

**THE NOTION OF COMMITMENT IN SELECTED WORKS OF
MAISHE MAPONYA**

THESIS

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BY

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ABSTRACT

This study is a critical analysis of selected works of the playwright Maishe Maponya namely, **The Hungry Earth**, **Jika** and **Gangsters**.

The main thrust of the analysis of the thesis is centred on questions around what 'Commitment' might mean in literature and drama. This concept has appeared in many names and guises. In theatre, it has assumed names like Theatre of Commitment, Theatre of the Dispossessed, Theatre of the Oppressed, Theatre of Resistance, as well as Theatre of Radicalization (Bentley 1968; Boal 1974; Mda 1985; Maponya 1992). These names came into existence as a result of a concerted effort to refrain from the use of the traditional conventional theatre, which does not appear to address itself to societal problems - the preoccupation of Theatre of Commitment.

Chapter One is principally concerned with the concept of Commitment and its implications in art and literature, more specifically in theatre. Further, the following interacting elements in South African theatre are highlighted: censorship, banning, detention and other restrictions, as well as DET education and religious institutions. Finally, Maponya is introduced, with his political inclinations and his views on art, together with the issue of theatricality in his plays.

Chapter two initiates the proposed critical analysis with a focus on **The Hungry Earth**. The focus is on Theatre of Commitment and the background events that inspired Maponya's response.

Chapter three concerns itself with the critical analysis of **Jika**, "a play about the making of revolutionaries in South Africa...and serves a political purpose - as a recording of pivotal moment in South African history..." (Haysom, 1988:1). An attempt is made to assess the extent to which the playwright has succeeded or failed to strike a chord harmonious with the pronouncements quoted.

Chapter four ends the critical analysis with the treatment of **Gangsters**. Here an observation is made on the fusing of the three personas, namely Rasechaba, Biko and Maponya, into one symbolic whole representing the image of Jesus Christ on the cross - the Saviour who sacrificed

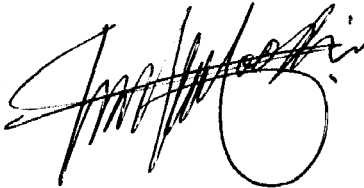
His life for the salvation of sinners. Maponya is seen to have sacrificed his time and energy for the liberation of the downtrodden.

The conclusion summarizes the study by placing the selected works in their suitable perspective in respect of the notion of Commitment in literature, with particular reference to theatre. Maponya is seen to have played a commendable role in the liberation of his peoples' minds by teaching them the business of organizing revolutions, as well as by championing the liberation struggle.

Delimitation of the Study

I considered it worthwhile to look at the police archives concerning the period of my research study. I struck an appointment with the Station Commander at John Vorster Square police station to peruse their files. I hit a rock, for when I met the Station Commander, Mr Botha, he categorically stated that their office could not grant permission to that kind of exercise. He explained to me that the law forbids it. He further explained that even if he were to allow me to do that, it would be almost impossible for me to obtain the information I sook, since their files are not orderly put or arranged. I have therefore decided to abandon this exercise altogether, because I hate wasting time on a fruitless undertaking.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. M. Botha', written over a large, empty circle.

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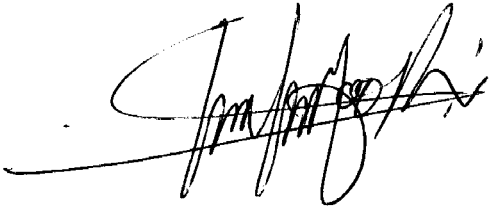
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DEDICATION

To my wife and the mother of our children, 'M'e 'Manthati.

DECLARATION

I declare that **The Notion of Commitment in selected works of Maishe Maponya** is my own work in design and execution, and that all the sources that have been used or cited have been acknowledged accordingly, and duly reflected in the bibliography.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maishe Maponya', written in a cursive style.

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Chapter 1: **Introduction: Theatre and Commitment**

1.1 **The Concept of Commitment**

Marxist criticism is not just an alternative technique for interpreting **Paradise Lost** or **Middlemarch**. It is part of our liberation from oppression, and that is why it is worth discussion at book level.

(Eagleton, 1976:76)

The foregoing postulation encapsulates the role of Marxist criticism in literature and indeed theatre. Marxist criticism considers literature as a weapon for liberation of the oppressed and exploited masses. It is the purpose of this study to analyse the selected works of Maishe Maponya and to base the analysis on Marxist criticism and the Africanist sociological perspective on art and literature. This study will critically evaluate these works and show whether they align with the positions advanced by the exponents of Literature of Commitment. The term **Literature of Commitment** has evolved from Marxist criticism. This analysis will determine whether these works can be constituted as Literature of Commitment, and then more specifically as Theatre of Commitment, especially in relation to the Black Consciousness ideology concerning art and literature.

From a common sense assumption, 'commitment' contains various connotations. For example, in daily social life reference is often made to **commitment** of an error of judgement; **commitment** of something to paper; **commitment** of a criminal act; **commitment** to prison; **commitment** of suicide; and many other shades of commitment within the ambit of this contextual level. The most appropriate shade of commitment to this study is that of pledging and aligning (oneself) "as to a particular cause: a committed radical" (**The Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus**, 1987:197)

In art, and for purposes of this study, this includes literature and theatre, commitment involves the capacity to express artistic initiative and creativity. It also includes the ability to demonstrate concern for the society which surrounds the artists. The notion of commitment as a political ideology has its traces in Russia and Germany during the 19th Century. Its proponents were Karl

Marx, Friedrich Engels and VI Lenin, among whom the former is generally regarded as the father of this concept. Eagleton (1976:37) indicates that

Even those only slightly acquainted with Marxist criticism know that it calls on the writer to commit his art to the cause of the proletariat.

The main concern of Marxist criticism, which is rooted in 19th Century Western European political development, is the liberation of the toiling masses who find themselves oppressed and exploited by the bourgeois class. It would seem that a socially inclined artist whose society experiences this exploitation will be expected by the society to commit his/her art to its cause through conscientization and criticism.

Both Marx and Engels shared the notion that art and literature should aim at inspiring the proletariat towards revolution (Robinson, 1991; Schapiro and Reddaway, 1961; Eagleton, 1976). Lenin on the other hand, proposed that literature must be “a cog and a screw of one single great social machinery” (Eagleton, 1976:40). His argument was that neutrality in art and literature is almost impossible. Marx and Engels felt that art and literature should rally the proletariat towards revolution against political oppression and economic exploitation. Lenin, on the other hand, was canvassing for partisanship as he expected writers to be dogmatic and serve the aims of the socialist state. He urged them to align themselves with the state and espouse socialist philosophy.

Lenin’s proposition for partisanship was (and still is) regarded by many artists as an unfair proposition which not only gags artists’ creativity, but also falsifies the reality. It also turns an artist into the state’s mouthpiece, instead of being the light of the nation. Whereas a call for artists and writers to align themselves with the society seems a fair and genuine call, partisanship forces them to operate against their will, feeling and experience, as well as their convictions. Dogmatic writers find themselves faced with unsettling contradictions: they may have to propagate lies and half-truths in trying to justify the state’s/party’s programme, while on the other hand the society expects them to write truthfully, without any distortions. Artists who allow themselves or find themselves caught up in these debilitating contradictions end up as debauchees or non-effective artists. Indeed, Nazareth (1972:5) could not have said it better, that “for a writer to justify dogma, to take a stand he does not believe in, is thoroughly bad.”

Nevertheless, even though he opted for a partisan attitude towards literature, Lenin was regarded as “a peg for political writing,” for he despised the apolitical poets of the time and referred to them as “feudalist or decadent” (Schapiro and Reddaway p 45-8). For him, apolitical art, or bourgeois art, as he called it, was fruitless since it aimed at prettiness and therefore failed to reflect the progressive aspects of reality. He commented on the function of art in the following way:

Art belongs to the people. Its thickest roots must go down into the midst of the broad toiling masses. It must be loved and understood by them. It must unite the feelings, thoughts and will of the masses, raise them up. It must produce artists among them and develop them.

(Schapiro and Reddaway p 60).

From this perspective artists are urged to engage themselves in making art that addresses the problems of the society. Artists will align themselves with the aspirations and needs of the people, thereby articulating their feelings and thoughts, and simultaneously help them to participate and develop as artists. They in their turn will develop artistic creations which are relevant to their situation; the masses will become artists in their own right and will unite and work out strategies that will solve their own problems.

This cry for commitment amongst artists has been adopted and adapted by many artists in Africa recovering from dominant colonialist rule. OF Onoge (in: Gengelberger, 1985:60) supports this by claiming that Marxist critics are

necessarily class partisan ... (their) dream is a community where all can be artists and art appreciators ... for a Marxist sociology, men are not just stage performers, they are also fundamentally playwrights and authors.

Marxism is, therefore, not a dogma but a political action which is to be regarded as a doctrine for political and economic emancipation. To highlight this view, suffice it to quote Rees (in: Schapiro and Reddaway p 89) in his summation that

a theory like Marxism can play an important part in the life of a revolutionary, even if his actions do not always follow the book.

This notion can hardly be divorced from Nazareth's (p 9ff) postulation that socialism is "the only solution to inhuman injustices."

Marxism is, therefore, a liberating concept, for it engenders change - the type of change which will sweep away economic exploitation, political oppression, racial segregation and all forms of maladies that cause pain and suffering.

With reference to Marx and Engels, it is important to note that their source of inspiration is embodied in the opening words of **The Communist Manifesto** - the project which they undertook jointly under the auspices of the Communist Party:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.

(McLellan, 1980:45)

According to Marx, society is mainly divided into two classes, the bourgeois and the proletariat - the former being the dominant class and owners of production, while the latter are labourers under bourgeois domination. Since the proletariat are forever economically exploited and politically oppressed, there is always a struggle to free themselves from domination. At the same time the bourgeois apply tactics to keep the status quo. Revolution therefore remains the only method of achieving the proletariat freedom. Lenin, the man of tact and temper, as Reddaway (Shapiro and Reddaway 1967:51) would describe him, throws in a word of caution that "the revolution does not need buffoons playing at revolution."

It follows therefore that revolution should not be taken for granted - what is required for the struggle is effective education, which is imperative for a successful and meaningful revolution. The proletariat should be well-versed with revolutionary tactics and strategies, otherwise a mere attempt at revolution may be a self-defeating and dangerous undertaking.

It is crucial for artists to conscientize the proletariat about their exploitation and oppression. In addition, the exploited must be warned of the power of the dominant class: they will use every social agency at their disposal to thwart any kind of uprising. The state will not hesitate to use social agencies such as religion, the media, censorship, bannings, as well as the brutal and deliberate use of the army and police to suppress the people's activities in the liberation struggle. For example, South Africa under apartheid regime was known for its use of the police and the security to suppress any form of uprising by the downtrodden majority.

It follows therefore that freedom is never given by the exploiters to the exploited, but should always be initiated by the downtrodden masses themselves, at their own terms. Yet they should be well organised into a unified force, "with philosophy as well as habit," as Laski (1971:15) would suggest.

Yet one might claim that some colonies such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland received their independence peacefully, on the negotiation table. True as it might be, advocates of Marxist criticism would interpret the seemingly peaceful handover as nothing else but a political manoeuvre that is calculated by the imperialist powers to subvert real independence of the people. This idea, which emanated from Fanon's **The Wretched of the Earth** (1968), is further reiterated by Nazareth (1972:34). He calls this seemingly peaceful handover "a trick by imperialism to forestall the worldwide movement against imperialism and to continue controlling the overseas territories."

It would seem that such 'peaceful handovers' have hardly been without an ulterior motive: to hijack the real independence of the people for the people and by the people. The imperialists' hidden agenda has been to rule these former colonies by means of using invisible powers that emerge among the very ranks of the society. These are the people, or the new class that Ngugi (1993:65) calls "black skins, white masks," or conversely "white skins, black masks" - "black skins concealing colonial settlers' hearts." No doubt this refers to modern dictators such as the late Leabua Jonathan of Lesotho, Matanzima of Transkei, Mangope of Bophuthatswana, and others.

To sum up, the aspect of commitment in art, which includes invention and expression in the theatre, calls for artists to align with the society and address its prevailing problems, the burning issues of the day. As has been discussed already, the aim of artists is to conscientize the society of its problems and inspire them to fight against economic exploitation, political oppression and racial discrimination. Since the proletariat and the peasants often lack revolutionary education, committed art will strive to provide them with meaningful education to ensure their success in practical revolution for liberation. Besides providing the people with tactics and strategies to be employed, committed literature cautions them of the power wielded by those in authority - which they are likely to use in the war of liberation. Armed with this kind of education, the people's victory against their oppressors is highly likely and this is to be the rallying cry of Theatre of Commitment.

1.2 Commitment as acknowledged in many parts of the world

In present day, Commitment as a political ideology manifesting itself in art and literature, as well as in theatre, is generally acknowledged and practised by numerous artists and theatre practitioners. The exponents of this ideology are Eric Bentley (1968), Wole Soyinka (1977), Chinua Achebe (1975), Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1972, 1981), Terry Eagleton (1976), Zakes Mda (1985) and many others, to name a few.

Commitment is considered by many artists as the antithesis of Alienation - the act of artists distancing themselves from the societies in which they live, by harping on irrelevant matters while their societies are experiencing harsh problems which need to be addressed, or worse still, failing to identify with the oppressed masses and, instead, blaming them for the problems they experience. Bentley (1968:190) draws a distinction between these antitheses by illustrating that:

The committed artist is one who is publicly protesting against American policy in Vietnam; the alienated artist is one who is sitting the war out and waiting for Godot in sulky solitude. Artists who are following any other line of action or inaction simply aren't with it.

Evidently, Bentley has no place for a man on the fence; a neutral artist. An artist/author is to be either Committed to the people's struggles or be alienated from it. It is up to each artist to either align him/herself with the oppressed masses and address their pertinent issues, or be alienated. Mucere Mugo, one of the Kenyan renowned authors, in her powerful speech on Commitment at The National University of Lesotho (October 1985) dismissed with disgust the so-called neutral artists. For her, "a man on the fence: during times of struggle conjures images of one in a perilous position, a target which is undoubtedly going to be pierced with bullets from both sides of the fence."

In this powerful presentation, Mugo made reference to two types of sins in the literary creative activity, namely the sin of commission (cardinal sin) and the sin of omission (mortal sin). In this allusion Mugo claimed that an artist/author who alienates him/herself from the society by portraying it negatively or blaming it for its problems commits the 'sin of commission.' Such an artist/author, having committed a cardinal sin, may be lambasted or pardoned. There's bound to be trouble for one who, while him/herself conscious of the prevailing problems of the society, directs his/her creativity elsewhere, depicting issues which are completely unrelated or irrelevant to the societal burning issues of the day, thus committing a sin of omission.

As Bentley (1968: 191) puts it, those artists who are neither committed nor alienated will "find themselves in outer darkness," since they lack the "desire to be in the swim." To illuminate this view further, Bentley (p 196) shoots at the uncommitted artists, who consider themselves innocent because of their not having done certain things. For him, they have committed the 'sin of abstention,' that is, the 'sin of omission.' For their inaction, these artists/authors, since they have committed a 'mortal sin,' deserve to be cast into that 'outer darkness,' which conjures images of condemnation.

To elaborate his point further, Bentley (1968:202) posits that pure alienation would produce no literature or art at all, since an absolutely alienated worker is a "desolate, a spiritually annihilated creature," who may "either languish or die or let rage give him back a portion of his humanity and rise in revolt."

Walder (1990:83) takes this argument further by positing that once one enters the 'universe of meaning' there is no way out. He highlights this view by indicating that "silence is a moment of language; being silent is not dumb; it is to refuse to speak, and therefore to keep on speaking." In other words, no artist/author may rightly claim to be innocent of certain things because of his/her abstention or omission - that since s/he never identified with either the exploiter or the exploited, s/he may plead innocence. According to this analysis an author may speak or write and claim to have not disturbed or hurt anybody, - which is tantamount to having not addressed anybody - yet, since everything he asks for is already granted, his is "an abstract dream," according to Walder (p 84). Such a writer, he claims, has failed in his duty to enhance symbols and images of his society.

As Rive (1982:5-6) observes, "the artist who is supposed to be the conscience of his people has no time for dreaming ... he wants some action, revolutionary action to be taken." It would seem that art for art's sake is not for seriously thinking artists, but for mere dreamers who have no concern for the society. Accordingly, their works serve nobody but those of the dream-world.

Such works are generally seen by the committed as a distraction from reality, as an escapism from the prevailing conflict between the two classes, the exploiters and the downtrodden, to one of which all people belong, according to Marx.

Soyinka (in: Gates Jr, 1984:54) pours an intellectual scorn on the uncommitted authors in his society, and poses the question: "What are you really contributing to the society while awaiting revolution?" Undoubtedly, Soyinka regards those artists as literary sinners, whose sin is that of 'abstention' or 'omission,' for which they deserve to be cast into that 'outer darkness' suggested by Bentley.

According to Soyinka (in: Petersen, 1988: 1), the writer should be "the true heritage," and not just "the recorder of the mores and experiences of his society," but also "the voice of vision in his own time."

It follows therefore that for the uncommitted, since they are only concerned about their personal dreams, literature serves no social purpose, but personal gratification. For Soyinka, art and

literature should not only expose and reflect, but should also ‘magnify’ the decadence and corruption prevailing in the society. Obviously, works that magnify concepts or events jolt the society into self-critical thought, resulting into renewals and regeneration. Though Soyinka’s teachings are so illuminating, his literary works are accused of “the unreal facelessness of his working-class characters” (Onoge: in: Gugelberger p 61).

Irele’s pronouncements (1981:2) on literature tally very well with Soyinka’s as he says that the writer’s expression “must not only capture the flow of experience” but propose “a broader vision of life that transcends the immediate situation to which his work refers.” This is what he calls “passionate Commitment.” In other words, as Kole Omotoso (in: Petersen p 19) suggests, “the artist is also the oracle of the people, the self-ordained priest who makes the society aware of itself in order to know where it is going.” Writers ought to affirm or challenge the attitudes, beliefs, values and aspirations of the society. This would help to reveal, illuminate some aspects of life that need to be changed, transformed, modified, improved or discarded. The society is thus afforded a chance to re-evaluate itself culturally, economically, politically, socially, technologically and otherwise.

In other words committed writers take the side of the powerless, the downtrodden, exploited and oppressed majority. Per Wästberg (in: Petersen p 19) aptly explains that committed artists “write of victims of arbitrariness, of others, they sing no song in praise of the victor. They are committed because they live in an atmosphere of urgency and frustration.” He further points out that the writer is at the same time “the connoisseur of power,” and with his/her abundant knowledge “lies power to influence.”

1.3 The writer in Africa

It is perhaps befitting for this study at this juncture to compare the African writer with the European counterpart. While the European writer is looked at with suspicion, since s/he lives a hermit’s life, “at the edge of society,” as Per Wästberg (in: Petersen p 19) puts it, the African artist “is part of the nation-building effort.” The African writer is therefore generally expected to use his influential power to teach, conscientize, and suggest solutions to the prevailing

problems of his/her society. This view is illuminated by Ngugi Wa Thingo's (1972:47) informative pronouncement that

The writer responds, with his personality, to a social environment which changes all the time. Being a sensitive needle he registers with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society.

Ngugi (p 50) further points out that the African intellectuals have a duty to align themselves with the struggling masses in their endeavour "for a meaningful African ideal," and help to articulate the feelings behind the people's struggles. In concert with this view is Achebe (1975:19) who states that the writers task is that of re-education and regeneration, for "he is the sensitive point of his community," and as such, "he should march right in front." Evidently, the writer, especially the African one, is expected to identify with the exploited and dispossessed masses for a national ideal.

Per Wästberg (in: Petersen p 19) puts it that "the traditional role of the African poet is to teach and praise, not to subvert society." It may be inferred therefore that the artist's prime concern is to recreate his/her society by portraying its strengths and weaknesses, its achievements and its failures. According to Achebe (p.19) "What we need to do is to look back and try to find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us." This is a self-critical approach which has to be taken by the oppressed masses.

Mutiso (1974:9) posits that, in an African setting, art has traditionally been highly functional, and as such, it has laid a foundation for the contemporary writers. Quoting a certain Roger Sieber, he claims that "art for art's sake as a governing aesthetic concept - seems not to have existed in Africa." In a vitriolic tone, Achebe (p.19) dismisses with disgust the exponents of art for art's sake, saying "Art for art's sake is a piece of deodorized dog's shit." African writers, according to Mutiso (p 10), "are socially committed and therefore write with that Commitment in mind." Mao Tse-Tung (in: Gugelberger 1985:50) dispenses with the pronouncement that

In the world today all cultures, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political line. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that stands above classes or art that is detached from or independent of politics.

The foregoing statement, which is in full agreement with Motiso's and Achebe's views, is a total rejection of the so-called apolitical artists/authors, whose literary universe, according to OF Onoge (in: Gugelberger p 53) is "inhabited by abstract human beings with abstract moral values of an abstract religious pietism ... which ... must be created by astral writers and equally astral critics."

1.4 **Commitment in theatre, with specific reference to South Africa in the '70s and '80s**

The term 'Theatre of Commitment' has for a long time been used in many parts of the world. It is an inclusive term that covers drama, dance, poetry and music/song. This brand of theatre manifests itself in both text and performance. It is a hybrid that has evolved as a result of socio-political, -cultural and -economic conditions prevalent in many parts of the world. Prevalence of this type of theatre has been experienced in areas such as Latin America, Asia, as well as USA during the Civil Rights Movement. Africa is by no means an exception in this regard. Theatre of Commitment has assumed many other names and appeared in many guises, such as Theatre of the Dispossessed, Theatre of Resistance, Radical Drama, Theatre of Radicalisation, as well as Theatre of the Oppressed. All these names have been used to distinguish it from any other type of theatre, and to differentiate it from the notion of Theatre as Art, whose prime purpose is artistic inquiry.

'Theatre of Commitment' is the most effective and commonly used terminology because it directly affects theatre practitioners as artists who are concerned about the welfare of their societies. This theatre conscientizes and rouses the people to action, and suggests solutions to their prevailing problems. The practitioners also demonstrate their commitment by challenging the attitudes, beliefs, values and aspirations of their societies for self-re-evaluation and critical thought.

This kind of theatre is socially committed in that it reflects and encourages anti-imperialist resurgence. It challenges, invites and incites the people to action against oppression. Committed

theatre practitioners derive their themes from the active struggles of their societies, and strive for positive solutions towards change.

As Brecht (in: Walburn, 1971:8) observes, the function of theatre is “an effectuation of social change.” This change is a necessary measure that is calculated to remove imperialism, economic exploitation, racial discrimination and all other forms of oppression. Ngugi (1993:73) rightly postulates that since imperialism is “the enemy of humankind,” any blow against it is clearly “a blow for democracy and change.” In the South African situation commitment is inculcated to instil political understanding and to promote the process of social change (Shara, 1989:2; Mda, 1985:9). Political commitment in South Africa, as in the rest of Africa, has had to be more pragmatic than theoretical - hence the need and relevance for theatre as an appropriate medium for expressing it.

In the apartheid South Africa, Theatre of Commitment used to draw its inspiration from the lived experiences of the black people. Its exponents are members of the same society that has suffered under the apartheid system. Indeed, Mda (1996:vii) expresses it clearly that in South Africa “the separation of art, and specifically theatre, is an illusive notion...” Committed theatre practitioners operated not from the periphery, but from within, as they were inseparable from the racially segregated, politically oppressed and economically exploited black South Africans.

They not only championed the people’s struggle for liberation, survival, development, equality and democracy, but also became the embodiment of the struggle itself. Rive (1989:48-9) casts a ray of light in reiterating this point, that in South Africa the black writer is “no different from the black man in the ghetto, the oppressed, faceless individual...” Because of this indistinguishability, the committed artists in South Africa found themselves caught up in a cruel dilemma of whether to fight or write or do both equally. Nevertheless, the main function of the black South African artist has been to “define and record,” because he/she has been “an articulate memory of his oppressed people” (Rive p 49).

Earlier versions of black theatre in South Africa prior to ‘70s and ‘80s were Protest Theatre and Township Theatre. Protest Theatre emerged in the early ‘50s with an aim of recording the injustices perpetrated by the apartheid regime upon the people of colour in South Africa, the black

majority. It addressed itself to the white liberals whom the playwrights hoped would be sympathetic to the black people's situation. It also directed its messages to those in power, with a hope that they would, through guilt, change their ways and attitudes.

Protest Theatre comprised plays which merely reported the various aspects of apartheid, without attacking the system or illuminating any solution to the prevailing problems (Shara, 1989; Rive, 1981; Ndebele, 1981; Tomaselli, 1980). Ndebele minces no words in his rejection of Protest Literature, saying:

Protest Literature has run its course. It is tied to a specific situation of near-helplessness, which existed in the '50s ... the articulation of grievances, ... a belief in the inherent persuasiveness of the moral position (which Rive calls 'look here, white man stuff') rather than a radical change,

and goes on to propose literature of affirmation. Leshosi (1985:1), on the other hand, refers to Theatre of Protest as theatre which capitalises on "gimmickry, crass commercialism and ideological exclusiveness." He further calls it the "theatre of the immediate" rather than that of the universal which "invites rather than prescribes."

Small wonder then that Tomaselli (1980:53) rebukes Protest Literature writers and piles a blame upon them for reinforcing the "myths held by the dominant groups ... in other words ... transmit to (these) audiences images of the ruling class." In this manner Protest literature, and indeed theatre, addresses itself to the white readership/audience and hopes for change from the dominant class.

Another well-known brand of theatre that was found in the black urban centres was Township Theatre, which developed in Soweto. This theatre has been accused of having an escapist tendency. According to Kavanagh (1981:xiv), Gibson Kente, the father of Township Theatre, "vitalised and developed Township Theatre. Its first characteristic is that it reflects life and culture of the urban township. Its second is that it is commercial." Kavanagh further claims that this type of theatre emphasises suffering at the expense of achievement.

Township Theatre failed to articulate the political, economic and cultural issues; yet like Protest, it has not been completely useless. For example, though Kente has further been widely accused of “perpetrating false consciousness, re-inforcing stereotypes, and being frivolous,” he has made a significant contribution in theatre - he has “opened the window of popular consciousness through the medium of dance, acting and singing,” according to Steadman (in: Gunner, 1994:27). The impact of his contribution manifests itself in works of numerous theatre practitioners in South Africa.

