COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF SELECTED SOWETO-BASED COMMUNITY THEATRE PLAYS (1984–1994)

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DECLARATION

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I declare that "Collective memory and the construction of a historical narrative, analysis and interpretation of selected Soweto-based community theatre plays 1984–1994" is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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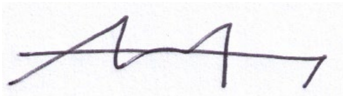

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is on community theatre of a particular period and a specific place in South Africa, namely Soweto during the period 1984–1994. Three community theatre practitioners represent the best in artistic achievement during this period: Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya. This study proposes that the plays produced by these Soweto-based playwrights warrant a narrative of their own to do justice to the substantial nature of each playwright's contribution to South African theatre. They developed training methods and theatre-making processes that resulted in plays that were uniquely expressive of their own approach to theatre but also complementary to each other's.

In discussing Sowetan community theatre as an individual entity, the study also attempts to provide an understanding of the socio-economic context of Soweto. This is achieved by discussing various aspects of life in Soweto, namely transport, schooling, infrastructure, the influx of immigrants, ideological beliefs as well as various cultural venues. Therefore, the study aims to bring together aspects of Soweto in a coherent and comprehensive portrait of the township.

Halbwachs' *collective memory*, assisted in enriching the views of each playwright's theatre style, and of how the socio-political environment influenced their work and how they in turn influenced other Soweto playwrights. *Collective memory* is the result of people relating to one another within the *cadres sociaux* or social framework. Halbwachs differentiates between history and *memory* and suggests that collective memory is organised through *time* and *space*. The social framework explains the manner in which an individual's recollections are part of the wider community's memories. Halbwachs argues that communities organise events around specific times and that communities use (cultural) spaces meaningfully (such as the space in which a play is performed is part of the communal experience of theatre). Drawing on public and private theatre archives, this study incorporates interviews conducted with Kente, Manaka and Maponya's associates.

Although their contributions to Sowetan theatre have been studied by other researchers, this study adds a new element to existing material by its use of Halbwachs' theory of *collective memory*.

Key Words: Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya, Soweto theatre, Community theatre, Maurice Halbwachs, Collective memory, Memory studies, Resistance theatre.

ISIFINYEZO SOMONGO WOCWANINGO

Lo mlando obhalwe lapha uqaphelisisa nge midlalo eyenziwe ngabantu ngesikhathi esithile besebenza endaweni ekhethiwe lapha Iningizumo Africa, ngokucacisela, e-Soweto, ngalesikhathi: 1984–1994. Imidlalo ka Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka no Maishe Maponya, beyikhipha ukuchwephesha ngalesikhathi. Lo mlando uphakamisa umcabango wokuthi lemidlalo ebhalwe ngalabo chwephesha, kufanele unikezwe ukuqabuka, ukukhombisa ukuthi imidlalo ebhalwe ngalabo chwepheshe yi sipho sase-Ningizimu Africa. Lobo chwepheshe ba sombulula izindlela ezintsha zokufundisa zokwenza imidlalo; ngaleyo ndlela ba hlumelela imidlalo ebonakalisa indlela yokushumayela efanele bona.

Ngoku phikisana ngemidlalo eyenziwe ngabantu base Soweto, lomolando uzama ukukhombisa inqondo yendlela ukuthi inhlangano kade iphila, noma iwonga kanjani e-Soweto. Ukwenza lokho, lo mlando ukhumbiso ukuthi, ukuthutha, izikole, izisa, nokufika kwabantu abaphuma kwamanye amazwe, ukukholwa kwizindlela ezohlokile ngendlela youkubusa, futhi, nezindawo lapho imidlalo beyikhona: ukubonakalisa ukuthi zonke lezinto bezisebenza kanjani eSoweto. Kanjalo, lomlando uzama ukuhlanganisa izimvela yezindlela zokuphila eSoweto ukuthi zanamathele sizokwazi ukubona iSoweto ngokugcwele.

I-*collective memory* ka Halbwachs, isizile ukucebisa ukuhumusha kwa babhali bemidlalo, nokubinsa isisindo senhlangano yaseSoweto kule midlalo yabo, futhi nokubonisa isisindo kwabanye ababhali bemidlalo baseSoweto. I-*collective memory* isuka kwindlela umphakathi wonke uphila nokukhulumisana ngakhona phakathi kwi *cadres sociaux* noma kwinhlangano yase Soweto. UHalbwachs uhlukanisa izindabazezwe *nezikhumbuzo* futhi usho ukuthi nokuqongelela kwezikhumbuzo zenhlangano zinga hlela ngesi *siskhathi* and ngendawo lapho *izehlo zakudala zenzeka*

khona. Masikhuluma nge nhlangano (social framework) sibonisa ukuthi umuntu ukhumbula izehlo zakudala nabanye abantu bo'mphakathi. UHalbwachs oveza obala ukuthi umphakathi uhlela ngesu izehlo ngokufanele kwesikhathi esithile, futhi nokuthi inhlangano ibona izindawo lapho kuboniswa imidlalo njengezi ndawo ezinomqondo. Lomlando uqoqa imithombo ehlukahlukene futhi nokuhlangana nabangani baka Kente, Manaka no-Maponya.

Noma abanye abafundi babhalile ngezipho zika Kente, Manaka no Maponya, lomlando ufaka okusha ngokusebenzisa ukuqabuka kwe *collective memory* ephuma ku-Halbwachs.

Isihloko se-*dissertation*: *Ukukhumbula kwo mphakathi noku hlanganisa umlando oxoxa indaba, owenza inhlaziyo, nesi chasiselo semidlalo ekhethiwe, eyenziwe ngababhali bomlando e-Soweto (1984–1994).*

Amagama asemqoka: Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya, Soweto theatre, Community theatre, Maurice Halbwachs, Collective memory, Memory studies, Resistance theatre.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii
ABSTRACT iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS vi
1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1
1.1 Contextualisation 1
1.2 Contributors to the definition of community theatre 3
1.3 A working definition of community theatre 9
1.4 Theoretical framework: Memory studies with a special focus on Halbwachs' contribution to the field 11
1.4.1 Developments in Memory studies 11
1.4.2 Halbwachs' contribution to memory studies 16
1.5 Kente, Manaka and Maponya as main figures of Sowetan community theatre 19
1.6 Literature survey 22
1.7 Research problem and objectives 26
1.8 Thesis statement 28
1.9 Methodology 29
1.10 Conclusion 30
2 CHAPTER 2: HALBWACHS' THEORY OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY 32
2.1 Introduction 32
2.2 Halbwachs' contribution to memory studies 33
2.3 Memories in the mind of the person remembering 36
2.4 The individual and the social framework 39
2.5 Mediating between history and memory 43

