AMBIGUITY AND DECEPTION

DISERVETATION

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By

Allan John Munro, M.A., H.D.E.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

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Dissertation Committee:
Professor Stratos E. Constantinidis, Adviser
Professor Lupenga Mphande
Professor Alan Woods

Approved by

Adviser
Department of Theatre
This dissertation investigates the phenomenon of theatre committed to social, political and economic change in an oppressive environment. The terrain covered is the theatre created in South Africa between 1976 and 1996.

The investigation is positioned around the theoretical writings of James C. Scott and his concepts of "onstage" and "offstage" transcripts of both oppressor and oppressed, as well as the writings on hybridity by Temple Hauptfleisch, and the "collective scribe" by Ian Steadman. The argument is made that the discourse developed in offstage positions is performed in onstage and public positions to legitimize the form and content of that which takes place in those offstage (oppressed) spaces. As such, all discourse is theatrical, as it involves elements of role-play.

The South African institution of the imbongi, or praise-poet, is used as a tracer element throughout the areas of investigation. The imbongi is seen as the interlocutor between various power positions, who, through the effective use of presentation styles and techniques, and Vail and White's concept of "poetic licensing," is legitimized both by the oppressor and the oppressed as a negotiator.

The dissertation investigates three areas. Firstly it considers the use of the
theatrical by Trade Union movement to mobilize and to create solidarity. Drawing on the work of Ari Sitas, and the Durban workers Cultural Local, I conclude that the theatrical leads to the monolithic in the onstage spaces and transcripts. Secondly, this work analyzes two Theatre for Development projects (The Marotholi Travelling Theatre, and the DramAidE Programme), following their use of Augusto Boal's theories on the Theatre of the Oppressed. I conclude that the theatrical here leads to new coping devises for the oppressed, as opposed to confrontation and change. Finally, this work considers Mbongeni Ngema's early plays (Woza Albert!, Asinamali!, Sarafina! and Township Fever!). I demonstrate how the offstage transcript is presented (in the first two works) to the oppressor, as a system of a resistance, but in the last two works, the offstage discourses are offered in a commodified form, "betraying" the privilege and legitimation of group belonging.
This work is dedicated to

God,

my wife and child

and to my parents
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Finally I wish publically to confirm the sacrifices undergone, and the unwavering support, abiding trust and deep love shown to me during the past number of years by my wife Marth, and my son Andrew, as well as the caring of all my parents. God has blessed me with a wonderful close and extended family.
VITA

December 3, 1953....................... Born — Louis Trichardt, South Africa

1975................................. B.A. University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.


1978 - 1982......................... Teacher,
                               High School for Boys, Potchefstroom.

1982 - 1990......................... Theatre Technologist,
                               Department of Theatre
                               Potchefstroom University for CHE

1990 - 1994......................... Graduate Teaching Assistant
                               The Ohio State University.

1993................................. M.A. the Ohio State University

1995 - present..................... Lecturer
                               Department of English Language and Literature
                               Potchefstroom University for CHE

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major field: Theatre.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dedication</strong></td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Acknowledgments</strong></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Vita</strong></td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Basic Thesis and Historical Overview</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>South African Theatre: 1976-1990</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Statement of Purpose and Definitions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ambiguity of Overt and Covert Texts</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Oppressors and Oppressed</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Fallacies of Hegemony and Interpellation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1</td>
<td>The Onstage Discourse of the Opppressor</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2</td>
<td>The Offstage Discourse of the Oppressor</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.3</td>
<td>The Onstage Discourse of the Oppressed</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.4</td>
<td>The Offstage Discourse of the Oppressed</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ambiguity and Confrontation as Strategies</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Governments and the Development of Trade Unions</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>The People and the Development of Trade Unions</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Ari Sitas and the African Perspective</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>The Worker/Actor and the Enactment of the Praise-Poets</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>The <em>Imbongi</em> and the Four Traditions</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>The Workers' Own Representations</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. The Ambiguities of Nation Building and Theatre for Development Projects...164
   4.1 Augusto Boal: Theatre of the Oppressed and Theatre for Development.170
   4.2 Two Case Histories.................................................................191
   4.2.1 Zakes Mda and the Marotholi Travelling Theatre....................192
   4.2.2 The DramAidE Programme in Kwazulu-Natal............................220

5. Ambiguity as Represented by Four Popular Plays..........................233
   5.1 Woza Albert!.................................................................239
   5.2 Asinamali!.................................................................262
   5.3 Sarafina!.................................................................278
   5.4 Township Fever!.........................................................302

6. Conclusion..............................................................................316

Bibliography..............................................................................328
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Basic thesis and historical overview: South Africa 1976-1990

This dissertation investigates three nodal moments in South African theatre from 1976 to 1990, in order to explain how ideologically committed anti-Apartheid resistance theatre both submitted to and subverted dominant, pro-apartheid institutions in South African society. The idea that a performance can be decoded to indicate submission, but also to demonstrate subversion, has led to a plethora of ambiguities, deceptions and misunderstandings in the interpretation of such performance events. The ambiguity between seeming submission and subversion has been made possible by the dimension of role-playing in the theatre and also in society. A brief overview of some relevant socio-political events in South Africa will set my observations in their historical perspective.

The last quarter of the twentieth century was momentous because of the changes that were taking place in South Africa. Prior to 1975, the racist policies of the white governments pushed for the complete separation of the races -- except in the workplace where white management and Black labor mingled on the shop floor. Workers of all colors worked side by side at the rock face in the mines but on returning to the surface, segregation was strictly enforced.
This system of separation extended to the setting up of nine quasi-independent states known as Bantustans (or homelands), which were scattered (and fragmented) in the rural areas of the center, north and east of the country.\(^1\) The white governments gave the individual ethnic groups the appearance of having their own independent political states. In reality, however, these "homelands" were little more than reserves of cheap labor.\(^2\) From the mid 1970's onwards four of these Bantustan areas (namely Transkei and Ciskei in the Eastern Cape Province, Bophutatswana in Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and Venda, in the far north of Transvaal), which were designated as "traditionally belonging" to certain "tribal" entities, opted to accept "independence." One "homeland" (namely Kwazulu), under the guidance of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi and the Inkatha movement, had refused to consider independence. Nonetheless, the others (e.g. Garankuwa and Qwa-Qwa), appeared to be on the point of "accepting" the "gift" of independence. In this way white governments split the emerging Black nationalist resistance along ethnic lines, and impoverished those ethnic communities to such an extent that these homelands were forced to provide cheaper labor than ever before.

Closer to the centers of capital, the vast pool of labor that was required to run industry (especially the giant industries of gold and diamond mining), was cloistered in "townships." In these townships, which, thanks to the separatist efforts from the white

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\(^1\)During the period under discussion, the country was divided into four provinces, but, following the change in government, these have been changed into ten provinces. Where applicable, I shall refer to the former dispensation. The Transkei and Ciskei were in Western Province, Kwazulu was in Natal, and the others were scattered in and across the other two provinces.

governments, were similar to ghettos in terms of living conditions, different ethnic groups (such as the Zulu, the Xhosa, the Tswana, and the Pedi), cohabited, mixing news and views about their oppression and exploitation. They shared information on labor practices, schemed against the elite white establishment, and organized into support units to prepare for resistance.

The three common denominators to all the sharing in the townships were the lot of the Black as a unit of labor (class concerns), the discrimination against them by the white governments by virtue of their skin color (race), and a perceived rallying cry around individual languages (which promoted ethnicity). The nexus of race, class and ethnicity became the site of much of the ambiguities that concern this study of this period.

Through intimidation, legislation and persuasion, the white governments "controlled" the class issue by refusing to acknowledge any trade unions, and by suppressing any attempts to set up similar institutions. The government tried to contain the race issue by implementing a "pass" system -- a kind of a "passport" that was designed to control the influx of labor from the "homelands" (Bantustans), and established an "ethnicity of the work-place," represented by a language that would presumably foster clarity on the shop floor.

The Minister of Education decreed that the language of instruction in the black community schools would be Afrikaans.3 This decree ignited an open rebellion that

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3For a full and very detailed account of the run-up to this event, see Baruch Hirson, Year of Fire, Year of Ash: the Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution? (London: Zed Books, 1979).
was subdued by an array of oppressive means. The black communities, on 16th June, 1976, reacted violently against this policy. Students rampaged through the streets for three months, confronting the armed security forces with sticks and stones.

The intense reactions of the black communities led to a number of things. First, there was a concerted push to reform labor regulations, as well as to acknowledge and foster the establishment of trade unions. Work-place negotiations, exploitation and labor disputes were to be worked through by organized labor and management.

Second, the newly "liberated" Bantustans became more marginalized from the black nationalist movement. They were branded as puppets of the white regime by the emerging mass-democratic movement. This movement included the trade unions (which worked in industry), and the Civics Associations (such as the South African Nation Civics Organization, or SANCO), which operated in the civil society of the towns and townships and whose goal was a nonracial and free society. The progressive left (such as the political organizations and institutions that espoused leftist thinking, which included an acceptance of nonracial democracy, also spoke out strongly against the "homelands." The idea that the Bantustans had been given independence, as opposed to the notion that independence had been "taken," undervalued the autonomy of the

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4The events of that day have been "mythologized" in much black literature (e.g. Ngema's play Sarafina!, discussed in chapter 5 of this dissertation). The Morris Isaacson High School was mythologized as the epicenter of the uprising. Hector Peterson became the first black martyr of the "uprising."

5They were also condemned by the outside world, who would not recognize the independence of the Bantustans.
process of independence. It became unacceptable to such broad resistance movements and the Bantustans were seen as concrete examples of ethnic division.

Third, opposition to the white regime, which up to this time appeared to be divided, now became unified in the United Democratic Front (the internal wing of the African National Congress). This Front united disparate forces behind the banner of a nonracial nationalism.  

Fourth, the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970's, which had encouraged the development of pride in cultural uniqueness and diversity, was accepted as an organization, into the United Democratic Front. However its arguments were appropriated by political, and socio-cultural organizations that attempted to take cultural diversity into the political arena. Thus organizations such as Inkatha, a Zulu based organization that espoused a policy of Zulu ethnic and cultural identity and independence, took on a strong conservative line in its political thinking. However, this cultural difference was not the same as the one that was constructed by the white government of South Africa. 

Thus ethnicity was seen as a stumbling block in the move toward a nonracial society, but it was also seen as a way of developing pride in one’s identity.  

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6For a detailed description of the origins and goals of the UDF, see Tom Lodge and Bill Nason, All, Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980’s (Cape Town: Ford Foundations and David Philip, 1991).

7For a fascinating glimpse into the way identities were constructed around political expediency in early South Africa, see Shula Marks, Ambiguities.

8The development of Black thinking during this period can be traced in Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (New York: Longman, 1983).
The disparate, seemingly controlled pressures from political organizations, civic structures and economic and trade union forces that came to bear on the white government during the decade following the 1976 uprising, broke into open and violent revolt again in 1984-1985. This upsurge in overt, violent protest occurred sporadically until the announcement of the imminent release of the mythologized head of the struggle for a nonracial democracy in South Africa, Nelson Mandela, from prison in 1990. On the 2nd of February, 1990, in his speech made at the opening of Parliament, Pres. F.W. de Klerk (the president of South Africa at that time, and leader of the Nationalist -- white -- government), announced the unbanning of the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and the Pan-Africanist Congress, as well as the release of various leaders of these organizations. With this development came the impending move toward multi-party talks which would lead to the development of a democratic society and the removal of racial oppression.

1.2 South African theatre: 1976 to 1990

The above brief description of the 1976-1990 period of South African history forms the backdrop for the topic of my research into the issue of ambiguity in theatre and in society. During the events that occurred straddling the fourteen years under

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9The mythologizing of Nelson Mandela had commenced with his term in maximum security confinement as a political prisoner, on Robben Island in 1963. He was incarcerated for some twenty-eight years, during which the myth of the man and the leader developed in the oppressed (and oppressor) communities of South Africa
consideration, five major clusters of theatrical dynamics emerged. First, there appeared a theatre that espoused the liberal tradition which launched a search for universal truths, both in content and in form. This type of theatre is exemplified in the work of Athol Fugard and in Afrikaans playwrights and companies in the country. A second cluster sought to access, recoup, formulate and develop a type of theatrical performance that was rooted in the old black cultural traditions that had been suppressed. This cluster is exemplified by of the Black Consciousness Movement.

A third cluster attempted to restructure ideas about performance from across the social spectrum, under the aegis of the Mass Democratic Movement. This strategy included the use of the theatre and the theatrical in the development of trade union agendas, the hybridity of performance forms (that is to say the appropriation of different forms from various cultures to form a "unique" theatrical event) and the use of theatre as a didactic instrument in unifying disparate elements in the struggle.

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10For a detailed summary of these theatrical conditions, see Martin Orkin, Drama and the South African State (Manchester: Manchester UP., and Johannesburg: Witwatersrand UP, 1991), especially Chapter 6 to the end of the book.

11A typical example of this is Russell Vandenbroucke's extended study of Athol Fugard in Truths the Hands Can Touch (Johannesburg: Donker, 1986). In Afrikaans, the early work of Andre P. Brink, P.G. du Plessis and Bartho Smit reflect more on existential dilemmas than on political realities.


14See chapter three for a detailed analysis of this approach, with specific regard to the trade union theatre.
The fourth grouping simply sought to make money out of theatre and the theatrical. These included theatres such as the Alhambra Theatre in Johannesburg, and many of the productions at the State Theatres. In contrast, the final group (chiefly of educationalists and activists) attempted to use theatre and the theatrical as a process for pursuing goals of social, economic upliftment and development (the so-called Theatre for Development). These included community activist programs, and university-based companies that served the (predominantly white) schools.

The common denominator in all of the above clusters was the acceptance of the principle that all individuals are capable of the theatrical, (i.e. they have the ability to manipulate role-playing both in society and in the theatre). This ability allows them to change, focus, activate or "develop" themselves either through practicing such role-playing strategies, or through viewing them. The available literature on the effectiveness of the theatrical indicates simply that the theatrical either happens or "should" happen because it is allegedly "innate." No study to date has explained how

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15 In this study I will concern myself only to a minor degree with this dynamic, although obviously the commercial aspects of any theatrical event are important.

16 See chapter four of this study.


18 Augusto Boal, the theatre practitioner that develops the theories and principle of the Theatre of the Oppressed which forms the backbone for much of the Theatre for Development movement, notes that “the human being not only makes theatre, it ‘is’ theatre” because the human being is able to observe himself doing things in society. Augusto Boal, The Rainbows of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 13.
or why the "theatrical" works in a society that is oppressed. Nor has any study shown this specific dynamic of the theatrical in society to be paralleled in the conventional stage or performance aspect of committed/resistance theatre. I will address this issue, in the context of the South African society and theatre during the 1976-1995 period.

Internationally, the dominant South African playwright in the last quarter of the twentieth century is Athol Fugard. His plays move between the poles of the highly allegorical (Dimetos\textsuperscript{19} and Place of the Pigs\textsuperscript{20}), to the overtly political (The Island and Sizwe Bansi is Dead).\textsuperscript{21} In South Africa, Sizwe Bansi is Dead became a benchmark for many of the black South Africa playwrights, such as the influential Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya, and in the performances and work of the theatre collective known as Workshop '71. However, the ethos that Sizwe Bansi is Dead creates is one of perseverance in the times of trial and tribulation,\textsuperscript{22} whereas the movement following the 1976 uprising indicates a militancy and a taking charge of one's destiny to produce change individually and collectively.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19}Athol Fugard, \textit{Dimetos, Dimetos and Two Early Plays} (London: OUP, 1977).
\item \textsuperscript{20}Athol Fugard, \textit{Place of the Pigs} (London: Faber and Faber, 1988).
\item \textsuperscript{21}The Island and Sizwe Bansi is Dead were written in collaboration with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, two black actors, and appear in Athol Fugard, \textit{Statements; Three Plays}. (London: OUP, 1974).
\item \textsuperscript{22}This was even true of the most "militant" of the pre-1976 plays, namely Survival! by Workshop '71, the title of which explains very accurately the attempts of the population simply to keep going. Nevertheless, there are hints in the play of the millennium, and the popular uprising. Ironically, the production of the play was in performance when the events of 1976 overtook it. See the Introduction and the play in Robert Kavanagh ed. and intro., \textit{South African Peoples' Plays} (London: Heinemann, 1981). See also Hilary Seymour, "Sizwe Bansi is Dead: A Study of Artistic Ambivalence." \textit{Race and Class}. 21.3 (1980): 273-289. See also Allan Munro, "Athol Fugard's My Children! My Africa! in the South African Theatre Paradigm" Thesis. The Ohio State University, 1993, chapter 2.
\end{itemize}
This militant type of theatre has variously been named "Committed theatre," "Resistance theatre," "Theatre for Social Change," "Popular/Populist Theatre" and "Black Theatre." This hybrid form of theatre drew on various "traditions" of performance. These traditions included story-telling and mimicry, mythological themes, highly energetic performance styles, music, singing and dancing, and performance styles from Western political theatre traditions (e.g. the living newspaper and the Brechtian epic style). The performance was normally located in a contested space, that is, a space whose occupants had a double agenda. For example, the productions of trade union theatre events were performed in trade union halls or open air arenas, where the performance was part of a larger political agenda. It was when an ideologically committed theatre performance moved out of a space contested as a "traditional" performance space, into a legitimised space (i.e. a conventional theatre), that the event was treated with a change in expectations.

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23 This study will use the term "committed theatre" simply because, as shall be shown, all of the theatre phenomena were committed to a particular, self-defined agenda. This term would therefore encapsulate all the other terms.


26 Witwatersrand University's theatre was the venue of much of the theatre events that moved from these contested spaces into a theatre. The Market theatre, too, hosted many of the theatrical events of this nature.
Furthermore, the ideologically committed theatre had a broad agenda, which was localized by framing it in the specific frame of reference of the community at the time. In this way the theatrical performance attempted to be didactic (or educational) by moving the details presented to the audience from the specific to the universal. In using theatre as a way of explaining or bringing about change, the practitioners were trying to be proactive. 27 This type of theatre also always showed the tensions between race, class and ethnicity, emphasizing demands of the day and the spaces the communities inhabited. It drew on "untrained" performers, assuming that theatricality was to a large extent "inherent" or "intuitive," and therefore "universal." Differences might be subsumed by the capacity to "act." Furthermore (except for the Theatre for Development projects) many of the products were eventually transferred to the legitimized market-place of the theatre. 28 As such, these performing talents, arising out of oppression, could be sold in the global market. 29

Black Consciousness Theatre, as Kelwyn Sole and others have pointed out, developed to a large extent from the work of the black petit-bourgeoisie. 30 The Black

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27 In this regard, see the struggle that Ari Sitas has in attempting to bridge the gap between the local and the universal, which he documents in his "Culture and Production: the Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in South Africa" Africa Perspective New Series 1.2-2 (1986): 84-110.

28 Whether the local community itself may be perceived of as a "market place" will be considered in Chapter four on Theatre for Development.

29 This is the trajectory of the career of Mbongeni Ngema, which will be used as the basis of this work in Chapter five.

Consciousness thinkers equated oppression in South Africa with being Black, and therefore sought a way to empower the oppressed (Black majority) with a sense of its own, innate and inherited, positive qualities. The agenda was to dignify and uplift the traditional performance styles and stories of the Africans,\(^3\) and to explain the "rightness" of the cause for which they were fighting.\(^2\) A major stylistic development occurred following the foregrounding of Black performance styles by the Black Consciousness theatre. This was the rediscovery and redeployment of the praise-poem (isibongo) and the praise-poet (imbongi), either as part of the Black Consciousness process, or as part of the committed theatre endeavor in general.

The imbongi as institution had long been part of the rural community. Singing the praises of the chiefs had been a way of consolidating power and regulating the community. With the vast migrant labor system that came into being and which was regulated by the regime in the period leading up to 1976 and beyond, many of the cultural activities of the rural communities came with the migrants and were practiced in the urban communities.\(^3\) It was perceived that here was an art form that was not

\(^3\)See, for example Credo Mutwa’s unNobilimela, in which the story is told of a Zulu girl who breaks with Zulu traditions, and goes on a journey of the degradations of migrancy and the townships, only to return to the rural and the traditional and to save her people from the destructive forces of industry and technology. This enhances the ways of the Zulu, and denounces the ways of capitalism and industry. Robert Kavanagh, ed South African Peoples’ Plays (London: Heinemann, 1981).


\(^3\)For a cogent example of this see the extensive work of David Coplan. As an example see his In the Time of the Cannibals: the Word Music of South Africa’s Basotho Migrants (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1994) which traces the sefela and lifela as referred to in Chapter four of this study.
typical of Eurocentric culture, and that was deeply ingrained in black cultural power. Consequently, the *imbongi* became a vital feature in the recuperation of the Black past.

Two dynamics impinged on this re-appropriation. In the first place, most traditional praise-poems were performed in the poet's own (ethnic) South African language. But not all South Africans had access to that particular language. Therefore, praise-poets were forced to use English as a *lingua franca*. This phenomenon inevitably inserted itself into the great South African language debate concerning languages of communication and languages of culture. Secondly, allegorical and metaphorical references made by the *imbongi* in his performance for his audience were lost both because of different linguistic and socio-political and historical backgrounds, and also because of differing life experiences which were used as the inspiration for the praise poems. For example, feats of courage no longer referred to wrestling with lions. Now the feats of courage had to do with the wrestling for a living in the sweatshops of migrant labor.

The two advantages of the praise poet in terms of space were his/her portability, and his/her adaptability. The *imbongi* could perform wherever the spirit moved, and could adapt, reconfigure or compose afresh whenever he or she was in a new space. But the recapturing of the poems produced in this manner called for systems of duplication that would translate the spoken praise poem into written form (and annotate where necessary), and make the poem available across a greater spectrum so that more people could be empowered by the agendas that the Black Consciousness Movements espoused. The result was a proliferation of publishing opportunities and cultural
organizations across the country, many of them with a small, in-house publishing programs to cater for the demands of this creative force.\textsuperscript{34}

Journals such as \textit{Staffrider} and Ravan Press were set up to publish the works of the burgeoning writers. Cultural organizations such as TECON, MDALI, METHU and, of course, the collective theatre company known as Workshop '71 (established in 1971), came into being. Junction Avenue Theatre Company developed out of the disaffected Witwatersrand University student population, and the actors who remained after the dissolution of Workshop '71 in 1976. Theatrical spaces developed, such as the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, and the Space Theatre in Cape Town. These spaces became contested areas throughout this period, because they sought to remain economically viable. To do that, they had to draw on the financial backing of successful capitalist business.\textsuperscript{35} The liberal tradition was to play an important part in the Market Theatre. In the townships themselves, organizations such as SOYIKWA under the guidance and leadership of Matsemela Manaka, became prominent. Many of the white universities opened their facilities to performances from the disenfranchised.\textsuperscript{35}

One of the major dynamics that entered the debate was the lure of the overseas (international) market. As more and more of the plays traveled through Europe and the


\textsuperscript{36}For a more extended overview of these organizations see Orkin, \textit{Drama and the South African State} chapter 4-6.
Americas, the style and demands on productions changed in the 1980s. The resulting insertion of commercialism challenged the original agendas of the Black Consciousness movement.\footnote{This dynamic will become one of the major ones in the discussion on Mbongeni Ngema in chapter five of this work.}

The Black Consciousness movement had foregrounded Black individuality. This idea of the individual, and the culture from which he or she comes, was to be taken on and considered in the works of the mass democratic movements such as the United Democratic Front, or UDF. The theme of "unity in diversity" sponsored the idea that each community and organization could work in its own locality for the benefit of its own community, so long as it obeyed the broad aegis of the thoughts of liberation, democracy, and the removal of oppression. Arising from this concept of individuality, the particular demands and agendas of the Trade Unions (as consisting primarily of Black members), for example, were addressed also as part of the democratic struggle, as well as members of the Black Consciousness Movement.

Inevitably, these organizations and their goals spilled over into other domains as the agendas became blurred, and agendas and procedures ambiguous and contradictory.

The strongly traditional (Black) organizations, such as Inkatha,\footnote{Inkatha is a strong, Zulu based, organization, primarily situated in Natal. Although originally established as a cultural organization, with the resurgence of political activities in the 1970's the organization became more and more embedded in a political struggle. For a more detailed analysis, see Chapter three of this study.} to a large extent rooted their cultural work both in tradition and in religion. The worship services of many of the Zionist and Ethiopian religious sects are powerfully theatrical in their
structure and style. The services contain many instances of stylized (or ritualized) movement, dress, song and speech. These stylizations are seemingly very expressive of devotion and also what appears to be "natural" abilities for performance.  

Nevertheless, this theological wellsprings (particularly in Natal and for those that came from Natal), influences much of the work of the new theatre practitioners. Indeed, the influence of the Black Theology and liberation theology is widespread.

Much of the liberation theology of the time was drawn from the thinking on religion from the Central and South American countries. This was also the center of much of the thinking on Theatre for Development. This resonated in much of the work on alternative education, particularly in using the theatrical as a methodological tool. In South Africa, the interesting blend of Theatre in Education and Drama in Education which came to a large extent from England (and which became a central concern of many Drama Departments in the tertiary institutions in South Africa as they scrambled to make their courses "viable"), combined with the thinking of practitioners of Theatre for Development. The theories of Augusto Boal and Theatre of the Oppressed is the backbone of this work. Initially, it drew on the work of Paulo Freire, who also became

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39 As an example of this, and for a detailed analysis and description of the Church of the Nazarene (the church of Isaiah Tshembe) in Natal, see Peter Larlham, Black Theatre, Dance and Ritual in South Africa (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985).


41 This shall be explored in some depth in Chapter 5 of this work.
important to the thinking on alternative education during this period. Theatre and “making” theatre was also to be used as a method of learning, and would be carried over into performance.

The agendas of all of these theatre groups intermingled, even though they represented different cultures. Furthermore, the centrality of the market place and the factory floor (as well as the mines) as social and economic spaces in the lives of the majority of the people in South Africa led to these same spaces becoming the primary focus of representation in the oppressed people’s theatrical paradigm. The communities which dealt with the oppression, adopted and adapted roles (or "masks") in order to appear to be acquiescing to the dominant ideology. These "games" of role-playing and mask development became one of the central methodologies and concerns of the committed theatre during the 1976-1990 period.

Yet in all of this, the tensions between race, class and ethnicity were foregrounded and theorized in the black people’s search for an understanding of the dynamics of the resistance strategies and agendas. These tensions also influenced the search for theatrical spaces, for "authenticity," origins, differences and similarities.

As a result a disparate conglomeration of theatre and performance proliferated. There were a large number of different theatrical and ideological discourses that were

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42 See Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. See also Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed transl Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), amongst other works from Augusto Boal. For a detailed discussion of Boal’s work see Chapter 4 of this project.

43 The questions of gender have not been explored in as much detail as have race, class and ethnicity been, by theorists and analysts writing about South African society and theatre.
used in any South African theatrical performance. Each discourse drew on its own roots (or agenda), offering its own possible solutions to the problems at hand.

1.3 Statement of Purpose and Definitions.

The "theatrical performance," in the sense of role-playing for a particular agenda, entails the existence of "non-theatrical performance." Goffman refers to "pure" performances (where the performance is framed as being intentionally theatrical), mixed performances (where the event contains elements of pure performance, and elements that appear to be "real" — for example a boxing match), and "impure" performances, where the intention of the actors is not to perform, but that which they do is framed as a performance by an "audience." This would suggest that there are moments, spaces, discourses and agendas that "hover" between seeming to be real, seeming to present reality, and seeming to present the theatrical. In an ideologically charged environment, most of such performances can slip or have slipped into the use of deception and ambiguity. There are moments, spaces, discourses and agendas which are framed as being "onstage," where negotiations take place between various power blocs, and "offstage" moments, spaces, discourses and agendas where consolidation, strategizing, and commiseration take place. The onstage space would be seen to be "theatrical" and the offstage space "less so," and therefore closer to the

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"truth." This phenomenon is particularly important in the decoding of traditional theatre, committed/resistance theatre, and the use of theatre as a methodology for conscientization, building solidarity, education and development, in South Africa.

In this study, I will explore the relationships among three major south African performance trends, namely of Trade Union theatre, Theatre for Development, and of Resistance Theatre for commercial profit, as exemplified by Mbongeni Ngema. I will show the agendas, spaces, discourses and limitations of these three types of theatre, and the concomitant ambiguities, misunderstandings and deceptions that resulted from the decoding of the performances that they produced. In doing so I will investigate the following theoretical problem: When an overtly political theatrical performance-text is presented to a particular political and social gathering, what are the dynamics present in the decoding process of that performance?

In general, the dominant classes depend on the subservient classes for material production. The subordinate classes survive by working within the structures that are in place. This mutual interdependence provides a common ground or space. Yet both dominant and subordinate acquiesce to this interdependence in order to minimize friction, to jockey for power, and to avoid retribution. This interdependence is held up as the space in which negotiations about power, for power and with power groups take place.

Notwithstanding this public space, discourse or text, there is also a hidden text encoded into the public text. When revealed, the "hidden" text speaks of the wishes of each party in a more "direct" way. The dominant force sought to hold onto and control
the public space, whereas the dominated classes sought to claim it back from the colonizers. The Blacks developed a discourse that was *ostensibly shared* by the Blacks but remained ambiguous and covert for the colonizers.

To rehearse their encoding and decoding strategies, each participant in the public discourse needed a safe space, with a trusted and like-minded community. The Blacks had a common goal and a shared agenda, and the colonizers had their agenda. In South Africa this separation has been "facilitated" by virtue of the overt and covert segregationalist policies in place, which led to severe oppression. I submit that the more severe the oppression the more overt and less ambiguous the "hidden" text of the dominant becomes in the public sphere (as it was, for example, during the Verwoerdian era of the 1960's). Likewise, the more severe the oppression, the more covert and ambiguous becomes the hidden text of the oppressed. Consequently, the more oppressive the society becomes, the less "direct" the public text of the oppressed becomes. Resistance, therefore, is encoded in specific forms and structures that are deceptive to the dominant classes because of their ambiguity. These structures, however, remain clear to the subordinate classes who "know" the code.

Thus the public acquiescence of the subordinate classes meant neither acceptance of a dominant white ideology, nor the effective use of the hegemony. The oppressed did not buy into colonist ideology. The cornerstone of ideological and hegemonic (as well as counter-hegemonic) arguments rests on the potential of the oppressed underclass to be rational. I endorse James Scott's views here, i.e. that the touchstones for action and reaction in the group lie in the twin factors of *autonomy* and
dignity, and that the oppressed consider their lives along these two fault lines. Inertia amongst the oppressed does not necessarily mean that the underclass has been interpellated, or even that it has been "persuaded" of the inevitability of their position. Rather, it can mean a temporary "silence" in the face of the forces marshaled against it, before it recovers its voice of rebellion.

In brief, and following the definition of the "theatrical" posited earlier, both the oppressor and the oppressed play roles in the public space. Their respective agendas and discourses are observed in the public space, and are decoded according to the particular balance of power at that historical moment. The decoding of their discourses and texts cannot take place as if either of the two is more "direct" than the other. When this situation in public life is used as the "model" for the performance, the ambiguities are compounded. This is true (but not often recognized) in the fields of Trade Union theatre, Theatre for Development and the Resistance Theatre for profit in South Africa, as I will show in Chapter Two.

Given the nature of these public and "hidden" texts, how are these "social" negotiations reflected in a theatrical performance? I postulate that there were three trends in the areas of South African theatre under consideration: the quest for solidarity and with it the need for confrontation; the refining of role-playing abilities; and the revelation of the hidden text.

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"Solidarity and confrontation" promulgates the strengthening of the power bloc of the oppressed. This is done through a sharing and an entrenching of the hidden text, so that the bloc may "speak with one voice" to others who are in the same predicament. This is the type of theatre that has come out of the Trade Union theatre movement. There are three major problems with this approach. It appears to be reactionary without being strategic or particularly innovative in form. Secondly, in its search for solidarity, it runs the risk of being itself oppressive, as it side-lines or squashes the dissenting voice. Thirdly, it debilitates subtle debate by simply positing an "us vs them" situation. The uses of the hidden text are clustered around "conformity." In the search to remove ambiguity in the discourse, space and agenda, strategies of oppression emerge.

"Role-play" suggests that contexts are defined wherein coping, strategizing and "educating" take place. Given the circumstances, how does an individual perceive that he or she can best turn or manipulate the circumstances to his or her advantage, or move within the circumstances to better his or her lot or, in the long run, change the circumstances to his or her own way of seeing or doing things. The work of Augusto Boal and the work of the Theatre for Development work within this theatrical paradigm.

The "revelation of the discourse." agenda and spaces that occur in the offstage spaces of the oppressed in the popular "commercial" theatre, is an attempt to create a performance that presents the ambiguity and deceptions in the public text. The text has been encoded for the public sphere by the oppressed, but has been prepared in the offstage, safe spaces. The works of Mbongeni Ngema chart an interesting arc through
the Popular theatre of his *Woza Albert!*\textsuperscript{46} to the controversy ridden (and commodified) *Township Fever!*\textsuperscript{47} Here one sees very clearly how the concept of the "collaborative process"\textsuperscript{48} is simply the revelation of the shared hidden text that has arisen from a shared oppression, and how, once the "collaborative process" attempts to stand outside and "mix" overt and covert texts, all that occurs is a text that realigns its ambiguities with the dominant.

The South African *imboni* is an established metaphor of a power broker that allows one to negotiate through ambiguities and deceptions of the overt and covert texts. This is specifically true of a performance, where the "poetic license" of the performer and his performance accredits some form of immunity to any confrontation resulting from realized deceptions. In other words, the space that the performer enters (a performance space), and the agenda the performer has (to entertain and instruct, for example) "grants" the performer some level of freedom of expression.\textsuperscript{49} I will explore the role, function and style of the *imboni*, in order to demonstrate the structural, stylistic and agenda-driven ambiguities and deceptions. I will then show how the *imboni* may be used as a tracer element through the three areas of consideration,


\textsuperscript{49}This is the argument made convincingly by Leroy Vail and Landeg White in *Power and the Praise Poem: southern African Voices in History,* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1991).
namely the Trade Union theatre, theatre for Development and the Popular committed/resistance theatre. The *imbongi* is part of an ethnic culture, and occupies spaces that traverse power relations. Also, the discourse that the *imbongi* produces contains most of the elements that are "typical" of the performance elements that occur in resistance or committed theatre.

In the third chapter, I will show how the Trade Union theatre in South Africa has come to realize that there are a number of overt and covert texts at play in a particular performance. Scott's central metaphoric concept of the hidden transcripts of the oppressor and the oppressed being "offstage," allows me to theorize that what is decoded as being offstage for one text may in fact be decoded as being onstage for another.\(^50\) Thus when issues of material production are "center-stage," issues of democracy, individuality, gender and others are not necessarily off-stage, but can be.

The ramifications of this conclusion are twofold. In the first instance the ambiguities of performer and performance cannot dissolve the material pressure of production and power relations. In other words, democracy may not protect the rights of the individual, but may in fact confine individuals to groups who agree and groups who disagree, with the majority holding control over the minority. The overt text of democracy makes way for the covert text of potential oppression. The tensions that this creates abound in the areas of the role-play, agendas, discourses and spaces that the participants draw on in their theatrical and everyday performances.

\(^50\)Scott, *Domination* 119-120.
In the second instance, individuals are "continuously on-stage" but the stages may merely differ. To assume therefore that there is only one stage -- the stage of material production -- is problematic. Trade Union Theatre has attempted to claim material production as the only stage, and have proceeded to attempt to remove the potential ambiguities from that text. This is revealed in the decoding of the stage performances that they create.

The spaces of power are perceived of as being so pervasive within the frame of labor relations, that the strategies of making the covert text less ambiguous to dominant forces will continually be fraught with the seeming intrusion of the texts of differing covert groupings. Theatre for the people, of the people, by the people leads to conformity rather than to resistance. It is through this threat of the monolithic that the theorist Ari Sitas (whose extensive writings on Trade Union theatre and the industrialized imbongi in South Africa are the backbone of my analysis in Chapter Three) and the Durban Workers Cultural Local\textsuperscript{51} (whose work I will refer to as a case study in Chapter Three) attempt to maneuver.

Sitás' work led to his exploration of the role of the imbongi in Trade Union Theatre. Here the theatre is used to attempt to "solidify" a single text of the oppressed, to provide the community with a history, a context and a purpose as the community moves to negotiate in the public sphere. The imbongi facilitates this process

\textsuperscript{51}The Durban Workers Cultural Local was a organization set up in Durban under the auspices of the trade union MAWU (Metal and Allied Workers Union) in 1983. Their theatre work has been documented by Astrid von Kotze in Organise and Act: the Natal Workers Theatre Movement 1983-1987 (Natal: Culture and Working Life Publications, Univ. of Natal, 1988).
by trying to draw on shared lines of suffering, but ends up drawing not on the labor movement's lines of suffering, but on the common strands of oppression and history which in South Africa is rooted in race oppression. Hence, I will explain why in South Africa, the texts emphasize Black history and performance styles, instead of Labor history and performance styles. Nevertheless, the imbongi figure has altered and adapted its discourse and agenda as it is appropriated by the Trade Union Movement.

In Chapter Four I investigate how the strategies of Theatre For Development taught methods of coping, in general, with the situation in South Africa in particular, instead of resolving the oppression. I explore the developing strategies of Theatre for Development in South Africa, as well as the theories of Augusto Boal as one of the progenitors of and strategists for this type of work. I argue that the problem in contemporary theorizing in this field is the reluctance to accept the hidden text as a vibrant characteristic of power relations in a community. I will show that there is a clear understanding of "liberation from" (usually from a perceived oppression), but there is little indication of an understanding in the methodology of Theatre for Development, of what is visualized for the community after the liberation has occurred. Consequently, strategies again seem to be self-serving, that is to say they are strategies that cannot "avoid" the dominant, or power position or agenda (in this case, the striving for some form of "development"). All that happens is that the "spaces" of

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conflict can be negotiated more effectively and efficiently by learning new strategies for coping. What occurs is that the spaces for development are simply enlarged, not redefined, because of the inability (or unwillingness) to deconstruct the central tenet, namely the nature of power in role-play situations in moments of oppression. Development is measured against some or other "universal" objective or agenda. This lack is accentuated, not diminished, in the staging spaces of Theatre for Development.

In the Theatre for Development concept (and Boal's work) the imbongi plays the role of the Joker or the trickster, nudging and cajoling the community into the "right" direction, the effective discourse, and the appropriate space. The imbongi acts as the interlocutor between the effects of the dominant power structures and the implications of those effects for the oppressed within that oppression. He also focuses the strategies needed to work with and within those structures. The imbongi is the facilitator for the community as it seeks to be "liberated from" oppression. However the imbongi works from an understanding of the public text, which includes the understanding of the necessity of power structures of a sort. She/he has the "privilege" of "poetic license" (which implies that she/he can move in and out of "role" but is also somehow automatically and inevitably able to be decoded as being able to do so). For the imbongi to work it must seem as if he has an understanding of the demands of the power spaces, and more particularly, an understanding of the overt and covert texts of the community, of both dominant and subordinate groups. Furthermore, the imbongi

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53Vail and White Power and the Praise Poem Chapter 2.
seems to be able to access some type of "universal" discourse, to make his or her judgements.

In this case, then, the imbongi might in fact be seen as an agent of the dominant, because the Theatre for Development movement attempts to disrupt the situation of domination, without providing any strategies beyond the disruption. It relies on a perceived ability of a community to reason "outside" the apriori dominant text from which it draws its ambiguous strategies.

The Theatre for Development displays a clear example of muddied thinking on the nature of offstage and onstage spaces, discourses and agendas. In Chapter Four I will examine two case histories to illustrate to this -- Zakes Mda' work as documented in his When People Play People, and the DramAide Programme at work in Kwazulu-Natal. In this latter project theatrical techniques are being used to attempt to combat the potential AIDS epidemic in the area. However, although knowledge about the spread of AIDS, and the attitudes towards it have changed, actual behavior patterns, (i.e. the ones rehearsed in the stage spaces) in real life have not.

In the Fifth Chapter I investigate in what way the theoretical concept of overt and covert texts, as illustrated by the South African imbongi in resistance theatre, is effective in assisting the decoding of the dynamics and meanings (in other words, the

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ambiguities and deceptions) of such resistance theatre. I will demonstrate the
effectiveness of the dynamic of encoding and decoding the hidden text and public text,
as a methodology in the analysis of ambiguity in Popular or resistance theatre. I will
argue, using the work of Mbongeni Ngema, that Ngema moved away from the
committed/resistance theatre when he seemed to exploit the covert and deliberate
ambiguity of the texts (of the oppressed of which he was perceived to be a part), for
what appears to be personal gain. I will show that Ngema's first play, Woza Albert!
was strongly influenced by the thinking of liberal theatre practitioners like Barney
Simon. Ngema's second play, Asinamali!,\(^{56}\) shows most clearly the presence of the
offstage discourse and the effect of the imbongi tradition on Ngema. Sarafina!,\(^{57}\) the
following play, shows Ngema's attempting to amalgamate the influences from the
traditions of the dominant and the subordinate, while his next play, Township Fever!,\(^{58}\)
prents on the stage the demonstration of the subordinate, offstage discourse without
due regard for the reasons for having an offstage discourse in the first place. I will
argue that Ngema abrogates, exploits and commodifies the experiences of the
oppressed.

(Johannesburg: Skotaville/Via Afrika, 1995). 1-53. Also in Duma Ndlovu, ed. Woza Afrika! (New
York: George Braziller, 1986) 177-224.

\(^{57}\)Mbongeni Ngema, Sarafina! The Best of Mbongeni Ngema: The Man and his Music.
(Johannesburg: Skotaville/Via Afrika, 1995) 55-125.

\(^{58}\)Mbongeni Ngema, Township Fever! The Best of Mbongeni Ngema: The Man and his Music.
(Johannesburg: Skotaville/Via Afrika, 1995) 127-190.
It is in the "collaborative process" of negotiating through the ambiguity in the codes of the popular theatre that the *imbongi*’s role of negotiator and catalyst becomes the clearest. The ambiguous political role of the *imbongi* facilitates this process, because not only is he privy to the strategies of encoding and decoding of both the powerful and the powerless, but both groups acknowledge to a greater or lesser extent his role as a performer of the negotiation. As the covert texts of the oppressed engage with the possibility of becoming more overt in the public sphere of the stage, the dualities, ambiguities and power demands of the oppressed need to be handled with thoughtfulness, delicacy and due regard for retribution so as not to drive the negotiations from the public arena. The limits of autonomy and dignity of the powerful or the powerless must not be overextended. Ngema’s earlier plays within specific historical parameters took cognisance of this dynamic, while the last of his plays to be discussed seems to exploit that autonomy and dignity of the oppressed for sake of his own personal gain.

The practice of the *imbongi* suggests the potential to build a theory of South African committed theatre. David Coplan has shown the beginnings of this African approach to this type of theory in his writings.\(^{59}\) Vail and White conclude their research on the praise poet and praise poem with the following thoughts:

\[\ldots\text{it’s (the performance of the bard’s) governing convention -- the aesthetic of poetic license -- makes it the primary means by which both oral intellectuals and}\]

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ordinary men and women express, within the existing structures of power, their versions of history. The resulting 'maps of experience' open up the intellectual, emotional, and moral life of the region's societies more clearly and dramatically than any other source.\textsuperscript{60}

To my mind, the "maps of experience" encapsulated in theatre, speak to the history of the people that created them, and to the "maps of experience" of those that use those maps to inform and shape their own lives. The \textit{imbongi}, as go-between, redraws the maps according to the spaces in which he or she works, and according to the power dynamics at work in those spaces. The use of the concepts of overt and covert texts helps to decode the maps and to observe and to challenge the ambiguities in the maps.

\textsuperscript{60}Vail and White. p. 320.
CHAPTER 2

THE AMBIGUITY OF OVERT AND COVERT TEXTS

In Domination and the Arts of Resistance, James Scott tells this scatological Ethiopian proverb: "When the great lord passes (walks by), the wise peasant bows deeply (to him), and silently farts." Caught within this scenario are the basic ingredients for the analysis of the "popular" and the committed, as well as the fundamental problems associated with an analysis of "power, "domination," "truth" and "resistance."

In the description, one encounters three actions. The first, the walking, and the second, the bowing, are observable. The third action, the silent emission, is perceivable only by the peasant. The great lord is attempting to get as much work out of the peasant as he possibly can. The great lord is required to encode a discourse of power that will keep the peasant productive, under control, and "motivated." The great lord achieves his goal through a balance of force and persuasion.

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2Scott Domination. n.p.
The great lord knows that the more brute force required to achieve the day to day objectives, the less the peasant can be seemingly coerced into agreeing with the domination. Conversely, the more effective the powers of persuasion, the less force and overt antagonism will be necessary. Consequently, the lord must develop a discourse that appears to be unambiguous as to his rightful place in the order of things. To facilitate this process he thus constructs a discourse of "inevitability." This discourse lies across the rift of production and universality, and therefore can be ambiguous for an "outsider." This ambiguity may explain why some forms of resistance appear to be condoned (by the great lord, for example), and others are not.

The peasant represents the dominated. He attempts to achieve maximum personal gain with the minimum of personal loss. To achieve this, he needs to "persuade" the great lord about the accuracy of the impression that the great lord has of him (one of servitude and obedience, in this case). At the same time, however, the peasant rehearses a silent, rebellious act. The peasant sets up a discourse that is ambiguous and deceptive. The peasant knows that he is encoding a false text for the appeasement of the great lord. The peasant relies on the quality of his deception and ambiguity to gauge the limits of his text. If he oversteps the mark, the deception will be perceived by the great lord, with concomitant results.

The peasant has the task of encoding in such a way that his fellow peasants recognize the resistance that he is demonstrating in ambiguity. Pure obsequiousness will lead to exclusion from his own peer group. Consequently, the text that is presented is decoded by the great lord in one way, by the peasant in another way, and by the peasant's
peers in the peasants' way, so that they admire his bravery. If effective, the hidden text will test the limits of the peasant's resistance, and will be functional for the peasant in his relationship with the great lord and with his fellow peasants.

The third agent is the illusive signifier (i.e., the fart), hovering silently, eluding the appropriate signification in the ears of the great lord. The lord is not aware of this silent (hidden) signifier. The peasant, on the other hand, obviously is aware of the biological emission and chooses to make the sound silent to "play it safe."

The feelings of the peasant toward the great lord might be "spoken" thus: "Give me half a chance, remove the danger of a possible confrontation, and the fart will no longer be silent." The feelings of the great lord, on the other hand, who heard the fart, might be spoken thus: "Shall I ignore the fart of this impudent ass, or act upon it?" The peers of both party would wait in "breathless expectation" for the next part of the discourse to unfold.

It is on the social sites and products of the silent or hidden (or ambiguous) transcript in a text (particularly a play-text) that this study will focus. Scott describes the hidden transcript in the following terms:

The hidden transcript is a social product and hence a result of power relations among subordinates. Second, like folk culture, the hidden transcript has no reality as pure thought; it exists only to the extent that it is practiced, articulated, enacted and disseminated within the offstage social sites. . . . The social sites of the hidden transcript are those locations in which the unspoken riposte, stifled anger, and bitten tongues created by relations of domination find a vehement, full-throated expression. It follows that the hidden transcript will be least inhibited when two conditions are fulfilled: first when it is voiced in a sequestered social site where the control, surveillance, and repression of the dominant are least able to reach, and second, when this sequestered social milieu is composed entirely of close confidantes who share similar experiences of domination. The initial condition is
what allows subordinates to talk freely at all, while the second ensures that they have, in their common domination, something to talk about.\(^3\)

The following dynamics become evident: firstly, the hidden transcript is structured by commonality of the experience, the dialogue in the space, the strategies under review and the type of sites in which the hidden transcript is being formed, and secondly, the subject of the hidden transcript is that of the domination that the members of the site are experiencing. The subordinate group develops an understanding (or interpretation) that is overtly shared by all in the group. This shared discourse enters the public discourse in a covert way, in the negotiations with the dominant group. The subordinate group rehearses the ambiguity of the negotiation in sequestered spaces, before it “releases” it in the public space where the great lord is present. Popular or committed theatre in the hands of the oppressed attempts to confront the dominant group with the hidden transcripts, and to boost their confidence to introduce their own interpretations into the public spaces that are controlled by the colonizer or the dominant.

The strategies of articulation in committed theatre include the following responses: anger; the parody of "impression management" (that is to say the parody of acts of deference, subordination and ingratiation); dreams of violent revenge; a stereotyping of the oppressors; the phenomena of "joy at the misfortune of others" (or schadenfreude); the use of the ubiquitous trickster figure;\(^4\) conceptions of the millennial

\(^3\)Scott Domination 119-120.

\(^4\)Scott Domination 41.
(or the envisioned wonderful life when oppression has ended); and the very strong bond of the communal (or community spirit) and commonality of goal and purpose.

The popular theatre addresses the domination/subordination dialectic in such an ambiguous way that both parties may have a way out of the potential confrontation. The performer constructs his or her hidden transcript so that he/she can use its ambiguity to evade possible retribution by the dominant group that "misreads" (or feels uncertain about how to the decode) the presented text. In short, popular theatre is a way of making the fart audible to the great lord so that the peasant registers his discontent into the public discourse. The great lord is unsure as to how to interpret the message, how rebellious it is and what to do about it.

2.1 Oppressors and Oppressed

The dynamics encapsulated in a relationship that may be described as existing between an oppressor and an oppressed are manifold, interwoven, and diverse. At heart, however, the relationship contains the positioning of two forces within a space, wherein one force is perceived to have found a way of containing or controlling the freedom of the other.

The lack of freedom may be construed as the denial of a right which the oppressor considers to be imperative so that the dynamics of the space may function effectively. In other words, if that right were to be granted to an oppressed person, then the activities of the space would not function. Conversely, from the point of view of the oppressed, there is seen to be a lack of freedom in a perceived space or movement. This "lack of
freedom” is either defined by the oppressed according to sets of circumstances not being available to him/herself (an “internal” monitoring process), or measured against some exterior, common or "universal" understanding of freedom (as encapsulated in a Bill of Rights, or a Freedom Charter), or is calculated according to rights that the oppressed observes that the oppressor has but the oppressed does not have. In this last case the realization is done by comparison.

The case of "freedom to do something" is difficult to theorize. The oppressed must somehow conceive of a situation when the lack of freedom which has been perceived to have been denied, is lifted, and as a consequence certain actions, (hitherto denied to the oppressed), can be carried out, or accomplished. Consequently, the oppressed must not only be able to locate the forces imposing the lack of freedom (and strategize ways of removing that imposition), but must also be able to conceive of what "new" and "free" strategies must be used to fulfil a reconstituted, "free" space in which the lack of freedom has been removed. Put another way, the oppressed must be able to gauge what is bad, how to get rid of it, and know what is better. The oppressed should be able to gauge what this new "Utopian" situation looks like and how it works.

Why a colonizer, for example, should need to oppress, is difficult to understand. Leaving aside the pathology of deriving "pleasure in the suffering of others," it would seem that the chief dynamics are locked into rights and ideologies that (in the colonizers’ view) are rooted in the lifestyles that are considered to be "natural," "inevitable" and "undeniable." Their ways of thinking, acting and rationalizing about things are deemed to be the only way. This suggests that the oppressor has "constructed" a way of thinking
for him/herself that rationalizes, justifies, and "imposes" the "ways" of behavior in the space. Whatever else that occurs in the space which is felt to be of such a nature as to cast doubt on the veracity (or effectiveness) of the happenings in the space, is blamed not on the faultiness of the logic that constructs the space, but on the fact that those in the space are not fulfilling their roles effectively, and need to be persuaded (or coerced) to fulfil the social "contract" of the space. The oppressor, consequently, constructs and is constructed by, a way of thinking that deems the ways of the world as they occur to be inevitable.  

However, the nature of the demarcation between oppressor and oppressed is situated in the domains of who has control over the space at the moment of cognition of the nature of some perceived inequalities in the space. Put another way, the question is: who is perceived (and by whom) to be in an unequal power position at the moment of the realization of the inequality? Contingent upon this is the recognition that the realization of inequality might not be recognized by the participants in the space, but by some external force (such as an activist organization that brings other values to the space). In this case the seemingly "obvious" nature of oppression cannot hold, because the space of oppression would simply have moved, and would now include the new, external, observer. Oppression is reliant upon some members of the space being aware of the oppression, and also being aware of the nature of the forces marshaled against the oppressed.

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The space in which the two agencies operate together is demarcated for a specific purpose -- normally around capital, or labor. The manifold debates in this arena deal with modes of production (the material) and the cognitive understanding of the necessity of (or for) modes of production (the ideational). It is in the way that the modes of production are constructed as ideas or, conversely, how the ideas of the agencies are made material that the debate around the oppressor/oppressed circles.

Theatre specifically plays a multiple role in this debate. Theatre objectifies human conditions by creating a material world (of signs) which is constructed because of ideas. It is through the workings of the world of ideas, in terms of the concepts of society (labor, capital, etc.) and of theatre (agenda and function, style, catharsis, possibility and probability, and so on) that the material theatre occurs.