Nonetheless, the intellectuals’ accusations of Kente’s theatre still stand. He fails to conscientize the oppressed people of the burning issues of the day - such as oppression, exploitation and racism. Though certain issues, such as rape and murder, were serious enough for discussion, “they were examined in a simplistic manner, which disregarded causality, and served on the whole to endorse and promote official values” (Mda, 1996:xiv). In addition, Kente usually committed a sin of omission by harping on frivolous issues when the people were experiencing unbearable pain under the apartheid system. Indeed, one feels bound to endorse Horn’s summation that Kente’s theatre is the Theatre of Acceptance and Lament (Mda, 1996:xiv).

Due to the failure of the two brands of theatre to serve the needs and aspirations of the oppressed and marginalised black South Africans, the ‘70s and ‘80s were bound to serve as a period of their replacement. For the first time in the history of South Africa there emerged a radical type of theatre known as Theatre of Commitment. This came as an answer to the Black Consciousness Movement’s (BCM) call for theatre practitioners to produce the kind of theatre that would function as a weapon for the liberation of the downtrodden masses in the country. Unlike Protest Theatre, Theatre of Commitment was aimed at inciting the downtrodden people to take the matter into their own hands and liberate themselves from their bondage.

The ‘70s and ‘80s marked a period during which apartheid reached its peak in South Africa. This heightening of apartheid precipitated the formation of the Black Consciousness Movement. This move emanated from the realisation that it was naive for the marginalised people to hope for change from the dominant class. The proponents of BCM realised that no meaningful change could be initiated by the dominant class, the owners of production. No sensible people would sacrifice their own opulence in all its different shades out of mere pity and the morality aspect.

The general conception was that art should be answerable to the people and refrain from placing the oppressed in a position of 'near-helplessness,' and that it should adopt the 'literature of affirmation' as suggested by Ndebele. In essence this was a proposition for the adoption of literature/Theatre of Commitment.

Since the South African society was characterised by racial discrimination, economic exploitation and political oppression, this theatre had become highly meaningful. Rooted in Black Consciousness ideology, it had become "a significant voice in the resistance of the oppressed majority" (Mda, 1983:13). Shara (p 145) dispenses with an informative observation that, like poetry of Black Consciousness, the drama proved to be "a cultural weapon" that fostered "unity and solidarity" among the dispossessed people. Conscientization was its main function, and it had become the method of disseminating the philosophy and strategy of BCM.

According to the BCM philosophy, conscientization meant that process of "learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Kavanagh, 1985:157). Members of society were to be made aware of their social and political situation. This was seen as the only route through which they could reach the point of analysing and assessing their own environment. They would then be armed with emancipatory tools by which they could determine their own salvation and project their own future.

Though this was a period during which many black artists committed their works to the cause of their people, there were some dissenting voices among them. This was due to the fact that not all black artists endorsed the BCM's ideology and philosophy of art. For example, Nkosi (in Peterson p 10), one of the South African artists from exile, would rather artists were committed to literature/art itself because they are 'congenial shirkers.' Though he tended to support Nkosi, Mphahlele (1992:19) extended his argument further, that artists should be "committed to their art and craft and to humanity at its various levels."

If artists were to be committed to art itself, or to 'their art and craft,' then they had to be faithful to their craft and avoid distorting the reality of the situation. On the other hand, if they were committed to 'humanity at its various levels,' then they had to be sensitive to the issues affecting the society. They were not supposed to alienate themselves from the society they purported to

serve by portraying it negatively. Rather they were supposed to address the societal needs, aspirations, prejudices, values, strengths and weaknesses. They were to draw images that reflected these aspects, and above all, they had to ensure that their creativity was informed by the priorities of the society.

Ndebele and Sacks (in: Sole, 1993:91) opined that artists should pay attention to “gaining useful skills and techniques to further their craft.” Sole interprets this to mean that they must pay attention to the moral quality of their work, rather than upholding the notion that their work “would be valuable as art if it appeared to demonstrate the ‘correct’ political attitudes and ideology.”

The point at issue here is the purpose behind the artistic creation, which presupposes the target audience in question. If it is true that the South African society was comprised of two sections: the oppressors and the oppressed majority (white imperialist regime and blacks, respectively), or the exploiters and the exploited, then a sensitive artist would have no option but to align her/himself with either side, the dominant class or the downtrodden. The mode of production and the communicative devices, including techniques and strategies, would then be informed by the target audience each artist would have in mind. Although each artist would have freedom of speech and freedom of choice, neutrality or art for art’s sake would serve a very little purpose, if any.

In support of this view, suffice it to quote Serote (1992:41) in his summation that:

In my country there exist two cultures. There is the culture of the oppressed who are in the majority. There is the culture of the oppressors, who are in the minority. It is not so long ago, in fact it is yesterday, when the culture of the oppressor in its defence coined the slogan: ‘Total Onslaught,’ and that of the oppressed said: ‘Freedom or Death.’

It stands to reason then that a committed artist whose target audience is the downtrodden masses would produce theatre that enable them to analyse their own situation, and work out strategies of liberating themselves from their bondage. The techniques employed by the theatre practitioner would, among others, include gestures, chanting poetry, music and dance, and the use of

appropriate language of the struggle, including sloganeering if necessary. This would be done in fulfilment of the BCM's position of being "unconcerned with literary finesse, but rather with slogans of political resistance underpinned by theatrical performance, it communicated simply, directly and dynamically," as Steadman (in: Gunner p 25) illustrates.

The language would be simple, direct and hard-hitting to elucidate meaning. Should need arise for mixing or blending languages in the performance for meaningful communication, the theatre practitioner would be mandated by the ethics of his/her craft, his/her convictions and political ideology to comply. This would be done regardless of whether someone out there categorises such practices as 'formal,' 'informal' or 'non-formal.' Her/his work would be valuable as art because it would achieve the playwright's objective. Gwala (1989:72) would support this view by posing the following rhetorical question: "In our case, how can there be neutrality when apartheid has reached terminal velocity?"

In general, the theatre activity of the BCM, as illustrated by Kavanagh (1985:161ff), contained numerous objectives which spelt out the movement's ideologies and principles. First and foremost, plays such as Bloke Modisane's **Blame me on History** (1963) and those of its kind - which negatively portrayed the people in the struggle, and with his contempt for 'African Culture' - were to be rejected and condemned. There was a dire need for the BCM playwrights to boost African culture and to commit themselves to the political struggle. African culture was to be afforded the dignity and validity it deserved.

In the second place, plays written and produced by the so-called liberal whites, who purported to be aligning themselves with the cause of the dispossessed blacks, were also to be rejected. The exponents of BCM regarded these liberals as pretenders who were out to subvert the black people's struggle for freedom. They were regarded as those who ran with the hare and chased with the dogs. Another accusation levelled on these liberal playwrights was their negative portrayal of the people in the struggle, and also of injecting despondency among the people in the war of freedom. It was also felt that these liberals were working with blacks in order to alleviate their guilty conscience - for they were regarded as belonging to the culture of oppressors, such that they could not be expected to genuinely portray the oppressed people's situation. A case in point is that of Athol Fugard who personally admitted on a number of occasions that it was guilt

that motivated him to work with the blacks, including the actual founding of the Serpent Players (Kavanagh, 1985:161).

It was further felt that, since multi-collaboration with whites invariably resulted in white control and domination, black artists were to cut links with them. It was considered important and imperative for the black playwrights to reject the tutelary role of the whites, thus making an attempt at repairing the psychological damage of oppression experienced by the black people in South Africa. The artistic content of the plays had to inject hope, courage and a positive attitude into the people who were struggling for freedom. In conclusion, Theatre of Commitment, which was rooted in the ideologies of BCM, was seen as an instrument of conscientization and liberation. In order for it to be revolutionary and to become an embodiment of black values, this theatre had to be written and produced purely by blacks. Black theatre practitioners had to stop collaborating with the liberals, as these were regarded as pseudo-representatives. Those black theatre practitioners who collaborated with the 'liberals' were considered "a danger to the community," and were guilty of "the arrest of progress" for producing "the theory of gradualism" which, as Biko (in: Kavanagh, 1985:162) would claim, created confusion among the black people in this country.

In order to fully understand their position in this liberation struggle, the committed theatre practitioners had to familiarise themselves with the terminologies employed by the BCM as a cultural movement. Understanding these terminologies would assist individual artists to assess their own situation and that of others as artists in the liberation struggle. The following are some of the terminologies which BCM used in its categorisation, as illustrated by Kavanagh (1985:163).

'non-white' - a member of a black group who still aspired to the values of the white society and resented his exclusion from it.

'black drama/theatre' - that which places sufficient emphasis upon the creation of a revolutionary mood and sees black liberation as the priority - as opposed to Kente's theatre with its non-political themes, which is referred to as 'theatre presented by blacks' and himself as a 'non-white.'

‘theatre presented by blacks’ - that kind of theatre that is produced by blacks, yet sings out the lamentations to an apparently sympathetic audience that has become proficient in saying what Biko called the chorus ‘shame!’

‘a black theatre group’ - a group that was first and foremost completely black. All aspects such as administration, technical, artistic direction, acting and so on were to be controlled by and in the hands of blacks. Material were to be written or created by blacks and performed by blacks to black audiences, from which, in most cases, whites were excluded.

1.5 **The effects of censorship and political detention on the writing of the plays.**

As Hepple (1960:7) postulates, censorship at any time is “the bludgeon of intolerance” which a party or government in power uses “to silence all opposition” to its policies and practices. The establishment of censorship laws and political detentions in the apartheid South Africa can be seen as the Nationalist government’s mechanisms of intolerance employed to silence anti-apartheid individuals and organisations: artists, writers, playwrights, politicians, critics, the press, libraries, publishers and all persons whose views were considered dangerous to the regime.

Though Gordimer (1988:11ff) claims that censorship laws never existed in South Africa before 1963, there had been ceaseless campaigns mounted by the Nationalist Party and government against all critics of the apartheid system, accusing them of “besmirching the good name of South Africa” (Hepple p 7). There also existed censorship and bannings of external literature and other materials from Europe, USA, USSR and other communist countries. These were applied through the Customs Act (Hepple, 1960; Van Rooyen, 1987; Gordimer, 1988; Merret, 1994), which empowered the customs personnel to seize the books on arrival, scrutinise them and decide whether they were indecent or subversive or both. Since there was a problem of whether to judge a book by its title, a jacket illustration, an author’s name or its substance, these books had to be actually read prior to making a decision (Gordimer p 12). Though books and other materials were censored and banned on the ground of their being regarded as indecent, obscene or objectionable, subversive or political, this section will specifically deal with the latter. The reason behind this decision is easy to understand: the Nationalist regime was threatened by the political views opposed to its philosophy, and its main objective was therefore political censorship, as Hepple (p

7) rightly observes; and this study's main focus is on the political aspect of the selected works of Maishe Maponya.

The need for the actual reading of the books was to become a step towards formal banning and censorship. The Publications and Entertainment Act 1963, covered both the internal and external writings. A special vigilance was to be kept on South African writings though, especially if they were imported books. This emanated from the realisation that, though some of these works were published abroad, they were written by South African authors, who posed a threat against the apartheid government. As a ploy made in the name of democracy, the Censorship Bill was drawn in which the public, including artists, were invited for comments. Gordimer (p 13) sarcastically puts it that "the writers and artists were asked to help devise means of censoring ourselves." The apartheid government would then be correct to claim that the artists were themselves part of the whole censorship exercise.

The Publications and Entertainment Act 1963 provided for the appointment of a Publications Control Board, which, in terms of section 8 of the Act, was invested with the power, *inter alia*, to determine whether any publication, in the opinion of the Board, was 'undesirable' (Suzman, 1972; Silver, 1984; Van Rooyen 1987). Though later amendments were made to provide a right to appeal to a provincial or local division of the Supreme Court, the initial draft of the Act prohibited its culprits to have such a right. This Board was directly answerable to the Minister of Interior, whose power was not only in the nomination of its members, but also to alter its decisions under controversial circumstances, if he deemed it fit.

It follows, therefore, that this Board, whose decision was final in the first draft of the Act, had abundant powers which could hardly be challenged. Even when the amendments had been made on the Act to give a right of appeal, this Board and its minister never reconciled with the right of appeal. A case in point is in reference to Suzman's (p 2) revelation that

In the course of the Cape Provincial Congress of the National Party, held at Port Elizabeth on 3 September 1969, Mr SL Muller (the then Minister of the Interior) stated that he considered the present system unsatisfactory and announced that the Government might

abolish the right to appeal to the Supreme Court against decisions of the Publications Control Board.

This view was to be further reiterated by the General Synod of the NGK in 1971, when it actually passed the resolution “calling for the abolition of existing right of appeal to the Supreme Court and for the establishment of a ‘special court of appeal’ consisting of ‘authorities in various fields’” (ibid). Needless to say, the Nationalist government power structures were all out to endorse censorship and remove all chances of recourse to law - as the latest government pronouncement highlighted the conspiracy fermented by the Departments of Interior, Customs and Excise, Posts and Telegraphs, and the police consulting “in regard to a review of the Act ...” (ibid).

Numerous reasons can be advanced for the apartheid government’s imposition of censorship upon artists in South Africa, especially as regards writers. Merret (1994:3) illuminates these reasons as

the suppression as far as possible, of information about the repressive tactics required to maintain the politico-economic **status quo** in South Africa for so long in the face of international abhorrence ... to keep to a minimum contact between the different racial groups into which the country’s population was divided, so as to perpetuate the myth that the differences between people are greater than their common humanity.

He further posits that censorship was a strategy to maintain the illusion that “the fine-sounding ideas of apartheid were not only desirable and moral, but realisable: ‘It was the fiction that counted, not the reality.’” This was indeed an absurd thing for the apartheid government to say. In an effort to justify its distorted political ideology, the apartheid regime employed twisted logic and made apartheid sound good to those who lacked the understanding behind its establishment.

By establishing censorship and banning the apartheid regime was, as Merret (p 4) observes, out to “wipe out all memory of the mass struggles of the ‘50s...” - for freedom, unity, equality, and non-racialism among the South African citizens. To forestall the people’s conscientisation and incitement, the regime had to censor and ban the artistic creations geared towards that goal. It also had to condemn, falsify and distort the truth contained in such artistic creations.

As theatre was regarded as a powerful political weapon which could hardly be separated from politics (Mda, 1996), the writing and production of plays were to be given special attention. Playwright's manuscripts were to be read by members of the security police, whereupon permission to the play's production would either be granted or refused. Depending on the whims and discretion of the members of the security police, the plays would either be restricted to certain venues or be banned outright. This was especially the case with those written and produced by black playwrights with BCM leanings. These were restricted to small theatre halls, to audiences of a limited nature and size (Gordimer, p 13; Maponya, 1995:xi).

The effects of these bannings and censorship on plays and other political literature are multifarious. While some artists from countries with freedom of expression and freedom of press would envy the South Africa situation and regard it as a challenge for more artistic creations, this has not been the case in South Africa. Instead of boosting the sale of books as some artists would imagine, in South Africa this would just be the opposite. As Gordimer (p 14) claims, people with such imaginations are innocent rather than ignorant:

innocent of the fact that a book is dead, in South Africa, if it is banned, and no writer of any worth would like to think that his book would find readers overseas not for its qualities but for the spurious distinction of being banned at home. And unlike Poland, for example, where a banned book is quickly printed and distributed underground, we have never managed to create underground distribution here on more than a pitifully inadequate scale.

Indeed, a book is dead if it is pulled out of the market or denied the readership for which it is intended. The message in it is throttled and aborted in advance, so that it hardly ever illumines the situation it is meant to advance. Even if it were to boost overseas sales, such a book would serve no purpose to the people in the struggle at home. Instead, it would be a beacon of light that would illuminate the South African situation to the international community, and enable it to contribute to the struggle in any way affordable.

These censorships and bannings had debilitating effects on the writing and production of plays, especially those which were committed to the freedom struggle. Having experienced harassment

and intimidation, some playwrights went into self-exile or sought ways of operating without attracting confrontation with the security police, such as workshopping plays without scripts and using African languages with English. This situation especially affected the black theatre playwrights of Radical Theatre, or Theatre of Resistance, as it was sometimes called (Mda, 1996). Like all political activists against apartheid, these theatre practitioners were also subjected to house arrests, restrictions and lengthy detentions without trial. The period of a house arrest or detention without trial was entirely dependent on the whims and discretion of the security police officers handling each case.

Detentions without trial in the '70s and '80s had become a norm in South Africa. The commonest was a 90 days detention, which could be extended to any length of period at the discretion of the panel of policemen in charge. Such detentions were tantamount to censorship and banning, for, as Albie Sachs (in: Merret, p 47) observes:

under such conditions, people start to doubt themselves and their ideas. Vulnerability and limitations become obvious in the loneliness of the solitary cell, and individuals were reduced to fatalism and moral uncertainty.

Unquestionably, this dire situation provides virtually no hope for articulate and coherent dissemination of information to the target audience. It is a situation which would contribute to the abandonment of some works as stillborns or moribunds. If ever productive, the practitioners would lack verve and the power to stimulate and motivate the people in the liberation struggle.

What needs to be included in this understanding of political censorship is the enforcement of the repressive policies through extraordinarily lengthy detentions. Perhaps the most vicious detention period ever experienced in South Africa was the "continued detention for renewable 12-month periods," which had a number of repercussions on the detainees concerned (Merret, p 47ff). Obviously, the apartheid regime established this form of detention not just as a form of censorship and banning, but as a strategy to destroy detainees mentally, psychologically, morally, physically and otherwise. It is not surprising, therefore, that some captives died in detention under some questionable suicide methods, such as "hanging themselves", "slipping over a bar of soap", and other such fabrications.

Since detentions were characterised by solitary confinement, the denial of a right to reading and writing materials, as well as denial of access to the courts of law, the detainees were often driven to despair, depression, even lunacy and suicidal moods. Worst of all, these detainees were “held incommunicado and ... could be incarcerated indefinitely,” while the Terrorism Act was used by the apartheid regime as “a licence for torture and murder of detainees under a cloak of censorship...” (Merret, p 49).

When playwrights and other artists with political inclinations were reported to have died in detention, be it through ‘suicide’ and other means, people were not surprised. When political activists ‘hanged themselves,’ ‘threw themselves out of high windows,’ people knew that it was the “ultimate censorship of silence,” as Merret further observes. Depressing as this situation may be or sound, it never fully achieved the objective of the perpetrators: to throttle and maim the people’s struggle for freedom and democracy.

Though these forms of censorship had an inhibiting effect on the artists and impoverished South Africa, there always emerged more militant artists, specifically theatre practitioners, who used their art as a weapon against the apartheid system. A noticeable period of these militant artists was in the ‘70s and ‘80s. The 1976 youth uprisings against the system had culminated in this militancy, which had come as an answer to the BCM’s call for artists, especially theatre practitioners, to communicate fearlessly messages that instilled hope and courage to the people in the liberation struggle. The messages were sometimes to be communicated in “polemic speeches” directed to the audience or in “strong, harsh images, employing ... sound, film projection, sculptural groupings, song, recitation and chant” (Kavanaugh, 1985:166).

House arrest, along with banning, restriction and listing, posed a serious problem for South African artists under the apartheid regime, as it was also used as another form of censorship. After spending numerous and lengthy detention periods in the cells, many artists were usually subjected to house arrests, whereupon only certain visitors could see them at a given time. Under house arrest one was not to see a listed person, for fear of their influence. One might not leave one’s house for a period of 12 to 24 hours a day, depending on the nature of each case. The lengths of these house arrests would range from a certain number of months to numerous years (Merret, p 49ff).

In essence, these house arrests meant that the artists could not possibly be productive while they were cut off from the public and the world. They were denied access to newspapers and other sources of information, making them completely uninformed about current affairs. Since they were banned from attending public gatherings and had restrictions on the type of visitors, these artists were in the stagnation period of their creativity.

A further factor that should be taken into account is the low rate of literacy among the South Africans, especially among the black majority, as another form of censorship. Gordimer (p 5) describes South Africans as “school primer or comic book literate” people, which emanates from the third-rate education they have been subjected to. She further points out that even that has been sporadic due to the black students’ uprisings in the ‘70s and ‘80s. Besides this, Gordimer argues, even libraries in the major cities have only recently been opened to all races, while most ghettos and all black schools she knows of still don’t have “anything worthy of being called a library.”

These literary limitations, coupled with the apartheid policy of barring the non-whites from access to books available to whites, have had serious repercussions on the readership of the books meant for public consumption. Whereas libraries in a democratic society are regarded as “trustees of the right of freedom of opinion,” as Hepple (p 25) postulates, in the apartheid South Africa black people have been denied this right. The system has been responsible for the lack of culture of reading and debate among the non-whites. It has therefore become imperative for Radical Theatre practitioners to rely more on artistic performance than on play scripts.

Finally, censorship has not only produced negative impact on the writing and production of plays, but positive results as well. It has affected positive and new style of presentation, which is South African authentic style. South African authentic style has been categorized by putting emphasis on performance rather than text. Basing themselves on the theme/s of the play/s in question, the director/s and actors workshop their plays and rely very much on improvisation as the first method. The script functions as the final product. Since the audiences are multi-lingual, emphasis is put on gestures and the mixing of languages for lucidity of meaning. Unlike in Conventional Theatre or in Theatre as Art, where the script plays the major role, the new South African style of presentation puts emphasis on the improvisation and the workshopping of the play and regards

the script as the secondary mode. In this style, the body is utilised to further messages, while the mixing of languages is meant for lucidity of meaning.

1.6 **The interaction of the DET education system and of religious groups to the political struggle**

History provides the motives that have for decades precipitated the education crisis in apartheid South Africa, as political and economic ideologies and interests have always taken predominance over the interests and needs of the black people in this country. Whereas traditionally Africans obtained their education informally at home, and formally at the initiation schools, the advent of the Europeans in Africa brought formal education in a school setting. Like other African states, this education was introduced to the Africans in South Africa in order to provide them with the ability to read the Bible and other religious materials. Since most of these materials were in English, it was considered of paramount importance to provide these Africans with knowledge of English. Knowledge of English, therefore, stood these Africans in good stead, not only as Bible and scripture readers, but also as clerks, storemen, supervisors and foremen (Hartshorne, 1992:189).

Incidentally, English took predominance over Dutch in the 19th Century. There was a drive towards white domination, and English was used as a medium of instruction in the black schools. There was an expressed feeling from certain white quarters though, that the teaching and use of English was “too ‘literary’ an education” for Africans, and that their education was “too bookish in nature” (Hartshorne p 189). Providing Africans with sound education was considered detrimental to white domination. The advent of mining in Kimberley and Witwatersrand marked the heightening of this complaint, as the traders shared these perceptions with settler communities.

Missionary institutions such as Lovedale, Healtown, St Matthew’s and others had been established as English medium schools designed to fulfil the idea of ‘evangelising’ and ‘civilising’ Africans (McKerron, 1934:162). The domination of English in these schools and those of their kind became very significant, and it can be seen as the British colonial policy - which resulted in the use of the English language as a tool for the achievement of ‘Anglicization’ and the maintenance

of political and economic domination. The medium of Dutch only prevailed in the farm schools, for the farms were under the Afrikaners.

As English was also seen as the common medium of communication between white employers and their black employees, proficiency in its spoken and written forms was emphasised. This applied to mission schools and was to be extended to industrial schools as well. Unquestionably, this exercise was meant to prepare Africans for employment as servants of the white people - thus promoting and maintaining white domination in the area of economic power.

This period was to be followed by the post-South African War Milner period, when the 'English Verwoerd' pronounced that

Dutch should only be used to teach English, and English to teach everything else.

(Hartshorne p 190).

Hartshorne posits that this was political and cultural imperialism which was not experienced again until 1953, when Bantu Education was introduced by the National Party (NP). Consequently, language became a controversial issue, and questions of power between the two white groups - English and Afrikaners - were negotiated. The result was that both languages achieved officialdom and enjoyed equality in all respects, while blacks were not taken into consideration.

The power struggle prevailed until 1948 when the NP took over the government. With the aim of creating a powerful Afrikaner identity to provide an emotional drive for the acquisition of political and economic power, the NP declared that Afrikaans was to become a symbol of the struggle for national identity and the state schools were "to foster that consciousness of a nation with God-given destiny" (Hartshorne p 151). This notion was to be supported by a number of theological justifications by the Afrikaners, such as:

God has willed it that there shall be separate nations, each with its own language, and that mother tongue is accordingly the will of God. The parent should accordingly have no choice in this case.

(Hartshorne p 191)

When the first Afrikaans-medium college for black teachers - Bethesda Training Institute - had been established in Transvaal in 1936, the objective behind its establishment was pronounced as

to give expression to the national personality for the Afrikaner people and to train Native teachers in accordance with the ideals of that people.

(Hartshorne p 195)

This was a strategy calculated to turn the black teachers into black Afrikaners, and to pave the way for the long-term plans which were being brewed for the language policy of black education. There was a clear desire for political recognition of power: African teachers were to appreciate the importance of the Afrikaners' language as an outstanding symbol of identity, power and solidarity. Obviously, the graduates of this college were expected to enhance, promote and foster Afrikaans among the black pupils they were to teach. Afrikaans was to become part of the mission to control and rule over South Africa,

The coming into power of the Nationalist government in 1948 spelt disaster for the black education in South Africa. The NP formulated what it called the Christian National Education (CNE) policy. Some of its outstanding objectives were that:

- 1) Any system of teaching and education of natives must be based on principles of **trusteeship, no equality and segregation**, (and) must be grounded in the life and worldviews of the whites, especially the Boer nation as the senior white trustees of the natives;
- 2) blacks be held to acceptance of Christian and National teachings of the Boer nation;
- 3) mother-tongue be the basis of native education and teaching; and
- 4) the two official languages be taught as subjects because of their officialdom, and because they are the keys to the cultural means that are necessary to his own cultural progress.

(Hartshorne p 196)

This fully exposes the typical Boer mentality that was, and possibly still is, prevalent in the apartheid South Africa. The Boer nationalist government had arrogantly assumed trusteeship for the black people in this country, and was determined to practise inequality and segregation in all spheres of life, be it political, economic, cultural or social. This government was even prepared to apply the most drastic measures against the blacks who defied the CNE teachings. Mother-tongue, on the other hand, was used as a basis of native education and teaching to deprive the Africans of the tools and equipment by which they could attain knowledge and means of challenging white domination in the areas of economic power and privilege. These perverse pronouncements were therefore not only marginalising and insulting to the black population, but also dehumanising and debasing the people of this country.