2.6 Other commentaries on separating history and memory 49
2.7 Gaps in the recollection of past events 53
2.8 Collective memory and time 59
2.8.1 Time as a form of duration 60
2.8.2 The configuration of time as *collective memory* 64
2.8.3 Collective groups and time 67
2.9 The *cadres sociaux*: the relationship between people and space 70
2.9.1 Collective memories inscribed and invoked in space 78
2.10 Conclusion 79
3 CHAPTER 3: SOWETO'S COMMUNITY THEATRE 83
3.1 Introduction 83
3.2 Sowetan community theatre 84
3.3 The Socio-political context of Soweto 1984–1994 . 95
3.3.1 Transport 95
3.3.2 Schooling 97
3.3.3 Infrastructure 99
3.3.4 Influx of immigrants 102
3.3.5 Ideological beliefs in Soweto 104
3.4 Cultural venues 108
3.4.1 Eyethu Cinema 108
3.4.2 Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) 109
3.4.3 Funda Arts Centre 112
3.4.4 Other Soweto venues used for theatre performances 121
3.4.5 Community theatre at venues outside Soweto: the Federated Union of Black Arts (FUBA) 129
3.4.6 Community theatre at venues outside Soweto: the Market Theatre 130
3.5 Conclusion 131
4 CHAPTER 4: GIBSON KENTE 135
4.1 Introduction 135

4.2 Writings on Kente: his place in South African theatre history 135

4.2.1 Writings on Kente: theatre from different perspectives 136

4.2.2 Books on Kente's oeuvre 141

4.3 Research from archival sources: texts (*Sowetan* and PACT Archive) 148

4.3.1 *Things Are Bad Mzala*, *Take It Easy Papa* and *No Peace in the Family* 148

4.3.2 *She Fears the Night* 150

4.3.3 *Bad Times* 151

4.3.4 *Sekunjalo* 152

4.3.5 *We Mame!* 155

4.3.6 *Mama's Love* 156

4.3.7 *Give a Child* 157

4.3.8 *What a Shame* 157

4.3.9 *Mgewu Ndini* and *We are the Future* 158

4.3.10 *Mfowethu – My Brother* 158

4.4 Research from archival sources: interviews 159

4.4.1 Kente's way of working 159

4.4.2 Mabutho "Kid" Sithole's memories 165

4.4.3 Kholofela Kola's memories 167

4.4.4 John Lata's memories 170

4.4.5 Dumakude Mnembe's memories 174

4.5 Kente's influence on township playwrights 179

4.6 Conclusion 182

5 CHAPTER 5: MATSEMELA MANAKA 188

5.1 Introduction 188

5.2 Writings on Matsemela Manaka: the evolution of his writing style. 188

5.3 Books on Manaka's form of theatre 193

5.4 Research from archival sources: texts (*Sowetan*, PACT and Ali Hlongwane's archive) 196

5.4.1 *Domba – The Last Dance* 198
5.4.2 *Children of Asazi* 199
5.4.3 *Toro – The African Dream* 200
5.4.4 *Koma* and *Mdala* 201
5.4.5 *Goree* 202
5.4.6 *Blues Afrika Cafe* 204
5.4.7 *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto* 205
5.4.8 *Yamina* 208
5.4.9 *Drums and Dreams* 209
5.5 Research from archival sources: interviews 210
5.5.1 Ali Khangela Hlongwane's memories 211
5.5.2 Sibongile Khumalo's memories 218
5.5.3 McCoy Mrubata's memories 219
5.5.4 Motsumi Makhene's memories 222
5.5.5 Memories of Funda Arts Centre 224
5.5.6 The role of women in community theatre 225
5.6 Manaka's influence on township playwrights 227
5.7 Conclusion 228
6 CHAPTER 6: MAISHE MAPONYA 232
6.1 Introduction 232
6.2 Writings on Maponya 232
6.3 Books on Maponya's form of theatre 239
6.4 Research from archival sources: texts (*Sowetan* and Maponya Archive) 242
6.4.1 *Dirty Work* 243
6.4.2 *The Hungry Earth*, *Gangsters* and *Jika* 245
6.4.3 *Umongikazi – The Nurse* 247
6.4.4 *Busang Meropa – Bring Back The Drum* 249
6.4.5 *Jika* 250

6.4.6 *Kuyanuka – Stink For Us All* 253
6.4.7 Directing and publishing 254
6.5 Research from archival sources: interviews 255
6.5.1 Maponya's way of working 255
6.5.2 An early play: *Peace and Forgive* 257
6.5.3 *The Hungry Earth* 259
6.5.4 *Umongikazi – The Nurse* 262
6.6 Bennette Tlouana's memories 263
6.6.1 Bahumutsi – The Comforters 263
6.6.2 Community theatre 264
6.7 Maile Maponya's memories 266
6.7.1 Music composition in Maponya's plays 266
6.7.2 The Allah Poets 267
6.8 Malcolm Purkey's memories 267
6.8.1 Involvement in the arts 267
6.8.2 Migration from Soweto to Johannesburg 269
6.9 Sibongile Nojila's memories 271
6.9.1 Maponya at Mabana Centre (Mafeking) 271
6.10 Conclusion 273
7 CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION 276
8 LIST OF REFERENCES 286

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contextualisation

Gibson Kente, who is acknowledged in academic and popular circles as the “father of township theatre”, died in 2004. Kente was born a generation earlier than Mtsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya, and all three produced many plays. However, the majority of Kente’s plays were destroyed in a fire at his Soweto home, leaving only one script from the thirty-five he had written. In contrast, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya published their plays and most are preserved in print. There is no common, overarching narrative linking these three playwrights to their Soweto roots. Although they were not all born in Soweto, all three of them did live and work there (during the period 1984–1994). They were committed to uplifting the community through their plays. Thus, it is important to take into consideration the practical issue of preservation of materials, such as their plays, posters and theatre manifestos, where applicable. All three playwrights wanted to establish a literary tradition of written plays. Kente explained to Schauffer (2006) that all his plays were written (as opposed to workshopped, improvised or adhering to the oral tradition). There are also comprehensive collections of Manaka’s plays, namely *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto*, *Five plays by Matsemela Manaka* (Davis 1997), as well as a collection of Maponya plays in *Doing plays for a change* (Maponya 1995).

A history of Sowetan theatre with a focus on these three playwrights has not yet been written. The first broad focal area of this study provides an historical survey of the community theatre produced in Soweto in the period 1984–1994. Evidently, community theatre was produced within a particular socio-political context, therefore it is also important to consider the whole socio-political context of Soweto (as a microcosm of SA) during this period. The theatre produced at this time interacted with this context by addressing contemporary themes and topical issues. Furthermore, the means to produce the plays, the ways in which the actors were involved in the theatre groups, and the staging of performances were affected by the period’s socio-political instability. The second focal area expounds the above approach from the perspective of the people

interviewed in this study. Most interviewees provided a first-hand account, analysis and interpretation of these community theatre plays. This cohort consisted of actors and colleagues who had collaborated with the three playwrights over many years. In total, fourteen in-depth interviews were conducted: personal accounts of Sowetan theatre that have not been recorded before. Maishe Maponya, the only one of the three playwrights still living when the study was conducted, was also interviewed (subsequently Maponya passed away on 29 July 2021).

It was important to get information from these sources, as in the absence of an archive preserving the history of Sowetan community theatre, their memories were important in informing the writing of the historical narrative. The interviews offered insights into how the playwrights worked and also described the manner in which the socio-political situation contextualised the various plays. This information assisted in the writing of the historical narrative and the interpretation of the plays. Thus, *collective memory*[1] is constructed out of the interaction between the written (documented) and the narrated (interviewees) recollections.

