. Duma Ndlovu served as the moderator. It was organised by the Lincoln Centre Theatre on 15 September 1986 shortly after the Woza Afrika! festival of plays written, directed and performed by black artists from South Africa. The deliberations appeared in: Maponya, M. (1987) South African Playwrights. *The New Theatre Review*. 1. pp. 1–8.

<sup>37</sup> This will be traced and examined under the brief survey of theatre history and theory in the next section.

<sup>38</sup> Chinua Achebe maintains that an arrow is useless if it cannot kill its prey. He uses this analogy to refer to the role of writers in society, stating that their duty is to represent their people and culture rather than unimportant issues. See: Chinua Achebe (1975) *Morning yet on Creation Day: Essays*. New York: Anchor Press.

The African writer in a colonial and post-colonial context, unlike his European counterpart, is a social and committed critic who writes with a firm pledge in mind (Achebe 1975). Many of these writers were more interested in reaching out to a largely unsophisticated audiences and readers, and were therefore not so keen about the idea of art for art's sake – artistic excellence and inquiry. The emergence of many political theatres under varied shades such as the avant-garde, theatre of resistance, theatre for development (TFD), guerrilla theatre, workers theatre, theatre of the dispossessed, legislative theatre, and theatre of the oppressed, demonstrate that the concern of politically-oriented artists is on theatre as a tool for change rather than as art. In South Africa under apartheid, the black artist is not completely “different from the man in the ghetto, the oppressed, faceless individual” (Rive, in Moorosi 1997: 12). Black artists in the country were indistinguishable from the masses because they are exponent representatives of the people. Manaka (1987: 6) maintains that these artists were part of the physical struggle because they participated in the boycotts, demonstrations and protests. This was especially so from the 1970s at the height of the resistance in the country.

Apartheid reached its peak in the 1970s and 1980s. The rise of radicalism and militancy was matched by corresponding legislations (while new laws were introduced, existing ones were tightened). The period heightened the call to direct art in the right cause, and artists thought to be passive, conformist, and entertainment driven were criticised for not doing enough. The watchword was *commitment*. Fugard resisted the call, chose to remain a non-commissioned political artist, and pursued a more realistic recreation of events – at least as he and his actors saw and witnessed them. His art was not answerable to the group criticising the presentation of the downtrodden in an absurd situation. Unlike Fugard, Maponya's politics of association (affiliation to the black cause) manifests in his plays. His commentators and critics believe that his commitment to the liberation project affects his work such that his interpretation of events is one-eyed.

Interpretation is an open-ended and cyclical process: it is hard to reduce texts or discourses, whether literary or social, to a single interpretation since they possess the possibility of many other realisations. The concept of meaning, even significance, in literary studies is not all that stable. The *centre* that defines the traditionalist distinction between works can be altered or deconstructed. The text is filled with contradictory meanings, without a fixed *signifier* at the centre (Derrida 1978). Meaning is, therefore, never complete, and never fully realised; but beyond the subject-writer, postponed and differed. Performance studies also presents us with

this problematic. It is pertinent to understand the relevant history, theories, and rudiments, so as to be able to situate playwrights in their right dramatic space and history.

### **1.6 A survey of the history and theories of modern theatre**

MacConachie *et al.* (2010: 3) maintain that there were/are *non-literate* records of drama, oral, ritual and Shamanic performances which predated the formal and written drama; in addition to the many records of religious and civic dramas such as the Mesoamerican performances, commemorative ritual drama in Abydos, Egypt, and the Islamic commemorative mourning and passion dramas, or *Ta'ziyeh*, among the people of Iran and beyond.<sup>39</sup> This thesis is not, however, interested in early non-literate performances, and whether they can qualify as drama in the Western term. This thesis is most concerned with the development of the formal drama, which led to the emphasis on the social and political conditions; as well as the revolutionary development, which also led to the break from the traditional to the postdramatic, postmodern and avant-garde, where the walls separating actors and spectators were torn down.

The first major break away from oppressive traditional theatre started with Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832), who regarded the three-unities – time, place, action – as a prison and a burden on the imagination. Fredrick Schiller (1759-1805) also criticised oppressive theatre rules and turned the attention of critics from classicism to romanticism – a shift “from plot to character” (Carlson 1993: 174). Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) contributed to the development of drama and theory more than any writer in his time; and his works dealt with drama and tragedy in detail (Carlson 1993: 193-4).<sup>40</sup> Hegel examined the place of the actor in theatre, mainly the changing role of his acting and his transition from the use of mask to complete submission to role-play, assimilation of the spirit of the poet (his words and ideas) and the discovery of the *self*, with the actor’s ability to interpret, fill-in gaps, and create (Carlson 1993: 194). This inspired modern and avant-garde performance theorists and artists. The Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinski (1811-1848) is credited as the “first to establish emphasis on the social and political concerns in drama” (Carlson 1993: 240). Belinski wanted a balance between aesthetic and social function in a work. In a *Survey of Russian Literature* (1847) (in Carlson 1993:240), Belinski maintains that “without a doubt art must be, first and

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<sup>39</sup> *Ta'zieh* (Persian) or *Ta'ziye* (Urdu) or *Tazia* (Arabic) means condolence; or the act of comforting a bereaved person who just lost a loved one. It is derived from the root word *aza* (mourning).

<sup>40</sup> Hegel’s critical input on the drama and its theories are contained in his *Aesthetik*. See: Marvin, Carlson (1993) *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*. London: Cornell University Press.

foremost, art – and then only can it be an expression of the spirit and direction of social life during a given period.”

The argument for socio-political content was most pronounced in the nineteenth-century, thus it has more relevance to this thesis. Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889) was at the forefront of this campaign, and was particularly praised by Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) for promoting “scientific materialism, utilitarianism, and social progress” in the society (Carlson 1993: 244). Unlike Belinski, Chernyshevsky regarded the Hegelian aesthetic as weak. Apollon Grigoriev (1822-1864) – who was a more conservative critic of the drama – believed that a great theatre must come from the people (masses) and should actually reflect their collective will.<sup>41</sup> Grigoriev (in Carlson 1993: 245) maintains that the playwright “must be a priest who believes in his god and who for that reason never gives the masses the least hint of insincerity in his worship, who instructs the masses, who puts before them the summit of their own world view.” Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) agreed with Pushkin and Grigoriev that the world should be a reflection of the collective need of the masses. On the contrary, Anton Chekov (1860-1904) argued that the literary artist is not expected to provide answers, but to identify the problems as an unbiased and detached witness. Georges Rodenbach (1855-1898) stated that drama should not be about the people, that it becomes a conduit of propaganda and politics, a parody of art, whenever it is lowered to their level (Carlson 1993: 315).

Despite Chekov and Rodenbach’s anti-people position, drama in the late nineteenth-century turned towards social revolution; it had a good edge with the publication of Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*. The spirit of the revolution informed Hermann Hettner’s (1821-1882) *Das Modern Drama* (1852). As a theorist and historian, Hettner, like Marx and Engels, stated that the modern drama can only be “social and historical” (Carlson 1993: 257). The concern was no longer about kings and princesses – important people – but about the social, political, and emotional needs of spectators. This appeared in the modern drama with its denunciation of classical rules and the celebration of reason and free-will, thus leading to the birth of a true protagonist (a fulcrum) who defies control and predetermined or divine forces. The naturalist theatre then emerged and portrayed contemporary conditions as they were; and eventually the symbolist (with Maurice Maeterlinck – 1862-1949) that was concerned with internal life and its external representation in drama (MacConachie et al. 2010). The concern with individuals across the social strata, and with social revolution, was matched by the transformation of the actor and stage.

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<sup>41</sup> The Russian Apollon Grigoriev shared similar view with Pushkin and Wagner. Ibid.

The transformation of the actor, like the drama, also had a long history – going as far back as the nineteenth-century – and theoretical backing. Hegel, Grigoriev, and Belinski agreed that the modern actor is a transformed subject, who interprets as well as creates. Pavel Mocholav (1800-1848) shared this view, searched for the potentialities of the actor, and looked-out for “spiritual profundity and flowing imagination” as benchmarks of great acting – a practice that “reached its most famous incarnation in Stanislavski” (Carlson 1993: 245). The oppressive theatre of rules was ultimately abandoned in the twentieth-century; the audience that once make up the theatre was lost as well. And to regain its lost glory, theorists and dramatists had to renounce dogmatic drama theories, literalism, and elevate the actor (Styan 1975; Carlson 1993; MacConachie et al. 2010). Georg Fuchs<sup>42</sup> (in Carlson 1993: 320) presents that the actor should be given the chance to grow and not be pulled back from exploring the stage.

The period from 1930 to 1950 is instrumental to the development of Modern dramatic theory because of the appearance of the major works of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) and Stanislavski from the 1930s and 1940s. This period is actually crucial to this study. Brecht believed that the theatre could be reworked to serve a more social use; Artaud insisted that the primacy of the text should be abandoned. Both playwrights had an impact on the avant-garde drama. Avant-garde “was originally a French military term referring to the forward line of soldiers – those leading the charge into battle,” and so avant-garde artists saw themselves as vanguards of artistic progress, a group fighting bourgeois propriety, breaking frontiers in the arts, and revolutionising the theatre (MacConachie et al. 2010: 354). It should be noted that Stanislavski already was a name in theatre before the 1930s, although his works only appeared between 1930 and 1940.<sup>43</sup> Brecht’s epic theatre revolutionised the stage; it had a clear political dimension, emphasising reason instead of empathy. Marx’s ideas – which are evident in Brecht’s works – shaped many of the major concerns of the period, especially the prevailing oppression and corruption, and were particularly helpful in the development of this new political theatre.

Brecht’s epic form differed from many traditional theatre forms. He established a distinction between “the emotional response to drama and the rational response to the epic,” and that between “aesthetic and political theatre” (Carlson 1993: 383). Brecht insisted that his use of

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<sup>42</sup> This idea is contained in his book, *Revolution in the Theatre* (1959).

<sup>43</sup> Stanislavski’s *An Actor Prepares* and *My Life in Art* appeared around that time and were read by many actors and theatre practitioners, especially in America. See: Marvin Carlson (1993) *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*. London: Cornell University Press. p. 382.



the word *epic*<sup>44</sup> is political, and managed to transcend the influence of Marx by developing a theatre that was targeted at the bourgeois society of his period. The epic theatre differed from the bourgeois theatre because while the epic uses alienation to render events as “remarkable, particular, and demanding inquiry,” the bourgeois presents “events as universal, timeless, and unalterable” (Carlson 1993: 385). Brecht’s epic theatre was intended to teach and bring about change in society. Brecht developed dramatic concepts and processes such as the *lehrstucke* (teaching play) and *verfremdung* (alienation). Alienation – which is the defamiliarisation of character and event – became the most important of Brechtian vocabulary, although Brecht himself did not create it.<sup>45</sup> In contrast to classical theatre, the theatre of the 1930s represented the common man and contemporary socio-political issues.

Brecht’s theorisations of theatre addressed that demand, but did not go unchallenged. Odon von Horvath (1901-1938) developed an alternative to *verfremdung* – a drama that allowed people to tell their own stories, one that called upon the “instincts rather than the intellect of the people” (Carlson 1993: 386). Georg Lukács (1885-1971) stated that what was needed was a realist theatre that would depict socio-historical situations, and characters who are neither unique nor abstract. This theatre could remarkably unite the general and particular to come up with a form that would depict universal laws of societies (Carlson 1993: 387). Yet, Brecht’s ideas out-lived these attacks and influenced theatre artists who wanted to explore the socio-political and economic concerns of their societies.

In France, Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) regarded drama as a tool of revolution and reordering of society, and his theatre can be compared with that of Brecht. Artaud argued for a theatre with the capacity to “change man not socially but psychologically, by setting free the dark, latent forces festering in the individual soul” (Carlson 1993: 392). Artaud was particularly concerned with man’s internal being and the deepest recesses of his mind, rather than social organisation. Artaud believed that true revolution starts and rests with the individual, and not social change, or the rejection of the status quo. He differed from Brecht and other politically

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<sup>44</sup> The word “epic” was first used to refer to long narrative poems – epic poetry – in the classical period; it is used today to qualify movies that either involve many people or tell great stories. It was necessary for Brecht to clarify his use of the term in order not to be misunderstood. See: Marvin Carlson (1993) *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*. London: Cornell University Press. p. 382.

<sup>45</sup> In the *Poetics*, Aristotle spoke of using literary devices to defamiliarise the audience’s understanding of the world. Marvin Carlson (1993) states that Francis Bacon – who influenced Brecht’s experimentation – recommended the use of *enstrangement*. This theory influenced German romantics such as Novalis. “The A-Effect” is, however, most closely traced to the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, in his essay “Art as Technique” (1917). See: Marvin Carlson (1993) *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*. London: Cornell University Press. p. 385.

oriented critics, theorists, and dramatists in this regard. Artaud advocated for a theatre that is free of text imperialism, trappings, and absolutes, a theatre whose language is religious and not humanistic or realistic – a theatre of cruelty (MacConachie et al. 2010; Hatlen 1987). His approach to theatre and its interpretation was in essence anti-textual and anti-authorial. This explains why his ideas were not accommodated at a time when the text-centred tradition was dominant.<sup>46</sup> The avant-garde groups that emerged from the 1930s also rejected trappings and author-text imperialism.

Harold Clurman (1901-1980), Lee Strasberg (1901-1982) and Cheryl Crawford (1902-1986) founded the avant-garde Group Theatre in 1931. The Group Theatre held a distinct political orientation and relied on Stanislavski's theatre experiments for inspiration.<sup>47</sup> The name of the group itself suggests that the actors were an ensemble – with no spotlight for individual stars. The group stressed collective ideas, collaboration, ideology and liberation, reality, and real-life drama (Benderson 2008: 4). The Group Theatre pushed beyond the ideas and experiments of Stanislavski, but flamed out in 1941 after a decade due to the impending war, lure of fame and riches in Hollywood, lack of sufficient funding and friction of interpersonal relationships within the group.<sup>48</sup> The group staged real-life dramas taken from the lives of its members. It achieved this through the total involvement of the audience. It was regarded (at least while it lasted) as a brave and significant experiment. The dramas that emerged in the 1950s also had experimental features.

The absurdist and antirealist drama emerged in the 1950s with the international success of Albert Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus* (1951), Samuel Beckett's (1906-1989)<sup>49</sup> *Waiting for Godot* (1953), and the plays by Eugene Ionesco (1931-1994)<sup>50</sup> and Arthur Adamov (1908-1970).<sup>51</sup> Ionesco (in Carlson 1993: 412) states that the intention of the drama was to defy limitations by breaking artistic frontiers and taking away from drama "all that is particular to it: the plot, accidental characteristics of characters [...] historical background, the apparent reasons for the

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<sup>46</sup> The text-oriented critical tradition of Copeau and Jouvet was at its heyday in the 1930s – especially in France. See: Marvin Carlson (1993) *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*. London: Cornell University.

<sup>47</sup> The Group Theatre started in New York as an offshoot of the Theatre Guild.

<sup>48</sup> The Second World War brought an end to many groups and movements in the early 1940s. Cheryl Crawford, Lee Strasberg, Elia Kazan, and Robert Lewis founded The Actor's Studio in 1947 (not long after the war), where the techniques inspired by Konstantin Stanislavski and developed in the Group Theatre were refined. See: Christopher Innes. (1993) *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892-1992*. London: Routledge.

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Beckett was an Irish avant-garde writer and director who believed in a minimalist theatre. He is regarded as one of the most influential writers of the twentieth-century; and wrote in both English and French. The Theatre of the Absurd had one of its early roots in Beckett.

<sup>50</sup> Eugene Ionesco was a Romanian-French avant-garde playwright.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur Adamov was of the chief exponents of Theatre of the Absurd. The political elements in his later works were influenced by Bertolt Brecht.

dramatic conflict, and all the justifications, explanations, and logic of the conflict.” Ionesco’s drama shared Artaud’s psychological vision of character depth and exploration, but differed because it did not make recourse to the primacy of language. It relied on gesture and the body as the actor’s means of expression. The emphasis on the actor’s body – and not language – is also exemplified in Artaud’s *The Theatre and its Double* (1938). The appearance of Brecht’s *Berliner Ensemble* in 1954 gave these new dramas a more solid base.

The emphasis on economic and socio-political issues manifested in the works of avant-garde theatres of the 1960s. The Living Theatre – first established by Julian Beck and Judith Malina in 1947 – came to be known as the best experimental group of the period. The ensemble’s theory and practice remained closer to Artaud than to Brecht because Brecht did not believe in the open participation of actors and spectators during the performance: Brecht’s alienation theory requires a certain distance between actors and audience instead of participation. The Living Theatre found in Artaud a revolutionary theatre that would allow them to release their trapped feelings in a participatory manner (Innes 1993: 172). The group challenged the moral complacency of its audiences and insisted on the link between art and life. Benderson (2009: 25) observes that the group, like the Open Theatre (1963-1973), placed heavy demands on its audience and society by “challenging theatrical conventions alongside ways of living.” The Living Theatre became infamous in the 1960s and 1970s when its politics and performance turned extreme. Notably, it was around this period that Fugard was developing collaborative-experimental plays with the multiracial group known as the Serpent Players.

Maponya’s work also coincides with this period. He equally placed a lot of demands on his audience and society to the point that his audience somewhat became the theatre (see Chapter 5). Beck (1972: 61) outlines the imperatives of this form of contemporary theatre: i) space; ii) freedom; iii) open-participation; iv) spontaneous creation; v) change.<sup>52</sup> The first imperative outlines that a piece could be staged in the street – or anywhere outside of the cultural and economic limitations of conventional and industrialised theatre. The second imperative states that a piece should be mainly for and targeted at the proletariat – the underdog and oppressed – and should, if possible, be free of charge. The third imperative is open-participation during performance. Audience-actor participation is a feature of protest theatre. Such participation is

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<sup>52</sup> Julian Beck outlined seven imperatives altogether. All the imperatives can be found in Beck’s work. See: Julian Beck (1972) *The Life of the Theatre: the Relation of the Artist to the Struggle of the People*. Michigan: LimeLight Edition.

a political act that allows for “radical changes in a social order” (Innes 1993: 173).<sup>53</sup> Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty demonstrated this practice because it involved the audience and trapped them inside the play. Augusto Boal (1931-2009) concretised the practice with his idea of the spect-actor, by placing his spectators at the centre of the performance. He also exemplified it in his famous Legislative Theatre, by recreating politics on stage and assigning his audience temporary roles as legislators during performance. He practically demonstrated it as well in Theatre of the Oppressed by taking theatre to the public during his work in Brazil. He argues that “theatre cannot be imprisoned inside theatrical buildings; the language of the theatre and its forms of expression cannot be the private property of actors” (Boal 2008: 19). Grotowski, however, argues that audience-participation is a myth, and that true intimacy is “more likely to be achieved through physical distance” (Innes 1993: 167).

Beck’s fourth imperative is spontaneous creation on stage. Improvisation and actor freedom are distinctive features of this theatre: actors are free to create and improvise with dialogue and action during rehearsals and performance. They are not limited to a script – written words or expected action – and so can spontaneously create during production. Stanislavski, Artaud, Brecht, Strasberg, Brook, Schechner, Grotowski, Crawford, and Lewis, are known with this kind of theatre.<sup>54</sup> Brecht notably advocated for the separation of the actor from character in his discussion of character development; allowed his actors to mimic their social relationships by choosing their movement, and, even, words in some instances, during a performance – a process which is part of his *gestus*.<sup>55</sup> Brecht (in McTeague 1994: 47) regards the character as a separate being who should be allowed to grow on his own accord – you should allow “the character to react to other characters, to its environment, and to the plot. All this in a simple and natural manner.” In his theorisations of the Poor Theatre, Grotowski also celebrates actor freedom and improvisation; this model puts the actor at the centre and does away with stage design, costume, decor and music. It is geared towards minimalism in theatre and exploration of character’s innate essence.

Grotowski discarded music, scenery, illusionistic lightning and make-up – insisting on simple costumes – and through that eliminated “all external paraphernalia to expand the one element

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<sup>53</sup> The Performance Group of Richard Schechner, Open Theatre of Joseph Chaikin, and Group Theatre of Harold Clurman also practiced open-participation.

<sup>54</sup> The approaches adopted by these contemporary playwrights, theorists, and directors differed, although there are certain parallels in their methods.

<sup>55</sup> *Gestus* is both an activity and a commentary of the actor. It spells out the attitude of the play to the audience – one that is in the case of Bertolt Brecht almost always political. See: Silvjer Jestrovic (2006) *Theatre of Enstrangement: Theory, Practice, and Ideology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

that distinguishes theatre from film or television, and without which it would not exist: the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, live communion” (Innes 1993: 150). This live communion requires trapping the audience in the drama. Thus Grotowski experimented a great deal with the actor.<sup>56</sup> Fugard pursued this actor-model early in his career as a playwright by giving his actors so much freedom, such that they even tampered with his original scripts during workshops and performance (see Chapters 3 and 4). Maponya’s work with actors also leaned heavily in this direction (see Chapters 3 and 5). Their methods of exploring the actor’s potentials, however, differed. Beck’s fifth imperative is the notion of change, which suggests conscious awareness, permanent revolution, and an unfixed and flexible ideology.

The Living Theatre was a political theatre with an enlightenment initiative, but then so were most of the avant-garde theatres of the period. It advocated for revolution as a way out of the American situation, although it had an unfixed ideology (Innes 1993: 186). The 1960s-1970s was in fact globally rife with politically-charged revolutionary theatres and movements. The *agitprop*<sup>57</sup> play emerged around that period in America with the politically oriented Chicano theatres such as El Teatro Compesino, directed by Luis Valdez.<sup>58</sup> The Chicano theatres were notably inspired by “the 1965 Huelga (strike) of Filipino and Chicano migrant farm-workers in California” (Carlson 1993: 466). This was a defining period in the history of avant-garde and other political theatres in America and across the world.

The period markedly provided an experimental and political working space to a lot of groups. The Performance Group, founded by Richard Schechner (b. 1934), emerged in New York in 1967. It was also an experimental avant-garde collective that involved spectators in an active and open experience. It explored Schechner’s theory of Environmental Theatre – a model that defied orthodox theatre and utilised space and audience in non-traditional ways (Innes 1993: 175-6). *Dionysos in 69* (1968) – among other works – demonstrates the group’s idea of open-participation, which for Schechner is the breaking down of the performance to a point that the audience can feel equal and participate in the world created before them (Innes 1993: 176). Open engagement of this nature allows for the transformation of an event from an aesthetic to

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<sup>56</sup> Jerzy Grotowski created and developed an experimental centre for actors in Pontedera, Italy, in 1986.

<sup>57</sup> Agitprop is a contraction of agitation and propaganda. This form of didactic theatre originated in the Soviet Union when the peasant and workers targeted performances of the Blue Blouse troupes. Agitprop plays chiefly propagate explicit political propaganda. See: Bruce MacConachie, Phillip B Zarrilli, Gary J. Williams and Carol F. Sorgenfrei (2010) *Theatre Histories: an Introduction*. (Second Edition). New York: Routledge.

<sup>58</sup> El Teatro was the most famous of the Chicano theatres of the time. Luis Valdez served as both its director and major playwright. See: Marvin Carlson (1993) *Theories of the Theatre: a Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present*. London: Cornell University Press. p. 466

a social one, and with that a shift from art-as-illusion to art-as-real event with a potential for solidarity from actors and spectators.

The period equally witnessed the rise of revolutionary black writers in America, led by Leroi Jones, who in the late 1960s changed his name to Amiri Baraka.<sup>59</sup> This movement – like the black consciousness model that emerged in South Africa with Maponya as one of its leading artist-revolutionaries – touched on numerous aspects of black life, from black ethnicity and culture, civil right activism and black political power (Carlson 1993: 470). Baraka argued that all theatre, revolutionary or conformist, has a political and social content. He referred to the new American black theatre as a theatre of victims (anti-western and anti-establishment) whose main objective was to defy authority, and destroy “white complacency and whatever the system believed was real” (Carlson 1993: 470). Ed Bulin and Larry Neal (Marxist black revolutionaries of the time) contributed in the development of this black theatre and argued for a form that celebrates communal needs rather than individual interest. There is a parallel between the black theatre in America, with playwrights like Ed Bulin and Baraka, and that of South Africa, with Maponya and Manaka (see Chapter 5).

These black cultural movements operated roughly around the same period. Interestingly, both challenged white complacency and regarded blacks, artists or not, as victims. A more current avant-garde group (in relation to Fugard and Maponya’s work) was the Open Theatre, which operated in New York from 1963-1973. The group was founded by a group of Nola Chilton’s (b. 1922)<sup>60</sup> former students and directed by Joseph Chaikin (formerly director of The Living Theatre). This group explored collaborative and improvisational methods, with emphasis on the significance of actors (Hatlen 1987). It was predominantly interested in developing acting skills; and Chaikin (as director) paid great attention to exploring actors’ potentials and group experience. The actors insisted on minimalism in theatre by reducing the stage to a bare space and their practice was not significantly different from Brook’s, who advocates for the empty space (1968). The group was known for its production of *American Hurrah* (1966), *Viet Rock* (1966), and *The Serpent* (1969). The improvisational-collaborative practices of the group can be compared to Fugard’s experiments from 1966 to 1973 and Maponya’s experiments from the mid-1970s.

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<sup>59</sup> Maponya also changed his name, in 1975, from Isaiah (after his grandfather) to Maishe – meaning one who conveys a message – as a demonstration of his involvement with the black consciousness movement.

<sup>60</sup> Nola Chilton is an American-born Israeli theatre director and teacher. She studied acting under Lee Strasberg and worked at the Actors Studio. The Open Theatre was founded the same year (1963) that she immigrated to Israel.

## 1.7 Experiment and collaboration

The idea of collaboration and co-authorship had generated great concern over the centuries. MacConachie et al. (2010: 177) note that co-authorship was a common practice in Jacobean England (1590-1625), and that Shakespeare and Fletcher probably collaborated in a number of their plays. Some of Shakespeare's plays are also attributed to Marlowe – suggesting that either these two leading playwrights collaborated, or that Shakespeare presented the plays as his own after Marlowe's death. Authorship was not a major issue at the time; and spectators before the advent of print culture did not really care so much about who actually wrote a play. This may explain why Shakespeare's dramas were only compiled posthumously. Some of the plays in the *First Folio* (1623) – a collection of 36 plays – have generated huge debates about true authorship and identity of the playwright over time. Authorship of printed plays, whether during the renaissance or modern period, is not clear-cut. This problematic is examined in the discussion of the true authorship of *The Coat*, and in the debate surrounding the collaboration process of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* (see Chapter 3).

Fugard's work with the Serpent Players led to experiments using real images and ideas, and resulted in the production of *The Coat*, *Death Watch* and *The Last Bus*. His work with Kani and Ntshona also resulted in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*; and that with Bryceland and Kingsley led to *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*. Fugard's work with the players also led to the remakes of European and classical plays such as *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Orestes*. *The Coat* was the group's first foray into immediate black experiences.<sup>61</sup> Fugard (in Vandenbroucke 1985: 102) recalled that the Serpent Players hankered “for a much more immediate and direct relationship with our audience than had been possible with the ready-made plays we had been doing.” These plays were remarkable, but lacked the urgent political and representational import that was needed at the time. Fugard, Kani and Ntshona's excursion into black life then led to their most political and radical experiments – *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*.

Grotowski first used the word *collaborators* – which is used in the context of this study – to refer to actors/artists who assisted him in producing and staging his plays. Fugard used it in a similar fashion. In Grotowski's Poland, like Fugard's apartheid South Africa, art was so heavily censored that artists had to tactically employ alternative means of reaching out to the

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<sup>61</sup> All these plays were produced from 1963-1974 – roughly a decade of Fugard's work with the Serpent Players. The group's first performance was inside a snake pit in Port Elizabeth museum, which earned the group the name the “Serpent Players.” See: Russell Vandenbroucke (1985) *Truths the Hand can Touch*. New York: Theatre Communications Group; Dennis Walder (2003) *Athol Fugard*. Hordorn: Northcote Publishers.

people. It is important to note that Fugard's system of collaboration – although it was not a direct one at the time – started with his work with the Circle Players in the late 1950s. It was, however, more of a method-acting style, a form that was popular in the 1950s, than a direct collaboration. The black actors in the group served as conduits into black life and township experience – material he used in the production of *No-Good Friday* (1958) and *Nongogo* (1959). Fugard acted the role of Father Higgins in *No-Good Friday*, proving that he was an actor before his heyday as an established playwright. He also acted in *The Blood Knot* (1961), alongside Zakes Mokae, at a later stage in his career, and more recently in *The Shadow of the Hummingbird* (2014) – returning to the stage after 15 years. His experimental-collaborative works emphasise the actors' personal experiences. He relied – as usual – on his black actors for inspiration and material because he was not allowed inside the black townships for a very long time. In 1963, he and a group of inexperienced black actors founded the Serpent Players. The impetus for founding the troupe came from a visit by the black actor and artist, Norman Ntshinga who, Fugard recalls: made “the old request, actually it's hunger. A desperate hunger for meaningful activity – to do something that would make the hell of their daily existence meaningful” (Fugard 1983: 81).

Fugard's initial reluctance to train and direct these inexperienced black men eventually gave way and a new wave of activities begun – actually more serious work than he had done in the past. Kani and Ntshona joined the troupe at a later stage and with the arrest and imprisonment of the hardcore actors/artists like Ntshinga and Duru in 1965 they were finally given a chance at bigger roles, eventually becoming the group's main actors in the early 1970s. They had to quit their jobs, however, and concentrate solely on acting, and also put up with the label of Fugard's “domestic servants” so as to be able to work with Fugard – sometimes in his garage. They were quite aware of the restrictions on interracial activities and the considerable risk of police harassment in coming into a white area. The activity rekindled a sense of commitment in Fugard's work, solidified his international acclaim and changed the content and form of his plays a great deal. Their work together showed that the theatre could be used for a cause other than entertainment and didacticism. The Serpent Players' dialectical exchanges, activities, and survival as an interracial group made them realise that they could end the suffocating silence in the country.

The group's activity, especially with their performance of *The Coat* (1966), demonstrated that the stage had a potential for subversion; that it could be used to speak across the divide – to talk, even if through images, about the happenings in the country, and possibly get away with



it. Their desire was, first, to talk about the condition of life in the black townships, with New Brighton as a case study. Fugard in fact helped to creatively release the creative potentials of the actors so that they would be able to re-live their lives on stage as an experiment. It was an experiment with materials and form, one that culminated in the group's most radical venture into politics in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. The third play in the trilogy, *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, was inspired by the image of six police photographs of a man and a woman of different races having sexual intercourse. In this play also, Fugard relied on Bryceland and Kingsley to creatively recreate the images in the photographs; and on Bryceland in particular, for the psychology of the character of Frieda Joubert.<sup>62</sup>

In contrast, Maponya distinguished himself as a playwright, activist, director, choreographer, actor, poet, and gumboot dancer: a jack of all trades. He was born and raised in Alexandra but spent part of his early life in Soweto. These black ghettos (Alexandra and Soweto) were hubs of all forms of social vices and misery, typical township settings under apartheid. Alexandra evoked creative sensibilities in Maponya – something no formal training or education could avail him. It also taught him how to survive, to transform his weakness to strength, and his ineptitude to visionary black representation. Maponya was actually a poet before his career as a recognised playwright,<sup>63</sup> and his embryonic stage as a dramatist started in 1975 before the Soweto Uprising and arrest of Steve Biko, a friend and founder of the South African version of the Black Consciousness Movement, in 1976 and 1977 respectively. In 1976, he founded the Bahumutsi<sup>64</sup> Theatre Group, a troupe he directed and acted in, with the goal of reaching-out, re-educating, and re-directing the people to the cause for liberation. Their first play, *The Cry* (1976), was banned by the authorities for its radical politics after just two shows. *Return the Drum* also went down the same way for its vitriolic poetry. Like the Serpent Players and similar anti-establishment groups, the Bahumutsi group was constrained by meagre finances, strict governmental control, and had inexperienced members.<sup>65</sup> The group, however, survived and managed to produce most of Maponya's plays.

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<sup>62</sup> Athol Fugard brilliantly explored the psychic recesses of the minds of his two actors during the workshop of the play. Records of the workshops prove that Bryceland and Kingsley did not only provide the acting, they helped in developing the earliest version of the play.

<sup>63</sup> Maponya was writing under the umbrella of the Modupe Writers Association, which was banned in October 1977. He also co-founded the Allah poets – a group of performance poets that performed in the black townships – in 1978.

<sup>64</sup> Bahumutsi means 'comforters.' Maponya saw his role (and that of the group as well) as both a messenger and comforter of the oppressed class.

<sup>65</sup> Maponya worked as a clerk (of course with a meagre income) in an insurance company. The group could not secure institutional or state funding and its members had to combine acting with menial jobs. This was the lot of anti-apartheid troupes at the time.

Bahumutsi Theatre Group earned a notorious reputation as a radical and militant resistance troupe. It was established with a collaborative purpose in mind (Moorosi 1997: 27). Maponya regarded experiments as the primary mode during playmaking; the text as secondary and a “skeleton which has to be fleshed out in performance through the dynamics of the actor, the designer and the director” (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1984: 147). The Bahumutsi actors – much like the Serpent Players – collaborated with Maponya in the production of *The Hungry Earth*, *Gangsters*, *Umongikazi*, and *Jika*. The nature of their collaboration and experiments differed (see Chapter 3). In these kinds of works, actors became writers of their experiences, and the playwright transformed to a scribe, creative agent provocateur, director, dramaturge, and script editor – in cases where there were scripts (Crow and Banfield 1996: 100-1). The 1960s to 1980s were rife with this type of experimentation, and avant-garde theatres use it to this day. And so, like other modern experimental artists, Maponya also practiced it.

As a versatile actor, Maponya believed that drama, poetry, and songs are ordinarily meant for live performance and should take precedence over the text (Moorosi 1997: 29). This explains why he regards actors and experiments as central elements in his play-making. As a group – one relatively inexperienced as well – the Bahumutsi reduced the theatre to the people’s level in order to reach-out and allow for open-participation. The actors used simple English, with a stirring mix of indigenous languages, and as Kavanagh (1985: 165) notes, common materials such as “the village dance under the tree” as useful and effective tools that the people could identify with. Songs and poetry were used in traditional African societies to rally, enlighten, and disseminate information (Finnegan 1977: 81). The group utilised this familiar mode in conveying its message to a largely rural and uneducated audiences; this mode also proved to be effective among the more enlightened and liberal white audiences. Plays, especially when unscripted, have a tendency of transcending societal and institutional constraints; their import and performative elements are often better realised, and differ in each performance.

The expected stimulant of a play cannot be realised in a text where performance elements are missing. The performative processes and images in a play are better realised on the stage. The actor-stage-audience praxis is now thoroughly permeated with productive experiments, such that orthodox formulas are deconstructed. Boal (2008: 3) maintains that “the first, extremely powerful poetic-political system for intimidation of the spectator, for elimination of the bad or illegal tendencies of the audience,” has also been undermined. (This postdramatic shift has been traced above). These practical changes led to the concern with the oppressed people and the making of their own theatre. The drama is now more revolutionary, and, as Walder (1984:

94-5) observes, is created “without the familiar hierarchy of writer, director and actor; drama performed without the familiar trappings of establishment theatre.” The walls were torn down in favour of actor-audience participation. The theatre has also turned towards the actor (rather than the script or playwright) and experimentation. In theorising this new theatre, Schechner (1988: xi) maintains that:

Performance is an illusion of an illusion and, as such, might be considered more “truthful,” more “real” than ordinary experience. This, too, was Aristotle’s opinion in his *Poetics* where theatre did not so much reflect living as essentialize it, present paradigms of it [...] performances not only play out modes, they play with modes, leaving actions hanging and unfinished, so theatrical events are fundamentally experimental: provisional. Any semiotics of performance must start from, and always stand unsteadily on, these unstable slippery bases, made even more uncertain by the continually shifting receptions of various audiences.

The turn towards actor and experimentation in theatre making attracted global attention from dramatists and artists who wanted to use the theatre to represent and transcend their contexts. The South African situation of the 1960s–1980s pushed Fugard and Maponya into producing unscripted plays with actors as co-creators – tactics in use by Grotowski in Poland. The stress was on the collective and immediate experience(s), the need to connect art to the lives of their audiences. Fugard and Maponya challenged theatrical limitation; experimented with the stage by creating real characters and according actors importance in play-making; and reduced the text to a skeletal improvisational guide, thus demonstrating an irreverence to the scripted text during rehearsals and productions. Improvisational practices of this nature became popular in “the West in the 1960s and 1970s, when its defining principles of spontaneity, creative play, openness ... and group participation captured the imagination of artists...” (Allain and Harvey 2006: 87). It is an alternative “tool of creative stimulation ... and for devising performances”; and a suitable collaborative method because it is fluid and gives equal chance to competing voices (Allain and Harvey 2006: 87).

By implication then, a written play is neither complete nor autonomous: actors interpret and assign meaning to it, often against its authorial intention. The playwright ceases to have final say on the play’s meaning the moment actors take up roles on stage, alter the original script, and put aside his words and improvise using theirs. At this point, it is the actor’s voice that is heard, not the writer’s; it is his action, not what the playwright or director expects. In this way actors become the first readers who interpret the text often against the playwright’s authorial intentions. The actors equally assist in rewriting it by tampering with it and subjecting it to a

transformational process. The text eventually becomes new, filled with the voices and actions of many others – not just the playwright’s. Acting is a multipurpose activity that involves i) being, ii) showing, and iii) putting written “dialogue into action”; therefore, whenever the actor changes his mode of performance, his “means of using the play to engage the audience changes as well” (Worthen 2010: 213). Styan (1975: 224) maintains that the audience, script, playhouse and actor are inseparable elements of the theatre event. Actors and audience rely on each other and their relationship is determined by the way actors use the text – as certain actors use it in different ways than others (Worthen 2010: 213). Audience, like actors, are therefore crucial to the play because they “share in a partnership without which the players cannot work” (Styan 1975: 224).

For experimental and improvised plays, there is no *object* at all (in the sense of something scripted) but images and ideas that are built on through close collaboration, experimentation, and improvisation. Fringe/avant-garde plays are not entirely thought out by one person alone, as in prose or poetry, but are collective works resulting from the active participation and ideas of a range of collaborators – actor, director, writer and choreographer, for example. There are many performance agencies such as acting, design, and space that should not be subordinated to the text as if theatre is synonymous “with the purpose of representing the dramatic fiction for our consumption” (Worthen 2010: 213). Theatre is primarily concerned with production, and this allows it to alter the relationship between actors, spectators, and events in its space. The text is just a single element of the many dramatic elements making up a performance. Attention in literary studies leans heavily towards the dramatic text for its own sake, thereby relegating other equally important elements.

This study is aware of these dramatic elements and implications; and has carried out a literary and performative analysis of the selected plays. The actor as a dramatic element is important to this thesis for his interpretive and creative role in play-making. Performance elements such as costumes, writer, and text are actually dispensable during performance, but not the actor. The thesis therefore explores the symbiotic relationship between playwrights and actors, and how this important affair critically shapes the *play* of intention and meaning. This is why the collaboration between Fugard, Kani and Ntshona is significant to this study. In analysing this playwright-actors relationship, and the contributions of actors as conduits and co-creators, this thesis also examines the place of experimentation and improvisation, and how they are utilised in play-making.

## 1.8 Problem statement and the aims of this study

It is problematic to assign value to anti-apartheid works as strictly committed *or* liberal, and with that misread historical influence(s) on artists and reduce political plays to the immediate and revolutionary. This has resulted in the misinterpretation of some of the plays as simply apolitical compared to the apparently political. Literary texts embody possibilities of several realisations, and so cannot be reduced to certain judgement(s), interpretation(s), or subjected to one or other Archimedean perspective(s). Fugard's plays have been reduced to the liberal – a dumping ground for white sympathy, dodges and evasions – based on the general claim that he treats issues of less political bearing. His plays are, however, an attempt to celebrate the belief in that the personal is political; and so are equally political discourses of the time. *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, and *The Island* (although collaboratively devised with black actors) reveal his attachment to the anti-apartheid struggle. His involvement with actors was, however, limited by the repressive apartheid context and shaped by his literary leanings and perspective on the nature of revolution and social action.

Maponya is regarded as a black ideologue and political and resistance playwright. This limits the value of his plays to the direct/immediate black South African experience, thus hindering their significance as timeless and universal. The reduction suggests that he could not secure a place in the broader canon of South African theatre. This does not, however, mean that he is a lesser playwright, or that his plays are not worth studying. *The Hungry Earth* and *Gangsters*, for instance, transcend apartheid since they deal with the horrid effects of capitalism (a global exploitation system) and subversion and containment, which is a trend in any class struggle. A literary work should be appreciated for its *play* of intention, silences, blanks, and aporias – what it does not say.

The theatre experienced a radical transformation with the rise of revolutionary and alternative – the modern and avant-garde – theatre of the 1960s to 1980s that resisted text primacy, stage constraints and playwright-imperialism in pursuit of a more immediate experience (the play as a social event) and actors' potentials. Improvisation, experimentation, and collaboration – in the sense of using actors as creative agents and conduits – attracted global attention from artists and theatre practitioners. This new method of play-making was beneficial, but also had its flaw(s); and resulted, in the case of Fugard, Kani and Ntshona, in intrigues and the limit of authorship. Their creative collaboration requires investigation in view of the actual *roles* and *contributions* of the co-authors. Fugard's wide claim to primary authorship of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, and the debatable transformation of the plays from political to liberal

and universal works deserves a critical study. Many critics, commentators, and black artists in the country criticised the white-black collaboration on the basis of the covert intentions of white artists and cultural establishments that regulated the impact and reach of political plays. Collaboration, as a concept and practice, is flexible and so changes with the artist(s) involved, historical period, individual talents, situation of conception or realisation and target-audience. This lack of fixity opens up the question of usage by an artist, or group of artist, and between artists – as is the case with Fugard and Maponya.

In brief, this study aims to:

- Locate the selected plays within the political discourse and context of their production and then measure the extent to which the playwrights have succeeded, or otherwise, in striking a chord harmonious with the expectations of a society in need of change;
- Examine the problematic perspectives surrounding Fugard's status as a writer without a political cause especially in view of his contribution to the struggle in numerous and equally potent ways;
- Study Maponya's plays against their reductive value as radical agitprop plays without a universal and timeless import;
- Study the nature of the creative collaboration between Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona in devising *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*; as well as the disputations surrounding their work and authorship of the plays; and
- Analyse Maponya's transformative experiments, collaboration, and acknowledgement of actors, in addition to his (and generally black artists') position on the white-black system of collaboration in the country.

### **1.9 Significance of a comparative study of Fugard and Maponya**

This study is perhaps significant for its dual comparative analysis of Fugard and Maponya's theatre: first, in terms of the political content of their works and thus their commitment (or otherwise) to the liberation struggle; and second, for their use of the experimental, workshop, and actor-based play-making techniques. The study is also concerned with the analysis of the nature of the collaboration between Fugard, Kani and Ntshona. This is necessary considering the controversies about role-play, identity, and politics that their work together has generated; and the possibility that the collaborators may not have received the acknowledgement due to them.

Aware that there are few studies on Maponya – especially when compared with Fugard – this thesis compares them; not as a perfect binary, but as two important anti-apartheid playwrights and collaborators who contributed to the struggle through the theatre in different, but equally potent ways. There is a dearth of comparative works on these writers, and – to my knowledge – no thesis-length book or thesis that compares the two. In fact, comparisons of any length or breadth do not appear to exist, apart from an article by Shane Graham (2005)<sup>66</sup> who compares the single plays *Gangsters* and *The Island* thematically. There are also no comparative studies of their use of the postdramatic theatre of the time.

Maponya has received far less critical attention than Fugard has. There is evidently no major work written on him – although he is included in some major studies on the South African drama. His play, *Gangsters*, is often singled-out and analysed in these major studies because it is arguably his most accomplished and known play. There are, however, a couple of dissertations on him such as Moorosi (1997) – which is solely on him – and Steadman (1984) – where he is examined as part of the black artists on the Witwatersrand. Fugard enjoys more attention as an established, and therefore canonised, dramatist. The difference between white and black writers has a long troubled history in South Africa: black artists under the apartheid regime received less critical attention and reviews (coverage), compared to the whites, due to the repressive context as well as the reduction of their works to the ‘journalistic’ and largely ‘uncreative’ space.<sup>67</sup>

The current works on Fugard and Maponya’s plays are also either ‘performative’ or ‘literary.’ This study is, therefore, vital for its examination of the content (thematic) and form (the play-making and performance) of the plays. It is also essential for its utilisation of archival sources such as original manuscripts and drafts of some of the select plays, rehearsal and performance notes, correspondences, and personal letters. This depth of ‘investigation’ is absent from the majority of the studies on the playwrights

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<sup>66</sup> Graham, Shane. (2005) Private Trauma, Public Drama: Fugard, Kani and Ntshona’s *The Island* and Maponya’s *Gangsters*. *English Studies in Africa*. 48 (1). pp. 107–203.

<sup>67</sup> The literature review in Chapter two will reveal this imbalance in the academic literature.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORY

#### 2.1 Preamble

Many scholars have written on Fugard's life, literary career, works, and the apartheid context that provided him with inspiration and material; they have used both the literary and dramatic angles. Maponya's literary career on the other hand has attracted a mere handful of important reviews. Despite his significance to South African drama, his life and works have not enjoyed as much recognition when compared with Fugard. Some of the reasons for this difference in reception and popularity will be addressed in the thesis. Reviewing all the studies on Fugard and Maponya is not feasible considering the bulk of researches (published and unpublished) relevant to this study. This review will therefore be limited to certain seminal works and their implications for this study. As such, the concern in this chapter will be limited to the scope and parameters set out in Chapter one; in addition to the methodology to be employed in this thesis. To achieve this, the chapter will be divided into four literature sections concerning the playwrights, their works, and their times: i) art, politics, and the notion of commitment in the theatres of Fugard and Maponya; ii) Fugard and the anti-apartheid protest; iii) Maponya and theatre for a change; and iv) postdramatic theatre and Fugard and Maponya's collaboration and experiments. The final section concerns the more significant aspects of the methodology of the study: V) theory and methodology.

#### 2.2 Art, politics and the notion of commitment in the theatres of Fugard and Maponya

Globally, protest literature serves as a medium whereby a society is changed or redirected – a catalyst, guide and a means of social change (Stauffer 2008: xi). It embodies requirements such as empathy, shock value, and symbolic action. Thus, while empathy encourages, shock value inspires emotions/desires, and symbolic action promotes interpretation (Stauffer 2008: xiii). A work of art should in this regard be mainly about education and change in a society, something writers should strive to attain. Vandembroucke (1975: 190) upholds that art reflects the society that gives it life, and it does so regardless of its purpose or medium. He adds that “like the real world, works of art are simultaneously religious, political, economic, historical, and aesthetic” (Ibid.). He also points to the multidimensional nature of works of art, and how artists are considered party hacks or ideologists because they espoused a political dimension, sometimes as a context rather than the subject, to their works. He notes that such a conclusion does the artists a great disservice and “reveals much about prevailing [mis]conceptions about



the relationship between ‘politics’ and art” (Ibid.). Thus, he warns of the danger of regarding works as good if their politics are acceptable, or dismissing them out of hand if their politics are considered bad by the reader.

A generalisation based on these sweeping criteria does more harm to the arts than good. It is an inadequate measuring rod because fiction is progressively discovered in the act or process of reading rather than a given object (Macherey 1978). Interpretation is therefore an ongoing activity, and meaning for literary theorists such as Derrida (1966; 1978), Iser (1974), Bennett (1983), Barthes (1968; 1977) and Macherey (1978) is not given in the text,<sup>68</sup> but is activated – and always differently – during the reading process.<sup>69</sup> There are therefore many factors to be taken into account before a valid (although shifting as well) interpretation can be attained. It is not enough then to condemn artists for lack of commitment; or relegate them for writing poorly. The historical period of a text’s production plays a significant role in shaping artists and determining the course their art takes (see Chapter 1). Tsiga (2010) and Walder (1984; 2003) argue that this context has been overlooked by many critics of South African literature. It is important to understand the practice of theatre at the time in order to appreciate the roles of white artists such as Fugard and Barney Simon who provided training and direction to a lot black artists.

Usually, writers require a relative peace, social contentment, and enthusiasm to produce great art (Long 2010: xi). This was however lacking in South Africa at the time, when the writers were placed in a situation whereby their thoughts and what they produced were subject to the dictates of the apartheid regime (Tsiga 2010: xi). Many literary works were banned, and even the handful that survived censorship trace a cyclical progression – a situation whereby efforts have not led to achievement or self-realisation, but rather endless spheres of disenchantment and frustration on the part of the characters. The works also reveal the absurdity of the life of the characters, and by extension, the black writers and the struggle against apartheid. The dire situation of blacks in the country pushed them into a vicious roundabout – leading to reaction, action and violence.

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<sup>68</sup> The latter Barthes in “From Work to Text” (1977) differentiates between “work” and “text,” arguing that the former is a closed object that is held in the hand, while the latter is a tissue and is held in language, therefore resisting authorial intention and open to possibilities. See: Roland, Barthes. (1977) *From Work to Text*. In: Lodge, D. and Wood, N. (Eds). (1988) *Modern Criticism and Theory*. New York: Pearson. pp. 192–195.

<sup>69</sup> Tony Bennett maintains that meaning in a text is activated and not something given. The reading process refers to the complexities involved in reading and how the reader’s reading formation influences the activity of reading and activation of meaning. See: Bennett, Tony. (1983) *Text, Readers, Reading Formations*. In: Lodge, D. and Wood, N. (Eds). (1988) *Modern Criticism and Theory*. New York: Pearson. pp. 45–57.

Fugard and Maponya were among those artists who were at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle. Maponya used the theatre as a resistance tool. Fugard was, however, sceptical about the role of the theatre in that regard. He was more interested in drama as art than as a tool for political action. Kani states that “their plays are called political because they show our lives, not because we are politicians” (Vandenbroucke 1975: 191). Even the black actors he worked with (Kani and Ntshona) understood the limits of politics in the theatre and so strived hard to maintain a balance.

Fugard and his actor-collaborators implicitly and profoundly understand that political values and processes permeate their lives and must, therefore, be reflected in their work. “Politics” is not simply added onto pre-existing work, nor is it an independent element solely intended from the start. Kani has said that “it is for the audience to call a play political, not for the artist to intend it so...” (Vandenbroucke 1975: 191)

Fugard’s emphasis on artistic composition, rather than politics, was criticised by several black artists and critics, who viewed his plays with suspicion even though he added his voice to that of black activists. As a white writer he was regarded as a playwright whose skin colour would not allow him to be a committed cultural agent. Maponya (1987: 6) believes that Fugard talks about a different kind of freedom for black people compared to black artists in the country. It is worth noting that Fugard’s and Simon’s collaborations with black actors were successful despite the reservation and criticism levelled against white-black collaboration in the country. Ndlovu (1987: 6) notably hails the success of *Woza Albert!*, a collaborative work by Simon, Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, which was directed by Simon. He maintains that the piece was particularly more successful than *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Manaka (1987: 6) also criticises works by white writers for their distance from the actual black experience, and maintains that black artists are victims of the problems they present in their works.

Further, Manaka (1987: 6) argues that unlike white artists the black artists are both witnesses and victims who throw stones and join bus boycotts because they are an integral part of the resistance in the country. As against this criticism, Sherman (1995: 18) argues that writers such as Fugard, Simon, Brink, and Gordimer have the freedom to write about anything and any place, and as such could write about the black experience. Sherman (1995: 18) maintains that they have at least devoted their lives and talents to the black struggle for freedom and thus “should not be condemned for their colour or their success.” In his response to the place of politics in the country, and the role of the Market Theatre in the struggle, Simon (1987:

9)<sup>70</sup> states that “it is the fact that everything that happens in South Africa, obviously, is political, has a political reflection.” Simon recounts that a lot of political and collaborative plays were produced at the Market Theatre with the support of white theatre professionals. As an indirect measure, therefore, these collaborations were highly successful because they resulted in the production of influential performances like *Dingake* (1962), *uMabatha* (1973), *KwaZulu* (1973), *Ipi Tombi* (1975) and *King Africa* (1987).

Despite these recorded collaborative successes, Maponya (1987: 7) considers his theatre more political and resistant. Ndlovu (1987: 6) also argues that black audiences in the townships are not interested in race relations or the possibility of a non-racial society. He notes that these are people “who are interested in getting their freedom before they can even think of non-racialism.” He also reiterates that “the tendency of the people in the city would be to look for work that would make statements against apartheid as opposed to statements about liberation and about the land going back to whom it belongs” (Ndlovu 1987: 6). For Manaka (1987: 7), Maponya’s *Umongikazi*, a play dealing with the nursing situation in the country, is closer to the township demands than that of works by white playwrights. Maponya (1987:8) states that his intention was to perform *Umongikazi* in hospitals across South Africa so as to expose the happenings in the health sector, but after performing for three afternoons at the Baragwanath Hospital,<sup>71</sup> he was invited to Protea police station and interrogated about his association with the Nursing Association, which was at that time an independent body run by black nurses and doctors.

As against Fugard therefore, Maponya is particularly praised for his political and radical use of the theatre. Steadman (1994: xiii) believes that he was one of the prominent anti-apartheid voices. Moorosi (1997: 35) also maintains that, as a black artist, his message was potent and direct, almost always about rallying the masses to action, conscientising them, and suggesting alternatives out of their prevailing conditions. His plays are evidently about black experiences and the revolution (Steadman 1984: 387). Most of the anti-apartheid works at the time passed through a censorship system that was instituted by the state to gauge, suppress, and strangle politics and propaganda in the arts. As a result therefore, radical works like Maponya’s *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* were “restricted by the Publications Control Board to small, intimate

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<sup>70</sup> Barney Simon’s collaborative play (produced together with a multiracial cast) *Born in the R.S.A.*, was presented as part of the Woza Afrika! festival. It was the only play in the festival by a white writer. He was not in the country during the “South African Playwrights” symposium attended by the four black playwrights, but agreed to an interview when he arrived. The excerpt of the interview appeared in: South African Playwrights. (1987) *The New Theatre Review*. 1. pp. 8–11.

<sup>71</sup> The largest hospital in the Southern Hemisphere.

avant-garde theatres” (Maponya 1984: 1). These plays were limited to certain audiences, thus denying the township people – who the plays were expected to rally and conscientise – from seeing them. Radical performances were subsequently tolerated as a result of the amendment of the Publication Act from 1980 (Peterson 1990: 48). This led to the state’s loss of control of the black theatre due to developments in oppositional politics.

And with the Publications and Censors Board greatly undermined, academics and newspaper critics in the country were left to determine the fate of black performances (Peterson 1990: 48). They then publicised and promoted certain plays, and marred others by refusing them the attention they deserved (Peterson 1990: 48). Maponya (1987: 8) also lamented how a number of performances were neglected. He observes that township plays suffered a serious setback because the journalists in the country were not interested in going to the townships to review plays (Maponya 1995: viii). In order not to contradict its proclaimed (1989) reforms on the arts, the state had to devise alternative methods of checking the excesses of political theatre in the country. For Steadman (1985: 26), while productions in the more amorphous contexts of the townships were stifled by a number of factors, the double-bill, *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*, were successfully performed in the Laager section of the Market Theatre because the venue was considered as an established middle-class cultural haven.

Studies on South African protest and resistance theatre reveal that the plays performed at the Market Theatre particularly stood out because of the input of white professionals and because this theatre was a limited space. The audience members were regarded as converted liberals, and the message would not pass the confines of the venue. Not all playwrights made it there however. Those who performed in the townships had to develop unscripted plays. Manaka (1987: 5) recounts that scripting and publishing one’s play was risky, as there was the tendency that it would be banned. He maintains that the work “stands a better chance of surviving if it is not published as it was difficult for the state to ban performances.” Despite the survival and alternative play-making tactics, the regime managed, to a limited, extent to contain dissident activities and rebellion in the arts.

In South Africa, the social upheaval stemming from apartheid and its various policies/laws was reflected in the alternative theatre that emerged. Artists, especially the blacks, expressed their displeasure with nearly every facet of the apartheid regime – including the practice of theatre in the country. Watts (1989: x) observes that these artists made the liberation struggle their main concern because of their dissatisfaction with the political and social conditions in the country. She adds that their unrelenting efforts turned the South African problem into a

world issue, with the township youth seeing “themselves as fighting for the world, for the global restoration of political integrity, not just for South Africa” (Watts 1989: x). As a result, what Watt (1989: 211) calls a “literature of combat” emerged in South Africa.<sup>72</sup>

Watts (1989: 211) states that black artists challenged literary conventions in the country and questioned as well as experimented with form and genre, eventually establishing “alternatives that would counteract the cultural onslaught of white domination and serve the evolution of an ideology geared to the needs and aims of a black proletariat and rural population.” From the 1960s onwards, black and white artists dealt with pressing societal needs in their plays. Their works were *anti-text*, *anti-convention* and *anti-illusionistic* in nature, thus suggesting the postdramatic nature of the performances. Their works were also characterised by a change in content – no longer about the petty squabble of individual life. Walder (1984: 76) traces this change in Fugard’s *Statements* plays:

Unlike the Port-Elizabeth plays, the three *Statements* plays – *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island* and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* – all testify to the nature and effects of specific apartheid laws: the pass law; the laws banning the black opposition, the ANC and PAC; and the so-called “Immorality Act” (prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, 1949).

Walder (1984) reports that critics such as Stanley Kauffman were taken aback by Fugard and his collaborators’ explicitness in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* because they were used to his liberal ideals – in the sense of universal and spiritual values. John Elsom in a review of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, notes that the plays “call for political change, if not for revolutionary action, but they also make us aware that better political systems ultimately depend upon changes of heart” (Elsom 1974: 12). Vandenbroucke (1985: 175) however notes that Fugard had all along demonstrated a sense of commitment in the liberation struggle in many ways: he introduced the use of mixed-casts<sup>73</sup> in the South African theatre in *No-good Friday* (1958) despite interracial laws; he starred in 1961 with Mokae as the brothers Morris and Zacharia in the premier of *Blood Knot*;<sup>74</sup> and in 1962, he publicly supported the boycott of South African theatres due to their segregated audiences, leading to government restriction of his activities, and the eventual seizure of his passport in the later years (Vandenbroucke 1985: 176-7).

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<sup>72</sup> Literature of combat emerged as a result of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. The literature emphasises black identity in South Africa See: Watts, J. (1989) *Black Writers in South Africa. Towards a Discourse of Liberation*. London: Macmillan.

<sup>73</sup> Fugard starred in the play as Father Higgins (a white priest) for the first time on the South African stage.

<sup>74</sup> The play was revised and retitled *The Blood Knot* in 1987.

Despite the pressing situation in the country however, Fugard's plays are not overtly political. Even the *Statements* plays do not advocate for a revolution. He was "less the social critic and more the poet than people seem generally inclined to believe" (Vandenbroucke 1975: 191). In a later work, Vandenbroucke (1985: 182) maintains that although Fugard's *Statements* plays and are not a call to arms, they are nonetheless overtly political plays. He adds that the use of *Antigone*<sup>75</sup> within *The Island* raises the question of the relationship between art and politics. He notes that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* appear to be "pervasively political because the reality, the milieu in which they are rooted is so overtly political" (Vandenbroucke 1975: 197). Artists usually use different forms to protest over different things (see Chapter 1). From the Classical plays onwards, therefore, the act of making theatre is essentially a political act. van Graan (2006: 12) believes that the artist's choice of content (about what to make theatre about); target audience (theatre for); and place (at which venue); have always been politically strategic choices. Artists in South Africa had to deal with these choices as well. This explains why black artists like Maponya opted for a more radical form of theatre targeted at a largely black population, while the likes of Fugard and Simon resorted to experimental-collaborative practices.

Fugard worked closely with black actors since 1958, resulting in the production of *No-Good Friday*. His experiment with the Serpent Players from 1963 led to the township adaptations of classic Greek productions. *Friday's Bread on Monday*, *The Last Bus*, and *Sell-out* were the result of these experiments. He continued to use the theatre experimentally, with *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* performed in a similar fashion with that of the Performance Group's *Dionysos in '69*.<sup>76</sup> Niven (1975: 89) states that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was performed with the connection between actor and spectator in mind, so much that spectators were engaged, asked questions, led across the stage in some performances, and "made to suffer just for a moment the kind of humiliation which is permanent for the passbook-bearing African." Like The New Theatre also, Fugard's theatre was mostly actor-centred and anti-script – generally experimental in nature. Speaking about the use of script in the production of the *Statements* plays, Fugard states that "I didn't start rehearsals with a finished script, I started rehearsals with a little newspaper cutting and we went from there" (Wilhelm 1972: 109). Walder (1984: 78–79) maintains that "Fugard was attempting to participate in the international search for a new

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<sup>75</sup> *Antigone* is a classical epic and political play by the Greek tragedian playwright, Sophocles. Fugard, Kani and Ntshona used the trial scene in the play in *The Island* to interrogate the South African apartheid laws, crime and punishment, in the same way Antigone questioned the unjust law (as represented by Creone), which banned the burial of her brother.

<sup>76</sup> *Dionysos in '69* was written and directed by Richard Schechner.

theatrical language, initiated by, amongst others, Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski.” He states that the *Statements* plays were so extreme and radical, and introduced to the South African stage experiments like “extensive mime, narrative disruption, nudity and physical exposure, surreal lighting effects and direct addresses to the audience” (Walder 1984: 79). He maintains that the *Statements* plays reflect Fugard’s new approach; and had an impact on other black theatre groups in the townships.

Fugard’s experimental-collaborative practices set the stage for radical experiments with form and content in the townships. Maponya’s formation of the Bahumutsi Theatre Group in 1976 for experimental purposes somewhat reflect this influence. Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984: 147) state that Maponya regards experimentation as the primary mode, while the text plays a secondary role. Moorosi (1997: 28) cites Maponya, who maintains that the play is “a skeleton which has to be fleshed out in performance through the dynamics of the actor, the designer and the director.” Like the Serpent Players, and other avant-garde ensembles, the Bahumutsi actors also experimented and became writers of their own experiences. van Graan (2006: 3) states that protest theatre is not unique to South Africa – or anywhere per se – because it is a theatre that crops up whenever there is political conflict or social oppression.<sup>77</sup> And speaking against the relegation of the protest theatre to the political and uncreative space, he points out that the notions of timelessness and universality – in the sense of acceptance – should not be used to dismiss certain protest works. He also maintains that the dismissive attitude towards some of these plays by theatre establishments in South Africa largely reflects the influence of class, privilege, and prejudice.

van Graan (2006: 5) also maintains that plays produced under the guidance and direction of Simon turned out to be more professional and less didactic, therefore pointing to the positive influence of white theatre practitioners. He observes that protest plays produced by blacks in the country were criticised “for being too political and not sufficiently theatrical” (van Graan 2006: 6). He identifies the many ambiguities involved, ranging from international acceptance; recognition and support; form and content; and criteria by which to evaluate and label theatre. Vandenbroucke (1985) also believes that the black actors with whom Fugard worked – under the name Circle and Serpent Players – would not have made it that far without his training

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<sup>77</sup> van Graan states that it can be found among South Asian Canadians in Toronto; in the anti-war Vietnamese protest theatre; in the work of Luiz Valdez and El Teatro Campesino; in the message theatre of the current anti-war movement in the USA; in the protest theatre of Zimbabwe. See: Mike, van Graan (2006) From Protest Theatre to Theatre of Conformity. *South African Theatre Journal*. 20 (1), p. 3

and professional touch. It was, however, a reciprocal relationship because they all benefited; these black actors helped bring out the subversive potentials in Fugard.

Fugard's plays, from *No-Good Friday* to *The Island*, have innate subversive traits. They also educate spectators and readers about grace under pressure – a condition in which many South Africans found themselves. Subversion<sup>78</sup> refers here to an attempt to transform an established social order and its structures of power, authority, and hierarchy. Interestingly, Maponya's art demonstrates this aim. Fugard and Maponya attempted to disrupt the institutionalised South African structures of authority. Maponya's works challenged the values and principles of the apartheid system and attempted to reverse them through education, mass rallying and militant action. Both playwrights attack the public morale, and Maponya, specifically, advocated for the will to resist exploitation and enslavement in the mines and compounds (as in *The Hungry Earth*), the health sector (as in *Umongikazi*), and the security system in the country (as in *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*). Maponya (1995: xi) maintains that change can only be achieved through unity and revolutionary struggle; and campaigned for belligerent and hostile action.

Maponya's theatre is both Brechtian and Marxist in orientation. Brechtian in this context is synonymous with adopting a Marxist leaning and point of view. Steadman (1994: xvii) states that the influence of the Brechtian model “is apparent not only in the formal aspects of the play, but also in the vision inscribed therein, a view of literature as political demystification.” In line with Marxist and Brechtian aesthetics, Maponya paid more attention to the themes that affect the black working class rather than the depth and psychology of his characters. He also dramatises the evils of the migrant labour system, and presents stark images of exploitation, enslavement and black working-class life. Fugard likewise used subversion as a tool to attain political goals. He was not, however, as direct and hard in his attack of the state as the more nationalist Maponya. His theatre was characterised by its detachment, evasions, and, as some critics argue, adaptation – designed to respond to a dynamic and complex situation.

### **2.3 Fugard and the anti-apartheid protest**

In this thesis, the literatures on Fugard's contributions to the anti-apartheid struggle through the theatre are divided into three broad groups. The first group criticise his detachment and political posture on the ground that his plays are about personal concerns and survival; and that he did not do much to depict or proffer ways out of the South African problem. His plays are also considered by the group as liberal and universal, and not political works. The second

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<sup>78</sup> The word subversion is derived from the Latin word “subvertere,” which means to overthrow.



group classify the plays as political in their own right considering the context that would have otherwise made their performance impossible to begin with. The third group emphasise that the plays are multidimensional (liberal *and* political), and that his contribution to the struggle is, therefore, complex. (This is not however a standard grouping). I will in this section review the relevant works from all the groups. Fugard's shifting positions on his own art will also be reviewed alongside views and claims by his actor-collaborators, Kani and Ntshona.

Fugard was actually interested in universal themes like that of love, humanity, and suffering – themes that permeate his art. Discussing Fugard's *Hello and Goodbye*, Astbury (1980: 62) argues that the play's production at The Space Theatre in Cape Town was "simple, extremely powerful, and above all, concerned more with human beings than ideologies." Fugard's main concern with humanity and suffering is prevalent not only in *Hello and Goodbye*, but also in the other two Port Elizabeth plays (*Blood Knot* and *Boesman and Lena*). In *Dimetos*, he was particularly not concerned with South Africa. Speaking about the production of the play, he states that it is not set in South Africa, and as such its personal statements do not represent the social specifics of the country as has been the case with his other works. This demonstrates a shift in his concern and the universality in his art – no longer about South Africa or specific social realities.

In a review of *Boesman and Lena*, Gussow (1977: 94) maintains that Fugard's plays are both personal and powerful political statements. He reiterates that they validate the belief that art can be used as a social instrument. Gussow adds, however, that the plays are not just political, but also poetic. He further points out that Fugard's association with South African politics – especially abroad – led to the poor reception of his experimental play, *Dimetos*, when it was first staged in London. Gussow (*ibid.*) observes that the play did not receive the attention it deserved because it was an "excursion away from Africa and into a mythical landscape." He maintains that Fugard's universality can be seen even in his plays dealing with the South African problem, stating that this gives appeal to the plays and ensure their timelessness and greatness. He emphasises that Fugard's plays do not only deal with the problem of racism in his country, but are universal because of their concern with humanity – stories of man against woman and people against people. Gussow concludes that when concerned with love, Fugard depicts the strength of bondage, and the endurance and indomitability of mankind. These themes were best depicted in the Port Elizabeth plays.

Fugard during an interview (in Rae 1971: 87) maintains that the Port Elizabeth plays make personal statements. He confessed that all his plays primarily make personal and not social

statements. And speaking about the political impact of his plays, he admits that he does not see them as necessarily political, citing instances with *People are Living There* and *Hello and Goodbye* as plays simply saying something about social conditions (Rae 1971: 82-3). On *Boesman and Lena* and *The Blood Knot*, he submitted that what he tried to do as an artist was to depict the issues of his period in his plays. He revealed that he wanted to defy and protest against the silence, suffering, and injustices in the country – and about how people live and what becomes of groups other than one’s own. Rae (1971: 83) also revealed that what Fugard produced were plays about the country’s living condition, noting that during the performance the audience were involved in the plays due to their depiction of real events, and because they could not outlive the political implications in them. Fugard (1964: 56) speaks of his role as an artist in South Africa:

I finally realised that this is a fairly dark world. Things are happening that are not seen or heard about. There is a conspiracy of silence abroad in that country, and witnesses are needed. And, if nothing else, my writing and my work could come down to doing that. I was conscious of this when I wrote *Boesman and Lena*. Because, if you really were to pick your way through the various strata of our society and arrive at the real rubbish, *Boesman and Lena* are that. They are absolutely anonymous, absolutely without faces; they are lost. Forgotten. Not known about. Not thought about. Not cared about. They are a joke.

Fugard (1964: 57) admits that Port Elizabeth provided him with the specifics he needed as an artist. He also confesses that although his own situation was not that bad, it still provided the background to his plays. In an interview with Peter Wilhelm in 1972, he explains that what he tried to do was to bear witness to the happenings in his time and country, and to talk about his fellow countrymen. Like other artists, therefore, his personality and art were also shaped by the South African context. He said that this context irreversibly conditioned his thoughts and shaped his art such that he could not really “argue with the sun that shines down mercilessly. You don’t question. You don’t pray. Thorn trees don’t pray; they just try to live (Wilhelm 1972: 114). In yet another interview with Raeford Daniel in 1978, Fugard complained of the situation in South Africa – one affecting artists and audiences, who had to survive amidst the storm. He reiterates that artists, notwithstanding, must persevere, knowing that they “live in a country with short horizons, with low-ceiling cloud. We’ve got to let ourselves go as far as we can, knowing that we are walking into a wall” (Daniel 1978: 64). At the time, writers had to deal with the choice of either writing overly political works that could lead to their arrest, or a ban on their works, or liberal works that were just as potent. In his analysis of Fugard’s

*Notebooks*, Coetzee (1992: 379) points out certain areas where Fugard expresses the dilemma of commitment and the fear of risking his integrity as an artist in the mid-1960s.