CNE policy laid the foundation for the Bantu Education that was to be introduced in 1953. It was the yardstick by which the Nationalist government tested its ideology and domination over the black people in South Africa. It also weighed and tested the people's patience and tolerance of the apartheid system in educational and religious matters. The main aspects of the CNE policy were that i) education should be based on church gospel, and ii) mankind should be divided into nations, and education should reflect those national differences (Ashley, 1989:7). It follows therefore that language mixing, cultural mixing, as well as religious and racial mixings were to be seen as not only undesirable but illegal in the apartheid South Africa.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 clearly stipulated that the Bantu Personnel were to ensure that the school was as Bantu in spirit as possible (Ashley p 13). Consequently, Afrikaans became compulsory in many training colleges, while the serving teachers were to make themselves competent in Afrikaans within as short a time as possible. This was to ensure a rapid development of Afrikaans into a dominant language in black schools, particularly at the levels of management, control and administration. Not surprisingly, henceforth the control of schools was brought into the hands of Afrikaner Nationalist principals and teachers who were committed to the ideologies of apartheid and CNE.

As if this was not enough, in 1959 the mother-tongue issue was extended to Std 6, followed by the writing of examinations in vernacular for the first time that year, instead of English. This new spirit of doctrinaire inflexibility marked a turning point in the education policy for the black

schools. As may be expected, this shift resulted in numerous pleas and protests for the reinstatement of English as a medium of instruction, but to no avail.

The apartheid government had perhaps blocked its ears to these pleas and protests because it regarded them as insignificant, since they were merely loud wailings which could hardly incite the people on the ground. They were never addressed to the oppressed masses themselves, but to the dominant class - the perpetrators of these oppressive ideologies. On the other hand, this display of obstinacy by the Boer Nationalist regime served to emphasise its arrogance and its preparedness to stick to power under any circumstances.

Both English and Afrikaans were made compulsory subjects in the secondary school, obviously to save the latter from dropping into a third language position. Both languages were also to replace the mother-tongue medium in the higher levels of education, once more to maintain Afrikaans second language position and to protect it from degenerating into the undesirable third grade level. In an attempt to justify its actions, the Nationalist government argued that the double-medium imposition was in answer to the officialdom shared by the two languages - conveniently forgetting "that dual medium education was not a requirement in white secondary schools" (Hartshorne p 198). In this way educational interests of the students and of the parents were made subservient to the ideological and political interests of the minority whites, and in particular the promotion and maintenance of Afrikaner Nationalist domination in all matters of politics and education.

In order for the Bantu Education to work properly and to achieve the intended goals, the apartheid government established a special branch of education - The Department of Bantu Education (DBE), to be later known as Department of Education and Training (DET) - which catered specifically for black education. This department was introduced against the wishes and aspirations of the black South Africans, and they saw it as a corrosive substance meant for the destruction of the intellectual capacity of the black people in this country. On the other hand, DET education was used as one of the brutal and sophisticated devices of repression and containment of the liberating forces. There is no denying the fact that the Boer Nationalist government felt threatened by the amassing liberating forces, which were marked by ever rising waves of resistance, uprising and insurrection.

As Ndebele (1992:23) observes, the apartheid regime regarded itself as the conqueror who then had a right “to build and shine the light of civilisation” among the black people of South Africa. The black people then were to be given a third-rate education that would ensure their status of servitude to the white minority. This arrogance, coupled with the emphasis and obsession of white domination, prompted the Nationalist Party and government to deny life for decades in this country. The onus was then on the oppressed majority to dismantle this, to reject the absurd life and to claim civilisation, freedom and democracy for all people of South Africa.

As would be expected, on the other hand of the spectrum, according to Serote (1992:42), the apartheid system

mobilised and nationalised the resources of the country to maintain this domination, as it also trained its police, army and security forces to repress blacks and protect whites.

Serote further indicates that ‘total onslaught’ sought to “defend and protect,” thus signifying “the culture expressing total intolerance to life.” Significantly, the deadly culture of apartheid - violence - was about to reach its highest velocity. That is why the ANC solicited support from the international community for its freedom struggle. It later expressed the objective of the struggle as “not only claiming freedom, or locating our country into civilisation, but as a people, we were reconfirming the fundamental rule of life, that change is constant to life” (Serote p 42).

A drastic change was to be anticipated in the ‘70s as the train of thought and methods of handling socio-political and -economic issues were reviewed by the black majority. The founding of the BCM was characterised by a new way of thinking among its members, such that a number of resolutions were made towards the intensification of the liberation struggle. Whereas the apartheid state adopted ‘total onslaught,’ the BCM policy was to liberate its people by destroying all the apartheid structures which tended “to furnish the stereotypes they require(d) for the justification and defence of their domination” (Kavanagh, 1985:67).

It was not surprising then that in 1976 the central focus was on the issue of Bantu Education, particularly on the question of the medium of instruction in the black schools. In the first place, black opinion never reconciled the mother-tongue medium of instruction beyond Std 2, nor did

it accommodate dual medium policy in the secondary schools. The strongest and most immediate opposition to Bantu Education had come from various quarters such as:

- a) the teachers in the Cape, which resulted in many resignations and expulsions;
- b) the Cape African Teachers Association;
- c) community organisations such as South African Institute of Race Relations, and the South African Council of Churches;
- d) in the Eastern Cape and Witwatersrand, parents boycotted Bantu Education and attempted to set alternative community school systems in which English was used as a medium;
- e) in the ensuing years the bodies closest to the Department of Bantu Education such as the Advisory Board of Bantu Education, the School Boards, and the African Teachers Association of South Africa, tried in vain to persuade the apartheid state to reconsider its language policy.

(Hartshorne p 198)

But the apartheid government maintained a hard-line stance which was to precipitate the 1976 uprisings initiated by students in Soweto schools. Clearly, the dual medium was weighing too much on the shoulders of the black students. Since their parents had failed in all their pleas and protests, the students now made it their duty to rectify the frustrating situation themselves. Leonard Mosala, a member of the Urban Bantu Council, reiterated this view in his pronouncement that:

We (the parents) have failed to help them in their struggle for change in schools. They are now angry and prepared to fight and we are afraid that the situation may become chaotic at any time.

(Hartshorne p 203)

His warning was that forcing Afrikaans upon the black students had potential for another Sharpeville. Indeed two days later a major confrontation with the police ensued, resulting in the loss of 176 lives within a week, thus marking South Africa as a country plunged into crisis. The apartheid state had now unleashed its military and police to kill black students for rejecting Bantu Education and the dual medium issue. In particular this was a rejection of Afrikaans, which was regarded as the language of oppression and exploitation - the "language of imperialism" as Hartshorne (p 187) asserts.

Apart from the DET education, the Church and other religious groups have had a significant interaction in the South African political struggle. Whereas the three Afrikaans churches known as the Dutch Reformed Churches- the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK) and Gereformeerde Kerk (GK) or Doppers' Church - have been held responsible for the planning and implementation of the apartheid system; the English-speaking ones - the Anglican Church and the Methodist Church of South Africa, as well as the Catholic Church - have traditionally been characterised by their verbal opposition to it (Cornivin, 1978; Villa-Vicencio, 1978; Serfontein, 1982; Cochrane, 1978). The notion of apartheid stems from both religious and political understanding of the Afrikaners: that they are a chosen nation which was "placed by God at the southern tip of Africa to fulfil God's divine mission"; and that there is "no other policy as moral, as responsible to Scripture as the policy of separate development" (Cornivin, 1978:35; Villa-Vicencio, 1978:3).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Dutch Reformed Churches' theologians have had the reputation of not only defending the apartheid system, but also of glorifying it. Their actions are justified because, like any other parent, they praise and glorify their own baby - since they formulated, developed and improved this system.

When the Nationalist Party (NP) made "emotional appeals to preserve Afrikaanerdom (sic.)," and claimed that it had "the sacred duty to uphold apartheid" (Raynes, 1955:2), the international community was baffled. But now one clearly understands the NP's psychological problem: it entirely believed in the myth that the Afrikaners were a God's chosen nation with 'the sacred duty' to perform. When it further expressed its determination "to maintain at all costs the superiority and domination of the white population" (ibid), the NP's position was illuminated: it

had made a resolve and a vow to destroy life in South Africa. Though this was an egoistic attitude it hereby displayed, the NP was apparently unaware of the implications of such a statement. It was probably failing to realise that this meant the destruction of life in all its spheres, which would undoubtedly affect all South Africans, be they white, yellow, pink, black or whatever complexion.

Needless to say, the Nationalist government had clearly laid down its ideological position in front of all South Africans and the world. This warranted politicians, critics and religious organisations to take action against such pronouncements. Since apartheid was “not just a political deviation or an error but something so fundamentally evil as to be a blasphemy” (Worsnip, 1991:xii), it was a matter of grave import for the Church to join hands with all other religious bodies to denounce and attack this system.

Yet it would be naive to expect the Dutch Reformed Churches to denounce and attack their own creation. The onus was then on the English and other churches to spearhead the struggle against apartheid at its infancy stage. As Serfontein (p 1) would observe, the English churches had “hidden racism and apartheid practices” inside them, such that theirs would not be a genuine attack, but a mere display of ‘hypocrisy.’ Small wonder therefore that these English churches were generally known for their verbal protests, and hardly any active involvement in the struggle.

For instance, when De Wet Nel pronounced his “poetic imagination and wishful thinking” that

a Zulu does not feel happy among the Sotho and the Sotho does not feel happy among the Xosa (sic.) [and that] Each wants to live among his own group, and there he finds rest for the soul and happiness, for which any human being yearns

(Raynes p 4)

one would expect religious groups to attack this pronouncement. It clearly spelt out the intention to fragment the peoples of South Africa. It also displayed the Boer mentality in turning itself into the spokesperson of the Africans. Moreover, this posed a threat against religious organisations and the Church, as they were faced with imminent restrictions in their future operations.

Not surprisingly, the Dutch Reformed Churches, in particular the NGK, fully supported Nel's pronouncement, and even laboured at the attempt to defend it theologically (Cochrane p 2). Though they registered their protest verbally and in writing, the anti-apartheid churches failed to take a firm and active stand against this idea. Perhaps they were in concert with the feeling expressed by Clayton (the then head of the Anglican Church) that the church was not supposed to give the lead but "to state clearly the moral problem and leave men to form their own personal decisions" (Worsnip p 32). Cochrane (p 2) advances an informative observation that a particular ambiguity in the South African English-speaking churches is

a consistent anti-apartheid record on paper coupled with a generally manifest powerlessness to translate that record into practical policy, except at the least threatening levels.

Though Geoffrey Clayton clearly fell within the above category, some characters within his church have correctly earned themselves the reputation of having consistently been actively involved in the struggle against the apartheid system. There are the likes of Michael Scott, Trevor Huddleston, Patrick Duncan and Ambrose Reeves, to name a few - all of whom were white ministers during the apartheid era. These 'activist' individuals have put the Anglican Church in the limelight of the struggle, as embodied in Trevor Huddleston's summation (in: Worsnip p xiii) that

... it is in the history of the Anglican Church between 1948 and 1957 that you will find most of the reasons why we now stand at the threshold of victory in the struggle to end apartheid forever.

According to Worsnip (p 73), the Anglican Church generally held the views that

- 1) racism was incompatible with the Christian gospel;
- 2) the church has both the right and the duty of proclaiming what the demands of God are in the political affairs of the South African situation; and (that)

3) politics and religion cannot be divorced from each other.

He further postulates that what distinguished the 'activist' wing from the rest of the church hierarchy was their active participation in the struggle against apartheid, which was characterised by their vocality and fair flamboyance. Their activism and sharp political outlook bore their roots from the first-hand involvement with blacks engaged in "extra-parliamentary opposition to apartheid," he says. Theirs was therefore an authentic political opposition to the system.

Indeed Worsnip (p 48ff) observes well that another glaring difference is embodied in Clayton's patronising speeches which were usually meant more for the white audiences than for the black people. A case in point is where Clayton compared the apartheid in South Africa with Hitler's racist mentality and his view of the Africans, where he calls them "half apes." On this issue Clayton remarked condescendingly as follows:

African people have much to complain of today. But today they have friends ... (who) are allowed to speak openly for them. No one puts me in prison if I say that you ought to have better schools or if I protest against the colour-bar. If Hitler were the ruler of this country, no one would be allowed to say such things. You would be far worse off than you are today. (p 49)

Needless to say, this speech was, to all intents and purposes, aimed at the appeasement of the apartheid regime. It bluffs the discriminated blacks and induces complicity in their suffering. In short, Clayton emerges here as a pseudo-representative who pretends to support the people's struggle while at the same time he corroborates the apartheid system. He can be clearly identified with those church liberals who "continued to view the society in which they lived, worked and witnessed, from 'above' rather than 'below,'" as Worsnip (p 51) would observe.

Contrary to this image of the church liberals is the position adopted by the activist wing, as represented by the four activist clerics discussed earlier. Besides being well-known for their alignment with the black political action, they were also associated with the broader sweeps of political pressure groups such as trade unions, trade councils and legal aid bureaus. Above all, this wing has also identified itself with political congresses such as the African National Congress,

and South African Indian Congress, and have even displayed their preparedness “to flirt with the South African Communist Party” (Worsnip p 76).

Further, these activist clerics even represented the oppressed people of South Africa to the international community, where they proposed political isolation and economic sanctions as measures intended for forcing the apartheid state to amend its ways and adopt change for democracy. To top it all, their criticism was even extended to the Church itself for ‘sleeping over’, or for “a ‘tragic mistake’ that the churches failed to take action together” against apartheid (Worsnip p 102).

This activist image was later to be adopted by the African clerics such as Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak and Frank Chikane, whose fame has transcended the confines of Africa and covered the entire world. Like their predecessors and colleagues in the church-state struggle, they have organised and participated in successful marches and pickets against the system. In these settings they have been known for their militant and emotionally charged addresses, which have helped to incite people into positive action and instil hope for victory. Chikane’s statement, which he presented in his capacity as the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) at the conclusion of the peace march on 13 September 1989 in Cape Town is a testimony to this view:

Those who struggle for truth to triumph over lies, peace over violence, justice over injustice and liberation of oppression can be sure that God is on their side.

(Villa-Vicencio p viii)

Besides earning Nobel prizes for their commitment in the struggle, some of these activist clerics have headed not only the SACC but gone to such heights as to lead discussion and debates in the recently established Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These are the forums which afforded the likes of Tutu a chance for a final display of their prowess, dedication and commitment in the political affairs of this country.

Undoubtedly, there are some black clerics who have been notorious for preaching distorted and dissuading religion in this country. These are, among others, those who are members of the

'daughter' churches, which were later known as 'sister' or 'younger' churches - the NG Kerk in Afrika (NGKA) for Africans, the NG Sendingkerk (NGSK) for Coloureds and the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) for Indians (Serfontein p 109). As Serfontein indicates, these 'younger' churches and the NGK have been characterised by tensions and confrontations. Since these churches were a result of separate development, their structures, doctrines, confessions, traditions and customs are the same. Race was therefore the only dividing line, as members of the black churches may not attend white services, except under special circumstances with a special permission from the white church council.

Since these younger churches were "standing on the financial legs of the white church," as Ds Eddie Leeuw (in: Serfontein p 111) once declared, there had always been a demand for them to serve the interests of their masters, thus becoming stooges of the apartheid state. They were known to have endorsed and defended the apartheid system for a number of years. Whereas white clerics of 'mother' NGK had an extra duty of delivering their sermons to the army and the police, those of the younger churches usually preached in the prisons as an extra duty.

Even though they were still financially supported by the apartheid government, the younger churches stopped being the instruments of the apartheid government in the seventies. This marked a turning point which coincided with that of the BCM proponents in their political outlook. They now took an anti-apartheid and anti-government stand. The clerics and theologians, some of whom were adherents of the BCM, adopted new socio-political views and made resolutions to take a total rejection of apartheid, and to condemn government actions such as "detentions without trial, bannings, suppression of school boycotts and labour strikes" (Serfontein p 112).

In conclusion, religious groups have not only frustrated the struggle against apartheid, but have also initiated militancy and defiance among the struggling South Africans. They have generated unity and power among the downtrodden, not to mention the building and the sustenance of hope and courage among the liberating forces in the country. They have thus helped to reinforce everlasting spirit for peace, freedom and democracy.

1.7 An Introduction to Maponya, his political affinities and his views on art

Somewhere on the eastern side of Johannesburg in the Gauteng vicinity lies a black township named Alexandra. This township, like all of its kind in South Africa, has been characterized by darkness, congestion, filth, dust, poverty, theft, gangsterism and many other criminal acts. The aspect of “white opulence versus black poverty,” as Smith (1992:25) would put it, becomes crystal clear when comparing this infamous township with its white counterparts in the same vicinity.

This township has seen great men and women emerging from its bowels. For example, it has produced soccer stars such as Teenage Dladla and others, some musicians, artists and writers of different genders and statures. While for ordinary people Alexandra may be regarded as a breeding place for criminals, for many black artists and writers it has afforded them a copious source of material for their artistic and literary creativity.

Maishe Maponya, a distinguished and versatile South African theatre practitioner who ranges from playwright, choreographer, poet, actor, gumboot dancer and director to teacher, - “Jack-of-all-theatre-trades,” according to Kramer (1984:5), - was born and brought up in this township. As it can be expected, this township evoked creative sensibilities in Maponya; as he says:

In a purely sub-conscious sense the experiences I lived in the ghetto of Alexandra have given to my work a certain element that has not come from any formal training.

The Graphic (1982:p 7)

But not only Maponya derived literary material from the squalor of this notorious township. Scores of other black South African artists and writers followed suit. Included among these artists is Wally Serote, one of the most famous South African poets, who saw Alexandra as “a pained and downtrodden mother that despite all her hardships manages to survive” (**The Graphic**, 1982:p 7).

Maishe Maponya, the first son in a family of eight, was born 45 years ago and was given the name of Isaiah after his grandfather. Like Leroi Jones, a black American playwright who changed his name to Amiri Baraka as an indication of his fiercely aggressive Black Power position (Seymour-Smith, 1976:184), Maponya changed his first name to Maishe in 1975 when he started writing, as a demonstration of his involvement with Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Whereas Amiri Baraka adopted his new name to indicate his role of a 'spiritual leader' who is destined to serve the oppressed black Americans, Maishe regarded himself as a visionary and messenger of the dispossessed black masses in South Africa (Korber, 1985:2; interview 20 February 1994).

Maponya started writing poetry under the membership of "Medupe Writers Association which was later banned along with other organisations in October 1977" (Steadman, 1985b:iii). Among his contemporaries in the embryonic stages of his theatrical career was Matsemela Manaka, a close friend and eminent playwright. Whether coincidentally or by design, Maponya and Manaka reflect a thematic similarity in their plays, viz **The Hungry Earth** and **Egoli/City of God**, respectively, which depict the black man's life in the mining industry. This may be attributed to their environment, close friendship and involvement with BCM.

Maponya and Manaka seemingly share the same philosophy of the BCM, for while Manaka "indulges fearlessly in his being totally African and his unrelenting quest for the African truth in his work" (Khan, 1989:10), Maponya "bore the brunt of cultural chauvinism that judges one's contribution according to socio-cultural orientation" (**New Nation**, 1992 p 25).

In 1976, while working for an insurance company, Maponya established the Bahumutsi Theatre Group (Mispelled 'Bahumutsi' in **Upbeat** No 1, 1985 p 26). The word 'Bahumutsi,' which is derived from Maponya's African language, means 'the comforters,' and according to Maponya the group was formed with an aim of creating and producing theatre that was to function as a relief to the oppressed masses by exposing the injustices perpetrated by the South African apartheid regime (interview, 1994 April). The group's aim was not only to expose or to truthfully depict the realities of this country, but also to conscientize the masses, teach them the ABC of revolution, rally them to action and suggest solutions to their prevailing problems. In that sense,

as Manaka would suggest, they would fulfil their duty of being the “watchdogs of the society” (**The Voice** 1980 Vol 4 No 21)

The first play the group produced was **The Cry**, the play which unfortunately had only two performances before it had to close down due to the Soweto uprisings in 1976 (**Upbeat** 1985: 26). In 1978 Maponya co-founded The Allah Poets, a group of performance poets, and wrote poems for the group to perform in the township (Steadman 1985a: xiii). Though he was overburdened with financial problems and time constraints, Maponya continued writing plays and poetry.

Unfortunately, black theatre groups were without any government subsidy or funding from the private sector. Maponya was working as a clerk in an insurance company, with a small salary that was only enough for hand-to-mouth existence. Members of his group were also engaged in some jobs, hence, they were compelled to rehearse their plays only in the evenings. Since his pet cause was theatre, Maponya decided to work full-time for the Bahumutsi Theatre Group (**Upbeat** 1985: 26).

In 1983 he left the insurance company to organise and work for the Bahumutsi Drama Group in the capacities of director-producer, actor and manager. Instead of alleviating his problems, this move compounded them, for this was like managing a small business which had to pay the dividends. Since the group’s and indeed the playwright’s only source of income was from the sale of tickets for their shows during performances, this group found itself in serious financial trouble. For example, after paying for a myriad of services such as bus fares, materials for costumes and sets, hiring of halls or theatres, advertising, accommodation and so on, the group had virtually no money to pay for members’ salaries. Small wonder therefore that **The Hungry Earth**, which was first performed with “a cast of five” in Soweto and at Wits, had to go on the European tour “with the cast down to three” (Maponya, 1995:2). Needless to say, the group had to undergo intolerable financial restrictions and sacrifices in their daily operations.

Besides the financial constraints, Maponya’s theatrical career has not been a very smooth one. Similar to other activist theatre creations which were opposed to the apartheid system, it has been

characterized by state harassment and intimidation, coupled with censorship and banning. To highlight this state of affairs, it merits quoting a few incidents he experienced in his theatrical activity:

Firstly, relating to the play **Umongikazi**, Maponya (1995:x) has this to say:

Shortly before the play was due to tour Europe and the U.K, the lead actress Gcina Mhlophe was called to John Vorster Square police station. Her passport and mine were withdrawn, making it impossible for us to go with the group. I was not only the director but one of the four performers.

Secondly, according to Herbet et al (1985:1), when Maponya, then the young playwright award winner at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, ordered a cup of tea at the Johannesburg AA terminal “all hell broke out” as he was prohibited from sitting down to drink his tea. One white woman even threatened to slap him. To show the seriousness of the matter, a policeman was even called in to deal with him, who after examining his passport, allowed him to the bus. To add an insult to injury, in Maponya’s words:

When we arrived at Jan Smuts Airport, four security men were waiting for me. They searched me and made me go through the x-ray machine and they questioned me and they made me feel like a criminal

(in: Herbet et al p 1).

Thirdly, in his account of bannings experienced by South African theatre practitioners who were deemed radical by the apartheid regime, Larlham (1985:7) posits that by the end of 1975 “many black theatre groups promoting the aims of Black Consciousness had been silenced by the authorities.” Nonetheless, Maponya managed to produce his first play, **The Cry**, in 1976, though for the reasons given earlier, it had to close down after only two shows.

Maponya’s Bahumutsi Drama Group has, since its formation performed a number of plays, including **Peace and Forgive**, **The Hungry Earth**, **Gangsters**, **Dirty Works**, and **Jika** (Makaya, 1985: 11). Another outstanding production the group undertook was **Busang Meropa/Return the Drum**, which Brookes (1986:9) referred to as “An acrid pot-pourri of song, dance and verse.” The comment further describes this production as poetry “swollen with images of

violence.” Roger Dean (1986:7) claims that **Busang Meropa** “is the kind of black theatre that makes white audiences quiver in their beds,” and alludes to songs and poetry performed by the Bahumutsi Company as having “sharp edge of anger to them that is distinctly discomfoting.” All the foregoing comments distinguish Maponya as a militant theatre practitioner whose aim is to use theatre as weapon for the liberation of the oppressed majority in South Africa.

Maponya is a very busy theatre practitioner. Besides his daily involvements with his Bahumutsi Drama Group, where he does both acting and directing, he holds executive positions with numerous theatre committees. For instance, he was a drama lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand and an executive member of the Performing Arts Workers Equity (PAWE), where he had a reputation of

raising pertinent issues with a tenacity that does not endear him to those who prefer to gloss over the pervasive domination of African culture.

New Nation (1992:25)

He is also reputed to have spoken in the PAWE meetings on limited resources for blacks, such as

the inequitable distribution of available funds and the media indifference to African efforts. The misrepresentation of African culture by the dominant products that commercialise black experience and the lack of commitment by both performers and culture institutions.

(New Nation 1992: 25)

In these executive forums Maponya repeatedly proposed the formation of the National Endowment for the Arts and Culture (NEAC) which would pool funds for arts to ensure its equitability and non-partisanship, thus guaranteeing national cultural development. Unfortunately his proposals were hardly given the consideration they deserved. But this had not dampened his spirits. Instead of losing hope and resigning himself to his fate, Maponya, with a pinch of bitterness, would resort to his pen and paper and produce a poem, such as ‘We March!’, which is said to be “a vitriolic and unsparing attack on congress political culture” (**New Nation** 1992:

25). It would seem that these forbidding circumstances forced Maponya to overburden himself with Committed Theatre in pursuance of his philosophy of writing African theatre, designed for the liberation of the black masses. He calls this Theatre of the Dispossessed or Resistance Theatre (SNBFA Programme, July 1986; Sichel, 1986: 1; De Villiers, 1985: 5; Interview, 22 February, 1994).

As a co-founder of the Allah Poets in 1978, Maponya developed a brand of performance poetry which he then used as a theatrical convention. According to Steadman, “he becomes the radical black poet, declaiming in poetry the cause of black liberation” (**The Star** 1985:8). In **The Graphic** (1982 p 7) it is claimed that writing is mechanical, but effective writing requires a sensitivity known as ‘inborn.’ For Maponya, “writing effectively also requires a certain ‘lived experience’ that hits at the core of one’s sensitivity.” This ‘sensitivity’ is reiterated by Kramer (1984:5) where Maponya calls himself “a writer of conscience.” He is quoted saying:

Conscience makes me keep on writing. My inner being forces me to write about things that are inhuman, not proper. In my writing I cater for those who are on the receiving end, who are unfairly dealt with. I try to document certain incidents that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Evidently, Maponya’s main target audience is the oppressed and downtrodden majority, who in South Africa happen to be the blacks, or non-whites, as labelled by the apartheid regime. Nevertheless, Maponya admits that his messages are sometimes directed to the whites who must be exposed to his views “of the harm and damage they are doing to the black community” (**The Graphic** 1982:7).