Representation plays a role in both processes. The role of representation is either part of the objectifying process in that it presents a seemingly concrete reality (e.g. Realism, modes of production), or it is part of the world of “ideas,” attempting to dissolve the material world “into” the world of ideas, and therefore circumventing the materiality of representation. For the latter to occur, the "obviousness" of representation leads to an acceptance of the "inevitability" of the "thing itself," not a representation of a thing. However, it is in the dialectic between the material world and the world of ideas (the objective and the subjective, or the signifier and the signified), that the dynamics of theatre moves.

When one enters these thoughts into the oppressor/oppressed debate, a number of key concerns are raised. The notion of the "inevitability" and "correctness" of the
relationship is foregrounded. The oppressor seems to have a view of the modes of production that is based on a particular idea of the world. From their point of view the modes that are in place make for optimal use of the system (for their own gain), one in which there is no other positive alternative offered. In other words, viewed from "outside" the space, it would appear that the oppressor has conceived of and rationalized the modes of production in that space, the space that he/she dominates, to be the "inevitable and correct" modes of production. This would also include the "rightness" of what to them might seem like oppression, but was thought of as being "for the common good" or that was obeying some systemic understanding of society. This may be seen, from outside of the space, as being simply profiteering, and the self-serving seeking of power and control.

Yet if this were the case, then the oppressor's demand for "progress" (or the stabilization of the system to reduce resistance to their view of life) and change could only be predicated on a number of possibilities. The oppressor him/herself could perceive a fault in the process and wish to fix it in order to maintain his/her power. Alternatively he/she could realize that conflict in the space had diminished because the oppressed seemed to be realizing the "benefits" of the modes of production instigated. Conversely the oppressor could conclude that the modes of production needed "fine-tuning" to adjust to the (apparently either legitimate or disruptive) demands of the oppressed in the space. In this last case, the oppressor would need a "forum" to discuss the necessary changes, outside the ambit of the oppressed. It would be necessary in this
forum, to "re-idealize" a mode of production that appeared to be faulty, so as to present the new situation as a new materiality.

What one has, therefore, in this view of things, is the oppressor seeming to believe that the idealized mode of production in the communal space has been accepted as "natural" by the oppressed, in the same way as he himself has conceived of the "naturalness" of that mode. The space has become, or more correctly put, is becoming, ideologized. Alternatively, the oppressor realizes that the mode of production is not idealized, and the particular mode results from the dialectic in the space of production, in which case the "struggle" is a materialist one for control over the spaces and modes of production.

Seen from the point of view of the oppressed, the materiality of the space is the battleground, as soon as the oppressed recognize the modes of production as being oppressive. This "recognition" is perceived through two possible dynamics. In the first place the possible anomalies in the modes of production are of such a nature that they can be perceived to be anomalies by the oppressed. In this case the oppressed notice that in the field of representation that is open to them, or to which they adhere (their discourse), the events and the representations of events that occur in the spaces and modes of production (in this case, also of the production of representation) appear to be at times contradictory. Now the questioning of the modes and spaces occurs, using the discourse in use or available to the oppressed. In all of this, the struggle against oppression appears to work "from inside" the systems and modes of production and of representation. Here the Gramscian idea of the "organic intellectual" appears to hold sway. This concept,
however, is in itself an ideal one, proceeding from the idea that the mind is capable of perceiving inequities in materiality, without the alternatives being represented to it.⁶

The second possibility is that external agents "represent" these inequities to the oppressed. Here these agents inform (through representation) the oppressed about the oppression. They also guide the oppressed into a way out of the oppression. This occurs either through a new (ideal) discourse that is made material in confrontation, or through a refining of the discourse and materiality that they have at their disposal. In this case, the dialectic is between that which can be perceived by the oppressed as being oppression without the aid of the "activist" and that which the activist "from outside" sees as oppression. In the latter case, the activist is working from some form of "privileged" position. He is "reading" the representation of the discontinuities in the spaces and modes of production, and is inserting himself into the struggle according to his own ideas of the problem and solution possibilities. The concept of the activist in the space, and mode of production he employs to foreground the discontinuities and disharmonies, becomes, therefore, highly provocative.

The optimal Machiavellian solution, therefore, is conceived of where the oppressor creates an all encompassing discourse, based on ideas that appear to be universal and ahistorical, and represents those ideas in the spaces and modes of production in such a way that the spaces and modes of production work in harmony to advance and reinforce those ideas. In other words, the oppressed appear to accept the

universality and ahistoricity of the ideas and spaces. The ideas also reinforce the modes of production. Where this has appeared to have succeeded, theorists have attributed the success of the operation to the theories similar to Althusser's and Gramsci's theories of hegemony and concepts of interpellation.7

Althusser suggests that in order to "control" the spaces and modes of production, the dominant (in this case bourgeois capitalism) institutes two types of mechanisms to control or channel opposition to those spaces and modes. The first of these are the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA's), which include the police forces, the military and the law courts, whose chief function is to control and punish "aberrant" behavior, thereby controlling any deviance from the norm posited by the dominant. The RSA's modus operandi is overt violence, threatening deviants with bodily harm and economic sanction.

The RSA's must be shown to be ahistorical and therefore impartial and necessary. To do this the state institutes Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA's) whose tasks, according to Althusser, are to remove the seams or possible ruptures in the "naturalness" of the status quo through persuasion of the ideal of, and the historical inevitability of, the status quo. The ISA institutions include education, the media, the Church, political parties and the family. To do this the ISA's "construct" a material discourse, located in spaces and modes of production, that will challenge all opposition as aberrant, and will demonstrate, through the persuasion of the world of ideas (which has been materialized in the discourse) the universality and ahistoricity of the status quo.

Reactions to the ISA's are conceived of as taking a number of forms. Althusser, for example, posits the concept that those who accept the universality and ahistoricity of the situation, (and therefore "believe" the ISA's), are "interpellated." By this he means they have heeded the call to be part of the status quo. The reason why there seems to be very little overt reaction to "mild" or "moderate" repression is because of the interpellation factor. Furthermore, the apparent seamlessness of the dominant discourse is enhanced by the quantity of people that appear to have been interpellated. This is further proved by the type of discourse that permeates the discourse of the oppressed -- where the oppressed ostensibly use, or strive for, the same, or similar, discourse used by the oppressor or the dominant.

A number of things have become clear. Firstly, if the ISA's and RSA's are necessary, then it would appear that there are other discourses that are in circulation, and that these discourses have either been set up in competition to the dominant, or have nothing to do with the dominant at all -- the spaces and modes of production that concern the dominant discourse are not the same ones that concern the alternative discourses. Spaces and modes of production are not necessarily total and hermetically sealed. Secondly, people do rebel, and voice dissent. Thirdly, that dissent can be couched in the discourse of the dominant, indicating either that the oppressed have mastered the discourse proposed by the ISA's in such a way that they can turn the discourse back on itself by using the very discourse to indicate the ruptures and seams in that discourse, or that the discourse of the oppressed is to be used to ridicule the perceived "otherness" of the dominant.
In the former case the oppressed would seem to want a "purer" form of the
discourse, that would remove the aberrations either in theory or in praxis (the praxis does
not match the ideal, and the ideal is right). In the latter case, adversarial discourses
penetrate weaknesses in the seamlessness of the dominant, usually through parody, but
also through dialectical interpenetration.

2.2 The fallacies of hegemony and interpellation.

These potential, different discourses lead one to question the nature of hegemonic
forces at work in society. Theories of hegemony have regularly been grounded in what
Scott calls "thick" or "thin" variations of hegemony. The "thick" version suggests that
subordinate classes are "sucked" into believing that their oppression is actually good for
them. In this version the discourse created by the subordinate group is one in which this
group attempts to "be like" the dominant discourse. The dominant class constructs a
hegemony that appears to make "natural" the way of life to which the oppressed are
subject. The subordinated "will" submits willingly to its fate.

In the "thin" version of hegemony, the oppressed cannot see any other way than
the life that they have, and "resign" themselves to their fate. Hegemony's task is to short-
circuit all other options. In this case the oppressed are not to be allowed by the oppressor
to have their different type of discourse recognized, except as an oddity, as the texts of
troublemakers, or as pathological problem cases.

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Footnote: Scott Domination. See specifically Chapter 4. "False Consciousness or Laying it on Thick?"
I take issue with both these social and historical explanations. While theorists have looked to the available discourse and sources to make their conclusions about the submission of the subordinated, many have failed to realize that the available discourse is very often a document of the public sphere, and that both the dominant and the dominated have very vibrant discourses "offstage," as Scott puts it. An analysis of these "offstage" or "hidden transcripts," particularly of the hidden transcripts of the subordinate group, reveals the "mask-like" discourse in the public sphere:

the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped . . . cast. In other words, the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask.9

Scott maintains that the contributions the subordinate groups appear to make to the public discourse must be analyzed through the filter of "impression management:"

With rare exceptions, the public performance of the subordinate will, out of prudence, fear, and the desire to curry favor, be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful. I shall use the term public transcript10 as a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate.11

Consequently, contrary to common hegemonic theory, subordinates are not immobilized in thought, and rebel or revolt against oppression "blindly"--this would simply accentuate the "mindless mob" metaphor. They are immobilized in action out of fear of reprisals. In Althusserian terms, the ISA's are reasonably unsuccessful in their efforts, but the RSA's --

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9Scott Domination 3.

10Scott uses the term "transcript" throughout his book, defining it as all those signifiers, both verbal and non-verbal, that are involved in the communication process. I shall use the term as he does, but shall also use the term "text" as a synonym.

11Scott Domination 2.
the fear for bodily harm and/or economic sanctions -- are far more successful. The subordinate implement survival tactics and use techniques that seem to incorporate the dominant discourse, but they can imagine quite clearly what would happen if the power situation were to be reversed, or if retribution could come down, or if the power could be dissipated, and so on. They also have an extensive ability to vocalize these imaginings both within the "confines" of the hidden transcript, and within the cut and thrust of the public discourse (that is to say in the spaces and modes of production), testing, for example, the limits of the dominant power's endurance.

In the South African context, the space and mode of production has been dominated by the representations of the body, and more particularly the skin pigmentation of the body. The concepts of blackness and of whiteness, and the ideational dynamics around these two concepts have dictated discourse and counter-discourse. To a large extent the entire civil society has been positioned around the conceptions of the bodies of the inhabitants of the civil space, and industrial and capitalist modes of production. These two concepts interpenetrate each other. Modes of discourse normally associated with practices outside the modes of production (culture, art, communication, education, religion, and so forth, in other words those spaces "traditionally" associated with the development of ideas), and those spaces connected to the material world, have been used in reciprocal ways to justify, explain and render into discourse, the other.

The South African experience has seen an attempted "naturalization" of the idea of "race," where perceived differences in terms of physical (material) manifestations (i.e. the iconic, or visual representation of difference) have become the nexus of separation.
Consequently, the space of civil society was to be structured in such a way that these differences did not impinge on the Other. The upshot of this was the separation of groups of people according to race classifications, so that each was "forced" to have its own space. Within the realms of the idea, the concept of separation was supposed to maintain the historical entity and identity. To each his own. Within the realms of the material, however, too much of the geographical space that was available was already being shared, and so conflicts and demands and counter-demands were inevitable. The idea of an hermetically sealed geographic entity for each particular race (or ethnically homogenous nation) could not be matched by the material reality.

Interwoven into this, and flowing from it, the demands of material production, that is to say the necessity for labor, created another shared space. In order to control this space, the state attempted to control labor by categorizing much work that could not be done by blacks as exclusively for whites. Consequently, the entire "unskilled" labor force became black. Race and class had become conflated.

This dealt with the material requirements of the "state." But to have such a large "block" of race identity in the space of production posed what appeared to be an overwhelming physical threat to the white oppressor. To counter this, the state drew on the idealized concept of ethnic integrity, positing the cultural concept of difference between ethnic groups which to a large extent were to be defined along both spatial and language lines. Zulus had their own language, for example, and would therefore want to have their own cultural (and therefore geographical) space. This led to the development
of the idea of the homelands, such as the Transkei, Ciskei,\textsuperscript{12} Bophutatswana, Kwazulu, and the rest.

The constructed materiality of language was to be used to fulfil an ideational concept of culture. Furthermore, the shared mode of industrial (material) production was not be confused with the shared mode of cultural (ideational) production. Consequently, living was dispersed even though industries were centralized. However, an attempt was made through generous tax incentives and deals with international corporations to draw industry to the fringes of the homelands so that the labor pool could live in one space and work in another. This entire alienating device was intended to keep labor unstable, maintain some level of production, and maintain the idea of separateness.

Where labor needed to be near industry, the system of influx control to the major industrial cities was introduced, and the "passbook" was institutionalized. This document "controlled" in a very material way the lives of the people whose "cultural spaces" were deemed to be elsewhere.\textsuperscript{13} The upshot of this was the development of so-called townships (conceived of as spaces for transient labor accommodation, of which South Western Townships or Soweto is probably the most famous) around the fringes of industrial areas.

The consequences of this situation were manifold. Workers occupied two alienated cultural spaces. On the one hand, the heimat of the rural areas from whence

\textsuperscript{12}The manipulative strategy embarked upon by the white governments is starkly witnessed in the fact that there is very little if any "difference" ethnically, between the Transkeians and the Ciskeians. The split was simply done to divide the Xhosa of the region and to appease rival "tribal" leaders.

\textsuperscript{13}Althusser's Repressive State Apparatuses find one of their most violent, threatening and divisive examples in the passbook system.
they came (and for many of them where their families were situated) was a solid platform of cultural manifestations. For many their roots and early lived experiences were "traditional." On the other hand, their present lived experience in the townships, alien at it seemed, was shared by a number of others who were subject to the same sets of circumstances. It was the traversing of these two seemingly disparate worlds that lead to the development of coping mechanisms. The state relied on the material diversions of the state controlled beer-halls (but which were "undermined" by the "illegal" shebeens)\textsuperscript{14} and the ideational controls offered by the various churches to dissipate the threat of the disjunctures. What, of course, happened was the development of spaces and ideas for resistance, including the influential Liberation Theology.

Secondly, the travails of the workplaces, as well as the tribulations of transport, living conditions, and more particularly, longings, desires, recreation and the like, were shared across any divide, by most people forced to live in the townships. Consequently, when people talked in the spaces of the townships (or in the spaces of industry when time allowed), the objects about which they talked were very similar. Material reality was of such a nature that it formed, structured and directed the very spaces and representations of those spaces. The things that differed were simply rooted in the so-called "cultural heritage" of each individual -- his or her "historicity" or biography -- which would

\textsuperscript{14}A shebeen was an "illegal" bar set up by enterprising workers in the townships. These places of drinking were renowned for the potent brew that they concocted and sold, and for the conviviality of the gatherings.
include language, but only to the extent that the signifieds of the rural language had to "slide" to accommodate the changing material referentiality.15

Thirdly, the perceived all encompassing nature of cultural diversity and language difference fractured to a large extent because of the predominantly oral nature of interchange. Differences were not "frozen" ahistorically (a tendency that appears to occur when oral languages are "turned into" written languages).16 Consequently, certain manifestations that seemed to be because of ethnic differences, were ever changing, and could not be pinpointed as "typical." The dominant (white) power thought of ethnicity as being a universal and ahistorical idea (based on various written "documentations"). This "space" that was opened up by the difference between the idea and the materiality proved to be the site of conflict and a gathering point for change.

What one finds, then, are multiple shifting subjunctive17 spaces or domains in the South African social and political landscape. Some of these spaces (the market or

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15 Of course, this also lead to the development of a patois (Tsotsitaal) that could be used to discuss the very basic necessities of life. This patois was drawn from lived and shared experiences. The question which is raised by this is whether this patois will develop into a fully-fledged discourse, in much the same way as English developed.


17 Loren Kruger. "That Fluctuating Movement of National Consciousness:" Protest, Publicity and Postcolonial Theatre in South Africa." Imperialism in Theatre: Essays in World Theatre, Drama and Performance J. Ellen Gainor ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) 156. The notion of a "subjunctive action" or a "subjunctive space" is an extremely useful one as it posits the "as ifness" of the action or space, allowing the diglossic moment, or the dual moment to be manifested. This duality can and does extend to the doubleness of the material and the ideal, the actor and the character, in fact to the entire field of dialogic representation.
industry floor, for example), are shared by both the oppressor and the oppressed. Some are discreet, in that they accommodate only the one or the other.

In the case of the oppressed, we have already seen the multiplicity of these spaces, each one potentially (subjunctively) inhabited by groups ranging across ethnic, historical, language, race, class and gender boundaries, but each space also liable to contain elements of other categories. Thus one might find Zulu workers from Empangeni who are older than 50, clustered in a discreet space, or clustered as part of a space which also contained different age groups, from different parts of Natal, for example.\footnote{See Ari Sitas, "Class, Nation, Ethnicity in Natal's Back Working Class" \textit{The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries}. Vol.15. Collected Seminar Papers No. 38. (London: Univ. of London Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1990). 257-276.} However the common agenda (which in this case might be a labor agenda) is a greater clustering dynamic than the individual, differing clustering agendas that might be manifested in such a public space, sphere or domain. Furthermore, each space, as Scott points out, is based on an a priori agenda. The same might be true of the oppressor. Here, too, oppression is not seen as monolithic, or rather, the rationale is not seen as monolithic. Oppressor groups use different strategies to make their ideas material.\footnote{See the penetrating analysis of the American system as done by Chantalle Mouffe and Ernst Laclau, "Hegemony and New Political Subjects: Toward a New Concept of Democracy" \textit{Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture}. Trans. S. Gray, C. Nelson and L. Grossberg eds. (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988).} Liberal thinkers in South Africa were unable to make material contributions to change, relying rather on ideational persuasion, particularly in the fields of individual ability and a perceived utopian capitalist vision. However, liberal thinkers appeared to have exploited the economic stability that a
seemingly cowed workforce presented to them. Coupled with this was a systematic approach to develop a black middle class which would operate within the economic principles and ideas espoused by Liberal Capitalism. Liberal thinkers, in those spaces where liberal oppressors congregate, predicated difference on levels of development (such as education and sophistication), and on class. Language differences would be subsumed in the fields of a globalization policy (that is to say English would be the lingua franca -- most liberals were English speaking) where the international market forces would prevail.

Nationalist enterprises within the ambit of the oppressor have sought to cement the idea that nationalism is inevitable and desirable. To a large extent their approach was to undergird this "inevitability" with the concepts of Christian predestination, a cornerstone tenet of Calvinism. Yet, in the shared spaces of similarity (that is to say, in the spaces where oppressors of like mind got together) the predominant perception of difference was not economic, national or religious, but cultural. Otherness was spoken of in terms of difference in cultural values such as language, sexual proclivities, group identity, political persuasion, and political system, and, of course, art and music. Nowhere does economic exploitation figure in the discourse.

What all this leads to is that there appears to be multiple spaces and agendas at work in society. If the concept of a space shared by the oppressor and the oppressed holds, it would appear that the oppressor enters the shared space from an "off-space"

position (alternatively defined as another or different shared space). The oppressed also enters the shared space from a different space. Both would need to have a reason or agenda to enter the shared space. Both would be "listening to" the type of clues or information they would want to hear from the other in the shared space. Both would know that to achieve their individual agendas they would have to attempt to "speak the expected language" of the other. But most forcefully of all, both would know and realize where the power in the space lies, and what the limits of the safety from the imposition of that power might be. In many ways Althusser's RSA's and ISA's are neat corollaries to the situation -- persuasion to the point when the power position is challenged, and then the threat of force is brought to bear.

Within these spaces and domains, multiple discourses exist in the interaction between the various agendas. To a large extent one might identify four main discourses, described according to whether the discourse was constructed for onstage or offstage use.

2.2.1 The onstage discourse of the oppressor

This discourse takes place from the perspective of the dominant or oppressive force. It occurs in the shared or public domain where oppressor and oppressed meet. In this discourse, the oppressor needs to find ways to persuade or coerce the oppressed to do the oppressor's bidding, or, alternatively, to desist from doing things that would disturb the equilibrium of the public space. What is brought into the public space by the oppressor is an agenda that has been sharpened and refined in the offstage or private
space of the oppressor so that the goals and the objectives decided upon by the oppressor might be put into practice.

The *shape* of the discourse is to a large extent dictated by the perceived line of argument that the oppressor will employ to convince the oppressed that what is occurring is right and "natural." This can be seen as the development of the ahistorical hegemony. It is also dictated by the particular moment in history, which depends on the calculated expectations of the oppressed. In the former case the oppressor draws on some form of "universal" or "global" argument (capitalism, human rights, the individual, and so forth, or, alternatively, socialism, communism, the trade union solidarity, "an injury to one is an injury to all," and so forth). In the latter case, the oppressor draws on contingent events, perceived discourses, general rumblings of dissatisfaction and discontent, particularities and peculiarities of the space, and so forth.

Immediately, one is confronted by potential ambiguities and possible deceptions. The oppressor is drawing on a political (social, cultural) agenda that is rooted, for all its claims of universality, in the particular, and in the language of the oppressor (for example, English, or Afrikaans). Consequently, the very "timeless" nature of the underpinning of the discourse is placed in contention. The discourse presented to the oppressor by the oppressed is "managed"\(^2\) according to the expectations of the oppressed (as I shall argue below). Therefore, that which the oppressor encounters in the public space has already been manipulated by the oppressed to create the impression that the

\(^2\)See Scott, regarding "impression management," *Domination* 17-19.
oppressed wish to create.\textsuperscript{22} To build a discourse of manipulation on a discourse that has already been manipulated is potentially ambiguous.

2.2.2. The Offstage discourse of the oppressor

The oppressor also has a space in which discussions can take place "in private," as it were. In this space the oppressor does not have the "pressure" to control or constantly to manipulate the discourse to achieve specific results, as would have to occur in the public space (or "onstage space").\textsuperscript{23} What occurs in this space, then, is a "freer" exchange of ideas, opinions and plannings. "Truer" opinions that the oppressor has of the oppressed are expressed and shared. The oppressor has a space in which to explore, argue and consider the more "outlandish" possibilities for strategies and implementation in the public space. What this means is that the oppressor has the opportunity to hone, share and coordinate strategies for the furthering of communal aims.

The \textit{shape} of the discourse for consideration shows basically two type of characteristics. On the one hand, there is a parodying and a direct representation of the oppressed. This may take the forms, as post-colonial studies has argued, ranging from bitter satire of "backwardness" and "underdevelopment," to patently paternalistic approaches.\textsuperscript{24} On the other hand, the oppressor begins to theorize the "reality" as it

\textsuperscript{22}The example of the "aren't my slaves happy slaves?" is a particularly good example of this occurring.

\textsuperscript{23}To a certain extent I am "idealizing" the situation here the better to display the dynamics at work.

occurs in the public space, in such a way that it begins to “confirm” the applications that the oppressor has brought to bear on the public sphere. This "self-fulfilling prophecy" approach seems to assist in developing the hermetic theory of domination (i.e. that their ideas were correct), it bolsters the concepts of Otherness of the oppressed (confirming the subjectivity of the oppressor), and it assists in casting in stone the strategies that exist in the public sphere.

2.2.3. The onstage discourses of the oppressed

The discourse that appears to "represent" the oppressed in the public spaces demonstrates the danger of accepting the discourse placed there by the oppressed, as being the "truth." This discourse appears to indicate that the oppressed have acquiesced to the hegemonic discourse and demands of the public space, and that the oppressed have indeed, in Althusserian terms, been "interpellated" into the dominant discourse. The oppressed enter the public sphere with two basic agendas. The oppressed want and need to survive, and they wish to maintain their dignity. To survive the oppressed have to move, on the one hand, between the harsh demand of survival techniques needed to survive in destructive and violently unstable or unpredictable oppression (as in the case of slavery, or, living conditions at the height of the oppressive South African apartheid regime), and, on the other hand, the more subtle, yet no less necessary techniques of dealing with oppression from any employer, no matter how seemingly mild mannered. The oppressed wish to survive in such a way that they can use the space to develop and
progress, to grow and to accumulate wealth, prosperity and security, for example. 25

Ultimately, this survival strategy is an individual agenda.

The condition of "dignity" locates the oppressed as part of a group of people who would enter the public space under shared conditions. Here each member is aware not only of the demands of the oppressor, but also of the demands, or, more accurately, the limits beyond which he or she will not go. This "peer group pressure" (as well, of course, of individual pressure) enters a dynamic into the public space that suggests that the oppressed will test the limits of what the oppressor will allow, but also the limits of what the peer group will allow. For example, only so much groveling is allowed by the community before the oppressed person is supposed to react, or that person's acceptance will go down in the esteem of the group. By the same token, the oppressed individual will garner much respect in the group as he or she is prepared to face down the oppressor.

This delicate balance between the oppressed individual and the oppressed group, and between the oppressor and the oppressed enters the dynamic of expectation into the public sphere. Each knows what is expected of the other, and each knows the results of transgressing the limits. The tension in the discourse is reliant on the levels of predictability manifest and, to a large extent, negotiated through constant limit testing.

For this to occur, oppression is already a dynamic in the debate. Furthermore, each seemingly predictable moment also inevitably conceals or renders ambiguous that which is rendered public. The oppressor will not reveal his or her "true" motives (as

25 Perhaps the ultimate in survival strategies is the attempt by the oppressed to cement an ahistorical place in history.
these seem inevitably to be self-seeking, or not ideologically "natural"), nor will the
oppressed reveal his or her "true" feelings, as these would be harmful to the furtherance
of his or her goals (of survival and dignity). Consequently, both parties display strategies
of guile, but in such a way that the one appears (in most cases) not to be aware of the
other's "duplicity." The *shape* of the discourse is therefore one of cleverly constructed
*roleplay* according to the demands of the particular public space.

This view presents a number of questions. The origins of the ideas that the
oppressed create concerning what to expect for and from the future is troubling. To a
large extent their plan of the future is based on two possibilities: either the plan is
developed along a refined, or "purified" version of what is perceived to be a master-
narrative that has been "corrupted" by the forces of domination;\(^\text{26}\) or the plan is developed
as a counter to, or the opposite of, what the oppressor has entered into the public
discourse. In this latter case the oppressed conceive of the entire dominant project as
being abominable, and counter the argument, point for point.\(^\text{27}\) For example, capitalism
will be replaced by socialism, or the stress on the individual will be replaced by a stress
on the communal. The rational will be replaced by the spiritual or the experiential, and

\(^{26}\) The calls for "democracy" in South Africa, following the end of the struggle, in a state that
"proclaimed" itself democratic all along (although "democracy" was only extended to a small percentage
of the population), is a case in point. Furthermore, the rhetoric that is developing in South Africa at the
moment echoes and resonates with the rhetoric of the oppressive regime of some ten years ago, as the
present ANC (African National Congress) government finds parallel dilemmas facing it. The extensive
crime wave that the ANC is experiencing, parallels the attempts to make the country ungovernable, an
avoided strategy of the ANC in exile, and therefore calls forth the same type of fighting rhetoric.

\(^{27}\) Martin Orkin's approach, in *Drama and the South African State* follows Michel Pecheux's argument
of identification, counter-identification and disidentification. The last term is very difficult to conceive
of, except in terms of the apocalyptic, and in this case there doesn't appear to be much sense in moving
towards it! Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State* (Manchester and Johannesburg:
the hierarchies will be replaced by egalitarianism. The foregrounding of the values of the
colonial will be replaced by the foregrounding of the indigenous, and so on. The
argument is built around the conceiving of the moment when the oppressed come to
power.

Furthermore, how do the oppressed know what to speak, to whom to address
their comments, and when to speak? To a large extent the oppressed attempt, as has been
argued, to develop a "safe space" outside the ambit of the oppressor. The harsher the
oppression, the greater the tendency of the oppressor to control the "offstage spaces" of
the oppressed. This is done either through direct control or policing, where the oppressor
dictates through the use of spies and other devious means the developing offstage spaces,
or through regulation and preempting of the offstage spaces by providing "means and
places of escape." Most oppressors, for example, attempt to dominate leisure hour
activities such as sport\textsuperscript{38}, entertainment,\textsuperscript{29} religion\textsuperscript{30} and cultural events, thereby
channeling resistance, defusing aggression, rewarding accomplishments and attempting to
build "role models" for younger generations to emulate.

\textsuperscript{38}In South Africa, the vast sponsorships that go into soccer, and the fact that soccer was one of the
first sports to become multiracial, bears witness to this type of thinking.

\textsuperscript{29}The "permission" to criticize the South African government from the stage, for example, shows this
trend. This, of course, was compounded by the permission to travel overseas with potentially
"subversive" material proves the point. Also the fact that a vast subsidized film industry for the "black"
market was developed under the previous regime shows this. A final example is the way that music as a
method of escape was encouraged.

\textsuperscript{30}Religion has always been seen as a way of defusing aggression through channeling it into worship
services and outreach programs. The rewards are therefore also beyond this world, and are,
consequently, cheap to a dominant force!
2.2.4. The offstage discourse of the oppressed

Yet even in these oppressive times the oppressed find moments and spaces to conduct "safe" business. It is in these spaces that the oppressed develop the communal, solidarity, awareness, a sense of strategy to counter oppression, a sense of the "peer group pressure," and a place to dream of, and to construct (theoretically) the millennial. New methods of subverting the oppression are shared and learned, systems of bypassing the obstructing of progress are strategized and rehearsed, all in a spirit of shared suffering and common woes.

As part of the offstage space clever parodies of the oppressor are developed to act as a form of mirth and entertainment. Music that arises from and speaks to the common experience develops, and the practitioners of those parodies and that music hone their talents as a way of contributing to the struggle against the oppression by sharing the experiences and uplifting the spirits of the community. The cultural artefacts draw on the experiences of the community, thus rendering them specific to a particular historical (ethnic, national and class) moment and locating them in a particular history.

Finally, these offstage spaces are seemingly duplicitous in that they look both outward (to and against the oppression) and inward (to and for the oppressed) at the same time. It is this ambiguous nature of the artefact that might be rendered up for public scrutiny that makes analysis of the artefact so difficult. It is here that the dangers of the

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31 Robben Island, the island that was used to incarcerate political, that is to say, black political prisoners near Cape Town, is a case in point. Robben Island became affectionately known as the "University of Robben Island" because it was here that many were conscientized, and learned the strategies of resistance and planned the new government that would follow after the fall of the oppressive regime. It was on the island that Nelson Mandela and others spent much time in captivity.
exotic gaze and the fears of commodification are at their most profound. When the outsider "looks in" he or she sees that which speaks to his or her discourse, and it becomes very difficult to access the inward looking discourse that gave rise to the artefact. It is here, too, that the search for "motives" for the creation of the artefact become entangled in that which is constructed to confront the dominant, and that which is constructed to speak to the communal, or shared, experience of the oppressed.32

All stakeholders in the various spaces play roles according to the space that is framed or that they are framing.33 The various role-players have developed highly sophisticated, albeit at times not foregrounded, abilities to gauge the dynamics of the space that is being occupied, the agendas that are being advocated, and the parameters or limits of expectations and transgressions.

To all intents and purposes, the dynamics involved in the process parallel the dynamics of the theatrical. In the theatre the actor learns his or her role from multiple sources. Overtly, the most obvious one is the character as seemingly delineated by the play script. The actor is supposed to "convert" the signs of the page (a space of writing, if you will) into the signs of the stage (the space of performance, including audial, visual

32 Amanda Cole’s fascinating work on the Blackface troupes of West Africa demonstrate this admirably. Her contention is that the troupe’s use of Blackface is done simply out of the desire to amuse, and that the noted political agenda for which Blackface has been so sharply theorized, doesn’t enter the field of experience of the troupes. Catherine M. Cole, "Reading Blackface in West Africa: Wonders Taken for Signs"  Critical Inquiry, 23 (Autumn, 1996): 183-215.

33 See the work of Irving Goffman in this regard. Frame Analysis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), and The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).
and kinesic sign systems). Using his body, which is located in the theatrical space, as the vehicle for the sign, the actor adapts the sign according to the perceived demands of the discourse of the space in which the sign will operate, namely the stage. The concepts of the demands of the stage are concepts located in history and in particular histories. Consequently the way the sign is constructed and used in the historical space will differ from historical moment to historical moment.

However, the actor himself is located historically (as is the playwright) and therefore the construction of the sign is located in the spaces that the actor inhabits at the time of the construction. The sign is therefore fraught with tensions and counter tensions. These tensions include concepts of race, class, ethnicity, gender and the like, but will also include the particular space that the actor inhabits in terms of the powers, frames and agendas around him.

The desire to communicate (through the inevitability of creating signs) demands and is dependent on the theatrical nature of discourse. The truth itself may or may not be knowable, but the presentation of signs as concrete (or material) phenomena is inevitable and unavoidable. More particularly, the principles of the representation of either the material world, or the world of ideas, are dependent upon the ineluctable creation of potential signs in discourse.

Nevertheless, the very presence of the actor (as material body) within the discourse (both as object and as subject, that is to say, as a presence on the stage and as

the manipulator of that presence), punctuates the presentation in particular ways. This presence, therefore, through clear and seemingly inevitable racial or gender markings (specifically when the markings are tied to the political landscape in which the discourse is being presented as is the case in South Africa) conditions some of the responses to or interpretations of the discourse. Here the expectations of the interpreters are closeted, or at least clothed, in the spaces they occupy.

Furthermore, it can be argued that the very nature of theatricality is to reveal that which is expected to be revealed. It then follows that there is something which is not revealed. What is not revealed is "read into" the sign by the dynamics of the space/s occupied by the reader.

Yet the convolutions continue. When the construction of the sign system is made so that there is an element of ambiguity (or when the element of ambiguity exists by virtue of other factors, such as ignorance), then to a certain extent the interpretation of the sign "hovers," as it were, between the expectations of the interpreters according to the spaces they occupy, the agendas they have, and their expectations of the theatrical moment.

A further consideration must be made, and that is the concept of the deliberate manipulation of the sign according to agenda. I have already discussed how, in social intercourse (for example, in the shared spaces where oppressor and oppressed meet), discourse is constructed according to the considerations of what the expectations of the

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35In much the same way as in printing the use of different fonts, bolding and italics, for example, will foreground particular aspects of the discourse.
Other might be. I have also shown how each space is governed by the double dynamic of the agenda of the participants in the discourse, and the presence of potential or real onlookers from both sides of the oppressor/oppressed dialectic.\(^{36}\) This "spectatorship" is multiplied when the presentation of this discourse is moved into a space that is *conventionalized* as theatrical.

In other words, when the space to be used is determined (either by common agreement or by one side or the other) to have moved away from reality and has entered the realm of the subjunctive world, then there is an audience in a theatre. To a certain extent this would correlate with the concept of "the willing suspension of disbelief," where the "willingness" is part of the considerations of the agenda of either or both groups.

It is at this point -- the "willingness" -- that the dilemma of committed theatre is mostly observed. Willingness implies, *ipso facto*, that the person who is in the audience has the ability to know when to suspend belief and when not to. Furthermore, the very act of suspending disbelieve might not be known, or that "the willing suspension of disbelief" was an option at that moment, in that space, and with that agenda. In other words, the abilities to "make believe," to know when one is pretending, to be "real" and to know when one is "real"\(^{37}\) are very difficult moments, philosophically and politically speaking. Yet it is this potentially ambiguous moment between being conscious of (and

\(^{36}\)See the Ethiopian proverb discussed at the top of this chapter.

\(^{37}\)Or when one is pretending to be real, or when what one thinks is real is read as pretending by others. The paradoxical concept of "acting naturally" typifies this.
being able to manipulate), the moment of reality or of subjunctivity on the one hand, and not being conscious of that subjunctive moment, on the other, that drives much of the thinking around committed theatre.

For example, many of the anomalies in Augusto Boal's work are in this key moment of moving in and out of role. Boal's "inability" to see when one is moving in and out of what role and at what time and for what purpose, and more particularly to realize that one is always presenting a role of some sort or other, has clouded much of his thinking.\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, when one attempts to "find" the "core" "behind" the role, one still has to return to a role of some sorts.

Keyan Tomaselli, too, appears unable to think through the fact that the theatre, by its very constructedness, and its "subjunctive roleplay" is \textit{not} a reflection \textit{of} life but a reflection \textit{on} life. Consequently, when he argues that in committed theatre in South Africa one finds a seemingly seamless movement from life to the stage (and presumably back again) he misses the point of the agendas for such a move. Therefore he misses the constructedness of the artefact created. In particular, he misses the constructedness of the spaces inhabited by the oppressed, and the discourse that occurs in those spaces.\textsuperscript{39}

The theatrical moment is a moment, inevitably, that also is one of dissembling. The sign moves between the material presence of the signifier, and the ideational aspects of the signified(s), and back again (that is to say, it "hovers"). Interpreters attempt to

\textsuperscript{38}See chapter four of this work for a detailed analysis of this problem.

locate signifieds according to the agendas of interpretation and presentation, the spaces and who occupies those spaces, and the type of discourses present in the communication moment. In this way the potential for ambiguities, deceptions and dissembling increases. When this potential is located in a society where oppression is potent, and the amount of dissembling that occurs in the spaces of confrontation increases (or shows the potential to increase), so the possibilities of manipulating, fooling and foiling the interpreter increase.

The analysis of South African theatre, and more particularly the theatre that has struggled to emerge to speak specifically to the South African majority, has hinged to a large extent around the problems of race, class and nationality or ethnicity.\textsuperscript{40} It is important for the sake of clarity to make the distinction between the analysis and the practice of theatre, because the role of the intellectual (both traditional and organic in Gramscian terms), is a vital one. The bulk of the analysis has been done by traditional intellectuals. I will show how the practice of theatre reveals the role of the intellectual. This role has not been fathomed effectively by the traditional South African or analyst.

One of the central roles in the politics of government of so-called "traditional" communities in South Africa has been that of the Praise-Poet or Bard.\textsuperscript{41} Among the Nguni groups (Zulu, Xhosa and so on), he (traditionally it has been male, although much interesting work is now being done on the female izimbongi) is known as an imbongi

\textsuperscript{40}I speak here not of theatre that has drawn its roots specifically from a "tradition" that is considered to be "Eurocentric." By this I do not mean that theatre can be hermetically sealed in particular traditions, but that the bulk of the theory and analysis and practice of this theatre is based on work that scrambles the particularity of a social, cultural, political and economic nexus.

(plural *izimbongi*). Among the Sotho he has a slightly different role, and is called an *ntsomi*. The *imbongi* has a number of roles. Mafeje suggests that:

> The method of the South African bard, in carrying out his duties, is not unlike that of the European bards. Like them, he celebrates the victories of the nation, he sings songs of praise, chants the laws and customs of the nation, he recites the genealogies of the royal families, and in addition, he criticizes the chiefs for perverting the laws of the nation and laments their abuse of power and neglect of their responsibilities and obligations to the people.\(^{42}\)

Put another way, he acts as a interlocutor between the people and the king (that is to say between various power positions). He calls the king to task for some or other aberration to the ancestral law or custom or mores. He notes and records the history of the group, and uses and turns into metaphor certain events from the past in order to consolidate the power, dignity, cohesiveness and loyalty of the group. His position in the community relied on his three attributes: his ability to gauge the political currents in the community and in the power structures, his oral ability to extemporize and compose, and his aesthetic ability to sway audiences with his performance.

It is my contention that this central figure of the *imbongi* and his work may serve as a compact bridging metaphor to slip between and inform the analytical and political dynamics of race, class and ethnicity as revealed in the practice of theatre. I will show that the role of the *imbongi* has been appropriated (unwittingly, in many cases) by the powerful urbanization processes that the South African political system has propagated, and that that role has been molded and adapted by political exigencies and cultural

\(^{42}\)Mafeje *Bard* 195-196.
practices. It is my contention that South African "committed" theatre is one of the primary examples of the appropriation of a traditional institution like the imbongi. More particularly, I will show that this type of "committed" theatre and the collaborative processes that are involved in creating it, can be theorized along the lines of a "collective imbongi," which may also be read as a "collective organic intellectual" endeavor.

I will now outline the perceived dynamics of race, class and ethnicity and point to some particular problems in the South African context and specifically in the urbanization process. Then I will show how some theorists have dealt with these conflicts. Following this, I will consider the role, function and attributes of the "traditional" imbongi, attempting to illustrate through my description the potential theoretical parallels with the popular theatre.

In the hurly-burly of revolution, certain theories are considered "dangerous" or "counter-productive" and as such are not drawn upon to explain phenomena. This was and is particularly evident in the arts (including theatre).43 The clash of theory around the role, function and effect of race, class and ethnicity and the tangled web of interrelationships among the three, has led to such occurrences. The privileging (or appropriating) of positions, and an inevitable blindness to (or oppression of) certain views takes place. This happens as the pragmatics of politics, the historical moment of the

struggle toward "liberation," and the expediency of power alliances are made, sanctioned and entrenched.

There is a tendency, then, to focus on and make exclusive certain theorized and theorizing power dynamics. Thinkers also often work from a theorized position "before" the oppression occurred, and conceive of a theoretical moment "after" the oppression has been lifted. Power relationships are thus considered in a community as being "balanced" (or "harmonious") before some unbalancing force (such as a colonizing force) enters the field. These theorized power dynamics are then used to show how the community and the unbalancing force interact, and a potential vision is constructed that suggests that some new harmony is attainable.

However, this type of analysis posits a theorizing position "outside" or "above" the interaction -- the so-called "objective" position. In South Africa, this position is compounded by the fact that much of the analysis has been done by white intellectuals. This means that many intellectuals are striving to apply models of power dynamics to a system and community from which they have been excluded.

There are three dynamics at work in the power space in South Africa: the dynamics of class, race and ethnicity. Class theories are based on the oppression of one group by another, specifically to exploit labor markets. This analytical frame sets up bipolar tensions. The bourgeois class attempts to dominate the superstructural through the acquisition of power, wealth and control. The proletariat as a class (the working class) struggles to attain the power of equality, a share in the wealth, and the control of the
means of production. The frame does not consider cultural differences based on race or ethnicity, except along the lines of domination, exploitation and appropriation.

In South Africa the tendency has therefore been to conflate class (where historically the underclass is predominantly Black) with race. Consequently, tools for "rectifying" the situation or advancing the struggle, have drawn on "universal" class struggle strategies or weaponry, and have ignored cultural specifics. When Ari Sitas talks about Black performance, he has difficulty reconciling culturally specific dynamics of performance (based on what he describes as individuality, virtuosity and catharsis) with the "classical" tools and intentions of performance in the system of class analysis, namely those tools which are geared around collectivity, persuasiveness and understanding.\textsuperscript{44} Sitas is aware of the tensions and discontinuities, whereas Tomaselli and Muller radically exclude the race issue, describing it as part of the interpelling of hegemony in South Africa specifically, "universalizing" all cultural difference as part of the economic strategies of the oppressor.\textsuperscript{45}

The race issue was recently theorized in South Africa through the writings of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) leader Steve Biko,\textsuperscript{46} amongst others. The polarities Biko expounded were between White and Black seen as potential and constructed different entities with inherent discrepancies between them. The dynamic

\textsuperscript{44}Ari Sitas, "Culture and production: the contradictions of working class theatre in South Africa" \textit{Africa Perspective}. New Series 1.1 and 2. (1986): 84-110.


\textsuperscript{46}See for example his \textit{I Write what I Like} (London: Bowerdean Press, 1978).
driving this struggle was a search for the eradication of domination based on some idealized racial "superior or inferior" yard-stick. It was rooted therefore in cultural "equivalencies."

Consequently, the Black race that was considered "inferior" (by the white race), found strength in its own, Black, traditions, past, individuality -- in short in its "difference" from the white race. There was a search for a particular cultural hegemony which inevitably was based on the assumption that all people in one race (in this case Black Africans) would share in, desire, and possess such a cultural hegemony. The BCM had conflated the oppression (in this case economic and political oppression) with cultural oppression, in much the same way as the original formulators of the Apartheid system had done. What was sauce for the goose could become sauce for the gander.

As a result much important work was ruined by attempting a double dynamic -- conserving and promulgating all perceived "original" customs and practices without consideration for the urbanization dialectic, and accentuating "difference" as a dynamic of belonging -- a dynamic of counter-identification.

At the same time, the Apartheid regime split the race issue by formulating a policy of ethnicity (among Black South Africans). Here pride in difference of language and other considered ethnic (or "constructed tribal") individuality was to be the dynamic which drove all cultural processes, a dynamic which was to be used to foster feelings of nationalism and the establishment of the various "independent" homelands.

Two trends can be isolated. All three types of analysis are based on class, economic, racial or ethnic difference. Secondly, the analysis almost inevitably privileges
one of the two positions in such a model of difference. Such a privileging leads to the
analysis of the "Otherness" from the position of limited and limiting "vision."

This seems particularly evident when one reads the literature on the South African
urbanization processes. The analyses are continuously geared around what one might call
a "top down" process. For example, the processes of urbanization are discussed in terms
of interpellation, commodification, appropriation, and survival. Very little attention is
paid to what one could call the "drag" of culture. In the movement across difference there
is the "pull" of progress toward change and coping. But there is also the dynamic of
"fitting" the change and the coping to the extant cultural structures.\(^{47}\) Crassly illustrated,
Althusser's notion of interpellation suggests an inevitability on the part of the subject to
answer the call of the oppressor. Put another way, the "will" of the subject seems only
prone to the vicissitudes of the dominant class. The grass is always greener on the other
side of the fence, and the subject will always desire it and search for it. In point of fact the
subject has the will to chose to react or not to, and also the ability to chose to react in a
very culturally specific way and may vary his or her decision through time. In the
constant tension between progression and conservation, and perceived progress and
perceived conservativeness, lies the "dynamic of urbanization."

This dynamic of urbanization locates the subject in the tension of cultural
movement between two constructed poles, very often constructed as "difference." If one

\(^{47}\)Jean Comaroff's study, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South
African People* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), theorizes a very clear example of this double
dynamic. Although Comaroff works to a large extent with religion, the parallels to the political and
social dimensions are remarkable.
positions this dynamic within the arguments around the paradigms of class, race and ethnicity, and one attributes cultural characteristics to each paradigm, two things have occurred historically. Firstly, the decision as to dominance in the equation is going to dictate the "direction of resistance" in cultural matters, as well as the dynamics of interpellation, appropriation and so on. An example of this can be found in the strong influence of (and acceptance of) French as a dominant language in Black, Francophone countries in Africa. On the other hand, in Kenya Ngugi Wa Thiongo's resistance to European languages led to his refusal to write in English but only in his language of Kikuyu.

Secondly, the allocation of the task of the traditional or the organic intellectual slips from one "side" of the equation to the other depending on the decision of dominance by the intellectual in question. Thus, in the processes of "coping with history," a subject, (such Mbonjeni Ngema, as I demonstrate in chapter five) in empowering himself, will take from the moment what is expedient and use it, adapt it, exploit it, integrate it or reject it. The point is that whatever the subject does can be considered within the tensions or continua of the particular paradigm in question. Vail and White stress, therefore, the "sense of the complexities and mutability of power relations in Southern African societies." They insist that "power is a dynamic relationship between the relatively dominant and the relatively subservient in any society." This domination and
subordination is "determined by a host of economic, social, political, technological, and cultural factors."

The ability to negotiate between a dominant hegemony and a "different" hegemony, both in theory and in practice, is questionable. Negotiators may be construed to be prey to the very forces that they are negotiating between. Nevertheless, negotiation takes place. Theatre, and the practitioners of theatre are part of this process. So are the poets, poems and songs of the imbongi tradition in South Africa.

Bearing in mind, then, that the sliding paradigms of history influence not only the imbongi and his work, as well as the analysis that follows, I will now discuss the role, function and attributes of the imbongi. Leroy Vail's and Landeg White's book Power and the Praise Poem: Southern African Voices in History navigates through a highly charged atmosphere in South Africa surrounding the debate of the imbongi. They argue that, although the work of the person (the imbongi) is important, what is more important to consider, is the nature of the presentation that is forthcoming. Their argument is that the poetic utterance (and presentation) can be seen as history -- "as a 'map' of peoples' experience," and in history, "when, taking full advantage of the convention that criticism expressed in song is licensed criticism (poetic license), the songs define pungently and

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accurately the terms of exploitation (amongst other things)” (41). They theorize the
"dynamic, dialectical relationship between 'poetic license' and history” (48).

Historically, the *imbongi* has been seen as being "free to criticize." Three
examples show how this so-called "freedom" has been constructed by various well-
known theorists. Mazisi Kunene, in the introduction to his towering dramatic poem
*Emperor Shaka the Great*, suggests that the Zulu poets "defined social values, celebrating
what was historically significant and acting as democratic agents to reaffirm the approval
or disapproval of the whole nation."\(^{50}\) This romantic image of the *imbongi* shaping
destiny unhindered (and unguided) is repeated in the work of Mbulelo Mzamane, where
he suggests that the praise-poet is "the conscience of the nation. He cannot be censured.
Not even an all-powerful king like Shaka the great did it."\(^{51}\) To be sure, the *imbongi* was
caught between praising the king (or any other power paradigm in which he was
involved) and representing the "people." But history has shown that the position was
extremely delicate, and Vail and White demonstrate how some power structures
"welcomed" this dynamic as a fresh perspective on events, and others used the position to
garner tribute, bolster power and entrench practices (for example, Chief Gatsha Buthelezi,
both in his "parliament" and in Inkatha, has this instituted). The praise-poets have "not
always acted as autonomous spokesmen for the people" (54).


Yet the praise poet was still recognized as a (necessary) institution in the political make-up of the community. Vail and White argue that it was not the poet that was recognized, but the poem (54). Indeed, following Mafeje, and their own research, they note that

anyone can become an imbongi, even a 'white man'. (Mafeje, Bard, 194) If certain poets have acquired a special reputation, it is only because of the poems they have produced and not because of any special privilege vested in their ‘office’. . . . It is not the performer who is licensed; it is the performance (in whatever circumstance) (56-7).

This would legitimize the imbongi's work not only in villages, for example, but also in factories, townships, and other places of political activity. 52

Thus, Vail and White equate the poem as performance and the performance as poem, and locate the efficacy of performance/poem in history and poetic license. The interrelationship between these is grounded in metaphor as construct, that fosters movement through history and the telling of history. The poets that have garnered a reputation have done so on their ability to construct a poem that draws on some form of the communal of society -- usually a historical one, but also one of "anxiety, displacement, exploitation or loss" (57) amongst others -- that speaks through shared metaphorlic tradition to the society and the power structures that are in place, and that does so in the dynamic of knowledgability, historical immediacy and performance style. Their "authority" is grounded in the societally accepted moment of "poetic license," in the fact that they are not perceived to be taking sides in a power struggle but speak for

52 This concept moves the debate, in my opinion, squarely into the work of Victor Turner and his use of the "liminal and liminoid space." However, this is beyond the scope of this particular project.
"the common good" (be that based in a perceived "ancestral" moment, or a Trade Union, or whatever, "common good"), and in their skill as poets:

A gift for the memorable phrase and a gift for the elaboration of metaphor are both integral for poetic creation, and the word-play of the oral poet, his mischievous game with language, his skills in punning and double entendre, his manipulation of rhythm and expressive sound, and his control of metaphors carrying different layers of meaning, are all crucial to the impression he makes on his audience -- an impression in which delight, admiration, deep feeling, and intellectual consent are all combined (71).53

Two more characteristics are evident in the works of the imbongi. Firstly, there is an ability to comment cryptically and satirically on events in an imaginative and telling way. Poetic licence allows the satire to be direct and cutting. Satire works best when it is recognizable to all within the community being addressed, when it comments critically on social injustices, and when it accesses the "safety" of the performance conventions. Secondly, and related directly through satirical performance, is the ability to hold and sway an audience by means of the virtuosity of physical performance in situ. As Vail and White suggest: "Implicit in the very mechanics of performance is an expectation that something of public interest is being said, and said in a manner worth attention" (73).54

To take stock for a moment before moving into the theorists on South African theatre, it would appear that the imbongi as an institution promotes the concept of an artistic intellectual. That is to say the poet is not part of the dominant structure, but his

53Mafeje makes an interesting comparison: "In contemporary western societies this role seems to have been taken over by the newspaper cartoonist. The significance of all these public 'critics' (the European bard, the medieval court jester, the South Africa bard and the newspaper cartoonist) is considerable, since they serve as a check against the abuse of power by those in authority; they represent the opinions of the ruled." Bard. 195-196. Also quoted in Vail and White 53.

54Vail and White's description, in a long passage on page 73, of the style of performance is worth referring to.
position is constructed as a "go-between" among various (interrelated) instances, such as the history of the group and the present moment, their options and what their ancestors might have done in the present moment, the power of the dominant group and the desires of the subordinated group, as well as the use or abuse of such power and the suffering of the community.

However, I suggest that the *imbongi* as institution, in the urbanization process, has begun to be "used," over the last couple of decades, in theatre as a medium, as a means of focusing particular problems and solutions typical of the tensions in race, class and ethnicity. Moreover, I argue that through performance, the broad theorized characteristics of a so-called Black performance aesthetic, draws heavily and typically on the performance aesthetic of the *imbongi*. This has not been recognized because the word "*imbongi*" is Nguni, and therefore appears to exclude other so-called "ethnicities" like the Sotho, while privileging the Nguni. Also, the concept comes from an Black tradition, and therefore appears to promote difference between Black and White aesthetic. Furthermore, the *imbongi* appears not to address specifically the problems of class within a Marxist theoretical paradigm. I suggest that the analysis as outlined above speaks to the contrary in all three cases. Indeed, Vail and White take great pains in their book to explore the sub-continent, analyzing examples from Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and South Africa to describe and substantiate their "aesthetic," demonstrating convincingly as well that much of the praiases and songs have to do with resistance to exploitation by colonialism and capitalism.
The names applied to theatre in South Africa that comes from and speaks to communities that are in some form of domination or other, are (variously) "majority" or "popular" theatre (when the paradigm for analysis is grounded in a mass democratic movement), "committed" theatre (where the paradigm for analysis is a Marxist one), Black theatre (where domination is perceived as a race issue) and various other combinations and permutations of the above. In each case, theorists have posited theatre as the moment of revelation and combat in the history of a struggle towards freedom from oppression. Martin Orkin locates the central concerns over the past two decades in this analysis:

Attempts at developing a national theatre in the late 1970s and 1980s draw just as readily on non-socialist forms of discourse, or offer a mixture of socialist and essentialist discourses, or, again, in their construction of the subject, foreground the search for an essence and a strength -- that might defy and withstand the continuing onslaught of apartheid -- that is rooted in interiority. Thus Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya, amongst others in this period, draw with urgent militancy on the Black Consciousness movement while the work of Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa suggests affinities with emerging Black Theology.