Fugard (in, Coetzee 1992: 379) confessed that he could not imagine any moral dilemma more crucifying than choosing what to make plays about. Aware of the horror of the apartheid state and his limited space as an artist, he walked cautiously in order to avoid the wrath that befell many committed artists and activists; even as he revealed that he was willing to take the risk at a certain point. Fugard (1983) writes that despite this danger, the truth must be told, and he must play his role as a South African artist. Coetzee (1992: 371) reveals that Satre's influence on his art enabled him to take up the task of reporting events as he saw them. Coetzee (1992: 372) argues, however, that Fugard avoided open politics and remained a witness rather than a participant – a position he chose for himself. By implication then, even *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* are about the solidarity of an outsider who strived to remain a witness. Fugard reveals that there are things they (as a group) wanted to say; things different from what they have succeeded in saying.

In an interview in 1974, John Kani revealed that Fugard (as a director) always told the actors they needed their art, and not propaganda. Walder (1984: 87) maintains that despite his take on the place of propaganda in theatre, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is not entirely free of it. He states that the play used South African specifics, and as such could not escape the facts of apartheid and the assumption “that only the blacks can help each other” (Ibid.). He states that any form of propaganda can be included in art, and thus confirms that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* “gained an authenticity absent from other political drama of the time” (Ibid). The complexity in Fugard's art cannot be taken away from the complexities in South Africa, and this has informed even the review of his works. His plays are, therefore, neither entirely liberal nor political because there is always another side to his stories.

Fugard remained faithful to both the political and liberal projects. His post-*Statements* plays, for example, are noticeably about white experiences, and directed, in the first place, towards white audience. Walder (1984: 125) believes that the plays are in fact “a long way from the achievements of the *Statements* plays.” As such, the categorisation of his plays into periods or subject is problematic if one looks at the overlap – say between the *Statements* plays and the *township plays*; and the fact that some of them cannot fit into any category. On this, Bowker (1983: 102) points out that *A Lesson from Aloes* (1978) is clearly a post *Statements* play, and is as political as *The Blood Knot* with its reference to sociopolitical events and policies such as the Group Areas Act, banning, house arrest, imprisonment and exit permit. Fugard actually

protested against the apartheid regime in different ways. Although he never rebelled against the state, when compared with other black artists, he nonetheless presents before his audience the effects of the many restrictive laws in place in the country.

Vandenbroucke (1985: xiii–xxi) highlights that the effect of the Group Areas Act<sup>79</sup> is evident in *Boesman and Lena*; Immorality Act<sup>80</sup> in *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*; the Pass Laws<sup>81</sup> in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *Marigolds in August*; and the Suppression of Communism Act<sup>82</sup> in *Lesson from Aloes*, *The Coat* and *The Island*. Vandenbroucke adds that in nearly all the plays, an insecure character tries to “locate his identity and assert the dignity inherent in his humanity.” Vandenbroucke believes that Fugard’s concern with all races in the country made him create plays about poor whites, coloureds, and blacks: they all have black and coloured characters, and are typically about the impoverished classes. Fugard’s works are about poverty, and depict the poor, victims of different kinds, and outcasts in a world “where even the human family seems to be on its legs” (MacLennan 1981: 221). Poverty is therefore a *given* subject in his plays because it equally affects the majority poor whites in the country. MacLennan believes that his concern with specifics allows him to concomitantly adumbrate a universal vision. MacLennan (1981: 223) concludes that his plays depict “a very dark view of man and his predicament.” His concern with the human condition rather than specifics allows him to transcend his limiting context; it also launches his works into the realm of reading and misreading.

Vandenbroucke (1985) also identifies this problem when he emphasises that his critics have often stressed the specifics with which he starts rather than the universals with which he ends.

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<sup>79</sup> The Act was established in 1957 and amended several times over the years. It was first promulgated on 7 July 1950. It was then amended in 1952, 1955 (twice) and 1956. It was reformulated and consolidated in 1957, and amended in 1961, 1962, 1965, 1966, 1969, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1982 and 1984. It was finally repealed in 1991 by the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act. The act generally restricted residence and movement. It was created for the ownership and occupation of designated groups and made it a criminal offence to reside or own land in areas other than where one was restricted to remain and live. It determined where blacks and whites lived in South Africa. It also helped to institutionalise segregation in the country.

<sup>80</sup> The Act was established in 1927, but was amended in 1950 by the Nationalist Government of D.F. Malan. It first prohibited extramarital sex between white people and people of other races. The amendment in 1950 prohibited sex between whites and non-whites.

<sup>81</sup> Pass laws in South Africa had a long history. In 1952 regional pass laws were repealed and one nationwide pass law instituted, requiring that all males over the age of 16 carry a reference book containing their identity number and other personal details. It was used as a form of influx control designed to manage urbanisation and limit the movement of black Africans under apartheid.

<sup>82</sup> The Act was established in 1950. It declared the Communist Party of South Africa an unlawful organisation. It made provision for declaring other organisations that promoted communist ideals in the country as unlawful. It also prohibited publications that promoted communist ideals, and made provision for other incidental matters.

He argues that the notion of Fugard as a national<sup>83</sup> writer does his art a great disservice, and that a reduction of this nature is inappropriate because in contemporary theatre you can write about anywhere and anything. Fugard also has his own shortcomings as an artist because, on several occasions, he referred to himself as a regional<sup>84</sup> writer who had mastered the code of his time and place (MacLennan 1981: 200). His proclaimed limited status allowed him to use the details of his Eastern Cape region experiences<sup>85</sup> to explore the conflicts and quandaries in the country. The South African context was therefore the focal point in his art, rather than the subject itself. Thus, his plays are more works of art than sociological essays or political tracts. Niven (1975: 89), however, argues that his depiction of regional events serve as a microcosm of the larger human condition. This became more apparent in the universalised experiences in his collaborative plays. Fugard and his actor-creators universalised the incarceration, pain and misery of John and Winston in *The Island*. The pain of one man's actual situation becomes the primary focus here. Niven (1975: 90) argues that Fugard and his co-creators were perhaps the only artists in South Africa who were able to universalise experience. For Vandenbroucke (1975: 195), the characters Fugard created "are never one-dimensional stick figures" implied by the critics and reviewers who see them as political tracts."

Fugard's work with black actors turned the tide of the criticisms of his plays around. He was never really affected by the regular black disdain towards white writers; and so did not allow reservations to affect his collaboration with black actors. He instead went on to prove himself by working with black groups such as the Sophiatown Group (also known as Circle Players). Contrary to the common blacks' reservations against whites in the country, these black artists did not suspect him when he was first introduced to them. They worked with him despite his colour and job at the Native Commissioner's Court; and were instrumental in the production of his Township plays, *No-good Friday*, *Nongogo*, and *Tsotsi*. He assisted his black artist to make protest statements that would satisfy their thirst to articulate the experiences of ordinary black people. Walder (1984: 39) believes, however, that he was not really keen on depicting black experiences, but was actually pushed "into doing so by the demands of the black people who became his actors." He maintains that the protest was more important to his black actors, whose lives and suffering are depicted in the plays. This proves that there were statements his

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<sup>83</sup> Fugard is regarded as a national writer abroad because his works are considered to be mostly about events in South Africa.

<sup>84</sup> Fugard regards himself as a regional writer because the Eastern Cape region, specifically Port Elizabeth, provided him with the materials he required as an artist. Regional is a more restrictive term than national because most of Fugard's plays are set in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa.

<sup>85</sup> Athol Fugard spent the best part of his early life and career in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa.

actors wanted to make that were not what he really wanted to say. His semblance can be seen in Father Higgins in *No-good Friday*, who always helped the black characters in the play to express themselves.

Fugard was both a sympathiser (a conduit of black expression) and an involved participant. There are parallels between the experiences of the black characters in his plays and his own experiences. In *Nongogo*, for example, the outbursts by Queeny about knowing a few things about compounds and the experiences of sexual humiliation there demonstrates that there is a connection between her and Johny – which is the gold mine. The mines served as a common source of their travails and continue to dominate “the lives and aspirations of everyone, black and white” (Walder 1984: 50). Walder notably claims that Fugard’s sense of commitment and solidarity with the black struggle was tasted when he refused to return to South Africa after the news and photos of the grotesque Sharpeville massacre went viral. He recalls that he only returned to the country “nine month later by when his wife was pregnant, they had run out of money, work and opportunity, and *The Blood Knot* had begun growing in his notebooks<sup>86</sup> (Walder 1984: 57).

Walder’s observation cannot be taken away from the nature of criticism levied against Fugard and the complexity in his art. It is also not far from the complex nature of the South African experience. Walder (1984: 50) argues that, having failed to return to the country immediately after the massacre, Fugard felt guilty and strived to do more in the later years, leading to his work with the Serpent Players, a successful collaborative-experiment that resulted in his most successful plays, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Vandenbroucke (1985: 131) confirms that it was during this collaborative period that apartheid emerged from the background and moved to the foreground in Fugard’s plays. Speaking in an interview about the sociopolitical specifics in his art, Fugard admitted that he frequently wondered whether he should be closer to South African problems, adding that the closer he got to them, the more he lost his artistry (Hodgins 1967: 26). Art and aesthetic were of equal importance to Fugard and his actors, and for this reason they created balanced plays, poetically and politically.

Munro (1981: 150) praises the political dimension of Fugard’s art in his review of *The Island* as a play produced despite the daunting situation in the country. He adds that the performance of crucial scenes from *Antigone* for fellow prisoners “would not be taken as an arty excess on the author’s part” in many countries (Ibid.). Fugard, clearly, proved that political statements

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<sup>86</sup> Athol Fugard was at the time a young émigré living in London with his wife, Sheila, when the news of the massacre came through. This position had, however, been counteracted by other critics and reviewers.

could be made in the theatre, things could be talked about, and that an artist could educate and incite an audience to action (see Chapters 3 and 4). Astbury (1980: 60) recounts that the political success of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* at The Space was commendable because the police tried to stop the play from being staged with a strong warning that all those involved would end up in jail. Astbury adds that even when the performance reopened in a small club, it ran with two plain-clothes policemen trying to stop it but ending up as part of the audience. The underground performance of *The Island* also demonstrated this political feat (see Chapter 4).

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were particularly influential at that time because of the radical statements they were able to make. Pieterse (1976: 200) maintains that even the name ‘Sizwe Bansi’ implies struggle and resistance and reminds readers and audience of Umkhonto we Sizwe.<sup>87</sup> Pieterse (1976: 200) states that audiences outside South Africa might sometimes have lost the deeper resonance of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, but “all kind of echoes [were] there for people inside South Africa.” Walder (1984: 77) captures the reception of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* abroad and reports how Fugard was accused by the South African cultural attaché at the Royal Court in London “of creating ‘hundreds of enemies’ for his country every night” that the *Statements* plays were performed. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were so successful abroad that Kani and Ntshona were honoured with a Joint Tony Award for superb acting, and led to the renaming of *Die Hodoshe Span* to *The Island*. They established a name for Fugard abroad as a national writer, a feat that also gave them a cover, as demonstrated in the global outcry for their release after their arrest at the Transkei for anti-Bantustan remarks (Ibid.). All these successes, however, came at a price for the artists.

Fugard, in an interview with Pat Williams in 1971, narrated how The Serpent Players lost its principal and committed actors to Robben Island, and how they had to work in his garage in order to evade arrest (Williams 1971: 56). Fugard (1964: 54) revealed that the fear of banning and incarceration forced them to work underground. He states that, unlike the off-Broadway group that was crippled by economic set-up, what they were dealing with in the country was an “official way of life that is one step away from branding our efforts as criminal” (Fugard 1964: 54). Niven (1975: 89) maintains that the *Statements* plays were still successful despite the many constraints – problems that could stifle any art – that they “puzzled many members of the audience during the Fugard season that these plays could have been performed publicly in South Africa without police persecution.” He adds that the plays overtly indicted the state,

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<sup>87</sup> “Umkhonto we Sizwe” can be translated as Spear of the Nation, and refers to a military weapon and the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC).

and so were not too appealing “to the kind of audience who expects their ‘serious’ theatre to be accompanied by plush-covered seats and gin-and-tonics in the interval” (Ibid.).

Studies on Fugard’s collaborative practice reveal that he worked under very poor conditions, and with a relatively low budget. His desire to survive and work compelled him to improvise if he had to remain in business. Pieterse (1971: 199) reveals that he was moved by the need to survive as an artist; this survival method informed his use of few actors so as to travel easily. He sacrificed a lot to the struggle, and as a member of a poor-white class<sup>88</sup> in South Africa he was considered “a traitor for turning against their own apparent interests” (Walder 1984: 6). Unlike Camus, whose bitter experiences led him to alienate himself – a form of exile like that of his character, Meursault, in *The Stranger* (1942) – towards the end of his life, Fugard held on and contributed to the struggle.<sup>89</sup> Both writers believed in individual freedom.

The parallel with Fugard’s situation is his character, Pieters, in *Lesson from Aloes*, one whose dilemma as an African who is considered as a traitor (informant) is quite similar to Fugard’s (Roberts 1980: 229). Fugard’s pronounced support (in Rae 1971: 78) for black people and the poor (of all races) in the society met with challenges and rejections even by some of the black South Africans and artists. Some of the criticisms of his theatre are centred on his failure to transcend his skin colour. He defied this and wrote for the *underdogs* (to use Fugard’s term). Fugard (1964: 53) maintains that what South Africa needed at that time was “cooperation regardless of race, with mixed casts playing to racial audiences.”

Gray (1982: 16) notes that Fugard’s commitment and position as a spokesman of the victims of his own society (generally the dispossessed) was influenced by the anger of theatres of the 1950s and 1960s across the world. His plays are thus a detailed depiction of the suffering and struggle for survival in his country. His concern varies however if we compare the Statements plays with the Port Elizabeth plays of the sixties. Pieterse (1976: 201) maintains that although Fugard’s plays are political, they do not offer answers; the seriousness in them is lessened by their stark humour. On the contrary, MacLennan (1981: 218) observes that although Fugard’s plays are equally about the carbuncles in his society, the solutions in them are infolded to the “dramatic givens rather than mandates to remedy revealed social wrongs.” In MacLennan

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<sup>88</sup>The group is known for its anti-black feelings.

<sup>89</sup> Albert Camus was born in Dreaan (then Mandovi) in French Algeria on 7 November 1913 of Breton and Spanish parentage; Fugard also had a mixed parentage. Camus was brought up in North Africa and had many jobs there before moving to Metropolitan France. From 1848 to 1962, the Mediterranean region of Algeria was administered as an integral part of France. Camus’s experiences were quite similar to Fugard’s in many ways; he notably influenced Fugard’s practice and ideology about the revolution. Camus was active in the resistance during the German occupation and became the editor of the clandestine paper *Caligula* – a name of one of his pre-war plays *Caligula* (1939). He however abandoned politics (and journalism) and devoted himself to writing.



(1981: 219), Fugard also debunks the notion that his works are concerned with the universals as against the specifics:

If there have ever been “universals” in my writing they have had to look after themselves. I concern myself with the “specifics.” When the fire-blackened paraffin tin, or Boesman’s flea ridden mattress, or the mud between Lena’s toes means something to me, things might start to happen. It’s been this way with anything I have ever written. I think it was Camus that spoke about “the truth the hand can touch.”

The historical context of Fugard’s production (which is the setting for all his plays apart from *Dimetos*) was a troubled and extreme one. He however survived the numerous apartheid laws and overcame suspicion and state suppression by expressing his views through the theatre. He utilised all the resources that theatre offers, and through that depicted painful South African experiences, the type we find in *Boesman and Lena*. His plays demonstrate his deep faith in the individual human being’s potential for survival; his Port Elizabeth plays speak of this individual freedom most of all. The many reviews of these plays prove that he was already an established playwright prior to the *Statements* plays. His fame and reputation did not emerge as a result of his collaboration with the Serpent Players. The reviews of his post-*Statements* plays such as *A Lesson from Aloes* (1980) and *Master Harold and the Boys* (1982) also reveal that he is a playwright in his own right. Clark (1974: 7), for example, reports that Fugard is prominent in the US for his presentation of the troubled and tormented South African society in *The Blood Knot*, *Hello and Goodbye* and *Boesman and Lena*.

This study is aware of some of these recorded literary successes. It is (particularly) concerned however with Fugard’s collaborative-experiment, a type of theatre at a given time, one which sealed his reputation at home and abroad. Fugard’s reputation as an internationally acclaimed dramatist is confirmed by newspaper and performance reviews praising his success, locally and abroad. An example of these newspaper reviews is de Villiers’ (1974: 23), who notes that “when Athol Fugard’s season of plays ends here on March 2, his name could be as well established in Britain as that of a leading dramatist like John Osborn and Harold Pinter.” And speaking about the *Statements* plays, de Villiers reveals that officials at the Royal Court in London were delighted that the public had accepted the plays as theatrical works of a high order. Kroll (1974: 13) also praised Fugard’s *The Island* as an expression of humanity. Kroll writes that the play shows man’s defiance against the state and makes the point that “dignity and nobility can transcend oppression and degradation” – a very incisive statement capable of stirring the audience’s blood (Ibid.).

de Villiers (1974: 23) also captures Kani's excitement that *Die Burger*, a South African pro-government newspaper, headlined an article about their success in the British season. Kani was happy that the newspaper referred to him and Ntshona as South Africans and not natives or Bantus.<sup>90</sup> Smith (1974: 1) also maintains that Fugard was South Africa's most successful dramatist, adding that he was able to overcome his "prejudice from ever going forward and with nowhere to run back to." Mitchell (1974: 132) notes that Fugard's plays were considered during the South African season as examples of the best politics, and Fugard as a director of great genius for bringing out the best in Yvonne Bryceland and Ben Kingsley in *Statements after an Arrest*. Woods (2000) also confirms that Fugard is acknowledged internationally as a theatre genius.

Fugard's accomplished feats as a great artist were also stressed by a number of performance reviews. Wardle (1974: 31) for example reveals that the Royal Court management recognised "that Fugard's politics also involve art of a high order." Kroll (1974: 11) observes that Fugard and his actor-creators created a "theatre with unique dramatic impact and crucial significance in its relationship to reality – the Kafkaesque reality of South Africa." de Villiers (1974: 23) also reveals that the audience during the British season "tended to find the plays very human and not solely South African, they have sensed that they portray universal ideas of the human condition." Walker (1974: 3) also writes that Fugard, when probed on the effects of his plays, maintained that "if you tell the human story, the propaganda will come of itself." Fugard adds that he sees himself as "politically naive" and unable to handle specific issues (Ibid.). Walker quotes Fugard, who admitted that he was in despair about the fate of his country. Fugard, in an interview in the *Rand Daily Mail* (1974: 21), also admits that unlike Alan Paton who "is a Christian and has faith, I'm afraid I'm not and have none."

Jarvis (1973: 17) maintains that Fugard's adulterous<sup>91</sup> relationship with the theatre of South Africa did not in fact hinder his commitment to the liberation struggle. He states that Fugard, during his collaboration with the Serpent Players, urged the actors to break the conspiracy of silence in the country, maintaining that it was the only group at that time that had the capacity to achieve that. Jarvis observes that the new legislation which ultimately desegregated South African theatres made Fugard more willing to take the jump; it left artists in the country with the option of either surrendering to the 'silence' about the happenings at the time or utilising

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<sup>90</sup> The word "Bantu" was used by the colonialists as a general label for the 300–600 ethnic groups in Africa who speak Bantu languages. "Abantu" is, however, the original Zulu word and means people. Black South Africans were at times officially called "Bantu" by the apartheid state.

<sup>91</sup> Referring to Fugard's work in theatre with both black and white actors.

the new-found freedom to perform anywhere and before any audience, including a multiracial one. Fugard chose that he was no longer in support of silence, and so changed his stance on the “cultural boycott he initiated in the earlier years” (Ibid.). He remained faithful to the anti-apartheid protest, such that not even the seizure of his passport<sup>92</sup> stopped him from working, or compelled him to “leave the country on a one-way exit permit, which is what he felt the authorities were after” (Walder 1984: 26). Instead, he continued staging his dramas in mostly unofficial fringe venues and for all races in the country.

Fugard was nonetheless careful not to incur the wrath of the law, and this partly explains the muddle of perspectives in his plays. Smith (1974: 1) maintains that liberalism in Fugard’s art is strictly technical, the intention being to keep within the limits of his country’s censorship laws. He states that even in *The Island* (his most political piece) Fugard avoided making overt and provocative statements. He notes that the characters are clearly on the Island for political reasons, and that the idea of the liberation movement even appears, but “to go any further into that territory would have meant treading the dangerous ground inhabited by banned political parties” (Smith 1974: 1) – the idea was to get plays staged, not banned. Smith (ibid) adds that Fugard’s equivocation is tied both to the censorship and restrictive state laws and his genuine doubts about the revolutionary “crude policy of breaking eggs to make an omelette.” Fugard, like Camus, did not accept the idea that every revolution comes at a price, usually resulting in casualties who must give up their lives in order for the struggle to succeed. He also points out that Fugard was unwilling to give up his heritage by putting his life on the line.

Further, Smith rejects the claim that Fugard did not return home shortly after the Sharpeville massacre.<sup>93</sup> He maintains that Fugard and his wife (Sheila) bought a one-way ticket home at a period “when many liberal whites sought refuge in Europe from the massive police campaign mounted against all opponents of the regime” (Smith 1974: 1). Fugard (1983) emphasises that his country needed him and so he could not stay away. The impact of his contributions in the struggle against apartheid cannot, therefore, be ignored or downplayed. Smith (ibid.) argues that “there are no false illusions about the playwright’s impact on the political stage.” While speaking about his role in the struggle, nonetheless, Fugard claimed that his contribution was “just a drop in the bucket, but it’s a drop – my main feeling is that of confusion.” His painting

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<sup>92</sup> Fugard’s passport was seized by the South African authority in 1967 while he was working with the Serpent Players of New Brighton. The seizure was expected to put a wet blanket on him but he did not relent. And in 1971, a public petition helped secure his passport. See: Dennis, Walder (1984) *Athol Fugard*. London: Macmillan.

<sup>93</sup> This claim was raised by Dennis, Walder. Ibid. p. 57.

on a small canvas in plays such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* came to depict the larger strata of his society (see Chapter 4).

Dry (1985: 11) maintains that Fugard (et al.) in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* could not avoid politics altogether because they had a far-reaching effect on the lives of South Africans. His characters, therefore, embody the politics because they are representatives of that society. Dry observes that the characters are “irrevocably tied to politics and their lives are dominated by man-made laws at all levels.” He notes nonetheless that Fugard’s plays are not principally about propaganda, even as they raise issues that need to be attended to – the purpose being to stir and conscientise. Schonings (1985: 235) quotes Fugard, who recounts that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was successful in generating arguments among the audience members during its first performance on 8 October 1972 at The Space. It was able to achieve this because it pricked the minds and consciences of its spectators:

Arguments and counter-arguments, angry declarations and protests followed fast and furiously. As I stood at the back of the hall listening to it I realised I was watching a very special example of one of theatre’s major responsibilities in an oppressive society: to try to break the conspiracy of silence that always attends an unjust social system. And most significant of all: that conspiracy was no longer being assaulted just by the actors. The action of our play was now being matched and equally by the action of the audience. People were saying directly and forcefully, almost recklessly so, what they felt and thought [...] A performance on stage had provoked a political event in the auditorium [...]. (Fugard, in Schonings 1985: 235)

Mitchell (1974: 132) points out that despite such an accomplished political feat, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* present events as they affect the people in the country, and not based on what Marx and Lenin propose. He describes the collaboration between Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona as miraculous and presents that the events depicted in the Statements plays are “so saturated in politics that politics never have to be mentioned” (Ibid). He also observes that the truth in the plays is so strong that it can stand on its own. Kani states that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* are considered great plays because the co-authors did not sacrifice aesthetics in the play-making process:

Athol taught us that we need our art, not propaganda. We tell a story in the simplest form and then we add art to the telling of it. Athol always reminds us that the story is enough and the message will take care of itself. The truth is bigger than ourselves and we should tell it as simply as possible (Kani, in Mitchell 1974: 131).

Lambert (1974: 14) argues that Fugard’s protest plays do not contain propaganda, although they are deeply concerned with the dreadful pressures of a divided and authoritarian society.

For Lambert, the plays are concerned with people, and are comical and compassionate even at moments when they make serious statements. He states, however, that what the plays do not lack is that doggedness of the human spirit, something South Africans needed to survive during the apartheid years. Taylor (1974: 40) also questions the politics in Fugard's plays as well as the credit he enjoys as a protest playwright. He quotes Fugard's response in defence of his position and cause:

I'd like to believe that a play can be a significant form of action, but I have never been able to convince myself. Still, I can't make bombs or organise strikes, so I have to do what I can do reasonably well, which is write plays. I'm not good at propaganda, either. Maybe I'd be more useful if I was.

Fugard's defence of his role in the liberation struggle exposes the ambiguities in his plays and his ambiguous status and identity as an artist in South Africa. Taylor (1974: 40) observes that South Africa itself is defined by its paradoxes and ambiguities so much so that it is difficult to make obvious statements. As a product of such a society, Fugard's theatre could not escape double-edged standard and criticisms. As a white artist, Fugard sat on the fence – neither in support of the horrors of apartheid on its victims nor of the blacks' violent struggle – one that could lead to the loss of his loved ones and Afrikaner heritage (Taylor 1974: 41). Taylor adds that Fugard's dilemma is obvious, as can be seen when he expressed his fear and opposition to the violence in the country, arguing that there are Afrikaner elements in his life he does not want to lose.

Walder (1993: 121) maintains that the “the near-total hegemony of the white minority created by apartheid has meant that white liberals and other dissidents such as Fugard are part of the structures of domination they oppose.” Davis (2013: 120) argues that this can be identified in Fugard's work with black actors, and in the process of the publication of *Statements* (1974). She presents that the publication process “generated significant tension between the authors” (Davis 2013: 121). Olaiya (2008: 78) also maintains that Fugard's privileged status as a white playwright in South Africa allowed him to enjoy privileges, which then generated a cloud of suspicion and criticisms from critics and artists who argued that he “consigns his truth to a certain epistemological standpoint that essentially makes him a partial witness, despite his numerous protestations to the contrary.” And for Burns (2002: 242), Fugard has always seen himself as “a story-teller rather than a political writer.”

Burns (2002: 237) maintains that the Port Elizabeth plays are a testimony to his “sympathy for the underdog without directly indicting the social agents causing that suffering.” She also

observes, however, that Fugard contributed to the anti-apartheid struggle in his treatment of “taboo subjects such as race and sex” and in his portrayal on stage of the specifics of the lives of characters of all races (Ibid.). She states that *The Island* is a representation of the suffering and psychology of black political prisoners; and reports that Mandela also staged Antigone’s trial scene as a political prisoner on Robben Island. Burns (2002: 241) also maintains that the performance confirms the relevance of art in the struggle, its relation to the South African politics, and, generally, the “social and political responsibility of the writer” in a society.

Seymour (1980: 536) maintains that Fugard adopts a liberal philosophy in his presentation of characters and in the characters’ appeal to the audience. Seymour presents that “the questions he puts to the audience are purely emotional appeals to man’s better nature, a key concept in liberal philosophy.” In this way, Fugard established a sympathetic and emphatic connection between actors and audience. Seymour (1980: 537) states that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* “belongs to a liberal tradition which is both international and national.” As a liberal work, therefore, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is replete with the attempt to propagate the liberal ideals of self-interest and survival in a ruthless world, an ideal which Buntu attempts to instil in Sizwe in the play. Seymour maintains that liberalism in the arts, no matter how effectively presented, generates a negative impact because it is shrouded in its own contradiction(s). Seymour concludes that the liberal position is inadequate in dealing with the South African situation because of the dodges and evasions that characterise it. The many contradictory reviews on Fugard’s work in theatre reveal that he is the most controversial playwright of the struggle years.

Kruger (2003: 622) maintains that Fugard’s reputation as a great anti-apartheid playwright – one of the best to have come out of Southern Africa – needs to be reconciled. She states that there is an obvious contradiction in the way directors, actors, and critics deal with his hidden role as a “dramatist of personal betrayal in a police state” (Kruger 2003: 622). Kruger states that the contradiction in the plays is the result of the apparent paradox inherent in his art and conviction. She observes that while his “apartheid-era plays are certainly anti-apartheid, they do not advocate a collective political resistance or a socialist critique of apartheid capitalism” (Kruger 2003: 625). In a polemical letter to *The African Communist*, Robert MacLaren<sup>94</sup> (alias Mshengu Kavanagh) states that apart from *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, the rest of Fugard’s plays “were trapped by bourgeois subjectivity; they emphasised ‘stoic endurance’

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<sup>94</sup> Robert MacLaren was an anti-apartheid South African artist in exile during the apartheid years. He directed the South African Workshop ’71 and was the creator (with four black actors) of the anti-apartheid agitprop piece *Survival*, which was staged in 1976 on the eve of the Soweto Uprising. The intervention of the police during the performance forced MacLaren and the actors to leave South Africa. See: Kruger, Loren. (2003) Seeing through Race: Athol Fugard, (East) Germany, and the Limits of Solidarity. *Modern Philology*, 100 (4). pp. 619–651.

to racial oppression rather than revolt against apartheid capitalism” (Ibid.). Kruger argues that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* are different because the actor-creators are blacks who had experienced apartheid directly.

Kruger (2003) also cites Fiebach, who defends Fugard’s concern with individualism instead of collective struggle. Fiebach (in Kruger 2003: 626) maintains that his choice of subject and style allows him to depict a more clearer picture of the level of man’s inhumanity to man, in addition to the “total alienation of people under apartheid and the limitation of resistance to the individual level.” Kruger admits that his style was equally potent, even as it may not be as direct and overt as that of black artists. She gives an example with *The Blood Knot* and argues that although the play did not capture the hard times white liberals in the country endured as a result of their condemnation of apartheid, it is still replete with records of “the shock effect of the police massacre of unarmed protesters at Sharpeville in 1960, and subsequent banning of mass organisations such as the ANC and Pan-Africanist Congress” (Kruger 2003: 628). She observes that the play exemplifies the contradictions and limitations inherent in liberal works. Kruger (2003: 630) also cites Lewis Nkosi, who argues that Zach and Morris in *The Blood Knot* are presented under the spell of racist thinking. She thus points out that “Zach’s support of Morris’s attempt to pass and his capitulation to his brother’s resignation to a life defined by racial impersonation suggests not merely political quietism but also an implicit concession to the rationalisation of white supremacy” (Ibid.).

Diala (2006: 240) also emphasises that there is a paradox in Fugard’s theatre, adding that his contribution to the liberation struggle is enmeshed in controversies. He maintains that Fugard did not really appropriate his art to serve as a “weapon of the struggle against the Afrikaner hegemony” despite the incessant pressure by radical black artists in South Africa. Heywood (2004: 241) further reports that Fugard refused to tailor his art in that regard, and maintained the stance that he would not take orders from a cultural commissar. Fugard (in Diala 2006: 183) maintained that: “I know there is an enormous move afoot to create some sort of cultural commissariat that will make sure the arts are part of the struggle, I reject that outright.” Diala (2006: 184) also reports that as opposed to the call to use art as a political vehicle, Fugard retains his humanist ideals, and in that way pictures the absurdity of the human condition, one that offers no alternative or solution.

However, Fugard was to turn this thinking and criticisms around in his collaborative works with black actors. Walder (2003: 3) states that the collaboration gave the actors a platform to express their lived experiences. He notes that Fugard took a lot of risk – both on a personal

level and in his relationship with other artists in South Africa – at a time when the state was “hell-bent on destroying, not only serious opposition, but all signs of independent thought” (Ibid.). He states that Fugard’s family and actor-collaborators also had to endure “censorship, surveillance and worse, although as Fugard acknowledges, he himself was protected from the most terrible aspects by the privilege of his white skin” (Ibid.). The statements in Fugard’s plays were strong and overtly inciting, although Fugard preferred not to be labelled a political artist. Walder (2003: 2) quotes Fugard, who maintains that it was frustrating to be “labelled a political artist” because the nomenclature generated a number of expectations that affected the reception of his plays. Even more seriously, the labelling denies him certain freedoms as a writer, despite, as he states, the fact that he could not find a single area of his life that politics has not invaded.

Walder (2003: 7) also quotes Fugard, who maintains that his works were not informed by any ideology, political or otherwise. He further states that what Fugard tried to do was to report as truthfully as he could the pain and misery of “the nameless and destitute of one little corner of the world.” Fugard, therefore, wrote between the “two safe platforms of the private and the public, the personal and the political” (Walder 2003: 3). Heywood (2004: 184) presents that despite the limitations and contradictions in Fugard’s art, his *Statements after an Arrest* picks a taboo subject and creatively depicts the effect of the country’s infamous anti-sex legislation. Heywood adds that prior to *Statements after an Arrest*, there was no play that touched on the Immorality Act in the country. And speaking on *The Island*, Heywood (ibid) states that it was Fugard’s interest in the Nguni-Sotho oral civilisation that led to the play, adding that it was a “monument to the age of Mandela.” He also maintains that there is a salient and unambiguous reference to Mandela in the play, thus pointing that one can find in the play parallels between Winston’s defiance of the law during the prison concert and that of Mandela’s performance of *Antigone* as a political prisoner on Robben Island.

In a more recent work, Davis (2013: 117) notes that the performance of Fugard et al’s<sup>95</sup> *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* in the small town of Butterworth<sup>96</sup> was explosive and radical. She corroborates

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<sup>95</sup> Caroline Davis emphasised the collaborative nature of *Sizwe* and *Island*. Many reviewers and critics ignore, or downplay, the contributions of John Kani and Winston Ntshona in the play-making process. See: Caroline, Davis. (2013) Publishing Anti-apartheid Literature: Athol Fugard’s *Statements Plays*. *A Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 48 (1). pp. 113–129.

<sup>96</sup> Butterworth is a town in the Transkei, South Africa. Davis reports that John Kani and Winston Ntshona were the two actors during the Butterworth performance on 8 October 1976, barely two weeks before the Transkei was due to become independent. They were arrested immediately after the performance. Ibid.



that the apartheid state opposed the play for its critique of the sham Transkei<sup>97</sup> independence, leading to the arrest and detention of Kani and Ntshona for a few weeks. Davis (ibid.) reports that in its defence<sup>98</sup> of the incarceration of the actors, the state presented that the Butterworth performance was “vulgar, abusive and highly inflammable.” She reports that the Royal Court Performance Programme<sup>99</sup> considers *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* as radical, political, and anti-regime plays reflecting the realities of South African society. She also corroborates that the rehearsal and performance of *The Island* had to be underground “because of the legal embargo against publicly discussing the South African prison situation” (Davis 2013: 116).

Davis (2013: 7) reports that the *Statements* plays were considered “radical and subversive by the South African authorities, as well as by audiences and critics” during their early runs.<sup>100</sup> And consequently, the scripts of the plays went through serious editorial work, carried out by Carol Buckroyd of Oxford University Press in 1974. Davis (2013: 8) also maintains that the political impact of the plays was actually watered-down by Buckroyd’s extensive editing and Fugard’s inclusion of a solo introduction to the Oxford University Press (OUP) edition of the trilogy, *Statements: Three Plays* (1974). She maintains that all these changes were carried out without due consultations with Kani and Ntshona, the other black authors of the plays *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. She reiterates that the intention was to turn these plays into literary and liberal texts concerned with universal human suffering, instead of specific protest against the South African regime.

Thus, the reader of these most overtly political of Fugard’s plays was reassured at the threshold of the book that there’s no mention of the theory of apartheid in the plays [...] The reader was instead assured that the politics of the plays were tempered by literary abstraction. The specific South African content was not denied but the plays were promoted as more widely significant, as representations of “Africa” and the “African experience” [...]. (Davis 2013: 126).

Davis (2013: 127) believes that the intention was to actually downplay the radical and anti-apartheid content in the plays so as to promote and market Fugard, and, specifically, the plays as universal and liberal works rather than political and anti-apartheid plays. She discloses that the extensive copy-editing by Buckroyd, manner of printing, form of the book, the changes to

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<sup>97</sup>Transkei means an area beyond the river. It was a Bantustan area, with its capital in Umtata, set aside for members of a specific ethnicity. It was also the first of four territories to be declared independent of South Africa during the apartheid years. It was reintegrated into South Africa in 1994 and became the Eastern Cape province.

<sup>98</sup> *Daily Telegraph*. 13 October 1976. p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> The Programme was written by Mary Benson.

<sup>100</sup> The plays were first performed in South Africa between 1972–1973.

the manuscripts by Fugard, Buckroyd's blurb,<sup>101</sup> and solo introduction by Fugard generated a lot of controversy between the co-authors. She concludes that Fugard became the spokesman for his silent co-creators and assumed the role as the sole writer.<sup>102</sup> The omission of politics in the *Statements* (1974) eventually carved a niche for Fugard as a writer, and not a political commentator. This somewhat explains why his art was/is rejected in the anti-apartheid canon by black artists in South Africa.

The 1974 OUP saga somewhat explains the difference in reception, reading, and criticism of the *Statements* plays. While most early commentaries on the plays (as reviewed above) reveal that they were political, more recent works from 1974 stress either their liberalism or muddle of perspectives. Diala (2006: 184), for example, maintains that in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* Fugard reinforces the belief that there is no solution to human suffering, arguing that what is left are evasions, diabolical comforts, and acceptance of death as a beautiful gift. He concludes that, like Camus, Fugard is a humanist who "lumps existing social and political structures [...] with the universal and ineluctable absurdity of the human condition" (Ibid). Olayia (2008: 75) also argues that Fugard's art is liberal and humanist in nature. He notes that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* depicts the subjugation of the individual in South Africa in relation to a "global trend of economic and social marginalisation" (2008: 76).

Olayia (2008: 76) notes that given the trend across the globe, the contest then for supremacy between the apartheid state and the native South Africans in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is universal. He explains that it occurs especially in countries where legislation similar to that of apartheid is in place. Olayia also argues that as a play that emphasises the individual and not collective action and resistance, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* does not offer a way out of the prevailing situation in the country; but instead focuses on the brutalisation and survival of the individual in an oppressive society where his choices determine his existence. And while looking at the play from a different angle, he argues that it promotes transgressive acts and dissent – behaviour considered illegal and subversive by the regime. Further, Olayia (2005: 85) presents that the play "radically engages with the daily tensions faced by migrant labourers" in the country and

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<sup>101</sup> The blurb represented and packaged the plays as literary and liberal works. See: Caroline, Davis (2013) Publishing Anti-apartheid Literature: Athol Fugard's *Statements Plays*. *A Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 48 (1). pp. 113–129.

<sup>102</sup> Athol Fugard unofficially acted as John Kani and Winston Ntshona's representative during the publication process of the Oxford University Press edition of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island* and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* – called the *Statements: Three Plays* (1974). He, however, instructed OUP that Kani and Ntshona, as co-authors, should also receive royalties. See: Caroline, Davis. (2013) Publishing Anti-apartheid Literature: Athol Fugard's *Statements Plays*. *A Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 48 (1). pp. 113–129.

demonstrates the possibility of evasion and breach of law; ultimately endorsing that even the infamous pass laws can be frustrated and the individual can get around the unending laws in South Africa.

The review above reveals that Fugard's art is replete with paradoxes; and so his theatre can best be described as a theatre of ambiguities. Fugard's plays are seen as liberal and political, thus illustrating his multidimensional approach to art. It should therefore be noted that there is a contradiction in the reception and interpretation of their performance as subversive and political statements against the regime and in their reading and criticism as dramatic texts that emphasise universality, humanity, and liberalism. The many reviews on *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* (as dramatic texts) confirms Davis's (2013) submission that the politics in the plays have been watered-down in the Oxford University Press edition. Majority of readers today rely on the evidence provided in the texts, and because the plays are far removed from their context(s), they cannot then easily identify with the statements, characters, and events presented. The tendency to universalise the experiences in the plays then sets in. None of the works reviewed above have critically examined the plays as performance and dramatic texts. Readers coming from literary studies often find it difficult to discuss the plays in the contexts of their performance. It is in this regard that this thesis will particularly contribute in bridging this gap.

#### **2.4 Maponya and theatre for a change**

Maponya's role as a black playwright and a cultural agent for change – in both the conditions of black life and form of the theatre – had generated a number of controversies. His and other radical black artists' concern with the urgency of the emancipation project received a number of criticisms from critics, who argued that he had consigned his art to the bitter, political, and so uncreative space. On the contrary, a few reviews submit that the *local* and immediate with which he was dealing can have global legs.<sup>103</sup> These differing and alternative viewpoints are stressed by a number of performance reviews of his dramas abroad. It is also given weight by a few of the studies to be reviewed in this section. Generally however, most of the works here emphasise the radical nature of his performances; one which is particularly common to black theatre practitioners from the mid-1970s.<sup>104</sup>

Radicalism emerged among black artists in South Africa because black anger and resentment increasingly found a “daring outlet in the theatre of the struggle, where radical playwrights

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<sup>103</sup> Referring here to immediate black experiences (themes) and avid concern with the politics of place.

<sup>104</sup> Black playwrights and other artists were the cultural agents of the struggle against apartheid.

attempt to conscientise their audience with a mixture of blood, sweat and propaganda” (Silber 1984: 14). Silber observes that black theatre in South Africa avoided the old decadent junk common with commercial theatres at the time, and, as such, was not just any kind of theatre by black actors, playwrights or directors. He adds that it was a theatre that propagated, rallied the people and offered alternative ways out of their situation. Steadman (1994: xxii) considers Maponya as one of the black playwrights whose significant contributions led to the making of an alternative South African theatre that was geared towards black liberation. Maponya was an actor, oral performer, poet, director, and one of South Africa’s renowned black dramatists.

Maponya uses his theatre to explore the political and economic relations of social life, and through that paints the problems of racism and black life in general (Steadman 1994: xvii). Moorosi (1997: 12) presents that his theatre was geared towards producing an African theatre designed for the liberation of the masses – a clear Marxist orientation. Steadman (1994: xviii) maintains that resistance serves as a backdrop for the action in most of his works; frequently aided by resistance songs that emphasise awakening and a call to arms to resist segregation and the imposition of the apartheid state. Silber (1984: 12) refers to Maponya’s theatre as that of the dispossessed: radical in all ramifications. He cites Maponya, who maintains that he will continue to write radical plays till the wall which divides the people in the country crumbles. Maponya (in Silber 1984: 12) adds that he uses his plays for propaganda and conscientisation – emphasising that he needed “an escape valve for his burning anger.” Maponya said that he can only stand up and shout because that is what he knows how to do best, and because it is the practicable way he can get his people to wake up. Speaking about the dilemma of black artists in the country, he argues that much was expected from them, unlike from white artists like Fugard and Simon who could get away with just saying anything. Thus, he argues that “if I talk of freedom and Barney Simon talks of freedom, it’s two different things” (Silber 1984: 12).

Hollyer and Luther (1985: 16) recount that Maponya’s radicalism in *Umongikazi* pitched him against the security forces in South Africa. Maponya (1995: ix-x) recalls that he faced various forms of police harassment as a playwright even though he never submitted his scripts to the censors, or even published them. He narrates that he was questioned about *Umongikazi* by the security forces, who invited him to the station for interrogation. And in the 1983 “Programme Notes for the Performance of *Umongikazi*”<sup>105</sup> at the Market Theatre, Maponya writes that due

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<sup>105</sup> Programme notes are produced by playwrights, groups or theatre/cultural establishments (such as the Market Theatre). The notes serve as a brief on the performance: introducing the play, actors, director, rehearsal process,

to the radicalism in *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*, the latter was limited to experimental avant-garde theatre venues like the Laager section of the Market Theatre. In the “Programme Notes for the performance of *Jika*,” he upholds that many of the so-called protest plays that flooded the apartheid stage only lamented the plight of the oppressed, and did not proffer ways out of the impasse. He maintains that his play, *Jika*, attempts to provide answers to the problems in South Africa in the way the protagonists proffer revolutionary solutions. Under apartheid, black people had two choices: resist and gain freedom *or* conform and remain enslaved. Their evident choice of resistance manifests in works by black artists and about black life.

Steadman (in Jones and Jones 1996: 105) observes that there is a relation between Maponya’s radicalism and his experiences as a black South African. He maintains that the turbulence and political realities in the country affected Maponya’s life, and consequently his plays, stressing that it was his personal experiences of oppression that made him “a playwright of outspoken radical commitment” (Ibid). Maponya’s plays are known for their criticism of the excesses of apartheid. In *The Hungry Earth* for example he explores the “exploitation of industrial labour through the migrant labour system and the pass laws” (Jones and Jones 1996: 105). Maponya reveals the accompanied political consequences in the form of anti-pass law demonstrations and strikes, and in the human cost, resulting in mine fatalities, alcoholism, and prostitution (Ibid.). In *Umongikazi*, he exposes spectators to the racist practices in the health sector and champions change through unionisation. And in *Gangsters*, he challenges the “interrogation, banning, torture, and death in detention of a poet, lambasting police complicity [...] and castigating those responsible” (Ibid.). Studies on his plays highlight that exploitation, whether in the health sector, mines or rural migrant labour, is the bedrock of his radical message.

Steadman (1984: 392) maintains that playwrights such as Maponya demystified the migrant labour system in the country through the theatre. The migrant system provided these theatre practitioners with material. He notes that the core image of the “clenched fists” raised high in “black power salutes,” and the emphasis on phrases like “we will fight hard/we will rise up,” in *The Hungry Earth*, points to the evident political dimensions of the play (Steadman 1984: 392). He adds, however, that the play is a juxtaposition of popular entertainment and serious didacticism, with the serious intention in the play being the primary concern. Steadman (1984: 411) reports that the writer refers to his theatre as theatre of purpose, asserting that he uses it “to enlighten and conscientise.” Maponya (in Steadman 1984: 411) stated that he makes no

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and sometimes the situation(s) or event(s) leading to the production of the play that is to be performed. Notes are useful for this study because they help explain the situation(s) leading to the performance of the plays cited. They sometimes also reveal a play’s performance history as well as the players involved.

apologies if his plays sound more like propaganda. Steadman concludes that as a committed playwright, he demystifies important social situations and demonstrates the possibilities of “altering the dominant structure of relations” (Ibid.).

Maponya (in Nwapa 1995: 67) maintains that the “theatre is one of the most dynamic ways” of raising consciousness available to artists in South Africa.” Fuchs (1992: 168) presents that artists such as Maponya and Manaka were “inspired by the events of 1976 and the teachings of Steve Biko.” Consequently, they wrote about the situation in the country, while at the same time celebrating African history and culture. Maponya in particular emphasised the dignity of the African; depicted the suffering of migrant labourers in *The Hungry Earth*; the torture and death of a poet-activist in *Gangsters*; and appealed “for unity and action” (Fuchs 1992: 168). Fuchs states that Maponya and Manaka were censored and banned several times because of the radicalism and propaganda in their plays. She notes that the performance of Maponya’s *Return the Drum* at the Grahamstown Festival is an extreme example of the writer’s militant posture. Unlike other artists in the country, however, Maponya and Manaka notably retained their stance and theory, asserted their independence and dignity and “refused to be taken over by white liberals” (Fuchs 1992: 176). The concern with place, especially the recreation of the events and history of the country from a black man’s viewpoint, appears to be another central theme in Maponya’s plays.

Mngadi (1996: 199) observes that in *The Hungry Earth* Maponya demystified, recreated, and represented South African history on stage. Mngadi (1996: 199) also states that he calls upon history to “bear witness to colonial distortions and resistances.” Steadman (1988: 27) states that he, through a series of brief running scenes that echo Brecht’s practice, “dramatises and comments upon scenes of exploitation in sugar plantations, on the mines and in the day-to-day experiences of rootless migrant labourers.” He also observes that the scenes in the play were drawn eclectically from history so as to depict the effects of white exploitation in South Africa. Ojo-Ade (1996: 128–129) traces the presence of history in *Gangsters* in the depiction of the life of Biko, represented by the hero Rasechaba – a poet and activist who is detained, tortured and murdered. Like Biko, Rasechaba displays “immense courage and, significantly, a genuine solidarity with the people” (Ojo-Ade 1996: 129).

Konecniak (2012: 92) maintains that Maponya’s *The Hungry Earth* is replete with important South African historical accounts, ranging from the colonial period, the Isandlwana Anglo-

Zulu War,<sup>106</sup> and the establishment of the apartheid system. He states that the criticism of the apartheid system in the play is unapologetically explicit, leaving no doubt to the audience and readers as to who is to blame for the situations depicted. Konecniak (2012: 93) states that, through its brief scenes, the play exposes the usual colonisation patterns employed in former colonies: from the “exploration of the land, exploitation of natural resources and return to the colonial metropole, with the coloniser’s army left behind so as to maintain the white man’s authority over the new land.” Konecniak concludes that *The Hungry Earth* is a narrative of death that juxtaposes individual tragedies with the oppression of the black community during the apartheid years.

Diala (2006: 239) states that art and literature played a significant role in the “decolonisation process in South Africa.” The black artists in the country regarded politics and propaganda in literature as indispensable in the struggle against apartheid (Diala 2006: 240). Walder (2003: 17) observes that while Kente created popular musical melodramas for township audiences, Maponya and Manaka “drew on Brecht to inflect indigenous traditions with overt messages about living conditions of black people.” He points out that their works are, therefore, overtly political when compared to that of Kente. Kruger (2003: 631) notes that the period after 1976 was particularly notable for “accelerating political and cultural resistance” in South Africa. The period witnessed the rise of radical black conscious activists and artists who were greatly influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement championed by Steve Biko. The works by these artists depict the situation in the country.

The political weight of this resistance theatre was emphasised by Graham (2005: 115), who maintains that Maponya’s theatre is a “far more explicit form of resistance, including open demands for revolution” than Fugard’s *The Island*. He maintains that *Gangsters* contributed to the “evolution of a distinctly South African form of political theatre.” Hence, the play is an example of the new radical and revolutionary South African theatre. Graham (2005: 117) also maintains that it signals an impending revolution in the presentation of Masechaba’s<sup>107</sup> poems and tape recorder. He observes that the tape recorder is used by the police as an exhibit and as an instrument through which the poet’s oppositional voice is sustained even in death in order to warn the “apartheid masters of an impending revolution. Thus her poetry lives on after her, just as Biko lives on through his writings and his philosophies” (2005: 118). Speaking on the

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<sup>106</sup> The Anglo-Zulu War of Isandlwana took place on 22 January 1879 and was the first major encounter between the British Empire and the Zulu Kingdom. The Zulus emerged overwhelmingly victorious, although not without heavy casualties, thus hindering the first English invasion of the Zulu Kingdom.

<sup>107</sup> Shane Graham (2005) is using the name of the poet-activist in the published version of the play. *Masechaba* represents a female role.

poems' potency, Ojo-Ade (1996: 128) observes that they are "militant and meaningful" to the people, make a call to action, and are an "aspect of revolutionary action." He concludes that they are "strategically placed in the play to serve particular purposes" (Ibid.).

Graham (2005: 120) also emphasises that *Gangsters* does not only oppose the apartheid state, it likewise helps the people to "come to terms with the collective trauma that has been visited upon them." Graham (ibid.) then concludes that while *The Island* "bears witness to the silent suffering of ordinary people," *Gangsters* presents a "manifesto of a political poet, an explicit intervention into the struggle over how to represent the death in detention of Biko and dozens of others and over how their legacy will be depicted for posterity." Graham (2005) appears to be the only discoverable study that compares Fugard and Maponya's plays. It is however limited because it is concerned with only *The Island* and *Gangsters*. The works reviewed here mark the obvious differences between the two playwrights, hence establishing a binary that cannot be sustained in all cases (see Chapters 1, 4 and 5).

The concern with the details of human suffering and historical reconstruction run through the plays of Maponya. Konecniak (2012: 91) writes that Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* explores the cruelty at the heart of the apartheid state. He states that the play offers "a cross-sectional survey from the homogenous perspective of direct victims of the system" (Ibid.). In another study, Gilbert (2001: 13) notes that characters in the play are presented as archetypes – with Matlhoko as a symbol of suffering; Usiviko as shield; Beshwana as loincloth; and Sethotho as imbecile. Gilbert identifies capitalism as the heart of the apartheid system, and states that it is presented in its varied facets in *The Hungry Earth*.

Each of the loosely linked, almost abstract vignettes, a prologue and five scenes, focuses on a different aspect of apartheid's oppression, showing its many faces: child labour and poverty, family breakdown, dangerous working conditions, state sanctioned and legally enshrined racism, and the ruthless quelling of strikes. Overall, the play reveals apartheid as a servant of capital that supports an ideology of racial superiority to justify industrial exploitation and human subjugation (Ibid.).

Bishton (1981: 20) states that *The Hungry Earth* reflects the growing confidence of Maponya and other black artists in the country. He observes that the play depicts apartheid through the changing voices and perspectives of the actors, who "shift roles and relationships as the piece moves forward, tracing the plight of the migrant labourer from the hostel, to the plantation via the train to the mines – the hungry earth of the title" (Ibid.). He states that the Bahumutsi Group promoted a theatre which Maponya aptly describes as Theatre for a Purpose. Maponya



(in Bishton 1981: 20) upholds that it is a “living theatre which has a future for us because it is about us. It carries more weight because it is a mirror and a voice of the dispossessed. But it involves a lot of risk, both financial and in terms of personal safety.” *The Hungry Earth* is a serious political play, and, as such, was not submitted to the censors prior to its performance before private audiences in Soweto (Bishton 1981: 20). The success of the play at home and abroad was laudable owing to the urgency of the political cause, in addition to the nature of its performance.

The *Rand Daily Mail* (1982: 16), for example, reports that it was a highly successful political piece abroad. The newspaper also states that despite the poor acting, the play was praised as a “feat of the utmost skill and basic theatrical grasp.” de Kock (1982: 11) states that the artist considered the struggle as primary, and that theatre was his best way of taking it further. In his review of *Umongikazi*, de Kock (ibid.) points out that the play deals with the struggle by black nurses against the “petty bureaucracy of apartheid.” He also maintains that it depicts the concrete realities of a black hospital as a microcosm of apartheid, hence receiving both international and local acclaim. de Kock also reports that it was praised in England by a huge audience and was enthusiastically received in Germany and Switzerland. And back at home, it was praised in Johannesburg and in the townships, where it was to perform an enlightening and rallying role.

Maponya considers his theatre as that of the dispossessed – one that enlightens and heightens the awareness of black consciousness (de Kock 1982: 11). Aware of his objective, he did not “think too much of the possibility of detention and harassment for fear that it [might] hamper his creativity or lead him to self-censorship” (Ibid.). Despite his bitter message, his theatre is not dull or humourless. His catchword is thus dedication and consistency in what he believes. Mattera (1983: 12) corroborates that *Umongikazi* is a model of the whole South African way of life. He sees it as a political play that is direct, plain, uncompromising, and unapologetic, “swiping away at the system; venting the anger of the times” (Ibid.). He further observes that the Xhosa song at the end of the play was biting and cast a spell on the black audience, noting that it is a “moving call to the oppressed to arise and awake from their slumbers because the rays of the first sun of the new dawn were upon us” (Ibid.). The concern with the dispossessed is central to his message.

Kober (1985: 9) states that Maponya’s theatre represented the dispossessed, and so was not meant for entertainment. He reports that the writer holds that theatre’s main focus should be to show what is happening and to further advance the cause of freedom. Maponya (in Kober

1985: 9) laments how black people preferred entertainment to conscientisation, stressing that they needed to get their priorities right. Maponya reaffirms that he will keep hammering at the wall that divide the people in the country and keep “reinforcing the message that we need to have our liberty and our freedom” (Ibid). He sustained this revolutionary tempo in his later plays. His 1980s plays such as *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* turned out more militant.

John Vidal (in Marriott 1985: 11) maintains that Maponya’s *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* are resistance plays of a high order – committed and powerful. Vidal also states that the plays “express neither anger nor desperation but a chilling certainty that there is no way back for South Africa, and that morally inexcusable laws sow only the seeds of revolution” (Ibid.). He states that *Gangsters* echoes Biko’s voice (the voice of the people) and the conscience of the struggle, one that was finally silenced by the “barbed-wire mentality of the police.” Marriott (ibid) maintains that Maponya’s satire is clear and pointed, and that an emotional thread – the playwright’s presentation of a string of emotional issues – gives *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* a certain depth. Maponya’s politics and theatre were similarly criticised by many reviewers and critics.

In his performance review, Macliam (1982: 8) notes that *The Hungry Earth* is more of a work of propaganda than a great theatrical piece because of its “violent denunciation of whites” and the “harsh accusations” laid against them by the bitter, emotional, and angry playwright. He claims that the play’s bias is clear in its exaggeration of the events depicted, arguing that it is a racist play because it is clouded by emotionalism and over-generalisations, without any lucid and rational argument. Draper (1985: 18) also maintains that Maponya’s plays were regarded as too explosive, citing instances with the performance of *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* as particularly electrifying. He notes that *Gangsters* for example depicts the sweat and agony of Rasechaba,<sup>108</sup> the revolutionary poet who “ultimately pays a terrible price for his quiet but unswerving defiance of the system” (Ibid). Steadman (1984: xx-xxi) states that it was because of this sort of radicalism that Maponya’s works were considered provocative for township audiences. Bauer (1990: 15) presents that Africanists<sup>109</sup> like Maponya are often accused of being racist due to the bitter content of their works. He recounts that the dramatist believes that his job is to enlighten and rally his people, therefore following a “philosophical path in

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<sup>108</sup> Maponya acted the role of Rasechaba (a male poet-activist) in the early performances of the play. It was, however, changed to a female role after the publication of the play.

<sup>109</sup> Africanist is a strand of African nationalism, and, specifically, refers to the act of nationalism and activism against apartheid in South Africa. The ideology is also related to the Pan Africanist Congress of South Africa. Pan-Africanism, on the other hand, is an ideology that encourages the general solidarity of Africans.

the footsteps of radicals like Marcus Garvey, Franz Fanon, Malcolm X and, of course, Steve Biko” (Ibid.).

Bauer’s position points at Maponya’s sense of responsibility as a playwright of the struggle. O’Brien (2001: 118–119) speaks of this sense of responsibility, when he states that *Gangsters* is a deconstruction of race and religion. He also maintains that there is a complex intention in the play to “violate the cult of whiteness in Afrikaner nationalist religion by the very image of a black Christ, a revolutionary Christ, a terrorist Christ” (O’Brien 2001: 119). He also argues that the image (body) of black Rasechaba staked to the cross is a tacit attempt to deconstruct the symbol of Christ, “reterritorialising Christ as an insurgent in the theocratic white person” (Ibid.). O’Brien maintains that Rasechaba’s last poem in the play deconstructs the politics of race in the country. He concludes that *Gangsters* is evidently a radical play because it evokes liberation and war songs, propagates a collective struggle, and ends with a call to “bring P.W. Botha to trial like a Nazi war criminal” (Ibid.). Steadman (1994: xxi) sums up that the play is “as radical a play as has been produced in South Africa.” This is corroborated by Rylance (1988: 115), who argues that the portrayal of detention and death in the play “articulates the horror of what amounts to civil war through the character of Jonathan, a black stooge of the South African security forces, who is alternately bribed and cowed into carrying out their wishes.”

Maponya (in Shuenyane 1984: 149) defends the radicalism in *Gangsters*, and his other plays, when he stated that he was worried as he felt there was no time to keep fooling around. He believes that life was at stake and things in the country were getting worse by the day, hence the need to educate the public who chose to turn a blind eye to the many danger signs around them. He restates that he will “always depict life within specific socio-economic and political contexts,” adding that, as an individual, his “daily existence is affected by those influences, and there is no way of running away from them” (Ibid.). Speaking about Maponya’s sense of commitment, Shuenyane refers to him as a dedicated and determined artist – qualities that place him among South Africa’s top playwrights, actors, directors and producers.

This sense of dedication is emphasised by Herrero (1991: 309), who maintains that in most of Maponya’s plays, “political consciousness and education” are the core issues. He notes that the writer considers education as central to the struggle and the political consciousness of the people about their situation. Maponya’s plays are, therefore, didactic, and his theatre attempts to fill the “political vacuum that exists in township theatre” (Ibid.). Herrero (ibid.) reports that he “tries to show that there is a way by which theatre can depict the South African situation.”

Maponya believed that the theatre can represent the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, and ruler and the ruled, using traditional forms and styles. Like Manaka, Maponya created a political theatre whose central aim was to mobilise and conscientise the people. He upheld the view that the artist's sense of commitment should be to his community, thus the need to redefine and redirect art away from publicity and recognition (Herrero 1991: 310). Africanists such as Maponya hold that a true African theatre should be by blacks, and about black experiences. Some studies and reviews (Shuenyane 1984; Bauer 1990; Maponya 1995) reveal that it was this idea that pushed him into producing plays without white direction and support – a position disputed in this study.

Shuenyane (1984: 149) reports that Maponya successfully transformed the tradition of white-black collaboration in South Africa by creating white roles in *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*. He also directed the white actor, John Maytham,<sup>110</sup> in these plays to counter the common theatre practice in the country. Maponya asserts that he wanted to represent himself instead of being represented by white artists. Maponya (in Bauer 1990: 15) stresses that, as blacks, they need to understand themselves without the support of whites who seem to always want to do things for them. He also maintains that he believes in a theatre that is independent of white control, and that instils a sense of assertiveness in human beings (*New Nation* 1990: 12). He proffers that black artists should draw their materials from within the definition of African theatre. He also emphasises the need for an independent theatre, arguing that it is crucial for black artists to rediscover themselves and speak for the dispossessed in their societies (*New Nation* 1990: 12). His theatre credits are many: *The Hungry Earth*, *Gangsters*, *Dirty Work*, *Jika*, and *Bring Back the Drum* (a collection of poetry, music, and dance) – all of which he wrote, acted in, directed, and toured abroad almost alone.

Maponya (1984: 1), in the Bahumutsi Theatre Group “Programme Notes for the Performance of *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*” maintains that he wanted to reverse the practice whereby white artists directed blacks and depicted them in their productions. He pointed out that his brand of theatre is purely resistant – and nothing short of that. He emphasised that he will “always depict life within specific socio-economic and political contexts” (Maponya 1984: 1). And in the “Programme Notes for the British tour of *The Hungry Earth*,” he stressed that “theatre for a purpose carries much more weight because it is a mirror and a voice of the dispossessed. It

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<sup>110</sup> John Maytham starred as Piet Hannekom in *Dirty Work* and as Major Whitebeard in *Gangsters* in the early performances of the plays. As a black playwright and director, Maponya defied the theatre tradition in South Africa by creating white roles, and then directing a white actor, in his plays for the first time in South Africa. The practice had been that whites like Fugard and Simon created black roles and then directed black actors in their plays. See: Morakile, Shuenyane. (1984) Resistance Theatre. *The Drum*. 16 October. pp. 149–151.

has a direction” (Maponya 1981: 1). He asserts that black theatre must survive even if it does not subscribe to commercial slogan. Speaking about *The Hungry Earth*, he states that the play depicts the different aspects of black life – an ill-fated life the play makes its own subject.

It can be seen from the studies reviewed in this section that Maponya does not enjoy as much critical attention as Fugard. As a South African, his theatre is dynamic, but unlike Fugard’s, it is not steeped in contradictions. His theatre is considered as radical, committed, and political. A number of the works reviewed canvass that his works are limited to the apartheid context; make overgeneralisations about the conditions of black life; contain a violent denunciation of capitalism, imperialism, and whites without offering a rational and valid argument about how the events really occurred. Studies such as Steadman (1994), Mngadi (1996), and Konecniak (2012), however, speak of the universals in the plays; and O’Brien (2001) particularly regards his theatre as global for its connections with the more acclaimed playwrights such as Beckett and Havel. As far as the review in this section has covered, Graham (2005) is the only study that thematically compares Fugard’s *The Island* and Maponya’s *Gangsters*. This informed the need for a comprehensive study that will examine some of their plays and their contributions to South African anti-apartheid theatre.

## **2.5 Postdramatic theatre and Fugard and Maponya’s collaboration and experiments**

In this section, the concern will be with studies on the postdramatic theatre practice of Fugard and Maponya from the 1960s to 1980s. Performance from the 1960s onwards has come to be referred to as meta-drama<sup>111</sup> and alternative – *anti-text* and actor-oriented (Schechner 1998; Lehmann 2006; Hatlen 1987; Grotowski 1968; Boal 2008; Bradby, James and Sharratt 1980). Reviewers and critics of Fugard’s theatre (Gray 1982; Walder 2003, 2015; Vandenbroucke 1985; Heywood 2004; Kruger 2004; Burns 2002) identify that he explored this new theatrical form at a point in his literary career. Crow and Banfield (1996), Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984), Moorosi (1997), Kruger (2005) and Steadman (1984; 1994) also reveal that Maponya practised this kind of theatre. Fugard and Maponya were influenced by modern playwrights and theorists such as Brecht, Grotowski, Camus, and Beckett. As playwrights from the 1960s, they could not escape the influences of these modern theorists and practitioners (see Chapter 1).

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<sup>111</sup> *Meta* suggests ‘above’, ‘beyond’, or ‘about’. The idea of a meta-drama or meta-theatre – as coined by Lionel Abel in 1963 – means drama about drama or theatre about theatre. The wall that separates actors and audience in this theatre is shattered. The theatre is also known for its practice of a play-within-the-play system.

Hatlen (1987: 222) maintains that the “social climate of the times” influenced the practice of theatre across the globe. The emphasis on performance at the time cannot be overemphasised. Hatlen (1987: 221) states that it is a catchall term for happenings on stage and off-stage. He reiterates that it sets the stage for anti-theatrical productions, therefore reversing and negating “traditional theatre values.” It notably undermines “Aristotle’s hierarchy of plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle” (Hatlen 1987: 221). Hatlen (1987: 185) states that the unscripted method contradicts the traditional and classical form of playwriting. Many artists (who Hatlen calls *rebels*) in the modern theatre rejected the idea of art for art’s sake in favour of anti-art and produced works that are improvisational and experimental. He gives examples with artists such as Tristan Tzara and the Dadaists, who notably defied the conventional form of play-making and made improvisation the centre of their practice. Tzara, particularly, “led a group of European artists [...] and thinkers in a nihilistic onslaught against nearly everything, including the standards of conventional aesthetics” (Ibid.). South African artists at the time were not left out.

Fugard, Kani and Ntshona’s *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* (as performances) also defy conventional dramatic principles. The plays are experimental, and hence avant garde, because of their collaborative methods. In an interview with Peter Wilhelm in 1972, Fugard recalled that the rehearsals of the plays did not start with a finished script, but with images, notes, and little newspaper cuttings, and went from there (Wilhelm 1972: 112). *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was devised using improvisational techniques, thus explaining why it is, to some extent, formless and rambling at certain points (Vandenbroucke 1975: 194). It was unscripted until its first performance in England; and so Fugard relied on his actors (Kani and Ntshona) to improvise and recreate events every time they performed. Niven (1975: 85) states that the actors were able to relate to the events because the experiences in the play are closer to their experiences as blacks in South Africa.

Niven (1975: 85) maintains that Fugard uses the theatre experimentally; hence *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* “depends upon the closest intimacy of player and spectator.” Hough (1977: 127) reports that Fugard admitted that he “used the actor in a purely illustrative way” – an experience that enabled him to explore the creative potentials of the actors with whom he worked. Speaking about the London production of *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, Fugard confessed that his close relationship with Kingsley and Bryceland<sup>112</sup> “contributed the most

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<sup>112</sup> Ben Kingsley and Yvonne Bryceland acted in the production of *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* during the 1974 South African Season in London.

enormously decisive elements in the final shape of the play” (Hough 1977: 129). Fugard was, thus, responding to the theatrical climate of the time. Crow and Banfield (1996: 100) uphold that he pioneered the tradition of white and black collaborative workshops in South Africa – one that led to experiments using images, ideas, and improvisation, and finally culminated in the production of *The Coat* (1966), *Death Watch* (1968), *The Last Bus* (1969), *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), *Statements after an Arrest* (1972) and *The Island* (1973). The collaboration also led to experimental plays like *Friday’s Bread on Monday* and the remake of *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Orestes*.<sup>113</sup>

Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984: 147) maintain that Maponya also worked experimentally; that he considers a play as a “skeleton which has to be fleshed out in performance through the dynamics of the actor, the designer, and the director.” Crow and Banfield (1996: 100) present that the actors in Maponya’s plays are equally writers of their own experiences, and that the playwright basically served as an arbiter, director, dramaturge, script editor, and a “creative agent provocateur.” Brecht’s influence on Maponya allowed him to adapt as well as extend and redirect Brechtian principles in plays such as *Umongikazi*, *Dirty Work*, and *Gangsters*. Bishton (1981: 20) states that Maponya’s *The Hungry Earth* was able to transcend Brechtian aesthetics because it was given a more African than European footing.

Minervini (1980: 17) observes that Maponya and his actors experimented and demystified the stage, making it more useful. Maponya especially criticised the Euro-centred<sup>114</sup> development of theatre in the country, and allowed his audience more participation in the decisions of what was happening on stage.<sup>115</sup> Plays by Brecht, Fugard, and Maponya are examples of theatre as a collective experiment, a form radically different from the theatre as expression of individual experiences. Walder (1984) believes that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* could not have been written without the lived experiences of Kani and Ntshona. Vandembroucke (1985) also notes that *The Island* traces the bitter experiences of Welcome Duru and Norman Ntshinga – who were taken to Robben Island as political prisoners.<sup>116</sup> All these are aspects of collective experiments.

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<sup>113</sup> The experimental remakes were products of a close experimental practice by Fugard and the Serpent players.