It is not surprising therefore, that Maponya’s intention with his theatre was to expose the injustices perpetrated by the oppressive regime upon the black masses, the ultimate end being to engender change which would lead to a free democratic South Africa.

1.8 The issue of theatricality in Maponya's plays

As has been shown already that Maponya is a multi-talented theatre practitioner, his theatricality manifests itself in all his works, be it drama, song or poetry. For him, song and poetry, like drama, are not meant for reading, but for performance in front of the audience. The performance should be done in a theatrical manner that affords the audience an opportunity to see itself in the mirror and be able to analyse its own situation. By Maponya's standards, performance takes precedence over the text. No wonder that he regards the workshopping of a play as the primary mode, while the text plays a secondary role - it is "a skeleton which has to be fleshed out in performance through the dynamics of the actor, the designer and the director" (Hauptfleisch and Steadman, 1984:147).

As a black South African who was born and brought up in the dusty township of Alexandra, which was infamous for a number of things, Maponya regarded life in this notorious township as theatre itself. For example, when small boys scrambled and fought over a half-loaf of bread they had salvaged from a waste basket, Maponya could not ignore such an event, but would take it as a serious incident that needed to be staged and diagnosed in a theatrical setting. He saw it as a dramatic event that had causes and effects which went beyond what the eye could see.

For him, it was an event which had to be analysed from the socio-political, -economic and -cultural perspective concerning the situation which was prevailing in the apartheid South Africa. Supposedly, this bread was thrown into the waste basket by someone who could afford to dispense of it, while so many starving people would even fight over it. These people could hardly afford a decent meal because they were economically poor. Because of this very fact, they had adopted and developed the culture of scrambling and fighting over waste like animals, like dogs or hyenas for that matter. The system had indeed impoverished them politically and economically, to the extent that they had been reduced to the level of animals.

When as a young man Maponya joined one football club in his surrounding, his aim was to perform for the spectators, who would, through entertainment, get a relief from their socio-political, -economic and -cultural problems, even if temporarily. This same idea was to be transferred to theatre at a later stage. Maponya regarded his group as that of analysts whose

theatre would be an eye-opener to the dispossessed people of South Africa. Since the majority of these people were illiterate and semi-literate, Maponya and his group always employed different theatrical devices to reach their audiences' sensibilities.

For example, as a BCM adherent, Maponya felt the need to reach the people by using forms and materials that were common to them, to which they were acquainted and as part of their life. "The village dance under the tree," for instance, would be an appropriate form (Kavanagh, 1985:165). Small wonder therefore that Maponya became a gumboot dancer of a high repute, and used this well-known traditional dance in many of his theatrical productions. His influence in the teaching and performance of this dance manifests itself in the accolade presented by Mawer (1992), signifying a tribute to and acknowledgement of Maponya's theatrical expertise.

Poetry and song have traditionally been used as a means of disseminating information, conscientisation and incitement among the peoples of Africa (Finnegan, 1977). As an African theatre practitioner with BCM leanings, Maponya employed these two theatrical modes of presentation in his plays to achieve the same goal. This is noticeable in almost all of his plays, and its theatrical significance is quite outstanding. For instance, **The Hungry Earth** opens with a song that warns Mother Africa to be aware of the imminent rape by the white man, while in **Jika** the chanting of the song of defiance and resistance at the inception of the play marks the students' determination to fight the apartheid system to death. In **Gangsters**, on the other hand, poetry is employed at key points to emphasise important issues and to highlight the protagonists' defiance and militancy. The clenched fist sign and other gesticulations that accompany the song and poetry illuminate Maponya's ability to demystify his theatre.

Further, Maponya grapples with political issues theatrically in all his plays. He uses stylisation and religious icons to stimulate and challenge the audience. While in **Jika** his characters intermittently challenge the audience by facing and confronting it at key points, in **Gangsters** the protagonist, Rasechaba, decolonises the stage periodically and confronts Whitebeard with the issues pertaining to the apartheid system. This theatrical device distinguishes Maponya as a Brechtian scholar, whose aim is to demystify his theatre by challenging the audience and affording them an opportunity for a critical thought.

These key moments of confrontation and challenge help the actors to step out of the characters they represent on stage and stand out as members of the same community they hereby address. This is what Brecht (in: Willet, 1974:15) terms “epic theatre,” whose objective is to remove the emotional aspect of drama and introduce those moments which stimulate intellectual thought among members of the audience. Members of the audience can decipher and assess the causes and effects of the issues presented in the play, while at the same time they are able to think of the appropriate steps they may take towards solving the problems they are confronted with.

When in **Gangsters** the audience is presented with the religious icon of crucifixion, this becomes a critical moment of thought and debate. Perhaps the first reaction of the audience is that of shuddering with fright. But Maponya takes care of this by stretching this moment of fright and gloom to about three minutes of silence. It would seem that this is a strategy that is calculated to erase the fear and gloom that may be induced by this sight, thus giving the audience a chance for a critical thought concerning the spectacle in view.

Needless to say, the use of this religious icon of crucifixion highlights Maponya’s theatrical expertise in this play, and functions as a two-pronged device: it simultaneously arouses emotions and stimulates critical thought among members of the audience. One may also infer that it is also a theatrical strategy which distinguishes Maponya not only as a highly talented theatre practitioner, but also as an ardently religious playwright who believes in the BCM’s call “to re-orientate the theological system with a view of making religion relevant to the aspirations of the black people” (Kavanagh, 1985:149). He therefore uses the image of Jesus Christ on the cross as a symbol of innocence and torture.

Maponya’s introduction of Biko/Rasechaba’s shadow as the figure of Jesus Christ crucified suggests new religious dimensions which were perceived by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). This is the movement which Biko not only propounded and cherished, but sacrificed his life for. Contrary to the European Christian teachings and outlook, where Christ is depicted as white, Maponya, as a BCM adherent, decolonises the image of Christ. He turns Christ into a “revolutionary Christ, a ‘terrorist’ Christ” who becomes “an instrument in the theocratic white prison,” as O’Brien (1994:57) enthuses. This decolonisation process not only serves as a booster

to black people's self-esteem but also as a rallying cry for them to defy white supremacy and seize power by making Christ their liberation fighter in their struggle for political emancipation.

Finally, Maponya uses language as another mode of theatricality in his presentations. He uses English as a medium of communication, which fosters unity and co-operation among the people of South Africa with their eleven different official languages. His theatrical use of language manifests itself in dialogues, monologues, soliloquies, asides, as well as in song and poetry, all of which are embodied in his plays. Bearing in mind the literary shortcomings of his audiences, Maponya uses simple and straight-forward English that is accessible to virtually anybody in the country. He further blends languages for emphasis and lucidity of meaning. His theatrical language is piercing, militant and vitriolic. The whole question of language as displayed by Maponya in his plays harmonises very well with Gwala's views that the responsibility of an African writer is "to remould language in such a way that it becomes African but remains English" (p 72).

Chapter 2: Analysis of **The Hungry Earth**

2.1 Preamble

Maishe Maponya wrote **The Hungry Earth** in 1979. This play comprises five cameo scenes, revolving around the battle of the migrant labourers against the vicissitudes of life in industrialised South Africa, viz: the hostel, the plantation, the train, the mine and the compound. These are linked by songs and chants, coupled with valedictory soliloquies or political monologues.

2.2 Analysis

2.2.1 The aspect of naming

Wellek and Warren (1963:219) posit that naming is the simplest form of characterization, since each “appellation” is “a kind of vivifying, animizing, individuating.” Individual authors employ various naming strategies to accommodate their personal aims, such as to show the trend the story is going to take; for spelling out the central theme; for creating vivid images, and so on. Whereas some authors use onomatopoeic toning, others utilize allegoric or quasi-allegoric appellations to stereotype their literary material and their characters. Maponya falls into this latter category, and he is very particular with his naming. He uses it as one of the central concerns that filters through the play.

As a typical Brechtian scholar whose aim is to apply demystification in his plays, Maponya takes special care with his titles and the naming of his characters. The title **The Hungry Earth** embodies the central theme of the whole play, while the names of the characters help to develop the theme as they exemplify the situational conflicts.

The Hungry Earth is a lecture in socio-political and -economic structures of South Africa during the apartheid era. This title, **The Hungry Earth**, evokes images of a malevolent monster who has a penchant for swallowing victims, for instance the anti-pass demonstrators, victims of workers' clashes with the police in a labour dispute, as well as casualties of a mine blast.

Maponya advertised **The Hungry Earth** on its British tour as “a mirror and a voice of the dispossessed” (Steadman, 1985b:386), on account of the fact that the whole play provides the context in which to view the dispossessed people of South Africa under the apartheid oligarchy.

The Hungry Earth is therefore an amorphous unit which does not belong to any race, class or creed. It is a vortex which devours casualties of resistance.

According to Coplan (1985:222):

The title refers to the soil of the townships, which seems hungry for the bodies of African working men, who die in such numbers from mine and industrial accidents and other slings and arrows that the flesh of Black South Africans is heir to.

The characters, whose names represent certain aspects of the black society, present an overall view of the play. They are not individuals per se. Beshwana (loin cloth), represents traditional attire and retention of African values; Matlhoko (sufferings) symbolises misfortune, oppression and exploitation in all their forms; while Usiviko (shield) represents protection against all evils, which guarantees survival in a hostile environment by retaining one’s values; and finally Sethotho (imbecile) is the idiot who, like a sponge, absorbs all foreign values and extols the virtues of the oppressor.

These characters are a mouth-piece for Maponya’s Brechtian statements. Throughout the play he uses theatre as a vehicle for demystifying social and political realities in South Africa. Demystification, according to Steadman (1985b: 411), produces philosophy not action. But he is quick to point out, “new relations of thought can lead to action.” It follows therefore that demystification of the realities of the society helps to conscientize and move the society to action, towards the solution of its own problems.

As Brecht (Willet, 1974:14) would claim, theatre should aim at an “extremely classical, cold, highly intellectual style” to avoid giving a false view of the world. This style of performance, he posits, is for clear-thinkers and not for the “scum” who “want the cockles of their hearts warmed.” This he calls “epic theatre,” which aims at bringing out the material incidents in a “perfectly sober

and matter-of-fact way” (p 15). In other words, characters and incidents in ‘epic theatre’ should be portrayed ‘objectively’ so that the audience may be afforded a chance to analyse the play intelligently, rather than being emotionally involved in the spectacle presented on stage.

Maponya’s earlier attendance at Brecht’s **The Measures Taken** at the Edinburgh Festival has had a great influence on his style of presentation, as evinced by the prologue that immediately follows the song. This prologue identifies the maladies that gnaw at the fabric of the society: sufferings in their different shades such as wars, detensions, killings, poverty, hatred, selfishness, exploitation, and all other apartheid-induced problems.

2.2.2 Maponya’s notion of religion in **The Hungry Earth**

As a BCM adherent, Maponya has nothing against religion per se, but rather against Western religion. He considers this religion to cause untold confusion among the Africans. He also regards it as a source of division among them. Whereas the black man enjoyed peace and tranquillity in Africa before colonisation, the advent of the white man led to all forms of injustices and suffering, such as exploitation, oppression and segregation. Though he was welcomed with love and hospitality, the white man was full of cunning. With the Bible as a weapon for lulling Africans into complacency, he used religion as an opium of the people, as “a political opiate” (Villa-Vicencio, 1990:45). But the people were suspicious, especially about controversial teachings such as “you must always turn the other cheek when you are slapped” or “love those who misuse you” (p 153).

Moreover, though Africans adopted the white man’s religion in good faith, it has destroyed all they valued, even their sense of reasoning to the extent that they have now become “puppets on a string: unable to control our own lives” (p 153). Matlhoko, as Maponya’s spokesperson, indicates that while Africans are lulled and busily engaged in this type of religion, they are inadvertently exploited. Using the army as a force of oppression, gold and diamonds are dug and exported to Europe. In other words, the army and the police remain in Africa to perpetuate the wishes and desires of the white man, and to stifle any form of uprising by the downtrodden Africans.

This is Maponya's clarion call for African's to reject this distorted and divisive religion, for it turns them into inert slaves who perpetually suffer under the oppressive system of the capitalists. Once this divisive religion has been totally rejected, a new form of religion should be adopted - a unifying kind which promotes co-operation, unity, power and brotherhood among the people. For Maponya, God should be regarded as the father and protector of all human beings, regardless of their race.

2.2.3 Spatial demarcation

At the exposition of the play, a short song is rendered in an admonitory tone of voice, setting the mood of the play, warning 'Mother Africa' to be wary of impending doom:

WAKE UP MOTHER AFRICA
 WAKE UP
 TIME HAS RUN OUT
 AND ALL OPPORTUNITY IS WASTED.
 WAKE UP MOTHER AFRICA
 WAKE UP
 BEFORE THE WHITE MAN RAPES YOU.
 WAKE UP MOTHER AFRICA.*¹
 (Hauptfleisch & Steadman, 1983:158)
 (hereafter in this chapter page only acknowledged from this source)

Mother Africa is admonished to wake up to the sobering fact that she is a potential victim of rape. Ironically, the intended rape which seemingly threatens the very existence of the black man, is to be committed by his foe of long standing, the white man, on his dear 'Mother Africa,' the symbol of virginal innocence. This rape and its related atrocities of coercion, brutality, oppression and subjugation can only result in untold suffering.

*Capital letters are used as they appear in the text, though in a later version they are no longer used. This could be for emphasis sake.

The white man is seen by the playwright to represent the Western countries which economically exploit and politically oppress the entire African continent. The song is undoubtedly an exhortation to all sons and daughters of Africa to do all in their power to protect their mother against this brutal rape-to-be. It is also a call to Mother Africa to be aware of the intended rape.

The song can also be seen as an embodiment of the principles and philosophy of the BCM: it raises people's consciousness, and in the Brechtian fashion urges them to work out strategies to fight the impending doom. Mother Africa symbolises African unity and nationhood which, according to Maponya, had been shattered by the white man.

Having provided an introduction "on both emotional and thematic levels" (Steadman 1985b: 391), Maponya then takes his audience on a journey to his episodic settings to highlight the appalling situation to which the black South Africans are subjected, and to expose their heart-rending sufferings.

Scene one is set at a hostel in a mining industry. The stage description depicts the situation in the mining compound. One hostel room serves as a bedroom for four adult men, which presupposes congestion and a state of unbearable heat and nauseating smell, especially during a hot season. This nauseating and debilitating atmosphere creates frustration and restlessness, coupled with insomnia. This is a miniature representation of the situation to which blacks in South Africa are subjected.

Blacks are forever congested in the townships and homelands which the apartheid system has forced them to accept as their homes. They are 'restless' and they have to struggle for survival, yet they are 'asleep,' that is, unconscious of the prevailing problems. Theirs is mere mumbling, groaning and 'incoherent talk,' which signify nothing but near-helplessness. One of the hostel room occupants "tosses about and finally cries wildly" (p 152), which signifies utter frustration. One of his room mates wakes him up, and the other room mates wake up too. This is a clear demonstration of Maponya's intention - to wake up all Africans to assess their situation and take appropriate measures to rectify it.

Like a drawing on a teacher's chalkboard, this demonstration lesson to the audience conscientizes the dispossessed masses of their semi-slumber and frustration. They have to be rallied to action to save themselves from this plight which may otherwise end up in complete amnesia. Since this situation transcends the confines of the mining industry, the whole African continent should work towards a solution.

Now that everybody is awake, Usiviko relates the nightmare that has been torturing him. Sethotho describes Usiviko's reaction in this nightmare as that of "a child seeing a ghost" (p 153). Did Usiviko see a monster in that nightmare that sent shivers up his spine? Yes, 'umlungu,' the white man, but not just an ordinary one. This one, Usiviko explains, "had divided me against myself. He has tinted my colour. I can no longer distinguish between right and wrong" (p 153).

Indeed, the system had created uncertainties among the exploited blacks in South Africa. They were, and still are, divided and have not only lost direction, but their reasoning power and logic have been adversely affected, resulting in a distorted perception.

Using Mathloko as his mouth-piece, Maponya retraces steps in the sands of time and recaptures the advent of the white man in Africa. In a typical Brechtian fashion, "the lights fade, leaving only Mathloko lit" (p 153). Obviously the aim is for the audience to apply their full concentration on this character who endeavours to briefly recap the events of the period.

Given the platform and the attention he deserves, Mathloko relates the advent of the white man in Africa as the moment the continent started "giving birth to ugly days," marking this period as the turning point which caused peace to go "into exile, to become a thing of the wilderness" (p 153). As the playwright has already demonstrated that this continent is 'Mother Africa,' the idea of 'giving birth to ugly days' conjures a vivid image of a mother who, for the first time after numerous births, bears ugly children, possibly due to their being born out of the rape alluded to in the rousing song at the inception of the play. 'Peace,' used metaphorically, symbolises the husband to Mother Africa, who due to prevailing circumstances, is forced to go into exile and become a renegade.

Having journeyed back into history, Maponya releases his other characters to join Mathloko and rally the people to action by working at the strategies that need to be employed in recovering the African wealth that has been misappropriated by the white man:

Mathloko: Men and women of Africa: Umlungu has left us secretly. He has taken with him a great wealth of property, our sheep and cattle, our men and women as servants, gold and silver and all precious stones.

Usiviko: Let us give chase and get back what he has taken from us. Those riches belong to us, the aborigines of this land.

Beshwana: Umlungu deserves to die. Let us set out to catch him, and when we catch him we will hang him from the nearest tree. His servants must also be killed: they betrayed us. Let us kill the whole lot. (p 153)

In order for the readers/audience to critically weigh and consider the pros and cons of the white man's presence in Africa, Maponya uses Sethotho to present a conflicting idea which aims at portraying the umlungu positively, to defend him. As it can be expected, Sethotho has high regard for the umlungu. According to him, umlungu does not deserve these condemnations by his colleagues, for he brought along with him his civilization into the primitive Africa of years gone by.

Evidently, Sethotho's argument is a kind of justification some Westerners would advance whenever they are accused of milking Africa of its resources for the benefit of the European countries: that Africans "were savages swinging on to the trees and eating bananas," "lived like wild animals" and so on (H&S p 153-4). Although Sethotho, because of his imbecility, believes in his own argument, a thinker will quickly realise that it is nothing else but a complete fabrication of the truth. Surely if Africans used to swing freely on trees and enjoyed fresh and nutritious fruit, that does not mean that they were savages. From Beshwana and his colleagues' stand-point, Sethotho's argument is not only vacuous but offensive as well, for even though umlungu brought his civilization with him, he found Africa with its own civilisation and culture.

For example, music and song, politics and other forms of culture such as the building of pyramids were already practised in Africa before the advent of the white man. In other words, as Malcolm X would claim, even if the white man brought with him his civilisation, he did not find Africa a place of savages, but a continent with its own diversity of cultures (King Moshoeshoe II, in: Morrison, 1995:96).

In concert with the view is Achebe's (Duerden and Peterse, 1972:7) informative claim that an African writer should not take anything for granted, but should think of the needs of the society and contribute towards that goal. He describes the role of the writer as that of a teacher, part of whose duty is to teach his readers that "we in Africa did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans."

To indicate their disgust at Sethotho's collusion with the umlungu, the three progressive characters derisively promise that Sethotho will be forever with the white man, even in hanging, an act which would result in their having a 'combined tombstone' which will be inscribed with the following words:

In memory of the oppressor
And his oppressed spy
And to their love-hate:
They were inseparable
In life and in death
Find no peace.

(p 154)

Obviously the playwright holds up to ridicule those Africans who collude with the white man in exploiting and oppressing the black people in Africa. For him, such people deserve nothing else but to be hanged with the oppressor, and interred in a 'combined tombstone,' which makes them strange bedfellows. Ironically, their togetherness in their last resting place as 'oppressor' and 'oppressed spy,' with their 'love-hate' propensity, marks their inseparableness in 'life and death,' yet they are to have 'no peace.' They are both condemned eternally.

Though he may have brought his civilization with him, the umlungu has done more harm than good to the Africans. According to Usiviko, he has not only taken away the African wealth for which people have sweated, but has also “given them mirrors and knives in exchange for cattle” (p 154). These are extremely incompatible forms of bartering, and they signify exploitation at its worst. Indeed this act goes beyond mere cheating, it can rightly be called theft of a high order.

Now that the sins of the white man have been spelt out, Beshwana and other characters mime the battle of ‘spears against guns,’ which highlights the vulnerability of the black man against his opponent, the white man. Miming, as a theatrical technique, helps to demonstrate the incident to the audience without involving them in the purgation of emotions, thus affording a chance for their critical analysis of the spectacle. In addition to this technique, Beshwana, without dramatising it, simply tells the audience that they were attacked from all sides by the army, which is typical of Brechtian style of presentation.

This illustration is amplified by characters chanting softly, while Beshwana employs speech to supplement the song, the aim being to mobilise the people to action against exploitation and oppression:

Stand up all ye brave of Africa
Stand up and get to battle
Where our brothers die in numbers
Africa you are bewitched
But our black blood will flow
To water the tree of our freedom (p 155)

This rallying-cry does not only inspire Africans to stand up and fight for their rights, but also serves as an inspiration for bravery and determination in the battle for freedom. In short, the Africans are persuaded to die for Africa, if necessary, in an endeavour to free it from all forms of bondage.

Maponya’s innovative fusion of song, poetry and dialogue paves the way for easy transmission of messages which touch the audience’s various sensibilities. The people are not only conscientized

of their forefather's bravery in fighting the wars at Isandlwana and Umgugundlovu, but are also rallied to armed struggle to protect 'Mother Africa' from the impending rape previously alluded to at the beginning of the scene. That scene is over, characters merely illustrate and depict historical and social events without indulging themselves in any emotions. Having cast light on the present state of affairs, and helped the people to determine their future, the characters triumphantly retrace their steps.

These personas further depict child-labour and abuse at a plantation farm. To make it worse, the children involved are between twelve and thirteen years of age. Normally, children of this age would be at home under parental care and nurturing, indulging in the joys of childhood such as playing and learning. But these ones are precocious children who reached their manhood before their time. To aggravate their condition, they are overworked, but only receive an ex-gratia payment. This is an exploitation of children at a very tender age, which reflects total lack of parental instinct on the part of the perpetrators.

One feels bound to agree with Percy Qoboza's view concerning the amount of destruction done to the black children by the apartheid system:-

If it is true that a people's wealth is its children, then South Africa is bitterly, tragically poor. If it is true that a nation's future is its children, we have no future and deserve none ... We are a nation at war with its future...

(City Press - 20 April 1986).

The system had turned the black children into a generation of slaves, whose only hope ironically lay in the hands of the white slave-driver.

Not only children are exploited in this plantation, but adults are also treated likewise. For example, women earn R1.10 and men R2.00 per day for nine hour's labour. The labourers, both adults and children, have no recourse but to accept this state of affairs as their fate. They spurn intervention and label a sympathetic visitor as 'trouble maker,' as illustrated in this song of menace:

Here comes a man
 To cause trouble in my home
 Bring that stick
 And I will discipline him

(p 157)

Evidently, the system has frustrated them to the extent that whoever tries to assist them is looked upon with suspicion. They harbour a multiplicity of fears, such as losing their menial slave jobs. In other words, they have a defeatist attitude of which Maponya endeavours to conscientize the audience. He does this in a lecture-demonstration manner and sharply focuses on the shift in relations among the characters.

The train scene depicts migrant workers from Lesotho on their way to Johannesburg, the city of gold. With Mathloko as his mouth-piece, Maponya expresses his wish to be a spectator in this train. But he is quick to point out that “unfortunately blacks can never be spectators of white creations, but victims” (p158).

The train creates a scenario for struggle between a vulgar, autocratic, white ticket examiner and the black passengers, whose welfare is solely at his mercy. His very first utterance betrays his vulgarity. It is generally acknowledged that the main function of language is communication, but this ticket examiner utilises it for brutalising and debasing the black passengers:

Kaartjies! tickets! Come on you black bastards. Hurry up! (p 158).

(then eying them coldly) “Come! You Black bastards! where’s the dagga?” (No one answers). “All right! Out onto the platform, you baboons!” (He slaps and kicks the slow ones) (p 159).

Needless to say, there is no cause to swear at the poor black passengers. He seemingly enjoys hurling insults at them for not producing their tickets fast enough for his liking: “you black bastards,” “black skelms,” “baboons,” he blurts out, and they simply have to tolerate his behaviour.

It is not surprising therefore that when the train passengers could not produce the required passes, they were jailed, and then deported to their homes. Clearly, blacks had no freedom in the apartheid South Africa. They were jailed for periods decided by the white-powers-that-be or deported to their home countries or Bantustans as stipulated in the apartheid legislature.

Soliloquizing, Usiviko, as Maponya's spokesman, expresses the following viewpoint:

This is the inhuman and unjust procedure to endorse the unjust laws that make another a stranger in the land of his birth and rob him of his freedom to move wherever he wants.

and then like a teacher giving homework or assignments to his students, he poses the questions "Is freedom not the law of nature? Then what?" (p 160). This typical lecture-method leaves the audience with a mental assignment.

The mine scene vividly portrays the relation between black workers, their white seniors and the management. The scene opens with the workers performing a gumboot dance before being ferried into the bowels of the earth. This dance, like many others performed in the mining industry, plays a role in:

... helping migrant workers to orientate themselves in an impersonal modern world, to release tension, and to develop new relationships and forms of recreation.

(Osborne 1990: 50).

These miners' means of transport is a cage which usually "slows to a shuddering halt" for them to alight at the terminal underground. When they alight, according to Maponya, "they swarm out like ants" (p 160), highlighting the overcrowding prevalent in this cage. They are an endangered species who have to "stoop low, and twist and turn to avoid the wooden props which pit their strength against the full weight of the rocky roof that presses down on their crouching heads" (p 160). This description portrays a foreboding image of doom.

When the workers reach the work place, the white miner, Jannie, 'gives orders' for them to drill a number of holes on the face of the rock, disregarding the dangers involved. Though one of the workers cautions him of the wetness of the rock, Jannie retorts acrimoniously:

I did not ask your opinion. Do you want to argue with me when I tell you to work?