Halbwachs (1992) proposes separating memory from history. Memory is embedded within an individual, whose recollections of past events function not in isolation but within social formations. On the other hand, history is a record of events that are no longer part of the memories of the existing cohort of persons who have lived through the past. Their history is, however, not lost as it is captured in written texts. Separating history from memory provides a "reconstruction" or a narration of the past. This is because memory is not a static entity to be retrieved when a person is recollecting past events; rather, it is a reconstruction that considers prevailing social circumstances. Halbwachs' focus on the individual as an important source of memory is of relevance to this study. Adopting this theoretical approach has opened up a source of information that has not been fully incorporated into the writing of Sowetan community theatre before. The information from the interviewees contributes significantly to the writing of a narrative on

[1] In the thesis I italicise *collective memory* when using the term to identify and discuss aspects of Halbwachs' theoretical concept. I also write of collective memory (not italicised) when referring to collective recollections in a general sense, for example, the collective memory of a community or group.

this theatre. Furthermore, recollections of the past are partial and therefore a narrative of the past invariably includes gaps.

South African and internationally-based scholars have written extensively about the three playwrights. Significantly, Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984 & 1997) include Kente, Manaka and Maponya in their survey of South African theatre. These writers classify various theatrical traditions that have developed in South Africa, one of them being "black theatre". Other authors, among them Coplan (1985), Kerr (1995), Kruger (1999 and 2020), Kavanagh (1981 & 1985), Solberg (1999 & 2003) and Middeke, Schnierer and Homann (2015), also discuss the importance of Kente, Manaka and Maponya in the development of South African theatre. Furthermore, Solberg's *Bra Gib. Father of South Africa's township theatre* (2011) and Kavanagh's *A contended space. The theatre of Gibson Mtutuzuli Kente* (2016b) provide a more rounded portrait of Kente, as well as some commentary on his plays.

1.2 Contributors to the definition of community theatre

The focus of this thesis is on the period 1984 – 1994 in Soweto (South Africa) and on the contribution made by Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya during this period. Although there were other cultural activities taking place during this period, their work can mainly be described as examples of community theatre.

In their discussions on Soweto playwrights, a number of academics mention characteristics that define community theatre. Hauptfleisch and Steadman identified selected theatrical aspects to differentiate between various forms of theatre in South Africa. The authors (1983: 140) note that "Black theatre ranges from escapist fantasies in song and dance form to committed radical expressions of social protest, from ritualistic expressionism to social realism." They posit that Black theatre also accommodates influences from European and American theatre forms along with African traditions. Writing of developments in the 1980s, they add that Black theatre was also aligned to Black Consciousness ideology, not to refer to the pigmentation of playwrights but to their beliefs. For example, Maishe Maponya created theatre to "instil a consciousness in its

audience of what it means to be Black" as an antidote to the dominance of "White-orientated culture." (1983: 140).

Later Hauptfleisch elaborated on this definition and writes of community theatre that is developed primarily to serve a political imperative. He writes that workers' theatre "evolved from the broader socio-political and socio-economic issues," whereby, during a performance, a play may involve members of the audience in (protest) action (1997: 42). He notes that these community plays were influenced by the theatre of Augusto Boal and Paolo Frere. Besides advocating that theatre should use the actor's body expressively in communicating the character and the story, Boal also saw theatre as a political force in which ordinary people can collectively devise practical actions to change their social and political conditions in their communities . In the *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (2005:152) Paulo Freire wrote of a "cultural invasion" by a dominant class on "the oppressed" or the working class. He wrote that when their culture has been eroded, the oppressed inadvertently adopt "the values, the standards and the goals of the invaders" (2005: 153). It is for these reasons that education should be a process to conscientise the oppressed.

In 1988, while not directly offering a definition of community theatre, Ian Steadman described aspects of Matsemela Manaka's plays. Steadman's (1988: 116-117) contextualises Manaka's plays as belonging to the Black Theatre movement on the Witwatersrand. He notes that Manaka's plays in the late 1970s and early 1980s focussed on the theme of dispossession (explicitly of migrant workers working in the mines in the Transvaal). He also notes that Manaka created his plays in a workshop environment which took the form of improvisations, "acting exercises, and discussions with his actors." The written play included the contributions of the actors and was a concise text that had been sifted after a long process of developing a play. Manaka did video recordings of his plays in various stages of their development. As an example, *Pula* was developed over a period of five years. According to Steadman, in plays that were produced at Soyikwa Theatre Group (later called the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre), Manaka assumed the role of a scribe capturing the play's development during the rehearsal process and that actors were not merely required to interpret their roles, but to participate in the creative process. As a collective, they were committed to Black Consciousness ideology which was not expressed didactically, but by exploring themes of black unity in his plays.

These attributes, as identified by Steadman, have been accepted and have influenced subsequent analysis and interpretation of Manaka's plays.

Manaka also acknowledged the influence of Jerzy Grotowski on his plays (as did Gibson Kente). In *Towards a poor theatre* (1981) Grotowski outlined a detailed theatre methodology. For the purposes of this thesis, I may point out that he emphasised that the actor was the main conduit for communicating with the audience. He prioritised the link between the actor's spontaneous physical movements which function in concert with the actors' mental acuity and ability to express emotions when performing on stage. For Grotowski, training actors was not a matter of inculcating specific skills but stripping away the actor's preconceptions when s/he is creating a character on stage. He proposed that an actor should make "a total gift of himself. This is a technique of the 'trance' and the integration of the actor's psychic and bodily powers" (1981: 16). He argued that theatre can have an impact on an audience, without resorting to light and sound effects, as well as eschewing "make-up, fake noses, pillow stuffed bellies – everything the actor puts on in a dressing room before a performance" (1981:19-20). Speaking about his acting method, he encouraged actors to mingle with and encourage audience participation during a performance.

Both Kente and Manaka selected elements from Grotowski that suited their plays. Kente always encouraged his actors to inhabit their characters fully and to capitalise on the audiences' response during a performance. At times this meant using outlandish costumes and props that pointed to the fictionality of his plays (which is different from Grotowski's beliefs). Manaka's plays (particularly of the late 1980s/1990s) also employed props and costumes and did not solely rely on the actor to communicate with an audience.

On the other hand, Manaka (and Maponya) embraced several of Grotowski's ideas on theatre. The theorist posited that actors should "play among the spectators," to enhance the audience's affinity with the characters presented onstage (1981:20). This was part of Grotowski's ethos of poor theatre, that appealed to Manaka especially during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Here the actor is required to:

> to transform from type to type, character to character, silhouette to silhouette – while the audience … [is watching] – in a poor manner, only using his own body and craft. The composition of a facial

> expression by using the actor's own muscles and inner impulses achieves the effect of a strikingly theatrical transubstantiation, while the mask prepared by a make-up artist is only a trick (1981:21).

For Grotowski, the highest form of artistic expression came from "poor theatre," which refers to theatre that is "stripped of all that is not essential" (1981: 21).