<sup>114</sup> Bourgeoisie-controlled

<sup>115</sup> Maponya usually presents situations up to a point of crisis and then throws the decisions open to the audience. See: Minervini, R. (1980) Towards a Stage for Social Change. *Rand Daily Mail*. 7 October. p. 17

<sup>116</sup> Welcome Duru and Norman Nshinga were among the pioneer members of the Serpent Players of New Brighton, the black group Fugard worked with for a decade – from 1963 to somewhere around 1974. They were both arrested and taken to Robben Island. Nshinga was arrested in 1965 and charged with trivial offences on the evening of the group’s performance of Sophocles’ *Antigone* at the St. Stephen’s Church Hall in New Brighton. Ntshinga was to act the role of Haemon in the play, a role then given to John Kani, thus marking Kani’s first

Munro (1981: 147) presents that Fugard's collaborative plays (*The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*) defied the limitation of white-black collaboration in the country. Gray (1982: 19) also presents that his collaboration with the black actors made him "the spokesman of the dispossessed and the victims of his own society." Gray states that his collaboration with the Serpent Players led to the production of an improvised theatre that is similar to Grotowski's Poor Theatre. Gray, however, reports that he had been involved with this kind of theatre (as a practice) before his familiarity with the model. Vandenbroucke (1985: 107) argues that in the early 1970s, Fugard was restricted to South Africa as he did not have a passport, and so was cut off from the Fringe and Off-Broadway performances outside his country. As such, he was unaware of the stir Grotowski was causing on the international stage. He recounts that it was in 1970 that "Benson and Simon sent Fugard a copy of *Towards a Poor Theatre* and copious notes on Grotowski's New York lectures, along with a copy of Jean-Claude van Itallie's *The Serpent* from Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre" (Vandenbroucke 1985: 108).

Gray (1982: 20) maintains that the elevation of the actor from an interpreter to a creator had always been the norm in most of Fugard's productions. He states that *The Coat*, and later the *Statements* plays, documents his transformation from a playwright to a "scribe or go-between, a catalyst and a recording organiser" (Ibid.). Gray recounts that the period between 1963 and 1974 represents his long-lasting contact with black artists – a relationship that was beneficial, engaging, and fruitful for him and his actors (Ibid.). He notes that this crucial period allowed him to "break the conventions of orthodox theatre explicitly and semi-publicly" (Ibid.). The period also witnessed a major "contribution to an alternative theatre in the South Africa as part of a counter-culture which is the polar opposite of the state version" (Ibid.).

Gray (1982: 20) presents that Fugard's collaborative productions presented nude performers on stage and were improvisations instead of scripted texts. He also notes that these plays were self-inventing pieces that defied the conventional form of playwriting. In place of desirable state texts, they are political statements against the regime. Pieterse (1976: 199) corroborates that the collaborative plays are political. Walder (1984: 78) also states the plays challenged the "orthodox procedure, in favour of involving the creative abilities of the performers – their history, experiences, the very shape of their bodies."

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speaking role. Ntshinga was then sentenced to several years' imprisonment in Robben Island, and while there, he presented the production the group were rehearsing prior to his arrest. Duru was also incarcerated in Robben Island in 1965 and worked with Gibson Kente after his release. See: Vandenbroucke, Russell. (1985) *Truth the Hand can Touch*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.



Maponya's *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* are, likewise, collaborative plays. Maponya (1995: xi) states that the plays were written at the same time and were greatly informed and developed by Maytham who acted the original roles of Major Whitebeard and Piet Hannekom. Maponya states that *Jika* was also "workshopped with two actors from Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape" (Ibid.). Steadman (1994: xiv) maintains that Maponya's theatre is experimental, adding that *The Hungry Earth* "underwent numerous metamorphoses ... through the rehearsal process so that the script is often little more than the score of a performance created in workshop..." He reveals that the playwright restructured the script of the play over and over again such that the published text today is "merely an edited scenario of quite spectacular action" (Ibid.). This shows that rehearsal is central to any performance, but workshop, in particular, is common to this postdramatic theatre.

In a discussion of *The Hungry Earth*, Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984: 147) submit that the word "playwright" has certain semantic implications, emphasising that "plays are not merely written – they are wrought from many elements, the text being merely one element in the whole process." They maintain that the play as a dramatic form, and theatre as performance rather than text, allowed black artists in South Africa to undermine literariness in pursuit of theatricalism. They also state that *The Hungry Earth* is an unusual theatrical piece because it is "reminiscent of early Brechtian theatre, in that the actors present a 'lecture demonstration' about the conditions of Black working-class life..." (Ibid.).

Fugard's collaborative theatre also had similar influences. Taylor (1974: 40) presents that the Statements plays were influenced by Brecht's theorisations practice, although Fugard argues he considers Brecht a challenge rather than an influence. Taylor observes that South Africa is more U.S. than U.K. oriented; and reports Fugard's declaration that American writers such as O'Neill and Tennessee Williams influenced his theatre. Smith (1974: 1) also observes that as a regional writer Fugard was influenced by American writers such as Steinbeck and Faulkner. This proves that Fugard is a prolific dramatist and theatre-goer that is aware of world theatre. Mngadi (1996: 196) states that concepts of "alternative and oppositional drama are not alien to South Africa." He maintains that the concepts emerged in opposition to state "ideological and repressive apparatuses worldwide"; that they relate to Brecht and Grotowski who notably "inspired 'experimental' rather than realist and/or naturalist forms of representation of social relationships..." (Ibid.).

Further, Mngadi maintains that the emergence of this alternative theatre was informed by the rise in "uncompromising critical realism, inspired by what Baz Kershaw ... terms as Marxist

fundamentalism and situationist anarchism.” The motive was to change the world, to make theatre serve a more direct and political function of calling the people to action. Maponya used the theatre in South Africa for the same purpose. Mngadi (1996: 202) observes that *The Hungry Earth* and *Woza Albert* identify the colonial distortions of the history of resistance in South Africa. He maintains that the plays “have both been described as experimental, in the Brechtian and Grotowskian senses, seeking ways of representing social relations that revealed the constructedness of political subjectivities.” Perkins (1998: 65) maintains that *The Hungry Earth* and *Umongikazi* recreated the effects of apartheid on the lives of the exploited black majority by demystifying modern theatre models and resources. Maponya achieved this by blending traditional and Western forms of performances – an alternative system that worked quite well for black artists in the country at the time.

Fugard also created an alternative theatre form that blended African and European traditions in art (Walder 2003: 1). He was praised around the world for establishing this unique cultural form. Walder (ibid) confirms that later works by artists such as Mda, Mhlope, Ngema, and Simon; and collaborative pieces by Serpent Players, Workshop '71, Junction Avenue Theatre Company and the Handspring Puppet Company equally dissected and depicted socio-political issues “through collaborative workshop technique and a stirring mix of improvisation, mime, dance, music and document.” In his brief survey of South African theatre, Heywood (2004: 178) maintains that the country’s formal theatre moved from European and American classic, to the Afrikaner romantic realism of the 1920s and 1930s, and to the “symbolist, existentialist and expressionist writers like Beckett, Brecht, and others in the Poor Theatre tradition.”

For Walder (2003: 16-7) as well, it moved from the traditional and formal to the experimental and collaborative. The plays this study is dealing with fall in the latter category. Davis (2013: 116) presents that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* are collaborative “experiments in play-making.” She observes that the plays did not follow the traditional pattern of authorship, but were instead devised in workshop by the co-authors – a claim Fugard (1974: viii) confirms. Fugard (ibid.) maintains that these plays are performances and not completed texts, and states that “I have always regarded the completed text as being only a half-way stage to my ultimate objective: the living performance and its particular definition of space and silence” (Ibid.). He maintains that he is actually more concerned with the experiences in theatre and performance, and not words or the text as a static cultural product.

Walder (1993: 417) regards this kind of radical experiment in play-making as an “alternative to the dominant, Western, conventional hierarchy of author-text-production.” Biodun Jeyifo

(in Olaiya 2008: 80) states that as a director and playwright, Fugard experimented with the “two-hander technique” involving two actors “acting and playing multiple roles through role-playing and the intense use of their body to tell a story with many sub-plots.” Jeyifo observes that the use of two players was informed partly by Fugard’s lived experience “which taught him the tricks of survival” (Ibid.). The use of few cast members was necessary so as to evade the state laws banning interracial activities in South Africa (Olaiya 2008: 81).

Olaiya (2008: 81) states that Fugard utilised the “cockroach theatre” technique which allowed him to use limited casts and avoid “elaborate sets and stage properties; this then ‘conditions’ plays with small casts and manageable human and social milieux.” In developing and staging his plays, Fugard incorporated these determined social constraints, but however negates them through the device of “role-deconstruction and de-totalisation” (Ibid.). The black artists in the country were also shaped by this limiting condition, one that they tried to transcend. Andre Brink (in Diala 2006: 239) states that the works produced by these black artists defied “all trappings of conventional theatre, including lighting, costumes, even a stage.” The roles and contributions of black actors on the form and scope of Fugard’s plays have also been stressed by reviewers.

Heywood (2004: 181), for example, identifies Kani and Ntshona’s introduction of traditional improvisation in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* as one of the influences on Fugard’s art. He states that the actor-collaborators developed a theatrical form that merges action and context, allowing participation on stage. Walder (2003: 7) maintains that Fugard’s “emphasis upon disciplined physicality is derived from the performance tradition he discovered among the untrained but enormously talented township actors.” He writes that the creative contribution of these actors was so important to Fugard’s career from the start, but, however, notes that the influence was symbiotic. He presents that Fugard’s collaborative theatre practice challenged the restrictions weighing down black as well as white theatres and actors in the country – an influence that was very strong. This attests to Diala’s (2006: 239) submission that the talents and practice of black artists was weighed down by the restrictions on the arts at the time. Walder (2003: 17) views Fugard’s director-scribe relationship method (in the form of challenges posed to actors by the director) as also “derived from ancient and modern sources.”

Burns (2002: 242) maintains that the black actors who collaborated with Fugard “positively influenced the scope and form of his work.” Cima (2007: 47) corroborates that Fugard’s work with the Serpent Players allowed them to transform “their misfortunes into effective political theatre.” He gives the example of the group’s devised play, *The Coat*, and notes that the play

sprang from an incident which Serpent Player Mabel Magada witnessed during the trial of her husband, Norman Nshinga.<sup>117</sup> Using a Brechtian distancing technique, the group examined “the fate of that man’s coat and what possible uses the New Brighton woman had found for it” (Cima 2007: 48). Speaking on this, Brink (1997: 162) maintains that the group’s use of the challenge-and-response technique allowed Fugard and his collaborators to change the face of theatre in South Africa. This challenge-and-response system proves Diala’s (2006: 240) claim that Fugard’s theatre is known for its “breathless experimentation and innovativeness.” Diala notes that not only is Fugard’s stagecraft inventive and radical but Fugard is also “unarguably South Africa’s pre-eminent dramatist.” Fugard was however not the only artist in the country who explored experimental procedures in play-making.

From the 1960s, South Africa witnessed a surge of experiments in the theatre. Hauptfleisch (in Skordis 2003: 68) states that two forms of experimental theatre emerged around that time in opposition to elitist theatre: the “indigenous alternative theatre” and “indigenous hybrid theatre.” The former radically opposed established theatre practice; had an anti-establishment position; and duplicated “experiments from other countries, modifying them ... to go against accepted formulas.” It also utilised “techniques developed elsewhere in order to confront the realities of South Africa” (Hauptfleisch, in Skordis 2003: 69). The latter likewise opposed the establishment and was thus not “clearly defined as a theatrical form but is rather a specific yet eclectic attitude towards playmaking.” What the practitioners of this theatre shared with those before them, and amongst themselves, was the move to go “against the dominant tendencies in South African culture” (Skordis 2003: 73).

Skordis (2003: 74) states that these two experimental forms, and many others that developed afterwards, were influenced by the American and European avant-garde theorists and models. Fugard, on the one hand, was influenced by Grotowski, Camus, Brecht, Beckett, and Brook (Walder 2015; Cima 2009; Olaiya 2008). Walder (2015: 125) maintains that his creative use of “simple, often circular plots, static settings, and minimal props signal a dramatic language familiar from the work of Samuel Beckett – an obvious influence.” Walder argues that unlike Beckett, he is often “rooted in the local and particular, in what he refers to as the ‘textures’ of his ‘one little corner of the world’. This corner is the Eastern Cape region of South Africa...”

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<sup>117</sup> Mabel Magada and Athol Fugard were there during the trial. Magada was given a coat after the trial by a convicted black man, who requested that she deliver it to his wife in New Brighton, and tell her to use it. See: Dennis, Walder. (1984) *Athol Fugard*. London: Macmillan; Russell, Vandenbroucke. (1985) *Truth the Hand can Touch*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

(Ibid.). According to Vandembroucke (1985), he was also influenced by the performances of the Living Theatre; for Niven (1975: 89), by the Performance Group of Schechner, mainly their production of *Dionysos in '69*. Maponya, on the other hand, was influenced by Brecht, Grotowski and Brook (Maponya 1995; Steadman 1994; Moorosi 1997). Some of these artists, practitioners, theorists and avant-garde groups operated roughly around the same time.

The 1960s to 1980s was notable for radical transformations in playwriting and play-making. Artists in South Africa were not left out. Fugard challenged the theatrical conventions of the period and created dramas out of the impossible apartheid context (Vandembroucke 1985). Maponya, likewise, experimented with different performance techniques and succeeded in demystifying the apartheid stage (Steadman 1994; Moorosi 1997). Fugard (in Vandembroucke 1985: 106) defends his major concern with actor and space when he states that he considers a play as an experience in theatre rather than words on paper, emphasising that he holds “no reverence for words on paper, texts [...] I look at a man and see a body in the first instance. I would take away words from him if a simple gesture, a simple pause – the way he put on a sock [...] said it all.” Fugard’s position points at his concern with actors and experiments, a play-making practice he utilised, at different depth, throughout his career as a playwright.

In an interview with Stephen Gray, Peter Stevenson maintains that, in terms of performance, Fugard – even in his learning plays – “has always been a theatrically aware and full blooded writer” (Gray 1982: 118). Vandembroucke (1975: 194) also states that Fugard was obsessed with actors’ experience, an obsession which lasted throughout his career as a playwright and director. Beckett, in particular, had an early influence on his art. In several interviews, Fugard discloses that he admired Beckett. Wilhelm (1972: 113) believes that this artistic admiration manifested in Fugard’s early plays and theatre practice. Chapman (1996: 362) maintains that Fugard utilised Beckett-like economical settings in *No-Good Friday*. And speaking generally, Smith (1974: 1) maintains that Fugard’s admiration of Beckett’s art was a major influence on his art.

Walder (1984: 9) maintains that this admiration and influence is hardly surprising considering Fugard’s utilisation of Beckettian “small casts, sparse sets, flat, seemingly pointless dialogue and inconsequential plots” in his productions. Pieterse (1976: 200) confirms that Fugard is an existentialist playwright with a clear Beckettian influence. He states, yet, that as an artist, he transcends existentialist ideals. MacLennan (1981: 223) locates these Beckettian influences in Fugard’s *Boesman and Lena* at the point when Lena calls on God and God is conspicuously silent. MacLennan adds that Fugard’s theatre presents us with “a very dark view of man and

his predicament” – an influence that is both Beckettian and absurdist. Heywood (2004: 183) corroborates that Fugard “generated symbolic outlines along the lines of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*.” He notes that the actors in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* “exist on the threshold of existence and non-existence, life and death, picture and reality, having a pass and having no pass.” The emphasis on performance is especially common with Beckett and the existentialist and absurd tradition. Fugard’s emphasis on *performances* blossomed in his subsequent works with the black actors from 1963 to 1973.

Fugard’s work with the Serpent Players, from 1963, marks a landmark in his theatre practice. It was from 1966, with *The Coat*, that he turned to the improvisational actor’s theatre. Taylor (1974: 41) confirms that he abandoned the conventional and orthodox theatre, and in its place succeeded in devising plays with actors. He wanted to try out new alternatives and to use the actor as a “creative instrument.” It was this obsession with the actor’s theatre that culminated in the Statements plays (Ibid.). The Serpent Players – an ensemble of black actors from New Brighton in the Eastern Cape Region<sup>118</sup> – were especially instrumental to the development of this improvised theatre. Walder (1984) recalls that they experimented with both content and form, but Brecht’s *Messingkauf Dialogues*<sup>119</sup> principally provided Kani and Ntshona with the required inspiration. This collaborative period is important to this study because of the roles of black actor-creators who, significantly, transformed Fugard’s theatre.

Fugard’s collaborative phase was actor-oriented and experimental-based. Critical studies and performance reviews of the plays he produced at the time show that he relied on experiments. Niven’s (1975: 89) review of the London performance of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* reveals that Fugard used the theatre experimentally. The nature of the performance of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* allowed it to fit easily in “the intimate environment of the Theatre Upstairs or the Studio Theatre ... than in the orthodox auditorium of the Royal Court” (Ibid.). Niven gives an instance in the performance when Kani improvised by asking three white spectators to

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<sup>118</sup> This was historically the Ciskei Bantustan which became independent on 4 December 1981. The region became known as the Eastern Cape Province after 1994 and includes other areas such as the former Transkei Bantustan.

<sup>119</sup> Bertolt Brecht’s *Messingkauf Dialogues* was written between 1939 and 1942 and constitutes a vivid and humorous discussion of Brecht’s theorisations of theatre. It celebrates lightness and laughter and hence presents a four-sided debate – between an actor, actress, dramaturge and Brecht – about the making of theatre and the role of art in society. See: Brecht, Bertolt. (1964) *Brecht on Theatre: the Development of an Aesthetic*. Willet, John. (Ed. and trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.

give their passport numbers.<sup>120</sup> He states that the play evolved from improvisation(s) because the enacted experiences come close to what its cast members have experienced.

In a review of *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, Joubert (1972: 86) says that Fugard incorporated the spectators in the performance. As an opening piece for the Space Theatre, the actors performed barely a few feet away from the spectators, looking them right in the eye. Joubert recounts that in that intense involvement, the spectators forgot that they were watching a play. He also observes that as in the performance of *Boesman and Lena*, “the audience becomes the necessary unwilling additional player” (Ibid.). This comes close to the performance of avant-garde groups such as the Living Theatre and Performance Group.

In an interview with Peter Wilhelm in 1972, Fugard states that there is dissimilarity between his plays and productions by The Living Theatre. He stated that he had basic respect for the audience’s privacy and so did not want to assault them as was common with performances by the Living Theatre (Wilhelm 1972: 112). In an interview with Hough (1977: 126) he said that apart from the influences of European and American plays and experiments, Faulkner, in particular, had a remarkable impact on his art. He stated that Faulkner gave him total security to turn around and use the Eastern Province world as his main concern. In the same interview, he maintained that *The Coat* and *Orestes* are experiments with actors as creative and not just interpretive agents. He admitted that Grotowski’s theorisations and work led him to explore the actor’s potential:

This was the man who had developed to an astonishing degree a theatre that used the creative potential of the actor. And it was his influence that really blew my mind at that stage, and suddenly he set me off into a set of encounters with actors, which starting with *The Coat*, led through *Orestes*, and then culminated, in a sense, in *Sizwe Bansi*, and to a lesser degree in *The Island*, and then suddenly flowered for me in *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*. (Hough 1977: 127)

Confirming such influence, Vandenbroucke (1975: 195) relates the physicality (use of voices, faces, hands for expression and control of muscles and the body) of the black actors Kani and Ntshona as being informed by “Grotowskian malleability.” The work and ideas of Brook and Grotowski (especially of the latter) have been important for Fugard (Walder 1984: 4). Walder (1984: 5) maintains that Fugard was “inspired and sustained by the actuality of performance, by live actors before a live audience, flesh and blood, sweat, the human voice, real pain, real

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<sup>120</sup> The audience, ambushed by Kani and already on stage, responded differently. While two of them said they didn’t have a passport number, one improvised a series of fake digits. Kani responded immediately by querying the lie from a white man. See: Niven, Alastair (1975) Athol Fugard in Britain. In: Gray, S. (Ed.). (1982) *Athol Fugard*. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill. pp. 88–90.

time.” Walder (1984: 5-6) compares him with Artaud, and maintains that both artists notably rejected the “trappings of institutionalised, illusionistic theatre – buildings, props, costumes, lighting and so on – only interest in so far as they aid the primary function of drama: to define the truth of the living moment.” Apparently, this is an alternative theatre-making practice.

Walder (1984: 95) states that all of Fugard’s work in theatre can ideally qualify as alternative. He maintains that even those plays considered mainstream and conventional always began as a “low-cost, small-scale, makeshift if not improvised operation, in which he is simultaneously writer, director, and often, actor.” For Walder (2003), Skordis (2003), and Crow and Banfield (1996), Fugard’s workshop plays can fit into the new and alternative theatre tradition because they are produced using a director-scribe and actor-response method, thus defying traditional playwriting. This alternative play-making method echoes Brecht’s practice, who also utilised the workshop process and explored actors’ potentials.

Burns (2002: 237) maintains that Fugard uses Brechtian methods in *The Coat* to depict the situation in his country. She points out that the scenes in the play “are a dialectic in Brechtian style, with a presenter who challenges the characters/actors’ feelings and motives and with actors coming out of character” (Burns 2002: 238). Burns also maintains that he adopted the existentialist perspective of writers such as Camus and Sartre in presenting the characters and events. Peck (1992: 69) confirms the influences of Camus on Fugard’s art, citing *The Myth of Sisyphus* as an example. Diala (2006: 243) maintains that, like Camus, Fugard advocated love and sees happiness as an inward good. He maintains that both playwrights reject violence as a solution to the human problem. He notes that Camus particularly advocates for “metaphysical rebellion,” thus criticising “revolutionary violence” (Ibid). This marks one of the fundamental differences between Fugard and Maponya’s notion of the revolution, and the role of theatre in achieving it.

Black theatre in South Africa such as that of Maponya and Manaka was tailored towards the idea of revolutionary violence. This theatre broke away from the Western theatrical tradition in order to discover its own roots (Silber 1984: 12). It has been called the alternative theatre, resistance theatre and theatre of the dispossessed and was largely influenced by the American and South African Black Consciousness emphasis on conscientisation and collective struggle. Steadman (1984: 385) lists Maponya and Manaka as the important voices of this theatre. Maponya stresses that his job as an artist is to conscientise black people in his country and that conscientising the whites is, in turn, the job of white artists (Bauer 1990: 15). He states that in order to achieve that he had to familiarise himself with the works of Ibsen, Chekov,



Brecht as well those of Achebe, Ngugi and Dhlomo. Maponya believes in a theatre that instils a sense of assertiveness in human beings (*New Nation* 1990: 12). He founded the Bahumutsi Theatre Group as a result of his strong belief in a theatre that would, especially, serve the sole interest of the revolution (Steadman 1984: 384).

The group had to however work underground and relied on experiments and improvisation so as to work and survive. Steadman (1988: 22) reports that *The Hungry Earth* is as an example of “underground black theatre in Soweto, created independently of white capital.” Maponya (1995: viii) states that, unlike other artists in South Africa, he did not enjoy state support or white sponsorship of any kind and so had to improvise and support his group with his meagre income. Studies show that experiment and improvisation were central to the group’s practice. This manifested in the British performance of *The Hungry Earth* in the presentation of events through the changing perspectives of three actors who switch roles and relationships to each other on stage; and explored choral commentary, extensive improvisation, transformation and physicality common with African traditional morality plays (Programme Notes for the British Tour of *The Hungry Earth* 1981: 2).

Steadman (1988: 27) states that the dynamics of the performance of *The Hungry Earth* cannot be accurately represented in textual form, stressing that “dance, mime and song are used in abundance...” with the “focus on the personal lives and sufferings of migrant labourers.” He observes that the short scenes in the play resemble Brecht’s early *Lehrstucke*,<sup>121</sup> which allows Maponya to dramatise and “comment upon scenes of exploitation in sugar plantations, on the mines, and in the day-to-day experiences of rootless migrant labourers” (Ibid.). He recounts that the three actors<sup>122</sup> on the British tour adopted multiple roles and acted “as narrators in a series of short sketches that [drew] eclectically from history to portray the underlying effects of white exploitation” (Steadman 1988: 28).

Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984: 147) assert that *The Hungry Earth* is “reminiscent of early Brechtian theatre, in that the actors present a lecture-demonstration about the conditions of Black working-class life in South Africa.” Kober (1985: 9) maintains that the play is perhaps Maponya’s most widely known play, stressing that its “roughness of presentation, its collage of images” – features common with both Brechtian and Grotowskian theatre – makes it

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<sup>121</sup> Learning-plays.

<sup>122</sup> Maponya, Sydwell Yola and Dijo Tjabane acted in the British tour of *The Hungry Earth*. Ian Steadman writes that “the play, originally intended for five performers, was restructured when passports were withheld from two of them”. See: Steadman, Ian (1988) *Stages in the Revolution: Black South African Theatre since 1976. Research in African Literatures*. 19 (1). pp. 24–33.

appealing to the audience. Mngadi (1996: 202) corroborate that *The Hungry Earth* and *Woza Albert* by Ngema, Mtwana and Simon have been described as experimental in the Brechtian and Grotowskian senses. Mngadi (1996: 202-3) observes that they are considered as such because they seek “ways of representing social relations that revealed the constructedness of political subjectivities.” He concludes that the plays are replete with borrowings and influences.

Dunton (1995: 237) confirms these influences, especially that of Brecht. In his review of *The Hungry Earth*, he presents that the play is steeped with “sharp echoes of Brecht.” Dunton also observes that Maponya himself acknowledges Brecht’s *Measures Taken* as a stimulus for his play, confirming that *Measures Taken* is Brecht’s most radical and political play in terms of theatrical method. Steadman (1984: 385-6) emphasises the significant influence of Brecht on Maponya’s art. Like Dunton (1995: 237), he also cites Brecht’s *Measures Taken* as the major influence in the writing of *The Hungry Earth*. Steadman (1984: 385) adds that, like Manaka, Maponya “restructures his play through the rehearsal process so that the script is really little more than the score of a performance created in workshop.” Influenced by Brecht, Maponya, in *The Hungry Earth*, depicts the effects of migrant labour on blacks.

What is significant about the dramatic portrayal of these issues is the view from inside which theatre provides. As Brecht proclaimed, and as Maponya deliberately sets out to achieve, the theatrical presentation of these issues can deal only with the effects of a system on people, but also with the underlying motive causes... As such, *Hungry* is a play which demystifies migrant labour on the Witwatersrand. (Steadman 1984: 387–388)

Speaking about the performance of the play, Steadman (1984: 388) observes that Brechtian methods were deployed, such as surreal lighting effects and unison address to the audience “inviting them to join in a journey with the Bahumutsi Drama Group.” Steadman states that, like Brecht, Maponya did not create complex characters, but instead paid attention to facts and evidence presented through the Brechtian actor-presenter style. Maponya used the actor-presenter to comment on the actions on stage and off stage (Steadman 1984; Herrero 1991). And similar to the avant-garde performances of the period, *The Hungry Earth* was unscripted throughout its performance history until publication (Steadman 1984: 391). Steadman (1984: 392) notes that the play invites emphatic response from audience, and leaves them to consider the implications of the events presented on stage. It also adopts Brechtian “gestic language” by stressing the symbolic relevance of phrases like “we will fight hard” and “we will rise up” and utilises the symbol of “clenched fists” (Steadman 1984: 392).

Maponya's theatre represents a transformation of both form and content, in the way it stresses evidence during performance. This is also a Brechtian influence. Herrero (1991: 307) upholds that Maponya is more interested with facts. Steadman (1984: 396) also maintains that what is most common in *The Hungry Earth* is the presentation of facts and evidence for the benefit of the spectators. Evidence of child labour, exploitation in the mines, and life in the compounds, are presented using a Brechtian model (Steadman 1984: 389). It is in this way that Maponya utilised the stage for the edification of his audiences. His acknowledgment of the Brechtian style informs an understanding of his dramaturgy, and is key to understanding the ideological basis of *The Hungry Earth*.

Steadman (1984: 400) maintains that "Brechtian influence is apparent not only in the formal aspects of the play, but also in the vision inscribed therein – which is clearly a view of theatre as political demystification." Maponya uses the stage to demystify the political and economic relations of social life, making it serve an ideological function (Steadman 1984: 401). Jones and Jones (1996: 105) identify that Maponya uses a narrator to comment on the action in *The Hungry Earth*. They add that he replaces dialogue with choral singing, incorporates gumboot dancing, and makes recourse to mimed sequences to represent elements of the performance. In *Umongikazi*, the playwright allows his actors to transform in up to eight different roles, in addition to the use of multiple flashbacks. And in *Gangsters*, he juxtaposes the interrogations of the poet-activist with the recitation of her poems (Ibid.).

*Gangsters* was, particularly, inspired by Beckett's *Catastrophe*. For O'Brien (2001: 103), the play is a "conscious and self-reflexive reworking of the European radical theatres of Samuel Beckett and Vaclav Havel." O'Brien states that Maponya appropriated their theatres to come up with *Gangsters*. *Gangsters* however "negotiates questions of power and representation" differently to Beckett's *Catastrophe* and Havel's *Mistake*. O'Brien argues that the depiction of race and gender in *Gangsters* is, actually, universal because of its reference to *Catastrophe* and *Mistake*. Worthen (2004) also maintains that the play is a pure political allegory crafted on the model of Beckett's *Catastrophe*. He notes that it invokes and challenges this influence, concerning itself with the series of apartheid laws in South Africa in the 1980s. Thus, while *Gangsters* is about the arrest and eventual murder of a poet-activist,<sup>123</sup> *Catastrophe* protests the incarceration of the Czech artist Vaclav Havel.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Saliently referring to Steve Biko.

<sup>124</sup> Czech play wright, and later president of the Czech Republic .

Maponya also creatively experimented with the global open-participation system particularly advocated by the likes of Boal, Beck and Brecht. Coplan (in Herrero 1991: 313) observes that his creative utilisation of the Brechtian acting techniques allowed him to control the response of his audience. This performance method had been in use in the country even before Fugard. Kruger (2005: 71) locates the root of spectator-participation in South Africa as far back as the 1950s with the performance(s) of Radebe's *Rude Criminal* (1950) (see Chapter 1). Herrero (1991: 314-5) describes that this spectator-participation technique was utilised in *Gangsters* in the playwrights' use of the Brechtian alienation effect on the audience through a system of flashback, poetry and the poet-activist's recitations of her poems under a blue light. This kind of delivery is a strong Brechtian element which disrupts the flow of the performance (Herrero 1991: 315). The light was used as a stage device to provoke the audience's consciousness and urge them to initiate changes. Herrero (1991: 318) concludes that the playwright reveals the hidden truth in his society, and so "opens the audience's eyes through his direct didacticism as well as through symbolism, images, reversal of myth, and Brechtian alienation technique."

The review above examined the literary and artistic influence of theatre practitioners such as Grotowski and Brecht, and avant-garde groups, on Fugard and Maponya. It also revealed that some of the anti-apartheid artists in South Africa rejected art for art's sake in favour of anti-art, while others blended art and politics in their works. The use of images, unscripted texts, the improvisation technique – derived from both traditional and modern acting methods – and actors' creative potential was also stressed by a number of the works reviewed. These works also examined Fugard and Maponya's experiments and collaboration, and how the dramatists were able to source material from actors' experiences, hence pointing to the use of the theatre as a collective experiment. The role of actors in collaborations, experiments, workshopping, and, generally, in the making of alternative theatre, has not received the desired attention. There is therefore the need to explore their roles as conduits and creative agents, and examine how playwrights are transformed through a director-scribe relationship technique.

## **2.6 Theory and methodology**

New Historicism is more of a practice than a set of doctrine or theory such as psychoanalysis, cognitive poetics, reader response and Marxism (Robson 2008: 4-5). It has helped in reviving "the traditional split between theory and practice" (Robson 2008: 5). For Greenblatt (2005: 3), it is a "collection of practices rather than a school or method". It also subverts the politics of cultural and critical theory; it is anti-theatrical; and shows and dissects the relation between the text and the history that informs its content (Greenblatt 2005: 1). New Historicism is not

new; it was built on the dark spurs and ashes of earlier (but existing) theories and ideas. As a new practice/theory, it “engages more explicitly with critical theory especially with the works of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, while at the same time retaining many of the traditional aspects of literary criticism” (Robson 2008: 12). It was not warmly received in its early years, and this points to the newness of the practice. Robson (ibid) states that “some critics saw it as a radical and threatening form of Marxism, while others described it as conservative.”

Greenblatt (in Robson 2008: 24) markedly advocates that a new historicist study should be a “combination of reading practices, informed both by history and by a sense of aesthetics and formal dimensions of literary texts, in which it is possible to see the relation of a text to that which seemingly lies outside it.” The critic must be aware of the use of history in the text and how that context is transformed, represented, or communicated. New historicists believe that no text is entirely disconnected from its original context (Robson 2008: 68). As a practice, it is markedly concerned with intention, genre, and historical situation (Greenblatt 1990: 112); and promotes the study of both *major* and *minor* authors, hence blurring the usual distinction between them (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000: 10). New Historicism is, therefore, chosen for the analysis of the plays, their conception, realisation, and context of production; and for the examination of the playwrights’ status. It is also selected because it accords more place for collaborative work (Greenblatt 2005: 1), which is one of the major concerns of this study. Greenblatt states that this theoretical practice denies individual human agency and creativity, insisting instead on collaborative work.

New Historicism allows the critic to escape the limits of pure literary criticism in the analysis of plays. The full theatrical implications of any play can only be realised through the analysis of its various records of performance. These records serve as “responses to the essential facts of dramatic illusion” (Styan 1975: 116); and so are likely to generate better valid judgements than a pure literary criticism of a dramatic text. This is because the “performance has proof of viability in the genres own medium, and no other approach can supply a substitute for this” (Styan 1975: 117). Veenser (1989: ix) states that new historicists attempt to represent the past, thereby resisting grand narratives. New Historicism also challenges disciplinary limits, giving literary critics the chance to cross into other disciplines:

As the first successful counterattack in decades [...] New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of non-interference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions

of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives... (Veese 1989: ix)

New Historicism is actually more inclined to historical, political, and performance practices than, say, Marxism – which is considered as an all-encompassing theory that is ready to say anything, anytime and on anything. As an off-shoot of Marxism, New Historicism is similar to Marxist literary criticism in many ways. The two theories also differ based on ideology and practice. This section will show the similarities and dissimilarities between these two seminal and related theories; and ultimately identify the root, practices and tenets of New Historicism. Marxism (as a set of ideas) has undergone a lot of changes. Marx (himself) did not develop a body of criticism, ideas, or theories, known today as Marxist literary criticism. Marxism thus developed from Marx's ideas to postulations by later Marxists, and to convergence with other modern radical theories. It has moved from revolutionary Marxism, to western Marxism, and has been crossed with many other theories in the attempt to give it a more sophisticated tool of analysis.

Thus it is not a misnomer to hear of Marxist-feminist, structural-Marxism, or post-Marxism. Many theories are associated with this self-reflexivity and development. Post-Marxism, with seminal theorists such as Ernesto Laclau (b. 1935) and Chantal Mouffe (b. 1943), contributed in explaining the marriage of Marxism and other 'post' related theories. It also rejected most of the tenets of orthodox Marxism. It deliberately draws on a wide range of poststructuralist, postmodernist and feminist thoughts to attack the evils of capitalist society (Stuart Sim and Borin Van Loon 2004: 121). Theories are usually built from older theories or postulations. It is this process that connects one theory to another – say between formalism and structuralism, or structuralism and poststructuralism. Structuralism is simply a reformulation of formalism in terms of linguistics. The movement of theorists from one theory to the next, say, Roland Barthes' transition from structuralism to poststructuralism also reveals that most new theories are reworked (re-theorised) versions of older ones. Post-Marxism significantly adopts "a very pragmatic attitude towards the construction of a new theoretical synthesis that builds on the liberationist ideas of Marxism" (Sim and Loon 2004: 122).

The development in the twentieth century of new social movements around the globe such as ecological, ethnic, sexual, and feminist, indicate that orthodox Marxism has been bypassed. Marx, according to Sim and Loon (2004: 123), envisaged this development, when he asserts, that his philosophy would be shed by changing historical, cultural, and political milieu. This suggests that the doctrine of Marxism is open to multiple interpretations and conjectures, and

is not a set of ideas to be followed blindly no matter the change in political situation. Thus, Marxist ideas must be altered in order to fit into the rapidly changing socio-political times. Something much more flexible is, therefore, what is needed to attend to the cultural climate of the later twentieth century and to counter the capitalism that is quickly growing, especially in the west. The American political scientist Francis Fukuyama wrote a book called *The End of History* in 1992 to attest to this new Marxist position. However, Derrida (1993: 12) states that Marx has become a spectre we cannot expel from our culture or consciousness. Derrida maintains that there will be no future without Marx, and his influence will remain no matter what the ideologues of liberal democracy might say.

Goring, Hawthorn, and Mitchell (2001: 185) maintain that Marxist criticism since the 1960s has come to reflect the diversities of Marxism in the modern world. Modern, and therefore committed, Marxists are more adventurous in the study of the mediating process than their predecessors such as Fredrick Jameson who introduced the idea of the *political unconscious*. Their postulations have transcended the ‘literary mode of production’ of Terry Eagleton, and the ‘structure of feeling’ of Raymond Williams (Goring, Hawthorn, and Mitchell 2001: 186). The Marxist Pierre Macherey, in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978), rejects most of the orthodox Marxist thoughts by stating that literary works cannot be reduced to the reflection of economic facts that orthodox Marxists mostly associate them to. Speaking on this, Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell (2001: 186) attest that:

Since the 1970s, one is likely to find literary critics or theorists describing themselves as ‘Marxist-feminist,’ or ‘structuralist-feminist,’ or seeking to combine or relate Marxism and postmodernism. What we can call monolithic Marxism seems very much a thing of the past, and after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe it seems unlikely to make a particularly strong comeback.

This gives credence to the post-Marxists attempt to look beyond orthodox Marxist ideas. As a result, Marxism has come to cross into what is referred to as New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. New Historicism rejects the synchronic approach to culture and literature, which is mostly associated with structuralism. Instead, new historicists proffer adequate answers to problems related to the tension between aesthetic, cultural, and historical approaches to the study of literary works (Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell 2001: 188). Michel Foucault, among others, has succeeded in suggesting new objects of historical study, emphasising “the way in which causal influences are mediated through discursive practices” (Ibid). Stephen Greenblatt is the influential figure in the development of New Historicism, especially in his collection of

essays, *Learning to Curse* (1990). For Greenblatt (1990: 112), New Historicism is a practice, and not a set of doctrines, that have permeated through the political and theoretical decades. He maintains that the critic should be concerned with the intention, genre, and the historical situation in the analysis of any work of art. These factors must be taken into account by the contemporary critic, as all are social and ideological, and will help in any reading. Greenblatt (*ibid.*) maintains that:

The production and consumption of such works are not unitary to begin with; they always involved a multiplicity of interests, however well organised, for the crucial reason that art is social and hence presumes more than one consciousness. And in response to the art of the past, we inevitably register, whether we wish to or not, the shifts in value and interest that are produced in the struggles of social and political life.

New Historicists pay particular attention to both the reading of texts and their composition. The *practice* challenges the notion that history can present a unified and internally consistent worldview of a people; and declares that “all history is subjective, written by people whose personal biases affect their interpretation of the past” (Bressler 2002: 181). Montrose (1989: 17) maintains that New Historicism seeks a repositioning of literature both in relation to other genres and discourses, and in relation to other social institutions and non-discursive practices. It emphasises that there can be no coherent notion of an autonomous textual order or aesthetic that transcends the shifting terrains of history, material needs, and interest (Montrose 1989: 18). A work of art must therefore relate to its creator, or set of creators, and the context which shapes and influences him/them. It is not possible to isolate a text from its writer and cultural context. This historical practice emphasises that history is itself “one of many discourses or ways of seeing and thinking about the world” (Bressler 2002: 181). And while seeking to reconcile *text* and *context*, it refutes the idea of a privileged and autonomous author – an idea common with most poststructuralist approaches to the study of literature. Its main tenets are captured by Bressler (2002: 185):

New Historicism asserts that an intricate connection exists between an aesthetic object – a text or any work of art – and society, while denying that a text can be evaluated in isolation from its cultural context. We must know, it declares, the societal concerns of the author, of the historical time evidenced in the work, and of other cultural elements exhibited in the text before we can devise a valid interpretation. This new approach to textual analysis questions the very act of how we can arrive at meaning for any human activity, whether it is a text, a social event, a long-held tradition, or a political act.



This context-author-text connection is emphasised by many new historicists. Robson (2008: 7) maintains that New Historicism explores “the ways in which texts subvert themselves” and “undermine the historical frameworks that have conventionally been used to explore them.” The literary work itself is put together through the “negotiation between a creator, or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society” (Greenblatt 2005: 28). Greenblatt (2005: 15) states that the reader or cultural critic must therefore go outside the text (a cultural object) to understand the nuances and various matrices from which the creator, or set of creators, derive his (their) materials. The intrinsic materials are as significant as the text’s extrinsic references to history, unified or not, and culture. Texts are, thus, not just cultural by virtue of reference to the world beyond themselves; they are cultural by virtue of the social values and contexts that they have themselves successfully absorbed (Greenblatt 2005: 12). The artwork, therefore, draws from the culture in which it emerges; but it also reproduces that culture in a modified form that can travel across boundaries, within a culture, between cultures, and across time (Robson 2008: 24).

In place of a stable sense of objects, or histories, as unchanging, waiting for the critic to view them from a fixed point, Greenblatt uses words such as “shifting” and “jostling” – verbs that connote an ongoing process. This way he also talks of the distinctions between art and other aspects of society as being constantly redrawn. As such, for Greenblatt (2005: 3), “history is both what happened in the past (a set of events) and an account of those events (a story).” It is only through critical reflection then that the adequacy of a history or story can be ascertained. It is in this way that New Historicism promotes reading against single-layered interpretations. History, and the account of events in a story, is not stable, and so is its interpretation. This is captured by Greenblatt’s (2005: 3) position that new historicists are “determinedly suspicious of unified, monolithic depictions of cultures or historical periods.” They believe that a unified history is often framed to serve a particular interest. It is for this reason, and many others, that they are concerned with representation and ideology.

New Historicism is preoccupied with ideology and social context because social systems are produced in the social practices of individual and collective human subjects. Language, as a source of great power, plays a vital role in the production and representation process. Artists utilise and manipulate it for different purposes. Greenblatt (2005: 2) observes that artists use it to “appeal to the readers’ most fundamental emotions.” He states:

In any culture there is a general symbolic economy made up of the myriad signs that excite human desire, fear and aggression. Through their ability to construct resonant stories, their command of effective imagery, and above all their sensitivity to the greatest collective creation of any culture – language – literary artists are skilled at manipulating this economy (Greenblatt 2005: 15)

Robson (2008: 2) maintains that literary artists are, in this regard, not different from literary critics because both exploit the power of language to make sense of the world and their ideas. Artists are able to use images or symbols as an economic system whereby objects, narratives, and representations are produced and reproduced in different ways, hence changing “value as they move from one area of a culture to another” (Robson 2008: 3). Literary works notably represent cultures, and so cannot exist in a vacuum. As such, they cannot be taken away from the very lives and histories of the individuals, cultures, and events “that are involved in their production or reception” (Robson 2008: 4). The social condition related to the text is crucial for New Historicist critics because the practice seeks to reconcile text and context (or actually holds the two in constant tension). History, as context, and literature, which is a philosophical depiction of historical events, are actually mutually connected.

New Historicism is an implicit “critique of Literary Formalism (or ‘The New Criticism’) that treated literary objects as ahistorical icons” (Greenblatt 2005: 3). New historicists do not see the past as an object detachable from its textual reconstruction. Literary artists too can neither detach themselves from the events in their works by reporting from a safe distance, nor avoid the implied implications of their position as witnesses to the lives that they represent (Robson 2008: 4). In the same vein, the theory – what Greenblatt refers to as a set of practices – rejects the privileged position accorded to the text, or author, because human experiences are multi-layered and continuously shaped by individual ideology and ideological discourses, practices, and institutions. The practice puts emphasis on context, ideology and intention, thus bringing the author, audience or reader, and text and medium, to the fore in literary analysis.

Ideological dominance is qualified by specific conjecture of professional, class, and personal interests of individual cultural producers (such as poets and playwrights); by the specific though multiple social personalities of spectators, auditors and readers who variously consume productions; and by the relative autonomy – the specific properties, possibilities and limitations – of the cultural medium being worked. (Montrose 1989: 22)

New Historicist criticism is founded on the awareness that ideology is a fluid and unstable concept, like the culture that shapes it. Montrose (1989: 22) maintains that the text is never reliable or autonomous because of its “status as a discourse produced and appropriated within

history and within a history of other productions and appropriations,” and also since “many cultural codes converge and interact” that ideological coherence and stability are scarcely possible. Raymond Williams (in Montrose 1989: 22) also speaks of ideology as “dynamic” and “dialogical,” and stresses that it depends on the “interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance.” The dominant idea is often contested in the arts, and the possibility of difference and opposition are launched in the interpretation of works of art, history, and culture. Williams’ emphasis on movements and tendencies justify this position. In this way, it is not possible to pin down or arrest meaning in a literary work for such an adventure is akin to containing an active cat in a box – with all the futility involved in the enterprise.

New Historicists<sup>125</sup> focus on the historical, cultural, and materialist details and how these shape textual content. It is not therefore entirely cut off from the many tenets of Marxism. It is built on the ideological positions of the Marxist critics Louis Althusser and Raymond Williams. It is also politically influenced. However, it ideologically differs from Marxism for its rejection of the emphasis on canonical and celebrated writers. Gallagher and Greenblatt (2000: 10) uphold that the study of un-canonized writers helps bridge the sharp classification of writers as *major* and *minor*. The above discussion is not a sweeping review of the tenets of New Historicism as a theory and practice. This study locates more of its historical, practical, and cultural tenets in the analysis of the plays and the collaborative tradition (see Chapters 3, 4, and 5).

## **2.7 Sources consulted**

As a qualitative study, this thesis explored related published sources (books, journal articles, chapters in books and published interviews); unpublished sources (postgraduate dissertations, indexes on censorship and printed interviews); newspaper reviews of the playwrights and the performances of the plays analysed in the thesis; archival sources (personal correspondences in the form of letters and other reports); and ephemeral sources (original scripts and notes of some of the selected plays, performance notes and important lecture notes). Video recordings of some of the plays (*Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island*, *The Hungry Earth*, and *Gangsters*), as well as some of the live performances, are explored and informed the analysis of the plays in performance.

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<sup>125</sup> New Historicists are divided into two major groups – the American group that prefers the term “cultural-poetics”, and the British group that prefers “cultural materialism”. By and large, the groups fall under the umbrella of New Historicism.

Some of the archival and ephemeral sources used in the thesis – and listed in the reference list under the Archival Component – were sourced from the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, where the researcher spent weeks of research and study, and had discussions with professional researchers from the Universities in the Eastern Cape (particularly Rhodes University and University of Port Elizabeth). Details of author(s), year, title of documents, type of medium, collection, document number, and name and location of archive are provided in the reference list. The ephemeral (vital but short-lived) documents are judiciously utilised in the thesis. Important electronic sources are used in the thesis in few cases. These research instruments proved sufficient in generating the information needed.

Proper documentation is adhered to in both in-text and reference list. Sources and notes are verified and standard bibliographic practice adhered to. A critique of the selected plays – as dramatic texts and performances – is carried out, situating them in their historical context and analysing the influence of the period on the writers' creative composition and work in theatre. New Historicism is used as a frame of analysis in the thesis. The published and unpublished, but printed, interviews with the playwrights and other theatre practitioners in the country such as Simon, Manaka and Ndlovu are used as aids in the discussion of the arts and theatre of the struggle.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

#### 3.1 Preamble

The need for an alternative to the orthodox and traditional form of drama led performance theorists, playwrights and practitioners into experimenting with different modes. A close look at dramatic practices across centuries shows that artists always created dramas that would suit their historical, social contexts and peculiar demands (see chapter 1). Drama had always been produced to attend to the needs of its period and audiences. Shakespeare's plays, for example, deviate from the traditional theatre, and were created to respond to the needs of the English Renaissance.<sup>126</sup> Stanislavski, Artaud, Brecht, Brook and other theatre directors and dramatists have created alternate forms more attuned to the political demands of the modern stage (see Chapter 1). At the core of theatre forms such as the avant-garde, "theatre-for-development, people's theatre, community theatre, worker's theatre, and workshop theatre in general, is politics; a perspective shared by most of the practitioners involved in these respective forms" (Skordis 2003: 66).

The rise of avant-garde theatres in America and Europe from the 1950s shaped the practice of theatre worldwide, allowing artists to transcend the limits of conventional theatre. This period (1950s-onwards) was also informed by the theories and practices of theatre used by Piscator, Artaud, Brecht, Grotowski, and Brook. Piscator and Brecht particularly stressed theatre's role as a medium of instruction and change, and came up with *epic* theatre. The theatre turned out to be the "ultimate theatre for instruction" (Skordis 2003: 46). It became "a part of the social struggle, a means by which the working class could define itself" (Roose-Evans, in Skordis, 2003: 46). Black artists like Maponya were moved by the theatre's potential(s) for instruction and social action, and adopted it in their conscientisation and mobilisation campaign. Piscator introduced agitprop theatre, a relative impromptu form of theatre with a Marxist orientation – one that emphasises social relevance and expects each performance to cater for its immediate audience (Innes 1993: 112). The epic form is also localised and limited to a certain audience or community, a feature South African artists utilised and transcended. The protest/resistance artists appropriated this epic form by using amateur actors and simple characterisation so as to reach out to a largely uneducated audience.

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<sup>126</sup> The Elizabethan and Jacobean period.

The urge to respond to sociopolitical conditions – some of the contexts by which plays are produced – leads artists to rebel against conventional forms. This affects not just the form but also the content of plays. In South Africa, for example, the apartheid period involved a range of experiments, sometimes collaboratively carried out in workshop settings. South African theatre practitioners such as Fugard, MacLaren, Simon, Purkey, and later Maponya, Manaka and Ngema, defied the status quo and overcame theatrical limits. The stage is usually used as a ‘subversive’ cultural space to protest against one form of injustice or the other. It was – and still serves – as one of the weapons of expression and protest. The tendency to use theatre for political ends in order to bring about ‘pseudo’ balance in society “runs right through from the tragedies of ancient Greece, to the Catholic morality or mystery plays in the Middle Ages, to the monarch commissioned performances in the Renaissance period” (Skordis 2003: 67).

Theatre is associated with the proletariat class in the same way that the novel is categorised as a middle-class form. Playwrights utilise its force to represent and speak for the proletariat and to undermine the dominant authority. This has been the trend from the classical to the modern periods. This then led postcolonial and Marxist critics to criticise Aristotle’s theory of tragedy “for its universalist indifference to history and for its focus on the fall of great men instead of social and political conflict” (Jeyifo, in Dahl 2014: 2).

Subversion and rebellion is at the heart of most dramas, as well as Marxist and postcolonial literary theories. The history of theatre, going back to the classical period, is one of resistance and social action. In South Africa, Fugard and Maponya have also employed their talents to report and protest, and subvert and resist the apartheid state. This subversion occurred in the general populace in everyday life, and among dramatists publicly in theatre, through attempts to defy and undermine the dominant dramatic traditions. Artists in the country produced plays that exposed the repressiveness of the regime. Most of the plays, as shall be discussed here in, were unscripted – without an easily identifiable author – and experimental, and relied heavily on theatricalism and the actor in a confined space. Their writers and actors operated under very tight conditions and had to deal with strict overt and covert government policies, but still managed to keep working. Some of them ended up either behind bars, co-opted, in exile, or, worse, dead, for defying apartheid, while others survived and worked amidst the storm. This informed the need to develop *alternative* plays (as in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*) with camouflaged content – works that could survive banning and reach the stage.

This alternative form played a vital role in the struggle for liberation (Solberg 1999: 6-11).<sup>127</sup> Some of the ensembles in the country were purely non-whites; others had whites as directors and trainers. The groups tried to offer an alternative to the white established theatre tradition in the country. The black theatre later evolved, becoming more radical and inward-looking, unlike Fugard's protest (testimony) theatre. Fugard's work with Kani and Ntshona was in all respect politically inflected and "gradually developed into the mode of Theatre of Resistance in later contemporary dramatists" (Solberg 1999: 10). It is evident that Fugard had also dealt with township life in *The Coat* – a piece devised in 1966 before his close collaboration with Kani and Ntshona. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were therefore not his first venture into the townships or his first examinations of the negative effects of apartheid laws on black families. Fugard had also explored township life in *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo* in the late-1950s.<sup>128</sup> Fugard's theatre however remained protest-inclined rather than militant and radical; therefore its impact cannot easily be compared with the black theatre of the mid-1970s.

The black theatre emerged from the mid-1960s and reached its peak in the 1970s-1980s under the Black Consciousness Movement (see Chapter 1). It was characterised by changes in form and style in play-making to attend to the demands of the modern stage. Black theatre emerged in opposition to the elitist white commercial theatre. It had a Marxist-orientation and leaning. The period (from the 1960s-1970s) also witnessed the performances of plays by white artists, that are also about black life. Fugard, Purkey, Simon and Kavanagh worked with black actors in many productions. These important artists constitute the "sympathetic section of the non-oppressed communities, who, although their work was largely institutionalised and relatively unravaged by censorship and control, also resorted to political themes and methods in their cultural expression" (Steadman, in Skordis 2003: 69). They were moved by an inward urge to contribute to the struggle for the emancipation of the black people in the country. Fugard (in Foley 1996:184) speaks of the guilt he experienced at a point in his career while recounting his encounter with Norman Ntshinga, who requested him to help train and direct the aspiring black actors who became the Serpent Players. Fugard stated that the proposal left him with a "guilty awareness of how selfishly I live with my 'simple' pleasures – how cut off I am from the physical realities of South Africa" (Ibid.).

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<sup>127</sup> Rolf Solberg maintains that black artists formed the core of the alternative theatre movement in South Africa. Solberg lists black groups such as the Peoples' Experimental Theatre (PET) and the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON), as well as individual ensembles such as the Serpent Players, Imitha Players and Phoenix Players, and maintains that each contributed to the struggle in numerous ways. See: Solberg, Rolf. (1999) *Alternative Theatre in South Africa. Talks with Prime Movers since the 1970s*. Pietermaritzburg: Haded Books. pp. 6-11.

<sup>128</sup> Athol Fugard worked semi-collaboratively with the Circle Players in the production of *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*.

The plays staged from the 1970s and 1980s were judged strictly on their political content and commitment to the struggle. Artists like Maponya and Manaka used the theatre (in line with the black consciousness ideal) as a political tool for the conscientisation and mobilisation of the oppressed class. The post-Soweto black theatre was a crucial transition from protest to resistance and radicalised theatre. It served the exploited workers and expressed their “hatred of their white masters” (Mshengu 1979: 33). However, it was testimony plays such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *Crossroads* (by Workshop ’71) that prepared the ground and proved that the theatre could serve the dual role of reflection and protest. The rise in black consciousness contributed to radicalising the theatre, and manifested on the political level in the strikes and protests of students and workers in the townships and urban areas.<sup>129</sup>

Because of the theatre’s potency for political action (as well as other elements) artists under apartheid were judged as either political *or* apolitical. Fugard’s liberal leanings and assumed apolitical position led to the condemnation of his plays by many black artists and activists in the country. Notwithstanding, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *Crossroads*, and *Survival* (the last two by Workshop ’71) influenced many of the radical political plays that emerged after the uprising. The post-Soweto black plays were anti-establishment in nature and defied both the authority and dominant playmaking tradition. The plays were mostly experimental and improvisational, and influenced by European and American playwrights and avant-garde models. Political and cultural activism in this period allowed artists to exploit the potentials inherent in theatre. The apartheid context was a repressive one, and artists often expressed political issues in theatre. Theatre’s subversive cultural force opened up political windows for dramatists because it was “cheap, mobile, simple to present, and difficult to supervise, censor, or outlaw ... and was the one medium left to the people to use to conscientise, unify, and mobilise both cadres and rank and file” (Mshengu 1979: 36). Aware of this political avenue, artists in the country used the stage to undermine the regime.

It was not easy for the apartheid state to nip such protest and resistance in the bud. The artists used unscripted plays and performed underground, thereby evading governmental control(s). This tactic had already been used by Grotowski, Stanislavski and others. Some plays adopted the poor theatre model: stripped the stage of all inessentials, and concentrated on the creative potentials of actors and on the bare stage. For example, the form of Fugard’s plays “reflects his long-standing interest in a stripped-down theatre, a theatre of basic essentials: a small cast

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<sup>129</sup> The black movement had affiliate non-white groups such as Theatre Council of Natal (TECON) and People’s Experimental Theatre (PET).



of characters in a circling, at times repetitive, yet passionately close relationship embodying the tensions of their society, often first performed by actors directly involved in its creation, in fringe or at least non-mainstream venues” (Walder 2015: 139).

The *stripped-down* (to use Walder’s term) model was key to the survival and success of many of these plays. The emphasis at the time turned to an actor-centred theatre, a shift away from writing out the story to discovering it through the actors’ creative agency (MacLennan 1993: 2). This actor-model was characterised by experiments and improvisations in workshops. The texts were fleshed out using the actor’s own life and experiences. *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were devised along that line. *Gangsters*, *Jika*, and *The Hungry Earth* were similarly fleshed out and developed in rehearsals, with actors playing central roles in the creation and interpretation of events (Moorosi 1997: 18-39). Actors in this kind of theatre often transform into creative agents in the presented drama instead of passive carriers of authorial intention(s) (MacLennan 1993: 2).

The modern drama (especially but not only tragedy) emphasises theatricality and suggests a balanced blend of form and content. *The Island* and *Gangsters* fit the modern tragedy criteria (see Chapters 4 and 5). Dahl (2014: 11) maintains that modern tragedy allows for “a reflexive integration of form and content.” Artaud condemns the relegation of actors to interpreters of dramatic text, and considers dictatorship of writers as the “fundamental problem of Western theatre” (Dahl 2014: 11). Menke (in Dahl 2014: 11) also states that the actor is free and “can never subject himself fully to the dramatic text, for the very reason that it owes its presence to him.”<sup>130</sup> The actors’ celebrated independence is not limited to the tragic genre. Ultimately, the actor is free to “invest his own bodily and vocal presence in his performance, without surrendering to the dramatic text” (Dahl 2014: 12). The early performances of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* reveal this newly found freedom. Kani (as actor and co-creator) altered the monologue in each performance and utilised the newspaper as a springboard for discussion and audience engagement.

Kani used humour in the play to make protest statements without sounding hateful or spiteful. This accounts for the play’s success and survival in a country where artists were not thought of as significantly different from rebels (or terrorists). Kani comically presents events without evident bitterness or hatred. Markedly, the play reveals how comedy can also evoke emotions and action. Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata* is an earliest demonstration of the potentials of comedy

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<sup>130</sup> Christoph Menke in *Tragic Play, Irony and Theatre from Sophocles to Beckett*. See: Christian, Dahl. (2014) Tragedy and Theatricality in *The Island. Modern Drama*. 57 (1). pp. 1–18.

to incite action and reveal human or societal failings. Moliere's *Tartuffe* also shows comedy's innate potentials to examine social wrongs. Kani's virtuoso demonstrations, improvisations, and role-playing allow him to create – to use Solberg's (1999: 25) words – a “theatre for the people with the people.” He used ancient African tradition of storytelling and role-playing, one where the narrator impersonates and is not significantly different from an actor on stage.

It is significant, therefore, to discuss the theatre practices of Fugard and Maponya, especially their use of collaboration, improvisation, and experimentation, which are crucial to the play-making process of the plays with which this study is concerned. The nature of the creative-collaboration between Fugard, Kani and Ntshona will be analysed along with the disputations surrounding their exercises. The regime's suppression of the arts and the artists' determined zeal to survive and work will also be studied in the subsequent sections.

### **3.2 Against the conventional theatre**

Artists in South Africa did not only defy the state by producing anti-establishment agitprops; they also transcended the trappings of conventional theatre and produced plays that can best be categorised as alternatives to the traditional playwriting method. While some of the artists, notably black artists, rejected art for art's sake in favour of *anti-art* – the concern being about political content and performance rather than literariness – artists such as Fugard and Simon blended art and politics in their work. There was a debate among black consciousness artists about what role literature (including theatre literature) and literariness should play in literary composition. The alternative theatre by both white and black playwrights is known for its use of images, improvisational techniques (derived from traditional and modern acting methods), collaboration, workshopping, and experimentation. The *Statements* plays are “experiments in playmaking” because the authors did not abide by the traditional pattern of authorship (Davis 2013: 116). The plays making up the trilogy, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island* and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* were not, therefore, complete texts during their early runs. Maponya also experimented with actors and space, and produced radical anti-elitist plays that defied state control.

Black artists like Maponya, Ngema and Ndlovu<sup>131</sup> had to deal with, and eventually transform, black township audiences that were used to Kente's musicals. Their audience was also afraid of the implication of attending anti-establishment performances. Drama groups such as South

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<sup>131</sup> Duma Ndlovu was a black anti-apartheid playwright and a contemporary of Mbongeni Ngema and Maishe Maponya. Unlike Maponya and Ngema, he left South Africa for the US in 1978 (at the height of the resistance campaign). He returned to South Africa in 1992 and now writes and produces television dramas and soaps.

African Black Theatre Union (SABTU), Peoples' Experimental Theatre (PET), and Theatre Council of Natal (TECON), and individual artists such as Gibson Kente and Mthuli Shezi had a massive audience in the early-1970s (Mshengu 1979: 36). Their main audience consisted of students and young activists.<sup>132</sup> Music – in the form of liberation songs – played a prominent role in township theatre, and its many resources were exploited to capture the attention of the audience and pass across revolutionary messages. The songs were uniting, electrifying, and evoked a feeling of sympathy, and often anger, in the audience.<sup>133</sup> Songs have always been a part of African oral tradition and were sung in the past in times of glory and despair, therefore signifying a return to African roots. Black theatre in South Africa broke away from Western theatrical traditions in order to discover its own models. The use of improvisation – which is as much an African tradition as it is Western – demonstrates the artists' attempt to come up with a blend of traditional and Western performance practices.

### 3.2.1 Improvisation

The modern period is one of theatre's most revolutionary and productive eras because it gave birth to a theatre of challenge and experimentation. This theatre was significantly shaped by world-changing forces, like the intellectual, industrial, and democratic revolutions across the world. These revolutions supported innovation, gave new meanings to art, and deconstructed human existence and almost all forms of social order (Brecht 1964). The theatre went through a great deal of transformation during the period (see Chapter 1). Playwrights, theorists, and theatre practitioners defied the conventional form of art and made improvisation the centre of their practice. It was a global phenomenon, although the nihilistic onslaught of the form and content of the drama started with European artists. The emphasis was on improvisation and theatricality (see Chapter 1). Skordis (2003: 40) reports that:

The practitioners of the so called “avant-garde theatre” or “experimental theatre” movement, which dominated international theatre for much of the twentieth century, were a segment of the first to make a break away from the rigid structures that had prevented previous practitioners from utilising improvisation to its full potential. Although the various endeavours were stylistically diverse, the practitioners were united in their desire to break away from, and rebel against, what they perceived as the bourgeois sentiments that had dominated theatre trends of the time.

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<sup>132</sup> These audiences were also the most politically volatile. See: Kavanagh, Robert Mshengu. (1979) After Soweto: People's Theatre and the Political Struggle in South Africa. *Theatre Quarterly*. IX (33). pp. 31–38.

<sup>133</sup> Songs such as “How Long (Must we Suffer)?”, “Black Child”, and “Iziboshwa Zomhlaba” (“The Prisoners of the Earth”) could transform the audience from random spectators into a unified body of black South Africans with electrifying effect”. See: Kavanagh, Robert Mshengu. (1979) After Soweto: People's Theatre and the Political Struggle in South Africa. *Theatre Quarterly*. IX (33). pp. 31–38.

Improvisation entails the relegation of the text to a more genuine and creative exploration of experiences and events on stage. It allows actors to explore and create, and offers a sense of freedom to interpret and represent events. Avant-garde theatre practitioners utilised it to explore primary theatrical practices and “access their audience on an organic human level, where they could make direct contact with their socialised audience rather than lull them into complacency” (Skordis 2003: 40). This practice stretches from Meyerhold, Copeau, Piscator, Brecht, and Marowitz. Improvisation was largely notable with avant-garde practitioners and ensembles such as The Living Theatre and Open Theatre. It was then an already established mode of traditional performances – one that Kani re-introduced during the workshop of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*.

Marowitz (in Skordis 2003: 51) notes that it allows actors to break the socialisation chain in the sense that “... once [the actor] is on his own, free of the oppressive influence of script and stage ... he will begin drawing from the real self and producing honest reactions.” If there are limits for the actor, then it is the script and stage. Good actors were able to discover themselves, and create characters on stage, because they defied text and stage limits. Characters (like the text) are not given *a priori*, but are discovered by actors through creative improvisations and interaction. The actor is able to interact with the character he is creating through this process, in the same way a reader engages a text and creates meaning. This allows for what Marowitz refers to as the kinship between actor and character. Improvisation allows an actor to properly understand, interpret, and creatively recreate his role and events. It also makes him a “keener critic of the drama, and consequently, a better interpreter of it,” thereby exploring himself in relation to other characters and the audience (Marowitz, in Skordis 2003: 52).

Improvisation requires that the actor controls the spontaneous flow of the action and produces pertinent details. Marowitz, however, notes that this should not involve elaborate construction of events. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* challenges this view because in the opening studio scene Kani carried out a lot of improvisation and construction concurrently. This suggests that there are differences between Western and traditional forms of improvisation – or at least Kani’s and others’. Kani and Ntshona improvised with slices of materials from their lives and the lives of those around them. The newspaper scene is a major reference point in reviews because Kani improvised and creatively constructed the monologue every time he performed the play. This implies that the script “was in keeping with current affairs and that each performance was unique to each audience” (Skordis 2003: 94). This oral tradition method allowed the actors to reach the audience, shatter their complexes, and explore their reactions, instead of alienating

them.<sup>134</sup> Although Kani's engagement with the audience using the direct address method was not what Fugard (as a co-creator, scribe and modulator) actually planned, such improvisation and acting were also utilised in the creation and production of *The Island*.

Fugard's role in (co)devising *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* will be examined here.

The actors, in true workmanship fashion, improvised situations in the investigation and exploration of the subject. Improvisation being the tool "through which an actor learns to understand and practice a role – becomes the means through which John and Winston understand and practice their humanity." (Wertheim, in Skordis 2003: 97)

Fugard's theatre from the mid-1960s – with the creation of *The Coat* in 1966 – to the early 1970s was actor-centred (instead of text-centred) and exploited improvisation. He had before this time utilised the actor's creative potential using what he calls pure theatre: with the actor, stage and silence as primary elements. (His role in devising *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, and *The Island* will be examined here). Fugard's emphasis on the actor's body translates into his concern with live performance – actors on stage. It is in "live performance that his plays succeed best – their surface often opaque written scripts for performance, rather than texts for close verbal analysis" (Walder 2015: 127). *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is not a "text in the strict sense of the term, because the actors freely improvise... and the words they speak bear only a general resemblance to those of the printed text, although the order of events remain the same" (Stone and Scorer 1977: 121). It was designed in this way to survive a system that censors individual thoughts. The actors thus memorised the words and relied on their memory every time they performed the play. Their improvisation, and not some authorial intentions or presence, enables them to make the play *mean* something. They are, therefore, the play's first interpreters and critics; and the audience relies on their interpretations – as well as action and inaction – to arrive at a valid judgement of the happenings on stage. For Mshengu (1976: 44), actor "improvisation is not simply an avant-garde affectation; it is the mainstream of dramatic composition."

Improvisation usually starts during workshop, where actor-participants improvise with ideas and dialogue. *The Coat* – an experiment in play-making – reenacts improvisational processes, which, starting with the image of a man's real coat, led to the exploration of his arrest and

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<sup>134</sup> The method was common with good storytellers (who were mostly women) in Africa. This reinforces the argument that the play had a lot of traditional influences.

trial at Cradock,<sup>135</sup> and then to the question of the best possible uses the coat will be put to by the wife. During this process, Fugard played the role of a scribe and agent provocateur. Cima (2009: 97) observes that during the workshop of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, Fugard “transcribe[s], structures, reimagines” the events and improvised actor’s dialogue. Kani and Ntshona, on the other hand, supplied the controversial image(s) and bulk of the material, and carried out the improvisation. Kani was so creative that he transcended the script in such a way that “if you had not read the night’s newspaper you might be excused for thinking that he said the same thing every night” (Charad, in Cima 2009: 100). This improvised monologue gives him better claim to the play as a performance than his co-creators. In an interview in 1973, Kani stated that “we did not write anything down, except for the letter which Sizwe Bansi sends to his wife. The rest is in my mind. I know what to say” (Cima 2009: 100). This suggests a salient claim to the play, at least as was performed.

Fugard also had to rely on the actor-creators, Kani and Ntshona, to improvise and recreate the events and dialogue in the early run of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* in England. As conduits into the townships, therefore, the re-lived events were, in fact, close to, if not their actual, personal experiences as blacks. The improvisational un-script style allowed them to attend to the needs of their varied audiences and defy governmental control. This partly explains how many of these plays survived. As a group constrained by finance (which was the common problem of most avant-garde and anti-state groups) Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona put together *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* on shoestring budgets, pointing to Grotowski’s influence. They thus transcended not just censorship and banning, but individual limit as well.<sup>136</sup> The theorisations and practices of theatre practitioners such as Grotowski, Brook, and Boal had an enormous impact on improvisational practices at the time. Grotowski and Brook revolutionised not only modern acting but the stage as well; Boal’s influence was mostly to do with the performance process and actor-audience relationship on stage.

The influences of the postdramatic techniques that these theorists-practitioners initiated, and also expanded (as with Stanislavski’s improvisational acting practices, expanded by Artaud) manifested on the anti-apartheid stage. Stanislavski’s method-acting was adopted by Fugard in the play-making of *Nongogo* and *No-Good Friday*. A revised version of it was used in the play-making process of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. The ‘Stanislavski system’ – a method used to train actors to create believable (so-called ‘realistic’) characterisation – was

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<sup>135</sup> Norman Ntshinga (a Serpent Player) was also tried and sentenced there.

<sup>136</sup> Kani and Ntshona had to quit their jobs and defy grave risk in order to actualise this; and the group had to work underground, sometimes in Fugard’s garage, thereby breaking the law banning interracial activities.

not, however, applicable at that period.<sup>137</sup> In *The Coat* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, the actors performed lived-experiences rather than a copy of others' lives; in *The Island*, they used their own names and a historical setting to depict real experiences. John (John Kani) and Winston (Winston Ntshona) were never imprisoned on Robben Island, but Kani's brother, Harry, and fellow players, Ntshinga and Duru, all served terms there. These 'close' experiences make up the play.<sup>138</sup> As shall be addressed, Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* and *Jika* also follow close-to-life-experiences, and *Umongikazi* employs input and acting from the nurses.