(p 160)

Needless to say, the black workers' opinions do not count here. They merely have to follow the white man's instructions, even to the detriment of their lives. Though the 'baasboy' is supposed to liaise with the 'makhulubaas' (big-boss), he is also left out of the picture. No wonder he vents his anger on the co-workers for talking to the white miner instead of him.

One does not take long to notice the vocabulary used in this industry. While the white miner is addressed by the Black workers as 'Makhulubaas' (big-boss) he addresses them as 'bastards' while the 'supervisor' is 'baas boy.' It comes as no surprise that even when he swears at them, they still thank him, as if saying "thank you for not taking a worse step against us."

But Sethotho's reaction is indefensible. Since he extols the values of the oppressor, he applies all his effort "to save the sole white skin" while his own brothers are dying in the rubble. As if this is not enough, the first two ambulances that arrive at the scene may not load the black casualties, for they are "for the white people only" (p 161). This is discrimination at its worst.

With a quick shift within the scene, the characters change positions to depict the strike which took place at Carltonville mine. Using the mine lingo, **Fanakalo**, the workers spell out their grievances to the compound manager. As Sole (1987:78) claims, the use of African language to those who are less literate in English "shows less divorce from the people." Likewise, since **Fanakalo** is the mine lingo, its use here is a symbol of authenticity and an indication of the playwright's identity with the mine workers.

Instead of paying attention to the genuine grievances of these workers, the compound manager advances a spurious argument: that they are given free accommodation, free food, free overalls

and gumboots. The workers are quick to see through this lame argument and they demonstrate their indignation by “a wave of angry protest” (p 162).

Realising that the workers do not accept his unconvincing argument, the compound manager urges them to go to work by pushing them. As a demonstration of their defiance and their determination to have their grievances heard, they react by pushing him in return. The compound manager, taking that to be an affront to both his authority and superiority, resorts to the police telephonically for help. He coaxes them into swift and effective response by spouting stories of imminent riot: “Yes anything may happen - they are about to destroy everything - they are wild - come quickly” (p 162).

As would be expected this kind of report is enough for the South African police to send a whole battalion to the compound, with fully loaded AK47's, not teargas or rubber bullets. Ironically, blacks are guilty even before they act. A mere sign of dissatisfaction among them warrants the police to mow them down without question, and the matter ends there: “who could listen to our cries?,” Maponya asks (p 162). This incident is no different from the Sharpsville massacre, where people demonstrated their grievances by burning up their passes. To highlight the hopelessness of the situation, Maponya employs a song as a technique for reaching the people's sensibilities:

What have we done?
God our spokesman
We put all our faith in you
Why have we to live this way?
(p 162)

Undoubtedly, this is Maponya's strategy for instigating the dispossessed workers to defy the system in various ways, as well as to indicate that the omnipotence of God is their ultimate salvation. He demonstrates that in revolution people must be bold and unite for the common cause. Even Sethotho, the imbecile, has now joined the other workers in fighting for their rights. This transformational change in Sethotho's outlook marks a positive evolution which Maponya is preaching.

In a valedictory soliloquy, Maponya, using Mathloko as his agent, relates how police “panicked” and massacred “unarmed innocent” blacks. One wonders whether it was really through sheer ‘panic’ that the police opened fire on the innocent workers or was it through the instructions of the powers-that-be to shoot to kill. In other words, was it due to their persecution complex that they acted in that fashion or could it perhaps be true, as Mkhondo (1993:78) claims, that the South African police have always functioned as a harsh and cruel force which serves as “an illegal master to perpetuate racial oppression.” Obviously, Maponya’s main concern is to illuminate the shocking rate at which this earth swallows the black victims.

The final scene, the compound, highlights utter exploitation prevailing in the mining industry, manifesting itself in disrupting family life and frustrating people to the extent that they are always in conflict with one another. The scene opens up with monotonous and boring activities of compound life: playing a gramophone; men asleep, gambling, cooking, and finally fighting. All these routines highlight the extent to which the workers have been reduced to the state of animals - especially the high incidence of fighting.

Nevertheless, though they hardly use their spare time for creative and positive activities, they can still afford to think in retrospect and assess their situation in the mining industry. For example, they are conscious of the fact that though the Bible preaches that everyone must live by the sweat of their brows, this industry has only exploited them to the point of destruction. Due to work-induced diseases, they are now suffering from tuberculosis and other related sicknesses. Whereas they hoped that they would upgrade their standard of living and live in happiness with their families, instead, they are in a state of quandary: “But here we are now, still struggling and about to die, no Buick, and wives still far away” (p 163).

In sharp contrast to the mining compound, there are tin shanties in its environs. These are “rusted, corrugated iron huts mixed with pieces of wood and petrol drums” (p 163). In this place which is in contrast with the compound in both structure and appearance, there are women who make a living out of selling liquor and themselves for survival. They have become victims of the hungry earth which has consumed their husbands. For example, Chirango, one woman from Rhodesia, came to live with her husband, only to discover that in the apartheid South Africa such a thought should not have even existed in their minds. She therefore had to ‘sneak in’ to be with

her husband in the hostel, which is not only inhuman and unjust but brutal. To exacerbate the cruelty of the apartheid system, Chirango had to undergo a 90 days jail sentence for being with her husband. This act, which has shattered African families, has not only resulted in her becoming 'every man's woman' but has also made her lose hope and purpose in life. Though the system enforces repatriation and jail sentences for her kind, Chirango is determined to stay here:

I'll never get to Malawi
 I'll never get to Transkei
 I'll never get to Bophuthatswana.
 (p 164).

The fact that Chirango is a woman, a black person, a widower and a foreigner, makes her defiance of repatriation very meaningful. As a foreign woman she has nobody to assist her. She suffers because of the insensitive apartheid laws.

Since this earth has become a monster with a penchant for swallowing victims of black humanity, the characters now engage themselves in a song, which functions as a comforter to those whose dear ones have been victims of this cruel creature. This group-song is also a prayer to Almighty God to save Africa and her people from the claws of this frightening and monstrous apartheid system.

The group-song is immediately followed by the epilogue song which ends the play. It demonstrates that the hungry earth continues devouring black victims in a myriad of ways, especially in the mining industry:

Where have all our men gone
 They have all gone down into the mines
 They will never ever return again
 They have been swallowed up by this hungry earth
 (p 165).

In conclusion, **The Hungry Earth**, narrated by the migrant workers in a mining situation, whose daily visit to the hungry bowels of the earth serves as a constant reminder of their plight, symbolises “the historical predicament facing Africans as a nation” (Gunner 1974: 46). By implication, blacks in the apartheid South Africa were exploited and oppressed, no matter what their class position was. It is accordingly very important for the readers/audience to note that these workers’ difficulties and sufferings have been exacerbated by their being foreigners - they were migrants from foreign countries such as Lesotho and Rhodesia, or the homelands which were the creation of the apartheid system. As Mamphela Ramphele, the newly appointed vice-chancellor of UCT, so succinctly puts it, “people who are ‘outsiders’ in the broader society are not well-placed to negotiate the mystique of the institutions in which they find themselves” (in: **Mail & Guardian**, Nov 10 to 16 1995, p 15). **The Hungry Earth**, therefore, has “a strong racial inscription which directs its anger at whites in terms of nation and race rather than class ...” (Rive, 1982:70).

Maponya has therefore fulfilled his duty of conscientizing, preaching survival and demonstrating hope, and finally rallying people to action in the struggle for their emancipation from the tethers of the South African apartheid system. It is important to note, though, that some incidents have been depicted as hopeless situations, as shown earlier in this chapter, to which only God may emerge as the redeemer.

Chapter 3: Analysis of **Jika**

3.1 Preamble

Jika was first workshopped at the University of Leeds in November 1986. It was written, produced and directed by Maishe Maponya. The original actors were Mthuthuzeli Sozwe and Ndizimisele Bedesho.

The aim behind the creation of this play was to “suggest ways in which poverty, squalor and political rhetoric could be eliminated” (Maponya, 1985: xi). According to Maponya, organised revolution was the only means by which the people’s liberation could be achieved.

3.2 The aspect of naming in **Jika**

In this play Maponya has used naming mostly as a source of inspiration for the liberation struggle. It is the kind of naming that signifies unity and determination in the struggle for a just, progressive and liberating system for the black people in South Africa. For example, the title **Jika** (Turn around) is a challenge to individual black South Africans to ‘turn around’ and assess the situation to which they have been subjected by the apartheid system.

‘Jika’ is a call to all the dispossessed - not excluding the observers and critics - to critically examine the depth of the prevailing circumstances. In other words, to look beyond the surface - examine the causes and effects of the children’s strike. People should be aware that

- 1) the 1976 strike was never an act of lunacy or lack of discipline, but an earnest action which was meant to remedy the malady prevalent in the South African education system;
- 2) the children were left with no alternative but to reject the status quo, and embark on a struggle for the liberation of black education from the hands of the oppressors;

- 3) the children had finally realised that liberation of black education was in their own hands, hence the need for meaningful revolution which would crack the skull of the apartheid system and shatter its myth.

It is also a challenge to the exploiters to critically and objectively assess the situation by looking at the causes and effects of their ill-founded ideologies and beliefs. The government of the day had to realise that it was through their own stubbornness and the insatiable desire for white supremacy that the black students had taken the matter into their own hands. The students had long-standing grievances which needed to be addressed and solved. Instead of taking these grievances into consideration, the powers-that-be had not only turned a deaf ear to them but had spread leaflets discrediting the students' leaders as 'instigators.'

It is aphoristically said that unity is strength. Addressing his fellow-students as 'comrades,' - which is a Marxist's term of address to express solidarity among the members of a group, to act as a unified force - the first student in the play clearly articulated the position to be adopted by the whole student body, not only within their school perimeters but country wide. As 'comrades,' since their teachers "have been conditioned and intimidated to understand this ridiculous leaflet," they had to take the matter into their own hands; had "freedom of electing their own leaders drawn from all over the country"; and discard the enforced Bantu Education, and in its place adopt a "new education system" which would be "planned and structured" by their own elected educationist, not by "those who oppressed our people for centuries" (Maponya, 1986:3). (Hereafter this source will be acknowledged by page reference only.)

Besides naming the students 'comrades,' as a sign of solidarity, Maponya has named the first student 'Mayibuye,' which literally means 'let it return' (the country). Mayibuye is a name which fosters and enhances the retrieval of the lost country. Naming this students' leader 'Mayibuye,' - which is related to the Africanist liberation slogan, 'Mayibuye iAfrika' - functions as a source of inspiration and an outcry to the oppressed Africans to seize their lost land from their oppressors. It also spells out Maponya's leanings towards the BCM, the movement which has been instrumental in the shaping of his artistic creativity (Interview Feb 1994). Falling in with the views of Biko (p 223), Maponya has taken a stance that since the whites have oppressed the blacks for so long, they "lose the natural right to speak as co-planners for the people's future in South

Africa.” He therefore uses the first student, Mayibuye, as his spokesperson to organise students in the planning and working out of future strategies in educational matters.

Another student who emerges as a leader of the students’ strike is Tokoloho. Tokoloho, ‘freedom,’ embodies the people’s freedom through his resolve to organise the students’ progress towards freedom from the inferior Bantu Education to which they are subjected. As a demonstration of his determination for freedom, Tokoloho rebuffs the principal’s pleas to refrain from his activism, nor does he succumb to the intimidations of the forces of oppression surrounding the school premises. Undoubtedly, this name, Tokoloho, is meant to stereotype the function of this student’s crisis: as an announcement that now is the time for students to defy, not only the principal and the staff, but the formidable South African defence force and the police as well, and march to freedom through revolution.

Though Tokoloho is one of those eliminated during the first massacre in the school yard, his death is significant and meaningful because comrades share a common belief that the blood of a committed freedom fighter becomes a nourishing substance, to water the growing tree of freedom. His death is, therefore, the source of inspiration for those involved in the liberation struggle to strike with all their might against all odds to ensure victory; while Mayibuye’s survival functions as a driving force behind the people’s liberation through planned revolution and armed struggle.

In order to seal their comradeship, and to emphasise the importance of ‘turning around’ in order to reflect on the imminent revolution, the two students “clasp each other in the arms and face opposite directions” (p 6). While the clasping of arms is symbolic of their comradeship and spiritual oneness in their determination to fight against the apartheid system, their back-to-back position highlights the fact that they are now on the verge of parting with their education and their beloved South Africa. As an indication of their patriotism, the two comrades personify South Africa and address it as follows:

2nd Student: O my beloved country where are you going?

1st Student: My beloved country turn around and look at yourself.

Both: Jika uzi jonge! (p 6)

The title, 'Jika,' is therefore the central image which challenges the audience to critically assess the situation and the future of South Africa under the prevailing circumstances. Throughout the play, the readers/audience have to 'jika' and reflect on the imminent revolution.

When the two comrades are uncertain about joining the guerilla forces for training, Maponya revives their hopes by presenting one comrade postman, who delivers messages with directions that define their position. The two comrades who have been waiting and directionless now find hope. No wonder the second comrade starts "humming a tune about his girlfriend Nomathemba" (p 21). It is typical of Maponya in naming to give his characters appropriately significant names. Nomathemba (Mother / source of hope), signifies the comrades' hope of joining other cadres at the camp. Needless to say, this is a very important moment in the lives of the guerilla fighters-to-be, for it marks a significant step towards becoming real freedom fighters, with appropriate skills and tools for winning the war of liberation.

Aiming to instil hope in the people involved in the liberation struggle, Maponya once more selects a relevant name for the pioneering liberation school in the Cape. Even though the people are beset with multifarious problems, the two comrades rejoice over the partial achievement of their mission. The result of their preaching to the Cape students "the ABC of the Education for the oppressed" is now seen as "the Eastern Cape children are boycotting classes..." (p 27). The school that engineers the strike is Themba lethu High, which translates as 'our source of hope' - thus signifying an inspiration for hope even when the matters look bleak. Maponya's intentions are clear here: the salvation of black education is in the hands of the students themselves - which signifies the people's hope for a liberated education system in the country. Black students should therefore not hesitate to embark on a country-wide strike to liberate themselves from this inferior education which perpetuates servitude under the white man.

One of the most important characters whose names befit their stereotypical function in this play is Mr Ndlovu, who is an official at the passport office in Ciskei.

The name Ndlovu, which means ‘elephant,’ is very significant for Maponya’s teachings. Instead of supplying his clients with proper information concerning their queues for issuing passes, Ndlovu bulldozes them, pushes them around, shouts and swears at them. He calls them names such as “Bishop Conference,” and shouts at them: “Hey shut your big mouth, wena!,” “Voetsek! shut up!”, as if to a dog; or “Uyakunya! (You’ll shit!),” (p 35). Worst of all, these abusive words bear no relevance at all, thus depicting Ndlovu as nothing else but a malicious bulldozer who throws his weight around without any provocation. Beside the dompas, blacks are expected to have many other unnecessary documents in order to qualify for a passport. They are to produce a ‘permit,’ ‘lodger’s card,’ ‘UIF card’ and many others. As a clear indication of the ridiculousness of the system, the caricature of Mr Ndlovu exposes the pretensions of the homeland officials, as follows:

- Mr Ndlovu : (Demanding) Dompas?
- Old man : I gave you
- Mr Ndlovu : Permit!
- Old man : There it is.....
- Mr Ndlovu : Lodger’s card! (old man fiddles) Hey I haven’t got the whole day here. (Takes it) UIF card?
- Old man : (searches himself) may I go out and ask my wife?
- Mr Ndlovu : I said I haven’t got the whole day here.
- Old man : (Finds it) I knew I had it (laughs).
- Mr Ndlovu : (Writes the information down) Death certificate.
- Old man : (Terrified) Mr Ndlovu?

- Mr Ndlovu : (Impatient) Death certificate, I haven't got the whole day here ...
Death certificate...
- Old man : But Mr Ndlovu, I'm still alive Mr Ndlovu! (can't believe his ears).
- Mr Ndlovu : (Still angry goes to shout in his face) It's all this crazy set up here
that drives me mad. Dis julle wat my deurmekaar maak. Passport
photos?
- Old man : There you are.

(p 37 - 8)

By caricature this character's behaviour is in complete agreement with the name Ndlovu (elephant) - a hefty animal which may easily trample to death the smaller ones in its way - and further extends the metaphor of naming in Maponya's **Jika**.

3.3 The playwright's notion of religion in **Jika**

Maponya, as a BCM adherent, clearly spells out his notion of religion in this play. For him, God is the liberator of the downtrodden, who is to come to their rescue in times of need. It is to Him that the dispossessed in South Africa should look for salvation. This notion is clearly displayed in the scene in which the police confront the striking students in Soweto.

As it has been shown elsewhere in this chapter, the students have taken it upon themselves to fight against the dehumanising Bantu Education and the issue of dual medium instruction.

Instead of listening to his students' complaints, the principal, who is himself the product of Bantu Education, dismisses them after intimating that their grievances are being handled by the authorities in Pretoria. Undoubtedly the principal not only acquiesces with the so-called authorities, but has also been intimidated by the militia men surrounding the school. Feeling insulted, the students refuse to leave the school premises, and the police storm them using dogs

and guns. As may be expected, many students are either fatally or critically injured in this incident.

Nonetheless, Mayibuye and one of his colleagues survive this ordeal, and plead to God to have mercy upon the people “who have been enslaved for so many years” (p 5). Pleading for God’s mercy clearly spells out Maponya’s perception of God as the saviour of the downtrodden. To show the irony of this belief, and as if to scorn prayer as an ultimate hope against odds, a bullet whizzes above the heads of the two students as they are busy praying, forcing them to run for their lives.

Once more, Maponya’s lesson is clear in this illustration: as the saviour of the dispossessed, God has spared the two students’ leaders so that they may have a chance to ultimately spread the revolutionary message throughout the whole South Africa. In other words, God has a plan for them: through his mysterious ways, he has rescued them from this brutal massacre so that they may be true messengers of the people’s revolution against the abhorrent Bantu Education. As such, it would be ridiculous and very stupid for them to remain there praying and turn themselves into sitting ducks - for then God’s plan for them would not be fulfilled.

The other aspect of Maponya’s notion of religion emerges in the comrades’ interaction with a priest in the hostel, where they have temporary sanctuary. While the comrades are busy preaching the ABC of revolution to the inmates, the priest comes in with his distorted sermon. For the comrades, revolution may only succeed if people understand what change entails. Change, according to them, does not mean the turning of tables, but turning into a challenge the people’s plight of being “dumped” in the so-called “homelands” (p 11). Though the apartheid state has ‘dumped’ the people like trash in the arid lands and turned them into aliens in their own country, the people must organise themselves into a unified force by forming co-operative unions for self-sufficiency and reliance. By involving themselves in agricultural schemes for food self sufficiency, and exporting excess production for profit, the people will have turned misfortune into advantage with communal sharing and self sufficiency as a life-style.

The seemingly indoctrinated and confused priest delivers his misguided teachings while the audience/readers are still grappling with the comrades’ progressive, though controversial, ideas

on revolution. He praises the Lord and encourages people to repent and be baptised for the remission of sins. He further pronounces a highly controversial teaching from his “holy book” that “you must love your enemy as you love thy self” (p 12). It would seem that by bringing in this priest with his unaccepted teachings, Maponya purposely adds an element of destruction, enabling the audience to weigh these futile sermons against the progressive ideas already discussed by the comrades.

Since the priest is the product of Bantu Education which was meant for a special kind of wisdom, “the wisdom to serve whites,” as Mallaby (1992:18) would put it, it is not surprising that he delivers this misguided sermon. Otherwise, how can one praise the Lord when the forces of oppression kill people like rats? and for how long should one continue loving one’s enemies? Indeed these are fair questions to ask under the prevailing circumstances. This is the kind of religion that freedom fighters would reject with the contempt it deserves, for it makes mockery of God Almighty. Maponya therefore thrusts this sharp satire to jolt the audience into a critical political thought concerning religion.

As if to compare and contrast the Western and African points in religion, with the second comrade as his mouthpiece, Maponya brings out into play a progressive prayer-method for the dispossessed to employ. Whereas the misguided priest uses prayer as a form of escapism, such as “My son, let us forget everything, let us just praise the Lord. Hallelujah!,” the second comrade utters an innovative and meaningful prayer that baffles the priest and the audience:

Modimo! (God) My Lord can you see what you have done! I want to talk to you my Lord! I want to talk to your cabinet. I want to talk to your minister of labour and manpower. Oh Ntate! (Oh Father). I want to stop him from forcing my people to live this shame life in the hostel. My Lord, in your cabinet I want to talk to the minister of police. I want to stop him from using that tear gas and bullets on my people! (p 13).

The playwright clearly emerges as a preacher of liberation gospel. He does not only reject the misguided and meaningless piety of Western religion, but demonstrates progressive prayer to be adopted by the dispossessed people in South Africa. He further identifies himself with the workers in their demand for control of the means of production in the industrial South Africa.

In general Maponya's intention is to politicise the students and the proletariat by conscientizing them to the fact that South African liberation is in their own hands, and through prayer, their solidarity and victory are ensured. Needless to say, Maponya considers the prayer as a sustaining and unifying force that has become a component of the liberation struggle.

Instead of taking note and changing his approach towards prayer, the priest is 'agitated.' He adopts and demonstrates the Western style of kneeling down with arms folded and eyes closed, saying that the Lord will answer. Answer what, for he has asked for nothing meaningful! That is why the second comrade confronts him with the realities of the South African apartheid state. Children are killed when they demand fair and meaningful education, he says. For the priest, the comrade pollutes the minds of the people, for they have to simply praise the Lord, for what, he does not say. Maponya metes out this sharp sarcasm on the indoctrinated priests with their misguided teachings as a way of introducing his new religious outlook which is relevant to downtrodden South Africans.

When finally the priest dodges the 2nd comrade's confrontation, claiming that the comrade would get him into trouble, the source of his indoctrination is revealed: he operates under duress. He will be in trouble with the South African apartheid state if he declares his progressive views as the young comrade does. This revelation is intended to show that there are those church ministers whose sermons become misguided, not because they believe in their own teachings, but for fear of reprisal. They live under perpetual fear under the apartheid state, and end up deceiving their congregation and themselves. For Maponya, such deceitful priests deserve the people's condemnation and rejection, lest they poison the minds of the revolutionary black youth in South Africa.

Worst of all, not only do these deceitful priests end up as apartheid state's puppets, but as their spies as well. For example, the misguided priest - who functions as a destabilizing factor of betrayal in the liberation struggle - reveals his true colours, as highlighted by his reaction and his words in the following dialogue:

Priest : (Stops preaching) Hey, young man, are you still in this hostel?

2nd Comrade : What did you think, umfundisi?

Priest : I thought you would be in jail already

(p 22)

Unquestionably, the priest has become an informer, a 'sell-out,' who has already betrayed the people's struggle against the oppressive regime. He has informed the police of the young comrade's presence in the hostel. As an indication of his detestation of the deceitful priests, Maponya uses the 2nd comrade as his spokesperson to hurl insults at the departing priest, calling him a dog.

Another aspect noticeable in Maponya's notion of religion is that he regards God as a fighting God, fighting against the oppressors of the people. The second comrade's prayer - which he utters after learning about the massacre of numerous innocent pupils in the Eastern Cape by the South African police - highlights this notion. He pleads with God to send the black people arms to defend themselves against the boers who do not seem to care at all about black human life. The arms requested from God are AK47's, handgrenades, teargas and limpet mines to be used in the armed struggle against the oppressors. There is desire for retaliation, which will end in the black man's emerging victorious: "Don't stand in the way of our triumph when we have our feet on their faces" (p 28). Needless to say, this is Maponya's encouragement for an armed struggle, and his inspiration for victory.

To sum up, Maponya's notion of religion is three-fold :

Firstly, he regards God as the redeemer of the downtrodden - to whom the people should extend their prayers in dire need for their salvation. Since God is the fountain of mercy, Maponya feels that He is likely to interfere when the boers experience defeat in the hands of the people, that is why somewhere he pleads with Him not to interfere.

Secondly, he regards prayer as the source of inspiration for the people in their liberation struggle, which promotes their solidarity, courage and a burning desire for victory.

Finally, Maponya teaches and inspires the downtrodden to regard God as fighting God who will supply them with arms to defend themselves against their persecutors.

3.4 **The 'iron': a symbolic instrument for crafting and building tension in the theatrical elements.**

Similar to the position of the indoctrinated priest - who has been introduced as an element of destabilisation and betrayal in the play - Maponya introduces the 'iron' as an instrument for crafting and building tension in the theatrical elements. The two comrades relate their stories in a typical Brechtian style that can be observed in **The Measures Taken** (1985). As victims of the apartheid regime, on top of the 'wanted list,' they had to take measures to guarantee their safety - for their identikits "were printed in all the newspapers," with a reward for information leading to their arrest, coupled with the closure of all borders (p 8).

The comrades' position was no different from that of rabbits cornered by hunters on a hunting spree. They were in a perilous situation which forced them to work out strategies for survival, as well as a clear political outlook which would not only ensure their safety, but help to revolutionise the dispossessed blacks in South Africa. Hence the need for make-up for disguise, and a place of safety. This was to be followed by a rigorous training which was meant to open their eyes and minds about "the proletarian struggle," the "classics of Schools Revolution," as well as learning about "co-operatives and communes" as an integral part of the "land re-distribution, agrarian reform" (p 9). Steadman (in: Maponya, 1995:xxi) succinctly puts it that after training the two comrades would reappear as mature revolutionaries exploring problems of freedom and political activism in the service of the dispossessed people of the country.

When one of the comrades enters the stage carrying a brazier and an iron, ready for ironing his shirt, Maponya's intentions become crystal clear. He uses the iron as a symbolic representation of the precautionary measures to be employed by the revolutionaries in their daily operations. In the process of ironing, the comrade accidentally burns himself with the iron - while at the same time the smoke from the fire overpowers him, causing his eyes to ache as the tears stream down his cheeks.

On one level, the shirt that is now to be ironed symbolises the black people, who were treated as objects in the apartheid South Africa. They were used and crumbled, then ironed to conform to the desires of the powers-that-be in the apartheid state. As human beings, with feelings, likes and dislikes, inclinations and attitudes, there was always a struggle against oppression - like the smoke that overcomes the comrade as he tries to fan the fire.

Instead of spelling out the principles or procedures to be followed in ironing, the first comrade accuses his colleague of not respecting the disciplines of ironing, and yet gives him no chance to respond to this accusation. This attitude is similar to that of the South African apartheid state towards the black people: the regime often meted out a myriad of accusations against the blacks, and hardly afforded them opportunity to defend themselves, nor did it give them a chance to air their views on matters concerning them.