From this one can draw three themes: Orkin's argument around a socialist aesthetic (which would speak to class concerns), essentialist discourses that are searching for ultimate truths both ontologically and through justification of essential differences as

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manifested in and through history (the "originality" argument), and "interiority" or the strength of the individual. All three themes, however, seem to answer to the demands placed on the *imbongi*: An individual talent, negotiating between two polarities, drawing on or selecting from communal, historical metaphors, and constructing a performance for a moment in history.

Orkin's comments on the work of Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa in this instance are only geared around their collaboration for *Woza Albert!* and Ngema's work with *Asinamali!, Sarafina! and Township Fever!* is subject to further analysis, as I will do in Chapter five of this study. Nevertheless, the connection he makes with Black Theology is crucial and ties into the work being done on the development of the individual Black churches in South Africa.57 However, his comments on Manaka's work are useful as they are reflected in a different way in the work of Ian Steadman. Steadman has worked extensively with Manaka, and has written particularly on Manaka's play *Pula* (Rain).58

Steadman's major contribution (to my argument here) is in his description of Manaka's method of working in the process of "workshopping" *Pula*. He suggests that Manaka operated as a scribe, allowing his company to improvise along selected themes.


However, according to Steadman, "the first thing I noticed was that underlying the rehearsals was a structure of shared political and creative attitudes which were crucial to the form and content of their work."59 This would suggest that the company had a shared cluster of metaphors from which to select for expression, and a shared political and social "agenda." However, Steadman avoids this theorizing strategy, and turns instead to Raymond Williams's "structure of feeling" concept. He (Steadman) suggests that "if the 'structure of feeling' is derived from the life experiences of the audience and modeled by the artists, the performance is both determined and determining because the 'structure of feeling' is drawn from and represented to its community."60 Here, again, lie the seeds of the imbongi -- the artistic intervention, through metaphor selection and combination, of a group of artists (perhaps a "collective imbongi") with the purpose of confronting the iniquities of society, in a way that would appeal to that society, that would "rewrite" the lived experience of that society, and in a way that would appeal to the society's "structure of feeling." Put another way, Steadman claims that

Manaka's theatre is a mediation of black experience -- but more importantly, it is a mediation through actors who become, in performance, both signifiers and signified. Manaka reveals ideology from the inside: his plays show audiences the very relations upon which they are commenting. His four actors are co-creators of the play as black working-class actors, and their role as creators are interchangeable with their status as characters in the play.61

59Steadman "Strategies" 5.

60Ian Steadman, "Theatre Beyond Apartheid" Research in African Litteratures 22.3 (Fall, 1991) 87.

61Steadman, "Popular Culture" 129. The emphasis is Steadman's.
Here Steadman does not imply that the performance is a "slice-of-our-lives," but that ideology is demystified through the parallel between actors' and characters' lives which is mediated through the performance. The actors, as members of the subordinate group, document their struggles by using the artistic intervention of selection and arrangement of metaphors from the "structure of feeling" of the community.

Steadman's insistence on the collaborative creative project is perceptive. His search is for objectivity, but he acknowledges that what might occur is a "dialectical interchange between different competing voices" which could in turn be viewed as a "reflection of the democratic processes in South African resistance politics." I would argue that this is a solid illustration of the way the imbongi institution is rooted in the history and the symbolic capital of a community. As the community strives toward democracy, and is wrestling with the reality of diversity, so, too, diversity of opinion, of goal and of artistic interventionism must permeate the poetry and performance of all artists. Furthermore, as each potential imbongi enters into dialogue with other potential izimbongi on a collaborative effort, not only is the performance diversified, nor also enriched by the diverse experience, history and memory of each, but the very fabric of performance itself as an institution is scrutinized. The workshop atmosphere becomes the place where each imbongi is both bard and audience/community.

The result of this, as many theorists have shown, is a move away from performance that rests on verbal communication and verbal metaphorization, toward a visual and kinetic metaphorization, relying on dance, song, tableaux, satirical

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characterization, individual mimetic virtuosity, in short in dynamic physical images.\textsuperscript{63} Subtlety of characterization is replaced by energetic stereotype. The necessity for subtlety is replaced by poetic license to criticize overtly, by shared metaphors so that the performance can move rapidly through established history, and by the desire to explore instead the rapidly changing power relationships in and against the community. Furthermore, the visual and kinetic dimension promotes the movement across barriers where the differences of race, class and ethnicity (such as language) may intrude in the process, so that a multi-medial performance can facilitate diverse readings.\textsuperscript{64}

The practice of the \textit{imbongi}, then, suggests the potential to theorize South African theatre. David Coplan has shown the beginnings of this African approach to this type of theory in his writings.\textsuperscript{65} Whether the dialectic is around power, authority, value, ethics, beauty, gender, economics, or whatever, the notion of organic and artistic intellectuals defending or attacking positions within and without certain positions, frees criticism from assuming positions except ones of description. Furthermore, the concept of theatre being

\textsuperscript{63}See the work of Steadman, Hauptfleisch, Larlham, Coplan and others in this regard.

\textsuperscript{64}It is this very dilemma that creates so many difficulties in the recording of performance, and the publishing of texts. Not only are metaphors taken as intrinsic to a community (and therefore not worth documenting because they are known and shared), but attempts to "transpose" these metaphors into visual and kinetic metaphors are extremely difficult to describe. Furthermore, it is not so much the transitory nature of the performance that is the difficulty (although that too), but the concept that a performance "speaks" effectively and efficiently \textit{only at one moment in history}, that mitigates against the necessity for publication. Hence the paucity of texts, the seeming "thinness" of such texts, (or the seeming esoteric nature of those texts) and the lack of desire to "recreate" another performance.

in and of history, theorizes the transitory nature of performance beyond a "now you see it, now you don't" facileness.

Vail and White conclude:

its (the performance of the bard) governing convention -- the aesthetic of poetic license -- makes it the primary means by which both oral intellectuals and ordinary men and women express, within the existing structures of power, their versions of history. The resulting 'maps of experience' open up the intellectual, emotional, and moral life of the region's societies more clearly and dramatically than any other source. (320)

The "maps of experience" encapsulated in theatre, contain information about the history of the people that created the history and the theatre. But it also informs the analyst about the "maps of experience" of those that use those maps to inform and shape their own lives (the oppressed and the intellectuals among them). The imbongi, as go-between, draws the maps. The life of the imbongi is not documented as a "private citizen" but simply as a person who inhabits both the onstage and offstage world of the community. As such, analyzing his onstage discourse will provide some system of understanding the offstage discourse. This analysis must take into account the agendas, power positions and performance dynamics of the onstage transcript -- a task that I undertake in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3

Confrontation and Ambiguity: A Question of Strategy.

In this chapter I examine the use of theatre by the trade unions of South Africa, particularly, by the Durban Worker's Cultural Local (DWCL) as part of the trade union movement in Natal during the 1980s. This trade union movement was documented in the writings of Ari Sitās, whose work about the DWCL I will discuss in this chapter. I will show that trade union theatre, (in its attempt to mobilize, conscientize and create solidarity amongst the workers), developed a monolithic, and to a certain extent, "hegemonic" discourse. This discourse was based on the offstage "texts" of the workers in relation to onstage and offstage agendas and transcripts of employers and the state.

I will argue that the ever present ambiguities of race, ethnicity and class, as well as the related political, social and historical dynamics, created a maelstrom of conflicting and competing discourses through which the performance had to negotiate for meaning and action. The multiplicity of offstage discourses made Sitās realize how enormous was the task of creating a cohesive and uniform message in a performance geared for the trade union agenda. Sitās refocused his attention away from the communal theatrical experience of group work into the work of the praise-poet or imbongi.
3.1 The Governments and the development of the Trade Unions

The development of trade unions in South Africa has a long and checkered history. The first major trade union established by Black Industrial workers was the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU) in Cape Town in 1919 under the leadership of Clemens Kadalie, a Nyasaland (Malawi) school-teacher. The ICU’s influence spread rapidly into other parts of South Africa, and eventually linked up to the South African Communist Party and the South African Native National Congress (later the African National Congress or ANC).¹

The first major movement by the government to combat this development that was to resonate throughout labor history was the passing of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 which effectively split Black laborers from the rest of the South African labor force, and granted the latter the right to construct and implement trade unions. According to the Act, black laborers could not be registered as "employees." Therefore they could not belong to employee labor organizations. This Act was substantially amended in 1956 (the Industrial Conciliation Act No 28 of 1956) and the controls over black labor were significantly tightened.²

Effectively, the black labor situation was controlled at that time by "the Native (later Bantu) Labour Settlement of Disputes Act No. 48 of 1953 which made provision


for the introduction of works committees. These works committees were to a large extent simply used as window dressing to assume that workers had some place to air their grievances. The Act stipulated that the works committees should be put in place by management, but there was no incentive for this to occur and it seldom did. As a result, the onstage discourse of the oppressed (the very definitions of the space for discourse), and the type of discourse to be used in those spaces, were controlled from the outset by the white minority.

These two Acts, then, determined the shop floor activities of the labor market and continued to do so until the explosion of worker unrest in Durban in 1973. However, as Bonner points out,

The 1960s, while witnessing a great expansion in the industrial working class, also saw much more systematic efforts to implant within it deep structural divisions. Influx control was tightened up, the contract labour system was refashioned to prevent migrant laborers acquiring permanent urban rights, and the provision of new housing in the African townships largely dried up. . . . Migrant workers were rendered far more vulnerable to state or employer intimidation, and were in certain important respects isolated from the permanent urbanized working class. The potential for division and conflict was great.

Bonner goes on to point out the types of pressures facing workers on the shop-floor.

These included the potential threat of intervention on the part of the police and the

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3Maree and Budlender, 117. For an analysis of the implications and effects of the Act see Dudley Horner, 126-129.

4Influx control was the system that attempted to control the influx of labor from the homelands into the urban, industrial areas. From this came the notorious Passbook system and the entire migrant labor practice.

various labor departments that controlled the influx and pass systems, the threat of being "endorsed out" of the labor areas by the influx control regulators, employers that did not take kindly to militant action on the shop-floor and which led to employers using "disguised or overt victimization" tactics. Significantly, there was also "the pressure applied by employer federations on individual managements not to break ranks."  

Following the 1973 worker uprising, in Durban and in other areas, the government rewrote the 1953 Act "to introduce plant-based liaison committees and upgrade the works committees. . . . The title of the act was also changed to the Bantu (later Black) Labour Relation Act (No.70) of 1973." Now the works committees would consist of African workers who were elected, but this could only occur if there were no liaison committees. The liaison committees "could be composed of up to fifty percent management nominees, but were denied rights of negotiation." 7 In 1977 the Black Labour Relations Act was amended to allow "liaison committees the right to negotiate in-plant agreements on wages and working conditions," but this was too late, because industrial action spread. Workers rejected the liaison committees, established trade unions, and used the works committees while the unions were still weak.  

In 1979 the government set up two commissions of inquiry into labor legislation. The first, the Wiehan Commission, was "to make recommendations regarding labour relations and the utilization of labour for laws administered by the Departments of Labour

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6Bonner 57.


8Maree and Budlender 117.
and Mines," and the second commission, the Riekert Commission, was "to examine the pass system with respect to the regulation of the movement and employment of African workers."9 The pass laws, as result among other things of the recommendations of the latter commission, were abolished on the 1st of July, 1986.10 In the case of the former, many of the recommendations were included in the relevant amended acts. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956 was amended in September 1979 and now included in its definition of employees all Africans, except those from foreign "internationally recognized countries."11 This meant that Africans, like whites, Coloureds and Indians could now set up legal Trade Unions, but the Act deemed it necessary that the unions be registered trade unions, and that the administration and fields of consideration of the trade unions were specified. The government was hoping through this to attempt to keep overt and covert political activity out of the trade unions.

For this reason the Industrial Conciliation Act was again amended and became the Labour Relations Act of 1981, in which all references to race were "deleted" and the Black Labour Relations Act was repealed.12 The problem and debate still remained very

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9Maree and Budlender 118.

10Maree and Budlender 116.

11Maree and Budlender 119. The reference to foreigners seemed necessary on two accounts. Firstly, the Act attempted to exclude the vast number of migrant laborers from neighboring countries like Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique, presumably so that the project unions could remain purely South African. Secondly, the reference to "internationally recognized countries" meant that workers from the so-called "independent homelands" like Transkei, Ciskei and Bophutatswana would be included in the requirements of the Act.

sharply as to whether unions should register or should not register as trade unions with the state, and was to lead to heated debates and much acrimony. The Labour Relations Act was amended in 1982 (the Labour Relations Amendment Act No. 51 of 1982) to strengthen the power of the industrial courts, and amended again in 1983 (the Labour Relations Amendment Act No. 2 of 1983) to grant unregistered trade unions access to conciliation boards but at the same time to attempt to make unregistered trade unions submit to administrative requirements. 13

Despite all of this legislation to organize the trade unions the state still had "a veritable arsenal of security legislation at its disposal which it (could) invoke at any time to curtail or even destroy organizations which it deems to be a threat to the capitalist system and its survival." 14 The acts that could be used outside of labor laws include the following pieces of legislation. The Internal Security Act of 1976 (known before that time as the Suppression of Communism Act) under which publications could be suppressed, gatherings disallowed and "banning" orders issued. This Act of course was primarily geared toward the prevention of the development of an offstage discourse as described above. The General Law Amendment Act of 1962 could be used to combat strikes as this could be interpreted as an action that sabotaged the development of the country's economic growth and prosperity. The Riotous Assemblies Act would cover the loopholes that might be found in the Internal Security Act. Finally the Terrorism Act which was extremely vaguely worded to include a person who might have "the intent to

13 Maree and Budlender 121.
14 Maree and Budlender 122.
endanger the maintenance of law and order in the Republic, (who) commits acts in the Republic or elsewhere, or attempts to commit such an act, or incites or organises it commission, or inspires others to bring it about."15 Clearly this was vague enough to be used against clergymen, politicians, and even shop owners who sold weapons! Furthermore, it could be used against authors whose texts "inspired" or "incited" others to undertake "terrorist" activities.

The major considerations of all of these acts clearly demonstrate the thinking of the oppressors. As they are forced to take cognisance of the rising majoritarian power of the workers, so they attempt to limit and channel this force. They rely on a three pronged approach. It would be necessary to divide the potential power of the unions which they do by excluding Blacks from the process, and then clearly regulating the entry of Blacks into the process. To do this they would need to attempt to keep control over the entry by instituting the works committees, and subsequently the liaison committees and only finally the trade unions.

The trade unions are then regulated by demanding the registration of extant unions so that the bargaining power of the unions can be administered. Consequently, and following on from this, the works committees and the liaison committees appeared to be considered to be a "partnership" between employer and employees, even though the employer stands to benefit far more than the employee. This "partnership" was ambiguous. It could either involve the development of the organizations for the purposes

of making a greater (material) profit (which would go to the employers), or it could be deemed to be for the benefit, upliftment and progress of the workers within the organization. In the latter case (the humanity argument) the committees take into consideration the working conditions and wages, perhaps to the detriment of the profits of the organization. The works and liaison committees were so heavily stacked in favor of the employer, relying on the sense of decency of the employer, as to be highly problematic. Finally, the government had the full weight of the various military and police forces behind them to sidetrack any attempts at destabilization that might occur.

Yet, despite all of these massive regulations and forces against them, the trade unions still came into existence and eventually flourished.

3.2 The People and the Development of the Trade Unions

The vast lists of acronyms that surface when one investigates the trade union movement show how widespread the trade unions were, how diverse in shape, form and function, and under what pressure both internally and externally they came into being, operated, made alliances and folded or collapsed. There were by and large three major groupings of Black trade unions, each operating at three levels: local shop-floor level; in some cases nationwide in affiliated unions for the same employer or in related fields; and in affiliation with like-minded similar trade union organizations. For example, the workers at the Dunlop Factories in Durban were concerned with their own shop-floor activities, were allied to other Dunlop manufacturing plants, were affiliated to the Metal
and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) which in turn was affiliated to FOSATU (the Federation of South African Trade Unions).

By the end of 1986 there were three major national groupings of trade unions: FOSATU, which had become COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions -- see below), UWUSA (United Workers Union of South Africa) and NACTU (the Nation Council of Trade Unions, formally known as CUSA or the Council of Unions of South Africa until its reconstitution in October 1986). Each of these groupings had its own particular major focus. According to Lodge\(^{16}\) "COSATU could claim the allegiance of the most effective and best organized sectors of the labor movement.\(^{17}\) NACTU, on the other hand "was strongly influenced by black consciousness ideas" which meant that they allowed no members of other race groupings into their ranks. CUSA had the extremely powerful National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in their midst until November, 1985, when the NUM switched allegiances to COSATU and it was after this that CUSA became NACTU. It was the role of UWUSA in Natal that was to be of considerable interest and the sight of great turbulence.

UWUSA was set up by Chief Mangasutho Gatsha Buthelezi in Natal as a counter to FOSATU and later COSATU. He wished to form "a Zulu-dominated, procapitalist,


\(^{17}\)It was COSATU which was later to join the African National Congress and South African Communist Party Alliance in the struggle for independence from the white regime.
anti-sanctions union." The date of the launch was the May Day celebrations of 1986.19

The union was to be driven to a large extent by strong Inkatha feeling, philosophy and rhetoric. The role of Inkatha was very powerful in Natal and needs to be put into perspective to show how the thinking was to run counter to the ANC affiliates. The events running up to the establishment of UWUSA need also to be traced, so as to indicate the strong tensions among the workers who were to be confronted by disparate and potent opposing forces.

Inkatha (or to give it its full name "Inkatha ye Inkululeko ye Sizwe" or "National Cultural Liberation Movement") was initially a cultural organization that was reborn in 1975 through the work and initiative of Chief Buthelezi, the nephew of King Solomon Dinizulu.20 Primarily, Inkatha was to develop three pillars of philosophical thinking. Firstly, Inkatha established and reinforced a strong historical and cultural-historical link with one of the great warriors and nations of South African history, namely King Shaka of the Zulu. Thus the "origins" of the Zulu nation, and its consequent right to exist was written proudly in the blood of the forefathers. With this came the pride in the cultural heritage of the Zulu nation. As Sitas puts it:

Inkatha's leadership argues that, as a cultural and political movement, it is the inheritor, protector and carrier of the pride of the Zulu nation and people. . .

18 Lodge, All, Here and Now 86.


20 Lodge, All, Here, and New 153.
These historical connections in all of their complexity are utilized not only to inspire popular support but also to bestow on the leadership legitimate authority: they become heirs in a long line of political craftsmanship.\textsuperscript{21}

Secondly, Inkatha made a differentiation between the ANC in exile, and the "true" ANC of Chief Albert Luthuli, who claimed a "peaceful struggle for black rights." This allegiance also indicates the strong disapproval of the South African Communist Party alliance with the ANC, and consequently the strong procapitalist movement within Inkatha. Thirdly, and perhaps most basically

\ldots it is a cultural organisation that embodies and preserves the Zulu people's way of life, of moral and social conduct: and, as such, it is concerned with the moral discipline, with \textit{uhlapanisa} -- the obedience of youth to their elders and the preservation of patriotism and respect.\textsuperscript{22}

The return to this strong tradition was emphasized because of two major developments in South Africa. In the long term the family unit, its attachment to the land, the historical links to the past, and the "inevitabilities" of the future had been, and were still being, drastically eroded by the Apartheid system and the migrant labor policies. This was becoming more and more evident in the seemingly degenerate lives that were being lived in the various sprawling townships and squatter camps around the country.

Inkatha would then become a system of moral rearmament for the souls lost to the abuses of the system. In the short term, Inkatha was to be used as a system of contestation for the rebellions led by the youth of the country, following the uprisings of

\textsuperscript{21}Sitak Class, Nation 263.

\textsuperscript{22}Sitak Class, Nation, 263.
1976. This uprising was seen to be a frontal attack on the primary tenet of authority in the Zulu nation, namely parental obedience and the patriarchal system. As Lodge puts it: "they believed that the traditional values embedded in patriarchal discipline were being undermined by the assertiveness of youth and the egalitarian rhetoric that were such prominent features of the political culture of the townships." It was to be the "egalitarian nature" of the community organizations such as SANCO (the South African National Civics Organizations) as they were operating in the townships, as well as the egalitarian operations of the trade unions on the shop floors, that were to be part of the primary dynamics that appeared to generate the call for UWUSA.

At the heart of Inkatha was (is) Chief Mangasutho Gatsha Buthelezi, a person who has driven Inkatha in the direction it has been going. Lodge's description of the Chief is apt, effective and pointed:

Chief Buthelezi's personality was an active factor in the shaping of Inkatha's political character and in the bitter rivalry between the movement and the ANC. Highly intelligent, authoritarian, proud, and acutely sensitive about his status and rank, he responds fiercely to the most mildly expressed criticisms. Accompanying these traits are considerable reserves of charm and an array of other attractive qualities, including an infallible memory for names and faces, that have won him a devoted following. In every sense he is a formidable adversary.

He is also witty, a prolific speaker and very religious in his form of Christianity. He has all the attributes necessary: royal linkage, authority and command, and an anti-ANC stance.

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23For a more detailed analysis of this, see the Chapter on Mbongeni Ngema in this work.

24Lodge All. Here and Now 152. For the presence of the youth in the struggle, see the Chapter five on Mbongeni Ngema, below, with particular reference to the play Sarafina!

25Lodge All. Here and Now 153.
What is so remarkable about this description is that in virtually all of the characteristics attributed to Chief Buthelezi, most of them resonate with the characteristics of the imbongi. It is as if the chiefdomship gave him the step into the position, but the theatrical nature of the man brings the patronage and the authority. The point is born out by the analysis of Buthelezi done by Shula Marks in her book *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal.* She notes the multiple onstage and offstage discourses that Buthelezi has to juggle in the pursuit not only of personal power, but also in pursuit of the development of "his people." These include his relationship with the State (from whom the bulk of the money for the province he rules comes), the homeland of which he is "prime minister," his relationship to Inkatha and the royal family, his calls for capitalist development and the support of the petit-bourgeoisie, the reaction of the trade unions in his province, and his soured relationship with the African National Congress. To keep all these pressures in a constant state of equilibrium requires a character that can adapt the discourse to be used to the situation that demands it. The combination of charm and fear plays a central role to this strategy negotiation.

The duality between the "Zulu-ness" of the workers, and their trade union aspirations were to cause much violence and soul-searching in the 1980s. In the early 1980s FOSATU was essentially a “workerist” organization, concerned with its place on the shop floor. During times of the debate between those for the registration of the unions and those opposed to it, the bulk of the unions affiliated to FOSATU appeared to

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favor registration (while those opposed to it appeared to do so primarily to maintain the loophole of commitment to a struggle outside of the shop-floor, namely in the townships).  

The debate was exacerbated by the launching, on the 20th of August, 1983 "at the Rockland Community Centre in Mitchell's Plain . . . outside Cape Town" of the United Democratic Front or UDF. This organization was a loose affiliation of all the key players and organizations that were involved in the anti-Apartheid struggles. These players included the churches, the Civics organizations, the education organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and certain trade unions. The overt purpose of the Front was to co-ordinate and focus the liberation struggle. The covert purpose was to act as a front for the ANC in exile. 

Members of the UDF recognized that the fight against the regime had to be total and complete in every aspect of the front. Thus, a strike by a certain factory in a certain area had to be accompanied by the boycotting of the products of that factory, and had to be assisted by the general ungovernability of the area in which the workers and the factory found themselves. The strikers themselves had to be supported during the times 

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28Lodge All, Here and Now 49.

29The purpose of Tom Lodge's book All, Here and Now is to document the growth and practice of the UDF.
of deprivation during the strike. Hence Civics organizations would be called upon to make the area ungovernable, and to assist in the enforcing of the boycotts (sometimes in the most violent of ways) and the union would do the rest. In this way, the supposed divide between the shop floor and the civil society was breached.

In Natal, the players were the unions which, to a large extent, had attempted to "keep out of politics." In addition, there was Inkatha who was attempting to build a unified cultural or ethnic base and to move increasingly and with greater encompassment into the party political arena, and the UDF which mainly consisted of the Civics organizations that were morally supported by the ANC. Lodge claims that "before the launch (of COSATU in November, 1985) the unions in the area had maintained a politically cautious position that allowed them to accommodate both UDF and Inkatha supporters." But at the launch, COSATU'S president Elijah Barayi spoke out vehemently against the Inkatha movement.30 This was followed up, when "in April 1986, in Lusaka, COSATU acknowledged in a joint statement with the ANC, that the ANC was the leading force in the liberation struggle, of which COSATU was an integral part."31 In the middle of 1987, COSATU adopted the Freedom Charter,32 notwithstanding festering tensions between 'workerists' and 'populists' in certain affiliated unions. The conference also

30Lodge All, Here and Now 165.

31Lodge All, Here and Now 84.

32The Freedom Charter was the guiding document "of intent" for a liberated South Africa. For a full text of the Freedom Charter see Lodge, All, Here and Now 331-335. For a sung version of the Charter see Mbongeni Nkema. Township Fever! The Best of Mbongeni Nkema; the Man and his Music. (Johannesburg: Skotaville and Via Afrika, 1995) 189.
passed a resolution in favour of the construction of 'disciplined alliances' with 'mass-based, democratic and non-racial communities.'

In other words, Lodge points to the United Democratic Front affiliates. This alliance between the UDF and COSATU was cemented in February, 1989 with the establishment of the Mass Democratic Movement (the MDM) which was to launch an even more coordinated "defiance campaign."[34]

The point is that from early on in 1983 right up to the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP (as well as the Pan-Africanist Congress -- a black consciousness organization) in February of 1990, and beyond, three-way tensions existed. Some trade unions (the workerist ones) focused expressly on the workplace tensions. Others were concerned with the conflation of race and class and the concomitant general oppression across this divide (the populist ones). Yet others were concerned with the role of trade unions in the maintenance or development of specific cultural agendas (the ethnic ones). These workerist, populist and culturalist organizations, as well as the tension between the various philosophical movements that embodied these sentiments, demonstrated the huge range of onstage and offstage discourses. As an indication of these tensions, Ari Sitats quotes Mi Hlatshwayo from an interview that Sitats conducted with Hlatshwayo in May, 1987. Hlatshwayo acknowledges Zulu history and the worker reality:

I want to be a man. A proper man. I want to respect my chief. I want others to respect me. But there are opposite forces fighting inside of me. On the one hand I

[33] Lodge All. Here and Now 112.

[34] Lodge All. Here and Now 111.
am an organised worker, on the other I am a captive of this Zulu propaganda. Despite my respect for these figureheads I am practically challenged by the forces of revolution in the townships, I am surrounded by conflict, and the capitalist system is hammering me. . . . (T)he chiefs are doing nothing about my situation. . . . (T)hey drive big cars and demand total obedience and the children are saying all this respect is fokall.  

To draw all these lines together one might argue in the following way. In the beginning, the trade unions were concerned primarily with conditions on the shop floor. These conditions included the lack of permanency of the worker, wages and benefits, working conditions and the hazards involved in the work-place, pensions, training, promotion and, of course, the right to bargain and the mechanisms involved in the bargaining process, such as the right to strike, lock-outs, and so on. Later it was realized that, to a large extent, these conditions were directly and heavily influenced by the living conditions of the workers. Consequently, issues such as the pass laws, migrancy, conjugality, slum areas, education, hygiene and basic living conditions, all surfaced and became part of the negotiations for better deals for workers. Workers realized that for virtually any negotiation to succeed an entirely different mind-set had to be encouraged both for employer and employee, and particularly between employer and employee.

The upshot of this development in thinking is clearly to be seen in the plays that were used to mobilize the masses during these 15 years. The early plays are confined almost exclusively to mobilization, conscientization, solidarity and strategic action. The off-shoot over time showed the trade unions beginning to move into social and political

\[\text{35}\text{Literally "fuck all." Here it means the extremes of nothingness.}\]

\[\text{36}\text{Sitats Class, Nation 263.}\]
issues, as the seeming success of the methods of mobilization and so on appeared to be effective.37

From this can be seen that the trade unions were to a large extent concerned with the space of the workplace. This space was inevitably inhabited by both the employer and the employee. Within capitalism, the employer’s aim in any situation is to produce the maximum amount for the minimum cost. Part of the employer’s cost overheads is of course the price of labor. What the employer had to do therefore was to find a way to keep the price of labor at a bare minimum, while keeping the productivity of the work force at optimal levels. In this endeavor the employer could draw on the two basic dynamics of the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA’s) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA’s) considered by Althusser.38

In the first instance the employer had at his disposal the mechanisms of the state to control the flow of workers to the work place. The threats brought about by influx control, the pass-book that had continually to be up to date and in order, the huge reservoir of unemployment created by the homeland policies making the threat of replacement a very real threat, the poverty of the homelands which drove so many to the urban areas for work, and ultimately the very real threat of police intervention if work did not progress and calm did not prevail, were all mechanisms the employer could forcibly draw on to maintain the status quo of the worker. From the ISA point of view the


employer drew on the shabby quality of education offered the workers, as well as the type of education provided.39 Workers were never trained to be skilled workers or to be able to move into management positions, nor could they, as a result of the policies of job reservation. Yet the skilled workers and the managers that were in industry led such luxurious and stylish lives, following the benefits accrued to them through their privileged status, that it provided a huge incentive for those who might consider the possibilities of climbing the corporate ladder. As a consequence, the potentially new life was made so attractive that the solidarity of the labor market could be tapped for informers ("impimpis"), and the potential unity of labor organizations could be divided. The ever-present threat of the informer and scab labor became regular themes in the plays of the trade unions, as these were perceived to be the primary attacks on the solidarity of the shop floor.

The employer entered, therefore, the shop space, the communal space armed with the law (however skewed it might have been as measured against international standards), the power of wealth and security, and also the theoretical underpinning of the "business sense" of much of the world, namely capitalism. The onstage discourse was buttressed by the offstage discourse of the pursuit of profit. However, much of the rest of the world had realized that labor was the key issue in industry, and had learned a way of dealing with this aspect of business. Amongst other things, they had discovered a way to work with unions. South Africa still lacked the expertise to do this, and so the employer was

39For a closer analysis of the education system, see the analysis of Sarafina! in chapter five, on Mbongeni Ngema.
confronted in the shared space by a growing militancy (borne from a desperation to survive, and from the work of interventionists and activists). To a large extent the employer resorted to oppressive tactics to deal with this "obstruction."

Labor, on the other hand, entered the shop space in a hugely disadvantaged way because of survival matters. The possibility of joint or shared combined action was severely undermined by divisions along ethnic, cultural and racial lines.\textsuperscript{40} The only binding factors they had on the shop floor were the oppressive situation, and the shared living conditions. To develop a concerted strategy for resistance on the shop floor, given the radical divisions, proved to be extremely problematic for many of the interventionists and activists working with the trade unions. The early work of the Durban Workers Cultural Local, initially under the guidance of Ari Sitas, is a case in point and will make up the bulk of the investigation for this chapter.

3.3 Ari Sitas and the African Perspective

In an extremely bold article which appeared in \textit{Africa Perspective} in 1986,\textsuperscript{41} Sitas outlines a number of the contradictions in workers theatre as he experienced it. Sitas sets his agenda early on in the article: "In short we need to define cultural spaces broadly: they are material environments, institutional or non-institutional, that act as physical and

\footnote{\textsuperscript{40}To this day, for example, there are still two trade unions for mining matters -- the National Union of Mineworkers, the biggest single union in the country and one which is affiliated to COSATU, is almost exclusively black, and the Mine Workers Union which is exclusively white.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{41}Ari Sitas, "Culture and Production: The Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in South Africa" \textit{Africa Perspective}. New Series. 1,1 and 2. (1986) 84-110.}
social carriers of events in popular or working class culture." Sitas sets his cap for the materiality of life, and the functionality of the spaces as carriers of the signs of culture. Furthermore, his insistence that there is such a thing as a "working class" culture, one that extends beyond the immediate and the historical, locates his argument in the realms of class differentiation, and not race or ethnicity.

Given this, he then makes an attempt to locate the theatre (not the theatrical, and this becomes a vital difference) within this working class culture and he does so by drawing on workers' experiences. On the one hand, the workers can quite clearly appreciate the exploitation and oppression of the shop floor, expressed, as he sees it, in the so-called khalo: "The experience of production, captured in the Zulu word khalo, which means pain but also grievance, which is lamentation but also complaint, which is tears but also 'wrong,' is handled through unique cultural formations." He acknowledges, too, the alienation effect of labor, which is to a large extent exacerbated by the South African situation. It is when he starts to consider the moment of theatre (still not acknowledging the theatrical) that the matter becomes problematic. He claims "the theatre is after all not an indigenous institution, although many of the rituals and indigenous forms of expression have much that is mimetic and include remarkable re-enactment qualities."44

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42 Sitas Culture and Production 90. His italics.


44 Sitas Culture and Production 90.
Firstly, Sitas appears to equate theatre with the imitation of life (mimesis). This is borne out by his claim of the workers' "remarkable re-enactment qualities." Sitas then looks around him to find an indigenous (cultural) institution that bears some resemblance (is mimetic of) the type of theatre that he knows. Sitas' own theatrical background is as a professional sociologist working with a highly successful Johannesburg based theatre company known as the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, under the very capable guidance of Malcolm Purkey. This company was responsible for plays such as The Fantastical History of the Useless Man (a potted history of South Africa, with a strong Brechtian approach to the production: script and style), the highly acclaimed Sophiatown (a theatrical piece with music, about the end of the highly vibrant and multicultural township known as Sophiatown), and sundry other productions developed as offshoots of the Witwatersrand History Workshop. This workshop had a strong Marxist leaning in its approach to history. These later plays include Randlords and Rotgut, Dikistheneng and the much acclaimed Marabi. Many of the actors who joined Junction Avenue had come from the defunct Workshop '71, under the leadership of Robert Mshengu

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46Junction Avenue Theatre Company, Sophiatown (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988).

47For a vivid description of the area, see Bloke Modisane, Blame me on History (London: Penguin, 1990). Sophiatown was bulldozed by the apartheid regime to make way for a white suburb called, ironically, Trionf (triumph).

48For an analysis of the Witwatersrand history Workshop see Belinda Bozoli and Peter Delius, eds., "Radical History Review: History from South Africa" Radical History Review. 46-47 (Winter, 1990), the entire edition.


107
Kavanagh's pioneering work, *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa*, had set much of the groundwork for the progressive theatre in South Africa. It was also under Kavanagh's auspices that the work of Credo Mutwa saw the light of day. Mutwa has always claimed that theatre had been part of the African tradition.

Finally, Sitas draws on the ritualistic as being mimetic and full of "re-enactment." Here he seems to come closer to the major problem of the *theatrical* as opposed to defining that which they do as theatre. The theatre which he uses as a yardstick, is the theatre that

was introduced through the churches and mission schools, to permeate much of educational institutions. It furthermore was inverted to fit a local cultural perspective by an educated African middle class for either nationalistic or traditional themes in the cultural politics of South Africa. It was finally buttressed by the white liberal community and the Joint Councils with very rare incursions into the cultural spaces of the working class.


When it comes to the *theatrical*, and particularly the theatricality of the traditions, Sitas hives off and onto the "traditions of storytelling that survive as oral forms in the interstices of compounds and hostels."\(^{54}\) In this he is supported by Coplan.\(^{55}\)

Sitas finds the elements of performance he is looking for in all types of *umdlalo* or play, sport or frolic. "Dlali" means either a player or an *actor*. It is unclear from the various dictionaries whether the actors referred to here are "stage" actors or simply those who act, as in performing a specific *social role* -- "he acted as chairman for the night."

The important thing here is that Sitas describes the function of the *dlali* as a participant in anything that "ranges from the soccer game to the church sermon and the lay preacher."\(^{56}\) What Sitas does stress is the indirect nature of theatre in popular culture, drawn specifically from his knowledge of the work of Gibson Kente, whom he labels as a conservative:

> with one leg in the liberal experiments of the past (‘the big variety show and the musical’) on (sic) the other, in the grassroots morality and ‘lobola’ plays . . . (Kente) has managed to create a universe of theatrical ‘types’ that achieved a significant symbolic and aesthetic hegemony in the townships and more specifically in working class experience."\(^{57}\)

\(^{54}\)Sitas, *Culture and Production* 90.


\(^{56}\)Sitas *Culture and Production* 91.

\(^{57}\)Sitas *Culture and Production* 90-91.
What he is referring to are the number of types of (stock) characters Gibson Kente created for his traveling theatre companies during the 1960's to 1980's. These traveling performances toured throughout the country and were very popular. Therefore Sitas suggests that the workers, when pondering what theatre was, could only draw on their experiences of what other theatre, the theatre of Gibson Kente, was and conclude that this was "essentially" black theatre. Yet Kente's work was modeled in itself on the immensely successful and influential production of King Kong in the early 1960's, which was a co-production of United Artists run by predominantly white liberals, but contained the (Black) jazz musicians of the Witwatersrand, who composed most of the music. The cast itself was black, yet the style of the musical took the form of the Broadway musical.58 Gibson Kente himself was part of the production team and was a member of United Artists, until the organization refused to support his own efforts in independently writing, composing and directing his own work, in 1963.

Essentially what Kente had done was to fuse the township jazz of the black working class areas (jazz which was itself drawing on the music of African American jazz and fusing it with the current local sound), with a reasonably skimp plot line that revealed some of the deprivation of the black, working class people in the urban areas, and with a performance style that had to cater for the huge halls in which the actors played, halls that had very bad acoustics, were constantly being invaded by the noises and

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58The production itself brought to world prominence artists such as Miriam Makeba, Jonas Gwangwa and Hugh Masekela, but only as musicians. for analysis of the production itself see Martin Orkin, Drama and the South African State 73-79.
occurrences "outside," and the ebb and flow of a very boisterous audience. To do all of this Kente drew on stock characters such as the indolent gangster type youth (the "tsotsi"), the drunken father, the woman who runs an illegal tavern ("shebeen") to survive and who has a heart of gold, and so on.

These characters are themselves to be found in reasonably fully fledged outlines in the 1958 play of Athol Fugard entitled No Good Friday. This particular play was also performed under the auspices of United Artists. Thus we see that Kente's stock characters may have come from his experiences on the streets, as it were, they may have come from the exigencies of performance, where brash and bold brush-strokes for characters were required, they may have come from the previous experience of theatre from Athol Fugard, or they may have come simply from Kente's particular style of doing theatre. Finally, research has revealed that the characters may have come from the American gangster movies that flooded South Africa during the 1940's and 1950's and which caused much imitation of the perceived American Way.

Here Sitas is caught in a quandary. If the "stock characters" refer to the offstage concepts of black audiences of what the "onstage theatrical" types are to be, then the

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60The spelling of the play's title changes from edition to edition. Sometimes it is spelt No-good Friday and sometimes, as here, No Good Friday. Dimetos and Two Early Plays. (London: Oxford UP, 1977).
theatrical conceptualization is valid, irrespective of the origins of the images of those stock characters. It might be seen as "life imitating art." Conversely, if the onstage theatrical characters are seen as representations of the theatrical representation of the offstage realizations of the black audiences, then these characterizations are equally valid but for the opposite reasons. Here art imitates life. The only way out of this conundrum is firstly to realize the theatricality of all representation, both of the material and the ideational, and secondly, to note the inevitable intervention of offstage conceptions of reality and the effects of those offstage interventions on the representation of the reality in an onstage discourse moment.

Sitas's "liberal" accusation comes from two sources. On the one hand, Kente's work in theatre is obviously influenced by United Artists and the people who ran it -- white liberal thinkers, including Athol Fugard himself. But the influence is also to be seen in the accusation that Kente, in all of his plays except one, refuses to call the people to action to relieve the oppression -- he simply bemoans the situation the characters are in and urges fortitude, resilience and endurance. Very often this is associated with a message delivered through the form of the local minister of religion. Finally, Kente himself seems to think that it is economically more propitious to present theatre that will continue to be presented and not banned by the authorities. Consequently, he shies away from overt criticism.

Sitas's problem with all of this is that Kente's overarching influence seemed to dictate the accepted "style" of performance, both in terms of characters and in terms of structure. It would appear, therefore, that Kente had created an "aesthetic hegemony"
which Sitas was having difficulty breaking. The point is that the workers had a dual understanding of the "theatrical moment," as I will argue below.

3.4 The Worker/Actor and the Enactment of the Praise-Poets.

Sitas sets out the problems he experiences in terms of certain contradictions. He lays the groundwork thus:

There is a genuine clash of moral orders taking place between workers' attempts to express khalo in the world of production, their strengths in organisation, their lives in the townships, and existing culture. That this struggle is conducted within and through the aesthetic hegemony of the current dominant forms of culture, created some of the central contradictions that propel this theatre to creativity.

Put in another way, the spaces that the workers inhabit -- the work place, the places of organization and the lives in the townships -- can only be articulated in ways and forms that appear to Sitas to come from the "dominant forms of culture," that is to say aesthetic hegemonies of performance prevalent, or at least known to the workers. In this sense, Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "autoethnographic" is useful. Pratt maintains that in the "contact space," which she defines as the space where competing forces or agendas meet and which might be compared to the "frontier zone" in colonial writing, opposing discourses engage with each other. This engagement is of such a nature that each "side" may at least be able partly to understand the problems of the other. Consequently each "writes" itself according to its perceived (or read) understanding of the agendas and

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61 So successful was the style of production, that a rival of his, Sam Mangwane, wrote and presented a play entitled The Unfaithful Woman, which toured the townships virtually continuously with various casts, for some 17 years.

62 Sitas Culture and Production 93.
forces of the Other. Where this applies to culture, the term "autoethnography" is applicable.\footnote{Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). Chapter 1.}

From this Sitas starts his list of seeming contradictions that occur in the "contact space." He first considers the space and conditions of work, and the problems of representing those conditions in a theatrical space: "On the one hand there is the workers' \textit{khalo} about exploitation and their actual conditions of work, and on the other hand a stage that cannot even realize the mere surface of their experience."\footnote{Sitases Culture and Production 93.} In this Sitas is obviously caught in the bind of representing the real, or, if you will, wrestling with the concepts of \textit{mimesis}. He suggests that there are two possible ways out of the contradiction: one could turn to the gigantic mechanisms suggested by Piscator and Meyerhold (although Sitas does not mention these thinkers by name), to "begin approximating the experiences of production," or "the second method is to find the correct metaphors or conceits to illuminate the reality."\footnote{Sitases Culture and Production 94-95.} Sitas' problem is to find the most effective discourse to fit the agenda for and of the space delineated. His first attempt to do this is fraught with the difficulties of budget, locality, mobility and theatrical spaces. Thus he has to turn to the solution which "involves the usage of the actor's mimetic and bodily abilities to create a rich texture to the work."\footnote{Sitases Culture and Production 95.}
The problem now is that the skill of the worker/actor as performer leads to a
dissipation of the intensity of portraying the struggle, as the actors turn to what Sit as
perceives as the entertainment value of the portrayal, and thus to the skill of the portrayal
of social relations, as opposed to the oppressive nature of the labor system. Sit as has to
decide whether to focus on the social relations of work, or the work itself.

It is here that he identifies his second contradiction. If the performance is to show
social relations in the work place, he is confronted basically by three groups of people
involved: the oppressors, the oppressed who express solidarity, and those of the
oppressed who do not show solidarity -- the impimpi or sell-outs/spies, or scab labor (or
simply the uninitiated or unproselytized). To Sit as' chagrin, he discovers that the skills of
the actors in mimicking the bosses and other representatives of the evil oppressor (and
this includes their representatives the impimpi) are of such a nature that the audience
rather like the old rogues that the actors create!67

Furthermore, the actors' experiences of the theatrical point them in the direction of
creating stock-types that will bring sympathy from the audience, and to a large extent, as
he demonstrates, the actors revert to the clever, mischievous tsotsi character -- a character
who bucks the system and gets away with it! These are the very characters that Gibson
Kente created for his theatre, and the ones that Sit as has criticized. Sit as' solution to this

67Sit as Culture and Production 96.
problem is to turn to the spoken word and "the monologue about khalo." Sitas' later work focuses extensively, in terms of the cultural, in this area as he explores workers' poetry, rising from his interest in the imbongi.

However, the clever rogue as individual sets up Sitas' third major contradiction. Here, he suggests that the concerted and united action of the struggle for worker rights can very possibly be derailed by the insertion of the individual virtuosity of the actor. Consequently, if one places the serious, morally correct and cause driven shop-steward up against the happy-go-lucky, slippery and deceptive, amoral, off-beat character, then theatrically the former has very little chance of appealing to an audience. Such a character is simply not "exciting" or "unusual" enough, nor does such a character resonate with the audience's own experiences of thwarting the oppressor. On the other hand, the immorality of the latter character is seemingly approved of. Sitas formulates the problem in this way:

The new seriousness of class conscious workers has not yet found its vibrant equivalent in formal terms. The performance dynamics bias plays in terms of excitement towards the drunkards and the off-beat characters. It is difficult to counter-balance this contradiction.  

Sitases notes how this leads to the next contradiction: the worker as bearer of a social process, in other words, the worker as defined as a worker by the fact that he or she is in a

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68Sitases Culture and Production 96. In fact, as the Durban Workers' Cultural Local becomes more part of the institutions of the Trade Union, COSATU, in Natal, and is run by the Union itself with Mi Hlatzwayo as the chief organizer, so Sitases turns to the poetry of the praise poem and the resistance poem, and edits and publishes an anthology of these poems entitled Black Mamba Rising: South African Worker Poets in Struggle (Worker Resistance and Culture Publications, c/o Department of Industrial Sociology, University of Natal, King George V Avenue, Durban 4001, South Africa; or COSATU Workers' Cultural Local, P.O.Box 18109, Dalbridge 4014, South Africa 1986).

69Sitases Culture and Production 97.
work place. Here the tensions lie between the exhibitionism and individualist performances, on the one hand, and the worker as part of the collectivity, with collective behavior on the other. The search for "heroic collective action" seems to be undermined by "a variety of non-theatrical activities."\textsuperscript{70} This occurs in both directions -- the actor is required to perform for optimal results in a particular way (the speed of the production, the athleticism, the mimetic qualities and so on) but the dignity of working class pride "off-stage" is assaulted in this manner. Sitas documents this problem in a short vignette:

Here especially the older workers insist that the time must take its course; they take more than an hour to recount one event with all its correct nuances. They insist on being in control of such time that it takes on an epic quality in its unfolding layers. They demand all the correct emphases included in the play without external interference. . . . To portray your story you have to be dignified and the time count is slow and eloquent.\textsuperscript{71}

One can imagine the frustration of the activists as they are bound to time restraints such as bus and taxi schedules, soccer fixtures, other meetings and the like!

Nevertheless, Sitas finds a very real problem here, one that can only be resolved, it seems, if one considers the onstage and offstage tensions. To a large extent the venerable gentlemen telling the stories are offstage from the workplace (as are all of those present) but onstage for the telling of the story. In the light of this, one can see that in the conventions for onstage storytelling, in the communities from which these gentlemen come, time is of no consideration.

\textsuperscript{70}Sitas Culture and Production 99.

\textsuperscript{71}Sitas Culture and Production 100.
Consequently what Sitas fails to realize is that the space in which the story is being told is both an onstage and an offstage space, defined by the agenda of the person holding the floor, and this has to be acknowledged by those who are not. Nevertheless, the licence to tell the story is granted by the commonality of the space and agenda of all participants. What one finds, then, is the tensions between granting the licence to perform (by virtue of this common space and agenda) and the mechanisms by which the licence is used or abused by the participants in the space (as will be seen in the discussion of Mi Hlatshwayo's work in "organizing" dissident work, and in the documentation of the Durban Workers' Cultural Local). The space provides the locality for the interaction, but does not guarantee the inviolability of the agenda and the discourses that flow from that.

Seen from another angle, Sitas' problem transpires from his yardstick of what would work in performance and what not. Here, the telling of the story, as he describes it, would not work, because performance uses other parameters such as structuring a story not to be told, but to be demonstrated and, as such, to contain visual as well as verbal cues. Yet the parameters that the old storyteller uses in Sitas' description, are never tested in performance. Sitas is assuming that because his parameters for performance have been shown to work elsewhere, they are assumed to be effective and the right ones to use in his own work.

Nevertheless, what Sitas does realize, and this is indicated in his fifth contradiction, is that the oral "tradition" of storytelling can fruitfully be juxtaposed with what he calls "enactment." To decide what to enact and what to tell becomes a major

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72Sitas Culture and Production 101.
problem. On the one hand, the simple telling of a worker's troubles may be effective in conveying all the necessary and relevant information, but on the other it is the enactment of the story that provides the excitement. To find a way that meshes the two he turns to the work of the praise-poet, where the poet not only tells the story, but enacts, or partly embodies the story. The sixth contradiction arises from this as Sitas discovers that the virtuosity of the praise-poet as praise-poet often overshadows the desire for the solidarity which is the primary function of the performance.

To pause here for a moment to take stock, one sees that Sitas up to this point is struggling with a number of contradictions, all of which revolve around three major concerns. Firstly, he has failed to come to terms with theatricality and the framing of theatricality. He assumes that theatricality is that which occurs on the stage as a specific type of discourse, and that the concept of role-play "off the stage" in other words in real life are two different things. Consequently, he assumes that the roles that he criticizes on the stage are contrary to the roles that need to be seen offstage. Yet the actors "create" these roles from their own experiences, both of life and of the stage. The elements of theatricality are present in both "spaces."

Secondly, he has conceived of space as being monolithic. The work space is different from the home space, which is different from the space of recreation. These spaces are, in my view, constructed on "locality." I submit that what Sitas needs to turn to is the defining of space through "agenda." In this way the roles of the people in those spaces are determined by the dynamics of the agenda of the space, and the dynamics of power within that space.
Thirdly, Sitas is caught up in the problems of creating a realism that relies on reproduction, rather than on mimesis. If Taussig's definition of mimesis holds, namely that "mimesis is the nature that culture uses to create second nature," then Sitas is caught in the whirlpool of who imitates what and for what purpose and within what contact area. Taussig's point is that mimesis relies not only on Copy but on Contact, and that there is a spiral of copying occurring in the contact zone, as each, with his or her own agenda, manipulates the copy to manipulate the contact. This would tie in with, and enhance, Scott's idea that the oppressed seems to have taken on the dimensions of the oppressor (and the dimensions expected of the oppressed, by the oppressor), but are in fact simply copying the expectations for specific own goals. The playing of the tsotsi character, therefore, is not simply a foregrounding of a likeable rogue for easy laughs, nor a parody of the amorality of the evil required to be done (successfully) in an iniquitous society, but is in fact a way of "rehearsig" the iniquitous, holding them up for scrutiny, recognition, contact and ultimately rejection. The point is that the "easy laughs" do not imply identification with the character, but simply a recognition of the character.

Sitás's seventh contradiction illustrates clearly this problem. His concern here is the seeming contradiction between the cognitive and cathartic effects of performance.

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74 Taussig would argue that the mimesis involved in the tsotsi character -- the copy through contact -- plays directly into the control of the character through the dynamics of the "magic" of mimesis. His argument leads, I suspect, into the problems of catharsis through recognition. I have difficulty with this position.

75 Sitas Culture and Production 102.
For him the danger of identification of and with these particular characters would lead to a catharsis, or a release of pent-up emotion, and thus a dispersing of the drive to effect change. What is desired is rather a cognitive approach which would lead to the means to evaluate a situation and thus to understand and combat oppression. Sitas assumes that spectators will "suffer" a "loss of will" in the space of the theatrical event. And yet he relies precisely on this for the worker to "find" the moment of oppression and react "positively" to it. His misplaced concern is threefold. As an activist or interventionist he assumes that there are moments which he would see as moments of identification and which are moments that are contrary to the perceived agenda of the working class. The moments must, therefore, contain some sort of "universal" appeal or connection, a concept which is patently problematic.

He also assumes that in the space of the theatrical, all react in the same way to certain stimuli. However, as I have already argued, the nature of offstage and onstage discourses leads to the reaction of different "groups" to the theatrical, dependent on whether the group sees the theatrical moment as an offstage or an onstage moment, and how it relates to their own particular onstage and offstage moment.