Kerr also writes broadly on the developments on community theatre under apartheid. From his discussion, I isolate some themes that refer to the characteristic of community theatre. Kerr's begins by presenting his observations on what he calls African popular theatre. I have condensed Kerr's detailed discussion in an attempt to draw the salient elements, which distinguish African popular theatre. He writes that the main attributes for African popular theatre (especially in the 1950s) was that playwrights adopted jazz music, a vaudevillian performance style and focussed on themes that addressed township social concerns. He (1995: 217) cites the influence of the musical *King Kong*, especially when discussing Kente's work. Kerr writes that African playwrights combined elements of indigenous culture (for example, dance forms and language) with Christian church hymns, as well as the English language in plays. In writing about Kente's plays, he mentions *Sikalo* (1965), which he says incorporated stock township characters, in this instance, a shebeen queen, tsotsis, a policeman, a "Zulu boy" and Zion church members. Following Kavanagh, Kerr observes that African popular theatre displayed a preference for "ensemble and solo singing and acting of precision and unflagging energy."

He writes of Gibson Kente's plays as projecting "the warmth and solidarity of community spirit" and that the socio-political messages of the plays became progressively streamlined to contain "clear political overtones" especially in the early 1970s. He refers to Kente's play *How Long* (1974) as an example of a political mode in adopted popular theatre. On the other hand, the play entertained audiences by incorporating elements of melodrama and burlesque. Kerr (1995:221) also notes that African popular theatre tended to emphasise acting ability (at the expense of character development), where the techniques of gesture and mime, were employed in conjunction with "songs, dance and ensemble movement." An example analysed here is *Too Late* (1975).

Kerr elaborates the view (as stated by Steadman above) that community theatre or Popular Theatre, was aligned to Black Consciousness ideology. He notes that Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* (1979) and *Umongikazi* (1983) incorporated "dramatized

poetry readings" which were sometimes accompanied by music" (1995:225-228). The dialogue of the plays presented parables, metaphors and allusions as a way of "expressing sentiments that were hard to identify as subversive" by the authorities under apartheid. *Umongikazi* in particular "used techniques of multiple roleplay, caricature, flashbacks and revolutionary songs to show the radicalization of a young nurse Nyamezo."

Kerr (1995: 232-233) describes Manaka as a "very eclectic drama creator." Manaka incorporated "South African traditions such as Xhosa story-telling, West African theatre and 'Poor Theatre' techniques." He says Manaka was influenced by Wole Soyika's manner of conjuring the stage as analogue to the spiritual and material worlds. Additionally, Manaka's plays emphasised "using the actor's creative bodily and vocal resources" as exemplified by the actors in *eGoli* (1978) who were required to depict the deleterious effects of apartheid on the working class.

In 1997, Hauptfleisch (1997: 49) refined his classifications of the different forms of South African theatre. Sowetan community theatre may fall within his classification of "Indigenous, hybrid." The attributes are:

> Performances using formal and thematic elements from all the foregoing traditional and imported forms, e.g. 'township musicals' and improvised cross-cultural performances.

Hauptfleisch (1997:62) refers to township musicals as melodramatic, whereby "performers combine township music, dance routines and narrative techniques with a stab at Brechtian alienation techniques."

In his definition of community theatre Robert Kavanagh proclaimed it as "amateur," mainly to differentiate it from mainstream theatre, in which there is a profit imperative. Kavanagh used the term "people's theatre", and said that it is practised in "schools, colleges [and] universities" (1997:3). For Kavanagh, this form of theatre is created by and for "the working class." The people involved may be an arts group or a civic organisation who organise a play to combat social problems in a rural or urban area. The actors may not have been formally trained and they would typically perform in community halls, without a raised stage, theatre lighting, stage set nor professionally made costumes.

By the late 1990s, community theatre in the townships had lost its core audience due to the changing lifestyle of Soweto residents. Also, theatre practitioners migrated to Johannesburg because new opportunities became available in the city centre. These developments altered the nature of the community plays produced by Soweto-based playwrights. Some playwrights also left the township to live in Johannesburg suburbs. In a number of instances, township-based theatre groups would perform for audiences in theatres in the city centre, with the most prominent being the Market Theatre and the Windybrow Theatre.

One new development was that government departments and parastatals occasionally commissioned community theatre groups to communicate various projects. Kruger (1999) provides an informative discussion on the various permutations of community theatre that arose in the 1990s. She describes the community plays as consisting of themes based on "topical" political or worker-based issues. She adds that, typically, the participants in community theatre groups had a number of (arts) skills, and used portable stage sets and props as they were hired to perform at various events. In addition, township communities formed groups based on their interests, for example, as youth, as gender groups or forming groups to highlight the dangers of HIV/Aids. Kruger (1999: 204) calls these types of plays "pedagogical theatre" or "theatre for development" because the plays involved "the use of theatre techniques (presenting a script to the audience) to communicate the developmental policy of national or international agencies or to implement technical solutions to immediate problems (such as the use of condoms by people at risk of Aids)."

Additionally, while discussing black playwrights, Kruger (2020) sometimes gives a brief indication of the characteristics of their plays and her observations are aligned to the attributes identified by Hauptfleisch, Steadman and Kerr. For example, she endorses the view that melodrama was the prevailing format of Kente's plays and adds that in his plays Kente combined the "usual mix of sentimental dialogue alongside comic gags and group mime, in which performer's bodily and facial mimicry of say, panicked response to a pass raid, makes a more vivid impression on the audience than verbal comment lost in the noise" (202: 118-119). Writing on Maponya's *The Hungry Earth*, she identifies a number of characteristics. Namely, that the dialogue of the mineworkers is rendered in an

"abstract, often choral speech" which was enlivened by dramatic action on stage. In discussing Manaka's *eGoli*, Kruger endorses the view that the play effectively dramatised the sub-standard working conditions facing black miners during apartheid. It is evident that the sparse stage set as well as Manaka's reliance on the performances of the actors, are key characteristics which made the play successful with audiences and theatre critics (2020: 133).

Other relevant aspects to consider when defining and describing community theatre include, as Homann and Maufort (2015:14) state, the notion that the "physical space that holds the performance is an important part of the significance of the work itself." Morris Gay (2015:26) also sees community theatre as a "mixture of story, song, dance, masquerade or mask, heightened use of the spoken word and energetic use of the physical body in performance." However, he points out that there were limited venues available to community theatre practitioners in the 1990s. Balancing out the limitations results in arts groups tending to have a sense of heightened camaraderie. Gay observes that in community theatre there is a collective use of resources where the power of the group is "in forming, leading, following, teaching, learning and directing" each other (2015: 46).

Meanwhile in the Methuen guide to contemporary South African Theatre, Middke, Schnieder, and Homann (2015), outline general principles of community theatre as encompassing multilingualism, the physicality of actors on stage as well as plays that include music, song and story-telling elements. Emma Durden (2015: 93-108) also endorses the view that "township theatre" included elements of melodrama, and that theatre also presented an imperative to rally the community to resist oppression.

1.3 A working definition of community theatre

Aggregating the contributions by academics as well as my own experiences of seeing community theatre, it is apparent that there are a number of elements which may be applied across the plays of Kente, Manaka and Maponya. It is also necessary to add a caveat and say that each playwright created a recognisable individual theatre style which showcased the strength of their plays.