With reference to the accidental burning of the first comrade's hand during the ironing, Maponya demonstrates that this 'iron,' though it is a mere object with no control over its own situation, can react and cause bruises here and there after being subjected to the heat of the fire. Similarly, though the white minority government might ride roughshod over the black people in this country, these blacks had power to react, and their reaction was undoubtedly going to cause an unbearable pain to those who used them as objects.

Alternatively, this symbolises pains and sufferings experienced through the liberation struggle. Since freedom is never given on a platter, - as it was shown elsewhere in this study - revolutionaries had to be prepared for a myriad of sufferings in the war of liberation. In other words, they had to expect to have their hands burned during their walk through the thorny road to the people's liberation - and suffering ought to be regarded as an aspect of the struggle, Maponya seems to say.

On the other hand, while the accident may simply be considered as a sign of negligence, that very negligence should be regarded as the major symbolic representation of the aspect Maponya is trying to grapple with. He employs this symbolism in his theatre as a theatrical technique meant for pronouncing his stand that caution is one of the most important elements of the liberation

struggle, for negligence is fraught with danger and disaster, as embodied in the following dialogue

2nd Comrade : (Giggling) Daardie iron maak jou mooi (the iron will fix you). Oh I'm sorry my friend.

1st Comrade : Don't be sorry - You must be careful. (Looking through the window) Comrade, the postman.

2nd Comrade : (Getting excited and rushing to the window) Comrade Postman? Let him come. Is he in his duty uniform?

1st Comrade : You know people will start suspecting him. I hope he has some messages from the camp. Listen you stand guard by the window and I'll close the door as soon as he's inside and nobody must come inside, hear.

Since the postman's arrival signified hope of receiving secret messages from the camp, extra care had to be taken to ensure not only his safety, but that of the messages themselves, lest they fell into the wrong hands. The smuggling of secret messages called for special caution, as the forces of oppression were determined to intercept them. Keeping a vigilant watch at the window during the presence of comrade postman signifies the extraordinary care that Maponya feels must be employed by cadres on their daily operations. As it was of paramount importance for freedom fighters to be attached to the head office, where planning and strategising took place, keeping an eye on the safety of the messages was of grave import.

While keeping an eye at the window, the second comrade washes his face, seemingly with an aim of getting ready for a new disguise - which is one of the precautionary measures Maponya propounds. He hums his song, 'Nomathemba,' as a sign of hope for a long-awaited-for moment. This signifies a new morning, like washing away stagnation and the old outdated life, and getting ready to wear the new skin of a freedom fighter. He is excited, and together the two comrades can visualise themselves 'in the heat of things.' Hence the cracking of jokes about their imminent

involvement in the armed struggle. They hurl imaginary bombs at imaginary enemies, thus registering their high desire for joining the armed struggle.

This is Maponya's call to the young blacks to join the armed struggle. He inspires them with courage, caution, determination and hope for victory. Above all, he wants them to be wary of elements such as the misguided priest. This comes to the fore as the indoctrinated priest appears during this exciting moment. Since the second comrade has a loose tongue and lacks discipline, he divulges what is supposed to be top secret, in an endeavour to confront the misguided priest. He intimates that he will join the freedom fighters within two weeks. He further antagonises the informer-priest by threatening him that his misguided teachings will be banned from the hostel in future.

As a visionary of his people, and a teacher, Maponya cautions the freedom fighters about the repercussions of talking too much. They had to talk reservedly and trust but little, since there were some police informers who were wolves in sheep's clothing, such as the informer-priest - the 'man of God' with a Bible as the weapon against the people's liberation struggle.

3.5 Spatial demarcation

This chapter will conclude by looking at the spatial demarcation, which attempts to analyse some aspects that will illustrate how all the sections in this chapter come together to form a unified whole.

The play is set in a school yard where students have gathered in hundreds, chanting a song of resistance, laying the foundation for uprising and defiance, and fighting for liberation. The students' disregard of the menacing police in 'hippos' and army trucks highlights their resolve to resist any form of intimidation that may be perpetrated by the apartheid regime.

Since the introduction of Bantu Education was aimed at destroying the black man intellectually, and to subject him to perpetual servitude, its rejection by these students is highly significant.

The rejection of this misguided education should be regarded as Maponya's initiative for engendering change, the type of change that is going to benefit all the black people in South Africa. According to Maponya, such change should manifest itself in the formation of co-operative unions, where all members will benefit from the fruits of their labour. Maponya embraces this Marxist thought, not only as a sign of his espousal with Marxism, but also as an indication of his position as an Africanist who believes in the principles of self-sufficiency and sharing among members of the community. He preaches solidarity and patriotism among the dispossessed, and carefully places revolution against all forms of exploitation and oppression. In short, he embraces "the entire transition from capitalism to communism and is therefore at the centre of what Marxism signifies" (Ehrenberg, 1992:173).

Maponya's view is that a reform which merely papers cracks "accelerates the process for the creation of class within class within the dispossessed" (p 9). The kind of change he espouses - that of equal sharing - may sound rather utopian, but it is the Marxist thought which is no different from the African practice prior to its colonisation. For example, though certain Africans were rich and therefore unequal to the rest of their societies, communal labour and sharing in agriculture, hunting and other activities were common practice. This is a stand which distinguishes Maponya as a typical BCM exponent, who espouses its call for the adoption of African Communalism, which "synthesized the virtues of 'black' traditional culture with 'private enterprise'" (Kavanagh, 1985:156).

Maponya further rejects the 'education' given to the dispossessed, for it does not teach them "the ABC of proletariat struggle" nor does it teach them "the ABC of the education for the oppressed." For him, among the oppressed, the school only served as an institute where the downtrodden competed with each other to get certificated; since competition eliminates the majority and encourages individualism (p 9).

This view is reiterated in the **Staffrider** stories as quoted by Michael Vaughan, stating that when a black person goes to school he does it in order to earn a certificate to serve at a better place, not for the sake of gaining knowledge to use for the betterment of his own people or to widen his scope of thinking so as to be able to analyse the world and find himself a place in it (in: Gugelberger(ed), 1985:217)

Though the foregoing view is a rather controversial sweeping statement, it has an element of truth in it. This is especially the case in South Africa, where the blacks had no say in the running of their own education. Nonetheless, Maponya further states his support of Michael Vaughan (in: Gugelberger p 218) who asserts that such education is a creation of a class within a class, “a condition of access to petty bourgeois status” and a strategy “to foster the individualism and elitism of a selected minority.”

It follows therefore, that until the dispossessed majority could be emancipated, or rather emancipated themselves through revolution, the school for them would serve as an apartheid tool of destruction which creates classes among them, thus causing disunity among ‘the people.’ Maponya seems to suggest that it is imperative to educate the dispossessed people of South Africa about the theory of revolution - as it is generally acknowledged that theory informs practice - because as Lenin would aptly put it, “there can be no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory” (Reinhold, 1987:32).

Another important aspect Maponya addresses is the private ownership of big industries such as mining. For him, private ownership promotes exploitation, impoverishes the majority while it enriches the minority. He feels that such big industries should be under state control for the benefit of all people, rather than the few rich people in the country. Public ownership is essential for the people to work together in order “to achieve their liberation and build a powerful People’s Republic of Zanj!” (p 11). This view is similar to Karl Marx and Engel’s clarion call for worker’s state in which there would be increased production by “the people” themselves in an endeavour “for human emancipation” (Ehrenberg p 179).

Since the apartheid state was poised to destroy all those who even dreamed of defiance against its policies, survivors of their brutality found themselves left with no option, but to take up arms against the regime. This move became significant because such survivors were labelled as ‘agitators,’ ‘terrorists’ and ‘communists,’ which heightened the difficulty and danger of their mission. Hence the need for high discipline among the freedom fighters, especially in their dealings with the police-informers and the police themselves.

Unfortunately, once one was labelled as an agitator, terrorist or communist by the South African apartheid state, one was already condemned. Since the police had turned themselves into a government, they did what they liked with such a person - be it detention for an indefinite period, without even informing the family concerned; torture to utter destruction; abduction and brutal murder of the culprit; or worst of all, killing the 'agitators' entire family and burn down their homes. Many of these atrocities emerge now in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), where many perpetrators divulge them in their hope for amnesty.

As the South African police had this unilateral power to do as they liked with the black community, those labelled as terrorists had to use a stimulant for courage. Maponya brings this to the fore by introducing the two comrades partaking of liquor when they are on the verge of joining the camp for training. Even before they start drinking, the comrades sing a song of liberation: that they shall kill the South African army in Angola - as the apartheid state is intent on destabilising its neighbouring sovereign states on its white supremacist ego-trip. For Maponya, taking liquor therefore became an essential step, which helped to eliminate or minimise fear in freedom fighters poised to face the formidable army of the apartheid state.

As a government intent on destabilising and destroying black humanity, - to promote and sustain white domination - the South African apartheid regime had divided its forces into sections for various operations. For example, whereas the security police were trained to combat armed struggle against the oppressive system, ordinary police were trained to harass, intimidate and brutalise blacks by enforcing the discriminatory laws, such as pass laws. The latter were those who usually roamed the town and township streets looking for the supposed trespassers. Maponya mocks and pours scorn on this group: "These ones know nothing about security. All they know is harassing innocent people about the bloody dompas..." (p 25). As a demonstration of his repulsion, Maponya uses the two comrades to poke fun and swear at them from a distance. Though these police may not hear the abusive words hurled at them, the audience/readers cannot miss Maponya's intention as the comrades derisively deliver words like 'voetsek,' 'hond,' 'stupid,' 'dog!' or "Nakunya!" (You'll shit!) and "Niya geza, 'makwedini!" (you silly boys).

The second comrade's final verbal attack on the police as they depart further demonstrates Maponya's intense aversion to the police, and highlights the freedom fighters' intentions in the liberation struggle:

(Going alone to the window) Hamba! Nja! Hond! Julle moer! Nda 'ni fumana ngenyi 'mini! One day I'll go over there I get my basooka and I'll shoot you to pieces... (p 26).

The playwright's intentions are clear in this verbal attack: since the police harass and brutalise innocent people, they should be regarded as enemies of the people, who deserve nothing else but to be killed like dogs.

As it is typical of him to give cameo episodes with exquisite touches of irony and sarcasm, Maponya also brings in an element of caution - as a disciplinary measure. The first comrade calls his colleague to order, as if they have not been poking fun at the police together. He warns him of the possibility of being taken to jail instead of joining the camp for behaving like an amateur. The message is clear here: 'even though we may poke fun at the police, let's not go overboard,' Maponya seems to say - which is an extension of the 'iron' as a symbolic instrument in crafting and building tension in the theatrical elements. This is immediately followed by an attention at the newspaper contents: there have been bus fare increases, house rent and tax increases, all of which have been imposed on the black people without prior consultation - which have left the black people crying. What galls Maponya worse is the knowledge that these increases are to prop up the apartheid system and enrich the minority whites, while the majority are further impoverished.

To aggravate matters, corruption prevailed in the apartheid regime. Ministers embezzled the state funds and sent them to foreign banks such as Swiss Banks. Unfortunately these ministers might not even be brought to justice for the fear that they would reveal "the other untouchables in the government" (p 27). Maponya exposes this sad state of affairs in order to reveal the injustices perpetrated by the apartheid state upon the dispossessed majority, with the hope that once conscientized the people would take the matter into their own hands to liberate themselves from these bondages.

Because of these economic impositions upon the people, coupled with exploitation and the prevailing corruption, workers demand to form trade unions and co-operatives for self-advancement. But since blacks are considered to be inferior, this move is denounced by the white 'authorities' as the work of 'agitators' or 'infiltrators' - which is an insult to the black man's intelligence. This attitude highlights the boer mentality which regarded the black people as being led astray by foreign elements from outside. In their opinion, the black man in South Africa was unable to organise his own strategies towards liberation, he must have been influenced by communist foreigners.

Contrary to the boer mentality, Maponya demonstrates that people have now begun to understand that the future liberated People's Republic of Zanj needs co-operatives in all sectors, including farming and mining, which should create an employment of millions, resulting in high production. Workers have also begun to form trade unions which will function as forums of debate and negotiation for working conditions. These forums, including co-operative unions, are meant for total liberation of the people - freedom from all forms of suffering such as oppression, exploitation, poverty, ignorance, disease and so on.

Unquestionably, Maponya has foresight for the future of South Africa. He has ability to project the free and democratic post-apartheid South Africa, where people will be working together as equals and as one nation. But, unfortunately there were those 'leaders' who were determined to mislead the people for personal gain. Whereas Maponya and many other artists completely rejected the homeland system as an apartheid creation meant to jeopardise the liberation struggle, some 'leaders' such as the Kwazulu leader were going astray. They misled people into forming unions that were opposed to the people's congress - they wanted international recognition of their homeland unions. These were reactionaries, defeating the people's liberation struggle.

For Maponya, this reactionary attitude not only shows selfishness and a kind of madness in these leaders. The questions Maponya poses to them are whether they are aware that the homelands are a creation of the same oppressive system, and an attempt to deny the oppressed masses their rightful claim to their land? Or are they openly fighting for the maintenance of the same corrupt system with the difference that their leaders should be restored to power? (p 29).

One might rightly add another question: were they aware that another aim behind the creation of the homelands was to use as a source of migrant labour? If their answer was 'Yes' to these questions, then theirs was a fight for individual gain, with no regard for people's welfare.

Maponya's intention for posing these questions functions as a challenge for critical assessment of the prevailing circumstances. This comes to the fore when he finally sounds a warning note to the deceitful leaders that "If you play with people, beware because people can react" (p 30). Indeed, if these so-called leaders knew what was good for them, they ought to refrain from deceiving people, for sooner or later disillusionment would dawn on the people, and that would be too late. No doubt, people would eventually see through the veneer of modern dictatorship, and nobody can stand in the way of poetic justice: that the vile will be punished and the good rewarded.

The South African apartheid regime had made it extremely difficult for the blacks to obtain passports, and that was aggravated by the demand for them to have a 'dompas' prior to obtaining a passport. This dompas was meant for dehumanising and brutalising the black people. For them to get passports, they had to line up in a state of disordered confusion, thus degrading them and reducing them to the level of animals.

Though the playwright abhors the homeland system, he proposes ways in which it might be turned into advantage for the liberation struggle. Since it was almost impossible for blacks to obtain passports in South Africa, especially international ones, the Ciskei homeland was to be used as a place for issuing such passports. This was made possible by the homeland leaders' belief that they were truly independent - which shows that fools end up believing fully in their own foolery. Maponya therefore capitalises on this state of the homelands' being true believers to accomplish the mission. Employing a piercing ridicule as a literary strategy of condemnation, Maponya uses the second comrade as his mouth-piece, claiming that it would be the first time he agrees to go to that homeland and "make those fools feel legitimate" (p 31).

In the Brechtian style of presentation, - where a distinction is clearly drawn between an actor and the character presented on stage, to remove illusions - the first comrade, as Maponya's agent, changes into priest's costumes right there on the stage, to the amusement of his colleague. This

method of presentation gives the audience a chance to realise that the actor is merely acting a part, thus challenging their critical appreciation of the spectacle.

The disguised comrade, though hating priests like Bishop Muzerewa, notorious for his reactionary stand against the Zimbabwean liberation, is prepared to impersonate a priest for the fulfilment of the mission. His disgust manifests itself in his exclamation: 'Ag shit!', when his colleague claims that he looks like Bishop Muzerewa. The lesson Maponya attempts to deliver here is that in a liberation struggle cadres should use almost any strategy available to them to accomplish the mission, no matter how disgusting.

The process of issuing passports highlights the ill-treatment that blacks were subjected to, both in the homelands and in South Africa. Whereas white officials in South Africa discriminated against blacks racially, the black officials in the homelands had a superiority complex which manifested itself in a myriad ways. In the first place, since they occupied an official position, the black officials imposed their weight upon their own brothers who were supposed to belong to a lower class. Secondly, since the whites discriminated against all blacks, those blacks in official positions seemed to vent their anger on the innocent people at their mercy. This was a deeply embedded psychological problem. For instance, there was no communication between the officer and his clients. All he could do was to instruct them to go in certain directions and swear at them calling them 'stupid' and so on. For him, exercising his power over the people was the only way, and the correct way.

Maponya concludes the play by introducing the first comrade's nightmares, to reveal certain aspects to be borne in mind in the ensuing liberation struggle. The comrades dream of their involvement with other cadres at the training camp in Lybia. Though this may be regarded as a mere dream emanating from his anxiety, such dreams could not be entertained in the apartheid South Africa, and one might suffer serious repercussions for having them. This is an ironic representation which is calculated to expose the ridiculousness of the apartheid oligarchy - one might not even dream as one might, never mind actually joining the armed struggle.

In this training camp the cadres are inspired and incited into action through slogans such as "forward with the African people's struggle," and "let the blood of the oppressor flow" (p 41).

This is Maponya's agitation for armed struggle against not only the South African oppressive regime, but all of its kind in the whole of Africa. This all-embracing call depicts Maponya as a true Africanist, whose vision and patriotism transcend his motherland to cover the whole continent.

Using animalization as his theatrical technique to illustrate and calculate the intensity of the problem, Maponya develops the comrades' nightmare by depicting elephants bursting into the camp during the final moments of the training. Panic-stricken, the cadres shoot indiscriminately, whereupon one giant elephant falls upon the dreamer as he stands petrified with fright. Unfortunately none of his colleagues realises his plight, nor are his cries heard by anybody. This portrayal illustrates the power wielded by the apartheid regime, and its determination to mercilessly crush all those who were struggling against its system. To illuminate this symbolism further, the police immediately 'burst' into the comrades' bedroom, where the door is 'kicked open' and the flickering torches expose the two "half-naked bodies of the comrades," catching them off-guard (p 41). This was typical of the South African police to 'burst' into the black people's houses at 'ungodly hours' - thus heightening the oppressors' cruelty and brutality in perpetuating the system. More often than not, they caused a similar pandemonium by beating up innocent people and by unleashing their dogs to bite them - just as the giant elephants burst in during the training session in the dream.

Nevertheless, when they are taken in, the comrades "march but with pride and confidence of men who will never be defeated" (p 43), marking the play's finality. Though the comrades are arrested for dreaming as cadres, there is hope in the whole exercise - victory is imminent. Their last words "Now it is your turn to turn around and look at yourself - jika uzijonge" (p 43), left a great challenge to all the dispossessed people of South Africa. It was a soul-searching challenge, a self-critical analysis so to say. The message is clear: the people should rise up and fight for their freedom, no matter how cruel and formidable the South African forces of oppression may be. Hope, courage and determination are the routes towards the attainment of liberation. Victory is certain, as long as people work in solidarity towards their own emancipation.

Chapter 4: Analysis of **Gangsters**

4.1 Preamble

It has been postulated that Maponya wrote **Gangsters** in 1984 with the aim of exposing the brutality of the South African security police. Its first production was at The Market Theatre in Johannesburg in the second half of the same year. It featured three characters: Whitebeard, the white security police major; Jonathan, the black policeman; and Rasechaba, the protagonist and the people's poet. The play was informed and developed by John Maytham who played the role of Whitebeard in its first production, while Maponya himself played Rasechaba. A number of restrictions imposed by the Publications Control Board on this play made it almost impossible to be viewed by the majority of the black audiences in the townships, as illustrated by Steadman (in Maponya, 1995: xxi)

In this play, Maponya explores political and theatrical techniques to "challenge the state with the power of the state" (O'Brien, 1994: 46). Using flashbacks as a theatrical strategy, Maponya guides his audience through the shifting sands of history, demonstrating to them the political power prevailing in South Africa. This device comes very much to the fore as the poet, Rasechaba, interacts with the police. The poet sometimes takes charge of the stage and chants the poetry while he is being interrogated by the police. At other times the two policemen conspiratorially plot the fate of their victim.

4.2 Approach

The playwright's stylistic and structural choices highlight certain issues: naming, religious symbolism, spatial location. These issues will form the basis of this discussion. Because of the division of the theatrical exploration of this play, it requires two acting areas - 'stage left' and 'stage right' - which in turn demands that the spatial demarcation be done in two parts. While part one comprises the prison scenes - 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9 - part two will analyze the office and/or interrogation scenes, viz 2, 4, 6 and 8.

This chapter will concentrate on the analysis of the original version of the play - where the protagonist is Rasechaba the poet, as opposed to the latest version in which the protagonist has been transformed into the poetess, Masechaba.

4.3 Analysis

4.3.1 Naming

The title **Gangsters** derives from the fact that the so-called South African security police behaved like gangsters and criminals towards the black people in this country (Maponya in: interview Feb. '94).

While O'Brien (p 46) claims that **Gangsters** is a play "on the death of Steve Biko in detention," Steadman (1985b:487), on the other hand, posits that the protagonist is Maponya himself. Maponya (1995:xi) personally supports the foregoing views by reiterating that

The idea of the poet was first inspired by my own experiences as a poet and performer but later found root in the image of Steve Biko, interrogated and tortured to death.

This title, **Gangsters**, evokes images of vandals demonstrating their power and brutality in public. The initial image is realised when there is a blackout on the stage areas, followed by an instant light that reveals the poet's limp figure on the cross, sandwiched by the two men who are apparently the gangsters alluded to in the title. The executed man is the victim of these gangsters. Maponya employs these theatrical physical details to expose and heighten the plight of the black people in the hands of the apartheid state.

Though Maponya has given names to the characters in this play, these are not personal names per se, but "stereotypical characters in stock situations" (Steadman p 392). It follows therefore that Maponya uses naming as a literary strategy to portray his characters' dispositions and functions in the play.

The first character, Rasechaba, is the antagonist who inevitably becomes the central focus of the stage action. His limp figure on the cross is suggestive of his fate - he is the messianic character who is similar to Jesus Christ who died for the downtrodden. His plight is not his own as an individual, but that of the black people in the hands of the apartheid state. He is the people's poet, whose sin is that of identifying with them in their liberation struggle.

Rasechaba, 'the father of the nation,' not only shows the plight of the black people in South Africa, but also displays the ideals and aspirations for which they are more than willing to die. His persecutors, the two security policemen sandwiching his dead figure, help to intensify the people's plight in the hands of the forces of law and order in South Africa.

Rasechaba has urgent responsibilities and commitments to fulfil. He writes and recites his poetry at the people's meetings in order to conscientize, inspire and rally them to action against all forms of injustices perpetrated upon them. Contrary to his convictions, his accusers label his poetry as 'inflammatory,' and hold him responsible for violent attitudes displayed by the people at these meetings.

Though the bulk of the poetry for which he is accused is his creation, it is not his own as an individual - it is the poetry of the people for the people, for it encapsulates their views, ideals and aspirations. As the people's representative in the liberation struggle, Rasechaba is prepared to fight against oppression, exploitation, segregation, as well as white supremacy, even if it may mean death as an ultimate end. Maponya (in interview Feb '94) highlights this view by indicating that, as the people's poet, he creates his poetry to conscientize and rally them to action against their oppressors - the security police and the apartheid state in general.

The second character is Whitebeard, the white security policeman. The colour 'white,' is symbolic of his advancing age. He is indubitably old, and old age should be the mother of wisdom. But his wisdom, which he acquired over the years, is being misapplied, as he is utilizing it for the purpose of furthering the aims of apartheid. Due to his lengthy experiences in this business, Whitebeard has now begun to take things for granted - he is no longer perturbed by the prevailing state of affairs - as the following verbal exchanges indicate:

- Whitebeard : So, this is what you did?
- Jonathan : Yes my lord.
- Whitebeard : How long has he been like this?
- Jonathan : My lord knows.
- Whitebeard : I forget.
- Jonathan : One week.
- Whitebeard : So,so! (pause) This is serious! I'll have to see what I can do...

Undoubtedly, Whitebeard has known about the fatal torture perpetrated by his lackey on the poet, but he has neglected the whole matter for a full week. Because of his vast experience, Whitebeard has been hardened to the core, and no longer has any feelings of pity, sympathy, urgency and the like. Nevertheless, when he realizes the seriousness of the matter, he employs an aside as a theatrical strategy and utters that he will have to do something about the matter. An aside, as a theatrical technique, helps the audience to penetrate the inner feelings and intentions of the character.

Maponya therefore uses this aside to show the power of relations prevailing here. Whereas Jonathan functions as a lackey or torture and murder machine, Whitebeard employs his 'menacing intelligence' to strategize murder and cook the evidence for the coroners court thereafter (O'Brien p 55). Maponya displays Whitebeard's attitude towards the persecuted poet in order to expose the security police's brutality, as well as their paranoiac and sadistic nature, thereby contextualizing the central concern of the play.

The name 'Whitebeard,' since it is given to a white security officer, is the staging of whiteness in a black theatre. This demonstrates Maponya's intentions of negotiating questions of power and representation among the black and white people of South Africa. As the white security officer

representing the apartheid regime, Whitebeard wields power, abundant power to do as he pleases with the 'enemies' of the system, as Maponya hereby demonstrates:

Whitebeard : (calling out) Jonathan!

Whitebeard : I want you to keep an eye on Rasechaba. This means, Jonathan, that you do not go to Ellis Park to watch soccer on Saturday. I want you to do a good job. Do you hear me Jonathan?

Jonathan : Yes sir.

(Scene 2 p9)

No doubt Whitebeard has power to have the movements and operations of political activists observed and closely scrutinized. Furthermore Whitebeard has power to restrict these activists' movements and involvements with their families, friends or associations. He can also confiscate their literature or even murder the captives:

Whitebeard : (with some anger) Rasechaba! (points to a chair. Rasechaba sits down)
Jonathan, it seems you are going to get a chance to read this after all
(hands him a written page) Read clause four, five and six out aloud.

Jonathan : Clause four: You are to report to your nearest police station daily before eight o'clock every evening. Clause five: you are not to attend any gathering and note that talking to more than one person at a time will be a contravention of your banning order. Clause six: This banning order is imposed on you for the next three years.

(Scene 6 p 19)

This revelation highlights the plight of activist playwrights who were subjected to house arrest and detentions by the apartheid South Africa. It also emphasises the abundant power vested upon the security police to do as it pleased with the enemies of the system; and that the length of the period of each house arrest was at the policeman's own discretion.