Sitans falls into the trap of assuming that the reaction to the theatrical moment, established in the drive toward mimesis, will lead to recognition and therefore new, foregrounded knowledge. Once the new knowledge has been acquired from the performance, then, Sitas assumes, a change of behavior and attitude by the observer will follow. This is a problem that Sitas will share with much of the Theatre for Development concepts, as explored in the next chapter. Knowledge does not necessarily mean a
change in attitudes or a change in behavior, which are the very things that Sitas and his theatre are hoping for.\(^{76}\)

The eighth contradiction also flows from the problem of mimesis and here Sitas identifies the "mythological aspects of portrayal as against the real aspects of portrayal."\(^{77}\) He sees this as blunting the emergence of the realist conflict. He assumes that the "copy" of the reality will make a greater impact on the worker community than a seemingly abstracted mythological one. Here Sitas seems to be torn between the duality of mythology as theorized by Roland Barthes on the one hand, and the cultural mythologies of the communities from which the workers come, on the other. Barthes' concept is rooted in a semiotic analysis, demonstrating the political or ideological nature of the interpretative act, and thus could be applied to the worker situation, where the worker portrays as "natural" that which the activist perceives as reinforcing the oppression. This is what Sitas seeks to guard against. On the other hand, mythologies arising from culture are in and of themselves part of the culture's "normalizing" strategies, and consequently can be "read" in much the same way as Barthes would have us read them.

Here again, Sitas has difficulty with the discourses and agendas that the offstage spaces construct. To a large extent for any meaning to be found in the onstage space, discourses are inevitably brought to the space (and, of course, taken away from the space). These discourses are rooted in systems and methods used to "make sense" of the

\(^{76}\)The classic example of this is that most smokers know how bad smoking is for them, and can describe in detail what effects it has on them; they will be able to demonstrate a negative attitude toward smoking, but it takes supreme will power on the part of the smoker to change behavior radically (that is, to stop smoking).

\(^{77}\)Sitas Culture and Production 102-3.
material world. As such, they are rooted in mythology. One cannot "show reality" without the semiotic process being engaged. The problem is whether the material world is made to "fit in with" the world of ideas, or whether this ideational world is made to accommodate the material world. In this binary tension, the problems of the portrayal of the realistic (material world) versus the portrayal of the mythological (world of ideas) are situated.

The final contradiction lies in the realms of the multimedial dimensions of theatre: "Here there is an acute tension between the old established forms like song or dance, with their own laws of development, with strong roots in people's consciousness as against the demand to perform a new function with a play." The "old forms" that Sitas speaks of refers here to the offstage (from the point of view of the workers) spaces, and the "play" refers to the redefinition of the onstage space. This reshaping of the onstage space according to the dictates of the new medium will influence the interaction between those who are used to the space (Sitas and the interventionists) and those who are drawn into the space (the workers and other audience members) in order that they might "comply with" the agenda of the space (here, the conscientization and mobilization of the workers). Both are going to bring to the space their own understandings of the demands of the medium. Inevitably, those with the seeming "experience" of the demands of the space are the ones who wield the authority over the space. When the demands of the space in terms of form and content (agenda) are in the hands of the activists, it is conceivable or even probable that the contradictions that Sitas mentions appear.

78Sitas Culture and Production 103.
3.5 The Imbongi and the Four Traditions

Sitas' way of thinking about and presenting these questions have progressed considerably since 1986, especially as he tackles the role of the *imbongi* in much more detail. This is particularly evident in the 1990 article that he writes on class, nation and ethnicity. His purpose in this article is to attempt to reconsider the inadequacies in the thinking of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.\(^9\) Sitas' point of attack is to attempt to deconstruct Anderson's concept of "the feeling of ‘nationhood’ or ‘ethnicity,’ the commonality of national sentiments amongst people is experienced (to use Benedict Anderson) as a ‘deeply, horizontal comradeship.’"\(^8\)

Sitas' concern is with what he calls "subject formation" and by this he means the development of the individual subjectivity. His argument, rehearsed below, is extremely useful, as he develops and considers the potentials and agendas of the differing and disparate offstage discourses of various individuals in the worker movements. Essentially, he is showing how disparate communities engage in the shared discourse while they are experiencing varying conditions, with diverse reasons and reasonings, but with historically similar outcomes.

Sitas' first major point is that, contrary to theories of ideological interpellation, people do have the ability, "through their own institutions . . . (to) regulate ‘subject


formation' despite dominant ideologies" as the people attempt "to control their conditions of life."81 Drawing on "Zulu-ness," he argues that

‘Zulu-ness’ must be viewed as a negotiated identity between ordinary people's attempts to create effective and reciprocal social bonds (or functioning cultural formations) out of their social and material conditions of life and political ideologies that seek to mobilize them in non-class ways.82

In other words, the people are first and foremost confronted by the exigencies of everyday life, and, as clusters of people share their similar exigencies, they develop strategies for coping with those exigencies which might first be communal, and these are only then "glossed" by the prevalent ideological positions. The combination of the personal and the political are then fomented into the third phase: "The myth-complexes that are generated, the identities that are produced, the common experience of a black oppressed majority," all these are "constrained by class determination."83 Although he presumes that the negotiating factor throughout subject-formation is a class determination, his overriding concern is valid, namely that "there is no one nationalism, populism or ethnicity; their are varieties, and each one of them brings with it a host of implications."84 Furthermore, to assume a monolithic nationalist (or cultural) "politically founded mythology" based on a multi-ethnic alliance (or conversely to assume that the potency of interpellation is of such a nature that all will be subsumed under the banner of such a monolith) is to deny the

81Sitias Class, Nation 266.
82Sitias Class, Nation 266. The parenthesis are Sitas’.
83Sitias Class, Nation 266.
84Sitias Class, Nation 267.
power of the individual. And further, it is more effective to consider alliances on "common attempts in struggle to forge a common destiny."^85

Sitas concludes that the deciding factors are negotiated, shared agendas, to combat disharmony in shared and negotiating spaces. Thus despite a perceived commonness of "Zulu-ness" as a possible nationalistic (or ethnic) identity, in fact the "appropriation of this ethnicity by black workers is related to their varied forms of historical experience."^86 To demonstrate this, Sitas describes four basic "traditions of resistance" from various parts of Natal. His basic criteria are geographic region of origin (Natal, Kwazulu and the adjacent Pondoland region); relationship to land and land possession or dispossession (land ownership and alienation); social stratification (chiefs, elders, fathers and children); colonialism and imperialism (that is to say oppressive governance); migrancy and influx labor relationships causing frictions of difference (who is permanent, who has a pass, and who is temporary); and finally, the work situation (proletariat and petty-bourgeoisie).

The first tradition of resistance that he describes comes from the Howick/ Mpophomeni/ Lionsriver area. There "Zulu-ness" is a "linguistic and cultural" moment, but the inhabitants of this area have had their land taken several times and as such they are more concerned with all who have been dispossessed in this way. Organizations such

^85 Sitas Class, Nation 268-9.

^86 Sitas Class, Nation 269 and ff.
as Inkatha, and to a certain extent the trade unions, have little use to them on this front. Their "horizontal sense of solidarity" is based on shared experiences of land alienation.87

The second tradition of resistance comes from the Richards Bay/Empangeni area, where the "Zulu-ness," with its sense of separateness, distinctive nation state ideas and historical background, makes the presence of Inkatha of vital importance. Labor is seen simply as separate, parallel and temporary "drudgery" that has to be undergone until power is returned. Land is the deciding factor, in that the land is available, but the parceling out of the land depends on the Zulu traditions of chieftainship, and consequently, discrepancies lead to disenchantment with the Inkatha dominated Kwazulu government.88

Durban's black working class provides the third tradition of resistance. Sitas maintains that the tradition is a combination of the previous two, but has the added, potent dimension of urbanization and industrial specifics. Consequently, there is "segregationalist rhetoric" in terms of who is Zulu and who isn't, the presence of the petit-bourgeoisie has a determining effect, the slum areas, influx control, political campaigns (such as the UDF and the PAC) all contribute to the formation of the tradition. As Sitas suggests: "These legacies make Durban's proletariat the most advanced and the most backward-looking in the country: the most experienced in organization and renewal, but the most attached to traditional institutions."89 In a nutshell, the ambiguities and seeming

87 Sitas Class, Nation 270-1.
88 Sitas Class, Nation 271.
89 Sitas Class, Nation 271-2.
contradictions of patriarchy and moral values of the past on the one hand, and the black workers' cultural formations on the other, lead to problems of interpretation of the cultural work that is generated. In simple terms, this is a clash between the ideational and material aspects of life, and the interwoven nature of the representation and consequent interpretation of the interweave of these elements, coupled with the agendas and the onstage and offstage spaces that provide the discursive dilemmas.

The fourth tradition of resistance that Sitas notes is that of the Amapondo, a group of people from the south of Natal who differ from the Zulu only in dialect, yet who have been "given" a lower status by the Zulu. To a large extent this marginalization has been compounded by the Transkei origin of the group (and thus the proximity to the Xhosa) and also by the migrancy nature of their existence. Nevertheless, they have shown themselves to be hardy resistance fighters following the Pondoland rebellion of 1959-1961. Sitas notes the worker concentration of these people.⁹⁰

Sitas shows the wide and diverse spread of the workers involved in the struggle for worker rights. He analyses the worker leaders who come from the far reaches of Natal and who come from larger factories like AECI Umbogintwini (chemicals), Unilever (soap and accessories), Dunlop (rubber, tires and sportwear), Frametex (textiles), Bata (shoes), Coronation Brick and Tile, Bakers (biscuits), SA Stevedores, Alusaf (aluminium), SAPPI (forestry and paper), Amatikulu Sugar Mill, Huletts (both sugar refineries), Huletts Aluminium, BTR Sarmcol (rubber products).⁹¹

⁹⁰Sitans Class, Nation 272.

⁹¹Sitans Class, Nation 276, n.55. The parentheses are mine.
He concentrates on "contemporary leadership with oral power: the symbolic brokers of class culture." This connection between the oral abilities of the leaders and their leadership "abilities" seems to be of paramount importance. Von Kotze, too, points out this connection. Following the success of the Dunlop Play (see below) "the Dunlop worker-actors gained such popularity that it was not surprising to find them being chosen as shop stewards at the next election." The following questions need to be asked of this phenomenon. Were the leaders "good" actors and good leaders or were they taken to be good leaders because they were good actors? Secondly, to what extent did the audiences note the difference between being able to stand up to the bosses in the theatrical context and doing the same in reality? In other words, did the audiences see the theatrical event simply as a "rehearsal" for the struggle, and thus those who had been involved in the rehearsal were already more versed in the confrontation tactics than others who were not, or did they see the actors as "really" better at it? Is "performance style and ability" a necessary attribute of leadership? Fundamentally, though, the question is: Is resistance by its very nature "theatrical," and thus, to be effective in resistance, one has to have mastered the demands of the theatrical in the confrontation space, that is to say, in the onstage discourse between oppressor and oppressed? Those who can "play the expected" role better are likely to win more concessions.  


93 Of course, the explanation can be as simple as the publicity that is automatic during performance meant that the bulk of the workers could at least put a name and face together during the elections.
It is necessary, therefore, at this stage to turn to the documenting of the development of the Durban Workers Cultural Local, with specific reference to the theatre aspect of this movement. Because the praise-poetry played such a significant part in the shared offstage spaces, much reference will be made to this process, too. What this will demonstrate is the gradual realization that the theatrical (as a system of role-play) is not a given universal aspect of humanity (as Augusto Boal would have it, and which I will explore in chapter four). Nor is that which enters the onstage space particularly what is expected to go there by the activists. I will also show that attempting to develop a monolithic form of solidarity in the onstage space is highly problematic, as this calls for a denial of (some) of the offstage discourses which should inform the onstage space, if the two are to be seen as one. In other words, the truth and experience of workers is not simply rooted in the experience of the workplace, but is rooted in the entire living condition (including the mythologising capacity) of the participants in the onstage space. Solidarity and individuality are inevitably antagonistic.

3.6 The Workers' Own Representations

The history of the Durban Workers Cultural Local (DWCL) has been documented in the work of Astrid von Kotze and her work will be used as the primary basis for the analysis that follows. The DWCL came into being following the presentation of The Dunlop Play in July 1983 in Durban and "actively sought to propagate the use of culture

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in the labour movement." Von Kotze describes the working process that the group goes through, and summarizes the plays that the group have performed. The purpose of this section is not to attack or denigrate the work that has been done, but simply to show, on the one hand, that the eliding or collusion of the offstage and onstage spaces is not clearly theorized, and, on the other, to show how the concept of the theatrical is assumed as inevitable and transcendent, thereby creating a paradox in the method. Furthermore, a close reading of her work shows that what on the surface seems to be a "democratic" way of creating plays, is in fact a movement to creating a new hegemony.

Von Kotze starts her work by suggesting that the workers have begun to take control of culture:

In their poems and plays and songs they put forward their own views about how they see the world and how they would like to change it. They tell stories of their exploitation, they talk about their history of struggle against oppression and about their organizations and their leaders. They have begun to take culture out of the hands of the establishment and to create new forms that are meaningful to the democratic forces who are working for change.

From these opening remarks one is already aware of the duality of the procedure: the workers draw from their own lives and construct "poems and plays and songs." In other words, the system of construction must be seen to be independent yet linked to daily experiences but not a duplication thereof. The insertion of the process of moving from experience to "culture" must be seen not to be inevitable, but to be a construct, with a

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96 von Kotze Organize 8.
particular agenda, and a specific system of discourse. Secondly, it must be noted that the
three areas that the plays will pursue are exploitation, the "history of the struggle," and
their "views on the world" and the attempts to change it. Here one finds, in embryo, the
shared experience of the onstage space (the work place, as seen through the eyes of the
oppressed, but rehearsed for presentation in the shared offstage space of the rehearsal
room). Furthermore, one finds the solidarity that is to be created by the events in the
plays, through, amongst other things, acknowledging a history and thus locating
themselves, in time and space. What is also present is the view toward the millennium,
or the changing of the order. All three ideas concur with Scott's view of the substance of
the offstage discourse.

The third idea from the passage quoted is debatable as one considers the amount
of interventionist experience that enters the construction of the plays, particularly. Also
there is some debate as to whether the forms are in fact "new" in so far as they draw on
various experiences (of performance) that the workers and the actors have had. On the
worker/actors that created the second play -- The Dunlop Play -- for example, von Kotze
notes:

None of them had had any formal training in theatre work. Qabula had
participated in cultural events in the countryside (he had been praise-poet) -- but
most of his comrades had never experienced a play before. They had to rely on
other experiences to help them with making and later performing their play.\textsuperscript{97}

She documents that Khuzwayo was a self defence instructor, a composer, a lay preacher
and had a gospel group -- "clowning was something he had learned from self-defence

\textsuperscript{97}Von Kotze \textit{Organize} 22 - 23.
displays." Matiwane played soccer and did boxing. Kanyile was a keen story-teller, and Qabula was a praise-poet.

The creation and presentation of The Dunlop Play will be used as the basis for the discussion. Von Kotze used the documentation of this play as the substance for her article in Communications from the International Brecht Society. Prior to The Dunlop Play Von Kotze and certain other members of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company in Johannesburg had been involved in the creation of Ilanga Lizophumela Abasebenzi ("The sun Rises for the Workers"). This play had been the result of the collaboration between workers who had been dismissed from an East Rand factory, and who had constructed the play on the advice of their lawyer and with the help of the members of Junction Avenue. The initial purpose was so that the workers could make sure of the sequence of events that led up to their dismissal. This "play" was eventually shown to the presiding judge as a way of presenting evidence.\(^{98}\) Later it was taken to the trade unions where, as von Kotze notes

Responses to the play were enthusiastic, and after it was videoed Ilanga was seen by thousands of workers throughout the Republic. In the final instance this was very useful because future workshop members could learn what a play is and what it might look like by reference to Ilanga.\(^{99}\)

The fact that the performance was videoed, with the express purpose of using it as a model at a later stage, is important. The play was workshopped to persuade a skeptical audience


\(^{99}\)Von Kotze Worker Plays 4. Von Kotze’s emphasis.
of the versatility of a particular case. Also, the workshop was done clearly under the auspices of the participants of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, who had studied Brecht as the guiding light of worker theatre. Consequently, the model that was to be used to illustrate the style and content of worker's theatre was not drawn from the worker culture, but from a European culture in form and intention at least. This is what led to Sitas' list of contradictions that I discussed above. Finally, the workers were from the East Rand, and not from Natal, where the DWCL was to be situated and to whose ranks the members of the cast of The Dunlop Play were to return. Consequently the "cultural formations" were different.

The Dunlop Play was commissioned by the Metal and Allied Workers Union and was premiered "in Durban in April 1983, at the annual general meeting of some 1000 people." This was at the beginning of the Dunlop worker agitation that was to lead to a full-blown strike the following year. Sitas notes that The Dunlop Play was used as a recruitment exercise, as a drive for solidarity so that management recognition would occur, and "to publicize their grievances. The play in turn tightened the links between Dunlop workers themselves and the rapidly expanding national union movement." The

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100 Von Kotze Worker Plays 12.

101 For a detailed account of the strike, see Ari Sitas, "The Dunlop Strike: a Trial of Strength" The Independent Trade Unions 1974-1984: Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin Johann Maree ed. (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987). 100-115. The article is useful as it sketches the labor relations in a particular set of factories (the Dunlop group, and particularly the Sydney Road factory) before, during and after the strikes of 1983 and 1984. It also provides a solid illustration of what some multinationals and management were themselves going through, as well as what the workers themselves were experiencing.

102 Sitas Dunlop Strike 108.
first aim is elementary: recruitment meant the publicity of the objectives of the union. The second aim of solidarity means that the union had to find ways of showing that the group together stood a better chance of success than its individual members. Sitás outlines the types of pressures and "temptations" that confronted the workers during a strike:

Firstly, to give in because of the pressures at home as resources dwindled -- the fear passed on by kin and friends that through the strike everything could be lost - - security, home, children's schooling, money. Secondly, the temptation to give in because of the pressures inside oneself: fears that one would fail politically, that the strike would bring trouble, that nothing good would come of this. Finally, to give in because of the company's messages: newspaper advertisements for a new labour force, the sight of scabs outside the factory gates, messages from 'Bantu Radio.' These temptations had to be struggled with daily.  

Sitás does not mention in this list the ever-present threat of peer group pressure, which was also problematic because of the widely differing bases for rationalizing the strike.

These temptations are compelling for a number of reasons. If one assumes that the onstage space is the union itself, then the pressure from outside the union, is powerful. This offstage space includes not only the worker's own "home" space but also the offstage space of the oppressor, in the form of the various media and visual impressions. It also includes a threat to the offstage space of the men themselves, namely in their "innermost beings" as individuals. This in itself can be seen as an offstage space, as the individual wrestles with his or her own sense of dignity and self-worth, and the limits beyond which he or she will not go when pressured in a particular direction. This is compounded by the "image of Zulu-ness," for example (in terms of the patriarchy of

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103Sitás  Dunlop Strike  114-115.
family responsibilities), which influences the worker's understanding of his or her obligations outside of the factory floor. This image impacts on the image presented in the onstage space of the union meeting.

There were 13 participants in the play which was developed along workshop techniques, using the Ilanga Li so Phumela Abasebenzi video as a basis. All of the participants were second generation town dwellers or migrant workers with the "overriding common denominator . . . the experience of being a black worker in South Africa and more specifically Dunlop."104 Before proceeding to the working method that they employed, it is worthwhile working backwards and documenting what Von Kotze notes as the "benefits" (of which there are five) after the process.

The first benefit von Kotze mentions is that "the workshops brought different people together as workers, on the one hand, and as men, on the other." The sharing and the discussions and enactment "drew them together and established a sense of solidarity with each other."105 Her analysis does not say whether this was on a personal (friendship) level, or whether this was simply "business" solidarity.

Her second benefit is worth quoting in full.

. . . each participant emerged from the workshops with a newly established sense of self-worth and self-confidence . . . the newly acquired performance skills also came in useful during worker-management confrontations and negotiations: 'Even now, I can stand up to my superior and look him in the face and tell him what I think.' So sums up Bongani. The workers have emerged as leaders and they

104Von Kotze Worker Plays 5.
105Von Kotze Worker Plays 13.
confront their leadership with strength and pride, both at their workplace and at home.\textsuperscript{106}

This observation raises a number of challenging questions. She assumes that, before participating in the workshop, the workers had \textit{no} sense of self-worth and self-confidence. This may be so (although it is hard to imagine) because of the degrading and inhumane system of Apartheid under which they were working and living. A more plausible interpretation might be that they lacked these characteristics \textit{in the workplace}, that is to say, in the particular onstage workplace and related (theatrical) space into which they were now moving.\textsuperscript{107} In other words, in the community of workers in the factory, they would have had time to rehearse and share the required discourse content and form, both to achieve the objectives of the play and to confront the discourses of oppression on the shop floor.

Following this, in the sequestered spaces of the workshop, the actors learned the strategies of resistance, confrontation and negotiation demanded of them both amongst their fellow workers \textit{and} in relation to the oppressor forces. They were able to present the strategies in the play, so that the workers too could learn from them, and they were able to confront the "supervisor" in the discourse that the supervisor could accept.

This level of resistance and confrontation could be rehearsed \textit{within the limits} of the strictures (legal and otherwise) placed on the onstage spaces (both in the factory and on the stage). The workers would "learn their rights" and the strategies for attaining their

\textsuperscript{106}Von Kotze Worker Plays 13.

\textsuperscript{107}This will become a cardinal critique of the Theatre for Development approach in the following chapter.
rights. They would also learn what would happen if those rights (and discourse boundaries) were transgressed. It is small wonder, then, that these workers became leaders. Over and above the oral aptitude that the workers obviously showed, they were also highly knowledgeable about their positions. Leadership characteristics must contain elements of the theatrical. Power is demonstrated theatrically.

The third benefit mentioned is that of a shared knowledge both of different sections of the plant, and of the history of the workers at the plant. In the first instance workers shared what the working conditions and dangers were in various part of the plant, and secondly the older workers could tell the younger ones of the continuities of the struggle, both on this factory floor and in the labor history in general. This diachronic and synchronic analysis provided continuity and depth to the complaints and strategies, and developed the strategic solidarity of the workers. However, the presentation of the conditions and the histories were subject to the theatrical nature of the presentation, even in the workshop space. In this sense, participants would gauge what had worked in terms of other storytelling situations, and would present their stories according to the discourse demands of the rehearsal. The story of the old man quoted above is an example of this process. (This aspect will be dealt with in some detail below).

Von Kotze suggests, in her fourth benefit, that these strategies were circumvented by the very technique of workshopping: "The workshop technique of assuming roles and arguing different viewpoints as a creative method was also very useful from the educational point of view. It brought to light attitudes which were prejudiced and often

\[108\] Von Kotze Worker Plays 13.
unreflected." By unreflected she means not reflected upon, but the question remains "prejudiced for or against" what? The benefit implies that the workers brought to the workshop their own lifeviews, but that these lifeviews might be detrimental to something -- presumably the workers themselves in this case. The point is that it is conceivable that prejudice might be measured against either a universal yardstick (the ideal world), which is in and of itself highly problematic, or measured against the material benefits of the group being represented, in which case prejudice against the oppressors or the employers is not only desirable but inevitable. Consequently prejudice, unless "unreflected," simply becomes a way of streamlining the onstage discourse of resistance, and removing the "aberrations" that might enter the onstage discourse from the individual offstage moments of the participants.\(^{110}\)

The fifth benefit for von Kotze is the employment of "traditional" cultural forms: the song, oral literature, storytelling "which incorporates mimetic and re-enactment qualities akin to theatrical forms," dances, and call and response techniques.\(^{111}\) Here she indicates that the assumed offstage performance techniques, rehearsed away from the workplace, are to be used to convey the message of the onstage agenda. This mixing of two agendas has been considered within Sitas' "contradictions" (see the fourth section, above). I will now examine this issue in relation to the imbongi and Sitas' move into the praise-poet work.

\(^{109}\) Von Kotze Worker Plays 13-14.

\(^{110}\) This point, too, will become of cardinal importance in the chapter on Theatre for Development.

\(^{111}\) Von Kotze Worker Plays 14.
The role of the activists (Sitasa and von Kotze particularly) is of utmost importance in the preparation of the workers' material for the trade union presentation, for two primary reasons. Firstly, the activists had far more knowledge of the workings of trade unions from their indepth study of trade unions than the ordinary workers had. Sitasa, for example, has a doctorate on the workings of trade unions.\textsuperscript{112} Thus, from their knowledge of how trade unions worked in other countries, they would bring this experience to the workshops. Secondly, both of them had worked with the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, whose primary modus operandi was through workshops and improvisations, developing plays with social and historical implications. This knowledge and experience rested strongly on their understandings of Brecht.\textsuperscript{113} Both were intensely aware of the following:

Activists realized, (sic) that participation (of the activists) must not become overriding intervention. Sarmcol strikers wanted to tell their story in the way they knew best. They insisted on realism -- exact reproduction of the facts. This might sometimes not lead to the most dramatic presentation but accuracy of content outways (sic) theatrical license (sic). On the other hand, activists contributed their skills which had been withheld from the workers due to lack of proper education.\textsuperscript{114}

On the surface this seems a fair proposition, but what happened in performance contradicted much of this objective. I have already reported on the use of the video of


\textsuperscript{113} Von Kotze's article "Worker Plays" draws extensively on Brecht's concept of alienation, and attempts to show how Brecht's understanding of worker theatre would have to be adapted in the light of her "on the ground" experience in Natal.

\textsuperscript{114} Von Kotze Organise and Act 100.
Ilanga le so Phumela Abasebenzi as a "model" for the theatrical presentation.\textsuperscript{115}

Secondly, it is unclear what she means by the "lack of proper education." The quotation suggests that the proper education would include the ability to perform in the theatre, or at least have an understanding of what theatre was or is. This, of course, suggests that the activists have such an education, and they would have to teach the workers. Also it assumes some sort of universal characteristic that would differentiate theatricality from reality, or, conversely, would be able to make that which was reality, theatrical. This concept is illustrated in von Kotze reporting that

the presentation included all the facts but was undramatic -- the conflicts were not worked out. Participants needed to develop the humour. The general chaos had to be structured. They had to find new ideas for making the scene exciting and lively.\textsuperscript{116}

Here the activist would "assist" in the process.

This is borne out by one of the participants:

They helped us a lot but most of the knowledge came from us. During the first days we were unable to play properly. We were workers who faced the strike unaware and also with very little education. Our organizers helped us to make difficult work easy. We have a good idea of a play now.\textsuperscript{117}

The idea of what it is that makes "playing" "proper" is very difficult to pin down, and the yardsticks for such a value judgement are highly ambiguous. Furthermore, the idea that one needs to be educated to be theatrical is controversial.\textsuperscript{118} Finally, the concept that

\textsuperscript{115}See Footnote 98.

\textsuperscript{116}Von Kotze Organise and Act 85-86.

\textsuperscript{117}Quoted in von Kotze Organise and Act, 89.

\textsuperscript{118}This idea is going to be cardinal in the work on Theatre for Development. See the following chapter.
"knowledge" (and the origins of that knowledge), and the formation and presentation (or representation) of the knowledge is tied to a particular method or system of representation is problematic, as I have already demonstrated.

Thirdly, the concept of "simply reporting the facts" was belied in performance, as the method of performance hugely colored the accuracy of the information. Von Kotze, for example, records this vignette:

Suggestions as to how the white managers should be portrayed were tried out to the great amusement of everyone, and, judging by the laughter and enthusiasm, the most authentic presentations were mimes of great stomachs, an assumed air of superiority and the allegedly stuck up way of walking. By the time of the performance pink half-masks or just noses were added.\(^{19}\)

This "Ubu-esque" figure was undoubtedly a figure of fun, but one wonders if the recognition of the figure was by virtue of the veracity of the mimicry, or by the indication of the figure's "whiteness" and therefore, willy-nilly, of the figure's representation of oppression. Furthermore, the "authenticity" referred to may also point to the authenticity of the theatrical mode of representing oppression. In other words, the three characteristics referred to are theatrical signifiers of oppression in and of themselves, in much the same way as Jarry's play exploits them. And finally, the authenticity may refer to the theatricality of the offstage representations of oppression, as discussed in the privacy of the oppressed's leisure moments.

\(^{19}\)Von Kotze Worker Plays 6. The emphasis is mine. A point of interest here is that the use of pink noses to indicate the white bosses is also to be found in Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa and Barney Simon's play Wozza Albert! See the Chapter on Moongeni Ngema, below. Furthermore, one of the major problems with von Kotze's article is that much of it is written in the passive voice -- the last sentence of the quotation is an example of this -- with the result that one is never sure of who the agent in the sentence (or the action) is.

142
Nevertheless, according to von Kotze, they had a fine sense of "the self-indulgent bosses (and the impimpi) who thrive on their own sense of importance. They become funny when they do not notice how workers undermine their authority behind their backs."\textsuperscript{120} The workers clearly have a sense of a weakness of the power-brokers. Whether this weakness is perceived, "real," wish-fulfilment or explanatory (i.e. it is being used as a way of "explaining" behavior which appears to the workers to be incomprehensible and intolerable) is part of the entire, ambiguous situation. Furthermore, this ridiculing of these supposed weaknesses is a further illustration of the offstage development of the rationale for behavior from the oppressors, and a way of "puncturing" the power of the bosses. Solidarity is a consequence of the satire as the workers share a common experience of mocking and the potential "semiotics of mocking" in the offstage moment and space.

When the matter turns to the workers' own representations, three cases need to be explored, namely the workers themselves, the impimpi, and the police.

Worker players and audience alike demand a celebration of the struggles which make up working class life... (W)orkshop members expressed an overriding determination for social realism in performance. They wanted to portray themselves on stage, insisting that they did not play a role but merely an objectified, i.e. generalized, version of themselves.\textsuperscript{121}

As a consequence the general feeling is that despite abuse of the "heroes" of the struggle "they are never shown as defeated or crushed. The notion of a depressed 'downtrodden'
workforce is as unacceptable to the makers of plays as it would be to the audience."

The tensions and ambiguities between the real experience of oppression (and the results of oppression), on the one hand, and the desire to remain and be portrayed as "heroic," on the other, seems potentially ambiguous here. A solid example of this can be found in the reaction of many of the characters in Mbongeni Ngema's plays towards the oppressor.

(See also Chapter five). This is the central concern of the entire process. Ostensibly the plays are not demonstrating the truth about the behavior of the workers towards their bosses, behavior that is brought about because of the necessity for seeming obsequious behavior in reality. However, the workers realize that they are simply playing a role for the oppressors in reality and this "reality of role-play" is recognized as such by the other (peer group) workers. The trade union plays demonstrate both these possibilities, but they also show that the workers have rehearsed or are rehearsing (in offstage spaces) the "real" roles they "should" be playing in confrontation with the oppressor, and it is these roles that are presented in the theatrical moment as the truth. It is extremely difficult to move among these three considerations, because it acknowledges, at some point, a possibility of weakness, which is contradictory to the expectations of the workers themselves.

Furthermore, the agenda of the play demands the necessity for solidarity, recruitment, and strategizing. Consequently, it is important to demonstrate those who had "given in" to the system, namely the impimpi (and, by implication, the scab). The portrayal of the impimpi had a dual purpose, namely to "provide the necessary

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122 Von Kotze Organise and Act 13.
entertainment, saving the scene from heavy handedness,"\textsuperscript{123} and to demonstrate the wiles and bigotedness of the "sell-out" and how this leads to undermining the solidarity of the workers.

The player (playing the \textit{impimpi}) modelled himself on an actual informer in the way he moved and spoke. The audience later recognized him and called him by name -- here was a chance to play with the \textit{impimpi} in a way not possible in reality.\textsuperscript{124}

The "safety" of "poetic licence" in the performance allows the worker to defame the \textit{impimpi} and get away with it. Of course, it also puts enormous pressure onto not only the real \textit{impimpi} to give up his ways, but provides a hidden threat to anyone contemplating turning into an \textit{impimpi}. What is also important is that here the "modeling" appears to be far closer to a realistic mimesis in terms of copy and contact, than with the supervisors.

Again it would appear that the intervention of satirical distance that is necessary to avoid persecution from the bosses, is removed in the offstage, peer-group spaces.

Inevitably part of the state apparatus to control the workers is the intervention of the police. Significantly the portrayal of the police in this intervention has twofold bearing. The inhumanity and heavy-handedness (and unfairness) of the police is illustrated, but the wiley ways of outwitting the police are also demonstrated. Von Kotze notes that during a discussion on different forms of gatherings and which were "legal" and "innocent" and which were not, the workers demonstrated how they changed an illegal meeting into a legal one, by turning a union meeting into a Bible meeting. "The

\textsuperscript{123}Von Kotze \textit{Worker Plays} 7.

\textsuperscript{124}Von Kotze \textit{Organise and Act} 26-27.
older participants remembered using those tactics during the political campaigns of the late 50's.\footnote{Von Kotze \textit{Organise And Act}. Also Worker Plays 7.}

This slide from union meetings to meetings for religious meetings is significant. As part of the offstage spaces, both the oppressor and the oppressed knew the format, and content of such religious gatherings, and acknowledged their importance.\footnote{The chapter on Mbongeni Ngema spends more time on this issue.} Thus the workers could use the expectation of the oppressor to convince the oppressor that the offstage space and agenda was at best "positive" and at worst either irrelevant or innocuous. This implies that the workers knew that the oppressor would condone such meetings. The Bible meeting was also a shared and communal experience for the workers, and as such could readily be tapped into without "rehearsal" -- the rehearsal had in fact been done in "real life." Furthermore, the workers were quite prepared to use their religion as a camouflage for their supposed subversive activities. This implies that either they deemed the work of the union part of the work of religion, and therefore they would be "forgiven," or they fully realized that both the construction of a religious meeting and the construction of a union meeting was "theatrical" in nature and therefore not completely "real." As such, they could discern which agenda in which space would be effective both for their own agenda, and the perceived requirements of an agenda by the oppressor. This code-switching demonstrates the theatricality of the workers in the real life situations.
In a play entitled Qonda (Vigilantes), which the DWCL did later,\textsuperscript{127} clear examples of this "code-switching" are shown. The vigilantes were presumed by the workers to be under the guidance of Inkatha, and as such were against the work of the unions. At a particular moment in this play one of the workers

\textellipsis is surprised by the arrival of Qonda. His behaviour changes instantly -- he becomes submissive and subservient. He begins to praise Inkatha and flatters the vigilante whom he fears. We realize that there are two sides to the migrant worker. He has adapted to urban life and so he has to play many parts to survive.\textsuperscript{128}

Significantly, the workers demonstrate clearly the necessity of code-switching for the sake of preservation of life and limb. Also significantly, and this is evident throughout the literature on the trade union theatre and performance, there is very little indication that code-switching might be occurring \textit{in and among the union members themselves during union meetings}. There is continually the assumption that workers will be "truthful" in their dealings with other members of the union. And yet the very nature of their dissembling in code-switching assumes that converse is a possibility. The problem is compounded, inevitably, when the notions of the theatrical are brought to bear on the presentation of dissembling.

Von Kotze notes that there were two types of plays produced by the DWCL: "plays for mobilization" and "educational plays." The latter were concerned primarily with living conditions in the townships, or at least "at home," and which sought to

\textsuperscript{127}First performed at the Natal Regional Culture Meeting, September 1986. Howard College. See Astrid von Kotze \textit{Organise and Act} 125.

\textsuperscript{128}Von Kotze \textit{Organise and Act} 122-123.
"educate the worker public on a broader range of topics." The former were "plays which are made with the intention of informing and mobilizing people in order to generate support for a particular struggle."

The concept of "mobilization" is a difficult one to pin down. It implies that those who were not "mobile" are now, through a series of "interventions" by outside agencies, moved to become involved in whatever process they are being mobilized towards, or in, or even with. Mobilized "towards" suggests that the state of being before the mobilization, is different from the state of being after the process. Mobilized "in" implies that the state of being in which the ones to be mobilized are existing, is simply a dormant form of that which will need to be energized, activated or dynamised by some intervention agent or agency. To be mobilized "with" suggests that the very process of mobilization can be seen as a self-generating agency. Consequently, once the process has been initiated, part of the process is toward a certain goal (a change of behavior or attitude, an activation, and so forth), but part of the process is also geared toward self-rejuvenation; a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, if you will.

The problems with mobilization "toward" is that it implies an inevitable duality between the ways of thinking of the workers (in this case) before the intervention, and the ways of thinking after. There would appear to be some form of ideological, behavioral or attitudinal shift that needs to be fundamental, and radical in the true meaning of the word. This process can occur only in two ways: either there is a radical intervention from

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129 All three these verbs are ones that Augusto Boal uses regularly, and will be dealt in the next chapter.
"outside," in the form of activists, educationalists, or other forms of pressure such as fear, intimidation, or threats (and the interventions of Althusser's ISA's and RSA'S would fit this description), or there is a realization "from within" of the anomalies of the life situation, which gives rise to the foregrounding of the so-called "organic intellectual." \(^{130}\)

The tension between "innate wisdom" and "popular knowledge" on the one hand, and "external intervention" is very difficult to quantify, but the tensions between the concepts are important to recognize. Sitas points very clearly to the tensions between the two in his analysis of mass gatherings. \(^{131}\)

Furthermore, the idea that "innate wisdom" is developed in offstage discourses amongst the oppressed, and then entered into the onstage discourse of public domain through the "spokesperson" for the generally (or democratically) agreed upon, points away from the role of the individual "organic intellectual" and toward the collective. Yet at the same time it points towards shared experiences and the "drag" of commonality. Consequently, if the move toward mobilization is a "top down" movement, in other words, the ideas and strategies are motivated and presented from "outside" the community which is to be mobilized, then one is talking about an ideological swing, no matter how "well intentioned" the intervention is. On the other hand, if one is talking about the organic intellectual, then the mobilization "towards" is heavily tempered not


\(^{131}\)Sitas. *Voice and Gesture.*
only by the confines of consensus, but also by the confining demands of people in a predicament.

In this regard, Mi Hlatshwayo (who became cultural organizer for COSATU) for, for example, discusses the process of selecting and preparing a play to represent the Trade Unions. The play is submitted to "everyone concerned, so that the workers have the opportunity to decide whether the play presents their strike or not." Negative comments are given to the play's production group. Hlatshwayo notes a case that caused some concern:

We recently had a case when a member from one of our unions presented a very exciting script for the May Day (Labor Day) celebrations. Unfortunately, there were some things that contradicted the principles of COSATU and the Mass Democratic Movement. He was called in by the shop stewards and they related his problem to him. He responded by saying that since he created the play independently, he wished to retain his freedom as a writer and a dramatist. The comrades responded by telling him that they respected his position and perhaps he was right. They did not threaten him with expulsion from the union but tried to point out some of the dangers in his position, like the possibility of him ending up in isolation from other workers as well as the democratic movement and its allies.¹³²

The writer submitted and changed the play. What is noticeable about Hlatshwayo's observations is that the approach to the "dissident" writer appears to be democratic, in that the writer is given the choice to change his play or not to. However, the forces mustered against him are formidable: the meeting to which he is summoned is run by the shop-stewards who have a large say in the running of the union that represents the writer to his employers; the writer is "reminded" of the possibility of "ostracism" not only from

the union in which he operates, but also from the entire labor movement, as well as the
Mass Democratic Movement; and the writer is reminded that his “task” is to represent the
unions and nothing else. The writer is confronted with a choice between “artistic
freedom” and isolation on the one hand, and production possibilities and a communal
spirit if he toes the union line on the other.

Hlatshwayo also notes that “the central principles and goals of COSATU and the
Mass Democratic Movement are the creation of a united, democratic, non-racial society”
and that the “culture of oppression in this country (South Africa) promotes notions of
individualism, tribalism and racism, (and) these ideas were not in accordance with the
culture of liberation.”133 In this sense, the trade unions were attempting to create a form
of Socialist Realism in their plays. The plays were to be “life building” plays, which were
to engineer the “New Man.” During the period of Stalinism this meant that the demand
on artists was to “bring their vision closer to the ‘normal’ vision of ‘normal’ Soviet
people, the creators of new life.”134 The plays were to be constructed to remove
individuality and promote conformity, which would be proclaimed under the banner of
democracy.

In trade union theatre the method of mobilization will tend to attempt to "import"
systems of activation that are drawn from outside the closed community, such as the

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133Hlatshwayo 194.

134Boris Groys, “The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde"
Laboratory of Dreams: the Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment Eds. John Bowlt and Olga
principles of Brecht and the like. As has already been argued, this leads to severe "contradictions."\(^{135}\)

It is the concept of people in a predicament that leads to the consideration of a dormant activism. Here the idea is that workers are innately capable of solving their own problems (as are all people), and all it needs is a confluence of extraordinary circumstances to "awaken" this in the worker. Here the "natural" abilities of humanity are foregrounded. Yet history indicates that humanity's ability is to "cope" with the ordinary, and it is only in the extremely extraordinary that instincts such as survival, and to a lesser extent the limits of affronts to dignity come to the fore. To this extent, the mobilization that occurs is not a paradigm shift, as it were, but a purging of the iniquities or anomalies in the system that is the spark and objective of the mobilization.

Consequently, workers will accept the necessity of workers being workers, and the balance of power "necessary" for the workplace to function (as it does), but will demand a purification of unfair practices (like victimization, unfair dismissals, better wages, safe working conditions and the like). They will not necessarily demand a reversal of the system (workers become bosses, no dismissals whatsoever, equal wages for all, or no wages whatsoever, no working conditions that need to be deemed safe, and so on.) Furthermore, the \textit{method} of mobilization will draw on the traditions of the community that is to be mobilized, as was the case to a large extent in the worker plays and later the worker \textit{izimbongi}.

\(^{135}\)Sitas Culture and Production.
Von Kotze declares that "as their use-value for propaganda purposes and tools for publicizing areas of conflict are recognized there is an ever-increasing number of them (worker plays) being made and performed."\textsuperscript{136} The fundamental drive, it appears, is firstly to inform workers of the state of affairs and the strategies for changing them (the transfer of knowledge, as it were) and secondly to attempt to generate support (that is to say, to bring about action) for the cause, which to a large extent requires an emotional, attitudinal and behavioral change in the workers. In this regard, von Kotze notes that "for months to come jokes from the play were reiterated during work,"\textsuperscript{137} indicating that the emotional had been tapped, yet, while referring to The Dunlop Play, she notes that six months after the play "factory leadership and morale were in disarray."\textsuperscript{138} The workers seemed to have understood the plays, caught all the jokes and the references, enjoyed all the songs, yet the actual impact of the play on behavioral changes appears to have been negligible. I shall show in the next chapter that attempting to affect behavioral change through drama is extremely difficult and problematic, even using the overtly propagandistic approaches that the workers' theatre attempted.

The second type of play that came from the DWCL was the educational plays whose

\ldots general aim (was to) initiate or reinforce discussions. (The plays) increase the knowledge and understanding of the issues which affect workers in their daily lives. \ldots They also aim to teach about the role of culture itself. \ldots The plays

\textsuperscript{136}Von Kotze Organise and Act 102.

\textsuperscript{137}Von Kotze Organise and Act 35.

\textsuperscript{138}Von Kotze Organise and Act 48.
contain a strong moral lesson. They warn of the disintegration of rural values and damages which confront young workers who are ignorant of the ways of the people of the townships.\textsuperscript{139}

These plays were geared fundamentally towards attempting to bridge two gaps. In the light of the migrant worker system, the plays we geared towards bridging the lives of the rural areas (which in many case, as has been argued, were dominated by the culture of Inkatha) and the lives of the urban, township communities. The differences in the two areas were both political (in terms of the UDF and Inkatha conflicts) but also social, in terms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation.

The plays were also developed to provide a broader front of solidarity for the workers on the shop floor, by developing solidarity with the workers "at home." Here the support groups of the workers, such as the wives and children, could learn of the difficulties of the workplace, the trials and tribulations that the workers were going through, and thus a stronger feeling of support and understanding could be fostered.

Von Kotze quotes from one of the DWCL workers, Nise Malange, who developed a play with the Amapondo street cleaners (all women). Malange notes that in the preparation of the play the women told their stories of exploitation and the one would turn to the other and

\[ \ldots \text{just say to another woman: 'Get up! You will be a street cleaner. I'll show you the argument with the workers. And then they would show me what happened.' They would take everything in the office to help them demonstrate the story.} \]

\textsuperscript{139} Von Kotze \textit{Organise and Act} 104.
From this she would ask them to "make a play and do as we usually do when you tell me your problems we can pass the message on to the community." Malange's approach, as well as the general approach to the creation of the plays, therefore, is that

... the workers bring in their own histories of working class oppression. They do not preach about things which they have not experienced themselves. They speak openly about their fears, their anguish, their hopes and their victories. They present well-known stories but they do it in exciting and an often funny manner. . . . The speeches are not written or studied, but the actors put the words simply in everyday language. The stories grow out of the experience of ordinary men and women and so does the dialogue.\textsuperscript{141}

Apart from the problem of assuming that speeches which are not "written down and studied" are automatically "spontaneous" and therefore potentially more real or authentic, this passage does illustrate how the plays become aestheticized versions of the offstage discourses of the participants. It is the aestheticizing process of rehearsal: finding the funny way of doing it, structuring the various stories into a whole, and so on, that allows that which occurs offstage to be entered into the onstage discourse.

Conversely, I would hold that while the dialogue draws on the experiences of the participants, it can equally be argued that the experiences of the participants draw on the dialogue of the participants. The form (and the relative nature) of the telling of the experiences is determined by the ways of telling, both in general and of the occasion. Hence the theatrical "natures" of storytelling, both as a genre and as a system that is bound to a particular cultural community at a particular moment in time, will determine

\textsuperscript{140}Von Kotze \textit{Organise and Act} 57-58.

\textsuperscript{141}Von Kotze \textit{Organise and Act} 13-14.
how the story is told, and whether the story will be told at all (or accepted as a "good" story).

But this does not imply that the authenticity of the story will work on the stage, as I have already argued. It needed the intervention of Nise Malange, who had learned her theatricality through or from the video of *Ilanga le So Phongela Abasebenzi* and from working with scholars and activists such as Ari Sitas and Astrid von Kotze, who in turn had learned from Brecht and the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, whose members worked from the University of the Witwatersrand's Drama Department and for companies such as Workshop '71, whose leader, Robert Kavanagh, had studied in Cape Town and at Leeds. At each stage the offstage desires of the performers are structured to suit the onstage requirements of the theatrical experience. Furthermore, the offstage discourses are structured *theoretically* to develop the commonality necessary to present them in the onstage spaces and within the onstage agendas.

The plays themselves eventually have serious problems in performance. They work effectively in small areas and with people of the same persuasion, but when presented at mass gatherings, they become problematic because of the nature of the performance spaces (huge podiums, draped in flags, and covered with tables, chairs and umbrellas for the dignitaries); the size of the crowds which necessitated the use of microphones for the voices, which in turn limited the action; and the distance the audience was from the podiums (the mass rallies were often held in soccer stadiums). Nevertheless, as Sitas documents in his work on the praise-poet, there developed three modes of and for performance: the affirmative mode, which worked toward solidarity
amongst the workers, the festive mode, which was intended to be celebratory in nature. and the cognitive mode, which was intended to impart knowledge and "wisdom." \(^{142}\)

Sitas' move toward the work of the praise-poet from the work on theatre implies that some of his thinking on the theatrical resonates with his thinking on the praise-poet. Sitas identifies three modes at mass gatherings, where each mode has its own laws of participation and limitation, and their dynamics hold in terms of the plays as well. He notes that

meetings are places where the emotive threads are sown together to create the fabric of mass movements. They affirm and manufacture identities and comradeship. They create a sense of belonging, and they demonstrate, ritually, resistance and defiance. \(^{143}\)

This mode seemingly belongs to the masses, as they meet in and for a common purpose. As such the event has to be carefully "stage-managed" so that this "coming together" is not fragmented by other events. Solidarity and the affirmation of old, developing and new identities must be carefully fostered. Consequently, the "stage managers" of the event form the second mode and they are:

those who control the 'stage,' the foreground, also control the messages, the images, and the interpolations. Here a broader grouping of leaders participate in the cognitive mode: people are asked to settle down, think, discuss, explain, justify, but, more often than not, ratify and endorse. \(^{144}\)

\(^{142}\) Sitas Voice and Gesture 102.

\(^{143}\) Sitas Voice and Gesture 102.

\(^{144}\) Sitas Voice and Gesture 103.
However it is necessary, within the mass meeting, to offset the serious, seemingly
cognitive work, with festivities in a "carnivalesque" mode145 "where people are asked
to 'enjoy' performers that assert, strictly speaking, the performance vitality of the
popular culture."146

These three modes seem to be part of the development of the trade union plays.
They also help to explain some of the reasonings behind the selection processes in
terms of which the "events" for a particular play might be made. The three criteria
would therefore be knowledge, affirmation and celebration. However, critical to all of
this is the concept of the development of a united front against all oppression in
whatever form.

Yet, why was this form particularly developed in Natal? Sitas turns to Alfred T
Qabula's izibongo at the Fosatu gathering in 1984, where Qabula sang the praises of
the union federation. Sitas claims that Qabula

... released an untapped source of popular energy which, without warning,
exploded everywhere in Natal. What was latent, what had remained
subterranean, poured out in volumes and volumes of sound in the context of
labour struggles and their mass. Ordinary black workers with performing and
rhetorical power began crating their poetry in Zulu, using all the elements they
could gather from their cultural formations to express a new sense of self
identity.147

145 It is unclear here whether Sitas is referring to Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque or not.
147 Ari Sitas, "Traditions of Poetry in Natal" Journal of Southern African Studies. 16,2 (June, 1990), p. 318. Steve Kromberg notes that Qabula's work was so successful at the Fosatu gathering that "when a
gathering of workers was asked to select a play to attend the Fosatu National Education Workshop, they
chose Qabula's performance. Those who argued that Qabula's poetry did not constitute a play were
defeated by a majority vote." Kromberg The Role of the Audience 188.
This "outpouring" he notes has five basic principles: (1) the poetry "is marked or
haunted by an 'aura' of hope, a promise, however distant, of redemption" (the
millennial in the offstage discourse); (2) the work is "haunted by death or deaths, and
the violence the society unleashes" (the poetry foregrounds disunity and role of the
"impimpi" and the scab); (3) the poetry foregrounds its own existence "despite the
harshness; it states that there is defiance and that it is defiant (Sitas' emphasis)." Here
the very presence and nature of the discourse proclaims that someone is prepared to
stand up for the victimized, and that the poet (and by extension the performer) is such a
one. (4) Sitas notes that "it claims for itself total familiarity with the people . . . but it
communicates) through the 'unfamiliar.'" Here again one sees the drawing on the
interpretive communities of the groups from which it comes, both in terms of content
(history, social experiences, agendas and the like) but formatting the information in the
aesthetics, and according to the poetic licence granted it by the community. The
offstage alliances dictate form and content for the onstage performance and
presentation. (5) Sitas notes that "it is at its best moments self-reflective and critical of
popular organizations and popular habits and practices." This observation echoes
decisively with the role and function of the traditional imbongi, namely that of praise-
poet and critic. In the modern context, however, Sitas claims that the poetry works
"through two mechanisms: a metaphoric and a metonymic one." The metaphoric
locates the poetry and the present conditions of the workers in "the black past and the
nationalist present" which has led to "a new, urban ghetto imbongi." The metonymic
is demonstrated by the very presence of the imbongi as an imbongi "which has liberated
oral poetry from its traditional role." Here Sitas suggests the shift of the *imbongi* from the role of praising (and criticizing) the power structures of the community, to what the "new" *imbongi* was doing for the worker community. Consequently, the *imbongi* had converted the ever-present phenomenon of power from that which exists between the chief and the people, to the formation of any form of solidarity which is opposed to some form of domination. The danger of the poet simply becoming the tool of the new solidarity power block is present, but may be tempered by the aesthetic. Conversely, the "power" of the *imbongi* may be diluted to become simply a mouth-piece of the organization it represents, and thus the circle of domination is prolonged.

Following Sitas' insightful argument on class, nation and ethnicity, in which he attempts to confront the "imagined communities" of Benedict Anderson,\(^{148}\) the following argument can be made. The struggle in the trade union theatre is the struggle to transfer the mythology of culture and more specifically, the culture of a particular group of people, from a ethnic culture to a class culture. In many senses then, the stage becomes a liminal space, betwixt and between the two cultures. It draws on the known, the intervening, the social, political, national and economic offstage spaces to compound a set of signifiers in two onstage spaces: the theatrical and the confrontational. But the spaces and the agendas are unstable and consequently the transition and the transference is unpredictable. Furthermore, the perceptions of the future can only be constructed on the lack of predictability. Consequently, a

\(^{148}\)Sitas Class, Nation, Ethnicity 257-276.
Page 161 & 162
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mythology is drawn on, transferred, transformed and articulated. This mythology is in and of itself unstable as it is constructed in sequestered spaces and then presented theatrically. Thus the liminal space is itself theatricalized, to answer to the call for solidarity (class), community (ethnicity), and resistance to oppression (materiality).

Furthermore, the strategic use of the imbongi, both as a collective imbongi in the plays, and as individuals means that the cultural construct is "authorized" as a "mythological authority" or, put another way, is granted "poetic licence" to speak to and for the people.149

The trade union theatre was an attempt to build a new, improved hegemony, one in which worker solidarity and ethnic diversity were joined. The effectiveness of the process was never measured, except by anecdotal means. Thus the effectiveness of the process is to be debated. The frame that the trade union theatre used to pursue its work bears some resemblance to the work of Augusto Boal and the trends in Theatre for Development, and, significantly, to Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.