Although Fugard maintains that Grotowski's "poor theatre" model only helped concretise his old practice of 'challenge-and-response' and proper utilisation of the actor's resource, a clear influence can be traced. The use of 'minimal scenery' in *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* alone demonstrates this influence. The simple and clear-cut language in the plays, use of two characters, and improvised minimal props, are what Grotowski calls *poverty* in theatre. The actors' use of monologue and role-switching and deconstruction in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Coat* also show this *poverty* form. The co-creators in *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* used the two-hander system as both a tactical survival method – modelled from Grotowski – and a theatrical practice. Grotowski emphasised 'poverty' and minimalism in performance, a revolutionary process that rids the stage of all inessentials and in turn forces actors to explore their innate potentials. Grotowski maintains that 'actor' and 'space' are all that are needed in a performance (Grotowski 1968).

Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona's improvisation with space and staging in *The Island* was notably inventive. The improvised stage was bare and rough; the message and acting was immediate – with actors sometimes performing a feet away from the audience (depending on the venue); the space was small, depicting the cell, quarry, prison, and country all at once; the invisible-made-visible through the depiction of the outlawed prison experiences, and wardens were/are considered as the unseen audience. This is not far removed from Brook's notion of the *empty space*. Brook maintains that theatre exists primarily to awaken in an audience a sense of their immediate condition (Brook 1968). The venue for this didactic purpose can therefore be anywhere.

Brook (like Beck) maintains that the theatre takes place in any empty space: in plush theatres, renovated church buildings, out in the open, or perhaps even people's living rooms where two

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<sup>137</sup> The Stanislavski system required actors to go out and experience the life of the characters they are to depict so that they will be able to create realistic characterisation. The literary catchword for this practice was *realism*.

<sup>138</sup> Fugard's research on Robben Island also provided valuable material.

or more people can watch actors perform – literally any bare stage. This was demonstrated in some of the performances in South Africa. *The Coat*, for example, had its first reading on 28 November 1966 in the Dunne Hall of the Hill Presbyterian Church. Most of Maponya’s plays had their first runs at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre, Soweto. This venue hosted many township plays. The use of this kind of improvised and largely make-shift venues echo both the ‘poor’ and ‘empty space’ models. Brook also argues for the ‘rough theatre’ system, where spontaneity, impulse, and raw emotional expression are core standards (Brook 1968). Kani’s spontaneous recreation of events in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* demonstrates this actor’s practice.<sup>139</sup> His ability to recreate lived-experiences – what Brook calls daily-life – also has a traditional feel of African oral performance.

In *The Island*, the actors presented a lived-life through a combination of the empty space and rough theatre models. Their strong emotional expression comes close to Brook’s theorisation, but also relates to other seminal postdramatic theorisations of acting and staging such as that of Boal, whose improvisational theatre system influenced many modern artists. Boal’s Forum Theatre is a critical improvisational practice because it trapped its audience members in the performance by asking them to perform their own interventions. This important audience-actors practice is also crystallised in Boal’s Legislative Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed. Beck (1972: 61) considers this open-participation system as one of the imperatives of modern drama. Like Beck, Boal and Schechner, Fugard and his actor-creators involved their audience members; but unlike Schechner (in *Dionysos in '69*) they did not physically assault them.<sup>140</sup> The apartheid stage was largely racial, and so would not accommodate Schechner’s intense improvisational practice. The performance of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* at New Brighton was an exception because of the lively debate among the largely black audience and the near-riot that broke out after the performance.<sup>141</sup> The townships were notable for defying limits, and black artists utilised this subversion.

Black artists in the 1970s and 1980s transcended the limitation imposed on the arts. Maponya notably experimented with theatrical methods such as improvisation and experimentation. He developed his plays using actors who fleshed out experiences and improvised (Moorosi 1997: 29). *The Hungry Earth* is made up of a series of short and running episodes that touch on the troubled lives of rural migrant labourers, presented through an actor-presenter and a group of

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<sup>139</sup> Kani recreated these events differently every time he performed.

<sup>140</sup> Fugard had so much respect for his audience privacy and so avoided the audience assault technique that was part of the Performance Group’s performance of *Dionysos in '69*; audience members during the performances were dragged into the open immoral and sensory artistic experience of the play.

<sup>141</sup> The debate was centred on whether it was security-wise to replace Robert’s passport with Sizwe’s.



actors who extensively improvised, switched roles and relationship on stage. The play was also unscripted until production, and as such the actors (including Maponya) relied greatly on improvisations to recreate their actual experiences. In *Dirty Work*, Hannekom's improvisation is also a demonstration of this re-imagined and relived experience, also pointing to Brook and Boal's models. In *The Hungry Earth*, Maponya also blended both the traditional and Western theatrical materials such as dance, songs, dialogue and action; the actors also improvised in the performances. Their target audiences and reactions informed the course the performances took. In this way, the workshop space permits greater actor freedom.

### 3.2.2 Workshop

Collaborative play-making is usually workshop oriented. Fugard established the 'white-black collaboration' method in South Africa (Crow and Banfield 1996: 100). This new play-making tradition influenced the theatre practices of contemporary artists and groups in the country<sup>142</sup> (Walder 2003: 1). Grotowski's workshop process also influenced many artists at the time. His influence on Fugard and the Serpent Players was evident, as it led the ensemble to their most "extreme excursion into radical communication by means of image and gesture, rather than established text" (Walder 1984: 12). Maponya also developed most of his plays through the workshop system. And like other black artists such as Manaka, he was essentially influenced by Brecht's workshop practices (Steadman 1984: 385-9; Dunton 1995: 385). *The Hungry Earth*, for example, was structured "through the rehearsal process so that the script is really little more than the score of a performance created in workshop" (Dunton 1995: 385).

Plays produced in workshop mostly turn out more radical and realistic because of the input of the many participants who bring in their varied lived experiences in the play-making process. Mitchell (1974: 135) argues that the workshopped *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were successfully performed, and (are) far better than anything Fugard had done on his own.<sup>143</sup> Maponya admitted to the critical contributions of his actors during workshops and the making of his plays (Maponya 1995; Maponya 1983).<sup>144</sup> He relied on the nurses as conduits into the healthcare system in the country in the making of *Umongikazi* in the same way that Fugard depended on his black actors for their lived experiences at a time when he was banned from

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<sup>142</sup> Athol Fugard notably influenced artists such as Zakes Mda, Geina Mhlope, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon. His workshop practice can also be seen in the collaborative works of groups such as Workshop '71, Junction Theatre Avenue Company, and Handspring Puppet Company. See: Walder, Dennis. (2003) *Athol Fugard*. Hordorn: Northcote House Publishers. p.1.

<sup>143</sup> The contributions of Kani and Ntshona in the collaborative process will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>144</sup> Maishe Maponya worked with both white and black actors. Their essential contributions in terms of acting and materials will also be discussed later in the chapter.

going into townships. Individual artists and groups exploited the workshop medium in a bid to realistically depict the happenings in the country. The theatre was returned to the people – the exploited workers and masses, who then used the stage to express and act out their varied lived experiences. The playwright's role during workshops is frequently transformed, but not undermined. The word 'playwright' itself has semantic implications because "plays are not merely written – they are wrought from many elements, the text being merely one element" in the play-making process (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1984: 147). Fugard's theatre was not undermined, but his role as a playwright was transformed during the workshops.

Workshop practice was not peculiar to South Africa. Ensembles such as The Group Theatre, The Living Theatre, Open Theatre, The New Theatre, and Performance Group also practised it from the 1930s (see Chapter 1). The groups exploited workshop resources, especially their political dimension. These groups chose the ensemble medium of play-making because of its collaborative and political features. They believed strongly in collective responsibility, and so gave their members equal right to contribute anything, and at any point, of the production. Their idea of collective work and direction ensured that "anyone and everyone can contribute at any level, or stage, in the process without having to have their creative input go through the hierarchal chain-of-command: director-producer" (Skordis 2003: 54). The groups operated an open and adaptive system instead of a closed one (Lewis, in Skordis 2003: 54).

Workshop processes are usually designed in such a way that input is scribbled down by the scribe or edited, and then reimagined and restructured over time in order to ensure the quality and professionalism of the piece. *The Coat* is an apt reenactment of this kind of play-making exercise: the actor-participants contribute ideas that are analysed by the group as a creative ensemble, in order that a collective and fairly objective idea can be negotiated and arrived at. Piscator's notion of theatre "as a force of social and political change effected through non-Aristotelian means, but with reason, clarity, and communication" influenced these ensembles (Aronso, in Skordis 2003: 55). Joseph Chaikin practised this ensemble and workshop theatre in the US around the same time (1963–1973) as Fugard, and his idea of fieldwork or research, at times both, in play-making is evident in the many groups operating in South Africa.

Maponya was notable for this kind of practice in his workshops of *Umongikazi*, *The Hungry Earth* and *Jika*. Fugard relied on his actors and on his notebooks – which are a detailed record of many years of research on an idea or image – in his writing. His plays were wrought from his notebooks. In some, as in *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, he uses photographs and newspaper reports. The immorality idea he was dealing with was inspired by

published photos of a couple arrested and tried for breaking the immorality law. His workshop practice was therefore similar to Chaikin's with regards to the use of actors.<sup>145</sup> Fugard's collaborative plays and, to a large extent Maponya's, are examples of theatre as a collective experiment – a form radically different from theatre as an expression of individual experiences. Their plays reenact researched and actual lived experiences of individuals and groups in South Africa. It should be noted nonetheless that Fugard did not give in completely to the workshop play-making technique as an alternative way of producing plays, despite his intimate involvement with the actors.

This explains why Fugard left the actor's theatre after the success of the *Statements* plays.<sup>146</sup> *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* could not have been written – at least in the way they are read today – without the experiences of black actors in mind. Kani and Ntshona sought the assistance of Fugard to help them develop a play at a time when the Serpent Players were falling apart.<sup>147</sup> *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was thereafter devised after a series of improvisations in workshop at the Space Theatre in Cape Town. Kani and Ntshona initiated the exercises, and after a series of exchanges supplied materials from their lived experiences, and (they claimed) the celebratory photo(s), which served as the springboard for their discussions in workshop; the photo(s) also informed their improvisations and acting.

*The Island* is likewise the result of similar workshop improvisation and acting, but one where Fugard supplied material about Robben Island from his notebooks, and Kani from the letters he received from his brother, Harry, who was imprisoned there. Ntshinga and Duru's crucial testimonies, scribbled in the notebooks years earlier, were also used during the exercise. This exercise allowed the actor-creators to experiment, improvise and arrive at an agreed narration of events. *The Island* is both a negotiated narrative of real events and a creative reenactment of personal stories. The play “operates within a dialectics of performance and text, player and role [...] peculiar to dramatic performance, and especially to the dramatic representation of rehearsals and workshops” (Dahl 2014: 3). This creative process will be discussed later in the chapter.

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<sup>145</sup> Fugard and Chaikin insisted on the training and physical state of actors; pushed their actors to discover themselves and access their inherent talents; and used amateur actors. Fugard's work with Yvonne Bryceland, and with Kani and Ntshona, demonstrates a parallel with Chaikin's Open Theatre.

<sup>146</sup> This thesis is, however, concerned with his collaborative work with the Serpent Players, and especially with Kani and Ntshona. Research shows that Fugard's work with black actors during those years allowed him to utilise the full potentials of the workshop theatre and the improvisational process of devising plays that examine the lives of those actors with whom he was working.

<sup>147</sup> This occurred in August 1972, shortly after the Durban Arts Festival. See: Cima, Gibson Alessandro. (2009) Resurrecting *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972–2008): John Kani, Winston Ntshona, Athol Fugard, and Postapartheid South Africa. *Theatre Survey*. 50 (1). pp. 91–118.

### 3.2.3 Experimentation

South African theatre had undergone an amazing metamorphosis from formal to experimental theatre. Its transformation was intended to respond to the tight apartheid context and attend to the needs of the audience. The change in form and content was also intended to keep track of the global transformation of the theatre. The plays of Fugard, Pieter-Dirk Uys and Zakes Mda exemplify these transformational changes. The 1960s–1980s<sup>148</sup> were rife with experiment and theatricalism globally, and artists were experimenting with innovative theatrical methods (see Chapter 1). Fugard, Simon, Purkey, Maponya, and Manaka also experimented with content, actors, stage, and innovative theatrical methods. This enabled them to transcend the limits of the apartheid stage and to produce anti-elitist and anti-establishment works. The experimental theatre is usually people-oriented, and so fashioned to respond to a sociopolitical situation. This explains why most of the plays have a relatively short span. Albert Wertheim (in Skordis 2003: 109) notes that “the lives of many political plays are conterminous with the currency of the political issue they address.” A lot of anti-apartheid black plays have lost their edge and potency precisely because the context that led to their production and the political issues they tried to address are no longer there. There are some, however, that have retained their value because of their universal and timeless appeal.

Fugard’s plays have survived because they are not limited to politics and immediate concerns – although the statements in them cannot be effectively realised without recourse to the times. *The Island*, for example, remains significant because it defies the drawback of simply bearing witness and the obsession with region and limits. Anti-apartheid experimental plays such as *The Island* are nonetheless important because they are a record of apartheid, and the articulate response to it. These works are also significant because they were *popular* and accessible to both their target audiences in South Africa and abroad. South African artists and groups at the time were particularly popular because they articulately responded to the harsh apartheid climate and exposed the state’s various methods of crippling protests. The form of their plays also made them popular. Junction Avenue Theatre Company, for example, was popular and “experimented radically with questions of form” (Purkey 1998: 17).

Experiment entails the artistic deconstruction and transformation of an existing form, and the reworking and reconstruction of an alternate form that will suit the performance situation and context. Apartheid compelled artists to re-strategise their theatre-making process in order to

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<sup>148</sup> This important period is the time scope for this study.

create plays that would survive the dangerous times – a period when “an innocent politics and an innocent theatre were no longer possible” (Purkey 1998: 17). Artists during the full state-of-emergency<sup>149</sup> of 1986 had to contend with strict containment and compulsion measures. It was a suffocating atmosphere and many artists lost the enthusiasm to write, which was what the state had envisaged. Experimentation turned out to be a feasible play-making method, and artists who chose to remain relevant to the struggle utilised various features. Experimentation involves ‘selection’ and ‘deselection,’ which is as much a part of play-making as any life-writing. The director (or facilitator) issues mandates and serves as a catalyst and scribe. The facilitator then selects and deselects from the experimental generated materials, scribbles, edits, and refines the words to come up with a skeletal script or working document. The script is continuously transformed during the exercise and remains open to inclusions and revision.

Maponya pursued this alternative process of creating plays. *The Hungry Earth* went through a series of metamorphoses “through the rehearsal process so that the script is often little more than the score of a performance created in workshop” (Steadman 1994: xiv). This allowed the playwright, along with other actors, to continuously experiment with materials and the stage. Simon and Fugard experimented in a similar fashion. Fugard’s experiments with the Serpent Players – one particularly reenacted in *The Coat* – shows that he utilised improvisation, and through that selected and deselected material. Simon’s actors, on the other hand, were said to possess a “fantastic pragmatism ... [which made them want to] work and ... work and work again, and they will fix and they will play and they will tighten, and they will keep moving, and then it somehow takes a form” (Smith, in Skordis 2003: 104). Anti-apartheid plays were transformed several times before they reached the stage. The transformation was continuous after their early runs, often until publication; for those plays fortunate to survive the regime’s suppression of the arts.

Kani and Ntshona also had a strong pragmatism, which made them experiment with form and materials from their lives, work and rework on images, and restructure and polish ideas. They experimented with the two-hander form, a technique that required Kani to play multiple roles as Styles, Buntu, Dlamini, Mr Baas, the Preacher, Salesman, Policeman, and clients who visit the studio as well as funeral parlour. Kani’s creativity, energy, and versatility enabled him to efficiently switch roles with great spontaneity. In *The Island*, the co-creators also successfully

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<sup>149</sup> The state of emergency was put in place in June 1986. Before that time, both white and black artists managed to make political statements and adopt political ideas such as those of Bertolt Brecht. The ideas became difficult to practice or appropriate from 1986. See: Malcom Purkey (1998) *Productive Misreadings. Brecht and Junction Avenue Theatre Company in South Africa* [pamphlet], manuscript collection, 2517. Grahamstown, National English Literary Museum

experimented with form and blended traditions. They creatively incorporated Sophocles's *Antigone*, thereby creating a play-within-the-play; Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*, as seen in the opening absurdist mimed beach labour and the prisoners' ability to transcend oppression; and Plato's *Parable of the Cave*, whereby the inmates defy ordeals and "entertain each other with theatrical representations" (Dahl 2014: 5).

Fugard's extensive reading of Camus from 1962 to 1963 influenced his perspective(s) on the nature of "man's rebellion, the significance of human action, and the importance and function of art" (Dickey 1987: 9). Most of Fugard's later plays were shaped by this influence. The co-creators in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were in fact so creative and experimental that they were able to make "statements that exploited the unique non-verbal resources of theatre – mime, gesture, symbolic action – rather than relying exclusively on the script and some very good acting" (Mshengu 1976: 46). Non-verbal resources are common in Western as well African oral performances.

### **3.3 Collaboration, play-making and the limits of authorship**

Collaboration provides a working space for all sorts of alternative, *anti-Aristotelian*, *anti-text*, and *anti-conventional* procedures in theatre. It goes against and reworks the usual playwright autonomy, thereby stripping him of autonomous control over texts. It promotes participation, and in that way sets actors free to interpret and create. Artaud (in Dahl 2014: 12) considers the "dictatorship of the writer as the fundamental problem of Western theatre." Menke (ibid.) also "compares the dramatic text to the fate of tragic heroes." Modern dramatic theorists and practitioners have reversed the traditional and dogmatic writer-text excesses. As discussed in chapter one, Grotowski, Brecht, and others, developed the workshop play-making methods to explore and utilise the actor's creative potentials. The collaborative theatre's emphasis on the ensemble and collective idea helped to liberate actors, transforming them into creative agents who contributed material, participated in the devising processes, and became co-creators. The ensemble method was especially popular from the 1960s, and artists turned to it to explore the political climates of their various countries.

As stated, both Fugard and Maponya worked in close collaboration with their actors. The concern in this section is with the particularities of the experimental-collaborative exercises they initiated, and in particular, between Fugard and the Serpent Players, and especially Kani

and Ntshona.<sup>150</sup> Their collaboration generated a great deal of tension and complication on the part of reviewers, critics, and researchers for over four decades (1972–2015). Cima (2009), Davis (2013), and Dahl (2014) emphasise the complications associated with the authorship of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, as well as the identity of the co-authors in relation to the plays' politics. Davis (2013) speaks of the tension between the authors and the transformation of the plays by Oxford University Press in 1974 – with the publication of *Statements* – from political plays to liberal and universal works without Kani and Ntshona's due consultation and input.

Fugard had already begun to build a reputation for himself before his collaboration with Kani and Ntshona in 1972. His learning plays (*Nongogo* and *No-Good Friday*) and Port Elizabeth plays (*The Blood Knot*, *Hello and Goodbye*, *Boesman and Lena*) had set his fame in motion. It was in view of this, in addition to his successful work with the Circle Players in the 1950s, that a group of aspiring black artists approached him and requested his assistance in training and directing their new group, which was to become Serpent Players. What cannot be denied, however, is the additional, crucial, experience that his work with these actors provided him at a time when (as he admits) he wanted to report the events in the country more objectively, but had little idea what to make drama about.

Fugard remarked that he went into collaboration with Kani and Ntshona during a period when he was experiencing 'writer's block' – precisely after the production of *Boesman and Lena* in 1969 (Hough 1977: 125). Fugard was worried that *Boesman and Lena* did not really address his socio-political concern. Fugard indeed wanted to "align himself with the forces of change and resistance in the country," as such his "drive to bear witness to the lives of the victims of apartheid soon created a remarkable group of experiments with play making that placed his chosen actors' experiences at the centre of the stage, challenging through production and performance the very divisions upon which the state relied" (Walder 2015: 132). He therefore worked closely with the black actors in the group to bridge what he considered as a shortfall.

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* entrenched Fugard's accomplishments and reputation as an accomplished playwright, and introduced Ntshona and Kani internationally. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* "stands as one of the most important Anglophone theatrical pieces of the twentieth century" (Cima 2009: 93). *The Island* enjoyed "a powerful impact upon international opinion, possibly more than any other South African play (Walder 2015: 134). These plays "initially

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<sup>150</sup> Maponya's collaboration with white and black actors, and his thoughts about white-black collaboration in general, will also be examined in this section.

brought police harassment; [yet] both have survived the disappearance of the laws they challenged” (Walder 2015 133). However, the success of the plays came with a price because the co-authors came to be known as political artists of great power – a reductive label Fugard was not prepared to accept. Fugard was not a playwright with ‘only’ a political cause, and he inculcated a strong sense of aesthetics and poetics (rather than propaganda) in the minds of his actors. Cima (2009: 94) observes that Kani and Ntshona also tried to avoid this (common) political label and their reduction to black actors who only supplied materials instead of being co-authors. Kani’s later *Nothing But the Truth* (2002) and *Missing* (2014)<sup>151</sup> demonstrates his literary acumen, therefore ensuring him a place within the literary canon of his country.

The question of authorship often comes to the fore in collaborative work, and who takes what credit is a core issue. In a letter dated 19 November 1977, Sheila Fugard states, in response to Stephen Gray, that Fugard from *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, to *The Island*, *Orestes* and *Dimetos* practised the improvised actor’s theatre. During interviews, Fugard admitted that these plays were collaboratively devised in workshops. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* are his most controversial works in terms of their political content(s), debate about primary authorship and the identity of the co-authors. These works were riddled with contradictions and disputations from the start.<sup>152</sup> In the introduction to the *Statements* (1974), Fugard apportions more credit to himself and, as Cima (2009: 99) observes, reduces the actor-creators, Kani and Ntshona, to “conduits through which he wrote.” Fugard declares to have been the director, creative agent-provocateur and modulator who issued creative mandates to the actors. In an interview with Rosenwald Peter in 1983, however, Kani maintains that they – as actors – issued mandates to themselves at certain stages of the *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* exercise (Peter 1983: 6).

In the controversial publication of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, Fugard declares himself the primary author. Ephemeral records and performance reviews of the play, however, reveal that it was a fully collaborative process. Kani’s improvisation – which changed every time he performed – actually allows him more claim to the play as performed than both his co-authors combined. The improvisational dialogue and the bulk of the materials making up the play are also, to a large extent, Kani and Ntshona’s. And while Fugard moved on to a more solitary playwriting phase, Kani and Ntshona kept on performing the play, with *The Island*, and were associated with the plays in performance. They recreated the dialogue, and hence the content, of *Sizwe*

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<sup>151</sup> Single-author plays published in 2002 and 2014 respectively – decades after the success of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*.

<sup>152</sup> The argument about role and politics started right from the workshop process. It worsened with the OUP publication of the plays in 1974. Aspects of this will be discussed in the section.



*Bansi is Dead* every time they re-staged it at home or abroad. Unfortunately, however, their status as actors and co-creators has gradually been forgotten, leaving the play *as written*, with Fugard enjoying the spotlight. Fugard's detachment from most of the future performances of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and the transformation of the 1974 printed version of the play (alongside *Statements after an Arrest* and *The Island*) from protest to liberal plays reveals his resistance to being labelled a political artist. His post-*Statements* plays (written entirely by him, but with input from actors) are less political, and so more personal. This confirms the claim that many of the statements made in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were not what he had himself intended to say.

### 3.3.1 Collaboration and play-making

Collaboration entails the unselfish surrender of participants to the demands of a play-making exercise(s).<sup>153</sup> Plays produced in collaboration sometimes turn out more objective than those produced in rehearsal using a complete script. The surrendered ideas and experiences are then censored and dialectically synthesised by the ensemble in a bid to arrive at a collective idea. Steadman (1992: 191) observes that “collaborative creative work is by no means necessarily more objective than the single voice, but in the creation of theatre texts it at least reflects a dialectical exchange between different competing voices.” A collaborative work is known for the shared creative and political attitudes of its participants, which in the end inform its form and content (Ibid.). Experiments (generally) lead to a draft performance-sketch amenable to inclusions and omissions. Play-making therefore entails the appropriation of many dramatic elements. In the case of collaborative plays, the surrendered materials are creatively reworked and restructured by the collaborative endeavour of the participants. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* are products of this kind of exercise, but whose full import cannot be appreciated without understanding the process through which they were devised.

There is no standard, acceptable record of the process of the creation of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Researchers and critics have relied on the memory-filtered narratives of the authors, and on Fugard's *Notebooks*. Kani states that each of them contributed to the making of what he later calls the ‘monster.’ The creation of the play required commitment and a give-and-take process, and the creators were open to ideas and materials from the slices of their lives. Kani recounted this three-way creation process:

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<sup>153</sup> Participants (actors or co-creators) surrender materials – that are often wrought from real experiences – and their bodies and energy in the making of a piece.

The heart was the photograph ... So, today, to begin to say, “who did what? Who contributed what?” It’s splitting hairs. The monster needed blood, I gave a pint. The monster needed an arm, Athol gave an arm. The monster needed a leg, Winston gave a – whatever the monster needed, that we were creating, we just gave at that stage. (Kani, in Cima 2009: 114)

Fugard’s fascination with working with black actors over the decades led to respect and trust between them, and thus determined the path his theatre was to take. *The Coat* marked his first group experiment(s) with black experience since, before to its production, the Serpent Players was developing improvised township remakes of Greek and European works like *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Antigone*. *The Coat* was collaboratively devised with Fugard acting as the director and modulator, although as usual he did most of the writing. The early performances of the play, as well as its early publication, indicate that it was devised by the Serpent Players of New Brighton – something that was to change. In a letter dated 18 August 1977, Stephen Gray requested a copy of the play from Sheila Fugard; and in another letter dated 22 August 1977, Gray wrote that Fugard thinks he is, in fact, the copyright holder of the play.<sup>154</sup>

Gray’s attack of Fugard’s status as copyright owner of *The Coat* demonstrates his awareness that the play was collaboratively devised, and his feeling that the copyright ownership should be the Serpent Players. The assumption of Fugard’s sole-authorship position can be located in several reviews and criticisms of the play despite the players’ critical roles in the play-making process. The play was the creation of the actors, and was devised from their experiences, with the man’s *real* coat serving as the heart of the exercise(s). Magada’s re-collection of the court and subsequent events provided an invaluable material.<sup>155</sup> Fugard took notes of this important experience, and back in the hall pressed Magada to creatively reimagine and rework it. He described the process in an interview with Don MacLennan in 1969:

It was just there, magnetic, dominating the imagination, provoking other images. It had what I think of as a dynamo of its own, generating all the time. And opposed to this puzzling, rich complexity, was the lucidity with which we worked on it. We said to ourselves (the seven of us left who were sitting around), we said, “The message that went back with the coat was, ‘use it!’ What does that mean? How can she use it?”... the result may look the same as any other one act play, on paper, but the way in which it came about was a revelation...

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<sup>154</sup> This is roughly a decade after the group’s first public reading of the play to a small audience (who requested to see a sample of the players’ work) in the Dunne Hall of the Hill Presbyterian Church in Port Elizabeth.

<sup>155</sup> Mabel Magada was a blues singer and one of the pioneer members of the Serpent Players. Norman Ntshinga was her husband and an early member as well. It was during his trial that she (accompanied by Fugard) met the man who gave her the coat to deliver to his wife.

We wanted first to see the moment when the coat was handed over, and we staged just that scene. We just wanted to see the coat leave Mabel's hands and end up in the other woman's hands. And we wanted to see something from Mabel, when she stayed on with the other woman. [so we asked] "what do you do with the coat now you've got it?" And [Nomhle Nkonyeni, the actress] playing the old woman says, "Well, I'm in my house. I've now heard about my husband. I'm not going to see him for five, six years. I've got his coat in my hand. I'll hang it up, first of all and go on working. And I will think about the coat." She was a good actress and in the course of all this a thing happened there. It took a few exercises to fatten it...

I jotted down several of her attempts, and at the end we compared notes and I said, "Now, this is how it came out." and the actors said, "Yes, that's right." And remember the other thing she said which was rather good? She spoke about the street... I made a little note and handed this to her and said, "Take it away. Come back same time, same place, next week. Think about it. See if you can fatten it, fill it out a bit."

She did, and next week we provoked her and she re-enacted the scene for us. Then we provoked her again by questions and a little bit of discussion... And that's how it grew.

At one stage we were trying to corner her. We said to Humphrey [Njikelene], "Right. Come on now. We need the man at the rent office, you know, where she's going to appeal..." So the two of them discussed it for a minute to get the rough geography [of the encounter], and we said, "O.k. put that on. Just try it." And again, I acted as scribe, made little notes, and at the end said, "Right, this is how it came out... (Fugard 1995: xxv-xxvi)

Fugard's role as the creative agent and scribe is unambiguous in this exercise. He did most of the editing, shaped the stories, and creatively drafted the script using details from the exercise and the participants' dialogue. Nevertheless, it is clear that that he did the writing, and so has better claim to the text as a published material.

Fugard's creative role in the production of *Orestes* is similar to that of *The Coat*'s. In letters dated 12 September and 4 November 1977, Stephen Gray again emphasised Fugard's role as scribe, shaper and modulator in the making of *Orestes*. The group during the creative exercise relied almost entirely on "three large drawing-books, a pale shadow of the eighty minutes of strange, somnambulistic action which took place at the time" to record their exchange(s) and performance (Walder 1984: 13). And in a letter dated 29 October 1977, Fugard stated that the *Orestes* captures the richness and complexity of the group's intentions, pointing to the actors' joint creative ownership of the play. *The Coat* and *Orestes* are fundamental in this analysis because they were undoubtedly devised in close collaboration with actors, an experience that Fugard brought to the *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* workshop when he was invited by the actors Kani and Ntshona, to help them develop a play.

In an interview with Carola Luther in 1983, Maponya stated that the tradition of white-black collaboration in South Africa (as was practised by, say, Fugard) “contains certain anomalies and contradictions which weaken the impact of any radical statement that might be made” (Maponya 1983: 27). This was the view of many black artists of the time.<sup>156</sup> This particularly manifested in the early stages of the *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* workshop when Kani and Ntshona hesitated to act the demeaning roles of waiters in a restaurant, an idea proposed by Fugard. It was this reluctance that eventually led to *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Richard (1990: 234) believes that Fugard “had ulterior motives for collaboration,” one that can be realised even in his most political plays. Kani and Ntshona transcended this suspicion and the regime’s segregationist legislation on interracial activities, and worked in close collaboration with Fugard. *Unhealthy* or not, Fugard crossed the racial line, defied form and scope limitations of the period, and had good intentions in the exercises. It should be noted that he was approached by some of the initial members of the group in 1963 (shortly after his return to the country) to help direct and train, and so to establish the group. He was also requested by Kani and Ntshona to help them develop a play, and so did not initiate it or go into the collaboration with a preset intention or prejudice.

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were tactically designed to survive the apartheid context – to subvert and reach out. These plays have developed a life of their own over the decades. It is vital, however, to discuss their joint creation. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is the most contentious, which, started with the controversial image(s) of a well-dressed black man. The workshop, as well as creation process, publication and authorship sparked a lot of controversy. The issue of who actually supplied the image(s) that the group collaboratively worked with is still in doubt since the co-authors – going by interviews and claims in published works – appear to be in disagreement. This tension explains the “ongoing struggle over the authorship of the play” (Cima 2009: 115). Fugard (1974), Dickey (1987) and Ait-Hamour (1990) assert that Fugard supplied the image and mandates for the group’s work, while Kani and Ntshona (in: Macliam 1986; Raynor 1974; Rosenwald 1974) claim that it was brought in by Ntshona, and Fugard just helped in developing the idea, starting with the nudging question of the possible motives for a black man’s strange smile in a troubled country and time. Cima (2009: 98) notes that the image question remains unresolved:

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<sup>156</sup> White artists were considered part of the oppressors’ group. The Circle Players, however, worked closely with Fugard. The Serpent Players also trusted and worked with him. In several interviews, Kani admitted that he suspected Fugard when he was first introduced to the group, but the suspicion gave way as they worked closely together. The Black Consciousness Movement spoke vehemently against these ‘unhealthy’ collaborations at the time, although it could not deny the necessity of it as an avenue for training and access to theatre facilities.

In one version of the story, the photograph was of a black man smiling broadly, wearing his best suit, a pipe in one hand and a cigarette in the other. In another version, the photograph depicted a black man standing with a newspaper tucked under one arm and a walking stick in his other hand. The two photographs shared common traits. Both pictures were consciously staged in the storefront photography studio, and both depicted happy men.

Fugard (1974: ix) claims that it was the mandates he issued to the actors and the details about the two photograph(s) that informed *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Dickey (1987: 175) maintains that the play was developed through a “challenge and response” technique with Fugard serving as creative *agent provocateur*. Most of the studies that discuss the origin of the image, and what happened to it when it was brought into the discussion, validate that Fugard’s *challenge* and Kani and Ntshona’s *response* – similar to Socratic dialectics – led to the collective notion that only a valid passbook will make a black man smile in a state as despotic as South Africa. The experiments developed along that line and explored the sad effects of the pass legislations on black life. Fugard, who worked in the Native Commissioner’s Court in Fordsburg in the late 1950s, where blacks were continually criminalised for passlaw offences, brought in his own experiences. This can be seen in the presentation of the details of the workings of the pass law, the bottlenecks involved, and the near impossibility of manoeuvring through the many laws. It is at this stage that the creators surrendered different lived experiences in the making of the play. The image served as the heart of the play-making process, and the launching pad for the dialectical exchanges between the competing voices.

Kani’s semi-autobiographical accounts of his work at Ford Motor plant featured prominently in the opening newspaper monologue.<sup>157</sup> He comically enacted the lot of the factory workers. The daily headlines allowed him to improvise and recreate his monologue without sacrificing the spontaneity of the performance. Styles’s choice of photography, a career his father cannot come to terms with, is also semi-autobiographical, as Kani’s decision to leave a steady job for professional acting was met with criticisms by his family. He narrated that he opted for a profession they could not actually understand, and they kept making suggestions (Kani, in Herber 1979: 3). In an interview with Rolf Solberg, Kani stated that he worked at the motor plant as a janitor, and because he could speak and translate Afrikaans he was used by Baas Bradley (a famous character in the play) as an interpreter (Solberg 1999: 226).

The actors’ real-life experiences feature throughout the play. Kani’s improvised warfare with the cockroaches was entirely his own contribution. Kani elaborately mimed and acted-out the

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<sup>157</sup> John Kani worked at the Ford Motor plant for seven years before joining the Serpent Players.

gun-slinging style of the Wild West in his cockroach battle at the studio (MacLennan 1979). Ultimately, the collaboration was a three-way give-and-take process, with all the three voices having a say. All the collaborators contributed in the examination and attack of the pass law system:

Ntshona, Kani and Fugard [...] bring their personal experiences of this legislative maze to bear upon the play: Ntshona had firsthand experience of problem with the pass law; Kani had worked as a welfare assistant with the Bantu Administration in New Brighton...; and Fugard could draw on his bitter memories of working as a clerk in the Native Commissioner's Court in Fordsburg during the 1950s. (Foley 1996: 205)

Fugard garnered most of the material(s) for *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* from his actor-collaborators, even as he did much of the writing when one looks at the printed version that is part of the *Statements* (1974). It is *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* that ensured a place for Fugard in the canon and not his prior (although equally successful) plays such as *The Blood Knot*. Cima (2009: 103) notes, however, that Kani and Ntshona's contributions (as actors and co-creators) to the success of the plays were "marginalised in favour of championing the figure of Fugard as author." Their names were omitted internationally, while Fugard was celebrated as a great playwright of universal (no longer regional and national) significance. Clive Barnes (in Cima 2009: 106) argues that the plays are great because of the "contributions of all three men to the script." The relationship between the co-authors turned sour, and manifested during the 1977 Royal Court revival of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Fugard eventually became quite dissatisfied with the collaboration and the reductive label that greeted the success of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. He felt that the politics in the play had overshadowed its poetry.

Cima (2009: 108) points out that *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* "transformed into exactly what Fugard meant to avoid ever since he stepped into the rehearsal room with Kani and Ntshona in 1972: an agitprop protest drama." Thus, while Kani and Ntshona toured the play around the world – from England, Scotland, Ireland, New York, Washington and Australia – before coming back to London in 1977, Fugard was dissatisfied with its agitprop nature. Fugard often questioned the political dimension of the play, alongside *The Island*, since it does not reflect his personal, metaphysical and apolitical vision. Fugard battled with this dilemma in a country that placed artists in a position whereby "their work will always be measured against the current political situation" (Dickey 1987: 2). He believes that art should "reflect the truthfulness of suffering without resorting to propaganda or moral instruction" (Dickey 1987: 3). He also believes that propaganda and didacticism – if they must feature in the arts at all – should play a second-layer

role – a latent and not primary position. This explains his disassociation from *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* as performance, especially as toured abroad and in South Africa by Kani and Ntshona. Fugard later worked with Kani in a number of personal – post-*Statements* – plays despite the controversies of authorship and acknowledgments that nearly crippled their decade-long work together.

Fugard always regarded the actor and space as the primary elements in theatre-making – the other elements being inessentials that the play could do without. His actors had the liberty to interpret, tamper with and create the action they did on stage. His decade of work with the Serpent Players was a step further in that direction. Grotowski's *poor theatre* did not initiate him into the practice of using actors and minimalist method, but rather gave him a theoretical backing and concretised an old practice. His brand of theatre allowed actors to recognise their *inner selves* by exploring the psychic recesses of their minds. This technique shows a modern and Artaudian influence. Fugard's use of *mandates* enabled his actors to explore and pull out their experiences during the workshops (Crow and Banfield 1996: 103). *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* were not, however, achieved overnight. Kani and Ntshona were able to easily and effectively co-devise these plays because they had already, for six years, experimented closely together in productions of *The Coat*, *The Last Bus*, *Friday's Bread on Monday*, and *Sell-Out* (Cima 2009: 96).

*The Coat* exercise prepared the ground for the group's most radical experiments in the 1970s because it demonstrated that protest statements could be made using the theatre and the artist could get away with it. It was a *meta*-experiment with immediate materials and politics. Some of the experiments that followed also proved that the problems bedeviling black life could be intellectualised and talked about. Kani (in Richard 1990: 248) recounts that the "experiments were commanded by truth." The exercise(s) for *The Island* also began with an image, but this time a general image of the infamous Robben Island. *The Island* experiment was a step away from the normal intellectualisation practice because it was more realistic and allowed the co-creators to break the long conspiracy of silence surrounding the notorious prison.

Initially, Kani says, "we were intellectualising. We were not honest ... And thus Athol came up with the idea that there is a place we never talk about, no one can write about, the press cannot talk about, not even the white South Africans, free as they are, can't talk about. It is the nightmare of every member of Parliament. What will happen to it in the end? That is Robben Island." (Vandenbroucke 1985: 126)

Ntshona traces the same genesis for *The Island*, but speaks more of what happened when they started to experiment with the vital image of the cell area: “we did one exercise on the lawn, calling it the sacred ground. We explored its space, stood in the centre, walked on the edges, and kept halving it until there was only room for the two of us...” (Ntshona, in Laurea 1998: 57). The sacred ground they created (one they re-created on stage each time they performed) represents their cell area, the four-walls of the prison, and the island itself. It is also a symbol of the containment in the country – a holy ground where “humility is demanded, and comes easily” (Benson, in Laurea 1998: 57). Walder (2015: 134) corroborates that the actors utilised this holy space throughout their improvisations and acting. Camus’s *Myth of Sisyphus* was an obvious influence, as was Grotowski’s *Towards a Poor Theatre* and Brook’s *Theories of the Empty Space*. Kani (in Solberg 1999: 223-24) traces the experimental-collaborative process leading to the story in the play:

At that stage, Athol Fugard, Winston Ntshona and myself had actually begun a process in the sixties which we called Experiment in playmaking, where together we would find, through trial and error, a subject that we wanted to deal with or talk about. And then we as actors would improvise situations in the investigation or exploration of the subject. And Athol would be making notes of what had happened, and at the end of the day we would discuss it. And then take it up again and try to move the story, following exactly where the idea was developing, discarding where we felt it wasn’t sticking to one theme or it was beginning to disperse in various directions. And after fourteen days we began to settle.

The idea of talking about the island was initiated by Fugard who, having formulated the style and structure of the play, felt that the group had the capacity to deal with the new subject and form. The trio worked on it, relying heavily on materials that Fugard had amassed and jotted down in his notebooks over the years. They also conducted research about the daily routine experiences of the prisoners. For his own part, Kani supplied information from the series of letters he had received from his brother, Harry, who served a five-year term there (Laurea 1998: 87). The play was actually developed in two weeks while the co-authors were waiting for passports to go for the London production of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Kani (in Laurea 1998: 87) recounts that “originally we put *The Island* together in 14 days, Winston Ntshona, Athol and myself. We were able to do this because we had gathered a lot of information about the routine experienced by prisoners on Robben Island.” As noted above, the trio could not have achieved this if they had not worked together as a group in the past, using improvisations and images.



The exercise was therefore a mixture of material and experiments, in addition to the traumatic experiences of some of the actors who were arrested and incarcerated on the Island. The place of research was essential for the co-devising of the play, because of the authors' quest to deal objectively with the subject. They amassed material on prison conditions from ex-prisoners. Ntshinga and Duru's experiences were already documented in Fugard's notebooks and served as the partial plot structure of the play.<sup>158</sup> Ntshinga and Duru provided the co-creators with a bulk of details, ranging from the i) dehumanising transportation of the prisoners in a police van; ii) the petrol station, where the coloured prisoners jailed close by urged the prisoners in the van to persevere; iii) the jetty, which took them to the island; iv) the warders' viciousness and the prisoners' strong and lasting bond; v) the weather forecast and news bulletin; and vi) the news and excitement of Ntshinga's early release<sup>159</sup> These vital details feature prominently in the play and constitute a valuable part of the story. The co-creators worked on these ready-made materials and creatively restructured the story.

The reports of Shark Mququlwa performing a one-man version of Sophocles' *Antigone* while working at the quarry on Robben Island, and messing things up, informed the use of the play-within-the-play (Kani, in Solberg 1999: 224).<sup>160</sup> It was at this point that work on *The Island* started. The name Hodoshe, like Suitcase in Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* and Mr Baas in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, is real, going by the testimony of an ex-convict that it was "the name we gave our warder. It's a Xhosa name for the big green fly that feasts on human faeces."<sup>161</sup> While the material making up the play was generated from the actors, Fugard supplied most of the images and dramatic techniques that the actors utilised. It began with images formed in Fugard's consciousness, later transmitted to the actors to flesh out. These images were: *space*, *time*, and *meaningless absurd labour* (Fugard, in Skordis 2003: 96). Fugard – in an Artaudian fashion – pushed the actor-creators to explore their minds by asking them thought-provoking questions and creating images that they could easily identify with and examine. He thus tried to "expound insights into the reality of the situation to bring about change in his audiences, and creatively he was utilising individuals who were truly 'at the rock face' so to speak" (Skordis 2003: 96).

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<sup>158</sup> The details of Ntshinga and Duru's experiences are documented in Fugard, Athol. (1984) *Notebooks 1960–1977*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

<sup>159</sup> These details shaped the story in many ways. See: Don, MacLennan (1979) *Notes for the First Versions of Sizwe Bansi is Dead and Die Hodoshe Span* [rehearsal notes], manuscript collection, 79.20.11. Grahamstown, National English Literary Museum.

<sup>160</sup> Shark Mququlwa was a Serpent Player imprisoned on Robben Island. He had worked with the group in the remake of *Antigone* before his arrest, although he never got to act in this role before his arrest.

<sup>161</sup> The programme notes prepared by the Ambassadors Theatre (1976: 6) for the performance of *The Island*.

### 3.3.2 Authorship and acknowledgements

Fugard often acknowledged the actors he worked with and wrote with them in mind (Laurea 1998; Foley 1996; Kearns 1983). The character of Blackie in *Nongogo* was written for Zakes Mokae; Frieda Joubert and Lena in *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* and *Boesman and Lena* were created with Yvonne Bryceland in mind; Martinus in *Playland* was created for John Kani. Kani (in Laurea 1998: 99) stated that Fugard understood him so well that he wrote “a role for me, he mostly writes across me.” The practice of writing for specific actors is an old one, as dramatists in the Classical and later periods developed plays with their actors in mind. Richard Burbage, for example, influenced Shakespeare’s creation of the title-roles in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Richard III*.<sup>162</sup> Simon (in Solberg 1999: 26) affirmed that Fugard was a good director who honourably recognised “the authenticity of the people he was working with.” The plays he brought to rehearsals were not finished products, and were often developed with actors who offered suggestions for their improvement.

As a good director, Fugard listened carefully and often incorporated ideas that tallied with his vision. Bryceland (in Herber 1979: 31) revealed that Fugard and the actors depended on each other, and he would not have been a great playwright “without the right actors.” Simon (in Solberg 1999), however, states that Fugard was already on his way to greatness, and would have been great even without the actors. Fugard’s obsession with working with actors started with his Sophiatown learning plays, and blossomed in his collaborations in early-1970s. His actors had been instrumental in his development as a dramatist. The actor is a vital element of the drama that can make or mar even great playwrights. The actor’s place cannot therefore be overemphasised, although, unlike the playwright, an actor’s recognition enjoys a shorter span – as long as the audience can still remember his brilliant acting. Kani and Ntshona’s superb acting during the early runs of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* earned them recognition – and ultimately a joint Tony award – but just for a while. Bryceland and Kingsley also enjoyed fame for their acting in *Statements after an Arrest*, but, as with Ntshona and Kani, it was very brief. Bryceland is significant not only for her great acting, but also for acting a seminal role in the development of Fugard’s theatre, a working relationship from which she also greatly benefitted.

She played all his best roles for women – some of which she herself helped devise, like that of Frieda, the unmarried librarian whose interracial affair is at the centre of *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*,

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<sup>162</sup> Richard Burbage acted these leading roles in the first performances of the plays

Clytemnestra in *Orestes*, and Sophia, the housekeeper of *Dimetos*...  
(Walder 2003: 19)

Bryceland is the other 'silent' and unacknowledged author behind *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* – at least the first version of the play that premiered at the opening of The Space Theatre in Cape Town in 1972 (Crow 1993: 21). Fugard was not satisfied with this version, and had to rework it at a later stage.<sup>163</sup> The role of Bryceland in the development of the psychology of Frieda cannot go unnoticed. She also assisted in shaping and acting the same role in the early runs of the play with Kingsley as Errol Philander. Fugard admitted that his relationship with Bryceland and Kingsley "contributed the most enormously decisive elements in the final shape of the play" that was performed during the South African Season in London (Hough 1977: 129). It is obvious that Fugard gave as much as he gained from his actors.

*The Coat* was originally devised by the Serpent Players of New Brighton, although Fugard is often associated with the play. The publication of the *Statements* (1974) plays by OUP also reveals the problems surrounding the collaborations that led to *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Davis (2013: 118-126) identifies grey areas such as i) the extensive editing of the plays by Buckroyd without due consultation with Kani and Ntshona; ii) a blurb repackaging the plays as artistic liberal works; iii) Fugard's contentious introduction, detailing his roles in the play-making process; and iv) Fugard acting as the unofficial spokesman of the co-authors during the whole publication process (see Chapter 2). These are not the only anomalies in the exercise. The first versions and notes of the plays reveal many omissions and restructurings intended to water down the plays' politics. A critical comparison of the earlier versions and notes with the published plays now in circulation reveal this intention.<sup>164</sup> Such anomalies explain why the Black Consciousness Movement spoke against white-black collaborations. The movement argued that white artists were taking undue advantage of black actors by surfing on their backs to greatness.

There was also the argument that the collaboration – and general association with liberals – was 'unhealthy' because sympathetic whites tended to think and act unofficially on behalf of blacks. The 1974 OUP publication saga created a temporary rift between Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona. And although the trio worked together at a later stage in their careers, the tension and debate about creative input and authorship remain unresolved. Despite the intrigues, they

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<sup>163</sup> The one that Bryceland and Kingsley performed at the South African Season in London in 1974 was the revised version. The influence of the actor and actress is manifest even in this version.

<sup>164</sup> More of this critical comparison will be carried out in Chapter 4.

transcended colour barrier and the superior-inferior notion attached to interracial relationships in the country. They demonstrated that interracial work was feasible “without the relationship descending necessarily into white patronisation and black dependence” (Foley 1996: 187). They also transcended a political tag and projected themselves as universal artists despite the success of their collaborative plays as political works. The performance of *Master Harold and the Boys* (1984)<sup>165</sup> marked Fugard’s transition to personal writing, and Kani’s post *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* acting in European plays and other universal projects transformed his image as well (Cima 2009: 107).

The actor-based play-making style that Fugard initiated in his work with actors was inventive because it allowed him and his co-creators to distort and therefore overhaul the conventional playwriting tradition. It was a tactical and necessary style considering the apartheid context to which they had to respond, and through which they had to manoeuvre if they were to survive and work. The experimental-collaborative method helped “to blur authorial boundaries and cross racial divisions” (Davis 2013: 121). Gray (1982: 21) describes the plays – *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* – that came out of this practice as experimental alternatives, a form of “impromptu inventiveness” that defied the idea of “unique authorship and the copyrighting of communal experience.” Walder (1993: 417) maintains that the plays, and the process through which they were devised, represent an alternative to the dominant and conventional – a move away from the author-text-production hierarchy. The co-authors transformed both the form and the content of the drama. The black experiences that the plays (including *The Coat*) dealt with are cultural expressions that required a new and alternative mode of expression.

Maponya and Manaka were sceptical about the nature of white-black collaborations in South Africa at the time, although even the most radical black artists could see the positive impacts of white training and direction. Fugard, Simon, Purkey, McLaren, and MacLennan,<sup>166</sup> as well as institutions such as the Market Theatre helped in the nurturing and development of black artists. The Market Theatre, founded and managed by Mannie Manim<sup>167</sup> and Barney Simon, provided a cheap and safe haven for collaboration and productions of black plays. Maponya remarked that “to hire a hall in Soweto, say DOCC, costs R80.00 a night [...] it’s cheaper to perform at the market – to hire the Laager for a week [...] costs about R125.00” (Maponya

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<sup>165</sup> *Master Harold and the Boys* (1982) was initially banned by the South African authority for its presentation of institutionalised racism, bigotry, and hatred, as well as its presentation of how racism can influence all those living in South Africa.

<sup>166</sup> These are whites who worked with black in different capacities and locations.

<sup>167</sup> Mannie Manim was also a white theatre artist and remains one of the most respected lighting designers in South Africa.

1983: 24). Segregation was nearly non-existent at The Market Theatre because of the liberal nature of the establishment. Audiences mixed on equal terms, with blacks often feeling more secure watching a radical piece with whites than they did in the townships for fear of police harassment.

This subsidy and safety, plus a good publicity system, compelled many black playwrights to take their plays there (Maponya 1983: 24). The Market Theatre was reputable internationally, and at home, as the theatre of the struggle because it provided training and a space for radical cultural outputs, even during the state of emergency in the 1980s. Black works like: *Bopha* by Mtwana and *Asinamali* by Ngema; collaborative pieces such as *Born in the RSA* by Simon and a group of players and *Sophiatown* by the Junction Avenue Theatre Company and the Market Theatre, and *Woza Albert* by Simon, Ngema and Mtwana were staged there. The Laager section also housed anti-state plays such as Maponya's double-bill, *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*. The Market Theatre "produced some of the best theatre in the world."<sup>168</sup> It was also a 'safe zone' for the state, where restricted plays were confined so that the impact of their radical contents was limited to those liberals who formed the core of the audience. The state's restriction of *Gangsters* to the Laager was designed to limit its impact and reach. Steadman (1994: xxi) confirms that:

The restriction of the play to "experimental or avant-garde" theatre venues such as The Laager Theatre served, for the Publications Control Board, to anaesthetise the plays: with the Market Theatre considered a cultural haven, its function was seen as appropriating political theatre and turning it into a harmless cultural commodity... *Gangsters* was as radical a play as has been produced in South Africa, but the state had now to act covertly rather than overtly against political theatre.

Black consciousness artists were particular about the influence(s) of white artists on the black actors with whom they worked. Maponya (in Maponya 1995; Bauer 1990; *New Nation* 1990) attacks some aspects of the collaboration and emphasises the need for black artists to discover and speak for themselves. This led him to work with Maytham in *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*. In these plays, Maponya created white roles and further directed the white actor, Maytham, in opposition to the practice in the country, where whites created black roles and directed black actors.<sup>169</sup> This further reinforced his sense of assertiveness and Africanist position: he wanted to represent himself instead of being represented by whites. Maponya's work with Maytham

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<sup>168</sup> Gloom Falls on Grand Old Lady of SA Theatre. (2015) *Sunday Times*. 15 February. p.8.

<sup>169</sup> Maytham starred as Piet Hannekom in *Dirty Work* and Major Whitebeard in *Gangsters* in the early runs of the plays. See: Shuenyane, Morakile. (1984) Resistance Theatre. *The Drum*. 16 October. pp. 149–150.

followed the same actor-centred style he had used in the past in the production of *The Hungry Earth* and *Umongikazi*. Maytham had the freedom to improvise and experiment with material and acting. Like Kani and Ntshona, he also contributed enormously to the plays. Maponya (in Maponya 1995: xi; Maponya 1986: 1) admits that *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* were informed and so developed to a great extent by Maytham's experiences and ideas. Maytham practically developed the characters of Hannekom and Whitebeard in close collaboration with Maponya.

Maponya's play *Jika* was also collaboratively devised in workshop by Maponya, Ndizimisela Badesho and Mthuthuzeli Sozwe<sup>170</sup> (Maponya 1984). These actors inspired the production of the play and contributed critical materials during the workshop. They also acted in the play's premiere in Leeds, in the United Kingdom. Like Fugard, Maponya used his actor-participants as conduits into their various lived experiences and professions. He also utilised the research, fieldwork, and workshop system, which provided him with significant material. In the play-making of *Umongikazi*, he utilised the inputs and experiences of the black nurses and doctors at Baragwanath Hospital, in Soweto. Maponya (in Maponya 1983) stated that he interviewed those nurses and doctors involved and kept going back to them with questions. *Umongikazi* is based on the day-to-day effects of racism on healthcare services in the country (Perkins 1998: 65). Hence, it required inputs from the nurses and doctors who were at the rock bottom. The final script of the play was semi-collaboratively developed and performed with the assistance of the nurses and doctors, before the play was banned after performing for three afternoons at the same hospital. The actor-participants, Thoko Ntshinga, Oupa Mthimkulu, and Nomhle Tokwe, provided the material for the play from their experiences as health workers.

The foregoing indicates that Maponya believed in research before developing his works. His motive was to create plays that could truthfully paint the effects of apartheid on black people. Black artists in the country dealt with these issues by *recreating* and *restaging* them on stage. Maponya's plays cannot, however, be reduced to the immediate. His avid concerns with race and gender, and his reference in *Gangsters* to Havel and Beckett, offers him a global standing (O'Brien 2001: 104). His obsession with the history of the black people pushed him into restaging important past events and role-players. This fixation was common among most black consciousness artists in the 1970s and 1980s. *The Hungry Earth*, for example, is a creative re-visitation and re-staging of South Africa's pre-colonial and colonial history. Post-Soweto black plays were fixated with history and conscientisation. In order to operate, anti-apartheid artists had to find a way of circumventing state laws and avoiding ban, arrest or exile.

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<sup>170</sup> Ndizimisela Badesho and Mthuthuzeli Sozwe were black actors from Uitenhage, in the Eastern Cape.

### 3.4 Post-script: state policies, evasion, and survival during the storm

The rise in subversive anti-state activities was matched by a holistic re-designing of existing anti-dissent laws and the launch of new ones so as to efficiently contain the rising subversion in the country. The state worked on the premise that desperate situation required even stricter measures. The censorship and publication laws, for example, were tightened to avoid obvious loopholes in the system (see Chapter 1). The South African Publication Act of 1975<sup>171</sup> listed a number of conditions that must be met before a work can be published (see Chapter 2). As such, works with radical/political content were labelled as *undesirable*, and therefore banned. The censorship laws thoroughly scrutinised all forms of expression. As a result, many radical works were strangled at birth.

Though the censorship laws ante-date total onslaught talk, they are an expression of total onslaught thinking, and the construction of a bureaucracy of censorship entrusted with the task of scrutinising every book, every magazine, every film, every record, every stage performance, every t-shirt to appear in the land is what we can legitimately call a manifestation of paranoia. (Coetzee 1992: 329)

These kinds of policies were designed to cripple revolution in the arts (see Chapter 1). Many of the works produced at the time were therefore censored, and those artists found guilty of contravening state laws were interrogated, warned, monitored, or arrested and punished as the law stipulated. This started with the purge of the Eastern Cape in the 1960s, which resulted in the arrests of a number of dissident activists and artists such as Shack Mququlwa and Norman Ntshinga on petty cooked-up charges ranging from attending meetings, distributing pamphlet, or membership in banned organisations. The source of funds (generally, finances for the arts) was also regulated so as to strangle the arts. Mshengu (1976: 40) revealed that there were also no “resources – no theatres, rehearsing areas, equipment, transport [...]” There was a relative succour for the arts from the 1980s: a landmark period for anti-apartheid artists because of the amendment of the Publications Act. There was also the famous pronouncement by F.W. de Klerk in late-1980s that artists would henceforth be given a chance to practise their chosen art.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> The Publications Act of 1975 of South Africa (as amended in 1978) gave the censorship boards across the country the prerogative power to ban undesirable works, and also to punish artists who produced anti-apartheid works. The Act stipulated i) decent content, ii) lack of ridicule or contempt, iii) respect for intersection relations, among other clauses, as criteria before a work can be published or performed. See: Coetzee, J.M. (1992) *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. London: Harvard University Press.

<sup>172</sup> This important pronouncement was made in 1989 in a speech delivered by F.W. de Klerk.

Our artists, just like any other important group, must be given a fair opportunity to perform their chosen task and to make their own contribution. Truly creative individuals must be able to develop fully and the arts must be allowed to play their legitimate role in society. And this must take place within the realities and the many restrictions within which the state performs its functions in South Africa. (De Klerk 1989: 4–5)

The overt state policies were then softened and covert methods were put in place to manage the radical excesses in the arts. Jolly (1995: 18) observes that the state “increasingly allowed the performance of banned plays in contexts that [...] would not significantly threaten its authority.” The avant-garde, experimental and liberal nature of the Market Theatre served this purpose. The government also controlled what was printed through censorship and imposition of prescribed school texts (Mshengu 1976: 44). Newspaper critics and academics also marred a lot of black works and performances by refusing them the attention they deserved (Peterson 1990: 52). Artists, for their part, responded to the overt and covert containment strategies by developing unscripted plays that were designed to survive the times. Artists produced skeletal scripts that were fleshed out through improvisations by actors under the guidance of directors, in such a way that it was “impossible to judge most black plays in South Africa by their so-called scripts. The living experience on stage bears very little relation to what the playwright gets down on paper” (Mshengu 1976: 44). This anti-script practice enabled many of the plays to evade censorship and banning or, at the least, their restriction to experimental avant-garde theatres in the country.

Many protest and resistance plays at the time “were never written down and were, therefore, not open to detailed government control” (Solberg 1999: 2). Some of these works had a fairly long performance span because they were unscripted, while others had a more veiled content. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*'s ‘veiled’ political statements and stark humour, for example, allowed it to manipulate audience’s reaction. Its unscripted form also enabled it to bypass the censorship board, thus transcending its context and some of the laws and acts that would have otherwise stalled it. It was, nonetheless, banned and restricted several times in its performance history, yet survived the legislation and system that tried to cripple its outreach. In response to critics’ queries about the survival of the play during the apartheid period, Kani, in an interview, said that “people fail to see the fact that this is a piece of work devised to survive under these conditions” (Cima 2009: 101). *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*'s survival and transcendence inclinations first manifested during the rehearsals and workshop, whereby the co-authors had to devise the play underground. Its premiere was also underground. The *play* of identity (Robert *or* Sizwe)



in the play also literally suggests the artists' escape from easy identification as co-authors. (In a way, it also points to the controversies that followed the play's production and publication).

The rehearsals and workshop for *The Island* was also carried out underground. It then opened at the liberal Space Theatre in Cape Town in July 1973, and was staged for about three weeks before limited audiences. It opened with the name *Die Hodoshe Span* [*Hodoshe Work-Team*] in order not to attract an early ban. It was only after the play's success abroad in 1974 that the co-authors changed the title to *The Island* (see Chapter 4). During the early performances of *The Coat*, the actors also subverted the form by using the names of their best roles from their previous productions, so as to hide their true identities from the Special Branch (see Chapter 4). Other anti-apartheid artists were ultimately forced into self-censorship. *The Hungry Earth* and *Gangster* were performed underground, although the playwright refused to be cowed into self-censorship (see Chapter 5). The fear of the state, and the need to get plays performed and published, and not banned, forced some artists to water-down their politics and propaganda in order to survive censorship (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The 'post-script' postdramatic procedure enabled many anti-state plays to escape censorship, and so reach and generate expected responses from intended audience members. As discussed in the chapter, it also allowed playwrights to shift from the conventional playwriting methods to play-making, which is a more actor-centred system that involves the exploration of actor's potentials through experiments and improvisations (with dialogue and staging) in workshops, where actors are transformed from interpretive agents to co-creators. The plays to be analysed in Chapters 4 and 5, but especially in Chapter 4, emanated from these postdramatic processes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DECONSTRUCTING COMMITMENT RHETORIC: IDENTITY AND INDIVIDUAL POLITICS IN THE COLLABORATIVE PLAYS OF ATHOL FUGARD – *THE COAT*, *SIZWE BANSI IS DEAD* AND *THE ISLAND*

#### 4.1 Preamble

The historical – and of course social – context that produced Athol Fugard’s art is a complex one, but then so are the events making up such a history. Considering this cultural dynamism, and the unease regarding the rigid demarcation of art during the apartheid period<sup>173</sup> as either political or apolitical and regressive, Fugard refused the ‘political label’ as he felt that would limit the universal potentials of his art. Instead, he pursued a humanist project, leading to the complexity and problematics associated with his classification as either political or apolitical. But his art cannot be neatly reduced to a single dimension. A literary work should be defined by the period(s) and influences that give it life. The representational medium employed by artists differs depending on their contexts, individual talents, ideological and literary leanings. The literary work is a fluid and dynamic cultural construct, much like the artist who produces it, and its interpretation should therefore embody this complexity. The writer is free to adopt a range of dimensions (political, historical, aesthetic, didactic) simultaneously, or to choose a single dimension.

Fugard adopts a multilayered and multidimensional approach to art as a choice – whether as a literary orientation or tactic for survival during the troubled times. This should be appreciated as it opens up his plays to varied realisations. The apparent content of a text is not a reductive yardstick of its status or contribution. Critics who look only at content and not form and other elements may misread texts. A misinterpretation of this nature is criticised by Vandenbroucke (1975: 191), who maintains that artists should not be considered party hacks or ideologists because they have adopted a political dimension – at times as a context rather than the subject – in their works. Speaking on the collaborative plays of Fugard, he maintains that:

Fugard and his actor collaborators implicitly and profoundly understand that political values and processes permeate their lives and must, therefore, be reflected in their work. “Politics” is not simply added onto pre-existing

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<sup>173</sup> I am particularly referring to the early period of his writing: between 1956 when he wrote *Klaas and the Devil* to the late 1960s and early 1970s when he produced his most protest and collaborative works, *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island*, and *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* – a period often categorised as his most productive and contributory years to the apartheid struggle. And during that time, he also wrote and produced *The Cell* (1957), *No-Good Friday* (1958), *Nongogo* (1959), *Boesman and Lena* (1969) and *Friday’s Bread on Monday* (1970).

work, nor is it an independent element solely intended from the start. Kani has said that “it is for the audience to call a play political, not for the artist to intend it so.” (Vandenbroucke 1975: 191)

Artists (writing alone or in collaboration) use language – and in the case of drama, a blend of words and action – to make sense of their worlds. Because they do not share the same cipher, they represent events and ideas differently. This is also common in any literary criticism of a text or art work. A change of perspective and views of the world is realisable in works about the same or similar event. This ever-shifting perspective of events and ideas is also common in works by the same author, when writing in different times and under different conditions. The social condition, intention, and reception of a work help determine its content, and so its criticism. The comprehension and analysis of a literary work depends on an understanding of the history and social matrix of which it is a part.

Fugard’s *The Coat*, for example, represents the lived experiences of actors. As an experiment in play-making, the play restages the actual fate of a convicted man’s coat through a series of improvisations, and lends credence to Robson’s (2008: 4) submission that the “past is not yet finished, or finished with.” This play marks an important landmark in collaborative practices and experiments with immediate material, and so prepared the ground for experiments with content and form in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. This chapter examines the notion of *commitment* in its many shades and politics in *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. The surrendered and shared perspectives of the collaborators (or play-making participants) in each play will be examined in a bid to present their complex and structured contributions. Intertextual, authorial, and contextual references will be explored in order to situate the select plays within a broader discourse and in relation to other and works.<sup>174</sup>

#### **4.2 Evidence, interrogation and play-making: developing the image in *The Coat***

*The Coat* – produced in 1966 – was an ‘experiment in play-making’ by the Serpent Players in collaboration with Fugard, who played the roles of a creative agent, director and writer during the play-making process. The group had worked with Fugard in the productions of reworked versions of *Orestes*, *Antigone*, *Woyzeck* and *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. They also experimented with local topics, producing unwritten plays such as *Friday’s Bread on Monday*, *Sell-out* and *The Last Bus*. *The Coat* emerged out of the group’s creative attempt to devise plays with their immediate audience and material in mind. This implies an important shift in scope (no longer using ready-made plays) and form (a deviation from established conventions to play-making

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<sup>174</sup> Modern criticism entails an understanding of the context of a text’s production and the writer’s ideology.

methods with actors as conduits and creative agents). Fugard was a key figure in the exercise, and although he did not supply the materials that the players dealt with in the making of *The Coat*, he provided the impetus and experimental form. Fugard admits on many occasions that these black actors influenced his art. He also reveals that he was influenced by American and European experiments and modern theatre practices common at the time (Hough 1977: 127). Faulkner, in particular, inspired him to restrict his art to his immediate context.<sup>175</sup> Fugard (in Hough 1997: 127) said that:

He gave me total security to turn around and look at the specifics, the humble specifics of an Eastern Province world – well, made me secure in my love of those specifics, made me hand myself over to my love, love of a region, of a place, of my passion for it. And to say, look, if I am going to be a storyteller, there is enough here for you. He gave me a total sense of security in the specifics of my place and time.

*The Coat* utilised actors as creative rather than just interpretive agents. The Serpent Players<sup>176</sup> held their discussion-readings and rehearsals after work hours, sometimes in “Fugard’s home garage to avoid restrictions upon interracial activity” (Walder, in Fugard 1995: xxiv). The arbitrary mass arrests, detention, and countrywide banning that followed the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre led to the arrest of some of the black actors. These arrests affected Serpent Players such as Ntshinga and Duru. But despite the arrests and surveillance of the players’ activities, the group did not collapse: Fugard was to work with this group for a decade (see Chapter 1). Fugard and the actors improvised and adjusted to the demands of the period, starting a “new phase of play-making, without texts or identifiable authors” (Walder, in Fugard 1995: xxiv). They transformed their limits into effective (though subtle) political theatre. It was from these events *The Coat* emerged: an experiment in play-making. Walder (in Fugard 1995: xxiv-xxv) recounts the origin of the play:

When Fugard attended Ntshinga’s trial (Ntshinga was accused of belonging to the banned ANC), he took the actor’s wife, the blues-singer Mabel Magada along. She was recognised by an elderly man from New Brighton who had just been sentenced. The man took off his coat, his only possession, and gave it to her saying, “Go to my home. Give this to my wife. Tell her to use it.”

The group’s experiment started with the image of the coat and the message that came back with it to “tell her to use it.” The actors, through a workshop process, debated and improvised

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<sup>175</sup> Faulkner’s works are specifically anchored around American slave experiences (slave narratives) and the migration and resettlement of migrants in America.

<sup>176</sup> It was their performance in the old Port Elizabeth museum and snake pit that intrigued the actors enough to call themselves the Serpent Players. See: Fugard, Athol. (1995) *The Township Plays*. Oxford: O.U.P. pp. xxiii–iv.

the many possible ways the coat could be used. Kruger (2004: 10) maintains that *The Coat* is “still South Africa’s most distinctive learning play.” The participants<sup>177</sup> during the workshop were fully “engaged not only in representing social relations on stage but also in enacting and revising their own dealings with each other and with institutions of apartheid oppression from the law court downwards” (Ibid.). The representation of the events during the reading – from the law court at Cradock, to Magada’s delivery of the coat, and to the possible uses the coat is put to – illustrates that history is open to revisitation. The participants’ engagement during the reading shows that each player is a statesman and a social actor.

*The Coat* is different from the group’s other productions such as *Antigone* and *Orestes*, which are South African adaptations of classical Greek plays. It also differs from their worked-out production of Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle* because it makes no reference to events outside South Africa. The shift from versions of Western plays to the South African context – with specifics of actual events making up the stories – was necessary considering the laws, persecutions and trauma of black people. Brecht’s *Messingkauf Dialogues* provided the actors with the right stimulation and procedure. The immediate events that the players were dealing with equipped them with the right material and gave them the inspiration and drive to pursue the specifics of individual lives and experiences.

The Cradock incidence<sup>178</sup> provided material for *The Coat* – one processed through a director-scribe procedure. Fugard put the other participants on the spot and urged them to examine the events, improvise, and offer suggestions during the play-making process. On 23 September 1966, the notes for the play were revised, story scribbled down, and a possible form emerged. Fugard served as catalyst and scribe in the play-making process – a *transformation* that was critical in shaping the piece, but that has always been practiced (although differently) by the playwright.

The elevation of the actor from an interpreter (of words and actions) to a creator had already been a tradition in Fugard’s productions. Mokae<sup>179</sup> of the Circle Players gives an account of the rehearsal process of *No-Good Friday*:

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<sup>177</sup> Athol Fugard, Mulligan Mbikwane, Mabel Magada, Nohle Nkonyemi, Humphrey Njikelane and John Kani

<sup>178</sup> Mabel Magada was given the coat by a convicted man after the trial of her husband, Norman Ntshinga.