As an indication of immense powers at his disposal, Whitebeard may even assign his black lackey to divert from his normal duties in order to perpetrate the sordid work, and he uses bribery as seduction:

Whitebeard : Do you think he makes sense?

Jonathan : I - I -

Whitebeard : Let me make some sense to you. How many children have you got?

Jonathan : Four, major.

Whitebeard : Where are they being educated?

Jonathan : Waterford, in Swaziland.

Whitebeard : And who pays for their education?

Jonathan : You do it sir, as a benefit for me.

Whitebeard : Am I making sense, Jonathan - am I making sense?

Jonathan : (Ashamed) Yes sir.

Whitebeard : Now, I'm detaching you from normal duties. I want you to organize a team of four men to follow him wherever he goes. I want to know who he meets. I want his telephone tapped and mail screened - and I have a suspicion that since the bastard is banned he is going to pursue his activities underground. I want you to do a good job - hear me Jonathan!

Jonathan : Yes sir. (slight pause) By the way Major, you promised that I could take the blue Mercedes Benz home for the weekend.

Whitebeard : Yes. The keys are in the key box.

Jonathan : (excited) Thank you sir.

(Scene 6 pp 21 - 22)

Unquestionably, Whitebeard's powers are vast, far above any normal law of governance. This extraordinary power is vested in him, not only as a individual, but as a white security officer representing South African white supremacy. Indeed, Whitebeard is the physical embodiment of the cruelty and brutality wielded by the South African state. Colour therefore plays a very significant role in **Gangsters**. Here, the colour white is a symbol of superiority and oppression, while by contrast black, as represented by Jonathan, symbolises inferiority and servitude.

As a black security policeman, Jonathan has limited powers, which may only spring from the fountain - Whitebeard the omnipotent. Accordingly, this power limitation presupposes his functions in this power struggle: he may only act on Whitebeard's instructions, regardless of his human inclinations and feelings. For example, he has to 'read out aloud' the banning order imposed on Rasechaba, yet he was never party to its creation; Whitebeard may detach him from his normal duties and authorize him to select a conspiratorial team that will follow the poet everywhere he goes. Once their culprit has been abducted, it is for Jonathan to administer torture and murder him. Finally, Jonathan has the duty of assisting Whitebeard in the cooking of evidence for the coroner's court. Maponya's intention here is to explore these immense powers vested in Whitebeard in his capacity as the apartheid representative, as contrasted with Jonathan's position of disgrace and servitude.

Throughout the play Maponya depicts Jonathan as nothing but Whitebeard's lackey who has been held to ransom to perform whatever sordid acts he is instructed to do. The name 'Jonathan' has numerous biblical references which befit the character 'Jonathan' in **Gangsters**. Horn (1979:164) advances an informative analysis of these Jonathans in the Bible, out of whose images Jonathan in **Gangsters** has been carved.

One of these Jonathans, Horn posits, was a descendant of Moses who had stooped so low as to become an idol priest, the action which was considered a disgrace for a descendant of Moses. As an inhabitant of Bethlehem, this Jonathan had, while travelling through Ephraim in search of work, met Micah, an Ephramite who lured him to officiate as the priest of an idol he had set up in his house. The idol was later stolen from Micah's house by Danites who hired Jonathan to continue as the officiating priest for his idol, but not on behalf of the tribe of Ephram. They set up the idol in the shrine at Dan, and the descendants of Jonathan remained priests of this idolatrous shrine.

The similarities between this Jonathan and the Jonathan in **Gangsters** are obvious. Jonathan the character in **Gangsters** is officiating under Whitebeard, and for the benefits that go with it feels bound to continue serving under the prevailing circumstances. His children, since they have benefitted under the oppressive system, are most likely to follow their father's footsteps by alienating themselves from their people.

Another Jonathan from whose image Jonathan in **Gangsters** has been carved was the son of a high priest, and had served as the messenger between David and the loyal courtiers in Jerusalem. He used to hide in a well and pass on to David - just like Jonathan-the-security-policeman - the information that came to him through eavesdropping. This Jonathan was also a scribe.

Evidently, Maponya's Jonathan is a direct replica of the Jonathans alluded to above. For example, besides serving as a security policeman under the white apartheid regime which is destroying his own brethren, he also serves as a scribe in the ceremonies:

Whitebeard : Put calamine lotion on head.

Jonathan : Okay my lord, I make note (takes out pad and pen. Notes down)
Calamine lotion on head.

Whitebeard : And why the long sleeves?

Jonathan : To help have him all black.

Whitebeard : No! The court won't take it.

Jonathan : I make a note. (takes out pad and pen. Notes) Hands exposed. (slowly with a sad look on his face) Hands exposed.

(Scene 3 p 10)

Jonathan apparently realizes that, although he has dressed the poet in long sleeves 'to help have him all black,' the poet is overall not guilty of all the accusations piled on him. Once the hands are exposed, they will resemble those of Jesus Christ on the cross - they are free from all the blemishes he has been subjected to death for, which causes a lot of guilty feelings within Jonathan. As the similarities between the poet and Christ will be so glaring, Jonathan undoubtedly cannot bear the thought of associating himself with Judas, who sold out Christ for thirty dinars. No doubt, Maponya exposes this dilemma with studied deliberation in order to reflect the plight of the black security police during the height of apartheid.

Maponya has used broad characterization that clearly depicts the central concerns of the play. His characters are broad, clear and easily recognizable. These concerns are: gangsterism prevailing within the security police - with Whitebeard representing the power-wielding white supremacist state while Jonathan embodies the betrayal of the black society in South Africa by black policemen. Rasechaba, on the other hand, unfalteringly displays the views and aspirations of the dispossessed people in South Africa, thus becoming a symbol of resistance and commitment. His death - which is the result of intense suffering at the hands of the security police - highlights his victorious heroism, for "suffering is the other side of power" (Orr, 1990:17).

4.3.2 The religious symbolism and Maponya's notion of religion

This play begins in a complete blackout accompanied by utter silence. It is an ominously gloomy mood which portends doom. The lights instantly come up, revealing an emblematic figure of Biko/Rasechaba/Maponya on the cross, dressed in black, dead and sandwiched between two policemen, one white one black. Whereas the stage has become "a theatrical metaphor for the state," as O'Brien (p47) claims, Rasechaba's figure is a striking symbolism: that of Jesus Christ

crucified, with his sadistic and sinful persecutors. By so doing, Maponya deconstructs the image of Christ.

This decolonization process stems from the African belief that, even before the advent of the European missionaries in Africa, Africans already believed in God. In support of this view, Biko (p 93) advances an informative claim that when the European missionaries arrived, Africans not only believed in God, but had their own community of saints as a liaising committee between God and man. He further points out that the peoples' communication with God was not a one-day-a-week affair done in isolation from various aspects of life. On the contrary, it was featured in all aspects of life: in wars, in beer-making, at the initiation school, in dances and customs in general.

The African image of Jesus Christ, on the other hand, is that of "the Messiah who was...the ordained to be the Redeemer of the world," the expression of the people's faith in God and in his promise of "One who would bring salvation to Israel" (Horn, pp 205, 585). The main function of Jesus Christ in the African setting is therefore that of a messianic designation, the people's expression of hope for deliverance from economic exploitation, political oppression, social and racial discrimination.

It is this faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah that helps to sustain the spirit of the marginalized people in their liberation struggle. Like the Jews who had faith in the promised Messiah, -the faith which bound them together as a race through a number of centuries and gave point to their existence as a nation (Horn p 585) - the dispossessed people of South Africa drew their spirit of salvation from this messianic disposition.

It follows therefore, that for Maponya and the BCM, Jesus Christ was an outstanding figure in the fight for liberation of the black people from the agonies of the apartheid regime. He was to be viewed not only as the redeemer of the dispossessed but also their source of inspiration in the war of liberation. The Biko/Rasechaba's figure on the cross therefore signifies the black man's relationship with God - there is hope for him to ultimately occupy a position of grace with the Almighty. In other words, since Rasechaba/Biko has been tortured and crucified for his stand as the spokesperson of the dispossessed masses in South Africa, he has emerged victorious and gracious, his position being symbolic to that of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, Biko (p 94) in his reference to Black Theology, has categorically analysed the relationship of God and Christ to the black people and their daily problems. He posits that Black Theology

wants to describe Christ as a fighting God, not a passive God who allows a lie to go unchallenged. It grapples with existential problems and does not claim to be a theology of absolutes. It seeks to bring God to the black man and to the truth and reality of his situation. This is an important aspect of Black Consciousness, for quite a large proportion of black South Africans are Christians still swimming in a mire of confusion - the aftermath of the missionary approach.

In fulfilment of the BCM's religious philosophy, Maponya has adopted this symbolic presentation with studied deliberation to portray Christ as 'the fighting God' of the downtrodden people of South Africa at the height of apartheid. Maponya believes that it is in Him that the suffering masses should hope for salvation, and that messianic hope is to be considered as the central theme of the people's struggle.

Since Maponya is a well known poet and dramatist who has experienced the security police's harassments and intimidations, one may conclude that through the play he makes a public declaration of his preparedness to suffer and even die for his cause as a committed writer. He urges all the black writers to use their pens courageously as weapons in the liberation struggle, even if, like Biko/Rasechaba, they may have to die for their convictions. Thirdly, since Steve Biko was not only the father of BCM but also its sacrificial lamb, Maponya makes a great tribute to him as the messianic figure of the marginalized people in South Africa.

4.3.3 **Spatial Demarcation**

The spatial demarcation of the action on stage - 'stage left' and 'stage right' - provides the basis for the division of the play into sections for the purpose of this analysis. Part one analyzes the prison scenes and, part two will attempt to analyze the office/interrogation scenes.

4.3.3.1 **Part 1: The prison scenes: 1, 3, 5, 7 and 9**

This part comprises the scenes in which Maponya exposes the barbarism of the apartheid state in its dealings with the black detainees. All these scenes bear a common characteristic: they not only expose the brutal methods of the security police in dealing with the 'enemies' of the state; but also show the power relations between the white security major, Whitebeard, and the poor lowly black security policeman, Jonathan. Whereas the major is portrayed as a "menacing and domineering figure, controlling Jonathan in every nuance of their relationship" (Steadman p 485), Jonathan is presented as an inadequate, unreasonable and clumsy piece of humanity.

This situation is further revealed in the interaction, dialogue and the language utilized by the two security policemen. Their dialogue is tense and rather restrained, which clearly indicates their relationship. Whereas Whitebeard always initiates the dialogue and the trend it takes, Jonathan simply has to answer the questions and follow Whitebeard's instructions. Jonathan also deifies Whitebeard as something more than just a senior official: "Yes my lord," "my lord knows" (scene 1 p 3), "my lord knows all" (scene 5 p 13) "why, my lord?" (scene 7 p 23), and "my lord knows everything" (scene 9 p 30).

The language employed by these two policemen further demonstrates Maponya's intention of stereotyping their functions. By caricature, Maponya portrays Whitebeard as a master-architect with vast knowledge in matters of this kind - he can easily see the loopholes in almost all the flimsy excuses Jonathan creates. By contrast, Maponya depicts Jonathan's deifying attitude, plus his inept and clumsy suggestions, as a demonstration of his cowed servitude - which was a position of disgrace and misery occupied by the black security police personnel in apartheid South Africa.

Yet more revelations are brought to bear in the scenes, further exposing the police's brutality and the stereotypical functions of the characters. One of the most disturbing revelations is that of the poet whose corpse had been neglected for a full week. This revelation exposes the security police's insecurity and their paranoiac attitude towards black people - blacks are not given human status and consideration.

Nonetheless, the seriousness of this matter gradually dawns on Whitebeard, who quickly recognizes the importance of destroying evidence of their brutality. As he regards Jonathan as a mere lackey with no display of intelligence, Whitebeard makes it his personal problem to solve the matter. Once more Maponya's intention becomes crystal clear here. He portrays the white major as an arrogant man who considers himself as the embodiment of superior knowledge and brilliance, while Jonathan is a nonentity in matters of intelligence. Since Whitebeard misuses his wisdom for furthering the abhorrently inhuman practices of the apartheid state, he has debased himself - he has descended from the sublime to the ridiculous. Jonathan's answer concerning the pinning of the poet on the cross further intensifies this view, -so that Whitebeard 'can see him well' (scene 1 p 3), as if he were a research specimen - apparently to prove his loyalty to the boss. Though Whitebeard feigns ignorance, Jonathan's pronouncement that it is 'common practice' for the deceased detainees to be dressed in black, further reveals that murdering the opponents of the system was common in the apartheid South Africa.

Due to the lengthy period in which the poet's corpse has been left in the cell, the head is already 'septic' and 'red and pink' in colour. Obviously the torture wounds have never been attended to, and rotting has taken its toll. Since he is nothing but Whitebeard's messenger of darkness, Jonathan has to apply calamine lotion on the wounds, apparently to hide their depth and rottenness, and also to give the impression that they have received medical attention.

Since he has personally murdered the poet in cold blood, Jonathan is undoubtedly consumed by guilt during these bizarre ceremonies, especially when he has to expose the hands. The sense of being the betrayer of an innocent man is simply too unbearable for him. In an attempt to alleviate these guilty feelings, Whitebeard reminds him of his duty:

Whitebeard : What is wrong now Jonathan?

Jonathan : I have seen those hands many a times in church.

Whitebeard : Remember, You had a job to do.

Jonathan : Yes my lord.

Indeed, Jonathan had 'a job' to do - that of torturing to death those labelled as the enemies of the system. He is, therefore, advised to discard any guilty feelings he might be having, since his job, sordid as it may be, is considered by his employers as a job like any other. He is employed as a security policeman and his job is to eliminate the state's 'enemies' so as to propagate white supremacy.

As Mkhondo (p 76) observes, part of the black security policeman's job was to harass, intimidate, torture and kill the opponents of the apartheid regime. Indeed, this was the unfortunate situation in which the black security police found themselves. Maponya therefore exposes this situation as a reminder to the concerned police that the people are aware of their plight; yet they are expected to disentangle themselves from this web. Their betrayal against the black people in South Africa is exposed. Maponya offers them an opportunity for a critical self-analysis, in the hope that they will salvage themselves from this quagmire in time. It may also serve as a warning to those blacks who were planning to join the police force to be wary of the prevailing situation.

Though it is very easy for Whitebeard to remind Jonathan, the automated killer, that he 'had a job to do' as a way of allaying his fears and guilty conscience, it is not easy for him to create an excuse for the murder in question. It is not surprising therefore that Jonathan's mood in scene 5 is completely different from that in scene 1 and 3. It has changed from gloomy and sombre to apologetic, fidgety, and frantic, bordering on frenzy and helplessness.

Undoubtedly, Jonathan had been trained - as a black security policeman - to harass, intimidate, torture and murder the opponents of the state, but he had apparently not been well-groomed in formulating excuses for the cold-blooded murders he committed. It would also seem that the process of formulating excuses was made more complicated by the fact that these cold-blooded murders had become a norm for the apartheid state, so that it had almost run out of excuses. No wonder, Jonathan grabs at almost any flimsy excuse that crosses his mind in an endeavour to turn the poet's murder to a suicide or accident:

I'll say he threw himself out of the window in an attempt to escape; we called him to have breakfast with us - he was so hungry that he ate his food so fast that it choked him; I'll say

he was on hunger-strike ...; How about saying he hanged himself with his own trousers - ...; he slipped on a piece of soap...(scene 5 p 12 - 13).

Since these lame excuses have either been used before or are not water-tight enough to convince the public, they are completely rejected by Whitebeard, the man with 'menacing intelligence' and vast experience in these matters. Indeed the public cannot be easily fooled with these excuses any more, for their suspicions have been aroused. Maponya satirises and caricatures the security police in order to expose their inadequacy and lack of planning in their covering up of their cold-blooded murders.

Whereas the black security policemen are portrayed as nothing but hounds who hunt down their own brethren and murder them without any preplanned cover-up, their white bosses are equally hopelessly and at a loss. The proof of this situation manifests itself in Whitebeard's final statement in this scene that "Maybe we should look back at our own history with him, Maybe that will give us a clue" (scene 5 p 1). It is worth the trouble to realize that this is the first time, and possibly the only time, Whitebeard makes reference to 'we' and 'us,' thus including Jonathan for the first time in planning, which demonstrates their partnership in frustration and helplessness. Careful use of language is clearly one of Maponya's important theatrical strategies to develop and comment on his major themes.

While not necessarily disputing what Steadman (p 486) suggests -that scenes 7 and 9 are "bizarre ceremonies as Jonathan and Whitebeard make notes of their case" - one might add that these bizarre ceremonies highlight the master-servant relationship prevailing between these two conspirators. For instance, whereas Jonathan is 'apologetic' and submissive, Whitebeard is 'authoritative' and bossy.

Whereas Jonathan - as the murderer of the poet - wishes to meet the pathologist, Whitebeard puts him in his place by retorting that the pathologist's coming is 'confidential to the party' (scene 7 p 22). Undoubtedly, Jonathan, as the black security policeman, falls outside the jurisdictions of 'the party,' whereas Whitebeard, as the white supremacist representative, is unquestionably one of its members. Since he knows his place very well, Jonathan does not even care to inquire about the members of this party. He merely has to present himself at a given time in order to put on

record all the details of the torture. Jonathan's is a very vulnerable position - he is completely at the mercy of the state's pathologist. Certainly there is teamwork and resourcefulness between the white security police and the pathologists, thus making it an institutionalized conspiracy. This is 'the party' of organized criminals, or gangsters as Maponya presents it. Though Jonathan is literally the killer, he is not considered as a member of 'the party' because of his status as a black security policeman.

Since he is merely a killer and a scribe in this establishment, Jonathan has to 'snap to it' in removing the poet's mournful apparel, so that Whitebeard may not be late for the meeting he has to attend - the meeting which apparently concerns the same murder they are presently analysing. The removal of the mournful attire reveals the victim's real clothing that he was wearing when he was abducted. This revelation prompts Jonathan to ask Whitebeard whether he likes their victim better without the black attire that has just been removed. This is an ironic comment since the major never liked the poet, dead or alive - it is in fact an irony which Maponya employs to satirise the cruel operation.

The poet was abducted while in peaceful slumber with his family -he was wearing his pyjamas. It is through the utilization of language that Maponya makes his strongest comment. The poet's committed voice articulates the cruelty and violence of the 'gangsters' in their desperate attempt to preserve the intolerable system. His illumination is of great importance: language and theatricality come together.

For the sake of authenticity, and also to show the power relations on stage, Maponya illuminates Rasechaba with special light, as he in turn bursts into poetry:

They broke one window first
 Then on all windows played sounds
 Made by drums of wars.
 Both doors joined the chorus
 The front emitting quick soprano notes
 The back a slow dub - dub - dub.

It all happened in minutes
The vocalists shouted
The notes one after the other
Like they'd never rehearsed before
Vula! Vula! Bulang man!
Open! The lyrics went
The timing was bad.

This is the music
That has become notorious
It plays at the first hour of the day
When your name rings
To be registered in the books
Of those messengers of darkness
You jump to your feet
Try to say something that you think makes sense -
You take all poems.
Hide all manuscripts
Throw some into the stove
To destroy all creation
rather than see it defiled by them
With their dirty hands.

If you're the poet's sister -
'Don't open they're thugs!'
And then the poet will follow
'We won't open you're thugs!'
To give himself time to destroy
everything and quickly relay messages
to the family

But then the door has to be opened -

Delaying tactics won't last forever
 You saw it in Zimbabwe.
 The back door is kicked open
 While you open the front
 Within seconds
 the musicians spit their songs into every room
 While others guard the doors for escapers.
 Torches flashing all over!
 And the poet is TAKEN.

(Scene 7 p 23 - 24)

This theatrical technique functions as a double-edged comment: the poet not only decolonizes the stage and seizes power, but also ruptures the secretive and sordid security police's brutal methods and techniques in their dealings with the black activists.

With Rasechaba, the poet, fully illuminated and revived from his formally lifeless position into a live poet as Jonathan and Whitebeard vanish into thin air, the stage becomes an operating-table on which to dissect the apartheid state's in relationship with the black South Africans.

These gangsters, or 'messengers of darkness' as the poet calls them, apply a myriad of techniques in their nocturnal operations. The poet's language illuminates this criminal activity. For example, these vandals 'break windows' and 'kick down doors' indiscriminately, while at the same time they utilize forceful and brutal language against the innocent family: 'Vula! Vula! bulang man!.' This vandalism turns into a pandemonium with 'music' whose 'notes' sound like they 'were never rehearsed before.' Though the poet may use delaying tactics by calling them 'thugs,' when the doors are finally opened, the poet is 'TAKEN.' This marks the finality - the poet will undoubtedly never be seen alive again.

This again identifies Maponya's presentation of these 'officers' as gangsters. Their nocturnal operations, which follow no legal procedure at all, depict them as ruthless gangsters against the black people in this land - theirs are acts of terrorism rather than policing. Indeed, Max Du Preez

(SABC TV, 24 June '96) put it well when he said that the South African police turned out to be terrorists rather than security men.

The penultimate and the final scenes differ from the rest of the other prison scenes in their endings. The final scene concludes with Whitebeard patting Jonathan on the shoulder and complimenting him for 'a good job' he has done:

That's enough for the day and remember that what ever happens - DON'T PANIC !
You've proved your loyalty (puts his arm around Jonathan as they exit) and I'll do everything to protect you.

(Scene 9 p 31)

As Steadman (p 486) asserts, these final words "are intended to leave the audience with a formal ceremonial image of their relationship which is built on the oppression of people like Rasechaba." Their relationship is built on 'loyalty' - Jonathan has to be loyal to Whitebeard by torturing and murdering the opponents of the system, while Whitebeard's is that of ascertaining that Jonathan does the 'job' per instructions and to its finality to perpetuate the status quo. Whitebeard then has the duty of protecting Jonathan by teaming up with the pathologist to shift the cause of the poet's death to a suicide or an accident. Jonathan has a loyalty to Whitebeard who, in turn, has been serving his own loyalty to the apartheid state for decades.

Betrayal, loyalty and power are the key issues that Maponya grapples with in these prison scenes. Their emergence is noticeable in characterization, language and theatricality. Maponya has demonstrated that while Jonathan's betrayal of his own brethren is due to his loyalty to Whitebeard for material gains, - which he fulfils by intimidating, harassing and torturing the black activists to death - Whitebeard's own loyalty is to the apartheid regime he represents. As partners in conspiracy, Whitebeard and the state pathologist's loyalty to the apartheid state is to concoct evidence for the coroner's court, thus ensuring Jonathan's immunity from prosecution. The poet's seizure of power on stage is a display of Maponya's envisaged outcome of the political struggle prevalent in the apartheid South Africa - that eventually the downtrodden black South Africans will emerge victorious.

4.3.3.2 **Part 2: The office/interrogation scenes: 2, 4, 6 and 8**

The office/interrogation scenes are set apart from the other scenes. They are located in a separate space on the stage. These scenes function as flashbacks to the circumstances leading to the present state of affairs. Factual information is contained in these scenes, whereby Whitebeard officially and criminally instructs his lackey, Jonathan, to perform the acts which have resulted in the fatal injuries which are sustained by the poet.

These scenes are, as Steadman (p 487) asserts, “realistic encounters with the philosophy and the methods of the security police.” They also demonstrate the relations of power and motivation in police interrogations. For instance, scene two introduces Whitebeard “seated on a chair and reading a newspaper,” while Jonathan is “standing somewhere at the back -idle” (p 4). The power play is reinforced by attention to physical staging and detail: Whitebeard is in charge of the office, while Jonathan is a foreigner who has no part to play in the interrogations.

As the officer in charge, Whitebeard initiates an idle conversation which arouses Jonathan’s interest and excitement. Jonathan jovially mimics a radio announcer at a soccer match, kicking an imaginary ball. Though their interaction begins politely and convivially, Whitebeard suddenly shouts at Jonathan and diverts his attention to business, cutting off his mimicry at the height of his enjoyment:

Whitebeard : (interrupting) Jonathan!

Jonathan : (freezes, leg still in the air) Yes sir.

Whitebeard : Fetch the poet.

Jonathan : Yes sir (opens door for Rasechaba to come in.)...
(Scene 2 p 4)

Maponya’s utilization of attention to physical detail highlights the power relations between the two characters. Whitebeard is the boss in control of the game, Jonathan is an obsequious servant

fit for running different errands. When Whitebeard expels Jonathan from the office during the interrogation, the power relation between the two characters is intensified:

Whitebeard : That interests me ... (sees Jonathan is in the room) I don't think we need you any longer Jonathan. Why don't you go out and get yourself a cup of coffee. (Jonathan leaves. Major switches off tape)

(Scene 2 p 5).

With Jonathan out of sight and the tape switched off, Whitebeard capitalises on the moment and accuses Rasechaba of inflammatory and militant poetry that evoked violent reactions in the people. The plight and characterization of Rasechaba affords Maponya the opportunity of expressing his views concerning art - "the relationship between black art and black resistance" (Steadman p 487).

For Maponya, his artistic creation is dependent on personal sources. Its manner of presentation derives from experience and feeling. An artist experiences exploitation, oppression and segregation and will write about them. Since these injustices are accompanied by pain and anger, their presentation is also painful and angry. Rasechaba/Maponya therefore reflects this pain and anger in his artistic work from first-hand experience.

This device that Maponya employs in his characterization of Rasechaba/Maponya, fused into one, takes a double-edged significance especially in performance. Indeed, this "metonymic connection," as Steadman (p 487) terms it, makes all the poems in this play more than merely effective dramatic devices employed at strategic points. These poems function as a means to rupture and enhance the action, since Maponya's and Rasechaba's experiences are fused into one

Contrary to Rasechaba/Maponya's feelings and convictions Whitebeard and his colleagues feel that the black artists should write about 'the beauty' that is surrounding them, instead of concentrating on the negative aspects of life. Rasechaba/Maponya sees no such 'beauty' but identifies sordidness, brutality and violence. He feels obliged therefore to write about this and

conscientize the people. This is in fulfilment of Mazizi Kunene's notion that "a writer who writes truthfully depicts a situation as he sees it" (in: Duerden Pieterse, 1972:24).