The following chapter will investigate this theoretical frame and will turn to two areas as ways of understanding the problems and potentials of the Boal method. These two areas are to be located in the work of Zakes Mda, and in the work of the DramAidE project in Natal, which seeks to combat the spread of AIDS in the province through workshops and other Boalian devices.

149 The concept of worker authorization is insightfully dealt with by Kromberg The Role of the Audience 180-190.
CHAPTER 4

The Ambiguities of Nation Building and Theatre for Development Projects.

In the previous chapter I argued that the development of onstage discourses for Trade Union theatre in South Africa, built on diverse offstage discourses, led to the emergence of a monolithic discourse of confrontation that brooked no ambiguity and contained the potential of being as oppressive as the discourse against which it was resisting. In this chapter I will demonstrate the methods used by some theatre practitioners in South Africa, in their practicing of the so-called Theatre for Development techniques, to attempt to overcome this conundrum. I will argue that the use of the theatrical as a way of strategizing resistance, and the processes of development for replacing oppression, can be problematic, for three reasons. The offstage and onstage binary does not guarantee the safety of the individual’s movement between the two spaces and agendas; the language of the theatrical varies amongst people or communities in its offstage and onstage manifestations; and the understanding, by the practitioners of this approach, that, because some principle or new knowledge is presented in the theatrical mode, the individual who is party to such a theatrical venture will inevitably

164
transfer this new principle or knowledge gained during activities in the performance space, into behavioral changes in “reality,” is faulty.

The Africanist scholar Ali Mazrui has observed that, as Africa moves from a colonized continent, through a period of seeming neo-colonialism, to a post-colonial situation, four fundamental processes are necessary for development. These processes he calls the strategies for social or cultural engineering in the pursuit of nation-building.¹ Mazrui notes that “institutions must be built for the management of tensions between groups; bridges are to be constructed between tradition and modernity, calculation is necessary for creation of new shapes and patterns of relationships; foundations are to be laid for a new national heritage.”² The “institutions” of which he speaks need to find ways of dealing with the tensions that exist across race, class and ethnic divisions (amongst others). The “bridges” are to promote the development of the community from a pre-colonial and colonial mode of existence, into a community that may participate (primarily in economic terms) in the modern world. The “new shapes and forms of relationships” would particularly address the methods of negotiating between tensions arising from differences, and would take the form of the concepts of “democracy.” The search for new “foundations” addresses the issues around nation building in general, and the search for a national identity in particular.³


²Mazrui xiii.

³Mazrui xiii-xviii, and 277-293.
According to Mazrui, to do all of this would require cultural and normative fusions, "economic interpenetration among different strata and sections of society," social integration and a shared national experience. One of the strategies employed to attempt this was/is the methodology known as "Theatre for Development." This approach was, and continues to be very widely used in Africa. Kerr notes that there were fundamentally two approaches to this movement (although during the 1980s much cross-fertilization took place). One section, exemplified by the Laedza Batanani campaign in Botswana between 1974 and 1978, employed the strategy of "agitprop" theatre. In this approach, a company (usually of informed social development specialists with a group of university-trained actors) would present plays to a community, offering solutions to particular problems that the community faced. In the Botswana example these included (amongst other things) migrant labor and domestic conflicts (1974), tuberculosis and government land reform proposals (1975) and venereal disease and sanitation (1976). These are typical post-colonial African themes, and demonstrate the types of problems for development that Mazrui raises. However, as Kerr points out, the approach was to seem to present the answers to the problems in theatrical form. Through research the

4Mazrui 277.


Kerr Chapter 8, 11 and 12.

Kerr 152.
company would identify the problem, note the constraints (both practical and cultural) to solving the problem, and then decide for the presentation what in the community they could enhance and what needed to be challenged. In this sense the intervention was “top-down” and did not seem to allow the democratic process that fostered a problem-solving regimen in the community itself. It also led to a “development strategy based on changing the poor, rather than the systems of oppression that makes them poor.” This approach addressed the symptoms but not the structures of oppression.

The second strategy that Kerr documents, drew on the work of Augusto Boal. This was particularly evident in the early work pioneered by Michael Etherton and Brian Crow in northern Nigeria, but it was to spread and be taken on by Kerr himself in his work in Malawi and in Botswana. It would also become cardinal for the work of Zakes Mda and his Marotholi Travelling Theatre and also the “DramAidE Programme” in Southern Africa.

Kerr notes that Theatre for Development drew on a “participatory method derived from the ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, and, though he has not been overtly concerned with theatre, he has remained a powerful influence on the debates

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9 Kerr 151.
10 Kerr 160.
11 Kerr 161-171.
13 As documented in Lynn Dalrymple ed., Is DramAidE making a Difference?: Evaluations of the DramAidE Programme (Durban and Empangeni: DramAidE, May, 1996).
about how to achieve a genuinely participatory theatre.”¹³ Freire’s basic assumption in his approach was that the oppressed could be taught to take control of their own destinies through empowering them in various ways. To do this one had to access the very language and discourse of the community and use that as the basis for further education. In other words the Theatre for Development companies had to have access to the offstage discourses of those they wished to help.

What Kerr does not note is that Freire and Boal worked together on language acquisition programs in Peru, and thus the link between Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed is made.¹⁴ In order for us to follow the theoretical underpinning of this movement, it is necessary to examine the writings of Augusto Boal. By exploring the theoretical aspects of Boal’s work one can better understand the problems of ambiguity and the host of deceptive decoding conditions facing the practitioners of Theatre for Development. These problems and conditions are to be found in their understanding of the theatrical as a methodology, in the lack of making the space of their work in performance safe both before and after interventions, and in their assumption that what is developed in the performance space will automatically be transferred to the social concerns of the community. In short, the ever present condition of role-play must permeate all that occurs in both onstage and offstage discourses in the movement toward “development” in the way that Mazrui sees it.

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The insights gained from a close analysis of Boal’s work will then be applied to Zakes Mda’s work in the Marlothi Travelling Theatre, and then to the attempts by the DramAidE Programme to change sexual behavior among the youth of Kwazulu-Natal, so that the spread of AIDS can be countered.

4.1 Augusto Boal. Theatre of the Oppressed and Theatre for Development

Augusto Boal's work has permeated the thinking behind Theatre for Development projects internationally, including South Africa. Zakes Mda acknowledges Boal in his book *When People Play People*, and so do the DramAidE Programme and the subsequent LIFE SKILLS project that emanated from the University of Zululand and extended to most of the Eastern Seaboard University Drama Departments. Boal techniques, such as Simultaneous Dramaturgy, Forum Theatre and Image Theatre, and the Boal principles such as the spect-actor and the joker (a version of the *imbongi*, as I will argue), are used in anything from Psycho-drama adaptations to a large number of

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*Mda. For references to Simultaneous Dramaturgy see for example pp.126-143, and for references to Forum Theatre see for example pp. 143-156. Throughout these pages Mda makes no reference to Boal in his descriptions. However there are some seven references to Boal dotted throughout the text.

*These are at the Universities of Natal (Pietermaritzburg and Durban), the University of Durban Westville, and the University of Zululand. Rhodes University in Grahamstown also has an active Theatre for Development section, and the University of Cape Town has been practising a form of this type of theatre for some time. The Witwatersrand University also teaches this approach.

issue-based projects world wide, that deal with everything from aging and retirement, to the conflict in Northern Ireland, to the use of more hygienic latrines and the prevalence of STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) and tuberculosis.

Theatre of the Oppressed appeared early on in Boal's career and outlined his theoretical underpinnings in respect of the work that he was doing in Brazil. The book demonstrates his indebtedness to the work of Bertoldt Brecht and Paulo Freire, as well as to the early work of Constantin Stanislavski. Boal attempts to deconstruct Aristotle's theories on theatre. Boal, through a reading of Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hegel and Brecht, develops his technique of Simultaneous Dramaturgy, which is the process of creating theatre with the audience. The action of the play would be stopped by the audience at moments that they did not agree with or saw ways of changing the direction of the action, and the actors would improvise around the suggestions given.

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20 The work of Zakes Mda is relevant here. See particularly his descriptions of his Marotholi Traveling Theatre and their production of The Rural Sanitation Play. Mda People. 115-126.


Boal refines and explains much of the thinking on his idea of a "Theatre of the Oppressed," as he develops the techniques and subsequent required exercises in *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.\(^{23}\) The introductory essays and the concluding work on the Joker (as facilitator of the interchanges between action and audience) as a technique are carefully constructed and are important guidelines to his system. In this book he also begins to rethink his ideas on overt oppression expressed in the first book, and begins to deal with covert oppression.

The third text, *Rainbow of Desire*,\(^{24}\) is written in self-imposed exile from Brazil in France.\(^{25}\) In France, and his further theatrical work, he encounters what he considers to be a far more diffuse form of oppression than the overt (political and economic) oppression of Brazil in the 1950's and 1960's. He formalizes his thinking on the theory, which he calls the "Cop in the Head"\(^{26}\) and the "Rainbow of Desire." Fundamentally, the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques dealt with finding ways to get economically, politically and socially oppressed people to confront and overcome their oppression. In the "Cop in the Head" and "Rainbow of Desire" techniques he is attempting to find ways of getting people whose oppression is not necessarily economic, political or social, but


\(^{25}\)See Boal *Rainbow* 1-8.

\(^{26}\)Augusto Boal, "The Cop in the Head: Three Hypotheses." Transl. Susana Epstein *The Drama Review* 34,3 (Fall, 1990): 35-42. Much of this particular edition of this journal is devoted to Boal and his theories.
may be psychological, ideological, hegemonic or sexual, to name, confront and find ways of coping with or alleviating such oppression. Case histories of his work are well documented in Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz’s edited book Playing Boal: Theater, Therapy, Activism. The fallibility and problem areas of his work are clearly documented here, as well are a number of so-called “successful” applications of his techniques.

Boal uses theatre to find spaces and strategies for the free interchange of ideas and problem areas, and arenas for the “rehearsal” of actions to counteract oppression. Boal articulates principles and techniques that expose oppression publicly, so that the oppressed may find ways of dealing with the oppression through consultation, sharing, insight, and rehearsal.

To do this Boal formulates his understanding of theatre on four basic principles. These are the principle of the “spect-actor,” and the processes of osmosis, metaxis, and analogical induction. The “spect-actor” is the principle that a person can be both actor and spectator of the action he or she creates, at the same time. Osmosis refers to the movement of social processes from the surrounds of the person to become part of that person’s social, ethical, philosophical and political “make-up.” Metaxis refers to the principle of creating a space that is seemingly both representative of the “real” and the “theatrical” at the same time. Analogical induction refers to Boal’s understanding that

the "spect-actor" can take that which is perceived in the theatrical space, in a moment of specificity, into the general "real" world.

The first principles of Boal's work are therefore, grounded in the tridimensionality of the human being: "The I who observes, the I-in-situ, and the not-I."\(^{28}\) This triadic understanding places the human as part of a life or society in which the human has the ability to note consciously that which is going on around him. But, according to Boal, the human also has the ability to locate him or herself within that society, in such a way that he or she can observe him or herself also within that life or society -- the ability to stand "outside" the moment and observe the "I" in relation to the rest of the society. Furthermore, the "I" can "imagine" what others (or the I) might be able to do in that situation. This forms the basis of his understanding of the theatrical.\(^{29}\)

Such an understanding of the theatrical remains ambiguous because it requires that a person must be conscious of both acting a role, and of not acting a role, i.e., of truth or honesty. This principle seems necessary for social engineering to take place, or any form of development from "within" a community to occur in what seems to be a "democratic" manner. It relies on the potential of an individual to be able to extricate him or herself from the claps of ideology in some way. It also relies on the person being able to "read" the signs of his oppression. If this were so, it would seem obvious that the person could of his or her own accord take the necessary action.

\(^{28}\)Boal. Rainbow 13.

\(^{29}\)Boal. Rainbow 13. Boal's emphasis.
For Boal "the suppression of our freedom of expression and action results from two causes: external, social coercion and/or internal, ethical choice. Put in other terms these are fear and morality." The human being might be all things, but his or her own fear of the society around him or her, as well as the moral and ethical "internal" injunctions are the brakes to such realizations. Boal proceeds to develop the processes that bring these brakes about (and also the potential removal of such brakes), and he theorizes on osmosis, metaxis and analogical induction.

Boal defines osmosis in his theory as "the propagation of ideas, values of tastes." He also calls this "interpenetration." He then poses these questions: "How does osmosis come about? As much by repulsion, hatred, fear, violence, constraint, or, by contrast, through attraction, love, desire, promises, dependencies, etc. Where does osmosis emerge? Everywhere. In all the cells of our social life." The "cells" he refers to are any units of "social organization" (such as "the couple, the family, the school, the office, the factory, etc.") and each cell, and the incidents in that cell, contains "all the moral and political values of life, all its structures of domination and power, all its mechanisms of oppression." In this manner Boal moves from the small themes to the larger themes, straddles the personal and the political in terms of oppression, and assumes the ability of the spect-actor to extrapolate from one to the other.

The principle of learning through pain and pleasure which Boal mentions — the negative aspects of society which stop certain behavior, and the positive aspects that

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30Boal Rainbow 35.

31Boal Rainbow 41.
reinforce certain other behavior — is deceptive, as it plays upon the idea that all people will react, given the opportunity, to the same stimuli negatively or positively, according to the situation. If this were to be the case, and learning took place through this type of reinforcement, then the principle of being able to conceptualize "outside" of that which has been learned is ambiguous.

To a large extent Boal's early work addressed the constraints that were imposed on the individual by society, which led to the various oppressive moments in a socio-political sense, and his later work (which he developed in his strategies and techniques of "Cop in the Head" and the "Rainbows of Desire") was concerned with what he perceived as the internal mechanisms of oppression. Boal needed a principle that would allow him to access a space for dealing with oppression, and for this he employed the principle of metaxis.

Boal defines metaxis as "The state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image."

Boal stresses the autonomy, in metaxis, of the two worlds. The one must not be a replication of the other, but "it must have an aesthetic dimension." 32  Here the concept of the "spect-actor" comes again to the fore. A space defined by an audience (i.e spectator and actor) is to become both a place for performance and for rehearsal for life. The actor and the audience member create images of their oppression. These images take on a new reality (as images). The oppressed then enter the reality of the images and play around with them, that is to say, they "practice" and change the images in the aesthetic world.

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32Boal Rainbow 43.
They then “return” to the “real” world, with new insights. This Boal calls the process of “analogical induction.” Thus “if the oppressed artist is able to create an autonomous world of images of his own reality, and to enact his liberation in the reality of the images, he will then be able to extrapolate into his own life all that he has accomplished in his fiction. The scene, the stage, becomes the rehearsal space for real life.”33 This progression from reality to fiction and back again is fraught with potential ambiguities.

The movement from offstage to onstage dynamics affects the stage language and the images that it creates. During this transfer from the one to the other, signification becomes potentially ambiguous due to factors such as space, aesthetic moments, styles, etc.34 The images are being “read” by the facilitators (the jokers) during the processes, but the process of onstage and offstage signification is saturated with ideology.35

According to Boal, the lessons learned will be applied when the “spect-actor” moves out of the aesthetic space into the real world. This, however, is only partially true, (See the DramAidE Project, below).

33Boal Rainbow 44.

34Kerr documents a case where a Theatre for Development project was about “older men impregnating young girls” which was stopped because it precipitated a crisis in the village leadership (because the story cut too close to the bone) leading to the dismissal of the chairman and secretary of the Malya drama core group.” This in contrast to a situation in “the Mbalechanda theatre for Development campaign in Malawi, where a similarly obstructive scandal was only revealed to the catalyst group on the last day of the workshop.” Kerr 158. (Kerr’s parenthesis).

35Herbert Blau’s penetrating and insightful book To All Appearances: Ideology and Performance (New York: Routledge, 1992) is a case in point. Blau argues that all is saturated with ideology, and that there is a "gap" between the appearance of reality, and the communicating of that reality. This gap is "filled" with ideology.
Boal sees two facets of conditioning: an external morality, conditioned by the outside world, and an internal morality conditioned by habit. Therefore, under this scheme of things, "every oppressed person is a subjugated subversive. His submission is his Cop in the Head, his introjection. But he also possesses the other element, subversion. Our goal is to dynamize the latter, by making the former disappear." 

The purpose of the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques is to "uncover" the forces that control the will, and "dynamize" strategies for combating these forces. The Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal writes, "is a system of physical exercises, aesthetic games, image techniques and special improvisations whose goal is to safeguard, develop and reshape the human vocation, by turning the practice of theatre into an effective tool for the comprehension of social problems and the search for their solutions." To do this the Theatre of the Oppressed technique tries to turn the oppressed person into the protagonist of the performance. Instead of being the compliant one in the process of the drama (and of real life) the technique attempts create situations where the oppressed can rehearse active resistance to the oppression." The victim becomes the "center" of the process. Boal sees the victim as one who is either caught in a process that seems to the oppressed to be unchangeable but who, with the right prompting, will be able to confront the

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36Boal Rainbow 35.
37Boal Rainbow 42.
38Boal Rainbow 14-15.
39Boal Rainbow 40.
oppression himself. It is a matter of the solution just being beyond the grasp of the victim, just out of view, or around the next corner.

The blocks that oppression places in the way of development must be identified, foregrounded, and combated in the performance space. Here the goal is “not to create calm, equilibrium, but to create disequilibrium which prepares the way for action. It’s goal is to dynamize. . . . (I)t purifies the spec-actors, it produces a catharsis. The catharsis of detrimental Blocks!” Boal 40 The stumbling blocks are removed, appeased or circumvented by the combined and concerted process of the theatre of the Oppressed project.

Boal, of course, assumes that the oppressed will be able to identify (and perhaps identify with) the moment of oppression. Therefore any solutions worked out are of themselves the “right” ones, because the solution appears to be “democratically” reached. Thus, to remove the blocks that “cause” the oppression makes the situation not clearer but more ambiguous and troubling. This is indeed the case as Zakes Mda finds out in the final play to be discussed on the section on his work.

The Boal system uses the techniques of Simultaneous Dramaturgy, Forum Theatre, Image Theatre and the “joker.” Simultaneous Dramaturgy is a technique that is set up primarily to combat osmosis. Forum theatre works extensively with metaxis, and Image theatre with analogical induction. All three attempt to combat the ambiguities brought on by oppression, but, as I have argued, the processes appear to hold the potential for ambiguity. The joker is the facilitator in all three of the techniques.

40Boal Rainbow 72-73.
In Simultaneous Dramaturgy the artists who are involved in a project develop a
play (or a series of scenes), each scene creating a crisis that leads to an oppression. Under
the supervision of a director, each audience member is encouraged to intervene at the
crisis moment and to tell the actors how he or she would handle the situation differently.

Forum Theatre has the same approach, but here the audience member is
encouraged to take over the role of the character in the play. The actors then improvise
around the actions of the “spect-actor” by attempting to prevent (gently, and within
reason) the spect-actor from achieving such a new resolution that will solve the
oppression. All potential solutions are “tried out” by the ensemble and the workshop.
Here the “writing” of the play occurs as the action of the play unfolds (hence the name
“simultaneous dramaturgy”). This development of the play takes the form of a debate,
with the director as the facilitator, and as such the aesthetic space moves into the audience
area and the entire group is involved. This debate-like approach which takes the form of
a theatrical event, Boal labels “Forum Theatre.”

Boal acknowledges that the more homogenous the group is in terms of its type of
oppression, the greater the participation of the audience, as they are all involved in the
same dilemmas. This phenomenon resonates with the idea of an offstage discourse that
is used by a community (of oppressed) in the safety of the offstage space as a site and a
method to work out strategies to combat oppression. These sites have the function of
sharing and developing common strategies through the participation of all in the same
predicament, and where various members of the site share the various degrees of success
in applying different strategies as they have experienced them. Members of the offstage

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site find solidarity and group courage through these communal goals and strategies. The situation remains ambiguous, because the perceived oppression may not be social, political or economic, but psychological.

Boal turns to the individual, in a therapeutic way, and he creates Image Theatre techniques. Image Theatre is used primarily try to get to those oppressions that seem to be “hidden” even from the person who thinks he or she is oppressed. The individual “knows” that something is wrong with him/herself, but is either unable to pinpoint the problem, and/or is unable to see how to solve the problem.

In Image Theatre the protagonist of the oppression becomes a stand-in director. The protagonist then creates, using the members of the workshop as the material, an image of his/her oppression. Following this, the protagonist constructs an “ideal” image showing how the world would be if his/her oppression is lifted. (Here the desires of the protagonist come to the fore). Then, in the third phase of the procedure, the protagonist and the workshop are encouraged to dynamize (activate, or give “life” to) the two images, showing how the one could move into the other.

The possibilities of the ambiguous creation and interpretation of these images are many and varied. Boal’s idea that abstracted images will lead to a better understanding (because they would seemingly come closer to some collective truth) is debatable. Furthermore, the creation of an “ideal” image is as much a potential product of reversing the oppression as it of wish fulfilment. Following on from this, the movement of the image from oppressive moment to idealized (Utopian) future, does not take into account the diverse forces of society at work. It becomes difficult to separate out the strands of
oppression. The overt and covert nature of all of the forces --the political, social, economic, physical (including well-being and medical), religious, ideological, relational, sexual, even geographical forces -- operate in a dense weave.

All three techniques depend upon the role of the director (or Joker as Boal has termed it). Jackson argues that “the joker’s function is not that of facilitator, the joker is (in Boal-speak) a ‘difficultator,’ undermining, reinforcing our grasp of the complexity of the situation, but not letting the complexity get in the way of action or frighten us into submission or inactivity.” The joker was (initially) a type of role played by the one of the ensemble whose prime function was to guide the performance and also to offer the analysis of the performance at the same time. This analysis was geared toward explicating the meaning of the text is such a way that the fictional events could be related to real events. In this way the joker could step out of character, could comment on the action, could speak the sub-text of any character in the play, could step out of the frame of the performance to comment on the event itself, and could ask characters to repeat scenes with different emphases. What is unclear in Boal’s exegesis is whether these “interventions” were in fact rehearsed or not.

In Forum and Image Theatre the joker is the facilitator of the interchange between actors and audience, guiding the various debates and “spect-actor” interventions. In this

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42Boal Theatre of the Oppressed 171-190.

43Schutzman Playing Boal 237.
sense the joker becomes the facilitator between the concrete realities of performance or workshop on the one hand, and some external, generalized reality.  

The joker has three roles or functions. As a facilitator, the joker mediates and challenges. As a director, the joker focuses the performance or workshop. And as a philosopher, the joker has a solid understanding of the structures and systems of society. However, the joker has one more function: to present all of this in a manner that is acceptable to the people involved in the process, performance or workshop.

In many ways these roles or functions parallel or echo the roles and functions of the imbongi. The imbongi, too, is caught by the need to present whatever is presented to an audience that needs to be challenged. Furthermore, the imbongi moves between confronting both sides of the power or oppression binary, and placating both sides. To do this the imbongi has to command the attention of all in the gathering, and to move in a continuous manner between the present and the future, describing the present (and the past) in terms of the desired model of the future. This movement to the future is steeped in value systems and views of a Utopia.

What Boal leaves out of his consideration is the aftermath of the events that occur in the “space.” As Adrian Jackson (Boal’s official translator and right-hand man) argues: “As far as I know, no one has yet attempted any follow-up study after a workshop: such an initiative would probably be doomed to failure, as we are often dealing with unquantifiable changes which resist statistical analysis; the observable changes are

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qualitative.” Boal is also reluctant to acknowledge that the language used by the oppressed is redolent with the dynamics of role-play already. Boal also seems to abrogate the responsibility taken by the leader of the workshop for participation in the “space.” Spry, one of Boal’s disciples, is aware of the problems that may result from participation, but passes the final responsibility for this back to the participants:

I tell them (the participants in the workshops) that they know their physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual limits whereas I do not. I ask the participants to be responsible for themselves; it is up to them to say no to anything they are not ready to deal with. . . . If the animator/joker takes responsibility for each workshop participant, they are perpetuating a form of progressive paternalism which creates an atmosphere in which the individual participants feel, once again, that they are not in control of their own lives. . . . As Augusto (Boal) said in one of the many discussions we had around this issue, “I care but I am not responsible for you. I cannot be. I do not know what is right for you.”

Given the very goals of the process, Spry’s position is questionable. “Taking responsibility for” is a regulatory mechanism that may work at all levels of oppression. Furthermore, given the changed reality environment of the space (using the concept of metaxis), “taking responsibility for” cannot answer to the question of whether the participant is taking responsibility for the character’s actions or the participant’s actions. If the goal of the process is to change behavior, then the basis for “taking responsibility for” may be predicated on the reality before, during or after the intervention.

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45Adrian Jackson “Translator’s Introduction” Rainbow xxiv. The work on the DramAidE project which I will discuss below has attempted such an analysis. Nevertheless, Jackson’s argument is problematic, in my view, particularly with the Theatre of the Oppressed approach, as it would be easy to return after a certain period of time and see whether things have changed or not.

For Boal and Spry the individual spect-actor can move into the framed reality of the drama only with great difficulty. Consequently extended games and exercises are used as a "foregrounding" for the individual, of that individual's performative presentation of self, or the "individual-in-role." The games are also used as a system of "de-programming through awareness" of the oppressions of habits, masks and rituals which are themselves in place because of the socio-political milieu. The Joker/facilitator/ informed and sympathetic guide, is introduced as a force that determines the "rules of the theatrical game to be played," to lead the people to the theatrical moment.

Of course, the reverse process may indeed need just as much "de-briefing" as the "briefing" might need. This is particularly true of his pseudo-psychological Image Theatre approach which assumes that there is a "universal language" of images which needs merely to be liberated. Hence there is no "de-framing" following an event, and there is no follow-up -- the argument is that the group provides possible answers, and then the individual proceeds to apply those answers. Several examples illustrate this point. Boal reports on the (1977) Godrano experience, where a Forum Theatre was made around the manipulation of the co-operative that was set up in the Sicilian village of Godrano. The mayor of the cooperative was responsible for the exploitation. During the presentation of the Forum Theatre the mayor himself was present. At a particular point,

47Boal Rainbow 19.

48Virtually the entire text of Games for Actors and Non-actors is devoted to developing strategies of encouraging both actors and non-actors to enter and use the space of the theatrical moment. As such, his exercises are very effective for the "re-educating" of the body and the exploration of further possibilities of expression for the actor who is to move on to create various roles.

49 This is an oppressive possibility, if ever there was one, within the Boalian theory!
when everyone was accusing the mayor (in the theatrical world, as Boal is quick to point out), the mayor also shouted “Stop!” following the procedure agreed upon. After much accusation and debate, he loses his temper and shouts: “It’s my co-operative, if you want to run it, set up another one.” “Clearly this was impossible,” as Boal states.\textsuperscript{50}

The situation was ambiguous. The mayor did not have to relinquish anything. In fact, the mayor was in economic control. All those who questioned his authority in such a public forum ran the risk of economic hardship by having their concessions and contributions dealt with and withdrawn. Boal announces that the villagers insisted that this was the fictional world ("we are going to talk theatre!"), even though the mayor was unable to see this. According to Boal, the mayor would not abide by the rules of the theatrical space (which are "democratic" rules), and that the mayor wanted to play according to his own rules, which represented his interests, and where he controlled everything.\textsuperscript{51} This is an example of economic danger resulting from the ambiguous role-playing situation of the workshop.

Boal recounts an example of physical danger brought on by misunderstanding and deceptions because of the ambiguous nature of the space Boal creates. During the early days of Forum Theatre, and during a particular intervention, a woman was invited onstage to show how she would deal with the problem.

She came onstage, grabbed the poor defenseless actor/husband (who was a real actor but not a real husband, and, moreover was skinny and weak), and laid into him with a broom-handle with all her strength. . . . We attempted to rescue our

\textsuperscript{50}Boal Games 30-39. See particularly 38.

\textsuperscript{51}Boal Games 38.
endangered comrade, but the big woman was much stronger than us. She finally stopped of her own accord.  

It would appear that the actor “became” the husband. The ambiguity of his function was not perceived by the woman, despite much work prior to the particular incident. Another example is recorded by Mda from his forum play The Trade Union Play. (Motale is played by one of his actors; the Migrants are part of the audience):

MIGRANT 5: This man is talking shit. I think he is one of the impimpis (sell-outs) of the Boers.
MIGRANT 4: Do you hear this boy insult me?
MOTALE: Please let us not fight. We do not want a situation where the quarrel of a man is settled with a stick. Rather let us act this out. Both you fathers come to the stage and act your differences out. You be Motale, and this elder brother here is Lebona.

But the man who has been insulted is no longer interested in participating. He leaves, fuming. All attempts to call him back fail. Another man from the audience volunteers to be Lebona.  

In a society where many slights made in the public (and private) spaces are settled with sticks (and knives), this is a frightening scenario, and one in which the joker (Motale) appears to shrug his shoulders when his attempts fail.

In Boal’s theatrical moment, the “spectator” always plays a role of some sort or other. But at the same time the “spectator” must be “truthful” in the performance moment. Society becomes a theatrical game, where roles are "negotiated" and where oppression is in and of itself also a theatrical moment. Conceivably this acting could include the moment of enrolling the moment of enrolling. This is called "pleasing the

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52Boal Rainbow 6-7.

53Zakes Mda When People Play People 227. The use of the family terms “father” and “brother” refer to direct translations made from the Sesotho. These were terms of respect.
instructor," and although it may be seen to be a harmless exercise, it becomes more convoluted and risky when the representatives of real oppression are present. Facilitators are regularly troubled by this when the results of their work go in directions they did not perceive.\textsuperscript{54}

Boal's own use of his technique called "Invisible Theatre" demonstrates this problem. In Invisible Theatre a play is devised by the company to be performed in an actual location where oppression seems evident (the exploitation of waiters, is one example that Boal uses). The play is constructed to provoke discussion amongst unsuspecting people who happen to be in the neighbourhood at the time of the event. As soon as the debate has moved away from the "scripted" control of the activists, they quietly leave and allow those that remain to get on with it.\textsuperscript{55}

Nevertheless, the ability to "tell the truth" (or "acting naturally") in a way that the "truthfulness" is in some way guaranteed is a hallmark of much of Boal's search for the theatrical. Besides the more obvious dichotomy between signifiers and signifieds, and the ideological weight of words and their meanings, there still exists the problem of the varieties of meaning that exist between oppressor and oppressed groupings, and this leads to the second question about Boal's work, because he does not argue persuasively whether or not the language of theatre (performance) is, in terms of the binary, learned or inherited.

\textsuperscript{54}In this regard see particularly the Canadian Roundtable in Schutzman \textit{Playing Boal} 198-226.

\textsuperscript{55}Boal \textit{Games} 6-17.
Boal’s does not acknowledge that the language about oppression (as used by the oppressed), is often “learned” from contact with the oppressor and is learned as an opposition to the language of the oppressor, or at least from the society in which the binary operates. Oppression is by its very nature defined in the binary. For Boal, oppression results from ignorance (or from withholding information), or from “education” (Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses) or from fear (e.g. of repercussions), all of which can be confronted in his theatre. Clearly ignorance is counterpoised against knowledge (presumably the knowledge that the oppressor knows, and knows to withhold) and therefore liberation is the key to education.\footnote{Boal claims that “it is fear that makes us accept oppression. A man without fear can be eliminated, assassinated, but never oppressed.” Rainbow, 118. It is, of course, debatable as to whether death, or the fear of death, is not the ultimate oppression.}

Conversely, the type of education provided by the oppressor for the oppressed is geared toward maintaining the status quo. The Boal theory has it that, given the freedom to choose, the oppressed will almost automatically choose the “right thing.” Boal attempts to bridge this in two ways. He introduces the idea that strategies will be agreed upon in the session through democratic means, so that, through observation and the trying out of ideas, the progress of the action will be judged on efficacious grounds, hence the best grounds. But homogeneity makes the choices seem “obvious.” With diversity of community, Boal accentuates the job of the joker, but this would involve the joker as an intellectual and would skew the process. Thus, he later claims that the role of the joker (and, of course, the Company) simply are agents provocateurs. Boal seems to realize the \footnote{“Liberation before Education” was one of the rallying slogans of the youth during the Soweto uprising from 1976 onwards.}
ambiguous position the jokers are in and then downgrades their contributions. The joker may become a representative of society. It is the fault of society that oppression occurs, one needs to change society, and not question the abilities of the individual. The result of this is that he formulates a theory which suggests that, given the lifting of oppression, the oppressed will become automatically “a better person.”

In a sense, Boal provides a space and an agenda which helps one "discover what is on one's mind" -- because the insidious nature of oppression is that an individual is very often programmed to take the path of least resistance and this path may indeed be one that contributes to one's own oppression. This may be seen as the Althusserian "interpellation." One can also learn to “speak one's mind,” not necessarily by using a new language but by adapting what one has, and by listening to other ways of using that language, as the ways are forthcoming from other oppressed. This can be viewed as the “pooling of ideas” concept. Finally one can rehearse strategies so that when the moment occurs when one discovers the licence to confront the oppressor one is “armed” with the right ammunition.

It is possible to practice Boal’s theory acknowledging the space that he creates so that the oppressed can explore their dilemmas and develop strategies for countering their oppressions. Boal creates "enclaves of freedom." However, there are so many factors that mitigate against such a freedom. Boal’s theory in practice in the South African experience has led to the moving of the parameters of oppression, rather than to relief from oppression. This happened because language, images, and society are built around
restraints, not around freedom. It is the restraints that foster freedom, and not, generally, the other way around.

4.2 Two Case Histories

The projects of Zakes Mda in his Marotholi Travelling Theatre company, and the work of the DramAidE project on Aids education in Kwazulu Natal have used Boal’s theories in practise extensively. These projects were geared to attend to some of the problems that were either oppressing or were potentially oppressing certain communities in Southern Africa. Their work created fertile ground for a demonstration of the ambiguities created by Boal’s theories. In both cases, difficulties arose from a lack of understanding that for any change to occur in a community, not only must “new” knowledge be learned by the community, but that attitudes and behavior must also change in the community. Historically, however, behavior changes may not have occurred after the workshop -- back in the spaces of reality. In the theatrical moment, attitudes and behavior may seem to be changed, but the historical forces were so strong that such changes were extremely difficult to achieve. It was in the ambiguous moment between the reality of the theatre and the theatricality of reality that behavior modification was lost. The facilitators in both case histories drew on a hasty understanding of the offstage discourses of the oppressed. This reading was to a large extent rooted in the assumption that by simply using the language and performed rituals of the oppressed, access might be gained to the discourse of the oppressed to start the change. It was also rooted in the assumed “natural” abilities of the oppressed to be
theatrical and to think and act in such a way that knowledge and behavior changes followed each other automatically.

The tenuous and ambiguous nature of the jokers (or interventionists), seen through the eyes of the imbongi, placed them in a position where things seemed to change but historically did not. This to a large extent was because of the training that they received which was “outside” the realms of the offstage of the oppressed. Although the intervention seemed effective from an entertainment point of view, the ambiguities in the reporting seem to suggest that it was problematic in terms of development. Fear may well have been the reason why the radical change that the activists had hoped for, seemed not to have materialized.

4.2.1 Zakes Mda and the Marotholi Travelling Theatre.

The Marotholi Travelling Theatre was set up as part of the English Department of the University of Lesotho to be a section of their English language program. It later developed into a company that specialized in Theatre for Development projects, first under the direction of Andrew Horn and then with Zakes Mda. Mda’s research, and the basis for much of section of this project, was geared toward developing a new communication model for Theatre for Development projects. Mda was concerned that

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59Mda *People* 65.

60 This book is a progression of his doctoral work undertaken in the Drama Department of the University of Cape Town.
the standard communication model used for development projects was a top-down model, where specialization and knowledge were constructed outside the realms of those who were to receive this knowledge, and who therefore did not have a hand in the form or content of such knowledge and development. He was also concerned with finding a way to utilize the capacities and capabilities of the people that “needed” to be developed.

His book documents four plays (amongst others) that move from agitprop theatre, through the gamut of Simultaneous Dramaturgy and Forum Theatre to what he hopes to be the best model of this type of theatre -- the “Comgen” or “community generated” approach. This trajectory shows his concern with making theatre the methodology (or, as he calls it, the “technology”) for problem solving and development. For Mda, agitprop theatre sees the bringing in of a play that has been constructed after a fair amount of research from the activist position, and the presenting of it as a “package” to the oppressed. Simultaneous Dramaturgy fosters the co-writing of the play, with a discussion intervention happening at intermittent moments, and Forum Theatre is the active engagement of the audience in constructing -- on stage -- the possible solutions to the problem, under the guidance of the jokers and the activists.

Mda’s ideal was to see Comgen Theatre take root amongst the oppressed. This was a shortened form of the words “Community Generated” theatre. In this type of theatre the community itself has the skills to employ the techniques needed to resolve problems and to promote development, without resorting to outside facilitators. Mda did not see that such a move hinges on the fact that the technologies were taught by outside
facilitators, and as such the process contained the colonialist thinking about black society that the outsiders envisaged.

The core concern of the Marotholi Travelling Theatre was on using theatre and theatricality for development projects. They define development as “the process through which a society achieves greater control of its social, economic and political destiny. The process allows the individual members of society to have control of their institutions, which leads to liberation from all forms of domination and dependency.” The central issue of “dependency” was one of Mda’s chief concerns. He suggested that dependency had come about because of years of oppression which had led to apathy in the communities. “Apathy should be presented as a consequence of years of oppression by the colonialist, and later the neo-colonialist, class in post-independent Africa.”

Consequently development would only occur if the

... root cause of people’s ‘apathy’ is critically examined, not just from within the confines of local structures, but in terms of wider historical, social, political and economic forces at play at national and sometimes, international level.... Repeatedly, what this means is that Theatre-for-Development must, first and foremost, help people to identify the sources of poverty and underdevelopment, and, secondly, explore ways and means of how such causes may be eradicated. Follow-up action should be the actual application of strategies to eradicate such causes.  

This led first and foremost to an approach that would “conscientize” these people. The community was perceived to be underdeveloped and poverty-stricken, and this had been

\[\text{61Mda, People, 42.}\]

\[\text{62Mda, People, 23.}\]

\[\text{63Much of what Mda states in his book is written in the passive voice. This makes it difficult to trace who the agents are the process.}\]
caused by oppression. That which stood in the way of the community recognizing this fact “spontaneously” appeared to be their apathy which had been brought on by oppression. Following this logic, it can be argued that the systems that oppressed them were the communities themselves. If this held true, following Mda, then what was needed was an outside agency’s intervention. This intervention had to provide a process that would raise “the critical awareness of the disadvantaged people in society so that they (would) be able to identify their problems as consequences of a particular social order.” Mda was slowly becoming entangled in the ambiguities of external interference.

According to Mda, the process of conscientization had three phases: naming, reflection and action. Naming was the ability to identify and name a particular moment or aspect of apathy, oppression or underdevelopment. Naming brought the situation to the fore, so that the matter could be debated in a form of some sort. Reflection brought to bear the various possible reasons for the situation to have occurred and led to debates as to how those moments of apathy, oppression or underdevelopment might be combated. Action, finally, suggested the way forward and the actions that needed to be taken in the community.

It would seem from this that the process required two major sources. The interventionists were the one source and the abilities of the community itself were the other. It was in the dialogue between these two sources that much of the ambiguities and

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64 Mda People 23.

65 Mña suggests throughout the book that very often one bit of reflection, encapsulated in a piece of Forum Theatre, leads to the call for another bit of Forum Theatre. This is a major problem for the approach, as I will show.
miscodings occurred. The ambiguities lay also in the structure or style of the dialogue itself that caused some of the problems that Mda wrestled with.

Mda notes that there were two types of interventionists (or “catalysts,” as Mda calls them) in the plays: the actors, and the “subject specialists,” where the latter were nurses, social workers, sanitation experts or trade unionists. As such, the discourse that they created together was the culmination of a dialogue of a different nature -- between the discourse of performance and the discourse of knowledge. Most of the actors were students or people who had just completed studies at the University of Lesotho. As such, they brought with them to the dialogue an agenda and an approach that could be conceived of as being elitist. Fundamentally, however, they had been schooled in the understanding of the dominant discourse, namely that of the ruling classes in the universities. As such, their abilities to judge, as all jokers must do, what crisis points in a community were important to that community, and how to name them, reflect upon them and spur the community on to action, must be seen through the eyes of the dominant, or through some discourse that was “above” the ideological. Plainly, this was a controversial stance to take.

If the educational or development powers were “right” (and the actors had learned that “rightness”), then there would be no problem. However, if the powers were “wrong,” and the students had been “taken in by” the persuasive abilities (or, for that matter, the fear of reprisals from those powers) of the educational powers, and were now propagating those agendas, then the actors would have fallen into the very trap that they were preparing the communities to avoid. This conundrum, offered in the form of the
following question: “Development according to whom?” confronted Mda with the problem of authority and structure, and for this Mda turned to education. Following Paulo Freire, Mda, notes that “education is a process of conscientization in which the community is helped to articulate its problems, then to provide solutions to those problems. This means that education must give people tools by which they can understand and change society.” In this sense, Mda’s thinking followed the thinking of Ali Mazrui that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

However this still raised the specter of the potential ambiguities of agendas and goals. The idea that a community could become aware of certain issues without them being foregrounded by those who “knew,” is deceptive. Furthermore, the concept that communities could learn how to “analyze” in the way that the developers thought was necessary, countered the idea that people would be able to solve problems of their own accord through dialogue, negotiation and role-play, as Boal suggests. The need for “outsiders” became almost obligatory.

Besides the artistic workers, other workers in the projects were all specialists in particular fields of knowledge that carried expertise in terms of which the communities might benefit: nurses, sanitation workers, trade unionists and social workers. The key to their involvement in terms of the type of discourses that they used was that they had access to ways of doing things that were therapeutic, efficient, and based on some sort of world-wide norm. As such they had an “outsider’s” view of conditions in a community, they had the view of what could be conceived of as a “better” way of doing things, and

66Mda People 38.
they needed a vehicle to bring this new knowledge to the community in such a way that the community realized that an adoption of the new way of behaving would lead to an improved living condition.

The specialists knew the advantages of the change in behavior. The communities did not, and seemed to perceive change as a threat and possibly another form of oppression. The discourse of the enlightened and the discourse of the oppressed seemed to be at loggerheads. The way to break the jam that was acceptable to both was through the ministrations of the theatrical. But to do this, the theatre for development projects had to access the safe havens of the oppressed so as to turn the offstage discourses to the advantage (presumably) of the oppressed. In other words, they had to learn the techniques of the Sesotho equivalent of the *imbongi*. It was to be the standard educational ploy of moving from the known to the unknown, of taking the known offstage discourses and using them in a public forum so as to incorporate the new ideas from the discourse of those outside the community. In other words, to avoid the seeming ambiguity of the agenda coming from outside, the facilitators had to “deceive” the communities into believing their honorable intentions.

The first stage was to identify the types of overt theatrical strategies that were known to the communities. Mda quotes Kamlongera when he says that

\[ \ldots \text{it is not a cliché to say that indigenous performances in Africa contain within them some functional element. In most cases this takes the form of a didactic statement. Whilst performers might engage in doing spectacular movements and dances, they might also carry within the performances special messages or lessons} \]
to some members of the audiences. Some work in Theatre for Development is a direct result of recognizing this characteristic in indigenous performances.⁶⁷

Mda notes a number of these traditions amongst the Sesotho, including folk-tales, riddles, poetry, proverbs, and, specifically, because it was these that he used extensively in his work, the lifela and the lithoko.⁶⁸ These systems are all used as methods of knowledge transfer in the communities. For Mda, “when the performance modes with which the people have a high level of medium literacy are introduced, the whole village gathered and participated.”⁶⁹ In other words, when the community recognized elements or entire sections of the offstage discourses (in relation to the interventionists) being presented, they engaged in the process.

However, the company also relied extensively on a perceived ability amongst the community to “act.” A vignette illustrates this effectively. At a particular moment in the presentation of the Trade Union Play a woman was asked to enter the fictional world of the play and make her contribution. She stated that she had not “learn(t) what to say” (in other words she had not memorized any lines). The catalyst then responded:

You are talking with me now, but you did not learn those lines beforehand. When you go out of your house in the morning and meet your friend, you do not first memorize what you are going to say to her. She also has not memorized how she is going to answer you. All you have is the topic that you want to talk about, and you each express your views on it. It is exactly the same thing here. We have our


⁶⁸Mda *People* 64. The lifela is a “form of poetry which is also a vehicle for social commentary” and which came about after the advent of the migrant mining laborer. The lithoko describes in poetry form the history of the community. See also 73-76.

⁶⁹Mda *People* 114.
topic. It is on the problems of strikes and the part played by trade unions in causing them. All we have to do now is to is to create situations around this topic, and act them out.⁷⁰

For the company, acting in life and acting in this performance space were nearly identical. Mda notes the blurring of the realities of the stage and the realities of life. He assumed that because one could have a conversation in private (in an offstage moment), one could also have conversation in public (the same conversation in the onstage moment), and that the two events would not necessarily be different. He assumed, therefore, that in the community of the oppressed, the two dialogues would be the same because they were shared by the moments of oppression. Furthermore, he assumed that because all in the audience were in the same predicament, they would accept as viable the contents of a such a conversation. In much the same way as Boal did, he assumed that the walking onto the stage aesthetized all things “onstage.” As such the stage became a safe haven for the conversation, for Mda.

Yet Mda maintains that “the skills of acting can be learned through improvisation. Indeed the narrative itself can be structured through improvisation.”⁷¹ This seems to contradict Mda’s previous contention. There are two ways to resolve this conundrum. The first is to assume that Mda was referring to “theatrical” acting when he refers here to acting. In other words, this was the type of training that he might give to the catalysts or interventionists who were being prepared to go into the field. The second is to assume that the people needed to learn, through improvisation (that is, through trial and error

⁷⁰Mda People 144.

⁷¹Mda People 22.
while actually attempting to do it in a safe space), how to move across discourses. Mda proposes that this is done through improvisation. In this line of thinking, different situations need different ways of acting. Therefore, for a new situation (i.e. one in which there is a change in behavior) the ways of behaving in that situation needed to be experimented with. If there was to be an intervention in a community, then the community needed to be able to rehearse strategies, and to confront problem areas in that community. This, of course, was Mda's goal with Comgen theatre.

Mda documented and analyzed four plays in some detail to illustrate how he saw these three concepts of theatre as technology, theatre as conscientization and theatre for development, work. In many ways his experiments tie into Mazrui's call for development in terms of conflict management, economic interpenetration, developing the bridge "between tradition and modernity" and the experimentation with "new shapes and patterns of relationships" (in this case democracy).72

Although Mda was not directly involved in the creation of the first of the plays, namely Kopano ke Matla! -- the play's title translates as "Unity is Strength!" -- (it was created under the guidance of Andrew Horn), Mda documented and analyzed the play, and it's intentions and reception. He claimed that the play could be seen as an example of Agitprop theatre, where the purpose of the play was simply to inform, instruct and sway the audience to adopt a particular course of action. The play was commissioned by the University of Lesotho's Institute for Extra Mural Studies and was to explore the importance of community co-operatives.

72Mazrui xiii.
The play addresses three worlds: the world of the contract miner (which became a recurring theme in all of the plays), the world of the community without a co-operative and the world of the community with one.\textsuperscript{73} The themes that link the three worlds were the search for capital for survival, and the male-female relationships. For the miners, this means going to South Africa and earning a (meager) salary working in the mines, having most of the money transferred to the central bank of Lesotho, which then makes the money available to the wives at home, or to the husbands when they return. This system was a source of some discontent, as there was no interest accumulated (for the miners) on the money while it is in the bank, although there is suspicion that the interest that is generated is siphoned off by “the government.” For the wives staying at home, survival was by and large through subsistence farming. It is to this that the play addressed itself, as it was thought that the contract labor system was too insecure an approach to capital accumulation (and all the plays speak of miners being laid off from work for various reasons).

The co-operative system (both in terms of Mazrui’s new set of political and economic relationships, and because of the bridge between the traditional and the “modern”) that the play was attempting to “sell” was based on a shared and communal way of farming. In other words, resources were to be pooled so that bulk buying and selling could be done and thus the cost of production lowered and the rewards increased. Also, implements needed for the farm could be shared. The two concerns raised by the

\textsuperscript{73}For a discussion of the play, see Mda People 98-115. For extracts from the play and a scenario summary, see Mda People 190-198.
discussion after the play illustrated the new way of thinking that co-operative farming would need, namely, the concept of a shared responsibility to work hard and contribute fairly to the process, and the systems of dealing with aberrant behavior (thieves, and lazy people, particularly). Both the thief and the lazy person were represented as males. The person who was against the scheme was also male.

These tensions between male, contract laborer, distant husband, lazy person and thief on the one hand, and female, farmer, present wife, hard working and responsible person on the other were potentially hazardous for the effectiveness of the play. To circumvent this ambiguity the play created the male figures as theatrically more interesting (in their dialogue and outrageous behavior), but less effective in terms of action. In this way the play diffused a potentially explosive domestic situation, but did not clear up the ambiguities and deceptions. Nevertheless, the debate between the men and the women, and between the co-operative and non co-operative characters in the play opened out the situation for consideration by the audience.

It is the debating aspect of the play that drove the action. Mda noted, for example, as a description of a moment early on in the play: "The women then discuss the fact that a neighbouring village has established a co-operative society. One woman objects to co-ops because of the corruption they generate; another on party political grounds."\textsuperscript{74} One notes immediately the potentially divisive nature of the interchange. Also, the fact that the party political grounds show efforts to address the structural aspects of such divisions amongst people is being considered. Even the miner who is boastful of his earning

\textsuperscript{74}Mda \textit{People} 191.
capacity at the beginning of the play, and who subsequently loses his job and has to return cap in hand to beg for a place in the co-operative that is established, has at first to debate (or negotiate) his deal with the community. Furthermore, the man who is the treasurer and who steals money and produce from the co-operative, is allowed to return after a debate.

The culture of debate is seen as one of the basic tenants of a democratic process. As such, the play encourages democracy as a system for problem solving. Yet here again, the underpinning philosophy is that the people “know” what is fair and appropriate behavior. The new knowledge was to be supplied, and the community would have the resources to deal with the rest.

The play ends with everybody happily and effectively involved in creating a communal co-operative. Mda had two major objections to the play and the way it was constructed. He claimed that the play was a “top down” event in that the research for the play was carried out and implemented following the guidelines of the Institute for Extra Mural Studies. His recorded interchange with Andrew Horn, the leader of the acting company, demonstrates his problem. Horn was accused of a “liberal and comfortable way” of doing theatre by moving from the outside to the inside of the community. “I don’t think for a doctor to cure gonorrhea he must have gonorrhea. I don’t think it is solely for the poor to cure poverty,” Horn responded. (He then went on to suggest, by way of ameliorating the situation, that the actors were all people who had come from communities such as the ones that the play was presented in). Mda responded by suggesting that “Horn’s medical doctor/gonorrhea analogy sums up the philosophy
behind the work of agitprop practitioners in theatre-for-development, and its undemocratic nature. The practitioner is an external agent with superior knowledge of the ailments of poverty among the peasants, and of the most suitable cures for such ailments.” He then argued that the peasants were forced to remain passive, and that this was not good.75

Mda insisted that education, and development by extension, would only take place once the community had actively been engaged in the theatrical moment. By this he meant that they should be physically involved, but also be involved in contributing to the debate. By sitting passively, or simply listening, one is rendered unable to confront the dualities and complexities in a silent yet engaged way.

The second play that Mda considered, and one in which he himself had a very active part, was the play that he labeled as Participatory Agitprop, namely, the Rural Sanitation Play.76 Mda noted that in early 1986, Marotholi Travelling Theatre was approached by the Rural Sanitation Project (RSP) of the Ministry of Health to create a play to reinforce their campaign in the southern district of Mohale’s Hoek. A new type of toilet, the Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrine, was being introduced, and the campaign’s main feature was the dissemination of information on how the latrine worked and how to construct one.77

Included in their brief was the transfer of information concerning all matters pertinent to defecation and the transfer of diseases through perceived unhygienic habits. This

75Mda People 105.
76For a detailed discussion of the play see Mda People 115-133. For extracts from the play and a scenario description, see Mda People 199-207.
77Mda People 115.
information should contain guidance to change behavior in terms of diarrhoea and
diseases of similar nature, rehydration, control of flies, hand-washing, and the
construction, maintenance and benefits of the VIP system.

To do this Mda was confronted with intimidating problems. He had to change
behavior patterns that had been in the communities for a long time, (and were therefore
considered “natural”). In this sense he had to find ways of achieving Mazrui’s call for the
construction of a bridge between the old and the new. Mda had also to replace these
“old” views with technology and equipment that was seen to be coming from the
dominant regime, and here he had to manage Mazrui’s perceived tensions between
different groups. Mda had to do all this in such a way that the idea for the replacement
appeared to be coming from the community itself, because the new structures of
democracy which he wanted to foster called for this approach.

Mda tackled the problem by drawing on the knowledge of the experts on latrines
and sanitation. Then he turned to the community to find the moment in that community
that could be used as an entrance point (in this case the medically incorrect procedure --
through the traditional use of an enema -- for the treatment of a child sick from
diarrhoea). Finally, before putting the play together through improvisation, he got his
actors to enter the community so that he, and they, could draw on the feelings, attitudes
and behavior patterns of the community in the construction of the play. Of course, it was
their own perceptions of these feelings, attitudes that were considered.