The first common element is that the role of the director is central in community theatre, as that person writes, directs and produces the play, recruits the actors and is responsible for training, costumes, set design, configuring the technical requirements and providing the overall artistic vision.

The second common element is that the plays placed great emphasis on the body of the actor as the main conduit for communicating the themes and messages of the play. All three playwrights discussed in this thesis capitalised on the relationship between the actor and the spectators. The performative style was a way of involving the audiences in performance, or soliciting audience participation, which can be either vocal or internalised as empathy with the characters represented on stage. Kente's plays invited audience participation through music, dialogue and dancing; in some of Manaka and Maponya's plays the actors traversed the auditorium to involve the audience in the play.

The third common element was that community theatre plays invariably addressed themes looking at social justice or dramatised political themes in a direct manner. Each of the playwrights studied in this thesis adopted different methods and style. Kente chose a more politically inclusive humanist approach, while Manaka and Maponya were committed to Black Consciousness ideology.

The fourth common element is that community theatre plays were (initially) performed in venues that had basic physical and technical facilities. In most instances, the directors devised their own ways of controlling stage lights and coached their actors to project their voice when there was no amplification.

Finally, I would like to propose the following working definition of community theatre:

Community theatre is the presentation of a narrative by actors on stage. These plays often include elements of drama, comedy, poetry, music, mime and dance. The plays are typically, at least initially, presented in venues with minimal stage lighting technology, an absence of voice amplification for the actors and no terraced seating. These circumstances demand a performative style of acting evident in exaggerated body movements and voice projection to convey the dramatic intent of the characters. The costumes and props used onstage are ordinary, domestic and found objects which are

employed to convey realism as favoured in community theatre. The director often takes on multiple responsibilities, for example, training the actors, writing the script, music composition, choreography as well as designing the stage sets. Community theatre plays are self-financed, and the playwright/director is also the producer of these plays and therefore responsible for booking venues, organising transportation for the actors and scheduling performances.

During the period 1984-1994, each playwright under discussion displayed their own idiosyncratic style. Kente employed mobile, painted scenic backdrops depicting various township scenes, wheeled home furniture as a stage set and a live electric band. Manaka wove into the drama poetic language, African drumming, fine art and African culinary practices. Maponya preferred a sparse stage set and initially rejected stylised lighting and other theatrical accoutrements.

1.4 Theoretical framework: Memory studies with a special focus on Halbwachs' contribution to the field

The absence of an overarching written record of Sowetan community theatre provides both challenges and opportunities for anyone wanting to record its history. Reasons for this omission include the fact that there is an absence of a general Sowetan (community) theatre archive and that the playwrights themselves did not always keep comprehensive records of their own work. Thus, an intervention is needed to address this gap in the information on Sowetan community theatre. Memory studies provides a method to recover information on plays that were performed in Soweto and on significant playwrights and their methods of creating plays, and to contextualise their plays within prevailing socio-political conditions.

1.4.1 Developments in Memory studies

Philosophical approaches to memory have a long history that is captured comprehensively in a number of sources, one of them being Rossington and Whitehead's (2007) book, *Theories of Memory. A reader*. Here the authors outline the majorcontributions to the field of memory studies, beginning with the classical era and

ending with the twentieth century. Rossington (2007a: 134) suggests that prior to the twentieth century, "the ethical function within the polity" of memory studies preoccupied philosophers. In early written recordings, memory was venerated in the art of rhetoric. Greek and Roman scholars held "that 'memory' is an active process which is defined by the two activities of collection and recollection, the storing and retrieval" of material (Richards 2007: 20–21). Another point these scholars shared was that collection and recollection "constitute the basis of knowing and understanding" aspects of the world in which they lived. In practical terms this involved "using memory as a mode of learning in terms of the memorization of traditional texts" (Ricoeur 2006: 6 & 15). Relevant to this study is Aristotle's belief that memory has "presence in the mind" and that memories are "recollected", thus implying the writing of a narrative.

In both the Middle Ages (5th–15th centuries) and the Renaissance (c 14th–17th centuries) there was an emphasis on "memory training" in education curricula (Richards 2007: 23). During these periods, the ability to recite texts verbatim and repeat complex formulations was seen as an important skill, as was the development of visual symbols to aid memory recall. Richards (Rossington & Whitehead 2007: 23) discusses the various training methods used in the past to aid memory. In this conceptualisation, memory is retained in the mind of the person recollecting.

Rossington (2007: 70) outlines developments in memory studies during the Modern Era (c 1596–1650). He notes that Locke (1632–1704) "identified the importance of memory for anchoring a sense of individual continuity over time." Locke also held that memory is retained in the mind of the person remembering. For Locke (2007: 75), the "retention" of information in the mind was for the sake of advancing knowledge. Rossington (2007b: 70) explains that Locke conceptualised memory as "'the Store-house of our ideas,'" thus emphasising that memory is a "repository" from which information or ideas may be extracted at a future time. For Locke (2007: 71), the mind retained and revived ideas "again after they have disappeared." Similarly, the mind may also recover perceptions, which together with memory provide information to the mind or consciousness (2007: 78). Locke's theory of consciousness sees memory as an inwardoperation but memory does not give a person the "capacity" to "give an accounting to himself or herself" in relation to other members of society (Ricoeur 2006: 102–103).

Hume (Rossington 2007b: 71) linked memory to the imagination. Rossington (2007b: 71–72) cites Hume (1711–1776) as having said that ideas of the memory are "more vivid representations of copied impressions than those of the imagination." Notably, the human self is not "stable and coherent" but is a result of an "illusion of there being a unity in our different perceptions over time." Rossington comments that for Hume, "memory contributes to this (illusory) sense of continuity that goes to make up our (false) idea of a unified self-hood." Hume (2007: 81) also compares history and memory and says that an historian may change the order in which past events are narrated. On the other hand (2007: 81), "the chief exercise of the memory is not to preserve the simple ideas [the relation of past events], but their order and position." Hume's formulation implies a narration of memories.

In *On the uses of and disadvantages of the history of life*, Friedrich Nietzsche (1841–1900) (2007: 102) considers the prospect of living "unhistorically… [and therefore living] in the present like a number without any awkward fraction left over." Nietzsche's engagement with memory in this particular publication occurred during the period of late modernity (19th century). Living with an awareness of history may be a burden for mankind. He notes (2007: 103): "Man [as a conscious being] on the other hand, braces himself against the great and ever greater pressure of what is past: it pushes him down or bends him sideways, it encumbers his steps as a dark, invisible burden… ." Nietzsche (1844–1900) proposes that living out of historical chronology has benefits for humankind. He notes (2007: 103): "In the case of the smallest or greatest happiness: the ability to forget, or expressed in more scholarly fashion, the capacity to feel unhistorically during this duration [accords the most happiness to a person]." Living "unhistorically" makes it possible to forget the past. Even though forgetting the past may bring joy, remembering past events is nevertheless important because recollections produce "a dialectical tension between memory and forgetting" (Rossington & Whitehead 2007: 93). Forgetting is perhaps inevitable, when memories are recalled.