<sup>179</sup> Zakes Mokae, born in Johannesburg in 1935, was educated at RADA (actors’ school) in London. He worked with Fugard in the Circle Players and premiered many of Fugard’s plays, including *No-Good Friday*, *Nongogo*, *Blood Knot*, and *Master Harold and the Boys*. Vandenbroucke states that Fugard and Mokae developed a strong bond and that Mokae specifically informed Fugard’s creation of the character of Blackie in *Nongogo*. See: Russell, Vandenbroucke. (1985) *Truths the Hand can Touch*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

There was a lot of exchange between Fugard and the actors, but basically he was our pen-man. If something didn't work, we'd throw it out and come up with something else. You had the stuff written, you had an idea, and if it didn't work you changed it around. We didn't do much improvisation per se. (Vandenbroucke 1985: 16)

As mentioned in Chapter 3, *The Coat* was first presented as a public reading on 28 November 1966 as a reenactment of the rehearsals and play-making processes. The reenactment left the audience members (about 150 of them) “frozen in horror and fascination,” horror in the sense of the accounts of the coat, and fascination with regards to the experimental and collaborative workshop procedures (Walder, in Fugard 1995: xxvi). The actors also adopted their character names (names they had used in earlier successful Serpent Players productions) and presented the events through a “Brechtian actor-presenter who encouraged spectators to think about, and not merely sympathise with the experiences they were witnessing” (Walder 1984: 81). The actor-presenter (Lavrenti) emphasises facts and objectivity, reason not emotion.

The production of *The Coat* demonstrates the group's capacity to manage the misfortunes in the country and channel bitter experiences in the making of great art. Cima (2007: 47) reveals that Fugard, along with the actors, successfully transformed “their misfortunes into effective political theatre.” They used the Brechtian distancing technique to analyse the fate of the coat and how best it could be put to use by the man's wife. The fates of the man's family and the coat are creatively reenacted and reproduced on stage, the motive being to explore the events in the country. The play does not present the events as *given*, but as texts in themselves that can also be subjected to *play*. Fugard also adopted the existentialist perspective of writers like Camus and Sartre in presenting the characters and events (Burns 2002: 237). His depiction of the specifics of individual suffering did not start – or end – with *The Coat*. He had exhibited a concern with individual suffering and the quest for survival despite poverty and humiliation in earlier plays such as *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*. The individual is always the centre in his plays. The lust for survival and possible joy hardly elude his characters, even in their most troubled moments.

The social context in *The Coat* is depicted as a ‘textual device’ that contextualises the events and history being referred to as a different kind of text, narrative, or discursive practice. The play, for example, explores the Suppression of Communism Act without directly referring to it, and makes the point that it is as a result of such a law that – like many others – Temba (the man) is tried and convicted. (The effect of this law is also indirectly referred to in *The Island* and *Marigolds in August*). The re-enactment of the specifics making up *The Coat* is made

possible because social systems are produced reproduced in the social practices of individual and collective human subjects. Issues to do with social relations in a society, political debates about government laws and the tendency for subversion, fear and pain, hopes of individuals in a cultural setting, and other cultural standards, are the business of new historicists. These socio-cultural issues are examined in the staging of the play-making processes making up *The Coat*.

The staged exercises leading to *The Coat* show a group well aware of its situation. Apartheid South Africa had strict laws that outlawed all forms of dissent activities. Artists and activists were compelled to operate underground so as to remain relevant to the struggle. During the play-making process, the participants were at first apprehensive about the many repercussions of their activity and the political statements in the play. They thus adopted character names so as to conceal their identities. Mulligan Mbikwane and Nomhle Nkonyeni adopted the names Lavrenti and Aniko respectively from *Caucasian Chalk Circle*; John Kani used Haemon from *Antigone*; Mabel Magada adopted Marie from *Woyzeck*; Njikelene Jingi became Humphrey from *Mandragola/The Cure*. Fugard (as catalyst and penman) pushed the actors into breaking the silence in the country by improvising and experimenting with material(s) from their lives and the lives of those around them. This explains why the Serpent Players were listed as the authors in the original script and first published version of the play.

New Brighton<sup>180</sup> serves as the context for *The Coat*. Lavrenti serves as the actor-presenter. In an address directed at the predominantly white audience in the Dunne Hall, which requested to see a sample of the actors' work, Lavrenti paints New Brighton (a township) as "that world where your servants go at the end of the day, that ugly scab of pondokkies and squalor that spoils the approach to Port Elizabeth" (123). Aware that most of the audience "live outside" New Brighton, Lavrenti states that the actors who "live inside" are there to educate the whites (123). The difference between those "inside" and those "outside" was clear to the players and audience – the Group Areas Act officially institutionalised their division based on race. The act gave the state prerogative power to forcefully evict people from certain designated areas. (The Mthiyane people of eMandlazini for example were given an order on 25 December 1976 to vacate the area before 6 January 1976).<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> New Brighton was a township of Port Elizabeth. It was established between 1902 and 1903, and was the first black residential area of Port Elizabeth. It had a long history of segregationist motives.

<sup>181</sup> The Mthiyane people were asked to move to Ntambanana, and the area was renamed Richards Bay, which is now one of the largest ports in South Africa. See: Ntuli, S.H. (1998) *The History of the Mthiyane People who*

The Serpent Players were “insiders” who understood the troubles and trauma associated with residing in New Brighton. They were aware of the politics and risks involved in breaking the conspiracy of silence in the country by talking about the condition of life in black townships, and were not deterred. Instead, they defied state laws and utilised the theatre for the service of a common good. Lavrenti speaks of the actors’ ideology and resolve:

LAVRENTI. There are many confused and even contradictory reasons for our existence as a group. The hunger for applause, boredom, conceit, desperation, even money at one stage – though we have now learnt enough to know that here in Port Elizabeth, theatre is not the way you make it, but lose it. We have talked about this question of motives more times than I care to remember... we want to use the theatre. For what? Here it gets a bit confused again. Some of us say to understand the world we live in, but we also boast a few idealists who think theatre might have something to do with changing it. (123)

The actors repeatedly questioned their resolve and purpose in the same way they questioned and represented the events in *The Coat*. As insiders, they depict New Brighton as a real world with “shopkeepers and the housewives who complain about the shopkeepers; the labourers coming home tired at night and the bus conductors who don’t wait for those labourers at bus stops; the tsotsis who molest the young lovers, the young lovers themselves” (124). In this way, the problems and pleasures of the township were detailed, presented, and represented on stage. The effect of the country’s many segregationist laws is also presented in the way black labourers go into Port Elizabeth in the morning to work and return home tired at night since they have no permit to reside there.

The level of poverty in New Brighton is also referred to in the troubled relationship between the housewives and the shopkeepers. The black hooligans (known as ‘Tsotsis’) compound the already worse situation by molesting the young and innocent lovers. They also terrorise the black townships out of frustration and hunger; serve as a buffer between the white and non-white groups; survive apartheid by defying state laws. An instance of their unchecked activity can be seen in Fugard’s *No-Good Friday* in the gruesome murder of Tobias (a rural migrant) by Shark (a *tsotsi*) for refusing to pay for the normal insurance cover – a practice common in the township, but one that Tobias did not know about. High poverty rate, indecent migrant and child labour, filth, and crime are defining features of New Brighton.

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were Removed from Richards Bay to Ntambanana – Wednesday 6 January 1976. Unpublished B.A Honours. University of Zululand.



The actors introduced outsiders into the New Brighton world through the image of the coat – an old man’s sportscoat, a real coat, like the New Brighton setting where the man lived, and where the coat is given life again when it is brought back from Cradock in a stranger’s bag. The coat serves as an image for the actors’ exercise: it was real, and the “cause and effect of things” (124). Influenced by Brecht’s theories and workshop process, the actors used the coat as evidence, and discussed and examined it. Lavrenti speaks of the group’s intention when he states: “we came to believe in it so strongly that we decided to use tonight to show you what happened when we discussed and examined it” (124). Lavrenti also speaks of their attempt to objectively analyse the coat during the rehearsal process, “there are certain facts; we will give you them. There are a lot of questions; we tried to find the answers” (124).

As in Brechtian epic theatre, the coat is presented as evidence; and as in a court proceeding, the exhibit is then examined under different compelling circumstances. The coat – and not the man – is crucial as it was what came back after the trial, while its owner went to prison. The actors’ public reading of the play in 1966, the revived performance in 1990 at the University of Witwatersrand Theatre in Johannesburg (directed by Maishe Maponya), and the published text, all represent the actors’ reenactment and improvisation of events during rehearsals. The image of the coat (during rehearsals and productions) passes from one experiment to the next and from one actor/actress to the other. Lavrenti begins by asking what kind of coat it is, and Marie replies that it is “just an old coat. A man’s sportscoat” (126). We hear more about the coat when Aniko (the actress acting the role of Temba’s wife) reveals that he “got it last year from a baas at his work” (127) – a white man’s garden where he used to work on Saturdays.

After carefully examining the evidence for its worth, the actors try out the possible ways it can be used, starting with Haemon’s request as the man’s sixteen-year-old son to borrow it in order to get a job: “couldn’t I borrow father’s jacket? Just to get the job! I will look after it. It will help me get the job” (134). The evidence then passes through hands as seen in the textual stage direction and during the performance when Haemon takes it off and hands it to Aniko, who then tries out the sick child’s experiment. After all that fails, the actors use it to get a two rand loan from a society at Nikwe Street, and, at that point, it is examined by June Molefe – originally acted by Magada. The loan is supposed to buy the family another week to raise the money to pay the arrears of twenty-four rand or face immediate eviction. The improvisations were intended to show how the coat could be put to its best possible uses. These reenactments help give the coat life. In fact, it was given new life because it was brought back to New Brighton.

In order to make each player a social actor in the events presented, the actor-presenter calls on the audience to listen and judge. A court setting (with usual proceedings) is then presented in the play through an interrogation of the exhibit, actors and New Brighton, elements that are all put on trial. The actors expressly examine the coat and the message that went back with it. A series of scenarios are created, and each is dispassionately examined and interrogated, with the actors getting in and out of characters. The participant-actors further serve as lawyers who objectively examine the case and evidence before them. The spectators and readers, in turn, form members of the jury, who are required to disinterestedly listen/read and pass judgment based on the facts before them. And after a series of improvisations (improvisation being the hallmark of the Serpent Players' practice) the events and exhibit are examined by the actor-presenter, and, in some instances, the actors. The actors, Marie, Aniko, and Haemon are also interrogated, and, like the accused in a law court setting, their statements and actions (or inactions) are taken into account in the whole process. As in a text-context situation as well, the evidence and accused are cross-examined concurrently. Marie/Magada, playing the role of the woman who brought back the coat, is the first to be interrogated. Lavrenti queries why she hesitates after delivering the coat to Aniko:

LAVRENTI. You hesitated there, as if you wanted to say something.

MARIE. Yes I know. I wanted to tell her it was silly to keep the coat all that time if she could use it. Five years is long.

LAVRENTI. Why didn't you?

MARIE. I don't know. I felt sorry for her. (128)

Lavrenti also questions Aniko's stubborn insistence on keeping the coat for her husband later in the play, "what do you think that coat is going to look like in five years time? All you'll have left to give him is a moth-eaten, useless old rag" (143). The condition of life on Robben Island – where Temba was to serve his prison term – was harsh and political prisoners there were subjected to unimaginable suffering and humiliation. They were shattered emotionally, physically and psychologically. As such five years on the Island are five long and bitter years of torment and misery, such that by the time the man is eventually free he will not only be old and destroyed, but the wife, children and coat will also be old. Freedom for black people even outside the confines of prison cells is at this time in history non-existent – more of an illusion (Dingake 1987: 55). In the play, Aniko narrates her conversation with her husband during her

visit to Rooihel<sup>182</sup> before his long walk to hardship and confinement on the Island, “you will look older when you come back to us...” (129–30).

The interrogations in the play are presented differently, although they all constitute a series of structures that, when put together, explains the whole exercise. Lavrenti also questions Aniko who as the man’s wife ponders what becomes of the coat:

LAVRENTI. [To Aniko, who is still by herself]

So now the coat is with the old woman, what did you, as the wife, feel when you got it back?

ANIKO. I’m not sure. I wasn’t really in it yet, you know, in the part.

LAVRENTI. What do you think she felt? Was she sad, or... (128)

Lavrenti plays Fugard’s actual role here – who as the director served as critic, modulator, and employed the director-scribe procedure to get the best out of his actors’ creative potentials. The play, therefore, reenacts the rehearsal process, hinting at how Fugard helped to shape the workshop procedure. Fugard harnessed the actors’ potentials by pushing them into reenacting the experiences in the play. As the modulator and actor-presenter, Lavrenti pushed Aniko into imagining the old woman’s feelings, and then into the ugly situation in the family. Temba’s family is depicted as a microcosm of life in New Brighton – and other black townships. The group paid attention to specifics, and through them paint the reality of life in New Brighton – families sleeping on the cold floor without blankets, absence of loyalty and family bonding, self-sacrifice, boys becoming men before their time, unemployment, rent issues, and, broadly, poverty. The group avoids hasty generalisations by emphasising the majority; but also hints that the minority also counts:

JINGI. So what are we trying to do? Aren’t we trying to find out something about New Brighton?

LAVRENTI. Yes we are.

JINGI. Then let’s concern ourselves with the majority. And I’m saying that the majority of young boys and girls, men and women for that matter, don’t give a damn about what is going on, not even in their homes. They don’t help their mothers the way Haemon showed us.

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<sup>182</sup> Rooihel literally means “red hell” and refers to a Port Elizabeth prison facility in the Eastern Cape region where prisoners were kept. It also served as a transit facility for prisoners taken to and from Cradock or Robben Island. Prisoners from Cradock, Grahamstown, and other places in the Eastern Cape region were kept there. It was a familiar facility for the New Brighton inhabitants arrested in the mid-1960s. Thousands of political activists such as Thabo Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba were jailed there.

HAEMON. So what are we going to do about those that do? Pretend they don't exist?

JINGI. If we are concerned with New Brighton, and understanding it...  
(135)

Haemon makes the case for the few individuals who care for their parents, arguing that, as the minority, they are, nonetheless, the most important and so cannot be ignored. New Brighton's youngsters, and men and women, represent self-sacrifice. They symbolise the lack of feelings associated with the majority of the populace in the country at that time. But there are apparent factors, such as growing up without parental care and affection – without one of one's parents (or both) at home – and the rate at which children are born and dumped, or not well cared for, by underage and accidental parents. The group censors New Brighton in search of answers to the problems bedevilling their people. Their attempts to disinterestedly reenact the conditions that can best put the woman on the spot, or even compel her to sell the coat, result in a series of absurd improvisations. Motives from that of poverty and starvation; to sickness; funeral expenses; and finally rent, are tried. In all these experiments, the actors search for facts about New Brighton and the coat, leading to an absurd cyclical progression – an unending exercises that confirms the existentialist belief that life lacks essence.

Lavrenti speaks of the facts about the man's coat, as well as about New Brighton, forgetting, as Aniko points out, that there are second-layer facts that may be unknown, and that can also be interrogated:

ANIKO. Don't just sit there and pity her.

LAVRENTI. What else can we do?

ANIKO. But a man wore this coat!

You think it's easy? Just hand it over and take the money! This is all that's left of him. It came back to New Brighton empty, but there was a man in it once... my husband, my children's father.

LAVRENTI. What are you trying to tell us? We know the facts.

ANIKO. No you don't. There are other facts. Life isn't just eating samp and beans, with meat once a week, or washing the white man's underpants and sleeping in council houses. We are a nation with men, and one of them wore this coat. Can I not struggle a little for him? When he comes back can I not say: yes, it was hard for us as well. But we waited. We had faith. Here is your coat my husband. We kept it for you. (142–143)

Aniko speaks of aporias, otherness, and blanks in our understanding of the coat – the husband and father who wore the coat, the untold story of suffering and abuse of the wives who wait, and the undisclosed fate of the many convicted New Brighton men whose tale of woes may

never be heard. She, however, directly refers to the poverty and starvation in the townships (eating samp and beans, with meat once a week), the degradation of labour there (washing the white man's underpants), lack of housing (sleeping in council houses), and to the once proud and able-bodied men in the country who have been silenced. The actors try to delineate the difference between the individual/actor who actually experiences the events and the character which imagines, interprets, and then reenacts the same events. Aware that the play depicts the real lives of its actors and the situation in the townships, the group tries to avoid emotion and sympathy by drawing a rigid line between actor and character – thus promoting empathy and value judgement. 'Reason' and 'emotion' are clearly emphasised. Their use of the Brechtian distancing technique in the exercise allows them to detach themselves from the events and to remind the spectators (and readers) from time to time that they are watching actors.

Athol Fugard and Mabel Magada attended Norman Ntshinga's trial at Cradock, where Fugard testified "as a witness in mitigation," but his testimony was not accepted (Fugard 1995: 230). Mabel met Temba after the trial, and he gave her the coat, his address, and pleaded that she informs his wife – who could not make it to the trial because of the distance between Cradock and New Brighton – about his sad fate. Temba's message that he will return, and that the wife should use the coat, is all that is heard from him. Acting as Marie, Magada recalls the event:

MARIE. The one with the coat came up to me quickly and asked me to see his wife and children. He gave me the address. He asked me to tell them what had happened to him. Then he took off his coat and said I must give it to his wife. "Tell her to use it," he said. "Tell them I will come back." (125–6)

The group provides very little information about the man himself, perhaps because not much is known about him. He is anonymous because there were many unsung –ordinary men– who were involved in the struggle against apartheid. It is quite possible that the group makes him unknown to instigate the audience to be selfless too. Or even that the struggle is multifaceted, and as such it does not matter what one person contributes, as long as the oppressed put their shoulders to the wheel. The man represents – like the comrades in *Jika* – the unidentified and unidentifiable that kept the black struggle alive. What had happened to him was not new. The trials of those arrested during the purge of the Eastern Cape between 1963-1965 took place in Cradock, a "small Karoo town far from the homes and families of those involved, so as to minimise disturbances and protest" (Fugard 1995: 230). All those sentenced were then taken to Rooihel, and then straight to Robben Island and other prisons in the area, including one at

Cradock (see analysis of *The Island*). In *The Coat*, Marie says that “the lucky ones get three years. Most of them get five or seven” (125).

In *The Island*, Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona pick up on the actual drama of what really happens to political prisoners after their trials, on Robben Island. In *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, the authors depict the circumstances (such as the violation of the Group Areas Act or pass law offences) that lead to arrests. Indiscriminate arrests of activists and artists were rampant at that time. Agitators and political activists such as Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu and Joe Slovo were also arrested, tried, and incarcerated for many years on Robben Island. Slovo was a white Jewish man and member of the South African Communist Party, who later joined the ANC.<sup>183</sup> Kathrada was an Indian man and, as a non-white, he believed that the future of his people (an oppressed group as well) lay with the policies and struggle of the ANC.<sup>184</sup>

*The Coat* enacts the incessant and indiscriminate arrests of blacks on various and inexcusable charges. In the play Temba is an example of the many regrettable victims of the system. Jingi laments how blacks were indiscriminately arrested and jailed, “Ai! The white people. What is it all about? What is the matter with them? They have got everything. And now they take our men away” (129). Blacks during those long years had to endure several hard-hitting laws that were meant to control and whip them into line (Cottrell 2005; Buntman 2004; Dingake 1987). In *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, Sizwe/Robert speaks of the black man’s precarious situation, like the discrimination of the system and the dilemma of adhering to laws and staying out of trouble. The several laws and compulsion methods in place at the time meant that the black man could not escape oppression and servitude. In *The Coat*, Lavrenti, in response to Haemon, confesses that life is never fair for blacks.

The history of apartheid reveals that blacks lived in utter fear and desperation for a change in the old status quo. The improvisations of the old woman’s endless troubles represent a typical New Brighton situation. Her family is a microcosm of New Brighton; and New Brighton that of South Africa’s black townships – where poverty, filth, starvation, squalor, incessant arrests and incarceration, and sickness were endemic problems. In spite of all these problems, New Brighton had its own pleasures. As an objective experiment meant to examine the conditions

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<sup>183</sup> Whites such as Joe Slovo, Ruth First, Helen Suzman, and Nadine Gordimer in the Communist Party were unashamedly identified with the black struggle. Slovo was arrested in 1956, but eventually acquitted in March 1961. See: Loren, Kruger (2013) *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing and Building Johannesburg*. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>184</sup> Non-white groups such as Asians (Indians, Chinese, Pakistanis) and coloureds held more privileges than blacks before the Nationalist Government’s institutionalisation of apartheid in 1948 under the leadership of D.F. Malan. From 1948, they were (more or less) categorised as officially non-white, and this compelled them to join forces with the blacks.

of life there, the participants use the man's family as an example. They depict the old woman as poor and helpless because of her husband's incarceration: poor and alone, with children to care for, a son's education to support, and the burden of rent in arrears (amounting to twenty-four rand) to settle or the need to find new lodgings.

The group made recourse to education as an alternative way out of the black man's problems. While speaking with Haemon, Aniko points out that education can change the condition(s) of life in black township, "No! You go to school. You learn. If your father had gone to school maybe he wouldn't be where he is now. You learn to read and write" (132). Aniko's position saliently contradicts the black priority of the time: that the struggle came first, and education later. In a sincere attempt to persuade Haemon against dropping out of school so as to support the family, she relates Temba's counsel: that the son "must learn. The white man's world is a strange one. Tell him to be clever" (133). The rate at which the youngsters in these townships dropped out of school either because their families could not afford it, or, like Haemon, they needed to support the family, was alarming. Aniko's position was not in fact pursued further because Fugard – as director and an inspiring figure in the exercise – does not believe that art should offer answers or solutions. *The Coat* is, therefore, not as political and prescriptive as, say, *Jika*, which tries to give answers. This limitation is, however, a matter of choice of scope and not a handicap.

Instead of didacticism and moral, or political, instruction, *The Coat* offers a more philosophical insight into the township experience. It gives layered accounts rather than generalised reports on the condition of black life. The poverty in the township, for example, is saliently related to the arrest of the many husbands and fathers who are the breadwinners of the families. Poverty and fear were so common at the time that neighbourliness, sympathy, and communality were largely lost. Jingi laments the destitution of many "families that go to sleep at night with only a mug of hot water in their bellies and their neighbours don't give a damn" (138). The players emphasise these specifics without directly relating them to the laws in place. Even the anxiety and misery in the township are presented through the old woman, who symbolises the women who had to fend for themselves and their families, in a layered format: first, the old woman's problems; second, the arrest of her husband. These layers are connected, but not emphasised. Acting as the old woman who faces a rent problem, Aniko relates her predicaments in layers as well:

ANIKO. The last four month have been terrible, Sis Joyce. Every week I said, this week I will pay the rent, even if I go hungry. But when the children come home and they are hungry, but I see they are too frightened to ask if there is any food... what must a mother do? Then the little girl was sick, John lost his job... Is it true that they want to throw me out? (140)

These layers – rent, starvation, fear, sickness, and loss of a job – all point to the poverty in the family as a result of the arrest of its head (the once proud father and husband). These series of layered experiments ultimately lead to the fear of losing the house, deportation to the reserves and, worse, losing Temba – all connected in a progression. This fear haunts Aniko, such that she is willing to sell the coat to retain the house. Lavrenti makes it worse by emphasising the clear repercussions of not paying the rent arrears, which is deportation to the reserves. Living in the reserves means that Temba will find it difficult to find Aniko and the children after his release, and that the son won't be able to work or continue with his studies. Reserves (known as homelands) such as Bophuthatswana, Transkei, Ciskei, and Venda are particular examples of the black zones that were designed to regulate residence and influx – a control mechanism (see Chapter 1 and 5).

*The Coat* experiment demonstrates that a single, topical setting or article can provide an artist (or a group of artists) with the right material. It shows that the immediate can be transcended; a small setting can denote a whole; a character can symbolise a group; artists can universalise experience. This however depends on what Arnold (1978) refers to as the convergence of the critical and the creative mind. All writers exist in history; and use its resources to make sense of their world and ideas. This explains why context-based theories emphasise that extrinsic material (from history) should be brought into the text in any analysis. Cultural criticism, for example, evolves a system that allows critics to describe a “culture in action... and reread it in such a way as to reveal through the analysis of tiny particulars the behavioural codes, logics, and motives controlling a whole society” (Veese 1989: xi).

*The Coat* is replete with social materials from the actors' lives, as well as the tiny particulars and behavioural codes of the people living in New Brighton during those years. The players demolished the boundaries separating reenacted events and the real New Brighton situation. Their emphasis on ‘facts’ allowed them to, as Lavrenti states, strike “a good balance between reason and emotion” (145). The Serpent Players' work on *The Coat* “led through *Orestes*, and then culminated, in a sense, in *Sizwe Bansi*, and, to a lesser degree, in *The Island...*” (Hough 1977: 127).



### 4.3 The personal is political: influences and individual action in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*

Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona drew material for *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* from sociopolitical events, then synthesised and reproduced them on stage through improvisation and the delineation of character skills and humour (see Chapter 3). *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was first titled *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*.<sup>185</sup> The co-creators defied the state, with its various laws, and produced this one-act play that explores controversial topics such as dehumanisation, economic exploitation, rural migrant labour and survival in a police state. And using a two-hander style, Kani and Ntshona represented the lived experiences of black people in South Africa. As blacks, the actors were subjects, so-called victims, because the experiences they depicted reflected their lives. Fugard directed the actors, served as the creative agent-provocateur, and, as scribe and professional playwright, helped shape the performance (see Chapter 3). It was influential at the time for its radical statements criticising the regime's segregationist structures and laws.

Audiences outside South Africa may sometimes lose the deeper resonance in the name '*Sizwe Banzi*,' but all sorts of "echoes will be there for people inside South Africa" (Pieterse 1976: 200). A surface interpretation of the play, without a detailed recourse to its historical period and condition of production, can be realised in some studies (see Chapter 2). A contradiction can be located in the difference in the reception and interpretation of the play as performance and in its reading and criticism as a dramatic text that emphasises universality and the human condition. Critical works on *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, as well as *The Island*, suggests that there is a double-edged interpretation of the plays. The *Statements* plays were considered "radical and subversive by the South African authorities as well as by audiences and critics" when they were first performed (Davis 2013: 7). *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was very successful during its first (and even successive) performances, such that it generated productive arguments and protests among audience members.

The successful production of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* at home and abroad was not well received by the South African authorities. Although Fugard was satisfied with the plays' achievements within a very short time, he needed something more. He refused to use theatre solely for political purposes because he did not want to be labelled strictly as a political artist, as he felt that could hinder his future art and achievements (see Chapter 2). Kani and Ntshona partly shared this fear, which then informed their attempts to separate art from politics during

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<sup>185</sup> The difference in the names is 'Bansi' and 'Banzi.' 'Banzi' roughly means the whole country: the nation. The full title translates as: the nation, countrywide is dead; our countryman is dead; or we are dead. Don MacLennan (1979) reports that Fugard says it means "the people are strong."

the workshop and play-making process of the play, by paying more attention to aesthetics and poetry than propaganda. Along with Fugard, they were, therefore, careful not to allow politics to overshadow the universal concerns in the play. This enabled the play's 'veiled' propaganda to be contained within its art and performance. The collaborators adopted a multidimensional approach to art, thereby allowing politics and art to safely interact and cohere.

Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona tactically disrupted and defied the institutionalised South African structures of authority in their play-making exercises despite the criticism against white-black collaboration and the problems and limitations associated with interracial activities. Sizwe and Buntu's attempt at subversion<sup>186</sup> in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* demonstrates that the play is not limited by Fugard's liberal ideals. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* could not really avoid politics altogether because it had a far-reaching effects on the lives of all South Africans (Dry 1985: 11). These dramas are "saturated in politics that politics never have to be mentioned" (Mitchell 1974: 132). In fact, the plays are about those politics.

Kani and Ntshona's influence(s) on the play-making process manifests here because as black people, they embody the bitterness and politics of their society. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona in the play depict the dehumanising experiences of blacks during the period. Kani and Ntshona provided the image(s), impetus, acting, and bulk of the materials that makes up the play (see Chapter 3). The whole play-making exercise was subversive. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* appears to be political mainly as a result of the actors' experiences, and because the re-presented events are entrenched in South African specifics. Although the play makes 'restrained' and 'indirect' political statement, it does not proffer alternative solutions out of the hopeless situation of the black characters.

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* reinforces the view that there is no lasting solution to human suffering, and emphasises that what is left are evasions, diabolical comforts and the acceptance of death as a beautiful gift. Like Camus, Fugard is a humanist who "lumps existing social and political structures [...] with the universal and ineluctable absurdity of the human condition" (Diala 2006: 243). The collaborators (Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona) picked their materials from socio-political events, but also censored, selected and represented those events. The influence of the black actor-creators went a long way in shaping the events that finally featured in the play. Kani's inventive utilisation of the newspaper headlines suggests that artists also censor and manipulate events. His reading varied each time he performed, depending on the context(s)

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<sup>186</sup> The word subversion is derived from the Latin word "subvertere", which means to overthrow. It suggests an attempt to transform established social order and its structures of power, authority and hierarchy.

(place of performance) and audiences (white, black or mixed). The published texts of the play differ from the first *Sizwe Banzi* version, with a record of omissions and extensive editing<sup>187</sup> (see Chapter 2). Kani's creative reenactment of events during the performances suggests that history in itself is in a state of flux – unstable, shifting and open.

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is so steeped in the sociopolitical history of South Africa that the drama would be incomprehensible without it. Kani's (as the character "Styles") deep knowledge of that history allowed him to improvise in the largely comic newspaper reading. His reference to the exploitation and dehumanising working condition at the Ford Motors plant was made possible because it was his actual experience. Kani had worked in a motor plant in the past – before his career as an actor – and this allowed him to creatively restructure his experience(s), work on the material, and comically represent it on stage. Kani's lived-life is closer to Styles' in the play, who also left a motor plant (Ford) in pursuit of a better life and honourable career, as a professional photographer.

Styles's studio doubles as an escapist and imaginary zone where blacks act out their dreams. The activities within its walls suggest that blacks are trying to give meaning to their lives – to counteract their neglect and misrepresentation in the annals of history. Styles's celebration of his escape from the shackles of capitalist enslavement (his six years of servitude in the motor plant), and from the humdrum of a foreman's job, is epitomised in his ability to establish his own business, the photo studio. Styles sees the studio as a mark of economic independence as well as an alternative historical chapter for the average black people in the country – allowing their histories (dreams, travails and accomplishments) to be preserved:

STYLES. This is a strong room of dreams. The dreamers? My people. The simple people, who you never find mentioned in the history books, who never get statues erected to them, or monuments commemorating their great deeds. People who would be forgotten, and their dreams with them, if it wasn't for Styles. That's what I do, friends. Put down, in my way, on paper the dreams and hopes of my people so that even their children's children will remember a man. (159)

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is, similarly, an alternative account of the dehumanisation and travails of black people in South Africa: a long history of oppression suppressed by the apartheid state.

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<sup>187</sup> There are many published versions of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. The notable ones are the *Statements* (1974) and *The Township Plays* (1995) – all published by Oxford University Press. The published texts of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* differ from the original version of the play, with the title *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*. This original version was used in the early performances of the play from 1973–1974. See: Davis, Caroline. (2013) Publishing Anti-apartheid Literature: Athol Fugard's *Statements Plays*. *A Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 48 (1). pp. 113–129.

Statements against the regime, and about its operational, regulatory, and containment policies did not go down well with the authorities. The play captures the segregation and exploitation in the country. It also depicts the ordeals and absurdity of black life and the near impossibility of escape from the fetters of the law. Black people at the time were denied a shred of dignity, and often belittled by being referred to as ‘boys’ (Dingake 1987: 77). In *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, for example, Styles, Buntu’s father, and the grown-up blacks at the plant, are looked down on as boys despite their age. This derogatory reference is not limited to the play. In *The Island* as well, the political prisoners are also derided and referred to as boys. The prisoners on Robben Island consisted of older men (seniors) and boys, although they were generally referred to as boys (Buntman 2004: 52,114) (also see section on *The Island*).

Black people were also referred to by numbers, instead of names. The native identity number (N.I.) was used to classify blacks and control their movements. It allowed the regime to check the influx of black migrants who left the homelands in search of a better life in the big cities. Sizwe Bansi, in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, leaves King William’s Town in pursuit of a dream and greener pasture in Port Elizabeth, but cannot stay because he does not have a permit to reside there, or even to look for a job. He has to consider losing his name and identity, or risk arrest and deportation back to his homeland. The pass laws regulated residence and movement and required that all males over the age of sixteen carry a reference book, containing their identity number and personal details.<sup>188</sup> It was actually designed to manage urbanisation and limit the movement of black Africans under apartheid.

The passbook was used to reduce the black man’s life – and by implication even the whites – to a record, in that its loss meant the loss of one’s identity, and even existence. It was a grand symbol of apartheid oppression because it turned the natives into strangers in their own lands. Labour was an integral aspect of the pass law system from its very inception, with the British proclamation of 1797. The abolition of slave trade around the world in 1807 required that the white settlers seek an alternative source of human labour. H.J. Simons (in Schoningh 1985: 240) remarks that the then Governor, Lord Caledon, issued the order that:

The semi-nomadic, cattle-herding Khoi-Khoin (misnamed Hottentots) whose grazing lands had been seized by invading colonists and who were now to be pressed into service to replace the slaves [...] were obliged to find a ‘fixed place of abode’ – meaning a White man’s farm – or run the risk of

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<sup>188</sup> Security and labour were the main aims of the pass system. The British introduced it by proclamation in 1797 at the time of their first occupation in the Cape. All Xhosa were declared aliens, and refused admission into the Colony without an official permit. See: Ferdinand, Schoningh (1985) Athol Fugard, John Kani, Winston Ntshona: no Permit to Stay. In: *Texts for English and American Studies*. Pretoria: Paderborn. p. 240.

being declared 'vagrants.' If they hired themselves out to an employer, the law required the drawing up and registration of a 'service contract.' No Khoi-Khoi was allowed to move about the country unless he had a pass issued by his employer or a magistrate. A person without a pass was a 'vagrant,' and liable as such to be fined, imprisoned or contracted out to a farmer.

The pass law system, which serves as the running theme in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, marked out the individual's place and contributions to the state, and allocated races to different areas. The restriction in setting and staging in the play echoes this grand segregationist design. Blacks were contained in certain areas, and those who crossed over without the required paperwork, permit, and stamp were raided, arrested, and stamped out. Sizwe narrates how he was caught by the headman at Zola's house for illegal entry into Port Elizabeth during one such raid:

SIZWE/ROBERT. I was staying with Zola, as you know. I was very happy there. But one night ... I was sleeping on the floor ... I heard some noises and when I looked up I saw torches shining in through the window ... then there was a loud knocking on the door. When I got up Zola was there in the dark ... He was trying to whisper something. I think he was saying I must hide. So I crawled under the table. The headman came in and looked around and found me hiding under the table ... and dragged me out. (170)

Arrested, endorsed, and stamped out of Port Elizabeth, Sizwe has to leave in three days. His book only allows him to live in King William's Town, a small town where he cannot find any meaningful means of livelihood. With his arrest, he is "required to report to the Bantu Affairs Commission, King William's Town ... for the purpose of repatriation to home district" (171). Sizwe's life is recorded in his passbook and he cannot escape the new instructions in it. Naive and ignorant (as a new comer like Tobias in *No-Good Friday*), he thinks of the alternative of burning it and applying for another one. The absurdity of that subversive act is however clear to Buntu, who knows the futility in it due to his understanding of the workings of the system. The play suggests that the result remains the same no matter what the individual does:

BUNTU. Burn that book? Stop kidding yourself, Sizwe! Anyway, suppose you do. You must immediately go apply for a new one. Right? And until that new one comes, be careful the police don't stop you and ask for your book. Into the courtroom, brother. Charge: failing to produce Reference Book on Demand. Five rand or five days. Finally the new book comes. Down to the Labour Bureau for a stamp... its got to be endorsed with permission to be in this area. White man at the Labour Bureau takes the book, looks at it – doesn't look at you! goes to the big machine and feeds in your number... card jumps out, he reads: "Sizwe Bansi, Endorsed to King William's Town..." Take your book, fetches that same stamp, and in it goes again. So you burn that book, or throw it away, and get another one. Same thing happens. (171–172)

Sizwe's thought of by-passing the law is first contained here. Buntu's knowledge of the rigid system contains and limits his creativity to think. The state succeeded in instilling fear in the minds of black people, thereby limiting subversive activities, though it did not eliminate them altogether. Black people had to suppress their yearnings for good life and freedom out of fear for the system. Sizwe laments this fear, suppression, and the unwilling acceptance of the will of the regime: "Sizwe wants to stay here in New Brighton and find a job; passbook says, 'No! Report back.' Sizwe wants to feed his wife and children; passbook says, 'No. Endorsed out' " (180–181). He equally criticises the lies that greeted the introduction of the passbook, "They never told us it would be like that when they introduced it. They said: Book of Life! Your friend! You'll never get lost. They told us lies" (181).<sup>189</sup>

The passbook helped to institutionalise segregation in South Africa through the Group Areas Act, which restricted all races and criminalised illegal trespassing. The act is never mentioned in the play, but its binding regulations determined that Sizwe should reside in King William's Town instead of Port Elizabeth or New Brighton. Like other black people who had trespassed therefore, Sizwe is officially endorsed out. His book is in fact instrumental to his containment and subjugation. There were other black people like Sizwe, who tried to manoeuvre the act's loose ends. These weak spots were tightened up by over time, and with every 'upgrade' of the system, the level of dehumanisation increased. And with every new law, or the revision of an old one, black people were boxed into a corner. The resultant protests and defiance were also managed by the state. Frustrated and out of options, Sizwe cries out and strips naked on stage (captured in the dramatic text in the stage direction) to question and express his humanity and manliness:

SIZWE. What's happening in this world, good people? Who cares for who in this world? Who wants who?  
Who wants me, friend? What's wrong with me? I'm a man. I've got eyes to see. I've got ears to listen when people talk. I've got a head to think good things. What's wrong with me?  
[starts to tear off his clothes]  
Look at me! I'm a man. I've got legs. I can run with a wheelbarrow full of cement! I'm strong! I'm a man. Look! I've got a wife. I've got four children. (182)

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<sup>189</sup> Exploitative policies and religious machinations often start in that way. In the past, black Africans were asked to kneel and close their eyes in the name of submission to a new religion, and by the time they opened them their firm hold on their lands and power was long taken away. Ngugi wa Thiong'o depicts this religious treachery in *Devil on the Cross* (1987) emphasising the exploitative and deceptive role that Christianity played in the colonisation of Eastern Africa – particularly Kenya.

Sizwe does not just cry out, he also speaks to our humanity and conscience and, involving the audience, asks that they think of him as a fully grown man and not an impotent little boy. His emotional and emphatic questions remind the audience/reader of Shakespeare's Shylock, who in *The Merchant of Venice* also forcefully, and ardently, asserts his humanity and speaks out against the maltreatment of Jews by Christians in Venice. These unfair laws that discriminate against Christians and Jews in the Venice of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* are quite similar to the laws in South Africa that discriminated between whites and blacks. Rigid laws, whenever in place, often contain all groups (especially the oppressed) and enforce allegiance to the state. The individual's will to break free in such societies usually turns out to be futile.

The laws that contained black people in South Africa also (but not equally) contained whites. Capitalism – an entrenched exploitative system – regulated and enslaved all the groups in the country. Style's comic dramatisation(s) of the shift in servitude role during Mr Ford's official visit to the motor plant reveals that white people are also victims of the system. It reveals that the whites (like the blacks) are answerable to a superior power. Styles comically captures the transformation of the white workers (lords) at the plant: "Yessus, Styles, they are all playing your part today" (155). The scene suggests that power shifts; and also hints at the possibilities of black freedom and independence. This is demonstrated during the translation scene, where Styles tactically seizes Mr Bradley's power, and for a moment takes control of the events and reactions of the black workers. This shows that black people are not condemned to servitude, although they seem to rejoice and smile throughout their enslavement at the plant.

The black workers at the plant, and the many others outside it, are well aware of the futility of bringing about a change in the status quo, and seemed resigned to living with it. The smiling workers, and the celebratory photos in Styles's studio, demonstrate a silent acceptance of the apartheid system. These photos (hung outside and inside the studio) are a record of the "poor, the non-literate, the necessarily nomadic South African blacks ... the photos [are] ... cherished possessions, the only record they have of family history, the only remembrance of parents, siblings, relatives, ancestors" (Wertheim, in Skordis 2003: 95). Thus, apart from revealing the naivety of black people, and their acceptance of the system, the photos also demonstrate that Styles has found a tricky and effective way of documenting black history. This turns the play into a "political weapon; 'a subversive historiography,' a method of re-writing the present so that in the future the lives of the *others*, that have been 'written out of the histories produced by white historians' can be remembered" (Ibid.).

The actual photographs (of a smiling well dressed black man)<sup>190</sup> that informed the content of the play, and provided impetus for the practice, can be extended to capture the transformation of the whites workers at the plant from bosses to capitalist slaves, who must also fake a smile in the presence of their superior, Mr Ford. Both black and white workers are contained by the repressive capitalist system. The black workers smile and sing to mask their unhappiness at the system, while the whites to retain their positions in the factory. In the end, both oppressor and oppressed wear a smiling mask. Smiling, apart from obviously showing happiness and so acceptance of a situation, also speaks a different language. It is used in the play as a servitude badge to hide the true emotions of the black workers at the factory, and by the white workers as a mark of subservience and allegiance to the exploitative capitalist system. Styles reveals the black man's dogged spirit, resilience, and cheerfulness through his example of the black workers and mourners at the funeral parlour, who ironically also wear smiles:

STYLES. When I looked again the mourners from the funeral parlour were there wiping their tears and saying "cheese." Pressed my little button and there it was – New Brighton's smiles, twenty-seven variations. Don't you believe those bloody fools who make out that we don't know how to smile.  
(162)

Dlamini's funeral parlour and Styles's studio appearing side by side suggests that happiness and woes, and life and death, are as connected as a string of pearls. As humans, therefore, our joys and troubles are so intertwined and twisted that they are difficult to separate. And this, in a way, captures the stance of tragi-comedy as a dramatic form. The shops' proximity and the nature of the knock on the doors (a solemn knock for the funeral parlour and an energetic one for the studio) imply that there is a very thin line separating existence and non-existence. This also suggests that individuals can make a choice to exist, dream and celebrate in the studio, or mourn and give up on life in the funeral parlour. The mourners, who look into the studio, wipe their tears, and shout "cheese" in celebration of life, represent the many black people at the time who chose to pick up the pieces of their lives and move on.

As for those who have reached home such as Outa Jacob, death is presented as a beautiful gift and an escape from the enclave of the real world outside the studio. Outa's death, therefore, implies an end to the absurdity of the human condition. And so with his death, and his body put to the earth, comes the likely peace and journey home – away from troubles and existence in a meaningless world. Buntu believes that Outa's incessant troubles – being exploited and sacked, going from one farm to the next begging for a job from the Boers with his load on his

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<sup>190</sup> There were two, but nonetheless similar, celebratory photographs.



back and his wife walking behind him, cold, dismissed, poor, and homeless – are now over. He has signed the terms of his contract with God, and has reached a home, a place of refuge where “no matter how hard-arsed the Boer in his farm wants to be, he cannot move” him (176).

Death is an unwritten contract between man and God: it is sealed and unavoidable. None of the characters in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* are, however, in a hurry to end up in Dlamini’s funeral parlour in spite of the promises of solace and refuge that the grave holds. The depiction of the level of man’s inhumanity to other men in the play presents us with a different perception of death. Alive and struggling, the black people in the play are synonymous with ghosts because their names have been replaced by Native Identity Numbers. Black people were referred to as Bantus (Dingake 1987: 79; Cottrell 2005: 13). They were also called “natives” or “plurals” at various times, until the development of Black Consciousness Movement, that argued that “all the oppressed share a common blackness, and were in that sense black” (Buntman 2004: 3). These blacks were numbered, and their dignity and privileges violently tugged away such that they were no different from the actual dead.

Death suggests restriction and confinement to a tight hole; and to not know what to expect on the other side – an awful situation to which blacks such as Outa were subjected to in the play. They lived with an agonising fear of the unknown and the uncertainty of survival in a police state. For Buntu, the black man is dead, and all that is left is his ghost. His dignity and pride do not matter as long as he can provide for his family. It is only when he is a provider that he can assume his role as a real man and claim dignity. Buntu maintains that it is more important to survive as an individual in contrast to Sizwe’s emphasis on the importance of family name. Buntu considers a name, and identity, as a burden since it cannot create a good life for Sizwe. This explains why Buntu plays the “real ghost” idea quite well; and urges Sizwe to forget his pride and play along as long as it can earn him a permit to reside and work in Port Elizabeth – and so stay out of trouble.

Staying out of trouble denotes obeying state laws; but may also suggest tricky evasions. The singular act of changing a man’s identity from Sizwe to Robert implies that even the pass law system can be manoeuvred and that the black man can temporarily avoid trouble. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* promotes transgressive acts at the more individual and personal level. Dissent of this nature is not peculiar to the play, or its apartheid context; it is born out of the individual’s will to survive and to exercise a sense of freedom. Even literary works about the more domestic and emotional themes record one act of dissent – whether to societal institutions or prescripts

– or the other. Repressive legislations are not peculiar to one culture, and have been protested against by writers of different periods and cultures. The subjugation of the individual and his (often) salient protest in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is, therefore, depicted in relation to what Olaiya (2008: 76) refers to as the “global trend of economic and social marginalisation.”

Buntu’s *surgery* of the two passbooks (Sizwe and Robert’s) has both an economic and social motives to it. The new *improvised* book will offer Sizwe the chance to work at Feltex, where Robert worked, and to live in Port Elizabeth. Although it offers him a temporary relief, it may not entirely do away with the system, as he may finally be caught. In the play, trouble always lurks around the lives of the black characters, and is never completely avoidable. The futility and absurdity associated with avoiding it is captured by Sizwe’s rejection of Buntu’s idea that it is possible for him to avoid trouble: “a black man stays out of trouble? Impossible, Buntu. Our skin is trouble” (191). Sizwe’s declaration of the impossibility of really avoiding trouble for black people is “the deepest, most condensed statement of the whole play” (Stone and Scorer 1977: 127).

The statements in the play are direct, but padded with humour. Sizwe could temporarily avoid trouble by altering his identity, but for how long? The identity switch buys Sizwe some time, a space to realise his dream, but is an impermanent solution that is more likely to be thwarted sooner than he thinks – just as the freedom of black people is in itself uncertain. Sizwe’s skin colour, like Kani and Ntshona’s, categorises him as the *other*: a native who cannot (in reality) escape the stigma associated with being black. The imprisonment of blacks, individually and in groups, for cooked-up charges (as with Ntshinga); imposition of fines for breaking laws; arrests (as with Kani and Ntshona in the Transkei); and endorsement out of the cities (as with Sizwe in the play); all show that black people could not avoid trouble altogether. The policies in place decided the status and contribution of individuals and groups to the state. *Difference* was at the heart of the apartheid system; and the play presents it in its various shades. Stone and Scorer (1977: 127) speak of the difference at the very heart of man’s affairs:

We are white, or black. We are Catholic, or Protestant. We have, or we have not. We are party members, or we are not. Differences, and people’s primitive sense of difference, remain to confuse our sense of humanity and to reinforce the insidious suggestion that, because other people are different from us in some superficial way, they may not be entirely human. As the writer of the *Book of Job* wrote more than two thousand years ago: “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* emphasises individual and not collective action and resistance. The play focuses on the suffering and survival of the individual in a society where choices determine existence. Styles's decision to leave the motor plant, pursue his freedom and independence, and assert the value inherent in his humanity, is itself an element of individualistic action. His choice of photography as a profession, despite his father's displeasure, allows him to escape a life of servitude, and to demonstrate his own worth and dignity in society: "Daddy, if I could stand on my own two feet and not be someone else's tool, I would have some respect for myself, I'd be a man" (156). Individualism is informed by individual action and freedom. It is determined by the individual's ability to change his fate and defy the conditions that would have otherwise clipped his wings and limited his potential. Styles risks going far on his own, and does not allow bureaucratic processes to limit his potential, contain his dream, or subvert his efforts at independence. He promotes the values of self-reliance, struggle, and persistence – the quest to jump over high hurdles, and to emerge from nothingness to one's own boss and proprietor.

Styles's liberation from clutches of capitalist oppression rests in his ability to utilise chances: he speaks of his zeal and doggedness to secure the available shop next to Dlamini's funeral parlour. Dlamini's advice, "grab your chance Styles. Grab it before somebody in my line puts you in a box and closes the lid" (157), sustains and prepares him for a series of encounters with the bureaucratic processes that cripple black men's dreams. He waits patiently for the shop allocation and refuses to let his individuality and dream die. The bureaucratic bottleneck associated with getting the shop, and finally the nature of the allocated shop (full of dust and cockroaches), almost discourage Styles. He, however, grabs his opportunity and speaks of his early victory after clearing the "Sahara desert" in the shop:

STYLES. I stood here in the middle of the floor, straight! You know what that means? To stand straight in a place of your own? To be your own boss [...] General foreman, Mr "Baas", Line supervisor – the lot! I was tall, six foot six and doing my own inspection of the plant. (157)

Unlike Mr Ford, Styles's horizon is limited because his success is limited by his skin colour. If the right opportunities are there, blacks like him may turn out like Mr Ford. His perspective regarding being a man goes beyond normal circumcision, as seen in his nude protest on stage about his manliness, or just getting a pay package. He insists on being a photographer, despite his father's criticism that the profession suggests a shift away from an old prescript. Styles's accomplishment means that he is no longer a boy: he is his own boss. His rebirth signifies the rise of individuals in a capitalist state. Individualism suggests transcendence of an old order,

self-interest, perseverance in a limited context, and ability to change one's stars. The studio is the transformation ground – where restrictive apartheid laws are manoeuvred.<sup>191</sup> The photo(s) offers an alternative historical chapter for the clients; it also boosts Styles' economic success. Styles and Buntu (both roles acted by Kani) represent the urban and capitalist space – where survival and individualism are the core standards.

The urban space is also characterised by violence and the lowering of moral standards. Man's inhuman tendencies are ironically most apparent in the urban areas in which the rural Sizwe and Tobias (in *No-Good Friday*) hanker to reside and work. The city is, therefore, a necessary evil as able-bodied men like Sizwe cannot find jobs in the homelands. Many of the rural and uneducated blacks who went to the cities were endorsed out, and the few who were lucky to stay behind ended up doing menial and domestic jobs because of their colour and their lack of qualifications. Those blacks who were resolutely determined to reside and work in the cities, but did not have the right permits, regrettably ended up in the mines, losing their lives, or at the very least, sustaining serious injuries in the process. Buntu says that getting a work in the mines was easy considering the risks involved; and because many blacks were not willing to work and die for a pittance.

Generally, black women were not allowed to go to the cities. Even those who ended up there were limited to activities such as domestic work, prostitution, and serving as *shebeen* queens. The likes of Buntu's wife, who also makes it there, worked in the cities in white homes, often leading to unintended social problems. The work required that they had to leave their families behind during weekdays, and this in a way contributed to the collapse of many black families. With the father or mother gone, and sometimes both, the children were denied the necessary home training, and had to find a way to survive. The financial effect of this social problem is depicted in *The Coat*. In Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*, the sad fate of the woman – who was arrested for sneaking into the city and miners' compound to visit her husband, who ultimately died digging gold for the white man while she was in prison – also reveals that black women were not usually accepted in the cities (see Chapter 5).

The struggle to exist and transform pushed many blacks in the cities to abandon their moral and communal ethos. Buntu and Sizwe's inglorious and condemnable act of robbing the dead (Robert) exemplify the moral degeneration in the cities. The action is, manifestly, historically informed since it is the sociopolitical and historical that shapes individual action and inaction.

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<sup>191</sup> The background posters in the studio (displayed in the performance, and described in the dramatic text) aid in the black customers' creative transformations.

Montrose (1989: 21) speaks of this social phenomenon when he argues: “possibilities and patterns of action are always socially and historically situated, always limited and limiting...” The argument between Buntu and Sizwe as to what to do with Robert’s corpse shows that the rural Sizwe has more moral and communal ethics than the urban Buntu. Buntu’s indifference and suggestion that they take the passbook and leave the dead body behind demonstrates the heartlessness and selfishness common in the urban space.

Self-interest and individual action are not entirely new themes in Fugard’s plays. In *Boesman and Lena*, the troubled and displaced couples also abandon the corpse of Outa,<sup>192</sup> despite his kindness and compassion towards Lena. That he stays up all night (by the fire) and listens to Lena’s tales of woe does not actually matter to the couples. Both instances portray man at his worst: individually inclined and unsympathetic to the misery of others. The acts, in addition, also defy ethical and communal conduct. This may explain why Sizwe finds it hard, at first, to rob the dead, insisting that the corpse be taken to the deceased’s family. Sizwe’s confusion and concern as to the potential loss of his identity partly accounts for his stubborn reluctance to take on the identity of Robert. His own name means everything to him because it implies ties, family, kinship, and a communal fold. It is what he will pass down to his children – a lineage that dates far back. A new identity (in the switch of name) means the disruption of an old system. Zwelinzima is just a corpse, unlike Sizwe who exists and has friends and family. Like Tobias in *No-Good Friday*, Sizwe signifies a cultural, moral, and ethical prescript, while Buntu symbolises the horror of civilised and capitalist societies.

Sizwe and Buntu’s condemnable act (robbing the dead) may well have been motivated by the fact that positive and proactive individual action for blacks was limited at the time. Montrose (1989: 21) speaks of individual motives and action when he argues that “there may not be any necessary relationship between the intentions of actors and the outcomes of their actions.” Motives and action are not necessarily connected. Sizwe partially transforms from a rural and naive black to a city man who is ultimately willing to play the real ghost idea in order to fit in and, finally, work in Port Elizabeth. He metaphorically dies as Sizwe, so as to live as Robert and hence make sense or, at least, get some value from his existence in the world. More than anything, his letter to his wife, Nowetu, reveals that he is no longer in trouble and can now dream big and hope for a better life for his family. Sizwe’s illusory survival in the borrowed robes of Robert implies the suspension of his troubles with the authority. He tells Nowetu that “for the time being my troubles are over” (191).

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<sup>192</sup> The name “Outa” (loosely suggesting an old and troubled black man) appears in many of Fugard’s plays.

Sizwe's resurrection is however conditional on how long he can stay out of trouble. His death and transformation means the temporary death of his identity. He battles with the thought of a strange identity, laments the attack on his name and pride, and speaks out against the whole enterprise: "I don't want to lose my name, Buntu ... I cannot lose my name" (184). A name is a priceless treasure, and so its loss means the loss of one's identity and sense of belonging. A dishonourable switch of name drags the individual's honour in the mud, and, as in the case of Sizwe, results in a crisis of identity and the attendant confusion:<sup>193</sup> "Robert... Sizwe... I'm all mixed up. Who am I?" (185). This identity dilemma (Sizwe *or* Robert) may have served as a way of concealing the true identities of the collaborators (see Chapter 3). The transformation alternative in the play is so temporal and shaky that it mainly rests on Sizwe's ability to avoid trouble, something also futile and unrealistic for black people at that time. And if, per chance, he is caught, he will have to be resurrected again – yet another problem.

As a symbol of the black man's struggle for existence, Sizwe has to explore alternative ways of survival. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* tactically promotes individual dissent although it makes reference to state policies like a residence permit, hawker's license, parole permit, work-seeker's permit, lodger's permit, which may well stand in the way. The play shows that these laws were so numerous and compulsive that the black man could hardly make a difference or successfully evade them: "There is no way out, Sizwe. You're not the first one who has tried to find it. Take my advice and catch that train back to King William's Town" (173). The play is, however, a more realistic account of the individual's failure to break during the apartheid years. The effects of the binding laws show the endless progression in the attempt at finding a lasting solution in the country. The black man's efforts to achieve self-realisation are as usual frustrated by endless spheres of disenchantment. Despite all the apparent impossibilities and uncertainties, Sizwe still tried. His personal act is as political as any other.

The laws governing black lives were petty and hard to overcome. Sizwe's individual action may have imposed limits, but it worked for him – even if only temporarily. It is potent in the way it proposes unthought-of solutions onstage. It also nearly led to a protest after one of its performances (see Chapters 2 and 3). *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* overcomes the usual futility of the

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<sup>193</sup> There is perhaps always an attendant crisis when it comes to playing the role of another person in the theatre. In real life, the conflict of identities is most apparent when a new culture tries to take over and replace (or subsume) an old one. Individuals in Francophone colonies (such as Burkina Faso, Niger, Cameroun, Chad, Benin, Morocco, Algeria, Senegal and Gambia), for example, struggled with forced transformation. France, using the Policy of Assimilation, expected a total assimilation of the French culture. This left the colonised natives confused and suspended between one identity and another. The Assimilation Policy was eventually replaced with the Policy of Association.

Sophiatown Plays – *Nongogo*, *No-Good Friday*, and *Tsotsi*. Sizwe’s symbolic ‘resurrection’ suggests the rebirth of hope in the individual subject; the thought of a decent and honourable existence are a source of new life. Although Sizwe hankers for death, and sees it as a gift and an end to his troubles, he won’t just give in without a fight. Sizwe wants to struggle: to find a way, not just perish without defending his own existence in an absurd world where struggles are futile. The will to survive is very strong that even the cockroaches – what Styles calls the “paratroopers” – had to defend themselves against Styles’s invasion as the new shop owner.

The imaginary and symbolic warfare between Styles (as the intruder) and the cockroaches (as the original inhabitants of the shop) suggests the conflict between overseas settlers and black natives who defended their lands (MacLennan 1979).<sup>194</sup> The Khoi-Khoi and aboriginal San were among the first tribes – what Laurens Van der Post among others calls the First People – to inhabit South Africa. Van der Post<sup>195</sup> (in Walder 2012: 51) reports that the First People (referring to the native Bushmen) inhabited South Africa and other adjacent territories where the Dutch trekked in “search of farmland, thereby helping to destroy those First People...” The Dutch came in the late 15th to early 16th centuries and were the first Europeans to reach the Cape. They eventually established a permanent station there, traded with the rural people, and, some historians argue, initially had no colonial intentions.

Van der Post states that this long “drawn-out process of colonial invasion and settlement” led to a series of “past crimes towards indigenous peoples” (Walder 2012: 52). Freda Troup<sup>196</sup> (in Walder 2012: 56) corroborate that the pre-settlement process in South Africa is associated with the “small and scattered groups of San, dwarfed and direct descendants of the proud first men who once roamed the African homelands almost unchallenged.” Van der Post’s claims about the crimes against the Bushmen were criticised by Doris Lessing, who maintains (in the *New Statesman*) that white writers such as “van der Post were using the continent as a peg to hang their egos on...” (Walder 2012: 52). Troup’s submission is also corroborated by Walder, who maintains that the Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, and Tswana people were dominated and accorded “less right to the land than the overseas settlers whose arrival was supposed to have occurred

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<sup>194</sup> Don MacLennan (of the Department of English, Rhodes University, South Africa) writes that after a dialogue with himself during the workshop process, Kani goes on to elaborately mime and act out the famous gun-slinging style of the Wild West during his battle with cockroaches. He uses the spray-tin as the gun to enact a brilliant dramatic scene. See: Don MacLennan (1979) *Original Script for the First Version of Sizwe Banzi is Dead* [play script], manuscript collection, 79.20.11. Grahamstown, National English Literary Museum.

<sup>195</sup> Van der Post was a soldier, explorer, traveller, and philosopher, who also fought in World War II in Ethiopia, Syria, and the Far East. The book is an account of his 1957 journey into the primitive Kalahari Desert in search of the Bushmen (hunters). See: Laurens van der Post (1998) *Lost World of the Kalahari*. London: Chatto and Windus. (The book was originally published in 1958).

<sup>196</sup> Freda, Troup. (1975) *South Africa: an Historical Introduction*. London: Penguin.

simultaneously” (Walder 2012: 55). The colonial settlement process is a complicated history that is open to diverse historical narratives. The dominant narrative – one Walder shares – is that the overseas settlers and black inhabitants arrived simultaneously. As usual, the dominant communities write out the minorities.

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead*'s early performances present a graphic image of the encounter between Styles and the battle-ready cockroaches. The text, on the other hand, captures the annihilation process in words and phrases like “reload,” “fight,” retreating through an “imaginary door,” “spinning the tins” and putting them back “into their holsters” (158), therefore suggesting an actual warfare. The whole episode leaves behind a scene of unbearable carnage, although not a permanent one. And when Doom fails to rid the shop of the resilient cockroaches, Dlamini, whose business is death, advises and then offers Styles a particular black township cat called “Blackie” (159). The cat is first and foremost black. Its ability to rid the shop of the menace of the hostile cockroaches saliently reveals how “impimpis” (meaning police informers) were used by the state to infiltrate and contain subversive elements. These black insiders supplied the state with information that helped in curtailing possible crises and breaches of the law. The battle between Styles and the dogged cockroaches also symbolises the confrontation and resistance put up by black activists and the state’s containment of their extra-parliamentary<sup>197</sup> activities.

Records of activities during apartheid prove that communist activities were contained; protest and resistance works banned; and many anti-parliamentarians exiled. Resistance meant a one-way ticket to Robben Island or other prisons in the country and mysterious disappearances. In *The Island*, Fugard, Kani and Ntshona reenact what happens when political activists and anti-communist laws offenders like Ntshinga are caught. The incarceration of non-white offenders and dissent activists, as is the case with John and Winston in *The Island*, is another example. The “tsotsis” (black hooligans or gangsters) were, however, allowed to operate in and ravage the townships at will.<sup>198</sup> Black-on-black violence was common and uncontained at that time – and is still a major problem in black townships today. Aspects of this violence manifest in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, in the murder of Robert Zwelinzima by the *tsotsis*; in *The Coat*, in their ability to manage and unleash violence in New Brighton; in *No-Good Friday* in the murder of Tobias by Shark – a *tsotsi* as well.

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<sup>197</sup> Anti-apartheid activities considered unconstitutional and subversive by the apartheid regime.

<sup>198</sup> Black gangsters who terrorised the townships: killing, stealing, and maiming fellow blacks.



The economic conditions in the townships made them dangerous and hot zones for all kinds of crimes (see Chapter 1). As reserves (labour pools) for industrial areas and big cities in the country, the level of filth, degradation and poverty there were alarming. The residents (mostly labourers) were cramped in compounds, temporary shelters, and, as in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, in single-men's quarters, with "twelve people behind each door!" (181). Poverty was on the high side in the townships, thereby making them volatile and so susceptible to violence. Even the few business opportunities available there were usurped by so-called foreigners (Asians), leaving the black people with nothing. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona fittingly make reference to the Chinaman's shop, where Styles runs to in order to purchase Doom (a pesticide) to use on the cockroaches. In *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, blacks were reduced to the lowest cadre of society, and left with nothing but the fear of the unknown. This fear is crystallised in *The Island* in the arrest, imprisonment, and absurdist fate of the political prisoners, John and Winston.

#### **4.4 Suppression and expression: the loud and silenced voices in *The Island***

*The Island* – like *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* – was collaboratively devised in workshop by Fugard, Kani and Ntshona. The play is a gripping account of incarceration, torture, desperation, and anxiety. It depicts the condition of the political prisoners John and Winston on Robben Island – an ominous dead end where life and dignity were snuffed out of political inmates and other dissidents. It was first performed underground.<sup>199</sup> The play is an apt example of theatre's role in depicting (and so exposing) the level of man's inhumanity to other men. The collaborators picked the taboo topic of Robben Island, and revealed the dehumanisation carried out there in the name of containment and transforming the prisoners. The play disrupted the silence in the country, and proved that statements could be made against the regime and its many inhuman measures of containing subversion.

*The Island* is a defiant piece about both the flawed and insensitive laws that send prisoners to the island and the prison condition. As in a tribunal, the play presents its audience(s) (readers) with evidence, bit by bit, and testimonies from subject-actors, hence guiding them in reaching a verdict. Robben Island – which served as a military base during the Second World War; as an island for banishment and imprisonment since the beginning of white settlement there; as a

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<sup>199</sup> Its first audience was small mostly members of The Space Theatre in Cape Town, in order to avoid publicity that could have led to censorship and arrest. *The Island* was the first play to openly discuss the condition of South African political prisoners on Robben Island. And because the state had banned the discussion of such issues in the arts, or wherever, the performance had to be underground, otherwise the play would have been banned. It could even have led to the arrest of the actors, director, and all those involved in the performance. This allowed this most political of Fugard's play to survive; impact on the audience; and influence many post-Soweto black play by proving that things could be talked about in the theatre.

leper colony in the nineteenth-century – was turned into a maximum security prison primarily for political prisoners in 1959.<sup>200</sup> Prisoners were taken there to be silenced and subdued, and not a single black warden, no matter his training, was posted there so as to hide the atrocities and horrendous deeds perpetrated within its walls (Jibril 2015: 141). It was an island-of-death much like the infamous death-farm Vlakplaas.<sup>201</sup> Cruel wardens like Hodoshe and Suitcase<sup>202</sup> represent the level of tyranny of the state.

Robben Island was a setting for the destruction of black bodies, conviction, and minds. High-profile prisoners such as Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, Govan Mbeki and Walter Sisulu served long terms on the Island.<sup>203</sup> The Island in the play is shown as both a historical and an imaginary setting meant to silence radical voice and contain dissent. It is not “merely Robben Island but South Africa itself, an absurd prison with absurd rules enforced by absurd officials. South African citizens, be they non-white or white, are as much immured or imprisoned as either the heroine in Sophocles’ play or the prisoners in Fugard’s...” (Wertheim, in Skordis 2003: 99). Ultimately, therefore, the Island represents the containment of whites and blacks in the country. It is also a metaphor for the containment of the black population under the Group Areas Act. However, even the Island, with its notoriety for cruelty and dehumanisation, could not successfully silence the sharp and bitter voices, or suppress the anti-state activities in its four walls. Lassie Chiwayo<sup>204</sup> (in Buntman 2004: 162-3) recounted that there was a “healthy relations among the different organisations on the Island, which was in sharp contrast to the attitude outside prison where other organisations were considered the enemy that had to be suppressed.”

*The Island* opens with a loud and extended siren (during performances, it ends with the same loud siren) and with the actors, John and Winston, miming back-breaking, strenuous, and

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<sup>200</sup> In the original notes for *Die Hodoshe Span*, Norman Ntshinga recounts that Robben Island was a maximum security prison. There was no way the prisoners could break out: with the sharks in the sea, patrol boats in case of attempted escape, and the distance to the mainland. He said that a lot of the gruesome activities carried out there were kept underground. The food was also terrible and the wardens were brutal and merciless. See: MacLennan, D. (1979) *Notes for the First Versions of Sizwe Banzi is Dead and Die Hodoshe Span* [rehearsal notes], manuscript collection, 79.20.11. Grahamstown, National English Literary Museum.

<sup>201</sup> Vlakplaas was a secret apartheid government farmhouse of death located on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Political opponents of the regime, communists and activists were taken there to be tortured, or even killed. Eugene de Kock (alias Prime Evil) carried out the covert assassinations there. See: Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla. (2003) *A Man Died that Night*. Cape Town: David Philip.

<sup>202</sup> Nelson Mandela recounts that Suitcase was the nickname of a dangerous, brutal and heartless white warden on Robben Island. See: Mandela, Nelson (1996) *Long Walk to Freedom*. London: Macmillan.

<sup>203</sup> Ahmed Kathrada, in particular, was first sentenced on the island for five years for inciting black workers and leaving the country illegally, before he was later sentenced for life. See: Fran Lisa, Buntman. (2004) *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 214.

<sup>204</sup> Lassie Chiwayo was a twenty-year old radical ANC member who was sent to Robben Island in 1988. *Ibid.* pp. 162-3.

monotonous labour on the beach in the scorching sun. The actors are wearing oversized khaki shirts and short loose-fitting trousers, and engaged in a meaningless labour that points to the absurdity of their existence. At the end of work, the actors can hardly register a sigh of relief. The siren, exhausting labour, and fear, which is registered all over John and Winston's faces, represent the prison situation and serve as a microcosm of prisoners' experiences in the other prison facilities in the country. The labour is cyclical and without essence.

The original script for *Die Hodoshe Span* [trans: *The Hodoshe Work-Team*] provides a more vivid account of how the prisoners were cowed into "animal-like submission" and treated as "unfeeling robots" that had to carry out a circle of "stupid and pointless labour" (MacLennan 1979: 2). The labour went on and on [...] with Hodoshe, the "green fly," pushing the actors to such an exhaustion point that "they cannot even register relief at the cessation of the work." These detailed images and descriptions are entirely missing in the published version(s) of the play.<sup>205</sup> There are evident omissions and tampering in the published text when compared with the original *Die Hodoshe Span* script; and so it is not surprising that the two elicit different reception or response.

The stage direction in the published text only states that "the labour is interminable. The only sounds are their grunts as they dig, the squeal of the wheelbarrows as they circle the cell, and the hum of Hodoshe, the green-carrion fly" (195). It is therefore evident that the imagery and descriptions in the original version have been watered-down so as to present Fugard (and to a certain degree Kani and Ntshona) as more of a great artist than a propagandist, one of the best in his country and region. The OUP anaesthetization process of the play – with *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* – achieved that result. This explains why the play was considered radical, political, and inciting during its early performances compared to its performance reception (it is now staged using the published versions) and reading today as a universal piece.

*The Island*, as a dramatic text, differs in many ways from its early performances (1972-1974). Fugard, eventually, disassociated himself from the later performances that Kani and Ntshona toured around the world, from 1974. Kani and Ntshona relied on the early version of the play and also improvised at several points in the performances. The original dialogue was in their heads, and so they did not feel constrained by script or authorial limitation. The performances of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* by the actors followed the same pattern, but were even more inciting and improvisational. The actor-creators enjoyed a lot of artistic freedom that allowed them to

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<sup>205</sup> MacLennan, D. (1979) *Original Script for the First Version of Die Hodoshe Span* [play script], manuscript collection, 79.20.11. Grahamstown, National English Literary Museum.

improvise with words and action, depending on their audiences, situations, and current events.