The play deals with a little girl who becomes ill with diarrhoea following “bad”
hygienic patterns in the village. A traditional healer is called in who prescribes an enema.
The girl gets worse -- this undercuts the community system of dealing with these problems -- and eventually a health worker is summoned who demonstrates the rehydration system, which is administered to the girl who recovers. A discussion ensues on the various necessities for better hygiene approaches, and the new latrine is explained, discussed and demonstrated. The community is encouraged to adopt the new technology and the play ends with a traditional song and dance.

Mda used two basic methods to draw the audience into the action (although only in discussion format, as he points out). The first was to use traditional modes of presentation at strategic points (songs, dances, and the ever present *sefa*la)\(^7\) and the second was through stopping the action at nodal points (for his agenda) and throwing out questions to the audience. An example illustrates this (as well as some of the other dilemmas in the play, and I will comment on these during the course of the extract.) One of the company actors plays LILOCHE:

LILOCHE (one of the actors)*( to audience): Are there village health workers in your village?

(This is a neutral question. No-one can really get into trouble by answer this question.)

AUDIENCE: Yes!
LILOCHE: Do you help them, since you hear that they help us free of charge?

(This question is loaded, as it assumes that the health worker is not paid, and is therefore generously providing her services as a volunteer. If the acting company is an organ of the government -- and given the fact they are in the employ of the Ministry of Health, this is a possibility -- then there is a danger in answering in the negative. This danger may

\(^7\) *Sefa*la is the singular form of the word *lifela.*
indeed be the fact that the worker might be removed from the community. This is borne out in the answer: )

    WOMAN FROM THE AUDIENCE: Yes, the one we have in the village, we help her.
    LILOCHE: With what do you help her?
    SAME WOMAN IN THE AUDIENCE: Anything she needs.

(The woman has played it safe, and has spoken the words that any authority would want to here -- all is well in the community).

    ANOTHER WOMAN FROM THE AUDIENCE (angrily): No, we don’t help her because she is a whore who spends all her time whoring at the dispensary. We do not help her. We attend to our own work.

( It is unclear whether the woman’s anger is directed at the health worker, or at the audience member that seems to have lied, in her view. The problem is compounded because it would seem inevitable that the health worker of that community was present, and as such was being accused of a heinous act in the public sphere of the performance. Mda did not answer to this. It is an instance of what can occur when the fictional world of the play spills directly over into the real world of the performance and its environments. Meanwhile, Liloche the actor and the character as the father of the sick child, is in a predicament. The actor needs the support of the health worker in the community to undergird the importance of the change in sanitation habits. He has two conflicting arguments and needs to mediate. His fictitious wife helps him:)

    LILOCHE’S WIFE: So some help, others don’t. I for one would suggest that she should be helped.

(Here the “wife” renegotiates the aesthetic space by acting as a fictitious character who has an opinion about the real moment. Furthermore, she allows each person in the
audience the right to his or her own opinion, and allows the potential conflict to defuse. What she doesn’t do, in my opinion, is to address the structural issues, such as poverty, deprivation and “lack” of education, that lead to the necessity of a volunteer health worker, nor to the reasons why the accusations leveled at the health worker’s subsistence methods might be necessary. She simply smooths over the situation. 79

The play clearly was meant as a conscientization exercise that would lead to action. The action here would be the implementation of new sanitary systems and practices. The situation in real life would have had the little girl receiving the (incorrect) treatment she did at the hands of the traditional healer. However, the structures of the community would have remained intact. The possibilities of a change in attitudes and knowledge after the intervention were clear. What is impossible to assess is whether these behavior changes did take place after the intervention or not, as there is no follow-up data.

Mda does note, at the end of the discussion on this play, that the intellectual community was deeply divided over the effectiveness of the VIP latrines. He notes an acrimonious exchange between researchers who are either for or against the implementation of the schemes. This in itself illustrates the dilemma of this type of intervention by people that are not actively involved in the communities. 80 If the technical specialists themselves are ambiguous about the worth of the new development, how much more must the information coming from the projects become diffuse and

79 Mda People 204-205.

80 Mda, People 125-126.
diversified by the theatre company, so that the chances of ambiguous behavior changes and value systems are compounded.

The third play was an attempt by the theatre company at Simultaneous Dramaturgy in a play entitled The Agro-Action Play. The work was commissioned by a Non-Governmental (welfare) Organization (NGO) run from Germany, whose objective was to look after the interests of the rural communities in Third World countries. In Lesotho, the project entailed a food-for-work program, where the work that the communities were commissioned by the NGO to do entailed both agricultural and infrastructural development programs. Each member of the program also received a small stipend. The idea was to create a program that would encourage agricultural self-reliance amongst the community and thus break the spiral of dependency on external food aid. It was never intended as a system of labor that would be self-perpetuating, but simply a method to reactivate a desire to be forward looking.

In Mazrui’s terms, the project would foster “economic interpenetration among different strata and sections of society,” it would promote the development of new technologies and the closer working of the town and the rural areas. Furthermore, if Mda succeeded, it would occur through the workings of a (structurally) new system of governance, namely a democratic one.

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81 Mazrui 277.
The NGO discovered that “the people were unhappy about some aspects of the programme, but were unable to articulate their discontent.” The Marotholi Travelling Theatre company was asked to find a way of bringing the grumblings of the offstage moments of the community into an onstage or public place, so that solutions could be negotiated. Research by the theatre company which was carried out in the communities prior to the construction of the play showed that the villagers did not trust the NGO as they thought the food-for-labor was simply another system of exploitation, with the NGO taking all the profits. Conversely, some villagers refused to work unless they were paid in food (which they had not grown themselves). In either case, the villagers’ dependency on food-aid was the cause of the stumbling block. The company had to find ways of breaking the perceived structural understanding of food as a method to induce labor, by suggesting that labor might of its own accord be for self-gain (i.e. growing food for selling). The stipend was an added incentive.

The approach of the theatre company was to investigate nodal points in the conflict in this regard in the villagers’ lives, and to develop story outlines with the villagers around those nodal points. Here the strategy was to develop referential outlines that could lead to the direct involvement of the villagers, because the referentiality would be village specific. In other words, the offstage spaces would be clearly recognized and recognizable to the villagers. Furthermore, the conflictual moments in the offstage spaces would be presented for discussion and resolution. This would be done in the public, or

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82Mda People 128. For an analysis of the performances, see Mda People 126-143. For extracts from the play, and a synopsis, see Mda People 208-220.
onstage, space of the village itself, using theatricality as the safety mechanism for the movement from onstage to offstage.

During their research the theatre company discovered that there was in fact a plethora of concerns that the villagers wanted raised. These included the problems of theft and destruction, the issues of leadership, the concerns of the community that there might be exploitation and external influences (by the German run and sponsored NGO), and the perceived need for foreign aid. This was in line with the problem of the interrelatedness of this type of conflict. Development (social engineering) has to occur across a broad front, as Mazrui has pointed out.\textsuperscript{83} It is extremely difficult to separate out one strand of the fabric of a society and address that strand only. Marotholi's answer was to consider that they would have to do a large number of plays to address all the issues.

Nevertheless, the activists left the community and created a play which reflected these nodal points. To do this they again drew on the experiences of the mines and the money it generated (the economic factors), the impact this had on the relationships between men and women, and the problems of dishonesty in the village. However, because they were dealing with the German (NGO) intervention factor, they also drew in governance in general, and the village government in particular (in the form of the village's chieftainess). They were particularly concerned with setting up an understanding of how authority and discipline could be imposed and implemented, as a way of ensuring that those who opted for the scheme would be left alone to develop.

\textsuperscript{83}Mazrui's entire introduction provides the thinking behind the structures for this type of development.
In broad terms the play tells the story of Size, portrayed as a lazy man who drinks and who is against the communal gardens that the NGO wishes to establish. Size claims that "our wives have been turned into slaves, into bulldozers that have breasts. They wake up in the morning working for the Mojeremane (Germans). This is German exploitation of our women. I remember how beautiful our women used to be!"\textsuperscript{84} The interrelationship between the people in the village as people and as economic entities is perceived. This is a standard offstage claim made about the women working in the village. Size, in a fit of rage at what he perceives the work to be doing to the community, raids the gardens, fishes in the dam and lets his horse eat of the produce. He is found out and the village is asked what should be done with him. In the performance the form of punishment and the way of enforcing the punishment was debated. This drew in not only the government as an authority, but also the reliance of the community on its own resources to deal with the culprit. A cardinal point is reached in the slide between the reality of the real villagers' approach and the play, or fictional world, when the wife of Size states (in role), "But now here is the thief. He is my husband. How do I deal with this matter? I find that taking him to the police will be a difficult matter. Also you heard how he threatened (to kill) me..."\textsuperscript{85}

This nodal point set up the movement between the fictional world and the real world. It foregrounded the interrelationship between economic survival, family loyalty and individual safety. It set the debate in the public space of the play and the village. It

\textsuperscript{84}Mda \textit{People} 209.

\textsuperscript{85}Mda \textit{People} 211.
also accessed the role of the women who were married to migrant laborers as opposed to those who were married to the men who stay in the local community. These were all structural concerns (in terms of politics and society) for those who lived in the village. As such, the play had moved from simply being an approach to conscientizing the villagers to the advantages of the communal gardens, to the point where the very nature of the village itself was foregrounded. In this, Mazrui’s goals for development had also been foregrounded.

This was carried through in the debate around the democratic nature of setting up committees in the village. The two structures that were involved were the “traditional” role of the chieftain or chieftainess in the village, and the role of a democratically elected group of people who have a responsibility to their constituency. This debate considered whether Size should be on the committee so that he could see “from the inside” whether the gardens were effective or not.

In the meanwhile the Size’s friend, a miner who has gone off to earn money so that the women don’t have to work in the fields for money, returns from the mines, having been fired for being involved in a strike. He finds to his horror that the nest-egg he had been building up has been squandered by his wife. He becomes an energetic supporter of the gardens. The documented performance ends, however, with a heated debate about the role the trade unions and specifically the role of the Basotho in the South African trade unions. There is a call by the community for another play on this matter.

What is clear from Mda’s description is that the villagers are keen to use the format of play as debate. Hence the call for the next play on trade unions. In the next
play one discovers that the demands for plays and more plays continues, each one calling for more. What seems to be occurring is that the naming is occurring, the reflection is taking place in the form of debates, and the action is taking place in terms of the debates leading directly to the calling for more debates, and not to action, change and development.

The final play, The Trade Union Play\textsuperscript{86} completed the trajectory that Mda envisaged, from agitprop theatre to the point where the audience became involved in the “writing” of the resolutions to the conflicts, in the acting spaces of performance. In the previous play the Marotholi Theatre Company had encouraged the audiences to be involved simply through debate. In other words, the movement was from simply presenting the offstage discourse in an onstage situation, to opening the contradictions up for discussion in the onstage space. Their purpose with this play was to get the audience actively to participate in the construction of the event by having them enter the performance space and take on or over the various roles. In this sense the audience member would forgo the “safety” of the communal (as audience member) and enter the acting space as actor. The audience member’s offstage space would be physicalized.

The documentation of the play was very confusing for a number of reasons. Firstly, although the play was presented in a Lesotho village, the play took place almost exclusively in the fictional world (when they were in the fictional world) in a mine compound in South Africa. Thus the clues to move between the fictional world and the

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\textsuperscript{86}For a discussion and analysis of the play see Mda People 143-156. For excerpts and a synopsis of the play see Mda People 221-233.
Lesotho world have to be very carefully constructed, and they were not. Following from this, the catalysts, or interventionists, frequently lost there place in the play, in their drive not only to move the fictional world along in a structured way, but also to deal with the conflict that was generated in the views of the audience. At the same time they had to remember whether they were actors in the fictional world themselves, or whether they were simply catalysts at particular moments in the action. An example illustrates this. One of the audience members had been persuaded to “become” a union leader, and he announced a strike. MOTALE (one of the actors from the company) stated: “So, now we are going on strike. We want more wages. Should we strike? No, let me not ask that, for we are going to strike. You heard at the meeting that we are going to strike. What will happen if we strike?” The first sentence clarified things for the present audience. The second sentence took the action back to the fictional world. The third sentence hovered between an event that occurred before the announced strike, and the actor’s desire to promote a discussion of striking as an option. As such it also indicated that the actor had “lost his place” in the multiple worlds (and thus foregrounded the offstage world of the actor as a forgetful artist). The next sentence located the audience back in the fictional world. And the final sentence located the debate in that fictional world.

This moving between worlds, and the consequent re-framing of the events each time was difficult to follow. It became even more convoluted when the audience members who were drawn into the action had differing views on the role, nature and functioning processes of the National Union of Mineworkers (the trade union under discussion). When these positions changed (whether by choice or coercion) following
argument, persuasion and added information, it became very difficult to follow who was
acting in the onstage position to defend a stand in the onstage position, who was acting in
the onstage position because that was what they believed, who was acting in the onstage
position to defend an offstage position (to impress a girlfriend, for example), who had
never left the offstage position and therefore assumed that the stage was a safe place, who
were the actors and which world they were in, which actors were acting, facilitating,
intervening and at what time, and was the intervention to hurry the action along, to
diffuse conflict moments, or to change the subject because their (pre-performance) goals
and understandings had been reached. Each moment became fraught with ambiguity.

Two things were resolved in the play. Firstly, it was decided that far more plays
were necessary to explore the situation, and secondly, that the women (who hardly take
part in the latter part of the play as the action became more and more embedded in the
world of the trade unions) had a clearer understanding of the complexities of the issues at
stake.

There was one scene in the play that worked very effectively, according to Mda’s
account. The group had decided to act out what would happen if there were a strike, and
what would happen if there were no strike. They tackled the latter first. Mda relates:

_The migrants and the catalysts once more assume different roles. . . . They go
down to work. They work very hard. They are mistreated by their bosses, who
even physically abused them. At first the catalysts thought that this was going to
be a very boring scene, since they did not know exactly what to show. But it
turned out to be hilarious. Work songs are introduced, some of which the
catalysis had never heard of before. A lot of mime. At the end of the month the_
The contents of the scenes that were improvised were strongly reminiscent of many of the miners' scenes in other South African plays. The reasons for the success of these scenes (and one can judge them "successful" from the amount of mirth generated) was to be found in a number of areas. It would appear that the miners were being given the opportunity to share their working conditions with the women of the community. Not only were they trying to impress the women, but they were also trying to rekindle the camaraderie of the mine situation itself. Consequently, the mine onstage discourse was filtered through the offstage discourse of the miners at home. The discourse was also presented in an onstage way (in performance) to impress the women, for offstage reasons. But this was also for onstage reasons, namely to bolster the idea of the necessity of the strike. As such, the danger and the lack of pay was (possibly) accentuated for both dramatic and argumentative effect. The style of the presentation itself was reminiscent of a number of others in plays of the times. The use of strong physical action, coupled with song and dance, accentuated the solidarity of the mining community, but also offset the strong verbal action of the debate. Hence, the presentation became a physical representation of one side of the debate -- consequently the action was deliberately one-

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87Mda People 230.


89In this regard see the work of Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka. See also my discussion on Woza Albert! in the next chapter.
sided, accentuating the hardships. Ambiguous interpretations were “removed,” only to be replaced with “one-sidedness.” Finally, the fact that the catalysts did not know some of the songs demonstrates the solidarity of the miner community -- there were some areas that the miners knew more about than the catalysts did.

The lack of clarity in the production resulted from this multiplicity of discourses and agendas in the performance. The actor was assumed to be an actor who could master the onstage and offstage (sub-textual) elements of the different characters he or she was portraying. Then the actor was presumed to be able to deal with the onstage and offstage discourses of the village in which the intervention was taking place. Furthermore, the actor had an agenda to follow through on, and to do that the actor had be a facilitator (he or she had to circumvent conflicts, keep the flow of the performance directed, and make sure the information was carried across) and be provocative within the bounds of what was safe, and more particularly what was safe for the community in which the event was taking place. All of this had to happen in dialogue and in physical action. The only way all of this could succeed was if all of this occurred either in the agreed upon onstage discourse of a play, or in an agreed upon offstage discourse, like a tavern or a classroom. In these two ways the strands of power could be separated out to some degree, at least. If they were not, there occurred the type of ambiguous situation that Mda describes.

The same type of confusion must reign in the minds and actions of the audience, as some of the examples quoted have illustrated. Not only do they have to operate in the minefield of the power politics of relationships inside the village, nor also the reactions of the community in the public space to what they might say in the public space (which they
may or may not have brought from the offtage space), but they also have to enter the world of the play, and this world fluctuates from the offtage spaces to the onstage spaces of the miners, but also to the offtage and onstage spaces of the performance. Thus, although the villagers who got up and became actors in the play under construction seemed to be doing effectively (as actors) according to the way that Mda transcribed the performance, but they had to know that when the performance closed and the catalysts left to go home, then not only were the ideas that were raised, made visible and reflected upon, but the power positions (or dynamics within relationships) that were raised, were also to remain behind. It is extremely difficult in the middle of a heated, recriminatory argument to claim that one was only acting. It leads to the question as to when one was not acting.

Thus, although Mda set out with the best of intentions (and the intentions of development are always worthy ones), the end result was an ambiguous one. Mda failed for three reasons. Firstly he had great difficulty in documenting and explaining the very dynamics of theatricality. This was accentuated by his sliding from one set of realities to another without clear clues and framing devices. Secondly, he did not see that the power dynamics (as opposed to knowledge and debating dynamics) that existed in a community were hard to judge, and therefore the consequences of the interventions were potentially very useful but were also hazardous. This was underlined by fact that behavior changes were not demonstrated, although attitude changes seemed to be made overt in the plays. Finally, Mda drew on what he deemed to be theatrical moments in the community (the lifela, and so on) but this did not carry through into the actual performances. It was only
when the miners present their improvisation, that the blending of traditions (and consequent development in the theatrical) took place. The way Mda used it was simply to find a way into the community’s frame. It was not integrated into the style of argument, for example.

Mda’s role (and that of the Marotholi Travelling theatre) was to act as an interlocutor between the community and the powers that influence development. As such, they seemed to serve the same functions as the imbongi. Mda’s task -- to conscientize the communities -- strikes problems when the very discourse that would allow the clarifying of the ambiguities of power, is not clearly understood. The problems that Mda encountered, are reflected in the work of the DramAidE Project of Kwazulu Natal.

4.2.2 The DramAidE Programme in Kwazulu-Natal.

The fundamental problem in AIDS and AIDS education is contained in the very nature of the affliction. The predominant spread of AIDS is through sexual intercourse.90 In the South African region of Kwazulu-Natal, the spread of AIDS through sexual intercourse has reached epidemic proportions, although the “second generation” of AIDS sufferers, namely the child born with AIDS after the mother had been infected, is becoming prominent. Intercourse between male and female is the primary transmitter of the disease, but intercourse between male and male, specifically in the jails and the single

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90The fact that HIV is the forerunner for AIDS will not be considered here, as very little of the work done by DramAidE uses this in its discussions.
sex hostels, is not infrequent. Further factors to bear in mind in South Africa are the propensity to place pass-offenders in jail at such frequent intervals, and the size of the migrant population living on the mines, for example.\footnote{The pass offences, and the jail routines, will be discussed in greater detail in the Chapter five.}

Sexual intercourse has been considered in two ways: biologically (or materially), and sociologically or psychologically (through relationships). Information on the physical process can readily be transferred and learned. However, relationships between sexual partners are embedded in cultural habits and expectations, in social conditions and dynamics, and, consequently, in the very power dynamics of the community. The concern with relationships places the debate in the camp that considers the “ideas” about life. As such, any change of behavior that leads to a curtailing of the spread of the disease, must be founded on the very fabric of the society.

The vast, and predictable, majority of South African who became infected with AIDS, either are dying, or have died of it. Death is a biological fact. Survival is a sociological concern, as is the movement toward a dignified death. Approaches to education on the disease dealt with curtailing or modifying certain behaviors. Thus the educational approach (typified in the DramAidE Programme) is one where death is not frequently considered, but the prevention of the disease is foregrounded.

This positive approach is reflected in the Mission Statement of the DramAidE Programme:

\begin{itemize}
  \item We see our mission as follows:
  \begin{itemize}
    \item to use participatory drama and other interactive methodologies to control the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}
* to offer life skills education that challenges young people; and their parents, teachers and peers; to take responsibility for shaping their lives, their environment and their community.

* To foster the acquisition of life skills within our own organisation to empower us to pass on these skills to others.  

The second and third mission statements rely on the fostering of “life skills” as the basis for their intervention. These life skills are geared towards “taking responsibility” for choices made by individuals. This in essence means that the choices that young people make must be put up for scrutiny, and should be measured against the following criteria: Did the action lead to infection? or Did the action show that the person took responsibility for his or her actions? The answer to the first question can be correlated statistically, or materially, through medical examination. The answer to the second question can only be gauged in terms of two possible criteria. The first criterium might assume a “universal” paradigm of behavior as a basis for the answer. The second criterium might assume a culturally specific basis for the answer.

It is at the nexus of the universal and the culturally specific that the prevention of AIDS might enter. In other words, the educators’ problems would arise when the universal and the culture of the community clash on the issues of the relationships that cluster around sexual behavior. To measure “responsible” behavior in a specific community might very well mean that the student had “gone against” the cultural norms of the community. He or she might therefore have acted responsibly with regard to the

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93 The first mission statement is a little mystifying as it suggests the idea of using drama with the microbes that cause the spread of epidemic, which is plainly not what is intended.
“universal” paradigm, but irresponsibly according to the cultural paradigm. This state of affairs would impact on the strategies required for educational systems to develop behavioral change in people.

Dealing with AIDS, therefore, became a very real concern for social engineers. All aspects of nation building were directly (if not metaphorically) connected to the development of a new paradigm of behavior. Following Mazrui, new modes of behavior and relationships were to be fused with traditional modes; economic systems had to be adapted to deal with those infected, and more particularly to negotiate different systems of economic behavior (such as bride-prices); and ways had to be developed to resolve the conflicts that arose from the spread of the virus. Moreover, the process had to become a national enterprise, because of the nature of the South African economy and its prevalent migrant labor system.

The evaluation of the program revealed many contradictions. Knowledge transfer of the spread of AIDS was greatly enhanced (and this was documented in both qualitative and quantitative research on the program), but all of the evaluations revealed the difficulty of behavioral change. Put another way, although onstage declarations of increased knowledge seemed to suggest the inevitability of the movement of the onstage to the offstage discourses, this did in fact not happen. The power of the offstage was of such a nature, that the penetration of the onstage into that discourse had to be reconsidered. Interpretation was not inevitable. This duality was enhanced by the

94Mazrui xiii, 277 and 278.
assumption of a “universal” onstage discourse of behavior, values and norms, and culturally specific offstage and counter discourse.

The Project had three components. The intervention agenda developed around the “presentation of a theatre programme and drama workshops designed to inform scholars of AIDS and AIDS prevention.” To do this the group had a theatre program which was presented in the schools, a drama workshop and related lessons, and an Open Day “presented by the school for parents.” The second component was “the application of an attitude and knowledge test . . . as a means to assess the efficacy of the drama intervention, “ and the third component was to be interviews with parents, teachers and students “in order to explore their views about AIDS, sex and sex education, before and after the project.” The project thus set out to do both qualitative and quantitative research, and the interventions were only partly “top down,” proclaiming a potential universal value.

The choice of drama as an intervention strategy drew much from the experiences of the originator and driving force behind the project, Lynn Dalrymple of the University of Zululand. She in turn drew her work from the Theatre-in-Education and Drama-in-Education work of Gavin Bolton, Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote and Cecily O’Neill. This was substantially augmented by her understanding of Ross Kidd’s work on Theatre

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95 In South Africa, the terms for school-goers are “scholars” and “students.”

for Development, and the readings of Augusto Boal’s first book, Theatre of the Oppressed.\textsuperscript{97} Her claim was that

dramatic play is part of the growth and development of all young people. Therefore, to extend and draw on natural elements of human behaviour and make use of the educational potential seems obvious. What are the significant features of ‘dramatic play’? Drama takes place as part of a fictional or imagined situation - it is, therefore, different from real life. However, the experience of drama is a real experience involving an interaction with others and allowing an expression of ideas and feelings. These feelings or attitudes can be safely explored in role-play without ‘real’ consequences. . . . it makes use of games and role-play to explore ideas at a deeper level and encourages discussion amongst the participants. It is an approach that encourages the participants to express their personal experiences, thoughts and feelings, and to recognize that there are different options open to them in their choice of behavior patterns.\textsuperscript{98}

There are a number of key issues that arise from this understanding of drama in an educational setting. The use of role-play to explore life was also seen as a mechanism not to change life, but to find ways of coping with life. In this sense, where there was conflict in the society, role-play would foreground ways of solving the conflict, but it might also provide ways of circumventing the conflict. As such, and to use an example from the AIDS interventions, abstinence (the material denial of sexual intercourse) might be replaced by a redefinition of trust and love (the ideational reworking of the problem). In this way the problem of AIDS is not solved, but it is simply “theorized.”


\textsuperscript{98}Dalrymple and du Toit 21.
Also arising from the justification is the concern over safety. The assumption that
the restrictions of the onstage discourse will disappear when the discourse is moved to the
improvisational aspect, is doubtful. The offstage space is supposedly “safe,” because it is
to be used to explore the relational aspects of society, but it inevitably becomes an
“onstage” space for all the participants. In their research analysis, the Life Skills
Programme found, for example, that among Black peer groups, “power plays in
relationships was a central theme,” that “the boys felt that their girlfriends have to listen
to them and not question them,” and that “girls could talk to their peers about this, but
because they are all going through it, this communication was more of a sharing than a
resolving.” They also found that “parent-children relationships were based on fear, duty
and rebellion,” and that, when it came to teachers, pupils wanted to talk to same gender
teachers, and that the girls feared the male teachers.

The project therefore had an impossible task in the way it was set up. If the
driving goal was to change knowledge about the conditions of the spread of AIDS, then
this could be done simply by augmenting the information that people already had, and by
couching such information in the language of the culture. The knowledge could thus be
assimilated through Boal’s “osmosis.” If the next stage of the process was to change
attitudes, then this too could be accomplished by a clearer understanding of what is
permitted or encouraged in the onstage discourse. This may very well demonstrate that
attitudes have changed. However, if the final goal of the project is to change behavior

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100DramAidE Staff. The Way forward? 281 and 280.
patterns, that is to say, to rearrange the entire offstage discourse so that even in the sequestered sites of unmonitored interrelationships the behavior is entirely different, then this is a very difficult task. It involves rewriting, as it were, the history of the community to suggest that many of the values that have been held for centuries were “wrong,” and needed to be changed. It would seem that, within a community where the relationships between men and women are central to the existence of the community, this task is almost insurmountable in the format of persuasion as the DramAidE project envisions.

This is reflected in the analysis of some of the plays presented in Open Day format. According to Preston-Whyte: “The message of the plays is that without major structural changes in gender relations and in the distribution of power and resources in Kwazulu-Natal, behaviour cannot change.”\[101\] She does note that three goals were achieved with the project. Students were no longer passive learners. Furthermore, the actual topic of sex was moved from the offstage discourse into the onstage and public space. Finally, the discrepancies between the onstage discourse and the behavior it required, and the offstage discourse and the behavior it required, as well as the demands for the future, all met in one space and were opened up for debate. Preston-Whyte speaks of the identification of “the barriers to putting into practice the basic message of survival.”\[102\]


\[102\] Preston-Whyte “Foreword” 3-4.

227
The fundamental driving force that seemed to prevent the change that the program is attempting lay is fear. This fear extended into peer group pressure (amongst males and among females and together), fear of offending authorities, like parents, teachers and elders, fear of ridicule at the hands of health workers when asking for condoms, fear of charges of promiscuity (or, conversely, lack of “manliness”), and finally the fear of AIDS itself, and the “stigma” that may come with it. Hambridge, for example, documents that boys feared wasting their manhood through abstinence, (or masturbation to relieve perceived biological pressures), fear that if “sperm goes to the head, it will make you mad” or, from the point of view of the women: “Our feelings push us to sex’ or, putting it another way, ‘You don’t think about AIDS if you love someone, but even if he does he enjoys making love so that doesn’t stop him.”

This is the fear of losing someone.

Hambridge also documented the impact of the traditional culture, claiming that many thought that STD’s were caused by the taking of “muti which is given to their girlfriends (by traditional healers) who then pass the STDs to them through sexual intercourse.” The intervention of cultural patterns were at their most striking when the long-term relationships that were constructed according to traditional customs were considered from the point of view of the women in the community. Seidel supported this when she documented that women had survival mechanisms in the community that were

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103 Maria Hambridge “Report of a Case Study on the Impact of DramAidE on STD levels amongst High School Scholars (1995)” in DramAidE Making a Difference? Evaluations of the DramAidE Programme Lynn Dalrymple ed., (Durban and Empangeni: DramAidE, May 1996) 79. Hambridge’s study concludes that there is very little behavioral change. She uses the reporting of Sexually Transmitted Diseases as the basis for her study. She appears to be rather scathing in her commentary, noting that structural changes must occur before behavioral changes can take place.

104 Hambridge 76. “Muti” is a type of traditional medicine.
specifically geared around their sexual abilities, and their fertility. As such, relationships were torn between emancipation and survival, self-esteem and economic necessity, submissiveness and strategic survival, pregnancy and marketability (a woman had to prove that she was fertile before she got married), and finally, the size and quality of the bride-price (or "lobola"). Seidel called these tensions "creative ambiguities."  

Yet, perhaps the most insidious of problems lay in the company itself. As their fourth mission objective, they had set out to foster the required life skills within their own ensemble. As such the evaluations were also done of the company. Harping’s analysis is damaging:

The teams varied enormously in their level of satisfaction with the work they were doing, and in their level of morale. The relationship between the team leader and members was a key factor. Some teams were close to dissolving as some members leave the project or request transfer to other teams or regions. Some teams felt isolated and wanted exposure to new ideas, better communication with management and among teams. Concern was expressed about the future role of DramAidE.  

These conclusions were characterized by the following types of statements: “I think we have to change, but I don’t know how.” “We have to come up with new ideas for ourselves more than for the students.” “Some of the team members are really growing, others are being left behind.” “We need to really listen to what everyone is saying or not saying.” Perhaps the most damning of the replies was: “I feel that we are fighting a losing battle; even many people in our own teams do not use safe sex, and have not be

105Seidel 159-160.

tested (for HIV/AIDS).”\textsuperscript{107} It seems that the company not only could not use their own techniques to solve their own problems, but were entering knowledge and required attitude and behavior changes into the public transcript, without practicing the same in their own offstage spaces.

It would appear that the three major problem areas in the DramAidE Programme consisted of the lack of clear and theorized differentiation between the material aspect of sex and the ideational aspect of the accompanying relationship; the collapsing of the theatrical into the real and the other way around, and thirdly, the shifting spaces of the onstage and the offstage spaces and agendas. This last dimension was made more convoluted by the clash between so-called traditional and “universal” values. DramAidE’s reaction to this seemed to be to specialize eventually in one area only, namely the teaching of Life-skills. These they define as “those skills which are needed by an individual in order to function effectively within the context in which he or she lives.”\textsuperscript{108} These are better defined as coping mechanisms for members of a society.

The projects described and analyzed in this chapter have all followed Mazrui’s call for nation-building and development through a process of social engineering. The methodology that the projects have selected to use is theatre.

In this chapter I discussed some of the problems that ensue from the ambiguities created historically and in practice when the theories Augusto Boal were applied by

\textsuperscript{107}Harpring 203.

Zakes Mda and the Marotholi Travelling theatre, and the DramAidE Programme, in Southern Africa. The shifting of information, attitudes and behaviors from the various onstage and offstage spaces, with their concomitant agendas, to other onstage and offstage spaces, has been shown to pose a host of problems for the practitioners of Theatre for Development. The element of the theatrical (which is defined as the use of role-play), as a methodology, frustrates the pinpointing of moments of truth and moments of manipulation. The shifting spaces and agendas may be useful once one is “in” one of them, but are dangerous when one moves “out” of those spaces. That which has been discovered in the spaces does not necessarily follow the “spect-actors” out of that space. In South Africa, the theatrical as it is presently understood by the practitioners of theatre for development, may therefore be seen not to be an effective method of behavior change.

In the next chapter I will examine the use of a transcript, which has been developed in the offstage position by an oppressed community, in the arena of commercial performance on a “traditional” stage. I will discuss four early plays of Mbongeni Ngema as a representative playwright of South African committed theatre. I will argue that the inhabitants of the offstage spaces demand trust and respect for the activities of the offstage space, and when this is abused by a member of that offstage space, particularly for a gain other than the furtherance of the agenda of that offstage space, then the playwright is seen to have committed an act of betrayal.
CHAPTER 5

Ambiguity as represented by Four Popular Plays

As a black South African Mbongeni Ngema is no stranger to the forces of domination in South Africa. Laura Jones' biography of Ngema documents in detail Ngema's background and the hardships, trials and tribulations of his rise to both national and international prominence.¹ Up until the writing of Township Fever!,² Ngema had written three other successful plays:³ Woza Albert! ("Arise, or Come here, Albert!") , Asinamali ("We have no Money!") , and Sarafina!

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¹Laura Jones, Nothing Except Ourselves: The Harsh Times and Bold Theatre of South Africa's Mbongeni Ngema (New York: Penguin, 1994). The biography is written in collaboration with Ngema, and the author spent some time with Ngema writing on Township Fever! and Magic at 4 a.m., both of which are in The Best of Mbongeni Ngema: The Man and his Music (Johannesburg: Skotaville and Via Afrika, 1995). The biography displays much of the awe that Jones holds for Ngema.


³Ngema's "first" play, The Last Generation has very little is written about it, and it was never published. I mention it here only.
Woza Albert! he co-wrote in 1981 with Percy Mtwa and it was later "refined" by Barney Simon at the Market Theatre,\textsuperscript{5} toured the townships of South Africa playing to white, black and "mixed" audiences, and then toured successfully overseas in America and Europe. Ngema and Mtwa were the only cast members.

The third play Asinamali!\textsuperscript{6} ("We have no money!"), he wrote and rehearsed in 1986, following the deaths of a numbers of blacks in the township of Lamontville during a rent boycott.\textsuperscript{7} Asinamali! toured the townships, played the Market Theatre and toured North America starting in Harlem's Roger Furman theatre. It was nominated for one Tony award.

Ngema's next play, Sarafina!,\textsuperscript{8} is a play with music and a cast of some 28 children and deals with the 1976 uprising which was spearheaded by the children in black schools in Soweto. The play was inspired by discussions with Hugh Masekela and Winnie Mandela. Sarafina! opened at the Market Theatre only (June, 1987), then moved to the Mitzi Newhouse Theatre, Lincoln Center, later that year and on to Broadway where it

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\textsuperscript{8}In The Best of Mbongeni Ngema: the Man and his Music (Johannesburg: Skotaville and Via Afrika, 1995) 55-126.
played for 724 performances and spawned two traveling companies (and one in Europe) and a controversial film with Whoopi Goldberg as one of the lead actresses. The play was nominated for 5 Tony awards.

Finally (for this dissertation) Ngema wrote *Township Fever*,\(^9\) which opened in the Market Theatre March, 27, 1990 but bypassed the townships. It played for 8 months at the Market Theatre, moved to the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Majestic Theatre where it opened December 19, 1990 with the idea of going on to Broadway. It closed after just over a month. Ngema received a $70,000 advance on the project, which eventually had a cast and crew of some 80 people, and a budget of 1 million dollars. The play deals with the 1987 strike of the South African Railways and Harbor Workers' Union. This strike eventually cost the South African government some $20 million, involved some 17,000 strikers, led to much destruction of property and the deaths of scab workers. Four union members were accused of the murder of the workers, were tried, and were sentenced to death. The play investigates the motives behind the deaths. Ngema's answer provoked controversy.\(^10\)

Ngema's working methods for the theatre show the revelation of the hidden transcript. His first two plays (*Woza Albert!* and *Asinamali!* ) demonstrate the revelation of the offstage discourse of the dominated group: the stripped down cast (both in size and clothing), the multiple characters (which leads to stereotyping of both oppressors as


\(^{10}\)The inclusion of the American data about his productions helps point the way to an understanding of his development within the hidden transcript argument.
villains and oppressed as heroes of fortitude and rectitude), and the trickster mode as the characters are seen coping with the oppression. Both plays have millennial endings (as does Sarafina!). In Woza Albert!, Morena (Christ) is asked to raise from the dead the great heroes of the struggle. Many of these had died attempting to reveal the hidden transcript (for example, Steve Biko), or to point out the contradictions in the onstage discourse of the oppressor (Victoria Mxenge, the lawyer who was later assassinated, Nelson Mandela, and others). Both earlier plays exhibit the mimicking and vocal talents that might result from the denial of more concrete methods or opportunities of presentation. The plays also demonstrate the presentational style of the imbongi. Both plays use the common Black theatrical metaphor of the prison at some point or the other.

Woza Albert! is written with a seemingly tentative approach, as if testing to see if there would be any backlash in the presentation of confrontation. In many ways the situations are amusing because of the virtuosity of the actors and the "outlandishness" of some of the scenes (for example, the helicopter rides and the attempted destruction of Christ with a nuclear explosion), and the anger is less overt. Ngema and Mtwu seemed hesitant to present the full-blown commitment to the hidden transcript that Asinamali! would.

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12Perhaps this was because of the directorial input of the white Barney Simon, but this can only be speculated upon.
In *Asinamali*, the rage is more overt, the calls for retribution and the removal of oppression more direct, although in many instances it is "camouflaged" from entering the hidden transcript of the dominant class by the use of Zulu or Tsotsitaal (the patois of the townships). The use of music (vocalizing) is used to further the communal, the shared experience caught in the "traditional" harmonies. These two plays, drawing so much on communal experience in the community, reveal the communal hidden transcript of that community in a particular site of public transcript.¹³

*Sarafina* deals with the reactions of the youth of Soweto to the imposition of a language issue in the schools and the subsequent uprising. Ngema recruited a large group of child actors. He worked with them for a number of months developing their skills in his type of theatre, and developing the play as he went along. At this stage he claims an influence from Brook, Grotowski and Luiz Valdez.¹⁴

The use of children, as actors *and* as characters, shows the problems that Ngema faced. They are still too young to have been steeped in the ways of the hidden transcript, although a start has been made. One actress suggests that around the supper table at night her father would tell her the "true" stories of South Africa that were not being told openly, but he instructed her to keep quiet about them. It was necessary for her to know

¹³This communality also speaks to the points on the "metonymic" as a strategy in black popular theatre as outlined in the work of Keyan Tomaselli. His point is that the experiences of actors, characters and even audiences are so "conflated" in performance because of their shared experiences in life, that to speak of a metaphorized "character" is extremely difficult. This is problematic, given the strong stereotyping that takes place, until one recognizes the hidden transcript dynamic, which relativizes reality into discourses *before* bringing them to the stage. See Keyan Tomaselli and Johan Muller, "Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre" *Critical Arts* 4,3 (1987): 40-58.

¹⁴Stein 102-103.
what was really going on in South Africa. Another actress refers to the "Black Laugh" in relation to the violence they perceive. This is a laugh that attempts to distance itself from the horror of the situation. Ngema combines the "cuteness" of talented kids in general, the hidden transcript of the sufferings of children in Soweto, their exuberance about the future (as envisioned, for example, in the final tableau as Sarafina describes the release of Nelson Mandela), the power of the mbaqanga music of the townships, the military precision and discipline of the performances, and public transcript of the oppressive South African situation. He is aided in all of this also by the usual "us versus them" script.

Following the success of Sarafina!, Ngema embarks on Township Fever!. He is made aware of the South African Transport Services strike and its aftermath and accesses both the court records and the condemned strikers to write his play. Ngema tells the story from the point of view of the condemned men in their cells telling about how very ordinary men with ordinary lives can do what they did. The men trace their life-stories to that point. The major difference between this play and the others is that Black has turned on Black in the struggle. It is no longer an "us versus them" situation. As Christopher Wren saw it, writing out of Johannesburg.

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15Voices of Sarafina! A film. Dir Nigel Noble. Prod. Bernard Gersen and Nigel Noble. A Lincoln Center Theater/Noble Enterprise Production. A New Yorker Films Artwork/Video, 1990/1. "My father used to, when we eating supper at home, he would talk to and tell everything about South Africa and what is happening and tell us to keep quiet, not to talk. He only wanted us to know the truth about South Africa and what is happening."

16For further information see Christopher Wren "Catch this Fever" New York Post. 20 December, 1990. n.p.. and Beth Coleman. "Broadway Fever!" The Village Voice 11 December, 1990. 43-44.
The play suggests that fear, not hate, motivated the killings -- fear of incurring mob vengeance if they held back and fear of joblessness if the strike collapsed. 'All I can remember was that I was scared,' says one striker in *Township Fever* when confessing how he stabbed his victim.\(^{17}\)

The upshot of this was severe criticism from the Mass Democratic Movement and COSATU (in the form of their Living Wage Group)\(^{18}\) who accused Ngema of "washing dirty linen here and abroad" and accusing him of creating "characters as insufficiently courageous." Wren notes that "in a recent issue of the African National Congress's magazine *Mayibuye*, a critic reviewing the play complained that 'the strike's image is harmed by fitting the events into the Broadway framework.'" In an interchange with Ngema, Wren notes that the Mass Democratic Movement's spokesperson was Mzwakhe Mbali, the well-respected Trade Unionist *imbongi*.\(^{19}\) Ngema defends his position by suggesting that he is writing what he now calls "theatre of enlightenment." Ngema says: "I don't write plays to please a political organization. I think writers should write what they feel inspires them."\(^{20}\)

I will argue that what has happened was a move from presenting the hidden transcript, which Ngema strove to do in the first three plays, to an attempt to claim to


\(^{19}\)The "political correctness" of mass representation was a important topic in South Africa at that time, sparked, amongst other things, by the Albie Sachs debate. See I. de Kock and Karen Press, eds. *Spring is Rebellious* (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990).

\(^{20}\)Ngema, as quoted in Wren.
speak the "universal truth," which he suggests is the purpose in *Township Fever!* The “truth” results in the denial of the communal and the solidarity that is part of the “contract” of the offstage discourses, and the exploitation by Ngema of the strategies of the hidden transcript (union solidarity, for example). Ngema casts that exploitation in a form that had proved to work on Broadway (the public transcript), for personal gain. Ngema had commodified the struggle.

Ngema's beginning work, and its success amongst the oppressed class in South Africa clearly shows his role as a potential *imbongi*. He reveals in an effervescent way the hidden transcripts of the oppressed. The further he moves along the path of the disclosure of the hidden transcript, the more he appears to abrogate the responsibilities of the *imbongi*, and the more he appears to exploit the hidden transcript of the community from which he draws his inspiration. *Township Fever!* turns the hidden transcript upon itself. The poetic license is abused, the site of safety violated, and Ngema moves to a realm outside the realm of Popular, committed or Resistance theatre.

5.1. **Woza Albert!**

*Woza Albert!* relates, in episodic form, incidents that Ngema and Mtwa suggest might occur if Christ were to come to South Africa. The play suggests in a number of scenes that the white regime would at first welcome Christ because they could claim that Christ had selected South Africa as his place of return, and not any other country. Gradually this welcome turns to suspicion and finally to hatred, because Christ is seen as

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21Pages references are made in the text itself. The text copy that is used is indicated above. 239
a destabilizing force in the country. Eventually the whites imprison Christ on Robben Island from where He escapes. They attempt to destroy Him with atomic weapons, but He rises up in a graveyard and there He is requested by the representative of the oppressed to bring back from the dead the great oppressed leaders of past.

The black characters show mixed reactions to His coming and to the work that He might do in South Africa. Some reject the possibility, some want Him to enhance their businesses, but it is when He encourages them to stand up to oppression, that they rally around him. The finally rallying cry is around the dead heroes who will "arise," like Albert Luthuli.

The tasks that the play sets itself are twofold. It brings the anger, despair and desperation of the Black community to the attention of the dominant and oppressive regime in such a manner that the regime will accept it and listen to it. It also displays the thoughts, aspirations, hopes and dreams of the Black community to the Black community itself, in such a way that the community recognizes itself and draws strength and solidarity from the sharing of the common experience. What occurs, therefore, is a theatrical discourse that is constructed in such a way that dual or multiple readings can be made of the play. The duality, or multiplicity (that is to say, the ambiguity) of the readings rely on the offstage and onstage discourses accessible to a reader or theatre audience.

This concept links ambiguity to the dual and interrelated fields of parody and satire. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines parody as, amongst other things, a
"composition in which the author's characteristics are humourously imitated." Parody relies, therefore, on the recognition of not one but two or more different texts: the "original" and the present presentation. Parody also foregrounds an author. The defusing mechanism that deflates a potential backlash is the use of humor, which in itself relies on ambiguity and the unexpected but plausible. Woza Albert! will also rely on the virtuosity of the actors as actors to defuse the potential anger.

The second term, satire, the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines as a "composition ridiculing vice or folly or lampooning individuals. Using ridicule, irony, sarcasm etc., in speech and writing for the ostensible purpose of exposing and discouraging vice or folly." Theatrical discourse is a type of writing, and therefore, through satire, the twofold problems of "vices and follies" of oppression and its results on the one hand, and the appearance of giving in to the oppression on the other, might be satirized.

There are a number of underlying and repeating clusters of similarities in the play which provide the skeleton or framework of the play. These through-lines are grouped around the interaction amongst the discourses which have been identified by the concepts of the offstage and onstage discourse of the oppressor and the offstage and onstage discourses of the oppressed. What has interwoven these seemingly disparate strands so effectively in this play is the fact that there were three authors to the play, one of which was a highly sympathetic white author in the form of Barney Simon. Simon's theatrical skill (or, more particularly, his understanding of the "Western" concept of theatricalism)

22Concise Oxford English Dictionary. The emphasis is mine.

23Dictionary The emphases are mine.
is also evident in this play, as the structure of the play is far more tightly controlled than
the other plays, which seem to wander from moment to moment.

The plays demonstrate a number of themes. The inherent theatricalism of
negotiating between the power bases of the oppressor and oppressed is shown. There is a
keen insight into and perspective of the white oppressor as demonstrated by the
knowledge of the oppressor, from the oppressed point of view (in other words the Black
view of the white view of the Black). The eliding of the anger and despair of the
oppressed, with its concomitant interplay between parody and satire, is foregrounded. All
of these themes coalesce around the fundamental interpretation of the Christian, and
therefore religious, views of South Africans.

The way these themes are developed throughout the play is through a series of
interrelated vignettes around speculations on what the reaction of various South Africans
would be to the arrival of Christ or Morena.24 As such, the play prepares a discourse that
is accessible to a world-wide audience in the sense that the values and moral groundwork
of justice, forgiveness, bounty and peace (inherent to the Christian philosophy), are used.

Furthermore, the entire National Party strategy and policies, that is to say the
philosophical framework of the regime in power during the times, was rooted in a
Christian national philosophy. Their understanding of Christianity resulted in them not
only basing their political machinations on that understanding, but attempting to entrench
it in the constitution of the country and in all avenues of life in the country. They scoured

24Throughout this analysis I shall refer to "Morena" as this is the way the text refers to Christ.
the Bible to find justification for policies of separate development and in this they were assisted by the dominant Afrikaans/Dutch Reformed Churches.

The Christian ethic was also a foregrounded factor in Black life, as the Black Christian Churches became a power to be reckoned with. A large portion of Black South Africans were practicing Christians, in the various denominations, forms and dogmas that were followed. Black Christian leaders, such as Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Archbishop of the Anglican church based in Cape Town, the Reverend Alan Boesak who was to become the Chairperson of the World Council of (Reformed) Churches, the Reverend Stanley Mogoba, past president of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and current president of the Pan-Africanist Congress, and the Reverend Frank Chikane, past leader of the influential Christian Institute and now special advisor to President Nelson Mandela, were to become dominant figures in the anti-Apartheid struggle. Much of the development of Black Consciousness was directly influenced by the thinking in Black Liberation Theology, and the structures and strategies that the Black Theology networks had established.

Christianity played the role of a central, shared but almost hypothetical discourse which was interpreted in two distinct ways by the offstage thinking of the oppressed and the oppressor. Both offstage discourses "used" the shared discourse for their own ends, which were to be predominantly political. Inevitably the political nature of the interchange resonated throughout the economic, geographical and social areas of contact,

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which allowed the play a number of spaces in which to argue the offstage/onstage disparities.

The conflict brought about by these disparities, are by and large presented in the play in humorous ways and provide the actors with vehicles that demand the utmost physical and vocal virtuosity, as they present the various characters. It is through this humor and this virtuosity (in other words, through the very obvious theatricality of the performative aspects of the production) that some of the potential anger and bitterness in the play is offset.

A large part of the negotiation that takes place in the onstage political and social space is by its very nature theatrical. The posturings, the presentations, the seeming obsequious behavior, the displays of might and terror, are all aspects of negotiations of power and the art of resistance and survival. The fact that this theatricality is presented in a performance medium, and in a parody of both the performance medium and the theatricality, adds dimensions and diversity to the impact of the play.

Woza Albert! opens with a scene that foregrounds all of the dominant aspects and themes of the play, except the Christian one. Unlike Ngema's other work where the actors "announce" who the characters are and where they come from, this play starts with the presentation of characters in role and in classic exposition form.26 The play sets up a

26 Two points need to be made here. The speculation on how much of an influence Barney Simon had on the construction of the play is futile, as the original manuscript that Ngema and Mtwa presented to the Market theatre is lost, presumably stolen by the regime in the Transkei under whose patronage Ngema and Mtwa were going to do the play originally, according to Ngema. In this regard see Laura Jones on Mbongeni Ngema, 82-103. Thus there is no way of reconstructing the original script. Secondly, all three claim credit for the writing of the script. However, I shall simply refer to Ngema in this work, to facilitate the reading and to make the comparison with his other work more streamlined.
Black actor playing a white policeman (he does this by wearing a policeman's cap and a pink nose) engaging in collusive banter with the audience while interrogating a Black man about the validity of the man's passbook. The Black man attempts to ingratiate himself with the policeman by "promoting" the policeman (from constable eventually to President) every time he talks to the policeman.

For the Black man having his pass in order is a deadly serious problem as it could lead to time in jail (as it does). The policeman, on the other hand, is enjoying himself immensely at the expense of his victim and he shares this with the audience with whom he thinks he is in cahoots. The policeman's "Hell, but these kaffirs can lie, hey?" (5) indicates not only the oppressed's understanding of the perceived offstage discourse of the oppressor, but also the idea that the policeman has that lying is the only way out of being caught with the passbook not in order. This reveals that Ngema is aware of the concept of the expectations of the oppressor toward the oppressed -- of course they will lie -- but, by placing the words in a black actor's mouth and therefore displaying the incongruity of the situation, Ngema foregrounds the two offstage discourses -- the oppressed expects the oppressor to expect the oppressed to lie. When the oppressed tells the truth, the oppressor is in an ambiguous position: should he accept the lie as a truthful representation of the oppressed, or should he accept the truth as part of the lying disposition of the oppressed? The only way out of the conundrum is to rely on force or power, delineating the power structures from his (the oppressor's) own point of view, and imposing them.
The role of the audience is posited and framed from the beginning of the play, and is seen in a type of oppressive mode. The audience will represent the dominant position, and will wander between the offstage discourse of the oppressor which is being parodied by the oppressed, and the presented onstage ambiguities.

The passbook proclaims that the occupation of the bearer is that of guitarist. By doing this the play establishes the metatheatrical aspect, in that Ngema's own profession is that of musician. This moment also ties into Township Fever! where the story revolves around Jazz, the guitarist who wishes to make a living from playing his instrument but needs to find work that is considered to be more "stable." This performance aspect of the "real" is also reflected in the names of the characters (Mbongeni and Percy), in the original text. These are the names of the authors. The divide thus between Black artist as profession, and the character in the play, is elided. This draws the play "closer" to reality, and makes the notion of the theatrical less ambiguous, because the play draws on the experiences of the actor. However this is also more ambiguous because the events are fictitious.  

This element is very clearly to be found in Workshop '71's production of Survival where, at the end of the play, the actors seemingly jettison their characters and speak as themselves, or, more particularly, as the persona that the offstage discourse has "written"

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for them. The "poetic licence" granted to the performers to present their own (or parallel or communal) experiences in theatrical form is akin to the "poetic licence" of the *imbongi*.

The next scene has the seemingly inevitable prison scene which includes the "Towsa Dance" -- a series of movements that prisoners go through to indicate that they are not secreting anything in any orifices of their bodies, including their anuses. The bodily degradation that this brings about is echoed in many plays of resistance theatre and indicates the all-pervasive nature of the dominant ideology.

Scene three brings the Christian discourse into play for the first time. Here Percy is singing in his sleep: "Morena walks with me all the way / watching over me all the day/ When the night time comes he's there with me / Watching over, loving me." (7) The irony, which Mbongeni perceives, is that despite this claim, Percy is sitting in prison. What is important is that the theme of Christ watching over them but not doing anything about the situation is foregrounded. It is this problem that highlights the offstage/onstage ambiguity clearly. Christ is their friend and their protector, but He appears not really to be "present." Percy's later claim that Morena will look after those that suffer, but only in the afterlife, does not ring as acceptable to Mbongeni. This is perceived as a

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28Workshop '71, *Survival! South African Peoples' Plays* Robert Kavanagh ed. And intro. (London: Heinemann. 1981). This play also enters the realm of the metatheatrical in similar ways to *Woza Albert!* in that the actors enter the theatre playing escapees from prison and the audience is asked by the actor/policeman to hand over the "prisoners" it is hiding (130-134). The metatheatrical is extended considerably from this point on in the play. See also the end of the play, pp. 168-171.