In the twentieth century, the cultural aspects of collective memory were emphasised by the theorists mentioned below. Regarding this period, Ricoeur (2006: 93) summarises theoretical positions on memory as centred on a duality between "the memory of the protagonists of an action taken one by one or that of the collectivities taken

as a body." There is widespread application of collective memory as a theory, as Garde-Hansen (2011: 17) points out: "all the key thinkers from the arts, humanities and social sciences of the twentieth century" have written on memory. She points out that the seminal texts on collective memory are those of Maurice Halbwachs' *The collective memory* (1980) and *On collective memory* (1992), Henri Bergson's *Matter and memory* (2004), Paul Ricoeur's *Memory, history and forgetting* (2006), Pierre Nora's *Les lieux* dememoire (1989) or *Realms of memory: Rethinking the French past*, *Vol. 1 – Conflicts and divisions* (1996) and Jacques Le Goff's *History and memory* (1992). *The Routledge international handbook of memory studies* (Tota & Hagen 2016) is another important source.

One aspect of memory involves its conceptualisation as a cognitive or psychological process of the mind. In *Matter and Memory* (2004), Bergson (1859–1941) (Rossington & Whitehead 2007: 93) explains the operation of memory as "sensori-motor mechanisms" that arise out of memories located in the brain. Thus, memories of performing tasks are automatically retrieved when one is required to perform a task one has performed before. Therefore, memories of past occurrences (actions) are spontaneously retrieved when a person recalls information.

Another development is apparent in Freud's (1856–1939) formulation of *A note upon the 'Mystic writing-pad'* (1925). He conceptualises memory as a function of the subconscious. There are two layers of memories, one in the conscious mind and another on a deeper level in the subconscious. The lower level of the metaphoric "writing-pad" houses "permanent traces" (Freud 2007: 115) and this is the "perceptual apparatus of the mind" (2007: 116) that incorporate the conscious and subconscious levels of the mind when recollecting the past. In this theory, the concept of retrieving information that is remembered by a person is paramount.

John Sutton (2016), writing under the title of "Memory, distributed cognition and social science" in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* usefully sets out a paradigm for memory studies that considers a "totality of conditions." This assisted in this study's endeavour to analyse the recollections of Soweto-based community theatre by taking into account philosophical and social science paradigms. Memory is the result of the interaction between a person and the world in which she/he lives. A recollection arises

out of an interaction of "personal memory in an intricate interpersonal and cultural world." This idea links cognitive psychology studies, which consider the "individual mind," with the operation of social processes. For Sutton, this idea means seeing "memories as not fixed mental images or discrete items of any kind, permanently stored in the individual mind or brain, [but that] the relatively unstable individual memory may need support from more stable external scaffolding or props." Sutton sees public scaffolding as consisting "of various forms, in the physical, symbolic, and social environment, [so that these] can shape the specific form and content of individual memory."

In his book *Memory, history and forgetting* (2006), Ricoeur surveys past periods in the development of memory studies. He observes that the absence of memories or of reminders of the past is as important as the memories available to a person. Ricoeur (2006: 143) also posits that forgetting may be experienced not only as an "attack, a weakness, a lacuna" on the reliability of memory, but may also open a discussion in which memory and forgetting are in balance. An advantage of forgetting is that it prompts the person remembering to revisit the past and perhaps to remember afresh with deeper "levels of depth" (2006: 414). Ricoeur (2006: 417) also writes about "the pleasure of recalling what I once saw, heard, felt, learned [and] acquired" as also mitigating the forgetting of past events as forgetting, at times, is "reversible."

In writing about another form of absence, Pierre Nora (1989) suggested a debate between metaphorical and material "sites of memory," in which an "historical continuity persists" in the recollection of past events. Another contribution to *collective memory* is made by Jan Assmann (2011). In a discussion of the conceptualisation of collective memory in the form of space, Assmann suggests that collective memory may be invested in monuments, as an aspect of what he called cultural memory. On the other hand, memorial places may be conceptualised as places of memory, which emphasises the difference between the time in which an event occurred and its recollection as a memory in commemorative spaces. These conceptualisations as space help to navigate the various formulations of memory and space. Also, of interest is Pierre Boudeau's (Rossington 2007a: 134) conceptualisation of "habitus" or "systems of depositions." He observed that embodied memories see the individual as "inseparable from the 'collective.'"

On the basis of Halbwachs' insights on memory studies, some contemporary writers, including Klein (Rossington & Whitehead 2007: 9–10) posit that collective memory conflates what should be different functions between "the individual psychologies" of those remembering and the "attendant cultural artefacts." Klein identifies the latter as "archives, public monuments and museums" that are created in a society. Another critique is provided by Kansteiner (2002), who argues that collective memory studies fail to outline what is "the precise relation between the individual and the collective."

In conclusion, collective memory has enjoyed much scholarly enquiry in the twentieth century and in the contemporary era. For example, in an article *The emergence of memory in historical discourse*, Klein (2000) notes that a "scholarly boom" began in the 1980s. Currently, Kansteiner (2002) sees a "memory wave in humanities", in which memory studies is applied as a principal topic of research in cultural studies, the humanities and social sciences (Kelber 2013: 266–68). Furthermore, Tota and Hagen (2016: 1) identify sociology, anthropology, philosophy, biology, medicine, physics, film studies, media studies, archival studies, literature and history as encompassing memory studies.

1.4.2 Halbwachs' contribution to memory studies

Halbwachs is my primary source for writing a narrative on Sowetan community theatre. A student of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Bergson, Halbwachs was aware of Bergson's "individualistic, psychologistic [and] subjectivist" approach to memory (Halbwachs 1980: 7). But he also drew on Durkheim's sociological approach to social relations in which there were collective (as opposed to individualistic) reciprocal interactions within society. Thus, he drew parallels between these approaches. Ricoeur (2006: 120) posits that Halbwachs provided "an external gaze" on memory, which is interaction between an individual and "the testimony of others."

Halbwachs' greatest contribution to memory studies was his proposition that memories are not situated in the brain only but are recalled by the person remembering through external means. Halbwachs (1992: 38) suggests that a person remembering is

assisted by other people who were part of the event being recollected. Thus, fellow participants give the person remembering the "means to reconstruct" a memory. In The collective memory (1980: 12), Halbwachs sets out his theory of memory, where, as Mary Douglas observes in the introduction of the translated edition of the book, there are "no individual institutions or memories" but rather "social processes in remembering." Considering the dispersed nature of memory studies, it is useful to draw together Halbwachs' concepts on "Individual and collective memory", "Historical and collective memory", "Time and collective memory" and "Space and collective memory."

Halbwachs (1980) conceptualised memory as complementary between an individual and prevailing social frameworks (or cadres sociaux). Jennifer Richards (2007: 21) notes that "recollection is a deliberate action; it is a 'search' entailing reflection on 'time' and the objects remembered through the orderly association of ideas and images." The idea that recollections take the form of images in the mind and that memory "has an associative and visual character" already implies that there is an underlying narrative in the process of remembering. Although Halbwachs did not specify these processes, they are implied in his theory. This aspect of collective memory assisted me in the writing of the narrative of Sowetan community theatre. This study considered the individual memories of interviewees. As a conglomeration of interviews, their insights contributed towards a collective memory of the past, thus ensuring a more comprehensive historical narrative.