Hodoshe, the infamous warden in both the original version and published texts, feeds on the prisoners' bodies and pushes them beyond human limits. As *fulcrums* condemned to rot and die, and guided by an existentialist belief, John and Winston accept their fate – as did the real prisoners on Robben Island. But although they are willing to take responsibility they refuse to be completely suppressed. Ultimately, Winston's unbearable voice is heard at the end despite his sealed fate as a prisoner for life on the Island. Winston is one of the living dead who has a long walk to his actual death. John and Winston symbolise the countless of prisoners behind bars in several facilities, in addition to other numerous other victims of apartheid not in jail, but who were psychologically and physically destroyed by the state. Prisoners were taken to Robben Island irrespective of their colour, offence, or age.

John – who is initially sentenced to ten years – refers to the coloured prisoners who, on their way to the Island, look out from their cell windows urging the black prisoners in the van to persevere and have courage, “coming to their cell windows and shouting. Courage, Brothers! Courage!” (215). Cramped in a police van and travelling for hours without a slight chance to urinate, and then into the jetty, John recalls that the sight of a familiar home, a familiar world, began to disappear – “you looked back at the mountains [...] farewell Africa!” (215). John's description of how they were transported to the Island is similar to Mandela's description in a *Long Walk to Freedom* (1996), and that of Ntshinga in the notes for *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *Die Hodoshe Span* (MacLennan 1979: 3). Ntshinga narrated that they were transported from Rooihel to Robben Island. He also recalled that the coloured convicts, who were charged with petty crimes, called on them through their cell windows to persevere and have faith. He stated that the event occurred when the police van transporting them stopped at a fuelling station to tank-up. Welcome Duru also recalls his experience on the way to the Island, and remembered saying: “this is the last time you stand on Africa” shortly before leaving the mainland.<sup>206</sup>

Mandela and Ntshinga also revealed the condition of life in the prison, one that the state tried to keep away from families of the prisoners, white liberals, and the international community. The apartheid government made writing, or any discussion, about Robben Island illegal and punishable. Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona contravened the censorship laws that prohibited the

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<sup>206</sup> Don, MacLennan. (1979) *Notes for the First Versions of Sizwe Banzi is Dead and Die Hodoshe Span* [rehearsal notes], manuscript collection, 79.20.11. Grahamstown, National English Literary Museum.

discourse by clarifying the mystery surrounding the notorious prison.<sup>207</sup> Kani and Ntshona (in separate interviews) maintain that they wanted to make their art more relevant to the people. Their exercise allowed them to remain objective by reporting events as narrated by Ntshinga and Duru.

Fugard (1995: 232) states that it was Ntshinga and Duru who provided the group “with their inspiration, and the detail for most scenes.” Nshinga and Duru’s testimonies were creatively synthesised and reworked through a play-making process despite the punitive laws that would have made the interracial practice difficult, or limited the content and creativity of the play by stipulating what was acceptable for discussion. The co-creators determination and capacity to jump high hurdles during the play-making exercises is synonymous with John and Winston’s perseverance and will to rehearse Antigone’s trial scene. Their ability to overlook the lurking danger sign during the performance is also synonymous with John and Winston’s willingness to ignore repercussion and make dangerous statements before brutal wardens like Hodoshe – a powerful political statement under that condition.

Burns (2002: 241) maintains that the trial scene confirms the relevance of art in the struggle, its relation to the politics of the time, and points to the “social and political responsibility of the writer.” Ntshinga and Mandela also presented the trial scene at different occasions while on the Island. *The Island* echoes Mandela’s presentation of Sophocles’ Creon – a vicious and rigid king who, like the apartheid state that he symbolises in the play, does not condone any form of subversion – through a play-within-the-play format. The play concurrently relates the sad trial of Antigone in relation to that of John and Winston. John and Winston compare their defiance with Antigone’s, a Greek legend charged with the offence of burying her (traitorous) brother, Polynices – an act in complete defiance of Creon’s authority. There is a connection between these two settings and situations – that of fourth-century Greek BC when Antigone defied the state, and that of South Africa in the 1970s with John and Winston following suit. In both instances, what is at stake is humanity, honour and existence, or the lack of them.

John and Winston defy the state to protect the little dignity they have left. They also put their necks on the block for the sake of the exploited and humiliated blacks. Antigone also defies Creon’s law to honour her dead brother’s body through proper burial. She believes that God’s law supersedes that of Creon. In both instances, therefore, the law is disobeyed in pursuit of a

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<sup>207</sup> Fugard and the Serpent Players didn’t know much about Robben Island. It was Norman Ntshinga and Welcome Duru’s testimonies (after their release) that exposed the atrocities there. Prior to that, it was all guesswork and rumours.

moral obligation. Man, from time immemorial, has the potential for subversion. His rebellion largely depends on how far he is pushed; and how long he is willing to endure oppression. Defiance, and sometimes uprising, demonstrates man's inborn will to defend and fight for what is right and just; it's apparent whenever a man's dignity and rights are removed.

No law, no matter how firm or punitive, can permanently chain down the innate human quest to break free from shackles of enslavement and tyranny. The actors' metaphysical rebellion in *The Island* demonstrates that man will resist exploitation through expressive protests, even as a last resort, and when all else is lost. Poetry's capacity to stir emotions and so effect protest, defiance, or even violence, cannot be undermined, and the co-creators – and by extension the actors – are aware of this. Plato (trans. 1992) speaks of man's capacity to channel expression in the course of liberation. He observes that poets are *mad*, and poetry is capable of disrupting the Republic; and is therefore a dangerous art.<sup>208</sup>

Aspects of subversion and containment are also manifest in Maponya's *Gangsters* – a more radical and militant play. Masechaba understands the expressive rebellious power of poetry in the struggle. Masechaba, the comrades in *Jika*, and John and Winston refuse to break despite the violent containment measures employed by the regime to curb their excesses and suppress their anti-establishment postures. Mandela, and the other activists, at the Rivonia trial proved that expression is a viable liberationist tool that cannot be taken away, even when all else is contained. There are evident parallels therefore between Winston's defiance of the law during the prison concert and Mandela's explicit attack of the same law during the Rivonia trial<sup>209</sup> Mandela questions the jurisdiction and right of the law to try him, and then pleaded not guilty during the trial: "my lord it is not I, but the government that should be in the dock. I plead not guilty" (Mandela 1996: 72). In the same vein, Winston (as Antigone) also challenges Creon's authority – particularly the law forbidden the burial of Polynices – and speaks to the audience and readers' innate human and moral conscience: "Gods of our fathers! My land! My home! Time waits no longer. I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs" (227).

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<sup>208</sup> The Classical Greek philosopher, Plato, maintains that poetry is a dangerous art that can incite, rally, and scientise, and thus leads to dissent and defiance against the Republic. It was as a result of the need to sustain total authority, and contain and avoid subversion, that the philosopher, Socrates, was executed for his dialectical teaching. Art at the time was censored to avoid dissent statements from reaching the populace. See: Plato, Grube, G.M.A and Reeve, C.D.C (trans.) (1992) *The Republic*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.

<sup>209</sup> The Rivonia trial that led to the imprisonment, and life sentence, of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govem Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Raymond Mhlaba, and other political prisoners, took place between 1963 and 1964. The charges levied against them ranged from recruitment and training of foot-soldiers, conspiracy against the state and communist activities.

Mandela and Winston's protest statements during these trials suggest that it is the state that should be tried for crimes against humanity; it is the regime that has broken human and moral laws. Walter Sisulu, in the same Rivonia trial, also blamed the regime for the dehumanisation and prevalent violence in the country: "the government is responsible for what has happened in the country (Mandela 1996: 72). And Kimathi,<sup>210</sup> in Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, also questions the right of the white government (the colonial court) to try him in his father's land. Kimathi, Mandela, and Sisulu shared the common ideals of liberation, freedom, and the right to one's human and moral obligations – ideals they dedicated themselves to, and were willing to die for. *The Island* makes the case that it is neither Sophocles's Antigone nor Winston that should be cross-examined and sentenced, but the apartheid government and its instruments of compulsion and containment.

The series of reviews of the performances of *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* confirm that the collaborators had produced heart-wrenching protest plays that combined creativity with strong political statements. They were quite aware of the risks involved in the exercise: first, was the limited freedom that black people had to practice their chosen art and profession; and second, interracial limits. Interracial activity and immoral conduct – in the sense of interracial affair, or even gestures on stage – were criminalised. Kani, for instance, received many death threats as well as an assassination attempts for kissing a white woman on the stage during the controversial performance of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* in Cape Town in 1982.<sup>211</sup>

Fugard (1964: 54) recounts that the fear of incarceration and banning compelled the Serpent Players – particularly Kani and Ntshona – to lie low and work underground. He revealed that, unlike the off-Broadway group that was crippled by economic set-up, what they were dealing with was an "official way of life that is one step away from branding our efforts as criminal" (Fugard 1964: 54). Despite the inciting nature of *The Island*, the collaborators did not suffer persecution unlike the other radical groups such as Theatre Council of Natal (1969-1973) and Peoples Educational Theatre (1970-73), "whose members suffered detention, death, or exile" (Kruger 2013: 104). However, the Serpent Players also encountered rough periods.

Fugard and the actors had to perform under very poor conditions. In *The Island*, for instance, the actors used the two-hander technique and devised and used minimal props such as a nail-necklace, buckets, a piece of chalk, wash-rag and blankets. In *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, the actors

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<sup>210</sup> Dedan Kimathi was a historical and revolutionary Mau-Mau general and commander in pre-independence Kenya. He was also a leader of men and contributed selflessly in the struggle for independence.

<sup>211</sup> This singular (immorality) act resulted in half the audience walking out of the theatre. John Kani was also stabbed eleven times after the controversial performance, and was fortunate to have survived.

acted the roles of many people through role-playing and switching. This gives credence to the group's use of the Grotowskian Poor Theatre model. Brook's conception of the Empty Space was also useful as it allowed John and Winston in *The Island* to convert their cell-area into a space for the prison concert and a quarry (see Chapter 3). Pieters (1971: 200) maintains that Fugard's will to survive and work informed his use of few actors in order to travel safely and easily. Financial constraints also weighed down his work; and to survive he had to improvise and utilise the little budget at his disposal (see Chapters 1 and 3). Grotowski's Poor Theatre helped legitimise his minimalist theatre – what Olaiya (2008: 81) calls the cockroach theatre:

The cockroach theatre cannot afford large casts and elaborate sets and stage properties; this then conditions plays with small casts and manageable human and social milieux. The dramaturgy of Fugard incorporates these determined social constraints but however negates them through the device of role-deconstruction and de-totalisation [...].

Jeyifo (in Olaiya 2008: 81) states that Fugard used this kind of theatre to contextualise as well as transcend restrictions. Fugard had used the workshop-based method-acting style during his work with the Circle Players (see Chapter 3). Baxter (2015), in an email response, identified that the workshopping impetus came from Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968); but was quick to note that the experimentation with Grotowski legitimised what had always been part of African performance and storytelling – as part of an oral tradition. This kind of theatre assisted Fugard in transcending and undermining the country's censorship laws. Almost all literary works at the time had to pass through a strict censorship system instituted by the state to gauge, suppress, and strangle politics and propaganda in the arts.<sup>212</sup>

Artists found guilty of contravening state laws were either arrested, warned, monitored or had their works banned or restricted to experimental settings. Fugard, Kani and Ntshona defied all these edicts. In an interview with Raeford Daniel in 1978, Fugard complained of the situation in the country, one affecting audience and artists who had to survive amidst the storm (Daniel 1978: 64). He states that considering the situation, artists had to persevere knowing that they “live in a country with short horizons, with low-ceiling cloud. We've got to let ourselves go as far as we can, knowing that we are walking into a wall” (Daniel 1978: 64).

In *The Island*, the collaborators defied censorship and regulatory state laws by speaking about Robben Island. They refused to be cowed into silence, although the published versions of the play reveal traces of self-censorship. Unlike in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, they are more engaging in the attack of the system. John and Winston's determination to rehearse, perform, and make

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<sup>212</sup> The censorship system was so stringent that even inscriptions on t-shirts were scrutinised.



protest statements during the prison concert, despite the presence of the omnipotent Hodoshe and other wardens, symbolise the co-creators' resolve to produce and perform the play. The dehumanising condition of the prisoners in the play signifies the real condition of the political prisoners incarcerated there. Inhumanly treated, these prisoners held on. Resistance for them was synonymous with power. Buntman (2004: 237) reports that inmates defined their lives by obeying institutional rules and exercised discipline without waiting for the wardens to impose it. Mandela (quoted in Buntman 2004: 237) recalls that the prisoners "seem to be running the prison, not the authorities."

The inmates' perseverance is depicted in *The Island* in John's improvisation by using urine to wipe Winston's injured eye. The resolution to take control of one's life in the prison is also demonstrated in Winston's built-up anger and frustration, and his will to resist the wardens. His "anger and outrage are uncontrollable" (195) and cannot be compared with John's lack of courage and resignation. It is here that we see a binary between the prisoners. Ntshinga, in the notes for *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* and *Die Hodoshe Span*, recalls the pessimism and cowardice of several prisoners; and the fear of Hodoshe and the wardens. This fear is replicated in John's attempts to placate and calm Winston's uncontrollable rage, who calls out to Hodoshe to read his warrant and remember that he was "sentenced to life [...] not bloody Death" (196).

The level of suppression on Robben Island is also represented in the character of Old Harry. Here also, we are confronted with a binary between *consent*, as shown in Harry's acceptance of the system, and *coercion*, as with John and Winston's unwilling adherence to institutional order in the prison. Buntman (2004: 237) also identifies these different behavioural patterns among the inmates. In *The Island*, time, patience, and the brutality in the prison have turned Old Harry into a rock and unfeeling robot – a living dead who has in fact forgotten why he is in prison, whose ideals and conviction are nonexistent. His willing adherence to prison codes suggests the success of the prison's 'reform' in transforming dissent activists.

WINSTON. When you go to the quarry tomorrow, take a good look at Old Harry. Look into his eyes, John. Look at his hands. They've changed him. They've turned him into stone. Watch him work with that chisel and hammer. Twenty perfect blocks of stone every day. Nobody else can do it like him. He loves stone. That's why they are nice to him. He's forgotten himself. He's forgotten everything... why he's here, where he comes from. (220–221)

The essence of the humiliations, robot-like labour, and cruelty on the Island was to transform the prisoners: to make them forget themselves, their ideals, dreams, conviction, and to accept

apartheid and its grip on individual lives. John's broadcasts and news bulletin about "black domination" being chased by "white domination" and "conditions locally remain unchanged" (196) illustrate the cyclical trauma of political prisoners. It is also, according to Ntshinga and Duru's reports, historical. This means of comic relief, a respite from the trauma of existence on the Island, can also be seen in the imaginary bioscope, and in John's one-sided telephone conversation. The make-believe telephone conversation and bioscope are forms of expression in themselves, because they connect the actors with the real outer world, especially with their family and friends. By keeping contact with the real world, they would always be reminded of the reasons they were in jail in the first place.

The rehearsal and performance of *Antigone* is not, therefore, their only escape from the harsh realities of prison life – they had to create their own world without Hodoshe and the wardens. Even the rehearsal and performance is in keeping with the outer world, since Ntshinga, whose experiences are represented, was arrested on the eve of the group's performance of *Antigone*. John and Winston have resigned themselves to their fate, resorting to the only alternative that they have left, performance of Antigone's defiance – itself an act of institutional expression. Buntman (2004: 238) writes that the code of conduct in the prison prescribes that "any action must advance the course of the struggle."

The choice of *Antigone* for the prison concert is a wise and tactical one because it enabled the actors to hit the wardens, as representatives of the state on the Island, with Antigone's defiant words right in the face; aware that it is difficult to effectively revolt or question the authority, except as Antigone and Creone. Nonetheless, a political statement that is padded with moral right and activism is made at the end of the play. Winston (as Antigone) throws caution to the wind by defying the authority on the island, making protest statements, and questioning the man-made laws guiding the state's operation. In this way, he also questions the morality and justification of the apartheid state and its beneficiaries. His defiance is heard through a mix of Antigone's voice with his own:

WINSTON. What lay on the battlefield waiting for Hodoshe to turn rotten, belonged to God. You are only a man Creone. Even as there are laws made by men, so too there are others that come from God. He watches my every transgression even as your spies hide in the bush at night to see who is transgressing your laws. Guilty against God I will not be for any man on this earth. Even without your law, Creone, and the threat of death to whoever defied it, I know I must die... Your threat is nothing to me, Creone. But if I had let my mother's son, a Son of the land, lie there as food for the Carrion fly, Hodoshe, my soul would never have known peace... (226)

Black people at the time were treated as second-class citizens, caged in poor townships, and boxed in matchbox houses and train-like single-men's quarters. These sociopolitical issues, and many others, led to a series of confrontations, strikes, protests, and violent compulsions on the part of the regime, therefore leading to the arrests and imprisonment of many activists, often without trial. The Sharpeville Massacre of March 21 1960, for instance, exemplifies the high-handed nature of state containment. Buntman (2004: 16) writes that state security agents "fatally shot, mostly in the back, sixty-nine people who were protesting the pass laws that limited African residential and employment rights." They also wounded roughly around one-hundred-and-eighty-six (according to official figures), mostly black protesters.<sup>213</sup> The Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976 also revealed the black peoples' (mostly schoolchildren) willpower to go against the state. Buntman (2004: 21) reports that about 15,000 schoolchildren marched on the streets against the teaching of certain subjects in Afrikaans, but unfortunately met with apartheid bullets. This, in a way, "ended the paralysing fear caused by apartheid repression" (Buntman 2004: 21). It led to a serious backlash, as witnessed in the series of demonstrations in the townships, and in violent police containment.

Lodge (1983: 339) reports that the uprising and sustained state containment measures led to a series of sympathetic protests across the country, with a quarter of a million students reported to have boycotted classes, "leaving one thousand dead, and twenty-one thousand prosecuted for related offences by September 1977." The containment process was intensified, such that even peaceful protests were stalled, and protesters murdered or incarcerated.<sup>214</sup> The uprising markedly "produced prisoners, many of whom were sent to Robben Island" (Buntman 2004: 21). In *The Island*, John also makes reference to the 1952 mass passive campaign against the apartheid regime, where over 8,000 people were arrested.<sup>215</sup> A lot of the activists had to go in exile (some were exiled by the state) to avoid incarceration on Robben Island.

The success (or failure) of the state depended on the suppression of radical minds, expression, and dissent. The state fed on the suffering of the oppressed in the same way Hodoshe, on the

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<sup>213</sup> The South African government banned ANC and PAC – political movements that were believed to have fuelled the protest – at the wake of the massacre. These movements, in turn, resorted to armed struggle. See: Fran Lisa, Buntman. (2004) *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.16.

<sup>214</sup> The tension also led to the mass exodus of mostly children and women to countries like Lesotho, Swaziland, and Botswana, and provided the Umkhonto we Sizwe armed group with a mass of saboteurs. See: Lodge, Tom. (1983) *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press. pp.339-40.

<sup>215</sup> The passive protesters sang defiance campaign songs during the protest. The volunteers (including blacks, coloureds and Indians) peacefully protested against the state across the regions in the country. The campaign was characterised by freedom songs, good coordination, and, then mass arrests – with over 8,000 people arrested across the regions.

Island, feeds on the prisoners' misery. During the trial scene, John (as Creon) argues that the success and stability of the state largely depends on its ability to contain and punish defiance, establish and enforce laws, and preserve the legitimacy of the authority. Subversive elements like Winston (as Antigone) must be arrested, answer to the law, and, if found guilty, confined on the Island to be tamed or to rot in jail. Almost on her own, Antigone defies Creon and her fear of death. Her cause is noble and just, although she is unjustly sentenced in the end. She is the epitome of the struggle, and the law that punishes her represents a flawed and insensitive law, the likes that blacks had to live and deal with. John and Winston see their struggle in her eyes: her rare courage, defiance, and unequivocal expressions of humanity, moral obligation, and values. But unlike her, they are not alone, because there is a sense of *collective* struggle in their actions and statements.

“Nyana we Sizwe” (in Xhosa meaning son of the nation/land) is referred to in the last scene of the play as a rallying cry urging the people to rise up and fight. It is also used to stress that the struggle encompasses individual and personal interest. It appears throughout the original script for *Die Hodoshe Span*; which explains why it was mentioned several times during the early performances of the play. The idea of fighting for the good of the land, and its people, sustained many prisoners on Robben Island. It also sustains John and Winston, although the latter sometimes doubts his ideals, and why he is incarcerated to begin with: “why am I here [...] fuck the others [...] fuck our ideals” (221). He also criticises the whole Antigone “legend” during rehearsals, arguing that unlike the fictional Antigone, their struggle and imprisonment are real:

WINSTON. Go to hell, man. Only last night you tell me that this Antigone is a bloody [...] what you call it [...] legend! A Greek one at that. Bloody thing never happened. Not even history! Look, brother, I got no time for bullshit. Fuck legends. Me?... I live my life here! I know why I'm here, and it's history, not legends. I had my chat with a magistrate in Cradock and now I'm here. (210)

The idea of playing another person – be it fictional, legendary or a real figure – was criticised by Plato (trans. 1992), who maintains that what actors imitate is a *copy* of something that is in itself unreliable. Drama is the ‘impersonation’ of individual life, or some aspects of real life, and so it involves elements such as representation or *re*-presentation – what Aristotle (trans. 1998) terms *mimesis*. It is the unreliability of the impersonation of Antigone, who is a *legend* and a copy-of-a-copy that can be disputed, that does not sit quite well with Winston. He seeks a more realistic *representation*, something closer to their own historical experience as victims

of apartheid on the Island. His rejection of the legend can be interpreted in two ways. First, he disputes that Antigone existed in history (she is clearly a fictional figure in Sophocles' play); and second, he rejects the impersonation, especially in the way he protests against dressing up with wigs and breasts as Antigone. Winston exists in history and as such his real-life situation is all that matters to him, and not the depiction of a fictional heroine.

John's conviction and ideals, on the other hand, seems constant. His constancy allows him to reeducate, redirect, and help Winston confront his confusion as to why he is on the Island. He reminds Winston of the apartheid agenda of ridiculing and crushing black ideals and protests. The bond between them (shackled together as cell-mates) allows them to take control of each other; the bond is given a very tough test with the news of John's early release. Historically, the prisoners on Robben Island had "control over each other, above all within organisations, but also among them" (Buntman 2004: 238). Some of the prison's laws and punishments, as in the mimed beach labour at the beginning of the play, were intended to check this prisoner intimacy excesses, although it failed in many instances.

Robben Island had punitive laws and breaking them meant disciplinary action for the inmates – who were sometimes put in solitary confinement. Mandela (1996: 151) narrates how he was confined for simply sneaking in and reading a newspaper, an act in clear contravention of the prison's laws. The security police monitored what prisoners read, or even listened to during visits, in a bid to "identify secret messages" (Buntman 2004: 86). Cell raids were, therefore, common, especially during disputes or hunger strikes (Buntman 2004: 87).<sup>216</sup> The essence of the raids was to confiscate contrabands like newspapers and letters. Political prisoners on the Island (and other prison facilities across the country) were classified into four categories (A-D), with accompanying privileges and rights for each category. The highest category (A), for example, had a right to purchase food and newspapers (from the 1980s). One's classification also determined the number of letters he could send and receive, as well as the frequency and length of visits (Buntman 2004: 117; Dingake 1987: 144-5).

In *The Island*, John laments not having received a letter from home for three month during his one-sided telephone conversation with Sky. The prisoners were allowed to receive a letter every six month; even letters from families had to be censored and decoded. Dingake (1987: 94) states that even this censorship mechanism could not stall the anti-authority activities in

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<sup>216</sup> It was from 1980 that the state acceded to the prisoners' agitation to be allowed the same privileges as normal criminal prisoners, which then it entailed the rights to newspapers. See: Fran Lisa, Buntman. (2004) *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.213.

the prison because the inmates still found a way to bypass the prison censorship, and secretly exchanged notes with other prisoners so as to get information about events in the country.<sup>217</sup> By denying prisoners access to letters (as with John) and newspapers (as with Mandela), the prison authority was cutting them off from families and the events on the mainland. This was aimed at making them forget who they were. In the play, John reveals Hodoshe's project, one aimed at ridiculing them and making them forget who they are:

JOHN. Hodoshe's talk, Winston. That's what he says all the time. What he wants us to say all our lives. Our convictions, our ideals [...] that's what he calls them [...] child's play. Everything we fucking do is 'child's play' [...] when we ran that whole day in the sun and pushed those wheelbarrows, when we cry, when we shit [...] child's play! Look, brother [...] I've had enough. (210)

John and Winston overcome the daily humiliation and daunting challenges and emerge intact. The shame associated with the use of the ridiculing prison uniform and prison cell numbers; being turned into boys; appearing naked before Hodoshe; and the emotional torture of being denied access to families did not discourage them. John says that the wardens (bastards, as he calls them) will try their best to break them at the quarry, and when it doesn't work, they will resort to the emotional torture methods. John reminds Winston of the "last visit of the wives, when they lined up all the men on the other side" and instructed that they "take a good look and say goodbye! Back to the cells" (213). Although they were humiliated, John and Winston do not give in. They endure due to the bond between them and, in the end, the thought of the ideals of the struggle against apartheid helps sustain them.

*The Island* suggests that individual action and defiance are limited, and are often followed by a corresponding containment. The struggle must, however, start at the individual level and the resolve to fight for the people. Collective action therefore depends on the individual's resolve to unite for a common cause. Winston, for example, is on the Island because he participated in a defiance protest, and because he burnt his passbook in front of a police station as an act of defiance against the state. The protest that sees Winston ending up in the docks echoes the 1952 defiance march that also saw over 8,000 protesters ending up behind bars for defying the imposition of the infamous passbook.

John refers to this event (1952 defiance march) when he relates the experience of the Serpent Players, particularly that of Ntshinga – who was arrested in June 1965 just before the group's performance of the reworked version of Sophocles' *Antigone* (see Chapter 2). (Ntshinga later

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<sup>217</sup> Michael Dingake was imprisoned on Robben Island for fifteen years (1966-1981)

performed the play as a prisoner on Robben Island). John recalls the experience and arrest: “Jesus, Winston! June 1965... This man. *Antigone*. In New Brighton. St. Stephen’s Hall. This place was packed man! All the big people. Front row... dignitaries. Shit, those were the days. Georgie was Creone... (202). The performance of *Antigone* at St. Stephen’s Hall had to go on without Ntshinga, who – prior to his arrest – was to act the role of Haemon, despite the tight security.

The transformation system within the four-walls of Robben Island was designed to suppress dissent, radical and terrorist minds. The wardens in the play succeed in transforming the likes of Old Harry into submissive machines (no one cut rocks better than Harry), but cannot tame Winston’s expressive rebellion. High profile prisoners such as Mandela, Kathrada, and Sisulu also survived this transformation process. Winston’s outrage and slide towards violence was uncontainable; as was Mandela’s protest against many of the prison laws. Robben Island was turned into a revolutionary stage – one where expression served a powerful role. Expression was clear, and the state, and its agents in the prison, could not silence the loud and tormented voices. The actors’ desire to speak against the apartheid regime and its many compulsive and cagy laws, to break the conspiracy of silence surrounding their incarceration as well as that of the many other prisoners in the country, and to resist the unjust laws on the Island manifest in the rehearsal and trial scenes of the play.

The trial scene captures the confrontation between the state (as represented by Creon) and the accused and oppressed: Antigone. Comically dressed as Antigone, with tits and wig, Winston reenacts the trial (relating it to their real experiences) and makes his point at the end while the wardens laugh. (The audience are considered to be the wardens during the performance of the play).<sup>218</sup> He questions the legitimacy of the law that imprisons him, confronts the authority, and, tearing off his wig, challenges the audience. He justifies his offence as moral and just: “I go now to my living death, because I honoured those things to which honour belongs” (227). Like Antigone, therefore, Winston’s nationalist and moral resolve is a declaration of war with the apartheid state that imprisons him. He thus represents the other prisoners incarcerated for standing up for their people and land.

John and Winston consider Antigone as an effective symbol of the struggle. By identifying with her, they also share her defiance and transcendence over awful circumstance. Antigone, “like Sisyphus and like the Robben Island prisoners, knows the consequences of her deeds ...

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<sup>218</sup> John Kani and Winston restaged the play in 2006 with the former political prisoners (including Nelson Mandela) as the audience members.

but she hereby comes to know an existential, happy transcendence over tragedy” (Wertheim, in Skordis 2003: 97). In the end, therefore, not even the thought of Hodoshe’s brutality, fear of solitary confinement, or the nightmare of living an eternity on the island, could contain and silence Winston – he also transcends the horror of the situation. Dickey (1987: 51) maintains that one of the crucial threads running through most of Fugard’s plays, which is also utilised in the collaborative work with Kani and Ntshona, has been the “celebration of man’s courage to voice rebellion and pursue significant action in the midst of a void.” This rebellious act is, however, presented differently in his plays. Fugard, Kani and Ntshona rise above the limits of conventional theatre through collaborative-experiments, role construction and deconstruction, stage containment and minimalism (see Chapters 1 and 3).

Winston’s declaration at the end of *The Island* is moving and sympathetic. Purgation sets in, and as audience (readers) we identify with his pain, misery, and despair, as well as that of the many other political inmates that he represents. The last scene suggests that although art, here theatre, does not ideally offer answers, it still has the tendency to contribute in its own way to the struggle for liberation and freedom. Winston’s rare courage and rebellion reveals that the regime can be challenged and that expression can overcome suppression. It also demonstrates that the long grave-like silence in the country can be broken if one doesn’t mind the price one has to pay.

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* demonstrated that commitment was possible; materials could be reworked in theatre; and that even apartheid laws could be manipulated and defied. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is an experiment with individual action – how far a person can go, and what law he can break or manoeuvre. *The Island*, on the other hand, identifies what happens when subversion is contained and ideals are put to the test. Most importantly, the play reveals the strength of conviction at both the individual and collective levels. *The Coat* experiment in 1966 remarkably prepared the ground for radical and immediate experimentations using real materials and individuals; it also proved that it was possible for South African artists to make subversive statements and still survive.

#### **4.5 Restriction, identity, and politics in Fugard’s art**

Fugard’s plays, even the most political ones such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, are replete with paradoxes and have generated substantial debate (see Chapter 2). He is the “most widely published and produced playwright from South Africa” (Kruger 2005: 19). His status extends beyond the shores of his country, and even region, and his many plays, both the solo



and collaborative ones, have earned him an enduring status in the South African, and perhaps world literature, canon. His more “mature plays created a South African idiom that could be national, local and intimate all at once” (Kruger 2005: 19). Walder (2015: 125) maintains that he is “South Africa’s most well known and prolific dramatist.” And as a dramatist, “actor and director, he has been a major influence upon the country’s theatre for the last half century, an achievement that received fitting tribute when a theatre was established in his name in a renovated church hall in the former District 6 in Cape Town in 2010” (Ibid.).

Fugard’s commitment position has been contested over the decades, often without recourse to his declaration that he was not a writer with a political cause (see Chapters 1 and 2). He was more interested in a theatre that could speak across the spectrum, and therefore created plays, sometimes in close collaboration, that survived the times and transcended local, national, and regional concerns.

Since the 1960s his plays have commanded audiences worldwide, although for many years they were premiered in his own country, in marginal, non-mainstream venues, with himself as director and, often, lead actor. His plays reveal a society in which the form of racist ideology known as apartheid created suffering of an intensity that shocked and which is yet depicted as potentially survivable. His is a dark vision of pain that never excludes the possibility of hope and dignity (Walder 2015: 125).

Fugard had always “protested against the prevailing tide of opinion” (Walder 2015: 127). He refused to tailor his art to serve the sole purpose of the revolution. Even his renowned works, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, are not limited to protest, per se. His plays offer a voice to the marginalised and voiceless – blacks, coloureds or whites – in his society. It is through these downtrodden groups that he represents the human and universal conditions. His works “revolved around a few fundamental themes: identity, pain, guilt and survival” (Walder 2015: 126). His painting on a small canvass is a microcosm of the human experience. He pays more attention to the potential and survival of the individual, rather than revolutionary action, such that he is considered by many critics and reviewers as an apolitical artist (see Chapters 1 and 2). Fugard defies strict categorisation as either a political or apolitical writer.

As a member of the underprivileged white class in his society<sup>219</sup> Fugard criticised the existing human condition, although he had hope in the individual’s will to survive. This constitutes an act of protest against the regime and a somewhat rejection of his privileged status. He crossed

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<sup>219</sup> This sector of the population formerly ruled South Africa. See: Dennis Walder (2015) Athol Fugard. In: Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schnierer and Greg Homann (Eds.). (2015) *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary South African Theatre*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 125-143.

the racial line, but unlike white activists such as Ruth First and Joe Slovo, he was careful not to incur the full wrath of the regime. Fugard hardly stood with the masses especially when his ideological view was at stake; he neither accepted white supremacy and racism nor supported the corruption that came with the “new, multiracial and democratic regime in his country.” This is demonstrated in his post-apartheid plays, *Valley Song* (1996), *Sorrows and Rejoicings* (2002) and *Coming Home* (2009) (Walder 2015: 127). Fugard did not, clearly, identify with a single class or race, and this gave him a neutral-playing ground that allowed him to transcend politics, allegiance, and identity.

There are many historical factors which may limit or otherwise propel an artist’s commitment (Hekman 2004: 82). Artists in South Africa were aware of the limitations in the arts, and that, to a certain degree, informed the statements in their works. There were evidently at least two choices: i) write undesirably and get banned, or ii) ignore and bypass the arts and censorship laws in the country, with the attendant risk in mind. Fugard’s choice of a more universal and humanist use of art – with the limitations and restrictions of artists in his country in mind – allowed him to evade censorship and survive. His plays portray his belief in individual action, but action limited by state policies that could make any attempt to find solutions futile. Artists in any context such as that of apartheid usually battle with the thought of the literary direction to take, the content of their works, and their place in history. Their choice determines how far they can go, and what impact their works will make (see Chapter 1).

There is the usual danger of expectation when talking about artists in politics (Hekman 2004: 81). Several factors come into play in the writing and production of works of art. Fugard’s choice of a literary style and scope, one that differed from the radical black approach, was, in a way, informed by the need to get plays performed, not banned. His choice of collaboration ultimately went a long way: *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* was created to survive the apartheid climate. This tactic worked for Grotowski in the past (see Chapters 1 and 3). The limiting forces at play and the drive for writing are usually contradictory, and the artist must deal carefully with them. Fugard’s *Notebooks* (1983) reveals an awareness of these opposing forces: it provides insights and details of his collaboration with black actors, thoughts about the apartheid state, and his work in theatre. It also offers specifics of the material, influences, contexts, characters and settings in his plays. Fugard understood the role of art in the liberation process, and was aware that politics impinge on the creative process; he drew a line between propaganda and art, and urged his actors to let their work speak for them. Coetzee (1992: 370) maintains that

Fugard was aware of the limitations in the country, and thus was moved by the need to put more into reporting what was happening on the ground.

It is normal literary practice to interpret texts differently. Fugard's plays are also received and interpreted differently. Texts are not codes to be broken (Barthes 1968: 186); their meanings often vary, especially when critics defy authorial intention(s). Poststructuralists maintain that it is readers (or, in the case of performances, audiences) that make the text *mean* something, and they do so based on their perceptions, positions in society, experiences, and tastes. Artists are also unconsciously shaped by their stratum and situations, and their perspectives on issues naturally differ, so do their expectations in society. Hence, what the text says (or fails to say) depends largely on the artist, or group of artists, involved in its writing and production. As an artist, Fugard tried to detach from the events in his plays, a method that took a toll on his art, but allowed him to recount events without the bitterness inherent in the works of black artists in the country. It is this that accounts for the major differences in the reception of Fugard and Maponya's plays.

Fugard avoided propaganda and didacticism for literary and, of course, ideological reasons. His detached position does not, however, make his plays much less potent or apolitical. It is clear that his passion about black liberation cannot be compared with that of his black actors since they experienced apartheid directly, but this does not mean that he is much less a committed collaborator. Although the statements in his collaborative plays *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* would have been said differently if he were writing (or devising) the plays alone, he still provided the platform for the actors to work. This in itself is commitment enough. Artists during apartheid (especially from 1960s on) were expected to lead, provide answers and serve as vanguards of the struggle; and so compromise and adaptation were criticised. Fugard wrote contrary to this expectation: for him it was about truthful reporting and not built-up anger and revolutionary call. He worked on his own terms and helped black actors to make sense of the world and events around them more creatively. He believes that art loses potency the moment overt politics is dragged into it.

The influence of Kani and Ntshona (and generally his long work with black actors) tilted his focus towards politics because working with black actors meant recording and detailing bitter black experiences. The accounts in *The Island* are entirely black prison experiences. The long and improvised newspaper scene in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is equally an expression of black life and trauma. Niven (1975: 89) observes that the actors were able to improvise and recreate the events because they were closer to their experiences as black South Africans. *Sizwe Bansi is*

*Dead* and *The Island* are therefore Fugard's most political dramas. They evidently differ from his Port Elizabeth plays and post-Statements plays because of the material, actors and process involved in their creation. The double-edged criticism of Fugard's art is not surprising going by the intricate context and delicate events with which he was dealing (see Chapter 2). The restriction and containment measure in place in his country added to his problems. The post-Sharpeville massacre period was so intense that even white liberals were not spared the wrath of the state. It was around this same period that Fugard returned to the country, and thereafter worked in close collaboration with the Serpent Players.

Smith (1974: 1) praises Fugard's resolve and observes how he, then a young émigré living in London with his wife, Sheila, bought a one-way ticket to South Africa at a time "when many liberal whites sought refuge in Europe from the massive police campaign mounted against all opponents of the regime." The state opposed dissent (in all shades) from artists and activists. It also contained and determined individual thoughts such that several artists were forced into self-censorship. Fugard transcended the constraint and crossed the racial and political line. He however avoided the large-scale insurrection and subversion and refused to channel his art to the sole interest of the revolution. His apparent equivocation is not only tied to the state laws, he also had genuine doubts about the revolutionary 'crude tactics' and 'agitation' for violence and sacrifice. He rejected – almost completely – the idea that every struggle comes at a price, normally resulting in casualties. The theatre was his most practical means of conveying his message. Good art conveys and impacts more on individual and group psyche than rebellion and violence.

Fugard's activism from the early 1960s yielded tremendous results. He developed the Serpent Players, above all Kani and Ntshona, from amateurs to professional actors. Kani and Ntshona became popular, and won a joint Tony Award, as a result of their work with Fugard. Fugard transformed the material they were dealing with, and channelled them towards making great art. In the same vein, he benefited from the engagement in content and form (see Chapter 3). Fugard contributed much to the liberation struggle, although his approach was different and went against to the hopes of the period. He says that he strived "consciously and deliberately for ambiguity of expression because it is superior to singleness of meaning and reflects the nature of life" (Fugard 1983: 183). Critics who mistake his ambiguous intentions with lack of commitment are more likely to miss-out the density, aporias, and unconscious in his plays. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* sparked a fire on the apartheid stage without necessarily

agitating for collective struggle or a rebellion. The plays have their own failings but they have managed to keep the hope alive and promote the belief in the personal is political.

Fugard remained uncommissioned and refused to take orders from a “cultural commissar,” or even suggestions as to what his art should be about (Heywood 2006: 240). Notably, therefore, he retained his literary leaning and ideology, but, also, selflessly contributed to the struggle in numerous other ways. He retained his sense of aesthetics, which can be considered as his own camouflaged way of registering protest. He displayed an unflinching will to work and to add another voice to the protest in his country. The need to survive and work concurrently pushed him into collaborations with black actors (see Chapters 1 and 3). It also enabled him to source materials he was banned access to at the time. Collaboration had been his most resourceful way of making tactical political statements and curing himself of non-commitment guilt. *No-Good Friday*, *Nongogo* and *Tsotsi*, for example, were devised and produced in collaboration with black actors, who served as his conduits into the townships. These early plays detail the lives of oppressed people in the townships: their hopes, dreams and struggle for survival.

Fugard’s concern with the little individuals (the downtrodden members of his society) is also evident in his Port Elizabeth plays, *The Blood Knot*, *Boesman and Lena*, and *Hello and Goodbye*. The plays are about poor whites and coloureds who are also victims of the system – since apartheid was largely capitalist in nature – in one way or the other. The Township plays and Port Elizabeth plays demonstrate Fugard’s sympathy and concern for the less privileged and downtrodden in society. It was in 1963 that he returned to full-time collaboration with the Serpent Players, risking his life and career in the pursuit of something other and greater than himself. His contribution to the struggle through his plays far outweighs the limitations of his liberalism and non-partisan stance. The reception of his plays locally and abroad reveals that he, far more than any playwright in his country or region, succeeded in exposing the events in the country.<sup>220</sup> His plays have an enduring appeal because they do not prioritise politics. They also survived the period precisely due to their veiled, although powerful, protest statements. Fugard had in his own equally effective way stuck his neck out for the apartheid hangman.

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island* and *Statement after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* were successfully performed in established theatres such as Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven; the American Edison Theatre, New York; and Theatre Upstairs, Royal Court, London. Kani and Ntshona had a taste of success in these theatres. The impact of the performances triggered an

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<sup>220</sup> This is evident in the way the Statements plays became international classics and generated so much debate and concern about the events in that little corner of Africa.

urgent call to action and a new wave of discourse on the situation in South Africa. The plays' political impact led the South African cultural *attaché* at the Royal Court, London, to accuse Fugard (and his actor-collaborators) "of creating 'hundreds of enemies' for his country every night" that they were performed (Walder 1984: 77). It was a sheer miracle, therefore, that he was not arrested, banned, or exiled, for his interracial and extra-parliamentary activities. His interracial activities contravened the Group Areas Act; his plays defied censorship laws.

The many performance reviews of the performances of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* at home also reveal that the collaborators had produced political works of great value. The plays generated a lot of arguments and protest among audience (see Chapter 3) and so were equally undesirable and subversive. Fugard had always been a revolutionary artist. His subversion of the usual theatre practice in the country started with his introduction of mixed casts<sup>221</sup> in *No-Good Friday* despite the state laws against interracial activities. In 1961, Fugard and Mokae also acted as the brothers, Morris and Zacharia, in the premier of *Blood Knot*. Fugard's innate rebellious tendencies did not stop at that, because (in 1962) he publicly supported the boycott of South African theatres due to their segregated audiences, thereby leading to a government restriction on him, family, art, and the eventual seizure of his passport in 1967.<sup>222</sup> The Cape Town's Artscape – renamed from the Nico Malan Theatre Centre in 2001 – is an example of the once-segregated theatres (cultural institutions) in South Africa.

Kani compares this once segregated theatre to the "ugly image of the apartheid system," an institution he despised because he was never allowed to perform there (Gwee 2016: 3). It is only in 2016, over twenty years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, that Kani is finally able to direct his solo plays, *Missing* (2014) and *Nothing But the Truth* (2002), there. *Nothing But the Truth* reenacts the perception of some people about the TRC, especially "as an excuse that allowed people who were guilty of crimes against humanity to go free without paying the price" (Ford-Kritzinger 2016: 6).<sup>223</sup> Kani's literary composition skills manifested roughly thirty years after his collaborative efforts – in the early-1970s. This collaborative era, notably, shaped his experimental practice. Fugard was particularly key to Kani's future (now contemporary) practice.

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<sup>221</sup> Fugard starred in the play as Father Higgins (a white priest) for the first time on the South African stage.

<sup>222</sup> Fugard's passport was seized by the South African authorities in 1967 while he was working with the Serpent Players. The seizure was expected to restrict him. In 1971, a public petition helped secure his passport.

<sup>223</sup> John Kani argues that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) "put a Band-Aid around the country" and left questions unanswered and wounds unhealed. Although he supported the commission, he "could not come to terms with the murder of his brother in 1985." Kani said "some part of me is unfulfilled, still waiting for some kind of settlement." See: Nadine, Ford-Kritzinger. (2016) Kani to Grace Artscape. *The New Age*. 8 April. p. 6.

Fugard's postdramatic theatre practices represent a shift away from proscenium arch realism to experimentalism: allowing him to abandon playwriting for play-making; transform form and scope; transcend cultural limits; and pursue expressive protest. Fugard demonstrated that anything could be talked about in the theatre. He laid the solid foundation for the political and resistance statements that came to be a part of the black theatre from the mid 1970s. The next chapter will be concerned with the plays of Maponya which exemplify a more nationalist and resistance black theatre that emerged after the Soweto Uprising.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BLACK DRAMA, RESISTANCE, AND THE PLAYS OF MAISHE MAPONYA – *THE HUNGRY EARTH, GANGSTERS, AND JIKA*

#### 5.1 Preamble

Maponya's plays capture the history and events in his country through the eyes of a so-called victim of apartheid. His place as a black artist, and a doyen of black consciousness in the arts, hampered his achievements and reputation in the South African literary – and theatre – circle despite his recorded feat as a dramatist, director, actor and poet both at home and abroad. The reception (as contained in reviews) of his works abroad reveal that they were considered great theatrical pieces produced despite the limitations and restrictions with which he had to deal – factors which would have otherwise stalled his creativity and potential, or made it impossible for him to operate. The reception of the plays staged abroad varies, but reveal that he depicted the happenings in his country capably and poetically; exposed the effects of the capitalist and corrupt system on migrant workers; and painted the depth of the segregation and colonisation process. The plays were particularly validated for the urgency with which they attended to the crisis in the country.

As performed, the plays creatively generated sympathy and solicited support from audiences abroad (including South Africans of every colour in exile) for their depiction of real township experience (see Chapter 2). Black plays such as *Woza Albert*, *Born in the RSA*, *Asinamali* and *Bopha* have been “marketed and consumed abroad as the authentic” black experience (Kruger 1991:191).<sup>224</sup> The plays were received as testimonies to the anti-apartheid struggle.<sup>225</sup> Amiri Baraka, author of the African American protest play *Dutchman*, states that the plays represent a “blood-filled society staggering towards revolution” (quoted in Kruger 1991: 191).

The value and success of the black plays – such as those listed above – was however unstable compared with plays by the more acknowledged and already canonised Fugard (Kruger 1991: 191). Their success at the time depended on “the performers’ presumed affiliation with a new and integral South African identity and, thus, on the metropolitan cities’ assumption that such a monological, uncontested identity exists” (Ibid.). Kruger believes that this form of reception is also unstable considering the complex nature of metropolitan contexts as well as the period

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<sup>224</sup> Loren Kruger maintains that Maponya's township plays were produced under varied local conditions, and for different occasions and audiences in South Africa. See: Loren, Kruger. (1991) *Apartheid on Display: South Africa Performs for New York. Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies*. 1 (2). pp. 191-208.

<sup>225</sup> Loren Kruger examines the promotion and reception of the plays in metropolitan contexts such as New York, and how they elicited different interpretations from metropolitan audiences (Ibid.).



the plays were staged – a “contradictory sociopolitical dispensation that is hardly postcolonial and in which violent conflicts persists over who gets to determine what and who South Africa is” (Ibid.).

At home in South Africa, the performances of Maponya’s plays had more urgency. The plays were received by embittered black audiences who saw their lives and travails – and possible solutions to their problems – acted out onstage. The performance reviews of the plays reveal that they had didactic, reeducation, and reorientation motives; and successful in the way they promoted agitation and called for unity and discipline in the struggle against apartheid and its structures oppression. The revolutionary import of the plays can be seen in the way the actors used the symbolic black power salute of clenched fists. The nature of the audience determines the acting and impact of plays (see Chapter 3), and political plays usually affect the audiences for which they are intended more, because they portray the mental and physical agonies they experience.

Maponya’s experimental use of the theatre and the role of the Bahumutsi Drama Group in the making of his alternate South African theatre was praised abroad. The “Programme Notes for *The Hungry Earth*” (1981: 1) for example, reveals that the play was praised in West Germany as an “experimental hit” and in London as a “theatrical miracle” (see Chapter 2). *The Hungry Earth*’s spellbinding effects on the audience earned it high praise. Equipped with a knowledge of the Brechtian and Grotowskian methods, and an advanced training in theatre – which was already a rare feat for a South African black artist – Maponya demonstrated that success in the theatre was not the sole preserve of white artists and professionals.

These European and avant-garde influences helped him to experiment on the apartheid stage, making it more revolutionary, political, and ideological. Along with other black visionaries in the Black Consciousness Movement, Maponya believed that South Africa must be changed – and the theatre with it. Theatricalism in *The Hungry Earth* and the dramatist’s call for Mother Afrika to wake up from her slumber before she is raped – a call made in vernacular during the early performances of the play – point towards Maponya’s Brechtian and Marxist leanings<sup>226</sup> (Steadman 1994: xvii). (This was also the inclination of other black visionary artists in South Africa). Maponya’s theatre stood for resistance propaganda and liberation. He upheld a sense of commitment by refusing to self-censor or dilute his anger at the system.

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<sup>226</sup> Brechtian practice of theatre in this context is synonymous with adopting a Marxist leaning and perspective.

Maponya's bid to educate and rally black people follows a "philosophical path in the footsteps of radicals like Marcus Garvey, Franz Fanon, Malcolm X, and, of course, Steve Biko" (Bauer 1990: 15). He refused to collaborate with white artists in the country, except when he directed Maytham (see Chapter 3). He had the requisite training of a true theatre artist. He was able to carve a space for himself in the theatre of the country, although, like many other black artists, his potential and drive were regulated by strict laws: legislation that crippled and criminalised those individuals and groups considered threats to the state. Maponya had to work under stiff conditions, uncertainties, and compulsions. These limiting factors affected his creativity and impact, but also prepared him and gave him a bold and unrelenting spirit to protest, condemn, rebel, defy and sentence the apartheid regime for its atrocities and violations of human rights.

Political and controversial artists such as Ngugi (in Kenya) and Baraka (in America) inspired the largely young and passionate black artists in South Africa. The black artists were after the right political theatre that could best serve their context. One notable parallel between Ngugi, Baraka, and Maponya is that they all changed their names at different points in their careers – Baraka changed his name in 1968 from Everett Leroi James to Imam<sup>227</sup> Amiri Baraka, Ngugi in 1977 from James to Ngugi wa Thiongo<sup>228</sup> and Maponya in 1975 from Isaiah to Maishe<sup>229</sup> Maponya (see Chapter 1). Ngugi and Micere Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (pub. 1976) helped to inspire the making of theatre in Africa in the 1970s. It was significant for its radical content and demystified form, and for its revisitation of Kenya's colonial history, particularly the trial of Dedan Kimathi.<sup>230</sup> Maponya's plays (as will be examined in the chapter) show that he was a black consciousness ideologue and one of the forerunners of the black movement in the arts. It is, therefore, important to discuss the South African black cultural ideology and the emergence and concerns of the black drama of the period.

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<sup>227</sup> Imam(u) is an Arabic name which means "spiritual leader."

<sup>228</sup> A move away from Western influence to the indigenous.

<sup>229</sup> One who conveys a message.

<sup>230</sup> The play was written from 1974–1976 and looked at the past through the eyes of ordinary Kenyan people. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo produced the play in light of misrepresentations of black struggle in Kenyan colonial histories, such as Henderson's *The Hunt for Dedan Kimathi*, Huxley's *A Thing to Love* and Ruark's *Uhuru and Something of Value*. They travelled around the country, interviewed people, particularly the Kurunaini people who knew Kimathi as a child and dedicated *gohamu* (one with a good sense of humour). It was revealed that Kimathi was the hero of the people who had to join the Mau-Mau rebellion because of the situation in Kenya at the time. A lot of the misrepresentations about the history of the struggle and Kimathi's role and personality were also revealed. To the people, he still lived in them and was not dead. Ngugi and Mugo then held public rehearsals, put together the play, and staged it. Spectators from far and wide came to Nairobi to watch the premiere in 1976 and marched out of the theatre and onto the streets singing liberation songs in honour of Kimathi's valour, sacrifice, and dogged quest for *uhuru* (freedom).

## 5.2 Black consciousness

In South Africa, there were many factors that compelled black artists to go all-out against the regime. The Black Consciousness Movement's (henceforth BCM) campaigns for reeducation and mobilisation provided the right platform for artists and activists from the late-1960s. The black theatre became the engine of the cultural group. The killings and random arrests during the Soweto Uprising of 1976, the arrest of Biko in the same year, and his death in detention in 1977 – after what soon became clear was due to police torture and violence – generated great tension and agitation. Biko had been severely beaten while in custody “until he slipped into a coma, received no medical care and then remained naked and shackled while being shipped to Pretoria” (Cottrell 2005: 106-7). The post-Soweto black theatre picked up on this narrative and recreated it in several ways, also reenacting the fates of the other victims of the uprising. Biko (and others) initiated and nurtured this cultural movement that by the end of early-1970s had actually “dug deeper roots in the townships, particularly among university students, who were attracted by the idea of psychological emancipation” (Cottrell 2005: 105).<sup>231</sup>

The news of the uprising was suppressed in places like Robben Island, but filtered-in with the arrest and incarceration of some of the uprising's members (Dingaka 1987: 198-9). The gory event went viral, although – as Foster Don, Haupt Paul and De Beer Maresa (2005: 4) argue – there are a range of perspectives on these events that “may open a more complex and nuanced account of perpetrators of dreadful deeds.” Foster et al. (2005: 4) state that even the ‘victims’ of the apartheid system likely include perpetrators, as seen in the tortures and murders across the spectrum. Joe Mamasela's confession during the TRC hearing reveals that the violence in the country cuts across the contending parties.<sup>232</sup> There are evidently many grey areas when dealing with apartheid narratives, giving rise to questions such as: who offers the account and using what lens, and which perspective(s) is being enforced. These questions also suggested the need for a New Historicist methodology in this thesis.

Fugard's collaborative plays – which are, like black plays, about black experiences – view the victims and/or perpetrators narratives very differently than the dramas of the more nationalist Maponya (see Chapter 4). The possibilities of using theatre as a statement and political space in the country, however, was fuelled by Fugard and his co-creators. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and

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<sup>231</sup> BCM garnered support among black schools at all levels, which also led to more government persecution. See: Robert, C. Cottrell (2005) *South Africa: a State of Apartheid*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers. p. 105.

<sup>232</sup> Joe Mamasela reportedly testified to more than 30 such senseless killings. See: Don, Foster, Paul Haupt and Maresa de Beer (2005) *The Theatre of Violence: narratives of protagonists in the South African conflict*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. p. 4-5.

*The Island* were particularly instrumental. The black playwrights at the time were also greatly influenced by the already ripe BCM ideals emanating from the US. They presented a victims' accounts of events through a black lens, shaped by black cultural perspective(s). BCM was a multifaceted cultural programme – umbrella for a host of black and Africanist consciousness-raising activities. It served as a manifesto for activists on different fronts: in the political arena for Biko –the founder and proponent of the movement in South Africa – and in the arts for artists such as Maponya and Manaka.

Fugard's collaborative plays, which are as much about black experience as other black plays, present the victim, or perpetrator, narratives differently compared to, say, works by the more nationalist Maponya (see Chapter 4). The possibilities of using theatre as a political space in the country, however, started with Fugard and his co-creators. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* ultimately influenced the production of political and radical plays by black artists from the mid-1970s. The black artists at the time were, significantly, influenced by the already ripe BCM ideals. They, therefore, offered a victim account of events through a black lens; shaped by a more cultural perspective. BCM was a multifaceted cultural programme and an umbrella for a host of black and Africanist consciousness-raising activities. It served as a manifesto for activists on different fronts: in the political arena for the likes of Biko – who was the founder and proponent of the movement – and in the arts for artists such as Maponya and Manaka.

The black theatre of the 1970s and 1980s was deeply shaped by the ideals and radical ideas of BCM. The plays produced by black dramatists centred on black experiences, ranging from: the accounts of mine workers in Johannesburg, as in Manaka's *Egoli/city of gold* (perf. 1979, pub. 1980); the experiences of political convicts, as in Ngema's *Asinamali* (perf. 1987); demolition of shanty towns such as Sophiatown, as in Manaka's *Children of Asazi* (perf. 1984 pub. 1997); the trauma of black policemen and operation, as in Mtwa's *Bopha!* (perf. 1986); high-handed security operation, as in Maponya's *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*; strike and arrest, as in Ngema's *Sarafina* (perf 1987). *Sarafina* is a musical drama about the Soweto Uprising (1976) that took the stage (at home and abroad) by storm. These radical black plays all pursue black consciousness ideals. Their impact on their audiences differed, but they all carried the urgency, purpose, and advocacy for change, protesting black life under the heel of the white government.

At both political and cultural fronts, black rights activism had already taken roots in America by the 1970s. After the 1965 Civil Rights Act, the US witnessed “an outburst of plays created under the parameters of what African-American artists denominated black aesthetics” in the

same way black theatre emerged in South Africa with the BCM movement, which reached its peak in the 1970s (Harrero 1991: 272). The black artists in the US were protected by the Civil Rights Act, and did not suffer the same serious setbacks in terms of censorship, banning, and arrests, unlike their counterparts in South Africa who had to deal with those limitations. The US, however, had its own issues of black segregation, inequality, and dehumanisation at the time. American artists Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, and Larry Neal, and South Africans Maishe Mponya and Matsemela Manaka, developed “out of the Black consciousness concept and its artists were, and are, committed towards the same objective: to conscientise black people about their need to take an action in their liberation struggle and that of their country through the recovery of black history and self-affirmation” (Herrero 1991: 273).

Baraka refers to the South African black model as a theatre of victims, one that is mostly anti-Western and anti-establishment in nature (Carlson 1993: 470; MacConachie et al. 2010: 439-40). Piniel V. Shava (in Harrero 1991: 277) compares the black plays that emerged under the black consciousness umbrella in South Africa to the many political plays that “emerged under the Black Power Movement in North America which ‘inculcated a sense of racial pride in the minds of black people.’”

South African BCM artists debated the question of the practical form, medium and language through which they could reach-out to their main audiences at home. They explored stark theatricalism, gumboot dance and traditional oral practices like storytelling, a typical African means of education. Folktales (usually narrated by old women in open village spaces at night) serve as the child’s first school, where he is taught the values and precepts of his society. The narrator of such stories dramatises the stories’ events and often impersonates many characters – including animals. Manaka (1987: 9-10) maintains that “the African artist is not just making art; for [her/]him, art is an extension of self.” Coplan (1985: 237) observes that although the African-American culture had enriched black life in many ways, it did not stop African artists from “creating their own art forms and styles.”

Black artists in Africa use traditional musical accompaniments such as drum and horn during performances. The drum is a cultural symbol that represents rebellion and revolution. It is used in some traditional cultures to pass across messages, entertain, and summon able-bodied men in times of war. The drum is also utilised during gumboot dance (*isicathulo 2*), a unique South African dance that developed from “traditional roots into a working class, urban,

African art form with universal popular appeal” (Osborne 1990: 50).<sup>233</sup> Gumboot dance, as a performance experience or theatricalised dance, was utilised in plays such as Manaka’s *Egoli* and Maponya’s *The Hungry Earth* (both plays about black mine workers). The dance was common at the mines and urban compounds, and served as a form of relief from stress (Osborne 1990; Steadman 1984). It also had military and authoritarian features in light of its relationship with tedious mine work and its performance features – with “military-like regimentation: the line formation, the shouted commands with the leader in control, the basic mark-time beat and even the names of some of the sequences” (Osborn 1990: 66). The dance appears to have developed from ritual, traditional practices, to become a political art form.

South African black artists utilised all these (and more) traditional performance practices and tools because they were common to the audience their works were centred around. *Egoli* and *The Hungry Earth* explored the gumboot dance to demonstrate the urgency of their messages, as well as provide a sense of relief from the tense events onstage. Africanists like Maponya tried to create plays that were closer to traditional African performances. The artists’ motive was to take the theatre to the grassroots and to allow ordinary, uneducated audiences a say in the affairs of their lives and what is presented onstage.

As Biko stated, BCM “seeks to talk to the black man in a language that is his own” (Biko 1970: 30).<sup>234</sup> The movement was tailored towards reeducating and reawakening black people. The use of vernacular in *The Hungry Earth* – in the call for mother Afrika to wake up before she is raped – is a step in that direction. BCM artists developed an alternative tradition whereby language was simplified to reach-out and rally the uneducated black masses in the townships. Osundare argues that simplicity should be the essence of poetry; it is man’s meaning to man; the relationship between man and art should be the same as that between the heels and dusty path.<sup>235</sup> Art becomes more effective if it is delivered in the language of its intended audience. BCM playwrights understood this, as did other people-oriented artists.

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<sup>233</sup> One should note, however, similarities between the South African miners’ *gumboot dance* and African American prison chain gangs’ *step dance*.

<sup>234</sup> Stephen Biko’s article, “We Blacks,” first appeared in the September 1970 issue of the South Africa Student Organisation (SASO) newsletter.

<sup>235</sup> Niyi Osundare is a Nigerian alternative poet, playwright, and literary critic. He wrote against the ivory tower tradition in Nigeria, which had university educated writers such as Wole Soyinka. His “Poetry Is,” which appeared in his collection of poems *Songs of the Market Place* (1983), counteracts the nature of literary composition in Nigeria, and served as a forerunner for the campaign for simplicity in the use of language and imagery in poetry. See: Aderemi, Bamidele. (1995) *The Development of Niyi Osundare’s Poetry: a survey of themes and technique*. In: *Research in African Literatures*. 26 (4). pp. 121-137.

Brook's notion of the empty space and Grotowski's concept of minimalism was not, therefore, entirely new to black South African artists. African performances and storytelling were normally presented without scenery or much costuming, with just a narrator who performs and improvises, a bare space, and an audience (young and old). This is a typical storytelling theatre. But the form of these traditional performances was rudimentary and the characters lacked depth. The characters in *Umongikazi* and *The Hungry Earth* (both written by Maponya) also lack depth and the stories are not complex. It is the actors, however, who – just like in traditional storytelling – develop the characters and roles during performance. Black consciousness artists in the country pursued an amalgamated appropriation of traditional and Western theatrical forms instead of one wholesale adaptation of a new form.

The notion of black drama (or, more generally, African drama) has generated considerable debates. In South Africa there are works by blacks that are clearly not about black aspirations (as benchmarked by the BCM) such as Kente's township musicals and early plays. There are works by whites (in collaboration with blacks) that are about black life and trauma such as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island, Woza Albert!* (Simon, Ngema and Mtwá), and *Born in the RSA* (Simon with a group of black actors). Whites artists such as Lewis Sowden (*The Kimberley Train*), Basil Warner (*Try for White*), and David Herbert (*A Kakamas Greek*) also tackled aspects of apartheid, although their plays were restricted to white areas, and so hardly made it to the black townships.

Maponya was suspicious of the professional and established white artists in the country, and refused to work under them.<sup>236</sup> In the political front, the sympathy and commitments of white liberals – also called leftists – was criticised (Biko 1970: 20).<sup>237</sup> Biko (1970: 21) disputes the claims that liberals have black souls inside them, and as such also “feel the oppression just as acutely as the blacks and therefore should be jointly involved in the black man's struggle for a place under the sun.” Many non-racial organisations and groups at that time were under the guidance and direction of whites. There were, for example, white liberals such as Joe Slovo (1926-1995) and Ruth First (1925-1982) who were active members of the African National Congress (ANC). Liberalism – as an element of the struggle – started in South Africa in 1953 with the founding of the multi-racial Liberal Party (LP) of South Africa by Alan Paton (1903-1988). It operated from 1953 to 1968. In 1959, a second wave was initiated with the founding

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<sup>236</sup> While Maishe Maponya refused to work with white artists in the country, Percy Mtwá and Mbongeni Ngema worked with Barney Simon in the production of plays such as *Woza Albert!* (1981) – a play about the second coming of Christ, this time in apartheid South Africa.

<sup>237</sup> Stephen Biko's “Black Souls in White Skin” first appeared in the August 1970 issue of the SASO newsletter.

of the Progressive Party (PP), which was led by Helen Suzman (1917-2009). And in the arts, the Ikwezi Players (a black group) worked under the direction of Don MacLennan.

There was a claim that black groups were manipulated by white guardians who never really wanted change in the status quo in the first place (Biko 1970: 23). Kani also, at a point in his career, argued that “whites who claim to be on our side are the ones prolonging the liberation struggle” (Kani 1988: 6). At that time Kani believed that whites only condemn the apartheid system and do little to help the blacks since the “freedom of the Black means an end of their comfort and they are not prepared to lose that” (Ibid.).<sup>238</sup> Although the level of activism of the liberals cannot be easily compared with that of the blacks – the tagged victims of apartheid oppression – there are instances where these leftists also crossed the line and had their share of the tragedy. Ruth First was assassinated in 1982 by the apartheid regime using a letter bomb, while she was in exile in Mozambique. Albie Sachs was victim of a similar explosion, also while in exile in Mozambique, in which he lost one of his arms. Michael Lapsley also lost both hands and one eye as a result of the letter bomb that was sent to him while he was in exile in Zimbabwe in 1990.<sup>239</sup>

BCM’s rhetoric of representation gave birth to a breed of radical-minded artists and activists, who were bent on representing themselves. Biko (1970: 23) maintains that collaborations and integration suffered because the whites do “all the talking” and blacks “all the listening.” He argues that while the blacks tried to break the chains of oppression, the liberals merely made deliberate evasive statements. Biko’s (1970: 24) emphasis on speaking with a greater sense of urgency helps to explain Maponya’s rejection of multiracial collaborative practice and his emphatic position that he would only work with whites on his own terms. He wanted to speak while avoiding the culture of white representation which was common practice at the time (Shuenyane 1984: 150). Biko (1970: 230) believed that what was needed for the struggle to succeed was for blacks to speak with their own voices and fight as a group, with everybody represented. The proposal for a collective struggle manifested in the arts and political arena by the image of the clenched-fist raised in high salute.

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<sup>238</sup> John Kani is not specific in his attack of white liberals. Like most blacks, he had a deep-seated prejudice against whites before his work with Athol Fugard, as already reported. Their work together allowed him to see the other face of whites. It cannot be ascertained with certainty, therefore, whether the rift between Kani and Fugard, which started with the *Statements* publication saga in 1974, informed his later criticism of white-black collaboration or integration.

<sup>239</sup> Judge Albie Sachs was one of the most significant contributors to South Africa’s human rights legislation. He returned to South Africa to assist in leading the justice system into a new era. Alan Michael Lapsley was an Anglican priest, social justice activist and member of the ANC. He survived the attack and returned to South Africa in 1992.



The black power salute (drawn from the United State) symbolised strength and collective action and resistance, as witnessed in the country during strikes and protests (Gerhart 1979). Over 20,000 schoolchildren took part in the Soweto Uprising and utilised its force to express their protest (Cottrell 2005: 105). Black artists and activists under apartheid in the 1970s believed that only large-scale insurrection could alter the entrenched race and class hierarchy in South Africa. This was clearly shown in the black plays that made it to the stage. Advocacy for black unity across all fronts was tied to commitment. This particular notion of commitment – with which this thesis is concerned – involves not only participating in strikes or protests, or just speaking with a black voice (whether in the arts or in the political arena), but also conscientisation and representation of the history of the struggle (see Chapter 1).

Biko (1972: 74) believes that black thinking and history was manipulated by the new system of education and missionary activities. Hence, he agitated for a revisitation of the country's history. It is in line with this call that black artists in the country revisited their history and represented themselves by producing on stage and on paper what they considered original black stories that run contrary to the colonial accounts of the country. Biko (1972: 76) stresses the need to rewrite the histories of the “heroes that formed the core of resistance to the white invader.” He argues that the battles need to be represented and that details need to be given as to what really happened. *Maponya* represents aspects of these wars at the beginning of *The Hungry Earth*. The play also reenacts the historical evolution of South Africa from the arrival of the whites, invasion, wars and colonisation process, to apartheid with its capitalist bent. The bid to rehistoricise cultures and people was not peculiar to BCM artists. Ngugi's *I Will Marry When I Want*,<sup>240</sup> for example, depicts the lives of peasant Kenyan workers who were exploited and abused by rich landlords and multinational corporations in Kenya in the 1970s.

### **5.3 South African black theatre and the post-1976 conscientisation campaign**

Generally, South African theatre history is open to “assembly and reassembly” (Kruger 2004: 257) because – like other histories – it is often inconsistent, contradictory, and dynamic. Even the binary (which appears in many of the theatre histories of the country) between ‘apartheid’ and ‘antiapartheid’ or ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ forms is in fact too simplistic. South African

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<sup>240</sup> The play was first written in Kikuyu and titled *Ngaahika Ndeende*. Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Maini used untrained actors (mostly peasant workers) during the public rehearsals and performance. During the open rehearsals, the spectators were allowed (and encouraged) to contribute ideas that would help in shaping the play since it was concerned with the specifics of their lives. The play was highly successful, but eventually led to the arrest and incarceration of Ngugi.

theatre (like the history of the country itself) has resisted totalising and teleologically oriented accounts. Kruger's (2004: 245) claim that South African theatre historians – including herself here – are “partial, to the extent that their investigations is limited to certain periods, forms or languages of performance...” may be true; but then history itself is characterised by apparent interest and limits and therefore hardly comprehensive.<sup>241</sup> The historical sketch in this section is mainly limited to the post-1976 period and the black theatre, the interests of this study.

South African black theatre dates as far back as the 1930s with the black sketches, groups and remarkable works of Herbert Dhlomo, considered as the ‘father’ of black theatre (see Chapter 1).<sup>242</sup> The theatre’s explicit political content can be traced to the 1930s as well with the short-lived but ambitious African National Theatre (ANT; 1936-41) which used local and imported plays – like those of American Eugene O’Neill – to depict South African specifics and global economic and race issues (Kruger 2004: 249). The 1970s – especially from 1976 – marked an important turning point for the drama as a result of the rise in BCM ideologies. This period witnessed a shift from the passive resistance theatre of Fugard to the “Fanonian revolutionary” theatre of Lewis Nkosi (Diala 2006: 237). Workshop ‘71’s *Survival* particularly had an influence on the “antiapartheid testimonial theatre in the late 1970s and 1980s” (Kruger 2004: 250).