It would seem that the only way for Whitebeard to understand the black peoples' dire position is for Rasechaba/Maponya to expose the atrocities perpetrated against them. "Signifiers and signified again mesh as Rasechaba asserts" (Steadman 1985b: 487):

I am not responsible for the creation of the squatters. I am not responsible for the starvation of millions of children because their parents have been forced into arid lands. I did not create the humiliating laws - and I never created the racial barriers in the land. Who do you expect me to blame when life becomes unfair to black soul? (p 7)

This is a most articulate and moving response from Maponya/Rasechaba. He employs militant and piercing language indirectly piling the blame on Whitebeard, the representative of the white supremacist state. This discourse obviously has a disturbing effect on the white major. He is left dumbstruck, baffled and stunned by the truth.

Capitalising on the major's temporary paralysis, Maponya/ Rasechaba utilizes the stage to pronounce yet more injustices. He employs poetic language as a stylistic device meant for brevity, dynamism and acuteness. He uses periphrasis in his chant, and as Wellek and Warren (p 182) postulate, "periphrasis implies a tension between word and thing: the object is not named but its qualities are enumerated":

When life becomes unfair to a black soul
 Who is to blame?
 When a child leaves home for school never to come back,
 When a mother hides the cracks on her face created by tears of crying,
 When a brother dashes in fear to seek refuge in the wilderness -
 We are all taken by surprise!

When life becomes unfair to a black soul
 Who is to blame?

When a child throws a stone in anger and dies!
 When a family takes a brazier into a shack and dies!
 When a young girl walks into the path of a stray bullet and dies!
 We are all taken by surprise
 But God is not at all taken by surprise! (p 7 - 8)

Maponya as a committed artist uses this moment to expose the destructive and painful effects of the apartheid system upon the black soul. His language and theatricality functioned as a challenge to the apartheid state. It was also food for thought for the audience, especially the downtrodden black South Africans. They had to deeply and seriously assess the situation and work out the appropriate strategies to liberate themselves from the tethers of apartheid.

The poet's courage and success in taking a free reign on stage and completely disarming the major signify the envisaged moment of victory over the apartheid system. This is heightened by the major's dumbfoundedness even after this powerful chant. Whitebeard regains his senses only when Rasechaba turns and challengingly confronts him with: "Who do you expect me to blame?" (p 8) This triumphant moment therefore marks the greatest dream of Maponya/Rasechaba/Biko - all three fused into one - when the apartheid system's skull would be cracked, and democracy reign over the South African state.

The act of controlling the stage is therefore a symbolic representation of this envisaged outcome. It was in defiance of the South African apartheid state and a signal that its time was running out. In this way it functioned as a booster to the morale of the dispossessed, rekindling their dimming light of hope.

Whitebeard finally admits defeat and agrees that things are not perfect for Rasechaba's people. His reference to the poet's people clearly demonstrates that he considers blacks as aliens in this country. No wonder these blacks were subjected to intolerable health hazards which Maponya describes in disgust:

Rasechaba : Of course I said I could write about flowers. But where are the flowers in Winterveld for me to write about? What kind of flowers will ever grow

at Crossroads? If that poet of yours lived in Alexandra, he would write about the stagnant pools of water and the smell of shit filtering through the streets at night because there is no drainage system... the buckets of faeces placed in the streets at night as if families are bragging which family eats more to shit more. (p 8)

Maonya's description exposes this intolerable situation as a demonstration of his stand as a committed artist, committed to the welfare of his society.

Again a cruel irony emerges - Maonya locates the betrayal in the church. Whereas Rasechaba has come to church to worship, Jonathan is here to fulfil his position as a betrayer - to 'follow' the poet in accordance with his white boss's instructions. Maonya employs this biblical allusion to equate Jonathan with Judas, the treacherous disciple of Jesus Christ. Jonathan is, indeed, a wolf in a sheep's clothing.

Time and language is spent on the stereotypical character of Jonathan. He presents a clear motivation for his behaviour. He is "doing a job like any other person ... for a white man" in order to "get a salary"; has "mouths to feed" and "children's school fees to attend to"; and that since he "took up this job" things have changed "for the better." In an attempt to expand this specious argument, Jonathan turns himself into a self-ordained priest and presents the sermon that:

I'm also convinced that we must stand aloof from politics. We are servants of God, and God does not wish us to enter the political arena. (p 11)

The poet informs the audience how to read this sermon by calling it "a sell-out sermon" that is given by a "blood-sucker" who is "dead inside" (p 11). Jonathan fails to comprehend Rasechaba's meaning, thus compelling him once more to seize power and eloquently advance his political ideology:

I knew you wouldn't understand me. By dead I mean the smile you put on when the enemy grins at you.

Death is when the colour of your skin turns against you and you don't know where you stand as others decide your fate.

Death is when your mouth can utter no cry.

Death is when your eyes cannot see light beyond the darkness.

Death is when your ears cannot hear the call filtering through the noise.

Death is when your feet can no longer carry you through the distance.

Death is when you stop to be you!

And above all

Death is when you start to hate to be black. (p 12)

This pronouncement demonstrates Maponya/Rasechaba/Biko's deep convictions. The language and voice of the committed poet is evocative, forceful and persuasive. His point of departure is 'death,' the word which keeps recurring throughout the piece. Maponya explores and exposes death as the kind of malady that is consuming Jonathan and his kind, which emanates from their hating 'to be black.' His employment of poetry as a literary style in this brand of theatre is in fulfilment of the notion that:

Poetry is the most emotional vehicle for subjective writing, for sublimating into a dense, literary image a whole range of personal experiences, associations, emotions and commitments.

(Blair, 1976:144)

Feeling embarrassed about being condemned in public, Jonathan threatens Rasechaba with death, 'real death,' as he calls it. Whereas the poet makes reference to death symbolically Jonathan's is not an empty threat, he refers to it literally. His aim is now to vent his personal vendetta on the poet for humiliating him. This moment of truth so deeply hurts Jonathan that he hurls a myriad of insults at the vacated stage while he simultaneously pleads for God's mercy. This demonstrates that Rasechaba has emerged victorious in the seizure of stage power.

Maponya brings physical action, language usage and the theme of power play together to enhance intention and central issues. Whitebeard demands Rasechaba's poems, but Jonathan, with some preoccupation with 'self,' enthusiastically announces the discovery of his driver's licence, his

insurance contract and the photos of his daughter. The motive for Jonathan's enthusiasm is clear here: an idle talk with Whitebeard functions as a comic relief and affords him an opportunity to relate to him on a man-to-man level, as opposed to the master-servant relationship prevailing between them. To Whitebeard this is time for business, and Rasechaba has to be brought in for the interrogation.

When Rasechaba has entered the interrogation room, Whitebeard forcibly and at gunpoint removes one of the poet's poems and reads it himself, disregarding the poet's protests over authenticity and ownership. This misappropriating relates to the question of power representation: who has to speak for whom and how. Finnegan (1977:28) puts it well in her postulation that one needs to remember the circumstances surrounding the performance of a poem, because

Differently performed, or performed at a different time, or to a different audience or by a different singer, it is a different poem.

O'Brien (p 55) on the other hand asserts that

This emblematic act of power, expropriating a black text from its author and giving it an alienated voice, is subjected to a double dramatic reversal. (Does Maponya here glance at his own 'seizure' of Beckett's text?)

Maponya has indeed based his **Gangsters** on Beckett's **Catastrophe**, as manifested by numerous similarities in the two plays (Steadman 1985b: 491, O'Brien p 46). Maponya (1994:xi) himself admits this seizure by pronouncing that in **Dirty Work** and **Gangsters** he "created the performance style of **Catastrophe**"

Indeed, as O'Brien (p 55) further posits, Whitebeard's voice is "moulded to the black text" from the moment he displays his power, for he has become Rasechaba's mouthpiece in presenting his poetry to the audience for the very first time.

Rasechaba's rejection of the tone of voice given to his poetry by Whitebeard signifies self-assertion. Whitebeard's martial power is depicted as the only resource left for him in this power struggle. His attempt at the exegesis of Marxist theory and the interpretation of Rasechaba's poetry further exposes his political naivety and sentimentality - he advances a bourgeois criticism of Marxist-oriented literature. Marxist-oriented literature, as Michael Vaughn (in Gugelberger, p 196) defines it, "focuses upon the way in which **individuals** experience conditions of oppression," and it is the kind of literature which is directed towards "consciousness-raising."

Maponya's intention is to show that this literature - since it conscientizes the oppressed masses and demonstrates a way towards their emancipation - has become a pariah to the apartheid state. He therefore uses this moment to declare his political ideology as well as his stand as a committed writer who champions the struggle for liberation of his people.

He employs stylized theatricality to illuminate the poet who this time stands on a chair to elevate his status. He uses special light on the poet, while Whitebeard is completely blotted out of the stage by fading the general lights. This theatricality signifies defiance and seizure of power on the stage. When Rasechaba immediately recites his poetry, his African authentic voice erases and nullifies Whitebeard's alienated one.

Rasechaba's attack in his poem is directed at the black middle class petit-bourgeoisie, whom he calls the "cheese and wine drinkers of our struggle" (scene 6). These are those who have opted for the better suburbs which are created as a divide-and-rule strategy. For Maponya, these people have confused the black people's struggle by being a party to that unfortunate strategy.

Since his leader is 'the people' Rasechaba/Maponya defies Whitebeard's demand for him to interpret his ethnic poem 'Ridovhakunda Ridovhavhulaya,' saying that there are many interpreters who are more than willing to interpret it. He instead seizes the stage power and passionately recites his militant poem.

This poem is a rallying song for the people to take up arms against their exploiters. It is in an ethnic language for authenticity, courage and inspiration. 'Ridovhakunda Ridovhavhulaya' (We will defeat and kill them) - which filters through the poem - signifies emphasis and determination.

The lines 'Ridovhafara ngamilenge / Ridovhakunda ngamatshero / Ridovhakunda ngamatshero / Ridovhavhulaya ngamadengwana' (We will hold them by the legs / We will defeat them tomorrow / We will defeat them tomorrow / We will kill them in the afternoon) emphasise the people's struggle and their determination to win the ensuing war of liberation, regardless of the fact that they have no firearms - they are prepared to use their own bare hands. Power of language therefore plays a very important part in this power struggle.

Victory is the theme of the struggle, and the poet identifies himself with his people, as manifested in the use of the people's ethnic language. He also places himself right at the centre of the struggle - this is indicated by the repetition 'Ri' (we), which indicates emphasis and self-inclusion. The final lines not only signify militancy and strong determination, but also a burning desire for and conviction in the imminent victory: 'Ridovhakunda My God / Ridovhavhulaya!'

The inclusion of English in this seemingly ethnic poem is to be seen as "an intermediary for another language with its own arteries of relations to history..." (Gunner, p 5). This intermingling of two languages, in such a manner that they so harmoniously blend into each other, yet with different registers, obliterates Whitebeard's alienated voice and diminishes his status as a man of menacing power and vast intelligence, giving in its place Rasechaba's authentic voice as the sole representative of the rainbow people of South Africa.

The final interrogation scene differs from the preceding ones. Whereas in the rest of these scenes there has been a demonstration of political power on stage, this time the poet is literally 'thrown in,' with hand-cuffs on - which is a display of martial power - demonstrating the physical brutality wielded by the security police as they manhandle their black victims. In order to demystify this situation, Maponya/Rasechaba employs a pastoral image as a literary technique: "Does the impala say no to the lion?" (scene 8 p 25), which denotes the survival of the fittest. The poet's desperate situation is effectively established.

Tension, brutality and roughness prevail in this scene. When Whitebeard pronounces that "justice has to prevail everywhere," one wonders what he understands by justice. He apparently means his own kind of justice, for what is witnessed on stage is a perversion of justice to a high degree.

The fact that the poet has to pay so dearly for the accusations wrongly directed at him - for which he is not expected to defend himself - is one way of defeating justice.

Though Rasechaba denies any knowledge of the so-called LMA, Whitebeard is poised to destroy the poet physically. When Whitebeard orders his lackey, Jonathan, to take the poet "to a position that will aid his thinking" (p 27) his intentions are clearly displayed. Rasechaba has to be subjected to ruthless torture, which is later revealed to be a hangman's noose made specifically for torturing black detainees.

For the first time since the inception of the play, Whitebeard publicly assaults and tortures the poet himself. His language is typical of white supremacist racist officials and portrays him as a product of an archetypal white Afrikaner background:

Whitebeard : Weren't you taught manners, kaffir, that when you're in the presence of the white man that you must stand up. (kicks him) Up! Up! I can't talk to a grown man on the floor. Up! (Rasechaba stands) Now who is LMA? (p 28)

Maponya's physical detail and the language used by the major are meant to expose the brutality displayed by the security police in their interrogations. Notwithstanding this display of brutality - as the poet is kicked and punched, not to mention the temporary hanging - the poet can still gather courage and balance equations in response to Whitebeard's confrontations and insinuations:

Whitebeard : I have here photographs of two of your best friends who've skipped the country and received training in Moscow and in Africa. How do you respond to your friends doing that?

Rasechaba : This government sells diamonds to Moscow. It is known to be getting arms from Bulgaria. How do you respond to your friends doing that? (p 28)

As would be expected, this response infuriates Whitebeard to the extent that he threatens personally to murder the poet: “These hands will do anything (claps him with both hands), anything - and blood will wash off very easily” (p 29). These paroxysms of anger give rise to the final molestation, kicking at the poet’s genitals - which signifies an emasculation of black humanity - obviously displaying the state’s martial power over the oppressed.

While the expectation would be some form of submission from the poet, this does not seem to be the case. Instead, Maponya/Biko/ Rasechaba turns this into a final moment of victory and triumph over the forces of oppression. Rasechaba, on his knees, faces Whitebeard and, as if writing on a political wall, presents his indelible statement concerning his political ideology and condition:

Rasechaba : So deep is my love for my land that those who fail to understand seek to destroy me.
 (Standing up slowly)
 Perhaps finally at the very end. When the curtain falls
 On the last act of your pillage
 You will come to understand
 How deeply
 We loved this land
 And cared for its people.
 (Upright now and facing the audience)
 White and black
 Free and unfree.
 (There is silence and tension) (p 29)

This is the moment of triumph for all freedom lovers in South Africa, regardless of their colour, race or creed. To Whitebeard and his colleagues in the force, this is a moment of defeat which may only be revenged by destroying the poet. The Major then unleashes his automaton, Jonathan, to “deal with Rasechaba as deemed fit” - even to subject him to the electric chair (p 29). Maponya hereby demonstrates that when reasoning power fails, the police had martial power to which to resort.

Though Jonathan harbours rancour for being humiliated in public, he has a soft spot for the poet due to his innocence. Since he does not want the major to start wondering where his loyalties lie, he finally peels off his jacket in preparation for the administration of the final and fatal torture. There is **BLACK OUT** that marks finality - the poet will never be seen alive again.

In conclusion, every literary device Maponya employs in this play - such as physical staging, language usage, and theatricality - is a crushing condemnation of the apartheid state. Though Whitebeard is depicted as a man of vast intelligence and menacing power, he finally crumbles into a paranoid rascal, whose humanity has been consumed by his own megalomania. His final display of intimidation, brutality and racism portrays him as the master of dissimulation who artfully creates an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. His power is measured by "the arbitrary and excessive pain" he inflicts upon the 'enemies' of the system he hereby represents (Orr, 1990:17). The protagonist, Rasechaba, not only emerges victorious but also occupies a position of grace by virtue of sacrificing his life for the liberation of his people.

The South African apartheid state was a police state. The so-called security police had become butchers of the black people. This was heightened by the using of black policemen like puppets on the strings - to eliminate their own brethren while propagating this barbaric system. Maponya's intention as a committed artist is very clear: he uses this play as a source of inspiration for artists to stand firm in their fight for the liberation of the black people in South Africa. His message is that they should not falter but adhere to the philosophy that "one of the basic tenets of Black Consciousness is totality of involvement" and that "the struggle without casualties is no struggle" (Biko p 97).

As O'Brien (p 56 - 57) correctly asserts, **Gangsters** is about "the deconstruction of race as a category, from the vantage point of Black Consciousness whose reflection has deepened under the impact of radical non-racial struggle ..." and that putting Christ on a cross "decolonizes the image of Christ, reterritorializing Christ as an insurgent in the theocratic white prison."

Rasechaba's resistance serves as a kind of model for all freedom fighters in the country. His clarion call for an armed struggle against the regime was a justified one, for the apartheid state

apparently understood only the language of force. Moore (1987:22) said: "The role of revolution is to assist the birth of a new society."

As a messianic figure for the dispossessed black South Africans, Rasechaba has become the tower of strength. He has courage, fortitude and a sharply analytic mind. His poems stimulate black people into political action. For him, a revolutionary has to have a clear perception of the world we live in and it can be changed.

Quoting Harry Gwala, Maphumephethe (1989:56) asserts that one is a better revolutionary if one has a clear and unambiguous understanding of the forces that stand for oppression and exploitation in contact with the forces that have the mission and ability to change the world.

Maponya/Rasechaba/Biko is a determined and committed revolutionary, blessed with an amazing political and theoretical depth of revolutionary clarity.

Chapter 5: **Conclusion**

The focus of attention in this research project has been on the manner in which Maponya acquits himself as a writer of Committed Literature. This, amongst other things, involves making the oppressed inherently conscious of their plight by means of exposure and condemnation of the injustices perpetrated upon them. But true Committed Literature does not end there. Maponya goes a step further by sounding to these inert oppressed, a provoking call to action.

In **The Hungry Earth** Maponya begins with an agitating ditty whose admonitory tone is a voice, warning Mother Africa to be wary of the impending doom of rape. This strategic technique of utilizing a rousing song, more than reflects Maponya's self-imposed duty, as a Committed Theatre practitioner, of awakening his fellow-Africans to the dehumanizing and degrading acts of exploitation, oppression, subjugation and brutality levelled against them. This clearly indicates Maponya's adherence to the ideological position of the BCM: that black theatre should strive to "tell the people to stop moaning and to wake up and start doing something about their valuable Black lives" (Kavanagh, 1985:45).

Maponya's status in the realm of Committed Literature is also enhanced by his vociferous condemnation of the migrant labour system which, besides depriving black men of normal family life, also made them victims of exploitation and political oppression. He also highlights the abominable conditions under which the black people lived, as well as the then prevailing discrimination based on the pigmentation of a person's skin. Maponya in **The Hungry Earth** preaches survival and offers positive solutions for the social maladies afflicting society.

In **Jika**, Maponya concentrates on the infamous Bantu Education system, a policy which was maliciously designed to lower the educational standards in African schools. This created the racial hatred endemic in South Africa. This hatred had been fuelled to such an extent that the students later reacted by chanting a song of resistance in which they pledged their resolve to retaliate by killing the boers. The song is Maponya's incitement for the armed struggle against the oppressive system which dehumanized the black people. He instils in these students the spirit of defiance, even if it means death as an ultimate end, thus making them hardened activists.

In this play, Maponya also introduces special revolutionary teachings, such as the 'Classics of School's Revolution,' the

'Co-operatives and communes,' the "ABC of proletariat struggle," and the "ABC of the education for the oppressed" (Maponya, 1986:9), which would stand the youth in good stead in terms of practical revolution. These teachings depict Maponya as one of the most outstanding teachers of the liberation movement or preacher of organized revolution.

Towards the end of the play, Maponya depicts two comrades discussing their dreams about their involvement in the war of liberation. The irony is that their innocent and sincere discussion lands them in gaol. Maponya introduces this episode with the deliberate intention of ridiculing the apartheid regime for its wanton disregard for human rights.

He inspires fortitude and hope by depicting the two comrades going to prison "with pride and confidence of men who will never be defeated" (p 43). This pronouncement is in complete harmony with Wole Serote's assertion that if South African literature did not inspire, give hope and optimism to the people in the fight, then it was "irrelevant" (in: Petersen, p 14).

The final utterance of the two comrades to the audience that now is the time to "turn around and look at yourself," serves as Maponya's challenge for a critical assessment of the developments in **Jika**.

In **Gangsters** Maponya introduces the audience to a gloomy, macabre and sombre world. He exposes and denounces the South African security police's brutalities and murders of the innocent black activists, whose only sin was that of identifying with the oppressed majority. The solution to such problems, according to Maponya, was to wrest power from the apartheid state for the benefit of all South Africans. This sentiment manifests itself in the actual seizure of the stage power at key points, where Rasechaba assumes the public persona of a multifaceted ideologist. For example, he condemns the forced removals which caused frustration and related sufferings, and the sordid life led by blacks in the townships, as opposed to the affluent life-styles of the white communities living in towns and cities. His condemnation also extends to the exploitation and oppression of the black people. He avails himself of every imaginable opportunity militantly to

chant his poetry, which he employs as a potent vehicle for the articulation of his political ideologies and, the rallying of the blacks to armed struggle against the oppressive regime.

Maponya's use of the concept of naming as a writing technique deserves special attention. As a true Brechtian scholar who believes in demystification in his theatre, he uses naming in his plays to focus on the central theme. He also utilizes the naming of his characters for the purpose of stereotyping their individualized roles in their respective plays. For this reason, Maponya's characters' names in **The Hungry Earth** are glorified icons reflecting their functions and attitudes. Examples include Sethotho (imbecile), Beshwana (loincloth), Matlhoko (sufferings) and Usiviko (shield).

In **Jika** on the other hand, he uses naming to articulate his political ideology. Examples are Mayibuye (Let it be retrieved, that is the country), Tokoloho (freedom) and Nomathemba (mother of hope).

Finally, in **Gangsters** the naming of the characters depicts their individual character traits and roles in the play. Consider the examples Rasechaba (father of the nation), Whitebeard (a man of experience) and Jonathan (a sell-out/betrayer).

Of particular significance is Maponya's notion of religion. As a BCM adherent, like Bentley (1972:240), he no longer considers religion as the opium of the people. He uses religion to invigorate the spirit of resistance among the downtrodden, dispossessed people of South Africa. Whenever people are in dire straits, he revitalizes their spirits by employing prayer as an edifying and sustaining force. He usually refers to God as the fighting God, the protector and redeemer of the downtrodden, from whom there is hope for victory as He is the provider of firearms and power.

Maponya's plays are sometimes wrongly referred to as Protest Theatre pieces. For many people Theatre of Protest and Theatre of Commitment virtually mean the same thing. It is a question of semantics, they say. These people's failure to grapple with these two genres as different entities emanates from their ignorance and insensitivity of the political, cultural and artistic developments

of the '50s and the '70s in South Africa, especially as regards the black people's situation. Whereas Theatre of Protest has been noted for 'crying out aloud' against the injustices perpetrated on the masses, the new 'black theatre' of the '70s and '80s, "the dominant genre in South Africa," according to Mda (1996:xviii), can rightly be described as Theatre of Commitment. It is the kind of theatre which is militant in form and content, which, unlike Protest, addresses its messages to the very people in the struggle. By way of conscientisation, it attacks the prevailing misnomers and prejudices, and further advances and illuminates the solution towards change for freedom and democracy.

As Gunner (1994:14) so aptly observes, like many other African dramas with BCM adherence, Maponya's works "break through the encasing of English and exploit both the intimate and oratorical devices of the indigenous African languages." His theatre therefore had strong impact and touched the very marrow of the people in the struggle. As a potent vehicle for the people's liberation from the tethers of apartheid, it became an empowering agency that gave them a new sense of control over their destiny. People were conscientised for their plight, then motivated for their own emancipation.

Many critics would argue that politics does not belong in the theatre, and that theatre falls apart the minute politics is dragged into it. For Maponya, this is a distortion of truth, a myth that needs to be shattered and thrown into a trash box. Testimony of this view emerges in his theatre, as the themes of oppression, exploitation and segregation have been the major concern of the three works. All these works emphasise the point that at the end of the day justice will triumph over injustice.

Though the South African apartheid government may not have been directly affected by these plays, it would be myopic for anybody to imagine that they never had any impact at all. Otherwise there would not have been censorships, bannings, house arrests, detentions, intimidations and all other forms of harassment meted out by the apartheid regime against the radical playwrights. These plays are of no ephemerality, but are significant even today, because they are an evidence of the people's past struggles for freedom and democracy. They highlight and heighten the people's desire to sustain democracy and regard it as an apple of their eyes.

Now that apartheid has been defeated, it is only fair to ask whether Maponya will continue producing works, and what themes he is likely to explore. In answer to this question, Maponya (in: E-Mail: 11 Dec'95) asserts that he will continue 'as a theatre practitioner,' but further spells out some reservations that

Unless I get some funding to produce, I may get into administration. If I were to produce, my themes would be varied. For example, crime in communities and how they cope with it; concepts of 'collective responsibilities' with an old African philosophy which is getting eroded by clinging to Western concepts of individualism; revisiting the wisdom of African mythology etc and instilling the sense of critical consciousness in the minds of our people.

So Maponya is still a committed writer who is likely to continue challenging the minds of his people to assess critically the burning issues of the day.

It is hoped that Maponya will not hesitate to take up his pen and indict his society, attack and condemn the corrupt and expose their weaknesses, continuing to identify himself with the masses at grass roots level, writing about human emotions and universal values; addressing himself to the emerging problems of the new democratic South Africa, thereby inaugurating a new Committed Theatre.

Since South African liberation was partly the result of an enormous world-wide solidarity movement, as Cronin (1997:55) postulates, it would only be fair to expect Maponya to transcend the confines of this country and indulge himself in the affairs of other nations. For instance, his theatre may concern itself with the appalling political situation of the East Timorians, who still languish under the imperialism of Indonesia. It would make sense and highly inspiring for him to conscientise these people of their plight and agitate them to pluck up courage and work out strategies of attaining their freedom. Further, it would be commendable for Maponya to incite the international community and rally it into taking a decisive move against this inhuman imperialism perpetrated on the Eastern Trimeens.

We strongly feel that Maponya should not hesitate to stand up and condemn the gross human rights violations and genocides taking place in this island and other places. As a Committed

Theatre practitioner, he must rise to the challenge that the world history has bestowed upon artists of his calibre. He cannot afford to do less.

Through his theatre, Maponya has distinguished himself as an abrasive conscience for the downtrodden South Africans. Now that apartheid is gone, it would be commendable for him to become an abrasive conscience of the rainbow nation, the continent and the world at large. He should now address his theatre to the global affairs, expose and denounce oppressive systems, regardless of who practise them.

As Ndebele (1992:25) would point out, “the possibilities for new writings are inseparable from the quest for a new society.” On that note, Maponya should strive to create plays that address the aspirations of the new society, where colour, sexism, religion or creed play no importance at all. His theatre should be inseparable from the demands of democracy and its difficult tasks. In conclusion, Maponya needs to be centrally located in the struggle for the building and sustenance of democracy. His materials and form should be informed by that democracy.

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