The interaction between the individual and the social framework is informed by a number of variables, some of these involving the expression of culture through commemorative events and cultural objects (for example monuments) created in a society. Rossington (2007: 134) describes *collective memory* as involving "practices of remembrance [that] are shaped and reinforced by societies and cultures in which they occur." One of the aims of this study was to show that the socio-political context of the time influenced Sowetan community theatre. The memories of the socio-political context are captured in the Sowetan newspapers of the era. Halbwachs' recognition of the dynamic interaction between the individual memories (interviewees) and the social context (among others, the Sowetan newspapers) is therefore appropriate for this thesis. Commemorative events, for example the church services to mark the June 16 1976

uprising, and work and school stoppages sometimes curtailed theatre performances. As part of *collective memory* these events are part of the historical narrative of Sowetan theatre of the period.

Halbwachs' theory of memory studies also outlines the interaction between an individual and the person's social frameworks. He proposes that people who belong to the same social organisations, live (or have lived) in the same town or country, share a common history and, indeed, share knowledge of cultural experiences. The contribution of interviewees is important in this study in that they had first-hand knowledge of Kente, Manaka and Maponya's scriptwriting and rehearsal and training methods. The interviewees were part of the theatre groups belonging to each individual playwright. Moreover, the interviewees are part of the larger Soweto community.

Halbwachs' input is regarded as seminal in that he introduced the concept of social frameworks to memory studies and outlined these in material social formations. Halbwachs' theory is useful as it allows for an analysis that views an individual as belonging to more than one social grouping. For example, these may be church groups, the family home, the school. He also set out determinants of these social frameworks according to the times of attending church services, going to school and gathering for meals, among others. Halbwachs conducted a sociological study of social classes and this informed his theoretical formulation of collective memory. He wrote: "One may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories" (1992: 40). Thus, Halbwachs not only identified these two centres of memory (the individual and the group) but also emphasised that they have a reciprocal relationship.

Halbwachs found it necessary to distinguish between history and memory. He said that history is not part of collective memory because it resides with people who are no longer living. Yet, it is important to explore how the current generation is influenced by and how it interacts with its past. Halbwachs' assertion here about the contribution of the current generation to memory is apt for this study in that there is a lacuna in terms of the written historical narrative of Sowetan theatre. It is the insights of the interviewees (their memories) that contributed to the writing of this history.

Halbwachs also holds that *collective memory* may be organised through time so that there is “collective representation of time” (1980: 88–89). Here, Halbwachs proposed that what was important to memory was not the fact that past events had occurred in the past; nor did he emphasise the notion that subjects may remember the duration or length of time since past events occurred. Instead, his contribution was that collective memories are organised according to times at which these events occurred in people’s lives. He proposed that the times when people attended church services (as a communal collective) or gathered for meals (as a family collective) constituted *collective memory*.

Another relevant aspect of collective memory is the manner in which space can represent *collective memory*. Halbwachs (1980: 158) emphasised the importance of physical spaces, as the shared use of space also demonstrates common usage by a community of persons. It is through these collective social engagements (or events that happened within these specified frameworks) that people will have memories. As Garde-Hansen (2011: 6) writes, Halbwachs “introduced a common notion today that memory is not simply an individual phenomenon but is, in the first instance, relational in terms of family and friends, and, in the second place, societal and collective in terms of, say, religious groups and social classes.” Thus, Halbwachs’ insights on *collective memory* assisted in achieving the objectives of this study because these concepts facilitated explanations of Sowetan community theatre. Halbwachs’ concepts are best suited to a qualitative study, proving apposite to my analysis and interpretation of Sowetan theatre and the prevailing socio-political context in the period 1984–1994.

1.5 Kente, Manaka and Maponya as main figures of Sowetan community theatre

In writing the narrative of Sowetan community theatre during the period under discussion, I will first look at the plays by the three main playwrights. Gibson Kente, a generation older than Manaka and Maponya, produced 35 plays that inspired other playwrights in Soweto. His plays include *How Long* (1973), *No Peace in the Family* (1984), *We Mame!* (1987), *Sekunjalo – The Naked Hour* (1988), *Give a Child* (1989) and *Mgewu Ndini* (1990). These were performed in community halls and were enthusiastically supported by Soweto audiences. Matsemela Manaka’s best-known plays include *Children of Asazi* (1984),

Koma (1986), *Toro – The African Dream* (1987), *Goree* (1989) and *Ekhaya Museum over Soweto* (1991). Maishe Maponya's best known plays are *Umongikazi – The Nurse* (1983), *Dirty Work* (1984) and *Gangsters* (1984).

All three playwrights wrote and directed their plays and created their own acting companies, thereby influencing the cultural life of Soweto. Manaka and Maponya were proponents of the Black Consciousness ideology. Although they lived in Soweto, they adopted different means of expressing their creativity in theatre, in this way presenting different facets of Soweto through their plays. They adhered to different political orientations, yet their common goal was to foster the betterment of their community through theatre. Therefore, the socio-political context is important when writing a historical narrative of community theatre as the playwright's interactions with the community are part of the social framework from which collective memory emanates.

Several writers' perspectives also contribute to the writing of the historical narrative. In the late 1970s, *S'ketsh'* magazine was an early example of township artists denouncing Kente's plays for holding a supposedly apolitical stance. This shows that the socio-political context has been important in Sowetan theatre for a long time. Kavanagh (also an editor of *S'ketsh'*) acknowledged the popularity of Kente's plays in the township. During the 1980s and early 1990s, Elliot Makhaya and Victor Metsoamere reviewed the plays and wrote about Kente, Manaka and Maponya's activities in Soweto. They provided useful descriptions of the plays and as Sowetans, their writings also illustrate the importance of audience participation during performances. In his writings, Hauptfleisch (1997) has contextualised all the playwrights in the South African theatrical tradition. Kruger's writing on the three playwrights explores themes of the transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994. Geoffrey Davis (1997) has compiled a group of Manaka's plays and explains the playwright's ideas on theatre as a vehicle for community development. Lastly, Ian Steadman (1995) has provided commentary on Maponya's plays from a working-class perspective.

In the study, I also look at the socio-political context of this period. Social aspects, depressed social conditions, and political circumstances, as exemplified by the impact of apartheid laws on the community, are an important aspect of the narrative of Sowetan

theatre. The lack of recreational facilities, especially theatres, was the result of the prevailing laws.

I interviewed former Kente, Manaka and Maponya actors. The interviewees' responses in this study constitute a collective memory of the plays that were performed in Soweto during the period 1984–1994. Collective memory differentiates memories that reside with people who are still living from history, which is primarily captured in historical texts. All the actors reflected on their direct interaction with the playwrights. Their insights contributed to the writing of the narrative in various ways. Senior actors shared memories of the 1970s, while younger actors related memories situated in the 1980s and 1990s. However, their memories did not necessarily adhere to strict historical boundaries. They reflected on the performances of the plays and also on the socio-political context of the period. Each of the playwrights in question influenced other playwrights in Soweto. In Halbwachs' terms, the memories of the interviewees are a reconstruction, and it is an analysis of these insights that enables the writing of an historical narrative.