29See the work on Post Colonial writing, for example Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) particularly Chapter 5 "Body Politics."
ploy that is used by the oppressor to maintain the status quo. Black Theology, and particularly liberation theology called for the intervention of Christ in the oppression of the masses on earth.

The following scene (food time in the prison) shows the wheedling that the prisoners must do to find some alleviation from the rottenness of the food. The prisoners are successful when they employ the correct method of discourse: "PERCY: A little bit of sugar, Baba. Please, little bit, Baba. Thank you, Baba. Thank you Baba, too much sugar, Baba." (8) The true nature of their feelings are expressed in Mbongeni's reaction to the food: "No, a dog wouldn't even piss on this food. Ikhabishi, amazambane, ushukela, ipapa, utamatisi endishini eyodwa -- ini leyo [Cabbage, potatoes, sugar, porridge, tomatoes all in one dish? What is this?]" (9)

What is important about the particular list that Mbongeni gives is the choice of the words and their English and Afrikaans derivatives. "Ikhabashi" is obviously derived from "cabbage," "ushukela" from "sugar," "ipapa" from the Afrikaans word for porridge, namely "pap," "utamatisi" which comes from "tamaties" (Afrikaans) or "tomatoes" (English), and finally "endishini" from the English word "dish." Presented theatrically, in the form of a roving description of the contents of the plate, the words would be performed slowly, allowing those that don't speak Zulu to attempt to access the language. This is further enhanced by the next interchange between Percy and Mbongeni.

MBONGENI: Woza la! [come here!]

Percy hesitates.

MBONGENI: (moves threateningly; points to the ground at his feet) Woza la!

(9)
The repetition of a word, followed by the action demanded, is an effective way for people to learn aspects of the language. In this particular case the importance of the word "Woza" indicating "come" is foregrounded and "taught" to the audience. "Woza" is of course tied to the title of the play. An audience member can now translate the title of the play as "Come, Albert." Who Albert is the audience is yet to discover, but access to the language of Zulu, the language of the oppressed in this case, has now been learned and granted, as it were.

Following this comes another masterly display of mime as the two actors are on a train. Percy plays the religious character who spouts versions of the Beatitudes, particularly those sections that refer to the "persecuted:"

Blessed are those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile ye and persecute ye and shall send all manner of evil against ye falsely, for thy sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad for great is the reward of heaven. (10)

The style of the discourse changes in mid-quotatation from a standard English version to the modern reading of the King James' version of the Bible. This indicates the strong teaching of the missionaries in South Africa whose primary goal was to bring Christianity and "civilization" to the indigenous people, but whose net effect was to seem to “tame” the people for the exploitation which was to follow. Furthermore, it is the same kind of onstage / offshore dichotomy that the white governments' proclaiming of Christian nationalism offered. In this sense it is clear that what Percy is presenting is the onstage discourse of the missionaries (and the Apartheid regime); but, played against the fact that he is Black and in South Africa, a clear understanding of the "gap" between what he is
saying and what actually happened, in other words, the offstage discourse of the oppressor, is made visible.\textsuperscript{30} It is to this "gap" that Black Theology and liberation theology and the play address themselves.

Mbongeni introduces the difference between the virtual reality or virtual spaces of Heaven seen through Percy's eyes, and the actual reality and spaces that the Black people are experiencing, in a playful manner as he suggests that Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, has visited "up there" and there is nothing there. In this manner he attempts to introduce the "word made Flesh," that is to say the offstage discourse of God, into the concrete here and now of the onstage South Africa. Thus the play prepares the ground for the arrival of Morena. This is done in subjunctive manner in the playacting of what it might be like when Morena arrives.

In many ways the "actual" arrival of Morena slips unnoticed between what it would be like if Morena arrived (the subjunctive moment) as portrayed by the TV interviewer who is not physically present but alluded to, and the actual interviews with Morena when he has arrived. This gap between the virtual and the actual is explored in the rest of the scene and proceeds to include scene fourteen. These scenes are all telling vignettes of various displays of poverty, age, living conditions, economic involvement and approaches to history.

In the first of these vignettes the Prime Minister suggests to the TV cameras that the boycotts against South Africa, instituted by the world to attempt to force the country to change its policies, means nothing now that the South Africans have "got" Morena.

\textsuperscript{30}In this regard see Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins \textit{Post-Colonial Drama} 46.
Yet even here the almost paranoiac fear that Morena is not "real" but an imposter sent to undermine the state raises its head. Ngema suggests in this manner that the interpretation of the reality of Morena will not reside in Morena's actual (that is to say onstage) events, but in the interpretation of those events which will be subject to the government's offstage discourses of discrimination and self-preservation.

Scenes seven to fourteen also allow the actors wonderful moments for virtuosity of performance as Percy plays, respectively, a bongo player, a young street vendor selling meat by the side of the road, a barber cutting Black hair with a hand operated hair clipper, and a coal distributor on the back of a truck. Mbongeni plays Fidel Castro, a flashy dancer, a laborer-customer for the meat vendor, an old woman who rummages in dustbins for food, a coal distributor (with Percy), and a "fragile, toothless old man" attempting to thread a needle. All these changes are done in rapid succession. The scenes all present different facets of life. Each person when approached and asked what he or she would ask for from Morena or what would happen when Morena arrives, construes his or her future in terms a vastly improved present situation. The street vendor wants his own butchery, the barber wants a flashy barber shop in the center of town, the old woman wants the wealth of the whites to increase so that the food that they throw away will be of a better quality, and the coal vendors reject the thought of Morena's arrival as it will put them out of work.

The old man's account is important as it is the first of the really belligerent replies, and espouses a strong Black Consciousness moment. He compares the arrival of Morena to the arrival of the white settlers in Natal in 1835, where an Afrikaner leader by the name
of Piet Retief was taken for a witch by one of the great kings of the Zulus, Dingane. Dingane asked the settlers, on the pretext of having a celebration, to leave their guns outside the royal enclosure, and, at a given signal the royal troops (impi) were instructed to cut the settlers' throats.  The old man maintains that this is what will happen to Morena.

The old man's parallel is relevant for a number of reasons. The white regime is portrayed as actually attempting to do this in a present day way, later in the play, with the attempted torpedoing of Morena with a nuclear device as He walks across the water away from Robben island where He has been imprisoned. (Also, the Biblical tale of Christ's apprehension by the Jews also smacks of deception, in that Judas "betrayed" Christ to the waiting soldiers). Furthermore, it is unclear in the telling of the story whether the old man sees the Zulus as the ones that will rid themselves of Morena or not. If they are, then the story echoes with the attempt to recapture the past before the White man (and his religion) entered the scene. If they are not, the old man suggests that Morena will only bring trouble to an already troubled land because Morena will be yet another division between white and Black, past and present. Whichever way the story is interpreted this is one of the only times in the play that there is an attempt to metaphorize Morena's arrival along South African historical lines. The writing of history is by its very nature fraught with the "interruptions" of historians' onstage and offstage discourses. In this regard the old man's telling of the Dingane and Piet Retief event shows strong

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characteristics of the imbongi as he "rewrites" history to make the parallels he wishes to make. This is borne out in the song he sings (in translation)

The soldiers of our enemies have come to attack the king
They are coming from the four corners of the world to attack the Lion
We must kill the enemies
They are attacking him from all over the world, the son of Zulu. These strangers from another place attack our King. (17)

Furthermore, throughout the telling of what will happen, the old man sings snatches of the song at key moments of heroism, which are "cued" by him turning to the Zulu language.

Following the vignettes, the next two scenes describe the arrival of the jumbo jet which is supposed to bring Morena. A flashy character descends from the plane and is mistaken for Morena. What is particularly important about these scenes is the way that events that are reported in the Bible, are intertwined with the events of the play. This demonstrates that they are part of a shared or common discourse between the Christians who are oppressors and those who are oppressed. The discourse is made ambiguous (through parody) by placing the events related in a highly modern and literal configuration, and then by placing them in the theatre.

After the "arrival" of Morena, Percy and Mbongeni are shown as out of work laborers who are in Albert Street near the pass office attempting to find casual work from passing motorists looking for temporary and permanent labor. Mbongeni notes the offstage discourse:

But you're still their dog . . . . Have you got a job? Have you got school fees for your children? Have you got money for rent? Have you got bus fare to come to
the Pass Office? Oh, come on man, we've all got specials but we're still their dogs! (21)

The "specials" he refers to, are special permits to find work in Johannesburg. What becomes clear from this extract is the anger of the man, and the realization of the situation. Despite attempts by the government to the contrary, these men know exactly what the problems are in the country -- they are reliant on the economic infrastructure for their very survival. When a car arrives looking for laborers Percy engages the driver:

"Messenger boy, tea boy, my boss. I make tea for the Madam, my boss, Bush tea,\textsuperscript{32} china tea, English tea! Please, Baba. Lots of experience, Baba. Very good education; my boss. Please my boss. Standard three, very good English, Baba." (21) As the car leaves them Mbongeni mocks him for his attempt, and his subservience. Yet when the next car arrives it is Mbongeni that rushes over:

One! One, my boss! Everything! Sweeper, anything, everything, my boss. Give me anything. Carwash? Yeah, always smiling, my boss. Ag, have you got work for me, my boss? I'm a very good nanny. I look after small white children, I make them tomato sandwich. I take them to school, my boss. Please, my boss. Please. (22)

This time it is Percy that mocks Mbongeni. Percy and Mbongeni develop communal onstage and offstage discourses to suit the occasion. More particularly, they accept that the type of demeaning behavior that they have to engage in to find work is acceptable to both of them -- they do not lose dignity in the eyes of each other.

Nevertheless, the desperation of the situation is demonstrated in the final attempt to get work as they try to outdo each other in their ingratiating:

\textsuperscript{32}He refers her to a South African herb tea known as "Rooibos" or "Red bush" tea.
BOTH ACTORS (*confusion of requests from each*): Six month special, my boss. Fourteen day special, baba. This is my last chance. Hey man, this is my corner! Very strong, Baas. Ek donder die kaffirs op die plaas. [I beat up the kaffirs on the farm.] Two, my boss, Anything, my boss. Have you got anything for me, Baba? PERCY: Basie, he's a thief, this one. MBONGENI: He can't talk Afrikaans, this one, my boss. PERCY: He's lying, Basie. Hy lieg, my baas! (22)

The two are pitted dramatically against each other as they rehearse what they are prepared to do to get a job. In this particular case the one "confesses" that he is quite prepared to beat up his fellow oppressed, while the other uses the language of the oppressor as a mark of acceptance of subservience. This leads into a confrontation between the two, where the one attempts to draw on his allies, while the other threatens to claim that the pass is a forgery. The work situation has led to a breakdown in solidarity.

It is at this moment when there seems to be no way out of the situation that the imaginary Morena appears to them from "outside" the South African scene. Their immediate reaction is to ask Morena to organize jobs for them. The approach is still within the frame of their passes being valid. This leads to Morena "instructing" them to throw away their passes and the two characters turn to the audience:

BOTH ACTORS: (*sing, exhorting the audience*):

Wozá giya nansi inkonyane ye ndlovu --
Aph'amadoda sibambe sebephelele
Wozani madoda niyesaba na?

(Come on join this child of the elephant
Where are the men? Let us face them!
Come men, are you afraid?) (24)

What is important here is that with the first signs of rebellion, the characters turn to the power of the "elephant," a traditional symbol of leadership amongst the Zulu. Morena is
"appropriated" by the Zulu culture and is given an suitable name. Morena will bring solidarity: "PERCY: When we follow Morena we walk as one!" (25)

Significantly, as the potential for rebellion is demonstrated, the scene turns to one where the virtuosity of the actors are demonstrated. In the next scene starts with the second of the train journeys. This time the actors are at a window, which allows them the opportunity to mime the putting down and up of the window, and the sound of other trains going passed in opposite directions, as well as the movement and sound of the train going under bridges. After this, the scene is divided into two sections. In the first part Mbongeni is dreaming of what will happen in the future as the people get what they want because of the intervention of Morena as they "will all go to Morena for our blessings." (26)

The second part of the scene enacts what will happen when "the government will begin to take courage again." (26) This leads to an enactment of a police raid on an old woman and her family. Significantly the old woman blames the children influenced by "Black Power" as the source of the raid, but she does it in Zulu, which would make it inaccessible for the bulk of the oppressors. In other words, even within the Zulu community, the threat of violence that might lead to the change in the regime is criticized. The offstage discourse is split and the threshold of tolerance and coping are still open for negotiation.

Scene eighteen is the longest and most sustained one in the play. Furthermore, there is an attempt to develop and sustain clear-cut characters in the form of Zuluboy (as
played by Mbongeni) and Bobbejaan,33 (as played by Percy, although Percy also at times plays the white overseer). These two characters are placed in opposition to each other, and as such develop conflict between them. Zuluboy is the devil-may-care man who will only give way so far before retaliating. This scene contains the only direct confrontation between white and Black in the play. Bobbejaan is sketched as the typical impimpi, or sellout, who will give in to the demands of the whites, so long as it brings in something, or it allows him to keep his job or make something on the side. In this way the two sides of the debate, which would lead to the splintering of solidarity, are constructed.

The action takes place at a brick factory, the Coronation Brick and Tile factory. This particular factory was well established as the place where the strikes of 1973 in Durban occurred. As such, the factory plays an important part in the real offstage discourse of the oppressed as a reference point for defiance. Coupled to this is the initial plan to ask Morena to turn the miracle of the loaves and the fishes, where Christ fed the 5,000 from two loaves and five fishes, into an adapted version where Morena will produce the bricks that are needed, in a similar fashion. The discourse of the two characters suggests that they wish to make the extant situation "better" in terms of their economic situation. It is only when Morena is rejected by the whites as an imposter, that Zuluboy rebels and confronts the white boss demanding that the situation be changed, not simply "improved."

33"Bobbejaan" is the Afrikaans word for "monkey," "baboon" or "ape," although, given the context of the work that the two characters are doing, it may also refer to a "monkey wrench" or an "adjustable wrench."
This change from attempting to use the dominant religious discourse to their own advantage, to demanding that the religious discourse "takes sides," is the cornerstone of the scene. Morena had been seen by the oppressors to have been on their side (in that they proclaimed a Christian approach to government) but as soon as Morena started going against the "rules" laid down by government then the whites proclaimed that "we don't like Morena anymore. And everybody who's waiting for Morena is getting fired" (29). The interpretation of the onstage discourse of Christianity is now determined by the offstage discourse of the oppressor. However, the offstage discourse of the oppressed does likewise in its attempt to appropriate the Morena discourse.

The confrontation between Zuluboy and "Baas Kom" (the white boss) comes to a head when Zuluboy accuses him of being unreasonable in the demands of the amount of bricks that have to be created that day. Zuluboy attempts to point to the industrial problems in the situation, but the Boss will not listen. In the exchange that follows one can trace the through-line from industry and the economy to the personal, the cultural and the social. Here Percy plays Baas Kom.

MBONGENI: The people want increase. Where's the money for the people?  
PERYC: Increase? 
MBONGENI: Increase!  
PERYC: Don't I give you free food? Free boarding, and lodging?  
MBONGENI: The people don't like your free food! they want money. There is big families to support. Too many children. 
PERYC: I don't give a damn about your too many children. Don't you know about family planning?  
MBONGENI: Family planning? What is that?  
PERYC: Don't you know that you must not have too many children? You must have two, three and stop your fuck-fuck nonsense! Too many pic-a-ninnies! Too many black kaffir babies all over the country. (Sharing this with the audience)
Their kaffir babies cry 'Waaaaa! Waaaaa!' Just like too many piccaninny dogs. (33)

The board and lodging is, of course, not free, because freedom here is ambiguous. The lodging may not cost them any money, but, following the pass laws, they are not free to stay where they wish. In this way the onstage economic discourse moves ineluctably to dealing with social and cultural differences, and reveals the offstage discourse of the oppressor in relation to the parenting habits (and seeming lack of self-control) of Blacks - the generic "they," or Other. It is at this point that Zuluboy rebels, and confronts Baas Kom with his club or knobkierie. Baas Kom retaliates with a stream of invective -- the "niceties" of onstage discourse, in reality, are past:

I am calling the police! I'm calling the government buses and I'm sending you back to your homelands. Ek stuur julle na julle fokken verdomde, donorse (sic) bliksemse plase toe.34 You don't like my work? You don't like my food? Go back to your bladdy farms. Go starve on your farms! (34)

The oaths are strung together in a comic and exaggerated way, but the language shows the offstage discourse of the oppressor in the heat of the moment. Furthermore, the thought that the farms "belong" to the Black man is by no choice of his own.35 However, it does indicate the idea that the oppressor conceives of the Black as essentially rural beings. The hint is given here that the Blacks will starve on the farms because they are useless at everything, as opposed to the idea that the farms are so small as to be to all intents and purposes useless.

34 The text translates this piece of Afrikaans as "I'm sending you to your fucking cursed, useless farms." (p. 34) A better translation would be "I'm sending you to your fucking, doomed, bloody, damned, farms." "Donorse" is incorrectly spelt -- it should be "donerse."

35 See Chapter 3 with reference to the homelands or Bantustans.
These two interchanges also reveal another of the offstage/onstage dynamics. It is when the tensions in the onstage discourse are at their most heated that the offstage discourses are revealed. When the moment is "written" through the eyes of the oppressed, then the oppressed very often is created in the heroic mold of the inflexible, courageous persevering individual, who will protect his dignity. However, in the case of this play the naked anger of the oppressed appears to lead to violence. It is at this stage that Morena appears, and Baas Kom is informed by Zuluboy that he, Zuluboy, has asked Morena to come to the factory to help make bricks, but now he says that Morena must assist them in a strike (35). All suddenly realize that if Morena did the work in stead of them, the houses that would be built would still be the house of the whites.

Baas Kom persuades Bobbejaan to go and fetch the police. He labels Morena a terrorist and a communist, the standard description of the oppressor for all agitators or people that want change. When Zuluboy discovers that Bobbejaan is taking a message to the police he reaches for his club, which is then mimed as being taken away from him by Morena (39). It is here that the plea for a non-violent changing of the situation comes to the fore. The police arrive, however, and Zuluboy prepares to defend Morena.

In the following scene the police appear to have captured Morena. This scene is particularly cleverly crafted as the fact that Morena is flying out of the tenth floor of the

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36It is this concept that is one of the major problems with Township Fever, as I shall argue below.

37It might appear here that this particular piece of philosophy would have been inserted by Simon the pacifist, although there is no way of proving this. At no other time in the plays of Ngema does this approach repeat itself.
notorious John Vorster Square police station is delayed until right at the end of the scene. The might of the Zulus in the meanwhile is praised as it appears Zuluboy has laid about him with might and main.

What is suggested here (and continues through until the end of the play) is that any change in the situation in South Africa may only be achieved through some miraculous means. In as much as the play attempts to "hide" this idea in the virtuosity of the performance and in the numbers of parodies of the onstage and the offstage discourses, the end result is couched in the dream of the millennial.

In the remaining scenes the two characters speculate on how the oppressor might treat Morena (by taking him to all the highlights of the country and wining and dining him) and they speculate on how Morena will respond. Here they document the evils of the Apartheid system, and the effect it has on people, families, societies, survival and dignity. They speak of the evils of oppression and discrimination.

The rest of the play, except for the final moments, plays off on and around Robben Island, the island that was used by the Apartheid regime to house its Black political prisoners. Morena is seen to be escaping from the island by walking on the water towards Cape Town, and is torpedoed by the security police, resulting in a violent conflagration.

The final scene has Mbongeni (Zuluboy) playing the caretaker of the graveyard (having lost his job at Coronation Brick and Tile), and for the first and only time Morena

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38The tenth floor of John Voster Square police station became notorious because of the number of detainees who "committed suicide" by "leaping" from these windows. This was the "official" or "onstage" reason given by the oppressors for these deaths.
is made concrete in the form of Percy. The two of them wander through the graveyard and Morena "raises" from the dead the various heroes that fought against the Apartheid regime. Albert Luthuli is the first to be "raised," followed by Robert Sobukwe, Lillian Ngoyi, Steve Biko, and then the list becomes multiracial and includes Bram Fischer, Ruth First and ends with Hector Peterson. This process of listing the fallen will become a hallmark of the four Ngema plays discussed here.

The list places the events that occur on stage into some sort of shared discourse (in this particular case the discourse of the oppressed in South Africa), and it locates the events in history. The importance of the historical and the traditions that are part of the past are foregrounded. Perhaps most provocatively, the purpose of the listing is to point out that the community must not allow the dead to have died in vain. Thus the list is used as a method of creating solidarity and grounding.

In this play Ngema and his co-workers have developed and showcased a method of presenting the discourse of the oppressed (as experienced outside the ambit of the oppressor) to the oppressor in a seemingly palatable way. In his next play, the subtleties disappear and the raw anger becomes transparent.

5.2  **Asinamali**

Ngema states, in the foreword to this play:

> Out of the anger and passion of the residents of Lamontville (a slum area near Durban) township came the leader Msizi Dube. Passionately demonstrating against the proposed rent increases, he lead the masses with the cry "Asinamali!" -

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^39Page references to this play documented above will appear in the text.
"we have no money!" This rallying cry provided a focus for the disenfranchised as well as a poignant description of the conditions of Blacks throughout South Africa.\textsuperscript{40}

The play deals with the lives of five of the people affected directly or indirectly by the boycott action, but also with the lives of Blacks in general at the time. Ngema assimilates a number of strands of oppression and weaves them into the play. His argument is that, despite the oppression, there is a vast pool of vitality of soul and resistance to oppression that permeates the offstage discourse of the lives of these men. They represent the Black condition in general. Ngema places the main action in Leeuwkop Prison, and consequently employs the prison metaphor that has become common practice in Resistance theatre in South Africa.\textsuperscript{41}

There is very little in the way of development of plot in the play, but an accumulation of disparate sub-plots that relate the stories of the different characters. In most cases the characters tell each other their stories. The title of the play \textit{Asinamali!} has very little direct bearing on the plot line, except in terms of the fact that this is a play about people living in poverty, and the ends to which they are driven to survive.

There are five characters in the play. Solomzi Bhisholo is a conman who comes from Soweto and who lives by his wits, and by being a member of "Bra Tony's" gang. Thami Cele comes from a farm near Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State and has been

\textsuperscript{40}Ngema, Author's note 3.

\textsuperscript{41}See here as an example Workshop '71, \textit{Survival! South African Peoples' Plays} Robert Kavanagh ed (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1981) 125-171. This play serves almost as a blueprint for many of the plays in this mold. It was improvised and performed in the period directly leading up to the Soweto riots of 1976. It's major theme is solidarity for survival.
convicted of an offence under the Immorality Act. Bongani Hlope is a migrant laborer from Zululand and is serving time for murdering his girlfriend who became pregnant and then killed the child. Bheki Mqadi comes from Lamontville but is in prison wrongfully, convicted of harboring a "terrorist" in his house. Finally, Bhoyi Ngema is an activist from Lamontville who "cleaned out" the collaborators and sellouts in the community (mainly using the "necklace" method).

Ngema has assembled a typical cross-section of the community at large: the "tsotsi" or clever villain, the rural person, the migrant laborer from Zululand who has left four wives and twelve children behind to find work in the urban areas, the activist and the "just happened to be caught in the crossfire" person from the townships. He attempts to weld these into a coherent group with a common agenda and a common living space. He does this through songs, sloganeering and by having the people in the same "living conditions," namely the prison. He introduces these characters in scene one of the play.

One of the central concerns of many of the plays of resistance, namely the problems of language and hence the highly ambiguous nature of meaning in the shadow of resistance, is developed next. The scene takes place in the Court room as Bheki, the one that has been wrongfully arrested, is being tried. The scene demonstrates a number of typical characteristics. Mistranslations occur, as the words of the judge are spoken (erroneously, and at times in very contorted language) in Afrikaans and then translated

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42. This Act prohibited sexual relations across the color (that is to say, race) line.

43. This method of killing a collaborator involved the practice of putting a car tire around the neck of the victim, pouring petrol (gasoline) into it (and occasionally having the victim drink the petrol) and then setting the petrol alight.
into English (for the sake of the white South African and international audience) and then into Zulu, and all of this is done by the Black actor. The "sellout" is the Black who prohibits the fair flow of justice by instructing Bheki in Zulu to sit down and shut up at times when Bheki is supposed to answer, or when he answers in a way that does not seem to "suit" the sell-out. There is a clash of meanings because of cultural differences. There is the litany of laws that have been potentially contravened, including "confusing the court . . . harbouring terrorists . . . (providing) wrong information . . . no house permit . . . no marriage certificate . . . (attending an) undesirable gathering . . . instigating the people . . . stone throwing . . . (and) burning the township." (12-13) For this Bheki is sentenced to seven years in Leeuwkop Prison.

Two critical moments illustrate the situation. Bheki is arrested for supposedly harboring a terrorist. It turns out that the person is the son (Johannes Zulu) of the woman Bheki is living with. The judge asks Bheki whether Johannes Zulu is Bheki’s son, but the judge states it as "Sê hy nie vir jou ‘pappa’ nie?" which the translator translates (correctly) as "Does he not say ‘pappa’ to you?" Bheki then replies: "He is my son, yes, kodwa akuyena owesende," which translates as "but he is not my blood son" or biological son (16). This is not translated to the judge, and so Bheki has to take responsibility for the doings of Johannes Zulu. However, in Zulu language and culture, the word "Baba" or "father" is used as a sign of respect for all elders. Thus the term of respect is used as a way of convicting Bheki. Ironically, and very ambiguously, the term "Baba" is not used in the text, only the English and Afrikaans translation of the word are used.
This "relationship" is compounded by the fact that Bheki is living with a woman that he claims is his wife, but they do not have a marriage certificate ("Asisayinanga enkantoło" literally: "we did not sign in the office," but here meaning "court of law"). Later it is pointed out that Bheki had met the woman in Durban and had saved her from a gang of thieves who had stolen her handbag. At this point Bheki had been living on Durban Station, but after the rescue he moves in with her. She is a widow who lost her husband on the mines (25-29), and thus Bheki becomes the "man" about the house. The ambiguity is twofold: on the one hand this is a standard practice amongst the Zulu community in that an eligible man will become a caretaker, but on the other, the story is told in such a way that Bheki is seen as a sweet-talker who abuses the debt that the woman owes him by making advances on her and then abusing the position he takes up. It is true that the migrant labor system undermines moral standards, but the integrity of Bheki is placed in doubt. However, the description is ambiguous, as Bheki's prison and outside bravura in the situation is reflected in the fact that he is telling the story and thus he is occupying a public space, but he is speaking of a common experience. In other words, his embellishments, and the others' acceptance of the embellishments may not really be taken at face value as they have to be observed through the skein of the public sphere. Nevertheless, Woman is relegated as object in this telling. This also occurs with Solomzi's telling of the his and Bra Tony's interaction with the Indian woman as described in scene eight.

Note here the oppressors' words embedded in the Zulu words. "Asisayinanga" has the English word "sign" embedded, and "enkantoło" has the Afrikaans word "kantoor" or "office" embedded.
The concept of the manipulation of the public space is clearly seen in the interaction of the prisoners with the "guards" (portrayed or suggested by the members of the cast):

_BHEKI moves upstage. He stretches his arm forward and using his thumb and forefinger he creates a peep-hole. He mimes the door and starts talking to a warder who is apparently passing by outside the cell._

BHEKI: Hey Sergeant! Sergeant! My Basie!⁴⁵ Hey Sergeant! Sergeant Nel! Sergeant Nel! My basie! Hey Sergeant! Dankie Baba!⁴⁶ Hey, you know what? This place would be shit without you, Baba. We like you, Baba. We really do, Baba, 'cause you are the best white man in the whole world. You're the one who puts salt in our porridge, ja. [yes] But, Sergeant, that new constable from the depot, Constable Schoeman, yisifëbe nje. He's a bitch. He kick me like a dog this morning. . . . I want to report him to you. . . . Between me and you that man is going to cause trouble. . .

BHOYI: (Goes to the keyhole) Sergeant. Only one cigarette, Baba. One for the night. Ag, asseblief, my Baas (see cigarette coming through the keyhole) ly lyk soos 'n koning, my Basie! You look like a king! (19)

This excerpt reveals much of the manipulation that is (or appears to be) standard practice.

The sergeant is praised for being "approachable," is softened up by suggesting that the prisoners are simple men and that the sergeant caters for their simple needs such as salt in their porridge, and then Bheki makes the suggestion that the new warder is the one that will bring trouble for the prison. What he in fact means, is that the new warder will make life difficult for the prisoners, but he suggests it in such a way that the prison as a whole will suffer for his presence. Once Bheki has manipulated the public space for the apparent interests of the public space in this manner, Bhoyi moves in and attempts to beg

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⁴⁵ Pronounced "may barsie" and translated from the Afrikaans it means, literally, "my boss." It is used as a generic term of "respect" when blacks address white men and youths. Generally it is considered demeaning, and as such see the discussion in the text.

⁴⁶ Literally "Thank you, Father." See note concerning the word "baba."
a cigarette from the same sergeant who looks after the prisoners' well-being so well. He is successful, demonstrating that the prisoners have found out how to speak to the guards in terms that the guards know, understand and accept (the "reformed prisoner" model), and that the prisoners can thus get what they want if they use the language that is expected of them. The final comment seems to be exceptionally ingratiating, but is part of the expected signs of gratitude.

Both Bhek'i's and Bhoyi's dialogue do not indicate the way that they feel about things (in other words, that they have not been sucked into the dominant hegemony which expects signs of rehabilitation) but simply that, as members of the oppressed they have mastered the demands of the discourse of the oppressed in the public space.

In terms of illustrating the onstage-offstage dichotomy this passage also shows that from the point of view of the oppressed the guards are not even in the onstage position (literally). The interchange between the prisoners is clearly visible only to the prisoners. Consequently, what may appear to be ingratiating (and therefore potentially the words of a "sellout") are undermined in the way the prisoners relate to each other during the conversation with the guard -- an interaction which the guard cannot see, but the audience can. In this manner the "softening up routine" is shared, rehearsed, and everyone knows his part in the routine. Furthermore, they assist one another in "fooling the system."

This particular moment seems out of place because it does not develop the dramatic action in any way, except if seen in the light of the former part of the scene. In this earlier part the demeaning process of having fingerprints taken is demonstrated in a
lighthearted manner (14-15), the issuing of outrageously large clothes for the prisoners is shown, and the first of two mime sequences introduces the working together of the prisoners, and the working together of the actors. These mime sequences are standard ones that illustrate not only the virtuosity of the actors, but also the manual labor that the prisoners do.\textsuperscript{47}

The sequence is interspersed with two songs. The first one, "Abelungu Wodam,"\textsuperscript{48} is a standard working song that provides rhythm for the exertion and recuperation during the carrying out of the task, and the second is one of the beginning of resistance to the oppression.\textsuperscript{49} Consequently, one finds the scene divided into four parts which show how they outwit and outfox the oppressors, without leading directly to an overthrow of the oppression. The prisoners have developed a knowledge of what is expected of them from the oppressors, so that they can manipulate the onstage dialogue to their own advantage.

The next series of events demonstrates the labyrinthine machinations the oppressed have to go through in the onstage spaces. In these two scenes the process that is required to be gone through to acquire the "passbook" and necessary work permits is

\textsuperscript{47}One finds similar scenes throughout much of resistance literature in South Africa. These sequences are seen by many authorities as part of the technique typical of the genre. See, for example, Matsemela Manaka, \textit{Egoli}; Maishe Maponya \textit{The Hungry Earth} and many others.

\textsuperscript{48}"Abelungu wodam; Abelungu wodam. Ngifise abafana bethunda nam'. Ngithunda. Ngabhajwa ngqi." This is translated in the text as "Damn the boers. Damn the Boers. I found the boys ejaculating. I ejaculated. I gotVD on the spot." (17)

\textsuperscript{49}The song is "Welimpombo (sic) sithwele Kanzima Sihala; Sikhala Kuginqika ibhunu kukhala, clinye. Ibhunu, Kubaleka, Ibhunu." The text translates this as "This side of the Limpopo (the river which is the northernmost boundary of South Africa) we are suffering. But now the Afrikaner is crying, the Afrikaner is dying and yet another is running away." (17)
demonstrated. This is a standard scene in resistance theatre, as it is one of the nubs of the separate development process (that is to say, the passbook and the control of influx labor is a cornerstone of the onstage discourse of the oppressor) and as such it serves as a necessary moment of satire. It is also a wonderful vehicle for the virtuosity of the actor as the Kafkaesque processes are easily lampooned but are tortuous to demonstrate.

The central scene of the play is now reached. It demonstrates a fascinating mix of onstage and offstage moments. One must filter the analysis through the fact that Bheki is telling the story to his fellow inmates, and as such he has to impress them (as well as the audience in the theatre), and this creates an "onstage" dynamic. The tale is constructed around events that the other prisoners will recognize (and accept, or, more specifically, not condemn). Bheki tells how he is out in Durban looking for work, dressed in his sartorial finest, when he is confronted by three "gangsters" who have stolen a woman's handbag and are passing it amongst themselves as they run away (25). When asked what he did he replies:

I grabbed it. I grabbed the handbag. And right next to me were two big Afrikaner policemen. I got in between them. I looked at the policemen. I looked at the gangsters (pause while giving the gangsters a serious face) and I said: Zinja [dogs] come! Don't run away. You've touched me. This is the day. How can you touch a lion? How can you touch a tiger? Here is the source of my power! (grabbing his genital area) How can you touch me? (he starts singing his praises in Zulu). (All the PRISONERS jump up and go towards him and also sing his praises. They almost lift him up from the floor as they shout his praises). (25-26)

50Athol Fugard's play Sizwe Bansi is Dead bases its premise on the convolutions and diabolical strangle-hold that the pass system has on the lives of Black South Africans.
Bheki intervenes, instead of allowing the "tsotsis," who were "clever enough" to take the handbag, to escape. When he does so, it is to situate himself between the bulk of two Afrikaner policemen, who are the epitome of the oppressor. Bheki is stuck with a ticklish situation in front of the people to whom he is telling the story. Firstly, he has thwarted criminals, that is to say the very people he is now confederates with (Solomzi is a thief and the compatriot of "Bra Tony," the arch villain). Secondly, he has turned for "protection" to the arch enemies of the oppressed, namely the Afrikaner policemen. In this he faces the potential loss of face in front of his listeners (both on and offstage, or in the prison and in the theatre).

In this ambiguous position Bheki resorts to the two shared and common entities amongst the men -- the fact that they have praise names that are rooted in ethnic tradition, and the fact that their ideas of power are grounded in the sexual. As such Bheki calls on the two common denominators to remove the doubts about his behavior. In this the potential divisions amongst the men flows smoothly into the Bheki's ability to tell a story convincingly and with passion, as is illustrated by the enthusiasm the men have for his deeds and his storytelling.

As a postscript to the story, Bheki informs them that he moves in with the woman, whose husband died on the mines. The woman has a son named Johannes Zulu, who is the one that caused the confusion in the court-case and led to Bheki's arrest and imprisonment. Bheki walks the potentially ambiguous line of having saved the woman on the one hand, and of abusing her gratitude and helplessness on the other. The latter Ngema appears to blame, as do many resistance writers, on the South African migrant
labor situation. Consequently what has saved Bheki further in the eyes of the men is his 
smooth talking and his manly actions.

The ability to tell a story well is most problematic in the tale that Thami tells as a 
result of the Bheki saga. Thami responds with the idea that Bheki's story is good, but his 
is better. In this sense there is the nature of the competition of storytelling, which 
everitably places the credibility of the narrative in doubt. Thami's tale concerns itself 
with the contravention of the Immorality Act which prohibited sexual relations across the 
"color line." Thami is a farm laborer working on a pig farm in the Free State. While the 
white mistress of the farm is alone (her husband is doing military duty), she seduces 
Thami: "And I embraced her with my dirty hands full of pigs' food and it was the daily 
bread again"(29.) The story has strong echoes of The Biblical Prodigal son story, and 
resonances of sexuality being the "bread of life." As such Thami appears to be the one, 
through his story, that has "liberated" the woman, or, more particularly, that sex is 
eventually the great liberator.

This, however, is not the most troubling aspect of Thami's story. It is the way that 
he describes how the family is fooled by the woman into accepting the moment of 
seduction:

THAMI: One night she called me in. "Thami, kom hier (come here), come into 
the house." A child asked from another room. "Mommy, who is speaking Zulu in 
the house?" She said, "Ag man, it's Radio Zulu. I am trying to learn Zulu; go to 
sleep honey." (They all laugh). 
BHEKI: These white women are clever.(29)

What makes this particular moment so ambiguous is the reaction of the other men. If the 
laugh is one of amazement that the white woman is, in fact, "so clever," then this suggests
a naivey and incredulity on the part of the men. This is so because the prospect of a white Afrikaner woman who lives on a Free State farm, traditionally one of the most conservative representatives of the white community, actually learning a Black language (Zulu) from a region that is far away from the normal labor pool for the farm, is very difficult to believe. In this the incongruity of the detail would be countered by the daringness of the event to follow (the hush of expectation) and the virtuosity of storyteller to capture the accent (white, Afrikaner, woman) of the event.

Alternatively, if the laugh is one of sarcasm not at the unreal nature of the events, but at the gullibility of the white children to swallow such an improbable story, then the solidarity of the Black community versus the white community is cemented as the men, together, cheerfully agree with Thami's summing up of the stupidity of the white family.

The third alternative is not even considered by the men, namely that the woman is attempting to reach out and engage the "Other" so as to learn about "them." This, too, would explain why the woman would want to learn a Black language. This possibility is not entertained by the men because the lines of resistance and confrontation have been clearly drawn by Ngema in this play, and there are no alternatives in terms of rapprochement.

This is most clearly seen in the story of Bra Tony as told by the "tsotsi" in the group -- Solomzi. Solomzi "works" for Bra Tony, a gang leader who, according to Solomzi, was highly successful. However, the particular episode that raises the ambiguity occurs (as Solomzi tells it) when he and the gang meet an Indian woman on Verulam
station waiting for a train going from Durban to Zululand. Solomzi makes advances to the woman and she seems to respond. Then Bra Tony intervenes.

SOLOMZI . . . I don't know how Bra Tony got to know that she had money. He stood up, pulled out his big knife. She was looking at me, pretty thing, in shock. She trusted me. Bra Tony just (siap!) slapped her so hard that I saw tears flying out. Bra Tony said, "The money!" and she said, "I . . . I . . . I have no money." Bra Tony repeated the action. He hit her again. The stomach. The back. the head. The bottom. Her skirts were flying in the air. When she turned around to look at me Bra Tony was there. He looked her directly in the eyes. "Give me your panties." She said, "I . . . I . . . I'm having my period." "My baby, sweetheart, give it to me." You know what she did? She pulled down her panties and Bra Tony grabbed the whole thing. A big roll of money came out, man.
(The other prisoners snore loudly. SOLOMZI notices and turns to face them). (43-44)

This passage is significantly ambiguous and potentially very damaging to the "cause."

Hence Ngema has the other men drop off to sleep during the telling of the story, indicating that the men are not impressed. In this way Solomzi is considered either to be telling a story that is beyond the pale as far as the men are concerned, that is to say totally against their moral values, or he is telling it very badly (that is to say, the implications for the actor are that he tell the story in a "boring" way, for example). The possibility of harm to the cause is created, inevitably, by the fact that the gang of four attack a single woman, first by building up her trust, sexually, and then by attacking her physically. Yet

51Verulam was one of the designated "Indian" townships north of Durban, which became an independent town.

52There is an echo here of the title of the the play -- Asinamali! "We have no money!"

53I saw a production of Asinamali! in Durban in December, 1996, with Ngema directing and acting in the production and, anecdotally, there was much disquiet in the post-Apartheid audience during the telling of this story.

54In the production referred to above, this was indeed a very strong possible interpretation!
the level of deceit works both ways, and it is in the lengths that both parties (the men and the woman) go to, to eke out a living and to protect that living (by secreting the roll of money in the vagina) that is a telling indictment of the distrust created by the political system.

Ngema's problem is that the woman is an Indian woman. As such this makes her part of the oppressed masses, yet Ngema (as do many Zulus in Natal) feels that she is fair game as he perceives that they have placed themselves "higher up" in the hierarchy of oppression. As such, the woman is caught by race, class, and ethnicity as an outsider to the Black community whose offstage discourse he is working with. It is here that the exclusion of others, and the building of a solid Black Consciousness is at its most powerful, and most troubling. Here there are no alliances. The lines along race, class and ethnicity are clearly and almost unambiguously drawn.

However, there is still ambiguity in the sense that the men are prisoners. Following the concept that South Africa is a prison, the Black community appears to have been driven to this position by the criminal nature of the society. As such, the behavior is understandable, in that any pretext of morality is subverted and distorted. All that is left are the communal goal, the shared experiences, and the omnipresent oppression.

From this point onwards in the play, except for one lighter moment when the prisoners are asked to sing "Happy Birthday" for the prison and then are informed that they have been granted a five year remission of sentence (48-49), the solidarity of the black cause is foregrounded and consolidated around the cry of "Asinamali!" (We have
no money). Scenes that are to recur in the next play Sarafina! are related -- the confrontation with the violence of the police (44); the friends who are shot (Bhekani and Bra Tony), and the subsequent burial; the anger that turns people against real, potential and imaginary informers and their families (including the description of a necklacing) (45); and the attempts by the oppressor to divide the community by showing pamphlets that "had good pictures of happy Black families: children going to school in school uniforms, parents waving, parents reprimanding." (48)

The play ends with a discussion amongst the characters of their own relationships towards each other. This is reminiscent of the ending of Survival! where the "actors" attempt not to be characters but to "be themselves" as they discuss events in South Africa with the audience.\(^{55}\) This leads into the reconstituting of solidarity by rejecting the impimpis who are accused of informing on the leader of the Asinamali revolt (Msizi Dube) (51-52) and by calling on the leaders of the past and the present:

BHOYI: . . . Where are our leaders today? Where is Griffiths Mxenge and his wife Victoria Mxenge? . . . .

*(All the prisoners jump up and start shouting out the names of heroes past and present)*:

ALL: STEVEN BIKO, NELSON MANDELA, WINNIE MANDELA, LILLIAN NGOYI, AHMED TIMOL, ROBERT SOBUKWE, ZEPH MOTHOPENG, ABRAM TIRO, HECTOR PETERSON, OSCAR MPETA, BOBBY TSOTSOBE, GOVAN MBEKI, JOE GQABI, KHOTSO SEATHLOLO, WALTER SISULU, NEILL AGGETT, RUTH FIRST, BRAM FISCHER, NDODA XABA, SIBOSISO ZONDO.

They then break into song (and do indlamu, a Zulu dance) and finally they come together to form a phalanx of resistance. (52)

\(^{55}\)See Workshop '71. Survival!
The particular call on heroes and leaders of the struggle both past and present, dead and alive, is typical of much of the endings of Ngema’s plays. In *Woza Albert!* the list is smaller and culminates in a call for Albert (Luthuli) to return. Here the list is extended, and in *Sarafina!* the list includes names from all part of the world that have Black civil rights fighters and victims (including Martin Luther King, Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkruma). In all three cases the *imbongi* approach of using history to verify the historical nature of the struggle, and this particular action’s part in that history, is used. This also has the function of attempting to blur the lines between performance and reality, and to draw the audience into the struggle once more. What is also noticeable is the sequence of shouting the names, then the dance, then the song. These are all parts of the ritual of motivation of many of the methods of protest used against the iniquities of the public sphere.

This play is Ngema’s most overt construction of the dialogue of the offstage discourse of the oppressed in the form of a play. As such he runs the risk continuously of alienating the oppressor because of the blatant defiance he portrays. Yet at the same time he encourages resistance amongst the oppressed by “legitimizing” the shared offstage discourse in the public space of a theatre. The reputation he has garnered as a playwright with *Woza Albert!* grants him Vail and White’s "poetic licence" of the *imbongi* to perform in such a manner. The elements of the theatrical (the cohesion of movement, the dynamics of performance, the dances and songs) all enhance his status as an *imbongi*, presenting the murmurings and complaints of the oppressed to the oppressor. In this regard Ngema himself notes that
Peter Brook, the living god of western theatre, said that with Asinamali! I had managed to achieve what Grotowsky (sic) had been trying to do all his life with his troupe. I had managed to fill every second with activity, just like in real life where every moment is used constructively, where one is always thinking, breathing, moving, talking or being silent. (p. vii)

Despite the inflated ideas, it is clear that the performance aspect of the production had legitimized the content (at least in Ngema's eyes, and perhaps also in Brook's eyes).

5.3 Sarafina!

In Ngema's next play, Sarafina!,\textsuperscript{56} he turns to the children of Soweto after the uprising and defiance campaign that started on 16th June, 1976. The events of the play occur some time after that date but the school in which the action takes place, Morris Isaacson High School, was reputed to be the epicenter of that day's events. In the play Ngema traces the lives of some of the school pupils gathered around the young girl Sarafina, and the school teacher Mistress "It's A Pity."

The play basically relates the events in the life of the main character, Sarafina. She is a senior pupil in the school and is highly regarded by all, to such an extent that she is taken under the wing of her teacher in the school and told the history of the struggle against oppression in South Africa. She is twice detained by the security police but returns each time stronger than ever. The class she is with plan a play for the end of year school celebrations and this is to be the story of the struggle. The play ends with Sarafina

playing Nelson Mandela, the leader of the ANC, in a song and dance number which celebrates the end of oppression and the rising up of the masses.

Fundamentally the play investigate the failure of both Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA's) in the form of the schooling system, and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA's) in the form of the army and the police, to change the way of behavior and way of thinking of possibly the most impressionable of people, the youth. In doing this Ngema shows that education cannot be seen simply as a matter of schooling but as a matter of the entire ambit of life. As such ISA's can only work if all the apparatuses seem to work seamlessly in the presentation of the ideological position. However, if the weight of oppression is large enough, even the RSA's will be unable to contain the resistance.

In essence what occurs is that the perceived notion of education by the dominant or oppressive class is considered able to bring about change, and the prescribed change must be controlled and monitored in the school. On the other hand, the subordinate class appear to know full well what the agenda behind the type of education is that the oppressor considers in the oppressor's offstage discourse (an education that is designed to keep the Black community, according to the Biblical injunction, as "hewers of wood and drawers of water") and can counter it, which is why the police and army are there. Furthermore the pupils are led by the agenda that they themselves construct in their

57 The fact the RSA is the abbreviation of both Repressive State Apparatuses and Republic of South Africa is not without its irony!
offstage discourses and spaces. The school becomes the public space where the agendas of the oppressor and the oppressed meet. As Colgate suggests:

In our times we don't have to fight to see the army, tanks, casspirs, thunder chariots or hippos, all of these army machines; we live with them right here in our school. The soldiers have become the inspectors who patrol in our classrooms. They even study the syllabus. Sometimes they even forget their walkie-talkies inside our classrooms... What was most exciting about our school was the unity, the characters. (59)

and later

It was always like that in our school. Oneness: imbumba. Those days went down bitter and sore in the presence of the army and the police not only in our schoolyard, but right inside our classrooms. Those were the days of anger, the days of panic and fear, the days when our brothers and sisters disappeared into police cells. (112)

Ngema's play, therefore has a threefold agenda. In the first instance it wishes to demonstrate the situations in the Black schools, but to do so in such a way that the iniquities of the system (that is to say the concept of education as propagated by the oppressor) are foregrounded. It wants also to lift out the heroism and unity of the children under these circumstances, while still showing that the children are still children.

Thirdly it sets out to use the children as a method of mobilizing the Black community, by displaying the offstage discourse of the children in such a way that the broad Black contingent of the community might rise in protest. Ngema, as writer, composer and director, attempts to do this not only through the content of the piece (characters, plot and music) but also through the disciplined and controlled performances of the cast and company.

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58Casspirs, thunder chariots and hippos are various forms of troop deployment vehicles, which are designed also to be mine-proof, hence their ungainly appearances.
Ngema introduces the characters in the usual Ngema manner -- by direct address to the audience. The scene and play setter is one "Colgate," known for his huge smile, which accentuates the whiteness of his teeth in the blackness of his face. From the first monologue Colgate situates the play in the public sphere of the school and the private sphere of the children in the school. Thus the form of education is separated from the content of education, and this duality and consequent ambiguity will permeate the play. Colgate notes that the army (the representative of the RSA's), is always present in the school situation. Thus the harsh reality of the actual political situation is located in the dynamics of the theatrical.

Colgate also locates the action squarely in history by stating that he is a student at the "Morris Isaacson High School" from whence the uprising of 1976 started under the leadership of Tsietsi Mashinini (59). This is not strictly true according to fact, but the "sequence of events" that occurred in 1976 have been mythologized to such an extent that it is necessary to reconstruct the historical evidence before tackling the charge of the mythology of the event, and its consequent ambiguity.

The government of the day was caught in a multiple vice of pressures.\(^{59}\) Politically the white government was caught between two forces. On the one hand, the ideologically hard (white) right insisted on the segregation of the races and the ethnic divisions in the country. On the other, the economic necessities brought on by recession and isolation activated a group of white politicians to attempt to bring about adjustments

for better coping mechanisms among the blacks. To a large extent the former group consisted of the blue-collar workers whose positions would be in jeopardy should job reservation be lifted. In essence, though, both groups were using ideological arguments to cement economic interests.

There were reformists in the white political party who were by and large industrialists whose jobs would be secure, but whose industries (and therefore profit margins) were suffering. This degeneration of the economic field was due to two chief factors. The economy of the country was reeling under the fluctuations and recessions that were occurring in the international oil and gold markets. South Africa's main source of international revenue was gold, and as more gold was used to buy oil at the new, inflated oil prices, the price of gold fell, and South Africa was hit by a recession. The strikes across the country which had started in 1973 in Durban brought more and more pressure on the government to reform and to enhance the power of the worker. To further combat the effects of isolation and the international boycott, industrialists turned to ways of expanding the internal, or domestic market. To do this, the buying power of the large Black community would have to be increased and this could only be done through raising wages (which would have been difficult because of the recession) or to "allow" more people into white collar jobs. This, in turn, would weaken the power of the government as it would lose the right wing support it was fostering to remain in power.

In a brilliantly Machiavellian move the minister of education of the time, Dr. Andries Treurnicht, implemented a plan whereby all education for Blacks would be conducted in English and in Afrikaans alternatively, with arithmetic and social studies
(history and geography) particularly, in Afrikaans. The logic behind the move was to provide the education that would advance the Black community into the white collar jobs that they would be able to occupy, but in a language that would be perceived to be the language of the new market place, namely Afrikaner big business. In this way the status quo could be maintained, but industry would get better skilled people who knew the language of the oppressor, and who would better be able to communicate with the oppressor in the language of the market-place.

It was this final move that inflamed the student community in Soweto initially.

From there on, as Lodge so cogently describes, the uprising began:

On 13 June 1976, at a meeting of the South African Students' Movement (SASM) convened at Naledi High School, a Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC) was formed. . . . It was this body, under the initial chairmanship of Tebello Motopayane, which planned the fateful demonstration for 16 June. On that day 15 000 children converged on Orlando West Junior Secondary School, only to be confronted by a hastily summoned and aggressive police detachment which, when tear gas had failed to disperse the students, fired into the crowd, killing two and injuring several more. The schoolchildren retreated and fanned out into the township. By midday rioting had broken out in several parts of

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60 Arithmetic would cater to the economic necessities of the proposed "new" environment, and social studies would allow a gerrymandering of the syllabus to attempt to show the inevitability of history and the demographics of the country.

61 Throughout the literature concerning the time the words "children" and "students" are used, disconcertingly, interchangeably. Given the fact that the ages of pupils in a particular grade in Black schools would fluctuate radically, one has difficulty determining the age of the "children." It is conceivable, therefore to note that some of the children in the schools might well have been in their teens or even in their twenties. It is this that has added credence to the mythology of the "children of Soweto."

62 One of those killed would have been Hector Peterson (or Petersen), the photograph of whom adorned the world press the following day, and has become an icon of the student's revolt. Peterson's name has entered the mythology of the era, and Sam Ndzima's photograph of Mbuyisa Makhubu carrying the bleeding body of Petersen "hangs in the United Nations headquarters in New York and other centres."

Soweto; cars were stoned and barricades erected, arson attacks took place on administration buildings and beer halls, and two white men were attacked and killed. The rioting continued into the evening and deepened in intensity when police baton-charged homecoming crowds of commuters outside railway stations.\textsuperscript{63}

Chaos further ensued as schools were closed, and students dispersed, causing breakdowns in communication and the failure of solidarity. Motopanye fled the country, and Tsietsi Mashinini took over as chairman of the SSRC.\textsuperscript{64} "The Afrikaans teaching medium was dropped by the authorities" from the curriculum soon after.\textsuperscript{65}

This last development causes problems in the understanding of much of the direct impetus for the further demonstrations as described in \textit{Sarafina!}, as it would appear that the entire rebellion against Afrikaans becomes a pretext for further, social, demonstrations (61–62). It is, however, a solid example of the way that a particular event becomes mythologized as a rallying cry against (in this case) a government that had as its chief language, Afrikaans. The leap from language as a medium of instruction to language as the language of oppression is easily made, because the sphere in which the language is used, is dominated by both the RSA's and the ISA's, and consequently they foreground each other. The cardinal blunder that the white government made (in their offstage deliberations) was to assume that the oppressed were not able to tie together the

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63 Lodge \textit{Black Politics} 328.
64 This is the Mashinini that Colgate refers to in \textit{Sarafina!} 59.
65 Lodge \textit{Black Politics} 328-329. This particular point provides problems for the text as, on (61-62) the students complain to Sarafina that they do not want to have all their subjects presented in Afrikaans. The Afrikaans language policy had been dropped some three years before the time of the action of the play. This is yet another example of the mythologizing process at work, as the language issue is demonized.
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284
economic upliftment that using Afrikaans might bring (i.e. material benefits), to the oppression of the world of ideas that it would cause.