Emerging black playwrights (in the 1970s) such as Maponya and Manaka took a hard stance, avoided the go-between nature of white-black collaboration, and spoke for themselves. Their theatre propagated black ideals; proffered solutions to the problems affecting black life; and rallied black people together (Silber 1984: 14). Most of the plays display great bitterness, frustration, and uncontrolled anger at the system. The black theatre provided artists with a platform and a means to breathe fire and brimstone. Maponya and Manaka embody the black anger of the period, and their works were censored, restricted, and banned several times for their inherent radicalism and propaganda. The artists, however, retained their identity and black ideals and asserted their independence and freedom (Fuchs 2002: 176).

Silber (1984: 14) states that radicalism emerged among black artists precisely because black anger and resentment increasingly found a “daring outlet in the theatre of the struggle.” The message was expressed outright, and the theatre appeared to be one of the few alternatives for its expression. Black artists needed a revolutionary theatre that could garner the energy and

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<sup>241</sup> Loren Kruger tried to address this shortcoming in her seminal book *The Drama of South Africa* (2005) – published a year later – by offering a more comprehensive history of South African theatre.

<sup>242</sup> Herbert Dhlomo produced the assimilationist play *The Girl who Killed to Save* (1934) – about the Xhosa cattle killing – as early as the 1930s. It was the first English play by a black playwright to be published.

urgency needed to resist oppression and establish the black man's place under the sun. This black theatre went through a noticeable shift from drama by blacks (plays by blacks, or that are about black people before the Soweto Uprising) to black drama (post-Soweto black plays). Barnett (1983: 241) defines the black drama as dramas by and for black people on "themes of black awareness and liberation." Black drama cropped up because black artists in the 1970s were displeased with the nature of white-black collaboration, especially the manner in which black actors and experiences were exploited by white entrepreneurs and artists.<sup>243</sup>

Black drama (or drama by blacks) began with the Bantu Dramatic Society. The exact date the society was founded remains unresolved – with Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984), Peterson (1990) and Kruger (2005) proffering different dates (see Chapter 1). Generally, it is agreed that Dhlomo founded the society at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg<sup>244</sup> Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984: 141) state that it was "formed with the intention of developing African Dramatic Art" and so provided an opening for educated Africans to develop a theatre of their own (see Chapter 1). Kruger (2005: 12) locates the drama's roots in the black sketches and groups of the early 1930s. Peterson (1990: 38) notes that it started in 1932 with the work of Reverend Father Bernard Hauss, who introduced the blacks he was working with to the pedagogical uses of theatre. Huss produced "numerous religious plays, comedies and dramatisations of Zulu narratives" at the Marianhill Mission School in Durban, where he "profoundly influenced former students such as Vilakazi and the Lucky Stars, who continued to create theatre after having left the mission school" (Hutchison 2004:342).

Huss' initiatives particularly led to the "establishment of the Bantu Men's Social Centre from which the Bantu Dramatic Society and Dhlomo emerged" (Hutchison 2004: 343).<sup>245</sup> The new theatre had a strong European and Christian orientation. Peterson (1990: 38) argues that, apart from instituting racist beliefs and the teaching of Christian or 'civilised' values, the black drama also served a political function, allowing the exploited blacks to appropriate and reformulate its form and content. In a pamphlet published by the British Drama League in

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<sup>243</sup> Ursula Barnett reports that Black Consciousness artists challenged the practice of theatre in South Africa, leading to the condemnation of the popular musical play *Ipi Ntombi*. They argue that this play exemplifies the exploitation of black actors and experiences by white artists during the collaboration process. They also condemned the kind of plays being produced for the consumption of black audiences, and in that regard specifically criticised Kente's entertainment and musical plays. See: Barnett, Ursula A. (1983) *A Vision Of Order: a Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914–1980)*. London: Sinclair Browne. pp. 227–252.

<sup>244</sup> Bantu Men's Social Centre provided a platform for black social and cultural gathering for thirty years. See: Loren, Kruger (2013) *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing, and Building Johannesburg*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 81.

<sup>245</sup> This theatre was also collaboratively improvised and incorporated traditional forms such as song and dance.

1934, the Bantu Dramatic Society asserts that while it would stage “European plays from time to time the aim of the Bantu Dramatic Society is to encourage Bantu playwrights and to develop African dramatic and operatic art” (Hutchison 2004: 345). Despite its very good intention, the society is criticised for paying more attention to European plays than African materials. Dhlomo, however, insisted on Africanist ideas during production, therefore anticipating “many of the radical developments which were to occur under the rubric of the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s” (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1984: 142).

The drama at that time was not regarded as black theatre, and the Society produced plays by blacks and not black drama, as earlier defined. Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984: 143) identify that although very little development was recorded during the 1940s and 1950s, there were notable but irregular moves to create black theatre. Nothing serious happened until the emergence of Gibson Kente’s musical theatre in the 1950s. Kente commanded audiences in the thousands from the rural and metropolitan areas of South Africa, and his musical drama provided relief for the diverse audiences from the misery and burden of life in an oppressive state. Kente’s musicals included *Sikhalo* (1965), *Too Late* (1977), and *Sekunjalo* (1985); and Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa were among his main artists at the time. The audience were primarily attracted to the unique relaxed ambience of Kente’s theatre. The promised splendour of music and entertainment led to the emergence of Dorkay House, which provided a space for the development of black theatre. This period and development led to an accelerating rise in black theatre (see Chapter 1).

Alf Herbert, Solomon Linda, and Ian Bernhardt established the Union Artists<sup>246</sup> (1952-1960s) to protect black artists from exploitation. The group “brought together jazz musicians, theatre practitioners, teachers, artists and writers” (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1984: 143). This union led to the production of *King Kong* in 1959 – a jazz musical promoted by Bernhardt, first performed at Dorkay House, and based on the life and achievements of the heavyweight boxing champion Ezekiel Dlamini. Kente spent his early years directing the group, a process that allowed him to hone his skills as a musical dramatist. *How Long, I Believe* (1974), *Too Late* (1975), *Can You Take* (1977) and *La Duma* (It Thundered; 1978) represent noteworthy transformations of his works from musicals to political plays. Hutchison (2004: 353)

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<sup>246</sup> The complete name of this all black group was Union of South African Artists. Kruger (2013: 81) maintains that the group “managed, despite class and race contradictions, to support black artists, and, in Lewis Nkosi’s view, to fuse ‘African native talent and European discipline and technique’ at the moment when participants of both groups by and large acquiesced to this division of labour.” See: Loren, Kruger (2013) *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing, and Building Johannesburg*. New York: Oxford University Press.

observes that although these plays were not overtly political, they were influenced by BCM ideals.

Apart from works by the Union Artists, Dorkay House also housed plays such as Alan Paton and Krishna Shah's *Sponono* (perf 1963; pub 1965), Ben Satch Masinga's *Back in your own Backyard* (1962)<sup>247</sup> and Cornelius [Corney] Mabaso's *Shaka* (1968). The Dorkay House was also a home to the Phoenix Players, an all-black company. Bernhardt helped to form this black group, which performed plays such as *Isuntu*<sup>248</sup> and *Hello and Goodbye* (1965), which was directed by Barney Simon (Kruger 2005: 132). The vibrant activities at Dorkay House also led to the emergence of the Rehearsal Room which, founded in 1961, housed plays such as Fugard's *The Blood Knot*.<sup>249</sup> The success of *King Kong* particularly led to the formation and finance of the African Music and Drama Association (AMDA) in the early 1960s (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1994: 146). AMDA served as the drama school for the Union of South African Artists.<sup>250</sup> But these black groups flamed-out quite early. Dorkay House and the Phoenix Players, for example, collapsed as a result of "the pressure of the Group Areas Act and growing racial polarisation" (Hutchison 2004: 356).<sup>251</sup> Such group constraints were eventually transcended in the white-black collaborative works of the 1960s.

The 1960s witnessed the rise of black protest dramas in the way white artists such as Fugard, Simon, and MacLennan worked with and helped black actors to express their living conditions and make protest statements. Simon collaborated with Ngema and Mtwana in the production of the well-known *Woza Albert!* Fugard worked with the Serpent Players in the production of *The Coat* in 1966, and then with Kani and Ntshona in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* in 1972 and 1973. Fugard helped in shaping the theatre and laid the foundation for the radical content of the black drama that emerged in the mid-1970s. The Grahamstown-based Ikwezi Players, a group of black actors founded and directed by Don MacLennan in the early 1970s, also contributed in the development of black theatre and had exchanges with Fugard's Serpent Players and the East-London-based Rob Amato's Imitha Players. And with

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<sup>247</sup> Ben "Satch" Masinga's *Back in your own Backyard* was the first all-Zulu jazz musical produced under the auspices of the Union Artists.

<sup>248</sup> *Isuntu* toured Japan as *Meropa* and London as *KwaZulu*. See: David, B. Coplan (1985) *In Township Tonight!* London: Longman. p.220.

<sup>249</sup> Athol Fugard made his first impression on the Johannesburg scene in the late 1950s with the performance of *No-Good Friday* (1958).

<sup>250</sup> This drama school was directed by Ezekiel Mphahlele.

<sup>251</sup> *Phiri* (1972; directed by Barney Simon), an adaptation of Ben Johnson's *Volpone*, was the Phoenix Players' last play. See: Loren, Kruger. (2005) *The Drama of South Africa: plays, pageants, and publics since 1910*. London: Routledge. p. 132.

the emergence of BCM (late 1960s-1970s) several black artists and groups tilted towards black drama and the concern with liberation and conscientisation.

The social upheaval stemming from apartheid and its structures of oppression led to the black consciousness theatre (in the 1970s). Black artists in South Africa vociferously spoke against almost all facets of the apartheid regime, including white-black collaborative practices and the commercial theatre in place. Ultimately, black consciousness became the sole drive and the artists' unrelenting zeal to turn the tables changed the South African problem into a global one, with the township youth regarding "themselves as fighting for the world, for the global restoration of political integrity, not just for South Africa" (Watts 1989: x). It was the youthful activism of this breed of artists that led to the emergence of a literature of combat.<sup>252</sup> Kente's early musical dramas could not contain the political aspirations and assertiveness at the time and a new theatre evolved to cater for it (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1984: 144).

Black plays such as Mthuli ke Shezi's *Shanti* (1973) and Mzwandile Maqina's *Give Us This Day* (1975) exemplify the more political and radical plays that evolved in the 1970s. Kruger (in Kruger 2013: 141) recounts that these plays were labelled by the state as provocative and explosive pieces and "banned after very short runs in university and township venues," and the actors indicted for terrorism. The technique of performance pioneered by Workshop '71's *Survival* – which is in part informed by *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* – informed black plays such as Matsamela Manaka's *Egoli* (1979) and Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* (Kruger 2013: 121).<sup>253</sup> This play-making technique also inspired multiracial plays such as the Market Theatre's *Cincinatti* (1977) and *Born in the RSA* (1985), and Junction Avenue Theatre Company's *Randlords and Rotgut* (1978) and *The Fantastical History of a Useless Man* (1977) (Kruger 2013 121).

From the mid-1970s, the alternative black theatre differed remarkably from the previous model in the way it avoided the overarching influence of Western theatre models and musical distraction; and in addition to how it promoted Africanism and African art, united black people, and restored in them a sense of their history and culture. In terms of form, the theatre developed Dhlomo's indigenous drama tradition and then imbued it with radical and militant content. In order to create a link between the aims of black consciousness in the political and cultural sphere, the artists used cultural means as an expression of their political aspiration.

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<sup>252</sup> Literature of combat was a BCM product. The literature emphasised black identity in South Africa. See: Watts, J. (1989) *Black Writers in South Africa. Towards a Discourse of Liberation*. London: Macmillan.

<sup>253</sup> Like *The Hungry Earth*, *Egoli* was workshopped with actors John Maolusi and Mahonga Silwane under the auspices of Matsamela Manaka's Soyikwa Theatre.

Much of the black drama unavoidably turned didactic (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1984: 148). Ultimately, this resistance theatre<sup>254</sup> replaced the protest model, which turned out to be insufficient because it did not pull its punches. Drama by blacks – alone or in collaboration with whites – before the 1970s depicted black experiences without the required thrust and political impetus that came to be a part of the post-Soweto black theatre. The post-Soweto period is important in the way it ushered in the production of accelerating political and cultural resistance works, and in how radical artists and activists challenged the regime despite the ominous climate.

The newly founded black militancy in the theatre was matched by a corresponding increase in state regulation. The apartheid regime tightened its policies and many artists were banned and persecuted in the process. Black theatre was considered as anti-white and anti-establishment and it met with the state's wrath. Individual artists and radical groups such as Workshop '71 and the People's Experimental Theatre<sup>255</sup> had to contend with stiff state opposition. *Survival* (the last production of Workshop '71 before McLaren's exile) had a revolutionary feel to it in the way it conscientised white spectators and rallied "township audiences as participants in defiance of laws against riotous assembly and seditious speech" (Kavanagh, in Kruger 2005: 157). Workshop '71's use of vernacular and masculine testimony provided the format for the black "theatres in the wake of the Soweto uprising and in the shadow of the emergency in the 1980s" (Kruger 2005: 157).

The post-1976 black groups and artists intensified this practice by tailoring the theatre to the sole service of black interest. In an interview with Carola Luther in 1983, Maponya maintains that the African theatre is synonymous with resistance: the freedom of the black man from colonial, cultural, political and economic shackles (Maponya 1983: 30). He also compares his resistance theatre with theatre of white artists – concluding, however, that he speaks with more force and urgency, which are the needed elements in the black struggle. This binary – white (black testimonials) and black (pure resistance) – has evident loopholes and crossings. Kruger (2004: 253) argues that even the so-called "white theatres" in the country were not in fact "genetically pure."

The post-Soweto black theatre made the pressing black experiences in the townships, mines, compounds and, generally, the rootless migrant labour its primary concerns. The black artists

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<sup>254</sup>This resistance theatre was also called the theatre of the dispossessed, theatre of the fist, or theatre for a purpose.

<sup>255</sup>The People's Experimental Theatre was founded in Lenasia in 1973.

were mainly concerned with these actual experiences (Steadman 1984; Osborne 1990; Jones and Jones 1996; Kruger 2005). Black theatre was conceived as a psychological and political weapon of liberation and adhered to the teachings of Biko and BCM principles. It restaged reconstructed versions of the country's history and culture by looking inwards and presenting events through black artist' perspectives.

Black plays (such as the ones yet to be examined in this chapter) suffered inadequate reviews in their time from reviewers and academicians. Maponya (1995: vii-viii) and Peterson (1990: 47) confirm that the black plays that were staged in the townships suffered from lack of performance reviews because most of the newspaper reviewers were not willing to cover them. Peterson (1990: 47) maintains that even academicians who should have offered critical reviews of the plays neglected them. Most of these plays were also lost "because their authors were banned, imprisoned, or in exile under apartheid"<sup>256</sup> (Kruger 2004: 255). This shows why many of these plays did not survive apartheid and the legislation designed to censor, restrict, and strangle black consciousness. It also partly explains why there are more studies on, say, Fugard than on Maponya (see Chapter 2): there is far less material to be found. That loss has become a major reason for this project.

#### **5.4 Representation and the black voice in *The Hungry Earth***

*The Hungry Earth* is one of the most radical, indicting, and outspoken anti-apartheid pieces to have come out of South Africa. Its representation project follows a black *re*-orientation drive in the footsteps of Biko and the BCM. Maponya overcame stiff laws and trappings that would have hampered the play's production, or even limited its scope. He contended with numerous cultural limitations that were the lot of black artists at the time. His ardent resolve propelled his work in the theatre and allowed him to transform adverse limitations and restriction to his advantage. *The Hungry Earth* was produced in workshop with actors and was first performed with a limited "cast of five at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) Soweto in May 1979" (Maponya 1995: 2). DOCC provided space for many black radical plays. It was a makeshift, impoverished and improvised stage – a poor excuse for a theatre – which lacked basic theatrical facilities when compared to the white theatres across the country. There were no dedicated theatres in the townships, and so black artists resorted to church and community

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<sup>256</sup> The historic and political value of many of these plays was masked. Some of them, as in Can Themba's *The Suit* (1960), were recovered. *The Suit* was adopted and revived by Mutloatse (directed by Simon) at the Market Theatre in 1993. See: Loren, Kruger. (2004) Reassembling South African Theatre History. In: Postlewait, T. (Ed). *Writing and Rewriting National Theatre History*. Iowa: Iowa University Press. p.p. 255-6. Zakes Mda's *The Dying Screams of the Moon* – first written around 1994 – was also recovered and restaged in 2016, directed by John Kani. See: Shanthini, Naidoo (2016) A Present from the Past. *Sunday Times*. 7 August. p. 6.



halls and other venues to stage their plays. But the performances at these makeshift grounds echo Beck's (1973: 61) position that a play can be staged even in the street; Brecht's (1964) use of street scenes; Brook's (1968) empty space practice; and Grotowski's (1968) notion of poverty in theatre.

During the heyday of the post-Soweto black theatre in 1976 Soweto had just two cinemas that catered for the predominantly black population, pointing to the differences in social amenities between townships and the cities. There was also not a single playhouse: performance spaces were at best temporary and sidelined. Even the few halls such as DOCC were under the strict control of the state and difficult to secure. Maponya and his group did not, however, allow the condition of the space, exorbitant cost, and bureaucracy involved in securing it, or the low turnout of township audiences because of the fear of possible raid and arrest, to put them off. Instead, they utilised and reworked Grotowski's poor theatre practice, defying the conditions that would otherwise have made it impossible for the group to produce the play.

*The Hungry Earth* also went abroad despite security threat and the resultant fear of arrest and incarceration. It successfully toured Britain from May to August 1981, and then Switzerland and Germany.<sup>257</sup> This feat in itself is proof that some black artists under apartheid could make it onto the world's stages. The Bahumutsi Drama group, like other anti-apartheid groups in the country, had to contend with state restrictions. They were, for example, compelled to reduce the cast for the play from the original five actors to only three (Maishe Maponya, Dijo Tjabane, and Sydwell Yola) during the British tour.<sup>258</sup> Maponya (1995:2) states that they also faced financial constraints, such that he had to use his own money to support the group's operation and finance its 1981 tour to the United Kingdom because he could not get support despite his advertised appeal. He also argues that he asserted his independence as an artist by not collaborating with white artists in South Africa, or seeking training and direction from white establishments.

In considering Maponya's proclaimed and celebrated independence, there are indeed many grey areas. The first pertains to the question of whether he was really financially independent and did not get financial support. One could ask how a black man under apartheid could finance his own productions. A second grey area is the issue of his artistic independence. He

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<sup>257</sup> It was performed at universities, community centres, fringe theatres and at the Edinburgh Festival, and was praised as a masterpiece, experimental hit and a theatrical miracle. See: Programme Notes for *The Hungry Earth* (1982) *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*. 8 July 1981. p. 8.

<sup>258</sup> They transcended these constraints and had their first commercial performance in South Africa in the Laager at the Market Theatre from January 19, 1982. See: Maishe, Maponya (1995) *Doing Plays for a Change*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press. p. 2.

was, in fact, sponsored by the British Council to attend a theatre workshop in London at a critical stage of his development as an artist. A third grey area, closely related to the preceding one, is his use of Western theatre forms, some of which he appropriated from white artists in the country (see Chapters 1 and 3). A fourth grey area pertains to the nomenclature of collaboration, since he did actually work with white actors and writers, although these collaborations may have been very different than others.’

The idea of *The Hungry Earth* was conceived by Maponya in 1978 and, along with the group, it was experimented with and first presented at the Moravian Church Hall in Diepkloof, despite the security issues involved (Maponya 1995: ii). Maponya states that the audience’s reception and response – from people who were perhaps seeing a serious political play for the first time – compelled him to develop the script. The script was initially a skeletal blueprint for action, informed by the need to survive and work. It was restructured several times by the playwright, so that the complete final version – which was first published in Stephen Gray’s edition of *South Africa Plays* (1993) – is “merely an edited scenario of quite spectacular action” (Steadman 1994: xvi). The play remained unscripted throughout its early run, thus defying the conventional playwriting method that often led to censorship, banning or arrest of the artists (see Chapter 3).

In *The Hungry Earth*, Maponya defied both state restrictions and the theatrical conventions of the period. The characters in the play are presented as part of the resistance, who (along with the playwright) throw stones at and indict the regime at every turn. As in Simon, Mtwa and Ngema’s *Woza Albert!*, the play revisits the history of the struggle by representing significant events through the eyes of its black victims. The notion of ‘victims’ (one particularly emphasised in *Gangsters*) is a loose term. It raises the issue of whether the victims of the apartheid state could also be perpetrators (also see Chapter 4). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) report reveals that the violence in the country cuts across the spectrum (Foster et al. 2005: 4). It identifies the many foot soldiers and guerrilla forces of the liberation movements who also perpetrated horizontal and lateral violence. ‘Horizontal violence’ occurred among many victims, as in the case of *tsotsi* killings, necklace murders, taxi violence, and bitter conflicts among dwellers in the hostels and townships (Foster et al. 2005: 5). ‘Lateral violence,’ on the other hand, affects all the conflicting parties such that perpetrators are simultaneously victims (Ibid.). The term ‘perpetrator’ is complex and ambiguous, and depends on who is telling the story.

*The Hungry Earth* and *Woza Albert* are black accounts of events. The plays utilised Brechtian and Grotowskian models in “representing social relations that revealed the constructedness of political subjectivities” (Mngadi 1996: 202). *The Hungry Earth* offers victims’ account of the effects of apartheid and its structure(s) of capitalist exploitation of the proletariat. It is replete with significant historical events such as the colonial period and the Isandlwana Anglo-Zulu War.<sup>259</sup> The play unapologetically and explicitly condemns apartheid, hence leaving no doubt as to who is to be blamed for the situation depicted (Konecniak 2012: 93). It also traces the pattern of the colonisation process – from the “exploration of the land, exploitation of natural resources and return to the colonial metropole, with the coloniser’s army left behind so as to maintain the white men’s authority over the new land” (Ibid.).

*The Hungry Earth* is a narrative and dramatisation (through short episodic scenes) of misery and death that juxtaposes the tragedy of individual characters with the oppression of the black community during apartheid. The play particularly advocates for collective action as opposed to individual resistance – which is limited and limiting, and more easily contained. The need to rally the masses was essential for the success of the struggle, although BCM activists and artists were fully aware that the struggle had to start with the individual’s resolve to resist for the common good of the people. The “call” for action in the play centres on the individual since it is individuals who make up any collective action. The pronoun (*we*) is used at several points to demonstrate the collective will of the oppressed class to resist capitalist exploitation in the (white-owned) mines and plantations.

The reference to mines, plantations, and rural migrant labour reveals that the playwright is dealing with sociopolitical, economic and historical events. Matlhoko’s account of the Carletonville miners’ failed protest, which is similar to the failed Sharpeville protest, demonstrates the playwright’s concern with revisiting actual events. Black artists at the time accorded keen emphasis to the specifics of the suffering and aspiration of the oppressed class – the most obvious victims of the regime. Usiviko and Beshwana’s enactment of the Sharpeville incident reveals the play’s concern with actual (but heavily filtered) events:

USIVIKO. Hei Beshwana, not here! At the police station. Come, everybody, let us go to the police station.

BESHWANA. Let us throw stones then. We must put up a fight.

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<sup>259</sup>The Anglo-Zulu War of Isandlwana took place on 22 January 1879 and was the first major encounter between the British Empire and the Zulu Kingdom. The Zulus emerged victorious, although not without heavy casualties, thus hindering the first English invasion of the Zulu Kingdom.

*They stop him from throwing stones*

USIVIKO. You are giving them a wrong impression of us. We are not violent people. And this is a peaceful demonstration. Come everybody [...]

*A procession and the burning of passbooks, with a song...*

USIVIKO. The police panicked at the sight of the massed though unarmed innocent black faces

ALL. We were of the same frame of mind [...]

USIVIKO. And they opened fire! [*mimes firing at the protesters as they fall to the ground*]. I went to the funeral and was shocked to see how hungry this earth is, for it had opened to swallow the black man. Those who survived were arrested and charged with incitement to violence under the Police Safety Act [...] Someone somewhere did not understand peaceful and violent. (17–18)

Usiviko and Beshwana's account raises the issue of peaceful versus violent resistance that remains ambiguous. Their accounts of the protest and eventual killings and arrests are apparently one-sided, and reveal the cracks in the glacial front of the parties involved. The work also highlights a mixture of issues such as intent, accident, misinterpretation and omissions (Foster et al. 2005: 6). In a new historicist reading, questions such as the intention of the perpetrators (here the security forces) involved, their prediction of the backlash, and misinterpretations of meaning down a chain of command come to the fore. The duty of a security force in any state is to ensure compliance to state laws, contain excesses, and enforce order. New Historicism requires that the critic listens to both sides – oppressor and oppressed – before establishing a link between the text and other historical elements. The opposing voice is conspicuously absent in this context.

Unlike in *The Hungry Earth*, *The Island* allows the oppressor a rival voice through Creon (a representative of the state). In *Gangsters*, Major Whitebeard also defends (however flawed) the position of the state and emphasises his duty to enforce compliance to the law. The many apartheid laws and measures deployed to check dissent are unarguably high-handed, but laws – as Creon (in *Antigone* and *The Island*) argues – exist to preserve and protect the interest of any state. Creon and Whitebeard's arguments suggest that their actions are in the best interest of the states they represent. They – like the other unheard perpetrators in *The Hungry Earth* – most naturally reject their ascription or labelling as perpetrators of heinous acts. It is far more convenient for third parties – the writer, for example, since he is only reenacting the event – to use the label perpetrators. Foster et al. (2005: 5) note that the TRC hearings reveal that it is “easier for outsiders, observers, analysts, and reporters to wield the term than for actors and agents of the deeds, whether individually or collectively, themselves to own the label.”

The representation of events in *The Hungry Earth* is not only simplistic, and often unjustified, but also unapologetic and bitter. The play adopts a black voice and, most importantly, politics as its sole dimension. The image of the clenched-fist raised high in a black power salute, and the emphasis on collective action, qualifies it as radical and political in BCM terms. This icon of the clenched-fist represents black power and unity in both the arts and politics. It also generated open participation in the early performances of the play. Schechner's participation rule (Innes 1993) states that audience participation can alter the nature of a performance – its rhythm and outcomes. The black audiences that the play was primarily intended for usually reacted with the same thrust and anger whenever the clenched fist image was used during performance.<sup>260</sup> That image still generates similar reactions among black people during protests and performances in South Africa today.

Black resistance forms the backdrop for the action in *The Hungry Earth*. The resistance songs in the play aid in the call for blacks to reflect, rise up, and resist imperialism and capitalism. Songs have the tendency of breaking cultural complexes and language barrier, and awakening the idle, passive mind. The songs in the play are intended to stir the (once heroic) spirit of the defeated blacks so that they can resist exploitation and the imposition of the apartheid state. They are also intended to rekindle the love for the land and the lost enthusiasm to defend the people and culture. The conscientisation and rallying motive is apparent in the way the songs evoke the need for Mother Afrika to wake up before she is raped; nudge blacks to rise up and end the plunder and exploitation of human and natural resources; and agitate for an end to the hungry earth's insatiable longing for black sacrifice. The agitation in the play is not water-down, and therefore counters adaptation, unlike in plays produced by white playwrights that are about the same or similar events.

*The Hungry Earth* condemns the silence and inaction of the oppressed blacks who stand aloof despite the rape of the land. It challenges the evident lack of feeling and passion to defend the land and its people from oppressive laws. The songs query the reluctance of the oppressed to “go into the streets and stop the wars, stop slavery, destroy the prisons, stop detentions, stop the killings, stop selfishness – and apartheid we would end” (3). The play suggests that it was individual selfishness and cowardice that led to the conspiracy of silence in the country. The need to survive and, at best, minimise trouble compelled many blacks to act individually, but not because they lacked feeling. Blacks in that period were aware of the rigid police state and

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<sup>260</sup> Richard Schechner proposed three actor-audience participation rules. They are summarily: i) audience in a space/ living situation, ii) the actors' ability to deal with spectators' reaction, and iii) participation as mutual response. See: Christopher Innes (1993) *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892-1992*. London: Routledge.

its containment measures. This awareness is epitomised in Buntu's conformity in Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. It was regulatory a vital determinant for the conflicting groups' (whites and non-whites) action and inaction. However, the defiance songs in Maponya's play stress that the black people will in time learn what strength, love, and courage is, and will unite to defend the land despite the ominous odds:

ALL. We will sing while we crawl to the mine  
TWO. We will rise up  
ALL. Bleeding through the days of poverty  
THREE. We will fight hard  
ALL. Pulsing in the hot dark ground  
FOUR. We will rise up  
ALL. Dying in the stubborn hungry earth, we will fight hard  
ALL. We will rise up  
And we will sing loud  
Against the hungry earth  
It is our sweat and our blood  
That made Egori what it is today. (3-4)

This song is a mixture of related issues: conscientisation (it is their sweat and blood that made Egori/Johannesburg what it is today), rallying (we shall sing, fight, rise up) and determination (singing out against the hungry earth). It demonstrates both a rise in consciousness and a will to fight. The actors' regained feelings and urgency reflects in the collective will to fight hard and sing loud. The song echoes the growing confidence of the proletariat and the readiness to unite to end the dehumanising living and working conditions of migrant workers. The actors' changing circumstances (finally willing to fight) echoes the turn of events in the country after 1976. The change in tone from conscientisation and rallying to the need for blacks to pick up arms and fight reflects in Beshwana's call:

BESHWANA. Stand up all ye brave of Afrika  
Stand up and get to battle,  
Where our brothers die in numbers  
Afrika you are bewitched  
But our black blood will flow  
To water the tree of our freedom [...]  
Mother Afrika wake up  
And arm yourself,  
Wipe the tears of your brave  
Mother Afrika wake up,  
Lest umlungu rapes you [...]. (7-8)

The reference to the mines and able-bodied rural migrant men who die in the stubborn hungry earth reveals the sad reality of the situation; it is the same men who grease the capitalist

wheels of the system that exploits them. The driving force was survival; Buntu in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and Jonathan in *Gangsters* stress this. The woman's lamentations in the play attest to the anomaly of black survival during apartheid, "Oh how cruel this earth is. Our men never stop dying to feed this hungry earth" (23). She is both an indirect victim of the system (since her husband died digging gold for the white man) and a symbol of other women who lost husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers in the same exploitative capitalist process. Her frenzied call for the men to own up to their responsibilities is crucial because the *woman* in this literature represents a new beginning and rebirth – a dawn of a new era in the struggle. She saliently questions the very heart of the apartheid, capitalist system:

WOMAN. [Hysterical and crying]. Oh, how cruel this earth is. Our men never stop dying to feed this hungry earth. Today I have no place to stay. Today I am a widow. Today my children are fatherless yet I do not know. How many more have vanished like that without the knowledge of immediate relatives? My husband has died digging endlessly for gold which would help to prop up the apartheid system. My man is dead! My man is eaten by the hungry earth! He is dead! (23)

The woman's lamentations raise an important existentialist question: what is the place of God in the affairs of man? Like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, she queries the existence of God who allows and watches the perpetuation of man's inhumanity to fellow men. *The Hungry Earth* was influenced by the absurdist drama and the existentialist ideals of writers such as Beckett, Camus, and Sartre. This influence can be seen in the depiction of the absurdity of the characters' lives. God may be absent the play, but the characters have not lost the determination to resist and fight. Unlike Fugard, Maponya tries to transcend the absurdity of the human condition by allowing his characters to rise up, unite, and advocate for a change in the status quo. This is exemplified in *The Hungry Earth* in the characters' resolve to resist and defy the fetters of the law. The epilogue song indicts the regime and blames the capitalist system for the mass and unaccounted death in the mines:

Where have all our men gone  
They have all gone down into the mines  
They will never return again  
They have been swallowed up by this hungry earth! (24)

Maponya's use of allegorical characters in the play is intended to depict the state of affairs in the country— *Beshwana*: loincloth (suggests black dignity, manliness, and courage); *Sethotho*: imbecile (refers to black cowards, moles and betrayers of the struggle); *Usiviko*: shield (refers to the non-violent defenders of the black cause); *Umlungu*: white colonialists (exploitation of

blacks and the land); *Sizani*: helper (suggests helping one another); *Matlhoko*: suffering (symbolises oppressed and exploited black people). Bearing in mind their allegorical representations, the actors recreated and restaged real experiences and the effects of the system on their lives. They also revisit the contentious history of the people in a bid to offer a black man's account of the events. Matlhoko's narrative suggests that the history of the country did not start in 1488, or even 1699 – that is, when the whites arrived:

MATLHOKO. When this land started giving birth to ugly days, things started going wrong from the moment of dawning and peace went into exile, to become a thing of the wilderness. Yes, we experienced the saddest days of our lives when umlungu first came to these shores called Africa, a total stranger from Europe. We received him kindly. We gave him food. We gave him shelter. We adopted his ideas and his teachings. Then he told us of a god and all black faces were full of smiles. When he said love your neighbour we clapped and cheered for we had a natural love. Suddenly we drifted back suspiciously when he said you must always turn the other cheek when you are slapped. He continued to say love those who misuse you [...] And whilst we were still smiling, he set up laws, organised an army and started digging up the gold and diamonds; and by the time our poor forefathers opened their eyes, umlungu was no more – he had moved to Europe. He has only left his army behind to “take care of the unruly elements that may provoke a revolution.” (5–6)

Matlhoko's narrative is an apt black account of the colonial patterns that led to the imposition of apartheid. His reference to the “land” implies a vast area without boundary. The geography and history of what is South Africa today were “marked by competing and often incompatible representations of the land and its people” (Kruger 2004: 249). The country – like perhaps all former colonies – is a product of imperial mapping. Matlhoko's claim to the land comes close to Caliban's (in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) thought on the “isle” as entirely his inheritance. Their account of the arrival of the so-called foreigner – from the pre-colonial period of relative peace, hospitality of the natives, colonial set-up, and finally domination and containment – is also similar. Ngugi traces a similar pattern in East Africa in his trilogy of *The River Between*, *Weep not Child*, and *A Grain of Wheat*.

South Africa has a long record of displacements at different sites and periods. The San tribe (nomadic hunter-gatherers) roamed the lands as far back as ten thousand years ago (Kruger 2004: 247). They were eventually displaced by the Khoi-Khoi herders and herder-farmers (initially Bantu speakers, later white Dutchmen).<sup>261</sup> The history of the land is one of

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<sup>261</sup> These stories are “recorded in the folktales of the dispossessed bushmen.” See: Loren, Kruger. (2004) *Reassembling South African Theatre History*. In: Postlewait, T. (Ed.). *Writing and Rewriting National Theatre Histories*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press. p. 247.



displacements, settlements, conflicts and wars between settlers and inhabitants (see Chapter 4). The country actually “gained its name and geographical integrity when it became a British commonwealth dominion in 1910 and so achieved (limited) postcolonial status after two and a half centuries of colonisation by the Dutch and later British” (Kruger 2004: 244).

As in a tribunal (a clear Brechtian appropriation), Maponya presents his colonial narrative bit by bit, allowing his audience/readers to harmonise with him or arrive at a decision on the two contending histories (colonial versus alternative black history). He also revisits the label of ‘foreigner’ that has generated debates over time. Identity is a fluid construct that is negotiable. It is often enforced – and also marred – by internal and constructed narratives that we tell ourselves; a “process of knowing that can be and often has been seen as analogous to what happens in nations, the product not only of a sense of shared language, culture, and territory but crucially also of a real or... imagined ancestry” (Walder 2012: 50). It is often our narratives that come to form our sometimes flawed sense of identity and place, even as we are all foreigners and so cannot make any safe claim over a land. The nomenclature of a ‘stranger’ is therefore subject to *play*, negotiations, and *renegotiations*, in the context of societal formation – or acceptance. The absence of a stable *centre* further problematises the concepts of identity and roots.

*The Hungry Earth* also revisits the wars between the so-called sophisticated invaders and the brave inhabitants of the land. The play’s account of what triggered the war and the bravery of the natives who stood up against an overpowering enemy is also one-sided. Beshwana speaks of the battle of spears against guns and recounts how the brave natives “stormed the bullets to protect their motherland from the cruel umlungu. One-two-ten hundreds of our brave never flinched, yet they knew they were heading for death” (7). The emphasis is first on the love for Mother Afrika and then on the fact that this time it is the black man who tells the story. Matlhoko’s narrative of what actually happened during the Isandlwana Anglo-Zulu battle (22 January 1879) is apparently a one-eyed account of the events. His narrative of a Zulu victory centres on the trauma of the events and the sacrifices from the natives who had to defend the land.

Southern Africa – and generally most early cultures and nations – was historically known for territorial conflict, interethnic rivalry, and wars of conquest; so the attempt by the Zulus during the Isandlwana battle to defend their land was not altogether new. There are reports of many wars between the natives (Zulus and Xhosas) and white settlers. Kruger (2004: 247-8), for example, writes that “the Dutch (1652-1806) and the British (1806-1910) regimes in the

Cape clashed with Xhosa, who competed with white settlers for farmland...” In most of these wars, the black people fought mainly with spears, but lost due to the sophisticated and heavy artillery power of the whites (Cottrell 2005: 16-23). The love for the land and its people had always led man to put up resistance against superior adversaries, leading in several cases to conflicts. During the 1730s, the “Khoisan conducted extended guerrilla campaigns against the settlers, while in the 1770s, additional clashes occurred as colonial farmers drove deeper into lands occupied by the Khoisan” (Cottrell 2005: 19).

It was around the 1770s that the enslaved Khoisans (adults, children, elderly) were mandated to carry passes (Cottrell 2005: 19). The passlaw system ensured compliance and regulated the movements of the natives. In *The Hungry Earth*, Usiviko speaks of how this pass system was used to enforce segregation and deny the blacks the right to free movement in the country:

USIVIKO. Most of us were “requested” to produce passes and permits. Those who failed to produce spent two weeks in jail and were deported to their respective home on their release. This is the inhuman and unjust procedure to endorse the unjust laws that make another a stranger in the land of his birth and rob him of his freedom to move wherever he wants. Is freedom not the law of nature? Then what? (14)

The actors’ narrations in the play reveal the personal as well as collective consequence of the pass laws on black life. Their recollections are steeped in historical events that can be verified (or otherwise falsified) by recourse to the varied historical accounts of apartheid. History has always been in a state of flux: ever-shifting and unstable. Plato argues that truth is an abstract idea, therefore there is no ideal truth in the sense of something concrete and verifiable (Plato 1992). It exists only at the level of philosophical contemplation (more in the mind) than in the real or natural world. The question of actual or objective history has thus been challenged by historiographers and new historicists. There is no truth devoid of contradiction and self-centred narration and perspective. *The Hungry Earth* – despite the limit of its proclaimed truth – is replete with historical claims on the effects of the capitalist system on individuals in the mines, hostels, plantations, and compounds. It is a narrative of black experiences during apartheid, told through the voice of a victim of the system, and yet can be as unreliable as any account of events of the period.

Maponya uses the tragedy of individual lives as a microcosm of the tragedy of rural migrant workers and the black community. He bitterly condemns the capitalist and imperialist system that exploits and enslaves migrant labourers. A Marxist-oriented writer, he makes political statements and uses his actors to sensitise and persuade the audience by goading them into

analysing the events presented. In this way, he brings down the wall that separates his actors and the spectators. It was Beck's work with The Living Theatre that significantly established this kind of dramatic practice (see Chapters 1 and 3). Beck's actors engaged the audience and urged them to respond "not just to the performance but also to the corruption of the capitalist, bourgeois society" (Hatlen 1987: 211). Maponya contextualises the experiences of his actors (characters) and does not hide his anger at the capitalist system enslaving and exploiting them in the mines and plantations. He feels it is the duty of writers to reflect the conditions of their societies in their art. This is essential for Marxist criticism because:

The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an interrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. (Sim and Loon 2004:19)

Capitalism classifies this class antagonism into two great and hostile groups – the bourgeoisie and proletariat.<sup>262</sup> – or the group that owns the means of production and the one that sells its labour. Marxists Lukacs and Plekhanov (in Bressler 2002) maintain that capitalism has serious negative effects. Althusser (ibid) emphasises the negative effect(s) of the system and proposes that artists should take up the liberation struggle. He also believes that revolution can be achieved without armed conflict if the proletariat can use artistic expression to revolt and usurp the hegemony of the dominant and oppressive class. Black South African artists accepted the challenge and attempted to reflect as well as speak strongly against the capitalist system. In *The Hungry Earth*, Maponya is particularly pragmatic about the need to change the social and economic structure of the state.

The liberation songs in the play show that change is possible, but only if blacks can unite to oppose the regime. The play emphasises what Maponya sees as the theft, plunder, and exploitation of the land and its human and material resources; and it agitates for an end to the rape of the land. Matlhoko speaks of these thefts: "men and women of Afrika: umlungu has left us secretly. He has taken with him a great wealth of property, our sheep and our cattle, our men and women as servants, gold and silver and all precious stones"(6). The voice of Umlungu (in Zulu, 'white man') is heard this time around, allowing an opposing perspective

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<sup>262</sup> The strict categorisation is the upper (bourgeoisie) class, the middle class, and the proletariat, who form the lower class. There are other sub-classes. Capitalism is, however, concerned with the opposing and hostile bourgeoisie and proletariats.

of the events rather than the usually skewed accounts. However, Umlungu is only given a limited scope to assert his claim over the land (refusing to be labelled a complete foreigner) and then is silenced when it comes to the exploitation and claim that he has robbed the land of precious resources and human capital. The notion of a foreigner boils down to the question of national or cultural identity, which are very problematic terms. How we choose to “identify ourselves depends upon the situation in which we are called upon to do so, since in practice everyone, migrant or not, has more than one identity and even, often, more than one place to call home” (Walder 2012: 57).

Identity – under whatever guise – is a problematic construct in the contemporary world. The mass movement of people across the globe in the last century (or even further back) confirms that we are who we are – devoid of a stable ancestry or territorial claims. Walder (2012: 24) corroborates that these global movements led people to ask the questions “Who am I? Where do I come from?” The question of national identity appears to be common in postcolonial countries, “where national identity has been a more troubled and troubling phenomenon, and far from settled or agreed” (Walder 2012: 57). In *The Hungry Earth*, Umlungu’s claim to the land (as well as its natural resources) can be justified by this contemporary movement. His sense of identity defies the old debate about the politics of location.

*The Hungry Earth* presents us with a proletariat-bourgeoisie conflict and demonstrates that it is born out of the capitalist system of division of labour – one that divides people into groups based on the manner of their production and contribution to the state. Maponya presents these hostile classes as dependent on each other because while the bourgeoisie owns and controls the mines and plantations, the proletariat services them with blood, bones and sweat. This is what Marx in *Das Capital* (1867)<sup>263</sup> calls surplus value of labour. It is for this reason that the protesting miners at Carletonville were forced to return to work. The black workers sell their labour to the whites in order to make ends meet, as seen in how the three child workers at the Doringkop plantation label the Visitor (who also doubles as an investigator) a troublemaker. The majority of the black labourers at the plantation regard their work there as the only available option, yet to the whites seem willing to serve in return for a pittance and to live in the stables. Plantation work is the surest option in their pitiful existences, and they must sell their dignity for a little pay. *The Hungry Earth* presents that despite the piteous work and

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<sup>263</sup>The book was a critique of political economy originally written and published in 1867, and edited by Friedrich Engels.

living conditions of the labourers at the plantation, they are still better off than the miners at Carletonville considering the risk and labour involved.

Usiviko accuses Umlungu of exploiting black labour, “you underpaid us and celebrated when we were starving” (7). He also accuses him of dubiously extorting the natives who exchanged their cattle and sheep for mere mirrors and knives; and for stealing from the land and using black labourers (to till the same land). The actors also narrate how child workers and women are exploited at the Doringkop plantation. The Transkei child labourers are housed in stables; badly fed, with no lunch at all; and have to trek for six miles every day to the sugar field. The actors reveal that the young boys earn mere cents, while the adults earn a few rand – not more than two rand daily for tedious work. The Visitor says that “some women told me they earned R1,10 a day and some men said they earned R2 a day after working nine hours” (10).

Capitalism utilises and exploits human capital. Illovo (the reported owner of the plantation) is a typical example of the bourgeoisie who bask in comfort at the expense of the arduous work of the largely malnourished and exploited labourers. Maponya demonstrates an awareness of the capitalist benefits of imperialism. The reference to the Carletonville mine and Doringkop plantation confirms that he understands the workings of the imperialist and capitalist process whereby one group lives in comfort because others suffer. The condition of life in plantations around the world – Kenya, America and Antigua for example – were the same. The owners of the plantations more or less feed off human labor. Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park* depicts the Antiguan sugar plantation as a source of comfort for its owner and misery for the labourers (Said 1993: 112; Webster 1996: 141; Bello 2013: 207).

Maponya questions the values and principles of the imperialist capitalist system and attempts to turn the tide around through education, mass rallying, and militant action. He also criticises the public morale and the passive (and silent) acceptance of the system; and advocates for the collective will to resist exploitation in the plantations, compounds, and the mines. Maponya is, however, aware of the absurdity of avoiding trouble in the country, as well as the black man’s futile struggle against the regime. In *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, Buntu notes the futility of the black man’s attempt to stay out of trouble, or even achieve anything meaningful at the time. In *The Hungry Earth*, Sethotho emphasises this futility while warning the labourers in the train:

SETHOTHO. Hey, my father lived in the city of gold and he told me there are so many crimes against the law of the white man of which black people might unwittingly be guilty. You will end up in jail if you are found in the

streets of the city and can't produce a pass anytime and anywhere the police demands it – even in the toilet – I tell you, they sometimes hide in there. If you drink too much you may be arrested for over-indulgence in alcohol. Do you know detention without trial? Section 10? Or six? Do you know house arrest? Do you know Robben Island? Makana? My father knows all! (13)

*The Hungry Earth* re-stages the specifics of the colonial process, noting how the black people were looked down upon, offered lowly (menial and domestic) jobs, and branded as “bastards” (12). The blacks in the play are depicted as bus drivers, labourers in plantations, and miners – menial jobs that do not need educational qualifications – compared to the whites who own the mines, plantations, and supervise the blacks as they carry out the risky and arduous work. The play also recounts the sacrifices of black people whose “sweat and bones and blood [...] made Egoli what it is today” (16); but who were, ironically, never allowed to reside or work there without a permit. In the play, Chirango (known as the woman) narrates how she was arrested in the city because she had no permit and “fined R90 or 90 days” (23). She notes that she had to go to jail after her arrest in the city since her husband – who had written to her to join him there – had no money to settle the fine.

Fugard also dealt with these kinds of specifics but was more interested in the depth of the bits and pieces of individual experience than Maponya who was more into the political dimension of art than the artistic representation of events. *The Hungry Earth* is evidently about the cause and effects of things, proving that exploitation only breeds dissent. *Gangsters* protests against the regulatory apartheid policies and highhanded measures of containment that led to the stubborn agitation displayed by Masechaba. The next section deals with this backlash – as dramatised in the conflict between Masechaba (symbol of cultural resistance) and the state's containment of oppositional politics.

### **5.5 A voice from the underground: subversion and containment in *Gangsters***

*Gangsters* premiered at the Market Theatre in 1984 as part of a double-bill with *Dirty Work*, with Maponya as Rasechaba,<sup>264</sup> Maytham as Whitebeared, and Sol Rachilo as Jonathan. The play was restricted by the Director of Publications under the Publications Act of 1974 to the Laager section of the Market Theatre (Maponya 1995: xi; Maponya 1986). As stated earlier in this thesis, the Laager's avant-garde and liberal audiences limited the outreach and political

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<sup>264</sup> Maponya acted the role of Rasechaba (a male poet-activist) in the early run of the play. The name was changed to Masechaba (a female) after the publication of the play. This change marks an important rethinking of gender roles and a “strategic shift from the postmodern European dramaturgy to the indigenous political aesthetic of performance poetry.” See: Anthony, O'Brien (2001) *Against Normalization*. London: Duke University Press. p. 104.

impact of the play. As a result, it could not reach-out to the larger township audience(s) for which it was originally intended. The play's restriction as well as experimental history confirms apartheid's far-reaching influence on the arts. Like other radical black works in the country, Maponya's plays suffered from the circumstances of their production.

In *Gangsters*, Maponya examines the highhanded containment strategies of the South African Security Branch. The early productions of the play opened with the pitiful image of a hooded crucified man, which reminded the audience of the crucifixion of Christ. This religious icon was meant to arouse emotion and stimulate critical thought. In fact it evoked fear during the early run of the play, an effect that was well managed by "stretching the moment of fright and gloom to about three minutes" (Moorosi 1997: 47). The icon was also used to "reorient the theological system with a view to making religion relevant to the aspirations of the black people" (Kavanagh 1985: 149). It is an image of innocence and torture, one similar to that of Prometheus, who was staked to a rock and punished for defying the gods by giving mankind the gift of fire in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*.<sup>265</sup> In *Gangsters*, the image stands for the trial of Masehaba who is tortured and murdered for speaking against the regime. In a joint experiment with Maytham, Maponya narrates and enacts this extrajudicial murder and demonstrates that the voice of the oppressed is so forceful that it can be heard even in death.

*Gangsters* re-enacts the communist activities, arrest, interrogation and controversial murder of Biko in detention. In this regard, the play is also a replay of the tragic fate of the activists who went down in similar manners. Major Whitebeard and Jonathan's (apartheid security force agents) assessment of the wounds on Masehaba's body suggests that Biko's murder is still shrouded in contradictions. Masehaba (poet-activist) is the resurrected image of Biko; her resurrection is informed by the need to listen to Biko's opposing narrative. The play represents the black peoples' best possible guess of what actually happened to Biko inside the dark and gloomy police cell. It also shares with *Catastrophe* – Beckett's play about Havel's imprisonment in a Czech prison – the "political aim of celebrating and vindicating a writer-activist in the hands of an enemy state" (O'Brien 2001: 105). *Gangsters*, however, differs from Beckett's *Catastrophe* and Havel's *Mistake* in the way it utilises the South African cultural milieu – both indigenous and global – to re-negotiate or deconstruct notions of power and representation (O'Brien 2001: 114).

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<sup>265</sup>Prometheus (a Titan) was the god of fire in Greek mythology. Ancient Greece had many gods – with each representing different aspects of Greek life. Zeus served as the head god. The gods lived on the high mountain known as Olympus and were said to interfere in the affairs and destiny of men. The interference of these gods and the conflicts between them are captured in classical dramas such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Euripides' *The Bacchae* and Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*.

*Gangsters* also deconstructs the idea of race by depicting it as a given historical contradiction “that cannot be transcended but must be lived through” (O’Brien 2001: 119). It uses poems as an alternative to the usual (and inciting) liberation songs to best convey its antiessentialist and deconstructive intentions. This is demonstrated in the last poem (recited under the blue light) in the framing of the struggle as a non-racial (white and black; free and unfree) revolutionary action. This *play* of intention(s) can as well cover the nomenclature or labelling of a gangster. *Gangsters* complicates the idea of crime – criminal or political – even further in its mixture of issues such as intent and accident. Even the TRC hearings and report had to deal with these issues (Foster et al. 2005: 6), thereby raising the question of whether one can be a perpetrator by accident. Individual or groups’ subversion and state containment harbour this kind of problematic, such that it is difficult to distinguish liberation movements such as The Azanian People’s Liberation Army – which also carried out attacks on white civilians (Cottrell 2005: 113) – from containment settings like Vlakplaas in terms of violence.<sup>266</sup>

Subversion and containment are recurrent themes in South African anti-apartheid literatures. Subversion here refers to the attempt to disrupt and transform an established social order and its accompanying structures of power, authority and hierarchy. Theatre had always provided a working space for this sort of practice. Shakespeare’s *Lord Chamberlain’s Men*, for example, rebelled against the British state under Queen Elizabeth who, ironically, was a supporter of the theatre (Greenblatt 2005: 2). The revival of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* under the sponsorship of Gelly Meyrick<sup>267</sup> proved that theatre has a potential subversive power. This confirms Plato’s fear, showed in *The Republic*, that poetry possesses the tendency to stir emotions, disrupt order and challenge the authority. Subversion is an innate human feature that appears in the arts and political spaces. The state’s ability to contain subversive activities is often regarded as a demonstration of absolute power.

Subversion and containment are inextricably linked. Individual subversion occurs either as a backlash or is created by the state to lure oppressed and rebellious spirits so as to effectively subdue and punish them as an example. This was the norm from time immemorial. Apartheid South Africa is not altogether different from what Montrose (1989: 21) calls the Tudor-Stuart

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<sup>266</sup> TRC offered amnesty to “acts, omissions and offenses associated with political objectives” under (Section 251, Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act no. 200 of 1993), therefore complicating the differences between subversive political activities and state containment processes. See: Don, Foster, Paul, Haupt. and Meresa de Beer (2005) *The Theatre of Violence: narratives of protagonists in the South African conflict*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. p. 6.

<sup>267</sup> Gelly Meyrick was an officer of the Essex household, which was a very important noble family during the Elizabethan period. See: Greenblatt, Stephen. (2005) *The Greenblatt Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 2.



states such as Britain and Ireland, who also, in many cases, created and contained subversive gestures. The parallels between the contexts are apparent. Plays such as *Gangsters* (and other prison plays) textualise a historical and political background. The play is an indictment of the police's strong-arm techniques leading to the death of the poet-activist. The murder cannot be far detached from the death of Biko under mysterious circumstances – an event that served as the political background of the play. Out of the several cases of deaths in detention during the apartheid regime, only Stephen Biko's and Stanza Bopape's were submitted for consideration during the TRC hearing; the rest (cases of nameless foot soldiers) remain uninvestigated or unknown (Foster et al. 2005: 16).

Johan van der Merwe<sup>268</sup> testified that he ordered the cover-up (like Whitebeard's cover-up of the murder of Masechaba) of the death of Bopape (a *mamelodi* activist) who “died on 12 June 1988 while electric shocks were being administered during interrogation” (Foster et al. 2005: 106). The boundary – if there was any at all – between lawful and unlawful operations carried out by both dissent activists and the regime was blurred at the time. The period of emergency (1985-1986) further complicated the already bad equation. The escalation of violence around the country forced the South African Police force (SAP) – with support from the military – to adopt overzealous containment strategies to crush dissent within or outside the ambit of the law (Johan, in Foster et al. 2005: 105). Johan maintains that the ANC and its allies' escalating unconventional war left SAP with little choice. He argues that strong-arms methods were not part of SAP's authorised operational practice, but the operatives involved in what are termed as human right abuses were trying to curb extreme potential threats (Foster et al. 2005: 106). These varying responses, from the different sides of the struggle, show how all voices are essential for cultural analysis, including that of the oppressor or authority and the oppressed (see Chapter 2).

*Gangsters* was produced during the state of emergency, which recorded the arrests of roughly 40,000 people (mostly black people). These incessant arrests and sometimes callous murders further fuelled the resistance and campaigns in the arts and political arena for an end to the terror in the country. As a Soweto poet-activist, Masechaba<sup>269</sup> symbolises the struggle and the role of artists in the campaign. Her resolve and resistance is, however, eventually contained by Whitebeard and Jonathan who – as state security agents – are required to stifle communist

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<sup>268</sup>General Johan van der Merwe was a former divisional commander of the Northern Transvaal Security Branch in the 1980s who was one of those offered amnesty by TRC. See: Don, Foster, Paul, Haupt and Meresa, de Beer. (2005) *The Theatre of Violence: narratives of protagonists in the South African conflict*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. pp. 106.

<sup>269</sup> In Sotho, Masechaba means mother of the nation.

acts by breaking the back of resistance in accordance with the laws of the land. Johan (in Foster et al. 2005: 118) outlines the roles of the police under the apartheid regime: protect people of all race and creeds; prevent the ANC – and other organisations – from forcefully seizing the country; promote the image of the state; destabilise subversive and terrorist acts (which include preventing the use of limpet mines, landmines and car bombs); and maintain law and order. The force carried out the duties to the letter, such that any form of resistance was regarded as a communist activity and those found guilty of it were arrested and punished.

In *Gangsters*, Masechaba's poems serve as the voice of conscience, which echoes despite the strict police warning and banning orders meant to keep the poet down. The poems are recited intermittently as expressions of the radical black principles of the day. The teachings, ideas, writings, and ideals of principal black figures such as Mandela, Biko, Sobukwe, Luthuli, and Tambo had a huge impact on the radical black minds of the period. The poems also recollect historical events, from the destruction of Sophiatown, to the Soweto Uprising and Sharpeville Massacre. They also criticise the imposition of the Bantu Education system and the severe methods of suppressing opposition. The poet-activist's view of events offers a glimpse into the apartheid system and police operations.

In the prologue, Masechaba criticises the imperialist capitalist system that led to the death of children in the streets. She also condemns the enslavement of black workers and fathers “who die digging the gold they will never smell” (78), thus offering a victim account of the system and its effects on black life. Similarly, she recollects the gradual destruction of Sophiatown – a forced removal that led to the sad displacement of many non-white families: “Sophiatown is no more” and “Gugulethu is no longer ours” (78). Gugulethu was a black township and a hub of cultural activities and crime in Cape Town.<sup>270</sup> Her poems depict the gloomy picture of the many black protesters “buried in Sharpeville” (78). Masechaba dwells on this tragic, although avoidable, incident and criticises the atrocities committed by the state's security police:

MASECHABA. In Sharpeville again  
I see mothers kneeling beside bodies  
Riddled with bullets  
And I mutter to myself  
The ugly brown trucks  
Drives a maneater  
Dressed in ugly brown canvas uniform. (80)

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<sup>270</sup> Gugulethu is a township on the outskirts of greater Cape Town. Like other black townships such as Langa, Nyanga and Sophiatown, its establishment (in 1958) was informed by the Group Areas Act.

There are varied accounts of this unfortunate massacre. Cottrell (2005: 6) reports that many unarmed protesters converged in front of the Sharpeville police station to protest against the imposition of the passbook, often burning their own passbooks as a mark of defiance. In turn, the police first used an aircraft to fly over the protesters, with the hope that they would scurry and disperse. Cottrell reports that neither the aircraft nor the heavily armed policemen moved the crowd. The situation remained like that until Lieutenant Colonel Pienaar showed up. Pienaar's inability to bring order led him to command the 300 policemen at his disposal to charge, later arguing that he had been unable to disperse the crowd: "I did not have any time to do that. I would have liked to" (Cottrell 2005: 8). Pienaar's claim that he did not give the order to shoot (Cottrell 2005: 9) can be interpreted in two ways. First, there was a misinterpretation in the chain of command; second, the policemen showed their fear, in light of the killings of policemen and informers by dissent activists and mobs across the country.<sup>271</sup> While these reasons may be valid, they cannot clear the perpetrators of their crime.

Biko's (1976: 82) discussion of fear as an important determinant of the actions and inactions of the agents of the state gives weight to the latter interpretation.<sup>272</sup> This fear is also replicated in the mammoth crowd, and, as Masechaba states, in the black townships such as Katlehong, Huhudi, and Leandra – which harbour the fear of security police dressed in "ugly brown canvas uniforms behind ugly brown trucks" (80). Masechaba believes that containment strategies are particularly effective with old folks, but cannot tame the resolved and "young determined Azanians" (81). She criticises the trigger-happy method of the police mandated to contain and manage the protest and questions the conscience of the white settlers that kill and exploit black people in the name of settlement, containment and law:

MASECHABA. You puzzle me Mister Gunslinger  
To think you will be strong enough  
To rid your conscience  
Of the days you made our lives ugly  
With torture  
With blood  
With massacre [...]  
Are you really sure  
You understand why you suppress  
Our aspiration  
And our dreams

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<sup>271</sup> On 24 January 1960 (a few weeks to the Sharpeville Massacre), 9 policemen were killed at Cato Manor, Durban, by an angry mob who resisted the raid of illicit liquor. See: Robert, C. Cottrell (2005) *South Africa: a state of apartheid*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers. p. 8.

<sup>272</sup> It is maintained that this inciting article (originally written in 1971, and only appearing in 1976) led to his arrest, torture and eventual death.

Into nightmares...  
 Are you aware of the deeds of your settler-forebears  
 With their wagon-wheels  
 Running  
 And crushing  
 The blooming lives  
 Cuddled with hope  
 You with your brown bombers  
 Ugly as ever  
 Parading the streets  
 Like it is the bush. (80–81)

Masechaba criticises the white settlement process that led to the murder of several natives in order to protect the interests of the new settlers. Her narrative is not however new considering the colonial processes in other former colonies of the world. Her account (mostly through her poems) offers the usual one-eyed perspective of the white settlement and colonial process in South Africa (also see the section on *The Hungry Earth*). It is domineering at this point in the drama. Generally, the interrogation scenes offer her – or Rasechaba in the first version of the play – moments of victory over her jailers. O’Brien (2001: 115) maintains that the scenes are important for their “powerful lines” and “political effectiveness.”

Masechaba’s encounter with Whitebeared and Jonathan at a later point in the play introduces us to an opposing voice: that of the state (colonial) representative. The image of the crucified and hooded activist (ironically symbolising a terrorist Christ) at the beginning of the play has a binding effect on audience and generates so much sympathy for the poet such that her voice dominates that of her oppressor. Jonathan – on the other hand – is a puppet on a string, whose intermediate voice regarding the events (he is a part of) is never heard. He is torn between his conscience and playing the stooge, a position that will ensure his preservation from want at a time when individual survival and place within a culture largely depended on the hard choices of, simply put, being with or against the regime. This explains why he is manipulated by Whitebeared, and why Masechaba’s bitter narrative of how the whites dispossessed the blacks of their lands and shared them among themselves nearly moved him to abandon the imperialist cause.

**MASECHABA.** In the beginning it was you and me. The land belonged to us. We tilled it. We shared everything equally. Then came the white man with his own thoughts. He put us asunder; put us against each other and while this was going on, he fenced us around and then moved about freely declaring our land his land – no man’s land. Did you not see [sic] those boards along the road as you came from home this morning, saying: ‘in front of you, behind you and all around you is a Rand Mines property?’ Have you bothered to ask yourself ‘where did Rand Mines get our land from? Who did he buy it from? He took it with a gun. Do you know what

the white man is doing today? He is sharing every little bit of our soil equally with his own brother. (97)

Masechaba's persuasion of Jonathan would have worked if not for the financial benefit he has to reconsider. Whitebeared understands this monetary weakness and uses it to tame Jonathan. There are clear loopholes in Masechaba's wild claims. First, her claim that the lands belonged to the blacks and was shared and tilled equally can be faulted on the grounds that ethnic tribes engaged in battles over land and authority well before the contentious white settlement. The early displacement of the San tribe (who had roamed the lands for over ten thousand years) is an apt example. Under Shaka's rule (ca. 1785-1828), the Zulus caused monumental havoc on neighbouring communities and peoples, seizing lands and displacing inhabitants. This created a sad "refuge crisis (*mfecane*, or scattering) that destabilised areas from Mosheosho's Sotho kingdom to the plains of Kenya" (Kruger 2004: 248). The dominant tribes grabbed lands with spheres in the same way that they were *retaken* (by the later settlers) "with guns." Second, but related to the preceding one, is the claim that the white man "put us asunder; put us against each other" (97). This is also flawed because African tribes (like many other early societies) have always fought each other over lands and authority. Apartheid did, however, sow seeds of division; the homeland system flows directly from that plan.

The homeland system was designed to deny political and other related rights to certain groups (mostly non-whites) inside South Africa, as well as to "speed up the division of the country in to segregated regions, white and black" (Cottrell 2005: 92-3). Segregation was the heart of the apartheid system. South Africa was divided along racial and ethnic lines. There were marked differences educationally, politically, economically, and socially between the groups.<sup>273</sup> The artificial borders in the country suggested (and unfortunately still do) not only designated areas of residence for each group, but also instituted differences in education, with the Bantu Education Act of 1953 designed to justify, institutionalise and enforce it at the schools level. It was also framed to deny black people (then called Bantus) proper education, teach compliance, and instil intellectual control. Masechaba criticises these hidden motives, especially the use of education as a control mechanism.

Masechaba considers the Bantu Education system as the state's way of extending segregation to the schools, hence enforcing a separate curriculum as well as educational facilities. Black people under apartheid were denied a good education, such that even missionary schools

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<sup>273</sup> The socio-economic aspect of this difference manifested in the provisions of social amenities and availability (or non-availability) of economic opportunities.

were forced to close down due to lack of government funding and support. This finally led to the boycott of the system from 1954 to 1955 and, ultimately, the Soweto Uprising of 16 June 1976 (Jibril 2015: 61). The Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974 aggravated the situation when it made it law that Afrikaans and English should be used as the languages of instruction in schools. This led to a series of protests by young high school pupils in Soweto (Buntman 2004: 21). BCM activists under Biko's leadership, and other ringleaders of the resistance groups, played an active part in fuelling the discontent that led to the uprising. Biko was later arrested, leading to his trial and death in 1977. Law, it can be argued, is an imperative aspect of any organised and sane society; it is the duty of any government to therefore enforce it irrespective of who is involved in breaking it or whose interest is affected in the process. In the case of apartheid legislation, however, human rights are accorded to a privileged few.

Apartheid's stance on subversion and acts of violence was unambiguous. Agitators are restrained in order to curtail further breach of the law. In Maponya's play, security agents such as Whitebeard and Jonathan are charged under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 (amended: 1967; 1972), Terrorism Act of 1962, Criminal Law Act of 1953, and Public Safety Act of 1953 with curtailing hostility and provocation; ensuring public safety; breaking protests; and containing rebellious gestures. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1956, for example, "permitted detention without trial for 180 days (up from the 90 days permitted in 1963)" (Kruger 2013: 96). The Suppression of Communism Act of 1967 notably "broadened the terms of conspiracy and 'racial hostility' further and allowed police in the special Bureau of State Security to detain suspects indefinitely without charge or notification" (Ibid.). Masechaba's inciting poetry contravenes the racial hostility clause and is regarded by the security branch as capable of instigating rebellion and disrupting state activities. Aware of the efficacy of poetry to stir emotions and incite violent action, Whitebeard warns:

WHITEBEARD. So what interests us is not so much the creative process as the effect that your poetry had on ordinary people: people who don't have the insight and understanding that you and I have, and therefore there can be no doubt Miss Masechaba that your poems have made a lot of people feel angry, even violent and it is my job to put a stop to that sort of thing.  
(85)

Whitebeard's main duty is to warn against dissent (as seen in his friendly advice to the poet), impose and maintain law and order, and repress rebellious spirits using any means necessary. He speaks for the authority in the same way that Masechaba speaks for the oppressed groups. Whitebeard and Masechaba cannot see eye-to-eye because they speak for and represent different and opposing groups. Their conflicting allegiances open up the debate as to who is

to be blamed for the violence that ensues. This was the case in the country during the period of emergency. Whitebeard maintains that Masechaba's poems ridicule the Afrikaners and police force. The poems also defy the Publication Act of 1975 because of their undesirable political and inciting contents. The Act (as amended in 1978) gave censorship boards across South Africa the power to ban all questionable works and punish artists who produce anti-apartheid works. Whitebeard identifies seminal areas in the poems where Masechaba has contravened the provisions of the act:

WHITEBEARD. Can't you see that you are inciting people to violence with your poetry. When you use lines like 'the barbed wire mentality of a good-looking Afrikaner' you are insulting the Afrikaaner people. When you write about the "trigger-happy fingers" it shouldn't surprise you when the people respond by raising their fists in the air and shouting "Amandla Ngawethu!" (87)

Whitebeard emphasises allegiance to state laws rather than to a group of people or a common cause. He speaks of the law in the same fashion that John (as Creon) in *The Island* sees it as the protector of the state. He believes that laws must exist in a civilised society, and must also be obeyed. He does not care who makes the law, or whether it is a just one or not, because his job is to enforce it (devoid of any party allegiance); and in the process defend his heritage. To defend his family – and so his race – he is prepared to go all the way: "but Miss Masechaba, in order to protect that little boy from you and your Marxist friends, to stop your violence and terror from changing that little boy's joy to tears, these hands will do anything [hits her with both hands], anything! And the blood will wash off very easily" (104). His cherished heritage and family are more important than the group and culture Masechaba agitates for, in the same way that his white family do not matter to the black agitators who promote violence. In these times, there were reported cases of "attacks on black councillors, police and collaborators and the increase of necklace killing" perpetrated by the resistance forces (Foster et al. 2005; 33).<sup>274</sup>

Aware of these potential threats, Whitebeard is willing to commit any act even if it means going outside the ambit of the law to protect his most cherished treasures of family and heritage. In the end, it is not just about the defence of the law, but also about the defence of a cherished way of life. As a father with the wherewithal to curtail violence, he goes the extra step to stop the fire from burning his hands. As Masechaba states shortly after Whitebeard's

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<sup>274</sup> These series of attacks continued until the unbanning of many organisations on 2 February 1990, the release of Mandela on 11 February, and the beginnings of political negotiations. See: Don, Foster, Paul, Haupt and Meresa, de Beer. (2005) *The Theatre of Violence: narratives of protagonists in the South African conflict*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. p. 33.

declarations, every individual, whether black or white, oppressor or oppressed, free or unfree, has equal right. She, however, condemns the way Whitebeard (symbolising the apartheid state) has used his unchecked powers to crush the hopes of one group in order to sustain the security and luxury of another. She honours the resolve of the oppressed blacks and suggests that their resistance is a natural thing – a backlash of centuries of mass murder and servitude. Maponya considers the impoverishment in the violence-ridden townships and the class structure as the main roots of the struggle and violence in the country. He believes that it occurs because a certain group is bent on suppressing another so as to maintain its hold on the wealth and affairs of the state. Masechaba thus exonerates black people from their violence and maintains that it is the draconian and stringent laws that account for the poverty and resultant violence:

MASECHABA. I am not responsible for the creation of the squatters. I am not responsible for the starvation of millions of children because their parents have been forced into arid homelands. I did not create the humiliating laws, and I never created the racial barriers in this land. Who do you expect me to blame when life becomes unfair to a black soul? (85)

Masechaba believes that defiance is the only obvious and necessary alternative for the black people. Black artists – from the 1970s on – wrote about black experiences in the township, mines and rural migrant labour; they did not chase rats while their houses were on fire (see earlier sections on black consciousness). Masechaba symbolises those black artists who defiantly threw stones at the authorities. She chooses the resistance poetry form to protest the killings and poverty.

Achebe (1975: 262) maintains that African writers should write about the actual colonial condition, instead of themes that do not directly affect the people. Masechaba argues that it is the lived experiences of writers that shape their perspective(s) and so determine their choice of subject, rejecting Whitebeard's suggestion as to what her poetry should be about:

WHITEBEARD. I don't know why you choose to depress them by concentrating on the negative aspects of their life. Why don't you cheer them up by talking about the good things that surround them – by telling them of the natural beauty that surrounds them [...]