As Lodge points out, there have been four major studies on the causes of the 1976 uprising, and he proceeds to outline and critique these explanations in the light of the perceived agendas of the authors. It is worth rehearsing the four arguments as they resonate with both the perceived offstage discourse of the writers and the political persuasion to which the writers belong, but the arguments also demonstrate to what extent, and in what direction Ngema himself uses the events of 1976 and beyond in his own agenda.

John Kane-Berman’s book, Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction, places the cause of the uprising within the bounds of the developing force of Black Consciousness thinking on the one hand, and a sense of thwarted rising expectations on the other -- the ideational and the material. The recession, the increased educational opportunities but the lack of jobs, less money spent by authorities on the infrastructure of the community, and arrogant officialdom, all contributed to the frustration caused by actual oppression. Black Consciousness thinking provided the community with a politicizing agenda to foreground a basis for self worth, dignity and community other than white, Eurocentric officialdom. As these two forces met in the public sphere of Soweto, the educational crisis was simply the spark that ignited the ensuing conflagration. As Lodge points out, this view of things was to a large extent determined by Kane-Berman’s liberal premises,

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determined as it was by a search for the dignity of the human spirit. In this sense the discourse of resistance was "written" from a universal sense of dignity.

Jeremy Brickhill and Alan Brooks' analysis hinges around two primary divisions. On the one hand there was an massive increase in school attendance in Soweto, without the necessary expansion of financial assistance to accommodate this. Consequently, the educational systems became more and more inferior. On the other hand, despite some movement in the labor market, any hope for improvement was offset by a large jump in the cost of living, resulting in spiraling inflation and the concomitant diminution of the workforce. This combination of inadequacy and despair, coupled with a return to the thinking of the ANC to provide guidance, brought about the policies of civil disobedience. In this sense, the agenda of and for the discourse for resistance had, as it were, been written for the students.

The third analysis comes from Baruch Hirson in his book Year of Fire, Year of Ash. He brings to prominence the strong, and developing, working class systems of resistance as demonstrated in the workers' strikes and industrial action which had started in Durban in 1973. He points out that the student leaders themselves had difficulty in judging the massive and necessary contribution the work force would have to play in the rebellion, and accuses them of seeming to want to dictate to the workers the nature of stay-aways and strikes. He also spends much of the book attempting to deflate the

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influence of Black Consciousness on the thinking of the leaders, as he sees Black Consciousness as a diversification of the process of the struggle. Consequently the "script" for resistance had to be created for the students by the workers. The stories of resistance told by the parents and the press and the lack of fire to combat oppression directly by the older generation, coupled with the very material pressure the students were feeling in terms of poverty, and the resurgent debate between Black Consciousness and the ANC, made the terrain ripe for the explosion. Here the offstage discourse called for solidarity and mass action and this precipitated the clashes. Yet Hirson also claims that the student leaders were not able to judge the importance of the necessary mass action, hence the discourse they developed relied on their own experiences and recognizances.

The fourth analysis of the events of 1976 comes from the official commission set up to investigate the uprising, namely the Cillie Commission. Lodge suggests that "the value of Cillie's massive survey lies in its descriptive detail (much of which is in flat contradiction to the report's conclusion)." Cillie concludes that the riots were the result of the inefficient and inhumane implementation of the policies put in place by the government of the day. The linchpin for this inefficiency was a lack of communication channels for the airing of grievances and levels of dissatisfaction. The driving force behind the uprising was, according to Cillie, the presence of agitators and intimidation. Put another way, if there had been no agitators, and if the channels of communication for

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71 Lodge Black Politics 332. (Lodge's parenthesis.)
the airing of grievances had been in place, then the riots might not have happened. In essence, then, the agitators made the masses speak the discourse that they wanted spoken, and the government's fault was in not providing a cathartic (in the sense of a safety valve) outlet for grumblings, nor a channel to find out how the system could be improved (as opposed to altered). From the point of view of the government, the ideological effectiveness of their policies (the onstage discourse of the oppressor) was inefficient, not incorrect.

Thus, the major discourses available to Ngema in the writing of the play were the ideational and material theories rehearsed in various offstage and onstage discourses of Black Consciousness, the liberal tradition, working class thinking, and the system in place (the onstage discourse of the oppressor). The very real and material conditions in which and about which he writes obviously have a unifying tendency, but Ngema will draw on all of them in the play.

From a liberal position Ngema draws on the idea that all children will have the same urges. Consequently, the boys and girls in the play are concerned with the relationships that teenagers have, namely the sexual. Sarafina is idealized for the idea that she is, amongst other things, a "pretty mama." The entire theme song for Sarafina is redolent with phrases such as "you break my heart in pieces," and "Sarafina when you talk de way you talk/ me body temperature begin to rise," and finally "I love you Sarafina." (62-64) Furthermore, the girls are shown to be girls as they play a rhyme game "POTATOES AND BANANAS" (76) and the boys with proving their prowess in fighting:
CROCODILE: I hit him so hard!
BOYS: Yah!
CROCODILE: I hit the mouth!
BOYS: The mouth!
CROCODILE: The nose!
BOYS: The nose! (77)

Ultimately, the children have dreams about the future when the oppression is
lifted and they can find freedom. The expression of this moment is captured in the play
that they are designing to perform, in which Sarafina is to play Nelson Mandela (see 121
to the end). This is caught up in the final song, where Sarafina is to stand in for Nelson
Mandela: "Bring Back Nelson Mandela,"

SARAFINA:
There will be millions of people, millions, from all over the world in a big open
field in Soweto. The whole place will be vibrating. Women will be ululating.
(She ululates) Dust will be rising to the skies. The air will be filled with the
sound of laughter. People will be rubbing shoulders with one voice, one thought,
one colour. Everybody will be shouting CHORUS: Mandela! Mandela! . . .
"My people, today I am free". And the people will say. . .
CHORUS:
Viva Mandela! Viva!
SARAFINA:
We were released from prison because you never forgot us. You constantly
demanded our release and carried on the struggle. We are here today not to seek
revenge or to destroy but to build the future. Where all of us, black and White can
come together and forget the past and work to liberate our land. We should
remember that it is only when South Africa is free that all of Africa is free. And
the people will go wild! Today I see all of my friends, brothers, sisters, our
heroes. I feel the spirit of those that died for our liberation. The liberation of the
entire African community in all corners of the world. (122)

She then proceeds to list the heroes of the Black community over the world: "Steven
Biko, Samora Machel, Martin Luther King, Nkwame Nkruma, Marcus Garvey, Robert
Sobukwe, Malcolm X, Victoria Mxenge. . ." (123) The list is different from the lists at

289
the end of the other plays because of the presence of the international names. The majority of the names are associated with Black Consciousness, namely Steven Biko, Marcus Garvey, Robert Sobukwe and Malcolm X, but all of them are associated in some way or other with Black liberation.

In relation to the rest of the play this monologue is rife with contradictions. Primarily the predominant and driving force behind the play is antagonism toward the regime in power. All the interaction that is demonstrated in the play between the Black community and the regime is violent and destructive. Some examples illustrate this. Sarafina is arrested and spends time in detention and the stories told about the detention include tales of torture and horror (78-80). When the soldiers and policeman attempt to control the crowds of children, the children are "gunned down" (82-85). Silence tells the story of his father being stopped at a road-block and being savaged by a police dog (93). Sarafina relates of her time with Victoria Mxenge during which Mxenge defended a woman who had been raped by a white policeman, and the subsequent assassination of Victoria Mxenge (101-102). In all of these examples (the police force, the education system, the traffic control, and the law courts) the savagery of the regime is presented in anecdotal form as the stories are spoken, and the reaction to the stories is re-enacted. Furthermore, the examples illustrate the blurring of the distinction between ISA's and the RSA's by the regime, as the oppression is perceived to become weightier and weightier.

Seen against this backdrop, it is difficult to accept the forgiveness and reconciliation that Sarafina speaks about in the closing monologue presented above. There are three possible solutions to this highly ambiguous quandary. In the first place
the Christian ethic of forgiveness and reconciliation which was to become the driving force behind the constituting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa in 1994 following the transfer of power in 1999, was put forward very powerfully by the concepts of Black Theology and the large influence of the Christian Churches in South Africa (see below). As such, the monologue reflects the move away from revenge and moves towards the era when the past will be or has been forgiven. In the light of the liberal tradition, this appears to be a fair conclusion.

Secondly, Scott's concept of the millennial is foregrounded here. The life after Apartheid has to be articulated in opposition to the present system of revenge and terror. Therefore, any millennial vision must not show division, discrimination and oppression, but must be conceived of in terms of unity (imbumba), fair play and equality. If this were not the case, then the community espousing the millennial would be as guilty of the transgressions against which they rebel as the perpetrators of the transgressions. In this sense, Sarafina is simply rehearsing the script of the millennial moment.

Thirdly, the jump from the horrors presented before the speech and the angelic vision of the future, appears to demonstrate to the audience that the children, despite all the trials and tribulations that they have gone through, are still capable of being "human." In this sense, the heroic nature of the children is foregrounded, not only in terms of the basic humanity displayed, but also because the children are the leaders of the future. As such an audience who saw a group of future leaders who were bent on revenge and destruction would not be sympathetic to future investments in that country. In this

291
manner, Ngema is seen magnanimously to forego revenge, but is in fact preparing the ground for the stability he would need to have his own theatre career to prosper.

In this last regard, one might also point to the convention of the musical as a genre to end on an upbeat note for it to have its audience leave the theatre positively. In this sense Ngema knows that to leave an audience depressed does not bode well for the box-office. It is this idea, amongst others, that will impact greatly on the effectiveness of his next musical Township Fever!

The Black Consciousness notions in the play reflect the popularized and politicized notions of Black Consciousness. The prime Black Consciousness slogan "Black man, you are on your own" was meant originally to suggest that Blacks would have to do everything themselves, and to do this Blacks would have to break the shackles of what was perceived to be psychological and physical subservience, as well as creating physical and political spaces in which they could operate. Essentially this meant attempting to create vast self-help organizations (which never really materialized) and political and educational organizations that would break assumptions of inevitability and plan for the future.

The core position of Black Consciousness was located in the twofold prongs of Black Theology, (providing a philosophical or ideational basis), and the Otherness of being from Africa. For the former many predominantly Christian organizations were used and accessed. This was for three particular reasons. Firstly, and very expediently in some cases, the Christian philosophy was the one weak link in the thinking of the white

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72 For a detailed, if stunted, view of Black Consciousness, see Hirson Fire Part 3.

292
government at the time. Their approach was rationalized around the concepts of presumed "Christian National" policies, not only in the governance of the country, but also in the system of education they propagated -- Christian National Education or CNE. Consequently, to attempt to refute the Apartheid policies, or at least to attempt to undermine theoretically the concepts of separate development, meant that those in theology had to deconstruct much of the theoretical thinking which attempted to underpin the policies. Hence Black Consciousness developed Black Theology, which was a combination of the burgeoning thinking around Liberation Theology from Central and South America, and a perceived unique blend of religions which were part of the African Christian experience. The upshot of all of this was that much of the leadership in Black Consciousness came from the religious thinkers and leaders, many of whom in the early stages were white.

Secondly, Christian structures and churches were condoned and thus very much in place in South Africa. The oppressor's thinking on this matter was that religion could be "used" not only as a mechanism for defusing rebellion because of the fear of God's punishment, but that the Bible could be used to "locate" people according to Biblical precepts. (This was the position of the missionaries in Africa, too). In this sense churches were seen as effective and necessary Ideological State Apparatuses. Thus Christian organizations were encouraged, and movement among and between organizational nodes was made easy. Black Consciousness organizations could thus make use of the structures in place, and the burgeoning thinking around Black Theology,
to access the communities and propagate self-worth as a fundamental concept. All else would follow once the Black Man had rediscovered his potential.

Thirdly, much of the same type of thinking on free movement had allowed the University Christian Movement to flourish on many university campuses. Consequently, the youth of the country, who were perceived to be leaders for the future community were not only allowed space to congregate and share ideas and strategies, but they were at first actively encouraged. The government was under the impression that Otherness, that is to say Blackness, was being developed, and this seemed to be in line with their own thinking.

This last assumption of Black Consciousness was rooted in rediscovering and theorizing this Otherness, as seen in opposition to both the African National Congress's notion of non-racialism, and the government's (offstage) concept of Black inferiority. To do this, Black Consciousness thinking turned to the particular histories of the communities and began to retell the events of the Black Man's heroism and resistance in days gone by. History was to be "rewritten" so that the "actual facts" would be told about the meeting of the Blacks and whites in South Africa. Consequently many of the leaders of the past were lionized, including Shaka, the supposed founder of the Zulu nation, and Dingane his successor, who had defied the white man and had "killed the Boers" who were seeking to take Zulu land. Events of particular significance were also enshrined in the history of the people, such as the Zulu victory over the British forces at Isandhlwana.
in 1879, and the Bambatha Rebellion of 1905. These people and events were held up as
role models and emulation possibilities, as beacons of hope and as the yardsticks for the
future. What was needed was a redefined and "rewritten" mythology of the Black nation.
It is this mythology that Sarafina uses in her history lessons with the white child (p. 69-71).

Historical figures and events were not the only aspects of difference. Customs
which were to be used to accentuate difference were also foregrounded. One of these was
a move away from the striving towards individuality and the foregrounding of the
individual, towards an embracing of what was perceived to be the concepts of *imbumba*
or solidarity, and the ideas of *ubuntu* or African humanity. The latter was to find root
through Africa in the concepts of African Socialism or African Communalism. The
social underpinning was seen to be the way of all African communities and could
effectively be seen, for example, in the beauty of community singing. The mass, and
seemingly spontaneous, choir-like sound that appeared to be typical of "traditional"
African singing was seen to be proof of that.

Yet this "togetherness" is indeed an invention of tradition, as can be seen in the
fact that tribal chiefs and leaders have immense power in the communities in which they
function. As I demonstrated in Chapter one, the *imbongi* was seen to be the interlocutor
between the power position of the chiefs, and the needs of the communities. To a large

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73See John Laband, *Rope of Sand: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom in the Nineteenth

74See particularly Ranger's own contribution to the volume, T.O. Ranger and Eric Hobsbaum eds.,
extent the "gap" between power positions and the communities could not be filled through democracy, and herein lies one of the major problems of "leadership through democratic means" as was propounded by the Black Consciousness movements. The result was that Black Consciousness remained to a large extent the ideals of the intelligentsia, but because the ideas were propagated through printing, and were disseminated internationally in a style that was accessible to many, Black Consciousness came to be seen as the norm for thinking about Africa. Furthermore, Black Consciousness did not attempt to conscientize the masses in any meaningful way. The theoretical position that democracy was either conceived of as participation in government and structures, or representation in government and structures was highly problematic.

The importance of this last point is threefold. The argument for Black Consciousness was articulated in the language of the oppressor (and the language of the West as dominant ideology, as well), and could thus be accessed for argument's sake. Following this, it could be assumed that the oppressor deemed the argument to be widespread and thus "democratically fathomable." Consequently, reliable parallels could be made to similar situations elsewhere in the world. Thirdly, and following from the first two points, Mbongeni Ngema could use the ideas of Black Consciousness, knowing that they were accessible to the majority of an international market, as well as the oppressor in South Africa.

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In this regard Sarafina is aware of the discourse of the oppressor (history, the prison experience) and is learning the discourse of the oppressed from the streets, from the interaction with her friends (of whom she has many), and from the work that Mistress is teaching them. This combination of Other discourse, Own discourse, and "being a girl and a friend" is assumed to locate the play in a discourse that appears to be accessible to all. It is to this that the audiences are supposed to turn to find their point of reference.

The working class community was to a large extent not drawn into the rebellion of 1976, and this is reflected in the lack of reference to the workers in this play. The ambiguous nature of this turn of events is apparent. Ngema may be seen to be historically accurate in this regard. The play has to do with children, thus it would not be necessary for Ngema to refer to the working class, as it would undermine the "unity" of the events. Furthermore, Ngema's working methods suggest that to a large extent the play is improvised according to the information he gleaned from the actors in rehearsals, and then molded and adapted to suit Ngema's vision as an artist. In this regard it would make sense to speculate that Ngema drew on the actors' understanding of the events, mythologized as they might have been by the time he "wrote" the play. Bearing in mind that Leleti Khumalo who played Sarafina was only fourteen when Ngema selected her for the role, it would appear that the mythologizing process had become popularized by then for the children, in much the same way as the myths of Shaka had been popularized for Ngema.

Consequently, the role of the worker is almost completely omitted, and appears only in the concepts of imbumba (the slogan "An injury to one is an injury to all" -- 108)
and hardship. Furthermore, the only adult in the play is the school teacher herself, who is perceived of as being an unorthodox teacher at the best of times -- her high kicks to illustrate a point or to gain attention are not typical of teachers. The only other event that demonstrates the oppressor's view is a farcical discussion between a sergeant and a lieutenant as to the legality of the killings, where the sergeant is shown quoting the relevant parliamentary Act, including quoting the commas in the Act. (109-111)

We meet Mistress in four specific teaching events. The first one is when she starts a school morning: "OK! We have to begin the day with the Lord's Prayer... Our father which art in heaven!..." (64) At first glance this moment is simply to reaffirm the abilities of the actors to singing in the mbaganga style of music and that the words of the Lord's Prayer are used as the vehicle. Yet coming near the start of the play, the song locates the characters in the heart of Black Theology, with all the concomitant expressions of faith in life and God and the Black experience of both. It is a moment of joy and potential. The fact that Mistress leads the worship, by indicating that it has to be done in the schools system, locates the event in an ambiguous way, in that it would appear that there are certain things that the oppressor demands of the Black community that they themselves find necessary. In this sense the clear differentiation between oppressor and oppressed is initially elided.

The second teaching event is the first lesson of the morning which is the recitation of William Wordsworth's poem "Composed upon Westminster Bridge," led by Sarafina. At first glance this is a strange choice for the play, as the poem deals, as Sarafina puts it, with "beautiful cities in England which have nothing to do with us." (69) As part of the
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299

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school syllabus, the intention behind the poem is not so much to explore the beauty of London, but to explore the beauty of poetry as a genre. In this sense, any vehicle would do, and it is a mark of the oppressor's lack of insight into the poetry of South Africa that it needs to turn to Wordsworth for this example. Yet the presentation of the poem, as Sarafina says a line or a word and it is repeated by the assembled students, gives an indication of the type of call and response that is typical of much of the play. Secondly, the enthusiasm with which the students engage in the task of presenting the poem indicates that they enjoy the task at hand and are willing to "be educated." In this, the claim by the oppressor (not recorded in the play) that the students were reluctant to attend school, is disproved.

Mistress herself realizes the incongruity to which Sarafina refers, as she answers Sarafina with "It's a pity!" (69) Yet she does nothing to counter the educational notions implied. This is underscored by her next class, directly after that, which is on mathematics, and here she expects them to excel as she provides them with a complex problem to solve. Having found that they cannot do the problem, they turn to history, and it is here that Sarafina leads the class into the "alternative" history. Sarafina relates the dual histories: “SARAFINA: I tell him about the history that we learn and I also tell him about the other history that Mistress teaches us, ... the history that is not in the books, the history of our people. The history of our heroes.” (70) Mistress has guided the students into this moment. The history of the oppressor is rejected, the heroes of the community are claimed (and proclaimed), and even Shakespeare is condemned. The scene ends with a lionizing of Nelson Mandela and a condemnation of the government as
"shit" in a call and response song led by Sarafina. (69-74) This is followed by the music class which is simply an excuse for marveling at the vocal dexterity and musicality of the youngsters, both as characters and as actors. After this the students take a break.

Mistress, in this sequence of events, has taken the audience from a moment where Black Theology and white theology overlap, through the syllabus of the oppressor, back to the duality of the discourses of history, and ending with "universality" of the music lesson. The trajectory of the events demonstrate the types of choices that the students (and perhaps the audience) would have to make during the course of the play. To whom is one loyal? What does one use as a yardstick for knowledge, attitudes and behavior? And what are the educational obligations that mistress does or should follow? These are all questions that Ngema raises in the beginning of the play.

After this, events overtake the moral choices. The third lesson is the lesson about the oil-producing nations of the world, and demonstrates how the oppressor's discourse does not allow for the "existence" of the oil countries that have regimes that oppose the South African white government. In this particular case the reference to Libya brings down the wrath of the regime and ends with the gunning down of the students and the subsequent funeral. (80-85)

The final contact with Mistress is in the discussion as to what the class is going to present at the concert, and leads, democratically, into the decision to do a play about Nelson Mandela, in which Sarafina is to play Mandela. (96-98) Yet before the concert, Mistress sings a farewell song with and for the youngsters who have decided to flee the country and join the exiled communities who are planning to take back the country, or
who have decided to go underground. Mistress, with the events of the day, has sown the seeds of the ambiguity. Thus Mistress has led the children through the full gamut of South African life, ending with the songs to Africa ("Kilimanjaro" and "Africa is burning in the sun"), (114-116) and the appeal to the millennials in the song "Bring back Nelson Mandela." (121-123)

By introducing these songs at the end, Ngema shows the resilience of the youth, and as such draws on the dynamics of the performance to mobilize feelings against the regime. It is just this point that forces him to forego his confrontational attitude as experienced in Asinamali!, as he is now aware of having a vehicle to speak to the entire world. It is a measure of the potency of this vehicle that Ngema was financed to undertake his next major project, namely Township Fever!.

5.4. Township Fever!

The play that caused the most problems for Ngema as a "playwright of resistance" was Township Fever!. This play deals with the killing of four scab laborers who had broken trade union rank during the strike by South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union (SARWHU, which is a COSATU -- Congress of Trade Unions of South Africa -- affiliate), against the management of SATS (South African Transport Services). A worker had been unfairly dismissed, and as a show of solidarity, the Union went on strike. The strikers were dismissed by SATS. During very heavy handed treatment by

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both sides (including the death of the four scab laborers, and the use of force by the police), tensions ran extremely high and loss of income to SATS was significant. The killers of the scab laborers were brought to trial and sentenced to death. All the strikers were reinstated at the end of the strike. To a great extent the events of history reflect the events recounted in the play.

However there is a subplot in the play that uses the main character, Jazz Mgadi, as a tracer through the oppressive situation. Jazz illustrates the personal in the political. He loves playing the guitar and wants to be a professional musician. There is no work for him, so, to earn money to marry his sweetheart, he gets a job in industry. He is swept up in the strike and the subsequent violence against the scabs, and is part of the group that kills the scabs. He is tried and sentenced to death.

Ngema himself sets the scene:

I was fascinated by the idea that people without any criminal record could be compelled to commit gruesome acts totally out of character with their personalities and their morality under the forces of what David [Dison -- his lawyer and friend] called a ‘pressure-cooker situation.’ Of course, I was also interested because I knew something that every black South African knew -- the appalling conditions under which SATS workers suffered. 

Ngema thus places himself right from the outset in the double bind. One the one hand he claims to know the working conditions of the strikers in real life, yet on the other hand he is not sure why they did what they did. Furthermore, he attempts to individualize the members of the group in his attempt to consider their motives and their states of mind, contrary to the calls by most of the Trade Unions for solidarity, and the subsuming of the
individual into the mass (see the chapter on Trade Union Theatre). In this manner he puts himself directly on a collision course with the Trade Unions.

In this section I will examine the following hypothesis. Ngema disregards the Trade Unions' public, onstage discourse (which calls for solidarity), relying rather on attempting to show the problem areas in the Trade unions' offstage strategizing and negotiation. In this sense, Ngema, by showing the petty squabbles, elements of coercion, and "weaknesses" of the offstage discourse, undermines the Trade Unions' calls for solidarity, dignity, democratic methods and just cause. He does this by relying on two major considerations. On the one hand he relies on the power and identification of and with the performance dynamics of the production, and on the other hand he relies on the monolithic "just cause" of black South Africans in the struggles for freedom. In other words he attempts to aestheticize the performance space, and to create solidarity with those who are against the political system in general.

Ngema's play locates four major characters in the of events of the strike that led to the deaths, and trial and ultimate conviction of the killers and their sentencing to death. Like Asinamali! he starts his play in a prison, as the four condemned men watch ghoulishly as a condemned man from across the passage devours his last meal -- an entire, deboned chicken. In his typically stylized way reminiscent of Asinamali! and of Sarafina! Ngema has the characters provide the exposition directly to the audience to provide them with the information that the characters are all in condemned cells. As in Asinamali!, the telling is through narration and direct address, coupled with call-and-response approach as each person leading a particular aspect of the dialogue, is echoed by

304
the others. In this case Sibisi, who will become the (very inefficient) Chairman of the meeting against the scabs, relates how his grandfather (Vukayibambe) was among the men that provided "medicine" to the warriors who fought and defeated Lord Chelmsford's British forces at Isandhlwana. (135-136)

From these very first moments Ngema introduces a number of major themes that will percolate throughout the play. There is the strong ethnic (in this case, Zulu) approach that will permeate the thinking of the four condemned men. This theme will resonate in the marriage relations and expectations that are to follow. Thus a strong Black Consciousness feeling is to be found in the play. But this was contrary to the major ideas put forward by COSATU who were to a large extent charterists.78 The unions that substantially backed the Black Consciousness approach to the issue were affiliated either to NACTU (National Council of Trade Unions) or to the Inkatha dominated UWUSA (United Workers Union of South Africa).79

The second theme that materializes is the one that shows that the Zulu people are men of war: "JAZZ: They did not know that you had the power of the African medicine. The power of War!"(135) As the men prepare to confront the police (and deal with the scabs) SIBISI brings his daughter who will perform the ancestral ritual:

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78 Charterists were those people who adhered to the African National Congress's "Freedom Charter" drawn up in 1956. One of the major tenets of the document is a nonracial approach to the population. One of the central tenets of COSATU, and one of the reasons for disbanding FOSATU was around this very issue of non-racialism. See the chapter three on the Trade Unions. Clearly, here Ngema defies the nonracial approach, and compounds the mistake by claiming the supremacy of the Zulu nation.

79 See Lodge, All, Here and Now 85-86. See also the discussion on the differences, as presented in Chapter three of this dissertation.
The men fetch their sticks and line up . . . The CHAIRMAN'S DAUGHTER puts the mbawula down stage left and the CHAIRMAN goes to it. He walks his daughter around the mbawula once and together they begin the ritual of dipping each man's head and fighting stick into the smoke. This is supposed to protect them from the police. (170)

Ngema's problem here is that he assumes that the men will not be able to survive without this ritual. In other words, the strength of the men themselves is insufficient. Yet the Trade Union itself, in its struggle to control the factory floor, is a modern, Western idea and prides itself on its own strength and solidarity. It does not need the forces of the ancestors to complete its task. Again, Ngema has superimposed his view and experience of the Black condition onto the Trade Union's. He has taken the offstage discourse from one space, and implanted it into another space. Then he has presented this ("incorrect") offstage space in an onstage space of the Trade Union gathering, and from there onto the stage of the theatre.

This leads directly to the third theme which is the one of the ancestors and the "roots" of the struggle. Ngema does this to locate the events in history (in much the same way as the imbongi might), so that the millennial will provide a continuum for the people whose space he is sharing and "documenting." In this he also gainsays the working towards equality for all by the Trade Unions.

The main character in the play is Jazz Mgadi, a budding musician/guitar player who wants simply to play his guitar in a band, but is forced by his mother to "get a job, any job." His claims that working long hours will ruin his chances of achieving his dream ring true, but also echo Ngema's own strategy of relying on the support of other
people to further his own musical ends.\textsuperscript{80} Jazz joins the union as part of his new job. He also has a love affair with Tonko Mnisi, which leads to the two of the main songs of the first act in English -- "Township Fever!" (138-9), and "Blazing like Fire" (141-2). He eventually gets married to Tonko Mnisi (once he has his respectable job), which provides Ngema with the opportunity for elaborately portraying a seemingly traditional wedding (158-163). The wedding is also used as a time to remember the strike, as the priest says:

\begin{quote}
Brothers and sisters, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I just want to ask everybody here to pray for the strike. Let us pray for our strength, for peace, for hope, for courage, for the struggle. Oh yes, let us pray for the strike! Hallelujah!
\end{quote}

(162)

In other words, the space of the wedding, which echoes not only with the traditional weddings of the Zulu, but also with Christian weddings, becomes at the same time a space that reminds the characters of the spaces of the work-place. All are conflated in a shared agenda of the wedding. Thus Jazz's marriage to Tonko becomes a seeming marriage to the Trade Union.

The priest's prayer also reminds one of the other priests that figure in resistance theatre in South Africa -- the priest in Athol Fugard's \textit{No Good Friday},\textsuperscript{81} and the Impundisi in Gibson Kente's \textit{Too Late},\textsuperscript{82} for example, both of whom pray for resilience to last through the struggle, but not to take an active part in it. There is a strong harking back to Black Theology, and the charismatic tradition, as the service ends with a typical

\textsuperscript{80}The bulk of the first part of Laura Jones' biography of Ngema documents the way Ngema moves from one "sponsor" to the next until he has outstayed his welcome.

\textsuperscript{81}Athol Fugard, \textit{No Good Friday} Dimetos and Two Early Plays (London: OUP, 1977).

call and response procedure, as well as stirring religious singing in a strong Gospel tradition.

Tonko is one of the pressures brought to bear against Jazz doing his Trade Union duty at a later stage in the play. In a scene that shows Tonko demanding of Jazz that he leave his Trade Union obligations and return to married life and the responsibilities that go with that, Tonko is made out to be an underminer of the solidarity of the struggle. Indeed, the confrontation leads to a physical confrontation: “(JAZZ resists her. She grabs his clothing and they have a fight. Eventually she rips his shirt and he forces her off him. She collapses in a heap on the floor, sobbing. He turns his back and walks away).” (169) The harsh physicality of the fight is very theatrical, but the implications for the play are (1) that Tonko (that is to say Woman) does not understand the demands of the struggle and that she is simply being hysterical by not acknowledging the different spaces, (2) that women do not support the struggle when it is at the expense of home life, and (3) that men are stronger than women. Furthermore, the only other fight that is presented mimetically in this way in the play occurs between Mrs. Mgadi, the mother of Jazz, and Mrs. Mnisi, the mother of Tonko. All the other fights are reported on in storytelling form in the oral tradition. When one considers that Tonko, Mrs. Mgadi and Mrs. Mnisi are the only female characters in the entire play who are not tied to a ritualistic moment (the other is Mthand’ iPoki, the daughter of Sibisi, who carries in the magic potion for the "warriors"), and that they are either maudlin or cat-fighting, one begins to critique Ngema’s seemingly negative view of women.
The construction and representation of the Trade Union on stage is also done in a sensationalist manner. When Sibisi is elected Chairman and he is introduced by Bra Cobra

Sit down please. Keep quiet. Comrades, I have been asked by our leaders upstairs in the small hall to bring this man to you (pointing to MR SIBISI. there is great commotion and BRA COBRA quiets the workers). Shut up, please sit down. Comrades, this man standing in front of you (BRA COBRA hits the CHAIRMAN with a tin cup) we elected him the Chairman. Chairman means, he decides who goes to the toilet. He decides who speaks. Comrades this is to bring about order. Ya, whenever you want to say anything, anytime, raise up your hand. When he points to you, stand up and talk. (166)

The overriding sense of this passage is one of mockery of the process. The democratic process, so keenly followed by the Trade Unions, is glossed over in that it appears that Sibisi is elected elsewhere, and then ratified by the people "in the small hall." Secondly the roll of chairman is denigrated by the blow with the tin cup, and the reference to the fact that he is to regulate toilet attendance. Furthermore, the raising of the hands echoes the process used by school children to attract attention. In other words, the very responsible task of chairman is made to resemble a goonish school teacher. Ngema plays this for laughs, but the implications mock the solemnity of the Trade Union. It also appears that Sibisi gets the job not because of any qualities of leadership, or because of service to the union, but for qualities outside the union's ambit, namely this connection to the powers of the ancestors.

Jazz eventually is one of the people that is tried for the murder of the four scabs. The scabs are taken out by Bra Cobra who acts as driver, stabbed by American Molefe, have their heads crushed by having a huge rock dumped on each head individually by
The Leg, and eventually they have petrol\textsuperscript{85} poured over them by Jazz and are set alight by Joe Motsamayi in a simulation of the necklacing method of dealing with scabs, "sell outs" and impimpis.\textsuperscript{84} Ironically, it is Jazz's close friend Philadelphia that becomes a scab, escapes, and is the state witness that identifies the workers involved in the killings.

All these details are revealed in seeming confessions to the judge during the trial. The killings are not enacted at all, but are spoken of. It is here that the understanding of the public space and the private or offstage space becomes critical. Bearing in mind that Ngema had, according to him, read the court transcripts,\textsuperscript{85} and the fact that he has always been prepared to use whatever material comes to hand, one can assume that the words spoken are taken from such a transcript. This transcript is a record of the events of the public trial, presented before mostly white legal minds. In this sense, the defenses of Chairman, Jazz, Bra Cobra, The Leg, and others are an attempt to make the events of the fatal night accessible and understandable to the oppressor (and this would also include an American audience who "weren't there").

To do this they have to rely on explaining the general anger of the strikers toward the oppressors. They also have to explain their anger towards those who appear to be assisting those oppressors in their task (i.e. those undermining the solidarity of the

\textsuperscript{83}The American term "gasoline" is used in the text for two possible reasons. On the one hand, the play was put together for the American market, as has already been suggested, but on the other the strong American influence in South African Black culture is also evident. For reference to this in the music see for example C.J. Ballantine, \textit{Mzakaki Nights: Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville} (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993).

\textsuperscript{84}For a description of the necklacing method see note 43, above.

\textsuperscript{85}Ngema, Author's Note. 129. "I spoke to the accused, I read the court records, and became intrigued. . . ."
workers). The explanations must cover the confusion in the darkness of the night, the enormity of the peer group pressure, the heat of the building that was sealed off to keep the teargas out, the use of alcohol and "ganja" (marijuana) by the strikers, and finally the seeming lack of control in the group, with orders being handed down "from above." 86

The rest of the play has also developed a community that is racked by gender divisions and oppression, poverty, oppressive legislation, a belligerent and vicious police force, a denial of the right to self-expression -- Jazz cannot practice his guitar, amongst other things -- and numerous other potential contributing factors. Any "normal human being" living in a "decent" society would perceive the enormous pressure on the accused, or, as Ngema himself states it, how "honest, working people... had been subjected to incredible forces during the cycle of violence which accompanied the April 1987 strike." 87

However, key to all of this is the fact that, although these factors may be true, to a large extent the accused are representatives of the Trade Union and therefore (it can be argued) should be presenting the offstage discourse (that which happened) in such a way in the public discourse moment that it might represent the "official" onstage voice of the Trade Unions. It is for this that the Trade Unions criticized the play. As has been seen in the chapter on the Trade Unions, the unions were deeply troubled by the loss of solidarity and the undermining of their positions through the use of scab labor and the sellout or

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86 This scene is made even more difficult if read in tandem with the court scene in Asinamali! Ss discussed above.

collaborator. Nevertheless, the "image," or onstage discourse they wished to present, needed to include the democratic right of the individual, open to persuasion by the "rightness" of the arguments of the labor, discipline in action and reaction, lack of physical coercion, exemplary social behavior, and above all, a union that presented a united front through communal purpose.

Ngema’s play does indeed potentially "wash the union's dirty laundry in public," as Mzwake Mbuli intimates.88 What, of course, Mbuli suggests, indirectly and perhaps inadvertently, is that all of these things do occur in the unions but these are things that are not to be shown in the onstage space, where, to a large extent the space is to be used to negotiate either with employers concerning matters of labor, or with government concerning matters of living conditions. Under these conditions, unity is strength, and dignity is power.

Furthermore, Ngema seems to suggest that it was the very trade union, and its methods, that drove the workers to do as they did. Chairman's speech to the court is typical of this problem:

Your Worship, I discovered that my duties were to stand in front of the people and to point at a person who had raised his up his hand, if he wanted to say something, and allow that person to come in front and say whatever he wanted to say. In fact to see to it that everything was running normally; if there was understanding among the / workers: to ask the workers to clean the toilets. Hey, there were many people, four to five thousand people. There were people in the hall, people in the streets, people in the passages, there were so many people that there was no place to walk. People were singing, everybody was keen to say something. You

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88Mzwake Mbuli. See Christopher Wren, note 17, above.
see, at first they would listen to me, moerskont.\textsuperscript{89} After the police came on the
22nd of April, the people got very angry. People started to drink in the toilets, people started to smoke ganja. There was food all over the floors and some people would urinate against the walls. Magistrate, people were so angry that they were out of control. You see, when I arrived at Cosatu House, they told me not to be afraid because I had never been chairman before. \textit{(Pause)} What, Magistrate? Who are they? The shop stewards, the people upstairs in the small room who were running the strike. They said I should stand in front of the people and encourage the people to strike. If I had any doubt I should raise up my fist and shout Amandla! (Freedom!) (181-2).

All of this is larded with things that would do irreparable harm to the image of the Trade Union. It creates an image of an unruly, undisciplined, barbaric community bent on destruction and chaos. It also creates an image of a very undemocratic process, as instructions are passed down from on high, and chairmen, by leading the workers in sloganeering, can sway the masses towards the fight for freedom.\textsuperscript{90}

In terms of resistance theatre \textit{Township Fever!} also shows a marked difference from \textit{Sarafina!} in its presentation of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses. In \textit{Sarafina!} it was noted that despite the attempts by the government to impose a new ideological and hegemonic position onto the students through systems of violence and through systems of education, the students were quite capable of refuting and countering the system and the hegemony. In \textit{Township Fever!}, however, there appears to be not one but two systems at work. On the one hand the

\textsuperscript{89}Moerskont” (literally “mother’s cunt”) translates figuratively as “motherfucker.” The reason why it is used here at this juncture in the trial is unclear.

\textsuperscript{90}The cry “Amandla!” is usually provided by the leader, and the response is “Iwethu!” The two words mean “Freedom” and “to the People!” respectively. This is typical of the call-and-response sloganeering of the masses. The other slogan system also follows the call-and-response idea -- the leader commences with “Viva (the person’s name)! Viva!” supplying the name that is to be cheered, and the crowd respond “Viva!” Hence “Viva Mandela! Viva!” “Viva!”
obvious controlling functions of State and employer are at work through the use of the
police and the threat of unemployment and dismissal from the company (SATS), but on
the other hand the Trade Union itself is attempting to impose a hegemonic order through
its calls for solidarity, and its dealings with those who disagree with the Union system.
Furthermore, the chaotic nature of the meetings and the results of the meetings suggest
that their system is not nearly as well organized as the state's is -- the killers are caught,
prosecuted and condemned.

Township Fever! thus demonstrates how ordinary individuals are caught between
two monolithic, oppositional forces. and, in the jaws of these systems, they are crushed.
In this they are shown to be pitiful creatures, inadequate to the heroic task of tackling the
regime that is oppressing them. Ngema has taken the chaos of the offstage discourse and
placed it in not one but two onstage discourses -- the court room and the theatre.

The final irony of Ngema's work is that he has removed the seeming solidarity of
the offstage spaces of the oppressed. Township Fever! makes this solidarity ambiguous
in the eyes both of the oppressor and the oppressed.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have interpreted some of the ambiguities and deceptions that occurred in the texts of ideologically committed theatre, which was used to combat oppression in South Africa. These theatrical performances in South Africa during the tense 1976-1990 period demonstrated the problem of overt and covert signification in public spaces. I have argued that these performances presented a combination of (a) overt texts performed by the oppressed in order to make the oppressor aware of what was occurring in the offstage social and political spaces of the community, and (b) covert texts that were "silently voiced" by the oppressed as a way of building solidarity amongst themselves. The theatrical performances turned on ambiguity because the same set of signifiers were structured in ways that permitted dual decoding by the different white and black interpretive communities. One of the tasks of the theatre artists was to create this type of ambiguity.

I have shown that the role-player and the role played were both framed by offstage and onstage spaces and political agendas. The theatrical and social spaces referred to were those that were occupied by the oppressor and the oppressed during the said period. The agendas shaped the style and content of these texts of both
offstage and onstage interaction between the oppressor and the oppressed. My focus remained on the offstage and onstage texts of the black South African majority.

The offstage agenda of the oppressed was to combat oppression. The development of solidarity amongst the oppressed, the development of the communal ethos and common strategies against suppression and exploitation, the sharing of the dreams of the future, the development of a shared understanding of "impression management" (usually through parody and satire), and the enjoyment of portraying some form of schadenfreude or the delight in the potential suffering of the oppressor in the millenial, all these phenomena were to be found in the offstage spaces of the oppressed. These "performances" questioned and undermined the white hegemony.

The forces against which the rebellion and resistance occurred were clustered around the dynamics of racism, ethnic difference, and economic (i.e. class) oppression. The oppressor conflated, and used, various combinations and permutations of these dynamics to effect the oppression that occurred. I have explained how the agenda of the oppressed in the offstage spaces was directed towards the unraveling these conflations of the white oppressor.

The performances constructed under the aegis of the trade unions were developed around the slogans of non-racialism, democracy, and socialism. Here the oppressed attacked the conflation of race and class. It was discovered that ethnic separation carried the potential for divisiveness, but that the negotiations in the offstage space of the trade union meeting countered this with an emphasis on the work-place. Nevertheless, such countering led to the formation of a potentially monolithic solidarity.
that did not tolerate any counter discourse. But ethnic, geographic, age and gender divisions did occur. Consequently, the plays were to be constructed to remove individuality and promote conformity, which would be proclaimed under the banner of democracy. Ari Sitas pointed out the contradictions in this approach, as I have argued in Chapter three.

My conclusion is that the ambiguity was caused by the duality between the role-player as an individual (with role-playing potential), and the role to be played as a construct determined by the individual’s historical and economic position in the community. The role-player was shaped by race, class and ethnicity, and this was enhanced by his contributions to the offstage spaces and agendas in the community. However, because the role to be played "hovered" between that which was occurring in the offstage spaces of the oppressed as a larger group, and that which was being constructed as the "correct" modus operandi by the trade unions in the confrontation with the oppressor (i.e. the role of democratic, non-racial socialism), the performances presented by the trade unions tended toward the development of a discourse that was constructed on solidarity and not individuality. The roles played seemed to be "engineered." My conclusion is consistent with the events related by Mi Hlatshwayo concerning the potentially "dissident" playwright who is "encouraged" to submit to the
demands of the trade union, or face ostracism from the union, the labor movement, and the Mass Democratic Movement.¹

The case of social and cultural engineering as a way of combating oppression was central to the ideas that arose out of the demands for development. Any perceived "lack" or shortfall in a society or a community that was oppressed (whether that oppression was economic, social or by virtue of colonization) needed to be combated. To a large extent, the Theatre for Development projects attempted to access the "innate" problem solving abilities of the community. In this manner the project leaders attempted to circumvent the charges of possible manipulation of the community.

The fundamental problem that the Theatre for Development projects encountered was that, for development to take place, the community's knowledge base had to be expanded so that the community readily had access to other possible solutions to their problems. However, it was discovered that for this knowledge to be of any use, the attitudes of the community towards both the activists (or interventionists) who brought the new knowledge, and towards the community's historical present had to be changed. The success of the solution to the problem would be found in the changed behavior of the community. The problem for the activists or the interventionists, therefore, was how to change the behavior of the community and do it in such a way

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that it would appear as if the community itself had solved the problem, and that the solution had not come from "outside" the community.

To do this, many of the Theatre for Development projects turned to Augusto Boal’s thinking on role-play in society. The activists thought that, because Boal was dealing with a "theatre of the oppressed" his theories would be applicable to the oppression in Southern Africa. Boal’s emphasis on the democratic process seemed also to make it ideal for the strategies of resistance that were developed during the 1976-1990 period. My conclusion is that the transfer of Boal’s thinking on the theatrical, and on the role-playing capabilities of individuals in societies is flawed. This is because these theories cannot take into account the multiple roles of race, class, ethnicity and gender that the South African oppressed are faced with.

Boal relied on the ability of the community to move in and out of role as the occasion demanded, and to "know" when to do this. In other words, Boal was relying on the community’s ability to understand the language of the theatrical, as well as the language of the "real." To do this the community was "trained" to move into role-play in a performance space, but Boal relied on the community’s own ability to move out of the (presumably) sheltered and sequestered "offstage" space of the performance, into the onstage space of real life. I have shown that the ambiguity of the "theatrical" language was in fact dangerous, because of the deceptive nature of the safety of the performance space, and because of the lack of clarity of the movement between the real and the theatrical (i.e between the role-player and the role played). Put another way,
the movement from offstage to onstage and back again in society is not nearly as clearly defined as it is in the movement between offstage and onstage in performance.

I have therefore concluded that the lacunae that the activists (in Africa and in South Africa) encountered revolved around three areas. The social and ideological fabric of the community was so tightly woven that to access one part of the social and political dynamic of the community and to attempt to effect a change in that part, meant that the entire cloth has to be addressed. The best the activist could hope for was the rehearsal of a new and improved coping mechanism to deal with oppression. What in fact occurred was that the community called for more and more performances and interventions of the same kind to address the new, unraveling, problems that the tear in the fabric of the community had caused or would cause. This occurred both in the Mda cases and the DramAidE Programme.

For a change of behavior to occur in a community, new knowledge had to become not only part of the onstage praxis of the oppressed (i.e. the knowledge that the activists brought to the community, and that was rehearsed and spoken of in the performance space of activists and community together), but it also had to be integrated into the offstage, sequestered spaces. For the Theatre for Development strategy to work, the new knowledge has to become part of the community’s understanding of the world after the activists have left. The DramAidE Programme, discussed as one of the case histories in this dissertation, documents how difficult such a development is.

Consequently, for this new knowledge to change the behavior of the community in the offstage spaces, the activists had to access the offstage texts of the community.
To a large extent this meant for the activists (as Zakes Mda and the Marotholi Travelling Theatre demonstrated) an attempt to access the theatrical performance texts of the community (such as the *lifela* and the *lithoko*). The assumption was that these performance modes would reveal the "true" nature of the community.² The performance modes supposedly documented that which occurred in the offstage spaces of the individuals in the community. Yet, when the new knowledge was presented in the community it was in the form of negotiations revealed in the play-making or role-making activity in performance, not in the form of the indigenous cultural artefact.

What the Theatre for Development project did bring to the community was a potential form of conflict management and resolution. Mazrui had called for this in his theorizing on cultural engineering and nation building.³ Theatre for Development set out to fulfil Mazrui’s injunction to build identity by “indigenizing what is foreign, idealizing what is indigenous, nationalizing what is sectional, emphasizing what is African.”⁴ In this sense, new knowledge was about building a national or community identity, which would presumably bring about a change in behavior. It could only work if the offstage spaces were changed as well.

Theatre for Development projects showed that at least the communities could change even if it was only in the sense of having more knowledge to use for any

³This “true” nature of the individual and the community Boal attempts to access in his use of Image Theatre.


⁴Mazrui xvi.
decision making that had to be done. The new knowledge could enter the offstage spaces of the community. If this were true of the oppressed, then it was considered also to be true of the offstage spaces of the oppressor. Popular or Committed theatre (in a commercialized setting), therefore, attempted to enter the offstage discourse of the oppressed into the onstage, communal, discourse space of both the oppressor and the oppressed, namely the conventional theatre space. The purpose was to show the oppressor the results of the oppression, but also to legitimize the solidarity of the offstage experience of the oppressed in its own eyes. To do this it had to demonstrate the way that the oppressor was attempting to remove the ability and right of the oppressed to act with dignity and with autonomy.

Committed theatre for “profit” had the multiple task of presenting the offstage text in such a way that the oppressed could take pride in their courage, their autonomy (seemingly against all odds), and their individuality or uniqueness. This had to be achieved in such a way that the oppressor would not become more harsh in its oppression, and he/she would be moved by the lack of humanity of its deeds.

My data on committed theatre in South Africa, showed that the performances navigated through the treacherous waters of retribution from the oppressed in several ways. Stylistically the performance used an aesthetic that called for athleticism, musicality and ingenuity of performance, resulting in the oppressor marveling at the techniques of the performance. The plays were structured as a sequence of fast moving vignettes, which accentuated the role-playing capacities of the actors, and avoided deep structural analyzes of the motives of the characters, resulting in the oppressor focusing
on seemingly good performance acting techniques, which, for the oppressed served to accentuate the plethora of roles that they needed to play in reality, to survive.

The content of the performance contained elements that were seemingly self-parodying. In this way the use of laughter "defused" the potential for anger and confrontation from the oppressor and consequently deceived the oppressor about the harshness of the situation in real life. These parodying moments were highly ambiguous, as they served as a form of identification between the oppressed and the performance. The recognition of not only the role but the parody built solidarity among the oppressed. A good example of this was to be found at the ends of the plays where the past and the future were linked in an appeal to universal values of democracy, fair play, dignity, autonomy and equality. The understanding by the oppressed of most of these values had been constructed in the offstage spaces which they inhabited.

The vital part of the ideologically committed theatre project resided in its seeming adherence to the Black majority’s demand that theatre be in the service of “the common good.” The work of Mbongeni Ngema was used as an illustration of the goals and strategies of this type of theatre. His work is particularly significant because it traced the trajectory of a writer initially using the offstage spaces to which he was privy as a way of engaging in the resistance theatre that the times called for, but then using those same offstage spaces eventually for his own, supposedly “artistic,” and economic, gain.
Ngema’s *Woza Albert!*, constructed in collective fashion with Percy Mtwa and Barney Simon, displayed tentative elements of confrontation, but was filled with moments of virtuoso acting and parody. His most overtly confrontational work was *Asinamali*. *Sarafina!* was again confrontational but was imbued with a performance style (the musical) that appealed to the dominant forms of theatre (worldwide), and to the musical traditions of both the townships and the rural areas.

However, on *Township Fever!* I concluded that Ngema abused his “inside” knowledge of the workings of the Black community in general and the trade unions in particular, to construct this play. Ngema used (offstage) material that he gained as a South African Black, and from his work in the Natal factories, as a framework for his “extravaganza” style of musical theatre. In this play he ridicules the trade union movement by misplacing and mis-timing his application of the moments of parody in the play, thus potentially undermining the perceived dignity and autonomy of the oppressed people engaged in the struggle for liberation from oppression.

What Ngema does do is to reveal the hidden transcript to the oppressor. From this I concluded that there is a hidden transcript, and that the hidden transcript displays clear signs of resistance to oppression, and challenges the effectiveness of supposed hegemonic forces in South Africa. Furthermore, Ngema’s efforts are part of the mounting body of evidence confronting the concepts of hegemony as a political strategy in general.

In all of this the “traditional” role of the *imbongi* as praise poet in the community served as a tracer element for understanding the role of the performance.
The *imbongi* traced the power relationships between those that hold power and those that serve the power. As Kaschula suggests, the role of the *imbongi* is that of mediator and of “political and social commentator” to the community in which he operates (i.e. trade union, social, religious, educational, and political community, amongst others).⁵ Kaschula uses Comaroff’s understanding of “formal and evaluative codes” in praise poetry to explain how this comes about. Comaroff suggests that “the formal code refers to abstractions and shared values; the evaluative code to the actions of living men. In other words, the former concerns authority and office, while the latter concerns power, performance, and office-holders.”⁶ Put another way, these two coding systems allow one to look for the values used as a base for the utterance, as well as the particular criticism that is being leveled at specific power constructions in the community.

The values that served as the basis of the oppressed community in South Africa, proved to be community specific, as well as part of the turmoil of the resistance and transition time. These values (of democracy yet solidarity, of the rights of the individual yet the call for the communal, of economic upliftment yet socialist equality, of freedom from oppression yet the threat of totalitarianism) point to the ambiguity in

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the very social fabric of society, let alone that which was presented in staged performances. The specificity of representing oppression in a performance, yet the dynamics implicit in formal values that are in transition, led to much of the ambiguities to be found in the South African performance of committed theatre during the period 1976 to 1990.

Following the emancipation of the vast majority of South African citizens after the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of all of the resistance parties in 1990, the presentation of role-playing and role-played may take on a different tenor. Theatre performances, too, will shift direction and focus, perhaps pursuing different areas of resistance and oppression. Suggestions from some of the Arts Festivals in South Africa (such as the Grahamstown Arts Festival) are that South African theatre is still attempting to find such new directions.

The dynamics of role-play in the social, political and economic community may change radically, too. Various institutions, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s public hearings present challenges to the theoretical model that I have constructed in this work. The changing nature of the trade unions affect the position of the *izimbongi* in such institutions. There are signs, for example, that the style of presentation of the *imbongi* has been commodified in such a way that even children are now presenting praises. Furthermore, the changing and reconstructing of educational curricula may remove the fertile ground for theatre for development and theatre in education projects. However, these are research projects for the future.
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