MASECHABA. If that poet of yours lived in Alexandra he would write about the stagnant pools of water and the smell of shit filtering through the streets at night because there is no drainage system! He would write about the buckets of faeces placed in the streets at night as if the families are bragging which family eats more to shit more! (86)



Masechaba blames the state and its numerous hard-hitting laws for the dehumanisation of the blacks in the country. She also indicts and compares Botha to Hitler and argues that he should be brought to trial for his government's highest level of inhumanity to man.<sup>275</sup> The harsh laws directly affected blacks to the point that artists had to work underground to survive. Masechaba narrates that she was a victim of a night raid – a usual security strategy employed to track down and arrest agitators. She recounts that the raid forced her to destroy her manuscript and notes, hard evidence that could be used against her by the police. Her arrest, detention and torture reveal the desperation and insensitivity of the police. The need to contain this poet forces Whitebeard (in his view) to order Jonathan to use any means necessary: “Jonathan, will you deal with Masechaba as you deem fit and if you have to teach her that electricity has other uses than providing light you must do it” (105). The use of electric shock for interrogation appears to be a common practice in the station where the poet is to be tamed. It is similar to the interrogation style that led to the untimely death of Stanza Bopape (Foster et al. 2005: 106). Jonathan's interrogation style leads to the death of the poet (although his actions may have been intended to subdue and not murder her). The move to conceal the actual cause of death reveals that torture and coercion are an integral part of the interrogation process. It also shows that the individual's resolve is strong, such that it is hard to bend or break it.

This individual resilience is depicted in *The Island* in the prisoners' dogged resolve in the face of clear doom. This sort of prison or cell experience is also staged in Workshop '71's *Survival* and Ngema's *Asinamali*. It is a theme in plays like Robert Bolt's *A Man for all Seasons* (1960), about the execution of Thomas More in detention and in Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow* (1954), which is set in Dublin's Mountjoy prison. Generally, prison plays share the common themes of captivity; violent containment; intense emotion of convicts and jailers/interrogators; unjust arrests; and suppression – which is often the real objective, despite the death of the prisoners.

Masechaba's torture and death in the gloomy police cell and the accompanied attempt to hide her actual cause of death relates it to the political background of the play – the death of Biko in a similar circumstance. Like Biko's death, Masechaba's is shrouded in secrecy and contradictions. The attempts by the criminal duo in the play to offer a justifiable cause of death reveals that there are different narratives to such kinds of unspeakable deeds:

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<sup>275</sup> P.W. Botha, famously known as “big crocodile,” ruled South Africa from 1978 to 1989. As the president, he authorised the imposition of many laws that contained and exploited non-whites. He also spoke against black majority rule and communism.

WHITEBEARD. What will you tell the court?

JONATHAN. I will say she threw herself out of the window in an attempt to escape [...]

WHITEBEARD. No good. The interrogation room is on the ground floor!

JONATHAN. All right, I'll say she was on a hunger strike since we took her in

WHITEBEARD. No! Jonathan when last did you check your record books? We gave that excuse some time ago

JONATHAN. [still panicking]. How about saying she hanged herself with her gown-strap, that's right! [excited]. Suicide!

WHITEBEARD. Not convincing. There's nothing in the cell to hang herself from!

JONATHAN. [a bit confused]. She slipped on a piece of soap..!

WHITEBEARD. You can't fool the public with that one again! (108)

The different crime narratives; reference to the "pathologist" who will be invited to examine and manipulate the cause of the poet's death; and the use of "calamine" to conceal all visible wounds expose the conspiracy associated with the death of the poet-activist, and by extension that of Biko (110). As a woman, Masechaba's devotion to the cause appears atypical: she refuses to bend despite threats, the banning order, and imminent doom. She states: "yes, they can ban me here but they won't ban the spirit of the nation. For as long as these millions of people are still thirsty the march will continue. I respect the convictions of my people and they respect my beliefs. I will help them carry the cross" (96). As the outspoken spokesperson of the black resistance, like the dramatist himself, she defies the regime despite humiliation and torture.

Masechaba's resolve actually gets stronger with the interrogations. She refuses to give in or reveal the meaning of the inscription (LMA) as scribbled down in one of her books that was found with four terrorists, alongside AK47s, scorpion and limpet mines, T5s and T7s and other deadly "instruments of terror that were going to sow discord and violence" among the people (102). She survives the series of interrogations and torture, such that even in death her poetry echoes and lives after her. Her ardent resolve to carry the cross all the way for the sake of her people demonstrates that there are Azanians like her who cannot be restrained or silenced by the four walls of the interrogation rooms. John and Winston in *The Island* also display this kind of conviction by refusing to be contained by the walls of Robben Island. But while John and Winston protest, Masechaba and the comrades in *Jika* resist.

Resistance and conviction are central in *Gangsters* in the way Masechaba (like Maponya and Biko) defies all the threats to her life for a cause in which she zealously believes. Maponya

thus shows himself a devoted resistance poet. There are many parallels between this character and himself: they both deliver their poems in public; Maponya acted in the play's early run as Rasechaba (then a male poet), establishing the obvious connection between his role as a poet and that of his character. Masechaba (or Rasechaba) therefore echoes not just Biko but also Maponya himself. The playwright, with critical input from Maytham, served as the play's conduit and creative agent. As observed earlier, Masechaba's poems are creatively utilised to replace the liberation songs used in *The Hungry Earth*. These poems are, however, distant from the intended audience of the play, who were used to the awakening songs that formed an integral part of the resistance against apartheid. The township audiences were generally used to Kentian-type musicals before the rise of artists like Maponya who brought liberation songs into their performances.

*Gangsters* clearly had a limited impact because it was removed from the audience it intended to conscientise and mobilise. Its early restriction to the Laager section of the Market Theatre contributed to limiting its outreach. The first performance of Ngugi and Mugo's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* in Nairobi also had similar limits, but in this case because of the play's use of performance techniques with which the target peasant audiences could not really identify – or even understand. In the end, these two plays were taken away from the people they should have rallied. However, *Gangsters* has a more literary footing compared to Maponya's other plays; its use of poetry makes it more literary than, say, *Umongikazi*. Literary language is more condensed, drawn out and telescoped than ordinary language. It helps ensure the quality of a work and its status as art. The poems in *Gangsters* are literary, but are also strategically placed to serve a resistance purpose.

Poetry is used in *Gangsters* as a rallying device that speaks across the spectrum: mobilises the proletariat and lambasts the agents (and stooges) of the South African security force such as Jonathan, who doubles as a spy and agent. Blacks like him were used to monitor excesses and curb subversion and violence before they erupted. As an insider, he is an evident threat to the individual and collective struggle. Jonathan is turned against himself, and used to carry out dirty jobs like that of torturing the poet to death. His conscience is heavy; but he is willing to live with the scar as long as he can meet his financial obligations. The individualistic quest for survival placed many black people in such positions. Jonathan argues that he is “doing a job like any other person who wakes up in the morning to go to work for a white man in town. On Friday when that person gets his salary I also get my salary” (88). His role – pejorative as it is – does not differ altogether from that of other subservient blacks who

worked as labourers and miners, as they all ultimately supported the capitalist system that subjugated them. Sycophancy and individual survival were common among many blacks who demeaned themselves because they needed a pay-package.

Masechaba criticises this individualist motive as replicated in the black associations that benefit from the system: the “cheese and wine drinkers” (93) of the struggle who betray the cause by selling their brothers out. Jonathan speaks of how the groups feed on the people and the black liberation campaign. These masked black saboteurs and sell-outs are not really different from the gangsters and rogues that the play condemns. The semi-darkness which falls on the uncrowned villains, Jonathan and Whitebeard, implies that what remains of them is a faint image of their humanity; but they are not altogether in total darkness. Their shadows, one that the audience sees onstage – or imagines when reading the play – is only a reflection or a copy rather than their complete image. *Gangsters* confirms that there are different *selves* and sides to one’s humanity – a multiplicity of character, shadows, and images. The contradictory images of Jonathan and Whitebeard (the play’s real gangsters) raise the fundamental question of whether we are truly our names and identities or mere masks – a point highlighted in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*.

The guilt that Jonathan carries is heavy, perhaps heavier than the cross the poet shoulders. He seems cruel but the guilt of the torture and murder sticks and haunts him. He uses the blanket and hood to cover the body and head of his victim in a bid to conceal the murder, and is quick to cover it again after Whitebeard’s examination. This cover-up trails the whole process; it is fictional as well as historical. Jonathan’s act in a way suggests that his sanity and conscience are only misplaced and not absolutely lost. As a black man and member of an oppressed class, he is also trying to manage the system although he has regrettably transformed along the way. The nomenclature of gangsters and rogues is so loose and encompassing that it covers the *tsotsis* and other unmasked black stooges who turned against their brothers and violated their own people. As products of the system, the *tsotsis* practically survived by defying the laws and serving as a buffer between the contending groups of oppressor and oppressed.

Whitebeard’s warning and personal declaration also mean that the gangster label is open to renegotiation. It seems that he is forced to employ coercion as a last resort so as to cow the poet into submission. The friendly chat and his humble plea to the poet to desist from defying the law by inciting the people with her poetry demonstrate that he is willing to operate within the dictates of human law; the banning order (for the most part) is geared at keeping the poet

down and out of trouble. His initial reaction upon seeing the dead body of the poet laid on the slab portrays the other side of his humanity. His mask falls off, exposing his softer human nature, although he is quick to force it back on in order to find a way to cover the cause of the extrajudicial murder. Hence, Jonathan and Whitebeard's characters and actions are negotiable and amenable to different interpretations since the narrative itself is never given from only one point of view. The use of the word gangsters to refer to Jonathan and Whitebeard cannot therefore be safely restricted. *Gangsters* ends with salient contradictory statements, expressed in the dead poet's wish that her murderers will somehow find sanity and understand her source of inspiration and conviction:

They would seek me out to pray together  
At the altar  
For they would have come to realise  
That I was against their own destruction  
And clung frantically  
On the frail hope  
That they would be brought to sanity. (111)

Masechaba's voice in death is as forceful, inspiring, and touching as when she is alive. She achieves transcendence over restriction, threats and death. And (like the playwright) she resists all odds that may lead her to self-censorship, or to limit the radical and inciting content of her poems. The running theme in the poems of *Gangsters* (as with Maponya's other plays) is the strength of conviction and the advocacy for resistance at the individual and collective levels. This theme runs through most black plays of the 1970s and later. Individual will was vital to the success of the struggle. The next section will be an analysis of individual conviction, as it forms the core of any collective revolutionary action. In *Jika*, Maponya presents that individual blacks – even in their little corners and pockets of the country – can add value to the struggle.

### **5.6 The uncrowned heroes of the resistance: the will of the unnamed in *Jika***

*Jika* (which means turn around) is an experimental play that was first devised and performed in 1986 during the period of emergency (see Chapter 3). Its productions (first abroad, later at home) were supervised and directed by Maponya, who – unlike in *Gangsters* and *The Hungry Earth*, *Gangster* and *Umongikazi* – chose to stay off the stage and concentrate on directing his black actors. As was common with most black plays at the time, *Jika* had minimal settings and costume. As a revolutionary play, *Jika* problematises the concept of the hero in drama, particularly the nobility yardstick enshrined in Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle maintains that the

tragic hero should be a god or nobleman of uncommon birth – one whose tragic fall affects a nation. Oedipus and Creon are fine examples of the eminent and noble in classical drama that provided Aristotle with material for his theorisations of the emerging Greek art. Maponya's celebration of the will and contributions of the uncrowned – and so unnamed – heroes of the liberation struggle in *Jika* implies that anybody can be a hero.

The celebration of the uncelebrated hero did not in fact start with Maponya. Arthur Miller in *Death of a Salesman* (1949) celebrates the ordinary, struggling salesman, Willy Loman; and Sembene Ousmane in *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) recognises the conviction of the marching heroes. In *Jika*, Maponya's heroes epitomise the struggle and several activists who ended up in jail, or sadly lost their lives. For many blacks at that time, resistance to apartheid was synonymous with affirming their dignity and place in a state that had long subjugated them and denied them basic rights. The many needless laws meant that many an individual could not live a decent life, or exercise his rights to movement and association. Individuals, both isolated and in groups, defied apartheid through one form of dissent or the other, the intention being to register their discontent and affirm their own existence.

The South African non-white liberation struggle is replete with the contributions of known and unknown agents, real people “who populated the movements and prison cells” (Buntman 2004: 11). Over the course of months, the TRC received thousands of individual stories – 22,000 victim statements, to be precise – of abuses throughout the apartheid era (Cottrell 2005: 115). These abuses (of both blacks and whites) cover the span of years and events. The state of emergency that followed the Sharpeville Massacre resulted in the banning of political (and sometimes non-political) gatherings, and arrests and detention of thousands of individuals deemed a threat to the public safety, under the government's Public Safety Act of 1953.<sup>276</sup>

These incessant, and often random, mass arrests and events only fuelled more resistance, such that even hitherto nonchalant individuals of the likes of *Jika's* comrades transformed into agents of the black cause. In *Jika* the comrades are largely anonymous because they represent a collective struggle, where the arrest of one hero does not necessarily imply an end to the struggle. They symbolise the convictions of many agitators who in their own ways added value to the struggle for human rights in South Africa. Their eventual arrest in the compound does not, therefore, imply an end to the struggle, in the same way that the death of Kihika in

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<sup>276</sup> The emergency provision guide gave backing to the arrests of twelve-thousand individuals – largely non-whites. Importantly even known figures such as ANC president Albert Luthuli and other top figures in the ANC, the PACT, and the Indian National Congress were arrested. See: Robert, C. Cottrell (2005) *South Africa: a state of apartheid*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers. pp. 9-10.

Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* and the execution of Kimathi in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* do not also suggest the death of the proletariat's will and struggle for *uhuru*.<sup>277</sup>

*Jika* – like *A Grain of Wheat* and *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* – does not fit the Aristotelian tragic system because it does not place the individual at the centre of the struggle. The arrest of the two comrades at the end of the play is followed by an emphatic reassurance of the survival of what the First Comrade calls the People's Republic of Zanj. It is given force by his references to the imaginary elephants' attack of the Umkhonto we Sizwe camp in Libya, the fall of some of the heroes, and the conviction of the rest to march out of the camp to free the land from the control of the regime. This suggests that no individual loss, no matter how highly placed, will thwart the revolution. Maponya's belief in continuous struggle is replicated in the comrades who, as children, are to carry the flag in and out of prisons, through all odds. The comrades (as children) symbolise the ideal of continuity. (Children in literature also symbolise the vulnerable, small, unnoticed and unenfranchised) *Jika* is a key revolutionary play in the way it grapples with questions about the liberation movement, the political atmosphere, and offers solutions to the many sociopolitical problems in the country.

*Jika* deals with the philosophy of critical consciousness and through that offers possible ways of realising freedom and getting the country "out of the political and economic quagmire after the revolution" (Maponya 1995: xi). It is a reconstruction of the liberation movement because it tries to trace the minor actors who act in the struggle. It follows the individual's awakening process through the rise of the comrades and their eventual alignment to the broader national consciousness. In *Jika*, the comrades pass through a series of tests and developmental steps – from ordinary school dissenters, to wanted (nameless still) activists, and to uncommissioned figures at the lower cadre of the struggle who go around the regions and pockets of the nation inciting discontent and protest. Their development into consciousness-raising agents can be compared with that of several party leaders in the PACT and ANC, who travelled around the country to mobilise individuals and groups.<sup>278</sup> This reveals "the interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory programme" (Buntman 2004: 17).

*Jika* is an attempt to devise the right political theatre for a largely oppressed audience (which was most common in Europe), in the way it stresses revolt and reformation. The concern with

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<sup>277</sup> It means "freedom" in Kikuyu.

<sup>278</sup> Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe and other PACT figures, for example, travelled around South Africa intimating people of their organisation's attempt to initiate an action campaign against apartheid, one that resulted in the Sharpeville protests. See: Robert, C. Cottrell (2005) *South Africa: a state of apartheid*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers. p. 6.

the ‘right’ theatre – not necessarily the leftist theatre – evoked the need to “rethink the nature and functions of theatre in the light of the dynamics of society outside it and of audience involvement within it” (Drain 1995: 75). This resulted in “new modes of acting, staging and playwriting, and hence new ways of representing the self on stage” (Drain 1995: 75). For Maponya, this new political theatre practice entails experimenting with the self (as depicted in the individual development of the comrades) and the playmaking form (see Chapter 3). He depicts the development of the heroes’ individual consciousness side-by-side with their political awareness. His experiments with the stages of individual awareness echo Freud’s theorisations of the layers of consciousness – what Wilson (1969: 59) terms the “different levels of understanding.”

As a consciousness-raising drama, *Jika* deals with critical economic and political matters that are anchored to imperialism and capitalism in South Africa. It is also replete with references to key historical events – but even the events are used to explain the condition and conviction of the individual. In South Africa, blacks have for centuries tolerated oppression and lived in dependence upon some power. Other non-white groups – Asians and coloureds for example – enjoyed more benefits than blacks before the imposition of apartheid in 1948 (see Chapter 1). Individual dissent ultimately culminated in the formation of organisations, parties, and unions who agitated for freedom from white rule and dependence. The struggle was intensified from the late-1950s, a period when liberationist and nationalist movements swept across Africa (as it did Asian countries decades earlier).

Individual blacks, alone and in groups, put in a lot to the liberation struggle against apartheid. The underground activities of the comrades in *Jika* testify that blacks played their little roles – roles that when put together constitute a collective cause and determination to bring an end to the regime. The individuals could be anyone because there were many foot soldiers of the struggle across the country. As student leaders and foot soldiers of the struggle, the comrades displayed their first act of defiance against the police, who came in trucks with guns and dogs to stall the student protests against Bantu Education and the reported massacre of blacks by the regime. The logic of this imposed black – Bantu – education was to produce less educated black Africans (Buntman 2004: 59) who could not really compete with well educated whites. The use of prescribed set-books and institutionalisation of separate curriculum was utilised to further entrench apartheid ideology (also see section on *Gangsters*). A separate development structure – which included ethnic and linguistic definition and physical separation – were key principles of apartheid (Hutchinson 2004: 350).



This led to the national school boycotts in the 1960s and the re-created student protest in *Jika*, with the comrades as ringleaders. Subdued and dispersed, the comrades are compelled to go underground and hide in Duduza Men's Hostel. Their survival there depends on their ability to avoid trouble and undue attention in the same way that the metaphorical survival of Sizwe (and so black people at the time) in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* rests on correctly acting the "ghost" of Zwelinzima. In *Jika*, the comrades must remain anonymous if they are to survive, let alone transform into agents of the struggle. The initiation from unknown to known agents comes in phases: first, they are to be trained in the villages of the Northern Transvaal; second, they are to travel across the country to mobilise and "teach the toiler the ABC of proletariat struggle" (120). This huge task takes them across the country, rallying and teaching pupils about the revolution. Back at the Hostel, the Second Comrade goes as far as challenging the priest, who justifies the exploitation in the country by preaching perseverance and subtly warning against subversion.

The Hostel is a potential revolutionary black hub that if properly rallied can add weight to the struggle. The Second Comrade argues that extending the message will ensure that they do not "lose out on all this potential support of the workforce in the hostels" (124). BCM artists and activists regarded enlightenment as a vital tool; it was the first and most important revolution. The need to rally potential revolutionaries was so important to the comrades – who symbolise black activists – that they are willing to risk everything for it. Black consciousness had a far reaching influence on many black people from the 1970s such that sacrifices were required at different levels: at the top were known agents (normally figures of organisations) who played major roles; and at the bottom were uncrowned (unknown) agents who were expected to learn from the sacrifices of bigwigs at the top and carry the banner forward, what the comrades call the flag of the Peoples Republic of Zanj.

There were arrests, detentions, even death, across these levels: Biko's arrest and extrajudicial murder exemplify the sacrifices at the top; the arrest and imprisonment of Mosibudi Mangena on the Island represent a middle-ranking sacrifice; the often random arrest and disappearance of unknown agents illustrate the sacrifice at the bottom.<sup>279</sup> In *Jika*, the comrades are aware of the required sacrifice and so do not waver even at the point of peril and intimidation. Arrested and marched to their doom, they urge the audience (and readers of the dramatic text) not to

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<sup>279</sup> Mosibudi Mangena was the first black consciousness activist to be incarcerated on Robben Island. The Island was populated by the ANC and PACT political prisoners. Many more BCM activists were later sent to Robben Island after the 1976 uprising. See: Fran, Lisa Buntman. (2004) *Robben Island and Prisoner Resistance to Apartheid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 20.

sympathise, declaring that they have played their own part in the struggle. The boy and girl in Ngugi's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* shoot a gun in court and shout "not dead" when Kimathi is sentenced to death, similarly declaring that the struggle is not over. In Fugard's *The Island*, Winston (as Antigone) demonstrates the same resolve when he courageously asserts that he is a lifer on the Island because he has honoured those things to which honour belongs. In *Dirty Work*, Hannekom demonstrates the regime's use of force to crush any form of resistance. And in *Jika*, the two comrades urge other black people to turn around and look at their sacrifices, examine themselves, and make sacrifices. As foot soldiers, they are vulnerable to the assaults and containment methods of the State Security Branch.

The violence meted out on the protesting students and comrades demonstrates that resistance, no matter how small, has useful consequence. The violent dispersal of the student-protesters in *Jika* is a creative reenactment of the 1976 Soweto uprising. Many students went into exile in the wake of the uprising, some returning only in the 1990s (Kruger 2013: 102-3).<sup>280</sup> *Jika's* depiction of the heroes' fates reveals that many other vulnerable victims of the struggle have perished along the way. The notion of who is a victim also emerges here, as the state did not have a monopoly on violence. The terrorist attacks by black political activists, under the guise of liberationist movements, also created victims across the races. The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) headed by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi; the National Party (NP), headed by De Klerk; and the Mbeki led African National Congress (ANC); all perpetrated one form of violence or the other (Foster et al 2005: 5-6), although their activities differed. The label of perpetrator or victim remains ambiguous.

The student uprising – in *Jika* an historical reenactment – shows that the apartheid regime can be resisted, and represents a turning point in the liberation struggle. The comrades understand that every revolution comes with a price – even if paid with blood. The First Comrade recalls that the postman (who appears anonymous) took them to a house in the villages of Northern Transvaal, opened their "eyes and minds about the proletariat struggle" (119) and taught them that there was no way they could "achieve liberation and freedom without revolution. Reform he taught us was the most dangerous step that would accelerate the process for the creation of class within the dispossessed" (120). The blacks treasured the thought of a revolution and it is

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<sup>280</sup> While many students were in exile, activists such as Ramaphosa and Mokoena continued with the anti-apartheid struggle in the country. Ramaphosa (and a number of others) however later diverged allegiances from "Black Consciousness to union work and the United Democratic Front (UDF)". See: Loren Kruger (2013) *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing and Building Johannesburg*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 103.

not surprising that Maponya also advocates it. This was especially common with black artists at the time (see section on black drama).

BCM playwrights from the 1970s presented radical plays that were not significantly different from political commentaries about their lives; black life featured prominently in these dramas – leading to sometimes sad consequences. The post-Sharpeville period produced accelerating resistance onstage. It also recorded sometimes violent protests and the clampdown of all sorts of marches under the Criminal Law Amendment and Public Safety acts, giving the regime the power to arrest and detain people without trial. Individual rights to “due process of the law was disregarded in the name of protecting South Africa from communism” (Buntman 2004: 17).

*Jika* celebrates the comrades’ audacity – a somewhat foolhardy but necessary venture – in a police state. The heroes’ underground operations at the Northern Transvaal and Eastern Cape, respectively, demonstrate defiance of the Group Areas Act and Suppression of Communism Act – bills that would have otherwise prevented them from crossing artificial boundaries and inciting revolts. They believe that their missions are necessary despite the risks involved. Hero dramas are usually about individual-fulcrums<sup>281</sup> who defy and transcend their contexts, limits, and fears in the cause for the greater good of themselves or a group that they represent. The comrades in *Jika* believe that it is more dangerous to retain the chains around their necks than not take action. The history of drama, from Thespis’ stepping forward from the Bacchian chorus to Vladimir and Estragon’s existentialist rebellion in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*,<sup>282</sup> is one of defiance. Shakur (2001: 45) believes that silence and inaction in times of oppression breed tolerance, such that “people get used to anything.” He maintains that for the oppressed to be free, the individual has “to become acutely aware of being a slave” (Ibid.).

In *Jika*, the comrades believe that inaction is analogous to endorsing transgressions of human rights. They are aware that to break the chain binding them to servitude, they have to put their lives on the line. In their drive towards conscientisation and mobilisation, they risk their own safety: damn the consequences of their actions and remain nameless throughout the play. The First Comrade celebrates the success and effects of his mission at the Transvaal and Eastern Cape:

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<sup>281</sup> In drama (and other literary genres such as the modern novel), ‘fulcrum’ refers to a hero or heroine that is not static; he or she develops as the story unfolds. Fulcrums shoulder their fates: accept responsibility; take action; and often defy societal prescripts and/or institutional limits. Examples of fulcrums in Shakespeare’s plays are Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Emilia in *Othello*, and Romeo and Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*.

<sup>282</sup> *Waiting for Godot* (premiered on 5 January 1953) is Samuel Beckett’s translation of his own original French version, *En attendant Godot*.

FIRST COMRADE. Now listen to this, “the whole of Northern Transvaal workforce is on strike; and thousands in other areas are beginning to march to the cities.” They no longer demand higher wages. They now demand to form co-operatives, a word unknown to South Africa. Trade unions in the north, south and west have indicated that they will follow the steps taken by their colleagues in the Northern Transvaal pending their colleagues’ decision on “Revolt or Reform”. Security Intelligence Agency suspects that it may be the work of infiltrators and agitators [...]. (135–136)

Communist activities were usually carried out underground for fear of the state’s wrath. The comrades cannot operate openly in the play because it is tantamount to arrest and persecution. This explains why they are hiding in the men’s hostel, why the postman remains anonymous, and why the training and missions have also to be kept a secret. The comrades are vulnerable because they have no organised support – a protection they can only attain when they pass the final initiation. This final protocol required training at camps abroad which are organised and more disciplined. But in order to be able to join the camps, they must drop all attachments to their former selves – quite similar to Sizwe’s change of identity – and take on new identities: first, as residents in the hostel; and second, by acting the Priest and Old Man so as to secure official passports from the Ciskei passport office, that will allow them to leave the country. Once out, they will join other comrades in the Umkhonto we Sizwe camp in Libya, where they are to be trained. Joining the training camp means being part of an organised and armed resistance group and contributing significantly to the struggle.

*Jika* also shows that the apartheid regime uses religious teaching to curtail the blacks’ radical excesses and to counter communist ideals, by teaching the oppressed to love their oppressors as they love their own souls. The Priest (known as Mfundisi in the play) preaches conformity and tolerance in the Hostel, by twisting religious teachings. He manipulates the reactions and minds of the residents, as seen in how he urges the Second Comrade to ignore the oppression, praise the Lord and move on. Karl Marx believes that religion is the opiate of the people – a tool used to exploit and manipulate them. The relationship between the Church and the states, or other political institutions, has a long history in which both have benefited: the Church had often served the cause and political interests of the state, and vice versa. The two institutions have depended on each other, in that revolting against the state for example was like rebelling against God. In England from the 17th to the long 18th centuries, the Church was used by the state as an instrument of control (Bello 2013; Sanders 2004; Giffin 2000; David 1995; Butler 1987). In South Africa, the Church was also used as one of apartheid’s structures. Afrikaans Churches, for example, “supported apartheid, and indeed famously threw out the few heretics who disagreed” with the system (Walder 2012: 52).

In return for its service, the Church was compensated with: positions in the courts, properties and money, leading to the inevitable class difference between priests and Church leaders, and the ordinary people (Bello 2013: 197). The Second Comrade criticises this church-state affair in the same way exploited Indians queried the schemed use of religion during the colonisation of India. Religion was utilised in colonial India to manipulate and compel the Indians to work in the plantations (Eagleston 2000: 27). The Priest in *Jika* is presented as agent of the regime, one that is not altogether different from members of the National Intelligence Service (NIS), or spies who provided information that led to many arrests. He is part of the cog in the wider machine. As a shepherd, the Priest considers his followers a “flock” of naive, insensitive, and lost souls (131). The use of the word flock has a biblical root and support, and thus suggests a group of blind followers who follow their master (or shepherd) without doubts or questions. Similar to a shepherd who does not want to lose his flock, the Priest pleads with the Second Comrade not to disrupt the peace of the Hostel (a safe preaching space) or put him in trouble:

PRIEST. Look here mfana wam. Let us not fight over nothing, uyeva? Do you hear? You mind your business and I'll mind mine. Uyabona (you see) mfana wam I've got a flock to look after in this hostel. So mfana wam, I beg you [...] (I don't want trouble). (131)

The Priest has sufficient grounds for his expressed fear: he regards the Hostel as a safe haven for preaching and transforming lost souls while the comrades see it as a likely hub for recruits that, if properly mobilised, can disrupt state activities – since it is largely filled with workers who historically grease the capitalist wheels of the regime. Disrupting the peace of the Hostel means extending the violence there, with the attendant consequence in mind. The only buffer between the residents and the violence is the Priest, unlike in the Eastern Cape – where pupils met with the regime's wrath. Although the playwright endorses ‘disciplined’ revolt, he rejects violence. But then, protests at the time only beget violence from both sides: the protesters and the state. The First Comrade's report of the casualties in the Eastern Cape, where 87 children met with apartheid bullets and many arrested, and his registered condemnations of the Second Comrade's rallying campaign, which largely lacks discipline, buttress this point.

This bloody protest is directly inspired by the Second Comrade, who instigates the children to unite and resist. The resultant violence is a replay of what the comrades – as student leaders – experienced at the beginning of the play. It is also a reenactment of the controversial Soweto Uprising where many school children were killed and arrested. The bloody images reveal that enlightenment and reeducation was effective in the redirection and reform processes. BCM's

emphasis on conscientisation and mobilisation succeeded in uniting black people (the bulk of the oppressed class) and redirecting their anger as intended:

SECOND COMRADE [boastfully] Jaa! My friend, it's those boys from the school I started with. If those boys went to the camp today they would make good cadres. The boys and girls from Tembalethu High School have the courage and tact [...] Now they understand the ABC of the Education for the dispossessed.

FIRST COMRADE [...] Hey, but eighty-seven were killed

SECOND COMRADE. Eighty-seven?

FIRST COMRADE [...] And one-eighty-nine were detained. Police used guns, bullets, dogs and the sneeze machine [...] Now the whole land is overshadowed by an ugly cloud [...]. (135)

Maponya suggests by this – and the many other incidents in the play – that the struggle came with a lot of necessary but unfortunate sacrifices on the part of the dispossessed. The Second Comrade later blames himself for the inflammatory campaigns, marking a step forward in the initiation process – discipline. Despite his development, he still holds on to a violent ideal in his call on God to intervene and save the overpowered masses by aiding them with AK47s, hand grenades, bazookas, and limpet mines so that they can turn the table around. These sorts of weapons proved to be equally fatal in the hands of the liberationist groups in the country at the time. The actions of ANC and its allied groups (Umkhonto we Sizwe and civilians acting under political guise, for example) led to large-scale violations, with a total of applications by victims for as many as:

1 025 incidents relating to some 2 339 violation acts, predominantly attempted killings (1 185 or 51 percent), killings (448 or 20 percent), illegal possession of weapons (153 or 7 percent), arson and public violence (142 acts) robberies (84), assaults (56), abductions (58), and 'other' acts. (Foster et al. 2005: 16)

This shows the level of violence that accompanied the 'illegal' possession of the same kind of weapons that the Second Comrade begs of God to provide the revolutionary groups with. The TRC report (vol. 6) reveals the attacks committed by the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) group as follows: "44 in 1984, 136 in 1985, 228 in 1986, 242 in 1987, and 300 in 1988 when there was widespread resistance to black municipal election in October" (Foster et al. 2005: 16).<sup>283</sup> The regime had to deal decisively with these kinds of dissent and violent tendencies. The common

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<sup>283</sup> The incidents were recorded in the geographical regions of the former Transvaal (61 percent) and KwaZulu-Natal (12 percent); only two percent was recorded outside South Africa, predominantly at ANC camps where suspected spies and dissidents were tortured and assaulted. See: Don, Foster, Paul, Haupt and Meresa, de Beer. (2005) *The Theatre of Violence: narratives of protagonists in the South African conflict*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. p. 16.

– and most effective – containment method was night raids. The raids succeeded in nipping a lot of anti-regime activities in the bud. It also helped sustain the segregation in the country by pinning down trespassers when they least expected it. Sizwe in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* narrates how black trespassers (from age 16) who had no official residence permits or passbooks were raided, arrested and endorsed out (see Chapters 1 and 4). The First Comrade reports a similar experience:

FIRST COMRADE. I remember now one incident of a comrade I met in the Northern Transvaal who was at home with his wife sleeping in the front room. Their children were sleeping in the back room of their two roomed shack. Suddenly, the door bursts open GQWA!!! The cries of their children could be heard everywhere in the township. Before they even knew what was happening, four heavily armed white policemen and a black man in a balaclava, were standing right above their bed pulling the blankets off their naked bodies. (126)

The First Comrade observes that night raids were normally carried out with the assistance of black spies (sell-outs). These moles provided the information that led to arrests, detention and torture of blacks, although they did not commit direct acts of human right violation (Foster et al 2005: 4). The First Comrade recounts how the police randomly harassed blacks without the official permits: “all they know is to harass innocent people about the bloody dompass ... and those who fail to produce it will spend a few days in jail – bloody stupid” (133). There were different classes of permits; each served a different purpose. ‘Permit’ is an all encompassing system that included reference books, identity documents and passports; it was a nightmare to Africans, both employed and unemployed (Dingake 1987: 30). One’s entitlement to a permit was determined by the Native Affairs Department, which had the right to give, reject, or even withdraw it, as it deems fit. In *Jika*, the conversation between the Second Comrade (as an Old Man) and Mister Ndlovu (an official at the Ciskei passport office) reveals that there were the passbook, residence permit, and lodger’s card. South Africa under apartheid had several laws, majority of which were targeted towards the containment of the non-white populace. In *Sizwe is Dead*, Buntu speaks of these many laws and the near impossibility of bypassing them. The Second Comrade’s caution to his fellow comrade to desist from having revolutionary dreams shows the entrenched nature of the laws:

SECOND COMRADE. Wait a moment [...] (Hold it just there)! You see, if your dreams are going to go as far as Libya while you are still in the country, you’ll shit! In this country you must not even be suspected of dreaming about Libya. You can’t afford such a dream here. (146)

In apartheid South Africa, black people had dreams which were more hopeful and serene, like securing a valid pass or joining the camps, as in the case of the First Comrade. In *Sizwe Bansi*

*is Dead*, Sizwe's possession of a valid passbook implies a dream-come-true. Similarly, they also had nightmares of raids and harassment through the pass laws (Dingake 1987: 30), issues that were as inescapable as being black. The usual blanket unlawful arrests, detention, and ill-treatment of dissenters led them to take up arms against the state, such that by "mid-1980s the ANC had roughly 8 000 personnel under arms, and a defence budget of roughly US\$50 000" (Davis, in Foster et al 2005: 7). The comrades in *Jika* are gearing to join the armed struggle – which is their final initiation – by joining the training camp in Libya. Agents were trained at camps in those neighbouring states that identified with the black liberation movement (Foster et al 2005: 7). Some of the camps – such as the one in Libya – were sited in distant countries, and were, often, under pressures from host governments. MK attacks were largely guerrilla in nature and targeted at operatives of the regime. The conviction of the armed foot-soldiers and their modus operandi can be compared with that of the Mau-Mau revolutionaries.<sup>284</sup> The First Comrade, particularly, praises the 'organisation' and loyalty to the land and ranks among the several recruits in the Libya camp:

FIRST COMRADE. My friend, we were already in "the camp" in Libya. Dressed in heavy uniform, fully trained as cadres. Ready for the first assignment. We were standing in rows with other more than one thousand comrades. There was this hefty tall middle-age field-marshal who was walking up and down the rows, singing the last instructions. He was also saying as if possessed by the spirit of our forefathers [...] (struggle)! Forward with the African people's struggle!... That is your land, fight for it [...] let the blood of the oppressed flow! Forward with the powerful People's Republic of Zanj! (146)

*Zanj* is an Arabic word which loosely means blacks, and was a slave label associated with the largely East African slaves who were forced to do the most tasking and arduous labour in Iraq and Iran – known as Mesopotamia<sup>285</sup> before the First World War (Shakur 2007: 56; Libcom Library 2007). These slaves staged a series of revolts against their masters but the bloody and most successful occurred from 868 to 883 AD – representing roughly fifteen years of violent and bloody conflict (Shakur 2007: 57). They were reported to have been incited and led by an Iraqi poet Ali Ibn Muhammad. Also called the revolt of the blacks, the rebellion was staged – more or less – against the Abbasid caliphate, and is regarded as one of the most vicious since

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<sup>284</sup> The Mau-Mau Rebellion/Revolt was an armed military conflict between the mostly Kikuyu natives and white settlers in Kenya. It took place between 1952 and 1960. Dedan Kimathi led the rebel group and was captured on 21 October 1956. His arrest dealt a serious blow on the campaign, but did not end it altogether.

<sup>285</sup> Mesopotamia was known as the land of the Tigris and Euphrates. It was part of the Abbasid caliphate – a powerful Islamic empire at the time. It covered a vast area from Southern Asia to North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula.



the Italian slave rebellion of 73 BC, which was led by Spartacus – a Thracian gladiator.<sup>286</sup> For Shakur (2007: 58), the *Zanj* revolt was the first major and organised black revolt – predating the much-recorded American slave rebellion of the eighteenth century. In *Jika*, the playwright traces black revolt as far back as that period. These two revolts, *Zanj* and the black liberation movement in South Africa, are similar because they began as a result of a proletariat struggle for freedom; in both cases the unsophisticated agitators defied and challenged an overbearing and powerful force.

Generally, revolts are fuelled by one form of discontent or the other: subjugation, exploitation or maltreatment, sometimes all three. In apartheid South Africa, it is the political condition of black people – not inseparable from the policies put in place to repress them – that led to the revolt. In *Jika*, the Duduza Men’s Hostel represents the living conditions of migrant workers in the country. Rural migrant workers were crammed in hostels and compounds. The hostels were meant for the male miners, and were known for squalor and abject living conditions. Interestingly they also served as hubs for anti-establishment and underground activities where wanted black agents like the comrades sought cover. Life there was not significantly different from the homelands that the Second Comrade and Sizwe in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* criticise.

The Second Comrade criticises the unfortunate Ciskei and Kwazulu agitation and struggle for separate independence in the same way that Sizwe ridicules and attacks Ciskei’s sham sense of independence. The separate local and international liberation campaigns (notably) revealed cracks in the struggle, which were exploited by Balthazar Johannes Vorster (1915-1983), who as prime minister accorded four Bantustans – the Transkei, in 1976; Bophuthatswana, in 1977; Venda, in 1979; Ciskei, in 1981 – a level of ‘autonomy’ and self-government (Cottrell 2005: 103-4).<sup>287</sup> Despite his adherence to the apartheid system, Vorster argued in 1974 that “South Africa has come to a crossroad” and as such the failure to develop amicable resolutions to the

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<sup>286</sup> The uprising was staged by gladiators against the Roman Republic and lasted for many years. The revolt started near the city of Capua (north of the present day Naples) in 73 BC. Spartacus and his gladiators were eventually subdued and killed. Slave insurrection was not new in Rome at the time because of the large number of exploited slaves who from time to time rebelled against their masters. See: Czech Kenneth, P. (2006). *Spartacus*. Available at: [www.history.net.com/spartacus/htm](http://www.history.net.com/spartacus/htm) [Accessed: 1 September 2015].

<sup>287</sup> Initially, 10 Bantu Homelands were created from the mid-20th C. to late-20th C, around the mid-1990s. They were: the Transkei and Ciskei, Xhosas; KwaZulu, Zulus; Bophuthatswana, Tswana people; Venda, Vendas; Gazankulu, Shangaan and Tsonga people; Lebowa, Pedi and Northern Ndebele; QwaQwa, Bosothos. It was in the 1970s that the South African government singled out and declared the Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana and Venda ‘independent’ Bantustans; the rest remaining self-governing territories. The Homeland system was then enforced by the new Bantu Citizens Act of 1970, which defined the Bantustans in terms of ethnic groupings and gave citizenship and limited civil and political right. See: South African History Online (2016) *The History of Separate Development in South Africa*. Available at [www.sahistory.org.za](http://www.sahistory.org.za) [Assessed: 16 April 2016].

crisis will be “too ghastly to contemplate” (Vorster, in Cottrell 2005: 104).<sup>288</sup> Maponya hits at the cracks in the struggle through the First Student’s voice:

SECOND STUDENT. My friend we’ve got to leave this country

FIRST STUDENT. But my friend, where shall we go?

SECOND STUDENT. Let us go to Ciskei homeland

FIRST STUDENT. No my friend, those people will sell us back to our enemies. Do you want to die? No! I will never go to Ciskei (118)

The rejection of the passport applicants from Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, East London, and Cape Town by Mr Ndlovu implies that the Ciskei considered itself cut off from the rest of the country. Ndlovu’s claim that those from other homelands do not qualify for a Ciskei passport shows this division. He advises the Old Man (acted by the Second Comrade) to go back to his government and “tell them that I say mina Ndlovu that they must stop buying a lot of police equipment. They must worry about their people’s travelling problems” (142). The Ciskei was a nominally independent state – much like the other Bantustans. Ciskei – meaning this side of the Kei River – was designated for the Xhosa-speaking people; Transkei (a Bantustan close to Ciskei) was also a resettlement territory for the Xhosas. Ciskei was finally reintegrated into South Africa in 1994 to form the Eastern Cape.

Unlike Fugard’s testimony plays, that make the audience, and readers, “uncomfortably aware of the carbuncles in our society” and that “no more advocate solutions to those inequities than Oedipus Rex offers a solution to the predicament of mankind” (MacLennan 1981: 218), *Jika* attacks the system and offers – sometimes skewed – solutions to the problems in the country. It is a far cry from Fugard’s plays, alone or in collaboration, in the way it offers solutions to issues and present heroes who are, in all respect, revolutionaries. The suggestions in the play are, however, more restricted than solutions to universal human problems; the dramatist looks inwards and traces the lapses in the black revolution. The reforms that he advocates for in the play are complex and require a deep-seated understanding of the intentions, expectations, and discipline of the struggle. Even Fugard’s plays, however, proffer solutions, although “they are infolded solutions to the dramatic givens, rather than mandates to remedy revealed social wrongs” (MacLennan 1981: 218). In the end, *Jika*’s keen concern with specifics of the South African problem, lack of character depth and didactic structure puts it way down the ladder in terms of universal significance when compared with the testimony plays of Fugard.

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<sup>288</sup> BJ Vorster was the 8<sup>th</sup> prime minister of South Africa (1966-1978) and its 4<sup>th</sup> president (1978-79). He was the minister of justice during the Rivonia trial in which Mandela, Kathrada, and other political prisoners, were sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Preamble

The study examined the notion of commitment – in its varied facets – in the theatre of Fugard and Maponya. It discussed the playwrights' identities and how that shaped their politics; their contributions to the anti-apartheid struggle; their use of experimental-collaborative theatre. Three plays were selected from each writer in a bid to examine their historical and political content: *The Coat* (1966), *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), and *The Island* (1973) were selected because they are Fugard's most political dramas; *The Hungry Earth* (1979), *Gangsters* (1984) and *Jika* for their radical political import, and because they are Maponya's most outspoken condemnation of apartheid. The plays are analysed independently and intertextually through a comparative analysis of their value and contribution to the struggle. New Historicism served as the frame for the critical analysis of the plays because of its concern with history as itself a kind of text; it is more of a practice than a theory; and for its concern with the other practical aspects of the study such as collaboration and the notion of the major and minor authors. This study recognises that no literary theory can adequately capture the full theatrical implications of the plays; and for that reason it gave critical attention to the plays' records of rehearsal and performances. It is thus an extensive analysis of the plays as dramatic texts and performances.

The study has discussed Fugard's experimental-collaborative work with Kani and Ntshona in view of the debate surrounding the collaboration and (so actual) authorship of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Their use of the workshop, improvisation, and experimental techniques has also been discussed. Maponya also utilised the experimental resources of the theatre, and the study has examined that. Both playwrights use actors as creative and not mere interpretive agent, and this has been discussed by examining the roles and contributions of these actors in theatre-making, as well as their place as conduits, creative agents and co-creators. It is for this reason that this study was particularly concerned with Fugard's collaborative and workshop plays, and with Maponya's clear exploitation of the actor's potential. The study was therefore limited to the six plays and the period from 1966, beginning with the production of *The Coat*, to 1986, ending with the production of *Jika*. This was the scope and delimitation of the study.

The study is mainly qualitative in nature. It explored published sources such as books, journal articles, printed interviews, and newspaper reviews of the performances of the plays. It also investigated unpublished, archival sources such as correspondences in the form of personal

letters, original performance/rehearsal notes, manuscripts and official reports. These primary and secondary sources were synthesised and exploited in the review and analysis of the plays. Recorded performances of the plays were also observed in order to examine their non-verbal elements, and that aided in the assessment of the plays as performances and not just dramatic texts. The performances supplemented the texts and added value to the analysis. This chapter now offers a summary of the preceding chapters and a general conclusion of the findings and analysis of the selected plays and their play-making process.

## **6.2 Summary of chapters**

Chapter one generally introduces the study: the contexts and concepts it deals with. It begins by analysing the contemporary system of plays and playmaking variously referred to as meta-theatre, postdramatic, postmodern, contemporary experimental or contemporary alternative. It then offered a background on Fugard and Maponya and their works. It goes further to identify the selected plays and why they are chosen for this study. The chapter discusses the notion of commitment, identity and politics and the playwrights' engagement with the struggle through the theatre. The historical context of the study – that is apartheid South Africa from the 1960s to the 1980s – is also introduced so as to situate the plays and highlight their response to the historical period. The chapter is divided into sections. The first section deals with apartheid, state policies and the structures of compulsion. It briefly traces the history of apartheid and its reception by the non-white groups in the country. The second section offers a brief survey of the landmark periods and figures of South African drama from the 1930s with Dhlomo to the 1970s and 1980s with the black consciousness drama.

The third section discusses the relationship between art, the social responsibility of the writer and politics, and through that situates Fugard and Maponya's response(s) to the sociopolitical and economic problems of their times. It also discusses the notion of commitment and traces the views of critics and commentators on the playwrights' commitment to the black liberation struggle. The fourth section situates the playwrights in the context of a broad theatre history and theories. It traces the history and theorisation of the drama from the Classical period with Sophocles and Aristotle to the contemporary period with Stanislavski, Brecht, Beck, Artaud, Brook, Grotowski and Schechner. It identifies notable periods and figures in the development of drama. The study, however, accords more attention to the modern period and theorisations of the play-making and political dimensions of the theatre, and figures in the transformative development of the drama.

The fifth section is a discussion of experiments and collaboration as play-making techniques and processes, and as contextualised in the study of the select plays. It traces the roots of the collaborative techniques and co-authorship to Renaissance England; studies the playwrights' restructured use of the techniques in play-making; identifies those plays where these methods are utilised; discusses the roles of actors as conduits, creative agents, and co-creators. The sixth section then locates the problems and aims of the study: it states five objectives altogether. The seventh section identifies the significance of the comparative study of the dramatists and the study's potential contributions. It reveals that there is no thesis-length work that compares the two writers that the study deals with. It identifies that Maponya has received less critical attention compared to Fugard; and that current studies on their works are either performative or literary – hardly both.

Chapter two is a review of related literatures. The chapter locates that there are several works on Fugard, but only a few on Maponya when compared to Fugard, and goes further to review only the relevant literatures. The chapter conducts a synthetic analysis of the selected seminal works, compares them, demonstrates their significance to the study, and shows how they, in the end, inform the focus of the research. In order not to lump the varied literatures together, the chapter is divided into sections. The first section deals with the works on art, politics, and notion of commitment in the select plays. The second section deals, predominantly, with the protest plays of Fugard – not only the collaborative – and his contribution through the theatre to the anti-apartheid struggle. The third section reviews Maponya's nationalistic orientation; literary and individual leanings; his contribution to the struggle through the theatre, as well as his advocacy for immediate change in the status quo.

The fourth section studies works on the influence of the postdramatic and alternative methods like experimentation and collaboration on the dramatists. It analyses the influence of modern theatre practitioners like Grotowski and Brecht on the playwrights, as well as the influence of the experimental Western avant-garde groups on their art. The chapter concludes by locating the gaps in the academic literatures and identifying the study's potential contribution(s) to the discourse on Fugard and Maponya. The ninth, and last, section explains the research design used in the study and introduced the selected literary theory used in the analysis of the plays. It explains how the study will be conducted as well as the sources to be used. It also traces the history of the theory (New Historicism) and discusses its tenets and viability in this study.

Chapter three examines the new experimental-collaborative alternative form of play-making – which opposed the traditional and conventional playwriting process. It identifies forms such

as the postdramatic and postmodern – generally alternative forms – and discusses Fugard and Maponya’s use of the revolutionary dramatic forms. The chapter also traces the new theatre’s main features, proponents, and practitioners. The need to respond to sociopolitical conditions accounts for the rise of new dramatic models and practices over time. The transformation of the theatre dates as far back as the Classical period. Subversion in the form as well as content of the drama was, however, most pronounced in the West from the 1960s. The chapter studies these developments, and identifies Fugard and Maponya’s appropriation of new revolutionary performance models. It also discusses how they were able to deconstruct these new forms to come up with a brand of theatre that suited their leanings and context. They did this by using the theatre experimentally and exploiting their actors’ creative potentials. Their actors served as conduits, interpreters, and creative agents, and, in the case of Fugard, as co-creators.

The chapter is divided into sections. The first section offers a preamble of the new theatre’s antecedents. It presents that subversion and rebellion against authority and conventional form of drama has been part of the theatre all along. It also highlights the conditions that prompted and allowed Fugard and Maponya to appropriate and develop alternative dramatic forms that best suited the apartheid context. The second section studies the playwrights’ defiance of the trappings of conventional theatre and the resultant production of alternatives to the traditional playwriting method. It reveals that while the black artists in the country defied the notion of art-for-art’s sake in favour of anti-art – a form that could at least reach out to the ordinary and largely uneducated audience – white artists to an extent blended politics and art in their plays. It discusses performance practices such as improvisation, workshop and experimentation, and examines how these techniques were creatively utilised in the play-making processes of the selected plays. How these methods ensured the productions, rather than banning, of the plays is also discussed.

The third section discusses the controversial collaboration between Fugard, Kani and Ntshona in the production of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. It also studies how the play-making was carried out and the limits of authorship of the plays. Kani and Ntshona provided material, dialogue, and acting for these plays; they are also the co-authors. The question regarding their contributions, roles and primary authorship resulted in a great deal of debate and contestation on the part of the authors and critics. Fugard has more right – and hence primary authorship – to the plays as dramatic texts while Kani and Ntshona are more closely associated to the plays in performance. This section also traces the anomalies in the authorship and copyright of *The Coat*, which notably first appeared as a devised play by the Serpent Players of New Brighton.

It also examines Maponya's criticism of the white-black collaboration method on the basis of what he regards as black dependency syndrome and white manipulation and advancement to the detriment of black artists. He also challenges the position of whites as spokespeople of the dispossessed. And for this reason, he developed white roles and directed the white actor, John Maytham – thereby going against the established system of collaboration in the country. The fourth, and last, section reveals that anti-elitist, anti-text, improvisational and *poor* techniques of play-making enabled artists in South Africa to evade, manipulate, and transcend covert and overt state control. The manner in which the theorisations and works of Grotowski, Boal, and Brook are utilised to achieve this are generally discussed in the chapter.

Chapter four is a textual and performance analysis of *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, and *The Island*. Attention is given to the history of their productions, as a textual device, by analysing them using key historical and sociological books – therefore establishing the interdisciplinary nature of the study. The playwrights' (considering the collaborative nature of the plays) lives, individual and literary leanings and perspectives are also explored to establish the connection, or otherwise, between art and politics, and how these shaped and determined the plays' form and content. It reveals that Fugard as a collaborator, co-author, and director did not believe in the revolutionary tactics and its attendant politics as advocated by black artists and so adopted a more multidimensional approach to art. The influences of black actors in the collaboration of the plays are apparent. The chapter is then divided into four sections.

The first section is an analysis of *The Coat*, a piece originally devised by the Serpent Players. It reveals how the play came about; the play-making process, which is interestingly reenacted and forms the content of the play; the play's evidence-based (in Brechtian style) interrogation of black life and township experiences. It also shows that the play prepared the ground for the more radical experimentation with form and content which is apparent in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. *The Coat* lit a significant fire on the apartheid stage, one that was demystified again and again in subsequent Serpent Players' productions. The section concludes that, more than anything else, the play demonstrated that statements can be made against the regime and the artist may get away with it.

The second section is an analysis of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* – a collaborative play by Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona. This section discusses the Western and traditional performance influences and appropriations in the play, the potency of individual, instead of collective, actions and its limits; and the search for an alternative in an absurd and existentialist world. In the end, the personal acts of individuals are as political as any other. The strength of individual conviction

is quite strong, and the collaborators demonstrate that the individual – even alone – defies his chains and insists on his non-negotiable existence. The section compares the published text – that is used for the textual analysis – with the original play-script of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and the rehearsal and performance notes in a bid to locate the omission and editing that came with the 1974 OUP publication of the play. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is also analysed as a dramatic text as well as a performance; which proves that the text has more political impact in performance than as a dramatic text.

The third section is an analysis of *The Island* – also collaboratively devised by Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona. Attention is also given here to history; not as authoritative and objective, but as a text in itself that can be *re*interpreted. It examines the conspiracy of silence surrounding the imprisonment and suppression of political activists on Robben Island, and the prisoners' will to survive, transcend oppression, and make protest statements against the regime side-by-side historical and sociological books. The literary-historical analysis shows that not even the four walls of the Island could contain the inmates' staunch passion to break free and make defiant statements against the regime as represented by the imagined warders in the dramatic text and by the audience in a performance setting. As in the earlier section, a performance and textual analysis of the play is also carried out.

The section also compares the published text with the original script for *Die Hodoshe Span* as well as with rehearsal and performance notes so as to locate conflicting areas where apparent omissions and extensive editing may have been carried out during the 1974 OUP publication. The comparison reveals that there are evident alterations between the two versions in terms of intention, content, and stage direction. *The Island* – like *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* – has a far more political value in performance than as a text. The fourth and last section discusses issues such as governmental restriction and containment as well as the place of identity and politics in the play-making process of the plays examined in the previous sections, and as they influence the content of the plays.

Chapter five is a textual and performance analysis of *The Hungry Earth*, *Gangsters*, and *Jika*. As in chapter four, the plays are examined as dramatic texts and performances. The attention to the historical period and how it influenced and shaped the author's psyche and art is taken into account. This historical period is presented as a textual device, especially considering the dramatist's often one-eyed black perspective of events and the struggle in the country. This is achieved by interpreting the presentation of history in the select plays side-by-side historical,



sociological and even government reports (the TRC for example) – thereby also establishing the interdisciplinary nature of the study. The chapter is divided into six sections.

The first section is a preamble of the chapter. The second section offers a discussion of Black Consciousness, and how this cultural movement influenced and fashioned the works of black playwrights in the 1970s and 1980s. It also compares the South African black movement with the likes of Maponya and Manaka and the American version with Baraka and Ed Bullins. The teachings and artistic practice of blacks who subscribed to the movement are also discussed. Black consciousness and the ideals and political teachings of Biko had a notable influence on Maponya's art. These influences are clear in the select plays in the representation of history, mobilisation campaign, and the call for collective action. The third section presents a concise history of the black theatre: from the 1930s with the black sketches and the plays of Dhlomo; the Bantu Dramatic Society; cultural activities at Dorkay House; the township entertainment musicals of Kente; to the black consciousness dramas of the 1960s-70s – a movement from drama by blacks to the radical black dramas.

The fourth section is an analysis of *The Hungry Earth* as a resistance play. It studies the black voice's simplistic and often unjustified representation of events; the grey areas associated with the dramatist's proclaimed artistic and financial independence; the collective will of the proletariat to resist exploitation and apartheid; the potency and strong import of collective (instead of individual) action; and the adverse effect of the apartheid system on the individual and collective psyche of the black people. The section also locates the problematic associated with the nomenclatures of collaboration, victim, perpetrator, and foreigner. It also presents an intertextual comparison of the play with *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* in terms of the individual versus collective action. There is also the discussion of the play's themes in relation to the capitalist system, thus opening the play to a broader and more universal discourse. The analysis reveals the playwright's one-eyed view of the events depicted. It shows that the other voice – that of the oppressor – is silent despite its historical importance in the events presented.

The fifth section examines *Gangsters* as a subversive anti-state play that celebrates dissent and individual conviction to subvert established authority. It discusses individual subversion as necessary, a sort of backlash, under any oppressive system and state's capacity to contain subversive tendencies and ensure order using any means necessary. The section also locates the loose nature of the perpetrator (the so-called gangsters of the plays) label; renegotiates the questions of power, representation, race, crime and even subversion and containment, thereby reinterpreting the authorial intention(s) on issues to do with perspectives, generalisations, and

reductive definitions and association. It problematises the play's reductive notion of gangsters – to refer to Whitebeared and Jonathan – and reveals that humans typically have varied sides, and put on different masks, depending on the situation they find themselves. The section also reveals that the theme of subversion and containment in the play is universal, and therefore is not restricted (unlike other specifics in the play) to South Africa.

The fifth, and last, section is an examination of *Jika*'s celebration of the conviction and will of the faceless individuals (agents) who added value to the struggle in all corners and pockets of the country. This section *renegotiates* the 'hero' concept as enshrined in Aristotle's *Poetics* through the life, struggles, and eventual downfall of the comrades, who are neither noble nor important figures in society. It relates their struggle to the Zanj revolt of 868-883 AD, and the Mau-Mau rebellion of 1952-1960 and further identifies the vulnerability of individual agents. The section also identifies the playwright's belief in continuous struggle as is replicated in the comrades, and the awakening process of individual agents through the rise of the comrades in the play and their – not-quite-achieved – initiation into the broader liberationist movement. It examines the state's use of covert agents like the Priest (a cog in the wider apartheid wheels) in thwarting or prolonging struggle. As in the previous section, this proves that the play has a global value, considering that the use of the Church in the colonisation process is not peculiar to South Africa.

### **6.3 General conclusion**

The study of drama is best pursued through the medium of theatre. A play is ideally meant for performance, and so to properly understand it entails an analysis of its mode of performance, audience perception, social experience, as well as conditions of performance. Studies that fail to examine a play's theatrical experience are either incomplete or peripheral. Performance is a vital element of a play because it brings it to life. This work avoided the peripheral criticism associated with literary analysis of plays since it is a textual and performance analysis of the selected plays. The theatrical experience in the plays is as important as the thematic, as all are related and aid in any comprehensive analysis. The plays are not conventional plays wrought from the creative imagination of a playwright, but products of experiments and collaborative workshop procedures. They were mainly unscripted during their early runs, and depended on actors who *recreated* them on stage each time they performed. The audiences determined the nature of the *recreation* and content of the plays. This explains why they cannot be reduced to mere dramatic texts that are *given* rather than open to what Styan (1975: 17) calls the "coded pattern of signal" – script-actor-audience.

The dramatist's background, condition of work, play-making process and historical situation affect a play's conception, realisation and impact. A play is a structurally woven construct – a melting pot of several elements such as playwright, script, actor, and audience, which must be understood and factored in any interpretation. In the case of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, *The Island*, and even *The Coat*, the collaboration factor has to be considered. Collaboration is not a fixed term or practice. It depends largely on the play, play-making situation and intention(s). It also transform on its way to the stage even with the same artists involved in the collaboration. The devising process that led to *The Coat*, for example, differed from that of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. Even *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* – devised by the same artists over a period of a year – were not collaboratively devised in the same way. Fugard's collaboration with the Circle Players (in the late-1950s) also differs from his collaboration with the Serpent Players (in the 1960s) and that with Kani and Ntshona (in the early-1970s). Collaboration as a practice meant different things at different times for Fugard.

Maponya's idea of collaboration also differs from that of Fugard. Although Maponya did not officially collaborate with his actors, he used them as conduits into their lived experiences (as in *The Hungry Earth*) and profession (as in *Umongikazi*). This playmaking system is in many ways collaborative and similar to Fugard's collaborative model during his brief work with the Circle Players in the making of *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*. In *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*, Maponya unofficially collaborated with the white actor John Maytham, a process that can be compared with the play-making of *Statements after an Arrest*, where Fugard clearly exploited the talent and psychology of Yvonne Bryceland. Fugard and Maponya used actors in different capacities and employed somewhat similar, but different, collaborative techniques. They both utilised the experimental, improvisational, and workshop-based techniques differently and at different times.

As unscripted pieces, Maponya's plays passed through several transformative stages on their way to the stage and publication. They were largely skeletal blueprints for action rather than complete texts. This partly explains how they survived the system that would have suffocated them. It shows that the author had to tamper – contrary to his claim to artistic independence – with the form and content of the plays at some points in their performance history. *Gangsters* and *Dirty Work*, for example, were restricted to the Laarger during their early-run, forcing the playwright to, even if unconsciously, self-censor them to suit the more liberal confines of the Market Theatre. *Gangsters* in particular had different versions before its publication. The first version was more acidic, indicting and political and gave the poet-activist (Rasechaba, a male

at the time) effective victory over his jailers. In the second version, the name of the poet was changed to Masehaba – a gender *renegotiation*. It also breaks from the forms of *Catastrophe* and *Mistake*, which were greatly exploited in the first version. Maponya's demystification of Western forms in this version allows the play to qualify as both local and global.

Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona's collaborative plays passed through this form of transformational processes. The actor-creators improvised with *dialogue* and *action* a great deal, such that the plays meant and evoked different meanings to different audience and at different times. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* for example generated varied reactions from spectators: it was well-received in the mostly liberal spaces such as The Space; it generated a near-riot in the black townships, at a point even leading to the arrest of the actors, Kani and Ntshona, for incisive comments. The reception of *The Island* also varied at different times that Fugard had to distance himself from the play in performance at a point due to its, often improvisational, radical import. Both plays elicited different receptions at an early stage, and were in fact groundbreaking and political in every sense of the term than their published versions. The 1974 OUP publication saga and the accompanied contention is proof that the plays' politics was watered-down through extensive editing (with evidence of large-scale omissions, alterations, and *redirection*) and transformed to represent and rebrand Fugard at the detriment of his co-creators.

Athol Fugard's credentials and literary achievements honourably earn him an enduring place in the canon of South African literature. The period in which he initially worked (1960-1970) greatly influenced his worldview and art. He contributed to the black anti-apartheid struggle in several ways. His plays are *open* narratives that are full of digressions and incompleteness, and resist any attempt at simplicity or closure. He adopts a multidimensional approach to art, and so is as much a political playwright as any in the country, although he has time and again rejected the strict political label for the simple reason that it is reductive and limits his art and achievements as an artist. His politics are therefore mainly limited to the effects of the system on individual life – the small canvas with which he worked, although it was potent enough to trace the trauma. It is in this way that he waves the banner of the personal, making it political. He depicts the minute and personal with an underlying political force that is unmatched in the history of South African theatre.

In apartheid South Africa, personal issues were often indivisible from political ones; the same way art and protest are inextricably connected. *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* exhibit an understanding of this quite dynamic context, as well as the collaborators' vision of the relationship between politics and art. Fugard is both a liberal as well as a political writer.

He is not a playwright whose works can be appropriated to validate the position that whites in the country only wrote ineffective testimony works. He may be white, but he was also a stern critic of the many apartheid policies, especially as they affected individuals across the colour bar. The failure, therefore, to understand the centrality of that fact, and how his depiction of the events in his society sometimes contradict nominal politics and expectations, will result in *misunderstanding* his perception(s) and *misreading* his plays at their most profound level of interpretation.

Fugard's political credentials have long been challenged by many of his readers and critics. The plays studied hardly – from a first layer interpretation – canvass for revolutionary action. There have in them however the kind of political and revolutionary messages that are likened to the more radical and political writers like Maponya. Fugard may not be as hard and direct in his attack of the apartheid regime and its measures to contain subversion, but that does not place him as a lesser or apolitical writer. In fact, his works depict the bitter and unacceptable experiences of the underdog more effectively than most of the radical black works. In *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*, he saliently responded to the prevailing call for art to represent the suffering and trauma of individual blacks. The influence of Kani and Ntshona as blacks and co-authors is unmistakable. But despite the actors more political drive, he ensured that he determined the course of events and marriage of materials, and that they responded in a more mature, consistent, and highly controlled fashion. Fugard controlled not just the collaborative process, but also the actors' reactions and anger at the apartheid system – the sort of working process BCM artists campaigned against. Kani and Ntshona did not only co-create and acted in the plays, they also served as conduits and creative agents. Fugard's established position as playwright was transformed during the playmaking process of the plays. As the reports of the first performance of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* indicate, his status as director (and playwright) was jettisoned when Kani took control first of the newspaper scene, and then the performance and audience through incredible acting and improvisation.

The analysis of *The Coat*, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, and *The Island* reveals that they are products of a tight apartheid context, one that was also interestingly transformational and revolutionary because it gave rise to a period of experimentations in theatre. *The Coat* prepared the grounds for the radical transformative experiments that can be found in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island*. These more mature experimental plays embody the authors' most crucial engagement with the specifics and politics of the period. Both plays are concerned with the downtrodden, even though they differ in their depiction of such themes. They are (in this respect) not mirror

images of each other, since their depictions of apartheid oppression vary. *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is clearly more liberal, evasive, and individualistic than *The Island*, which has more political overtone. *The Island* celebrates collective action, which however depends on the individual's resolve to stick his neck out for the apartheid hangman – unlike *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, which promotes individual survival, itself a political action. Sizwe is a city novice, who in the end is transformed and taught the tricks of survival in a capitalist world; but Winston is a political prisoner who represents both the voiceless political prisoners and the enslaved free, although he had to transcend his doubts and suppression as well.

*The Coat* experiments with, and demonstrates, these ideas. Temba's sentence – one that is not adequately exploited for obvious political reasons – reveals the individual's resolve to carry the cross for others. It is in *The Island* that his likely fate is shown in the brutal suppression of political prisoners. Like Temba, Winston also walks to his living death for honouring what is honourable. The experiments with the question of the best possible uses for the man's coat echo the search for an alternative solution out of Sizwe's passbook dilemma and by extension the alternative to the black man's pressing problem of the passbook. Survival is paramount in *The Coat* as much as it is in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. The depiction of township life – the black-on-black (horizontal or lateral) violence, destitution, and loss of morals – is also similar. In devising *The Coat*, the participants developed a theatre that was innovative and revolutionary. They proved that immediate experiences could be reworked, and artists could offer evidence of exploitation and possibly get away with it; while still recognising the impending danger awaiting them. The participants' use of their old character names demonstrates that they are, like the comrades in *Jika*, vulnerable and dispensable. It is their first major rebellious venture. Maponya, on the other hand, is a black playwright of the liberation struggle. His perspectives, literary practice and political leaning were shaped by a sense of urgency, nationalism and Pan-Africanist drive. His plays' diverse interpretive facets – their otherness – have rendered them open-ended and amenable to many realisations, interpretations and *re*interpretations. To a certain degree, they are, largely, as political and radical as they are literary and universal. In them are problematic concepts and labels that are open to *re*negotiations and *re*presentational process. They are as much local as they are global because of their demystification of themes such as capitalism and subversion and containment – topics as universal as love and survival. This, partly, accounts for the appeal of *Gangsters* and *The Hungry Earth* at home and abroad compared with the other equally political black plays of the period.

Maponya's perspective on events is apparently one-eyed and limited, although he utilised his characters' experiences to depict and narrate the shocking effect of exploitation and capitalist servitude in general. It is through the characters and the close-to-life experiences in the plays that the social group conflict (proletariat versus bourgeoisie) and the individual-state clash are depicted. The plays provide so-called historical evidences of murder and exploitation, skewed claims that can be *reinterpreted* by recourse to alternative historical and sociological sources. Maponya follows an evidence-based performance style in the footsteps of Brecht<sup>289</sup> and does not particularly pay attention to character development. It is only in *Gangsters* that he traces a bit of the development of the character of Masechaba, but even this development is tied to the struggle. His main characters do not believe in a change of heart and do not consider opinions different from their own – a single-layered black perspective common in most of his dramas.

The characters in the dramas are witnesses that can be cross-examined. Their testimonies and actions cannot therefore be relied on to arrive at a valid interpretation of events in the plays. They are largely static agents of the black struggle who do not shift ground. In *Gangsters*, the poet Masechaba retains her liberation ideologies and stubborn resolve; so do her oppressors Whitebeard and Jonathan. The comrades in *Jika* are bent on defying apartheid; and the state is determined to suppress them. There is a cognitive dissonance in the presentation of beliefs and characters – say between Masechaba as a firm representative of the struggle for black freedom and Whitebeard as an agent of the regime. This conflict is presented in *The Island* in the debate between John as Creone, and a symbol of authority, and Winston as Antigone, and a political convict; and enacted in the resolve of the inmates and the wardens' containment of their will and struggle.

Maponya is intimately attached to his characters, and so his bitter voice is unmistakable. His anger limits his expression and leads him to obvious generalisations. It also closes his ears to the arguments of the opposing group, a limit evident in the static nature of his characters. It is revealed in this thesis that Fugard detached himself from events and overt politics, and makes potent political statements without necessarily sounding desperate. His plays are as, therefore, as forceful as any produced by black playwrights. The notion of a binary opposition between the two playwrights is problematic and falls apart the moment they are compared as strictly white and black, liberal and political, privileged and underprivileged, or experienced and inexperienced. A categorisation of their plays as universal and particular, and canonical and uncanonical, is not also a stable one.

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<sup>289</sup> Bertolt Brecht's theatre is a tribunal that relies on evidence, direction, and spectator verdict.

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