Halbwachs proposed that *collective memory* may be organised according to time. To this end, we can look at the performance times of Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays and investigate how this aspect might inform the writing of an historical narrative. In Soweto, there was no specified time for performances to take place, save to say that performances were mostly held on Friday and Saturday nights. Kente's plays were also performed on weekday afternoons for school children. In their recollections, interviewees also framed their memories of Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays as having occurred a "long time ago". The temporal distance, from the democratic era (the time of the interviews) to the period under review also prompted a discussion on socio-political changes in relation to Sowetan theatre.

Halbwachs also wrote of the way in which collective memories may be organised by space. Halbwachs wrote of material spaces; for example, the home, school and church premises. Kente and Manaka had a base in Soweto for rehearsals and performances, with the difference that Manaka's plays were performed at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg. Maponya's plays were also performed primarily at the Market Theatre and occasionally in Soweto.

1.6 Literature survey

The literature study consists of two main areas, namely (1) theoretical sources on memory studies and (2) information on Kente, Manaka and Maponya. Regarding the latter, I have surveyed newspaper reviews of the plays, consulted collections of these plays and other sources (books and websites) on South African plays. I have also sourced posters, programmes and correspondence of the playwrights.

Various sources provide a comprehensive survey of memory studies. Among them are *Memory: A reader* (Rossington & Whitehead 2007) *and Writing the history of memory* (Berger & Niven 2014a). Berger and Niven include extracts from primary theoretical texts on memory. In *Media and memory*, Garde-Hansen (2011) also provides a history of memory studies and outlines its applicability in various fields of study. Halbwachs' *theory of collective memory* is discussed in these sources, which helped me to contextualise Halbwachs' contribution to the field of memory studies. In the *Routledge international book of memory studies*, Tota and Hagen (2016a) engage in informative discussions on various theories of memory, and survey and provide demonstrations of theoretical applications in various fields, such as culture, psychology, social and historical studies. Most notably, Barry Schwartz (2016: 9–10) expounds on Halbwachs' conceptualisation of memory as an interaction between an individual and the society in which s/he lives – a key concept in collective memory. In addition, *Voiceprints, and footprints of memory: Essays of Werner H. Kelber* (2013) is another source that discusses Halbwachscian collective memory.

Another informative publication is Paul Ricoeur's (2006) Memory, history forgetting. He insists that forgetting is an important part of memory, thereby highlighting that memories are selected by the people and communities engaged in a recollection. Ricoeur's statements on the collective consciousness and subjectivity also amplify Halbwachs' theory, a stance followed by a number of contemporary writers who explore the role of collective memory in traumatic historical events. Some uses of this approach have been applied to the analysis of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the tribal killings in Rwanda as well as to Holocaust studies, to name a few.

Halbwachs (1992) outlines the various theoretical aspects of collective memory in *On collective memory*. Other significant conceptualisations of memory have been written by Bergson, Freud, Nora and Assmann (2011). These forms of conceptualising memory assisted in highlighting the manner in which Halbwachs' proposals could be implemented in writing the narrative of Sowetan community theatre and in interpreting Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays.

In *The haunted stage* (2003), Marvin Carlson has applied memory studies to theatre studies; memory is a theme that is explored in many plays. For example, *Memory in play* (Favorini 2008) discusses the way memory may be used as a device to structure character, plot and language in plays. He discusses plays dating from the Greek period to contemporary drama. In the book, *Memory – Theatre and postmodern drama*, Jeanette Malkin (2002: 23) briefly discusses the manner in which Halbwachs' concept of memory differs from that of Henri Bergson, who was one of Halbwachs' teachers. Malkin also analyses various plays, among them Tennessee Williams' *The glass menagerie* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a salesman* from a postmodernist perspective to investigate the "configurations of memory in theatre" (2002: 20–21).

Memory studies is also a rich field of study in which South African and international writers explore the link between memory and theatre. Graver's article *Theatre in the new South Africa* (1995: 104) investigates developments in theatre productions on the cusp of democracy. For instance, *Sophiatown*, (the play) was itself a memorial (or as he says "an object of nostalgia") of the 1950s Johannesburg suburb of the same name. Graver also points out that plays from South Africa's theatrical past (which were written during apartheid) were performed during the first years of democracy. He suggests that Athol Fugard's *Nongogo* (1959) and Can Themba's *The Suit* (1963) represent a memory of South Africa's past. Using memory studies to investigate the broad scope of South African theatre, Yvette Hutchison (2013) in her *South African performance and archives of memory* concludes that memories of the apartheid era are part and parcel of contemporary theatre in South Africa. She links memory to an archive that is both material and embodied within socio-political formations. Memory (particularly in post-apartheid South Africa), is located in socially constructed spaces, as exemplified by the formation of the TRC, which was founded in 1995, and in the "modelling and remaking of specific

memorials and museums … [as well as in] public performances-of-national ceremonies" (2013: 15). Thus, the TRC becomes an embodiment of memory but also a public performance of the apartheid era in democratic South Africa. In other words, participants in the commission narrated and demonstrated their traumatic experiences in public proceedings. The archive is evident in the "plethora of engagement with apartheid ranging from historical events, commemorations to iconic figures" (2013: 15). Hutchison also notes that engagement with memory has been evident in post-apartheid plays that explore the history of apartheid through living political figures as "dramatizing [of] specific historical events" (2013: 184), as exemplified by a play on the Rivonia trial. Memory is also embodied in the recreation of apartheid-era theatrical "classics." Thus, theatre (2013: 200) "embodies repositories" as do "popular songs and dances, stories." The "citation of specific memories and histories" helps to create "a sense of a shared community" through theatre. Hutchison (2013: 2) adds that:

> performance has been central to these processes of negotiating memory in a number of ways: in so far as public events have been used to foreground particular memories and histories, in the way in which theatrical productions have supported or challenged these performances of memory and in the way a performance lens can further nuance particular formulations of memory.

She adds that "Time and space, history and geography are significant" aspects of memory, as "often events [of the past] are both narrated and embodied physically in a specific form and context."

Other writers have also shown an interest in exploring a link between memory studies and performance in South Africa. Coplan (2000) proposes that songs sung (in the mines) by Basotho migrants reflect societal cultural shifts and should be seen as the encoding of history in performance. Jennifer Delisle (2006) analyses Gcina Mhlophe's *Have you seen Zandile* and how memories (or a character's "nostalgia" for her childhood) may be read as "a community-based memory which articulates diverse, individual experiences." The memories then become a "multiplicity in the history of an inclusive and heterogenous [South African] society." Nadia Davids' (2007) thesis, *Inherited memories: Performing the archive*, explores the way in which the personal memories of members of the community in District Six can be understood to cohere into collective memory. These memories may also be conceptualised as both a material and a metaphorical archive that

can be made accessible through the District Six Museum and explored through Mark Fleishman's play, *Onnest'bo*. Memory, differentiated from history or as a part of an historical archive, is a subject that South African historians have been concerned with in both literary studies and cultural studies in post-apartheid South Africa.[2]

It was necessary to survey readings on Sowetan community-based theatre, a rich field of study. Some of these publications include Hauptfleisch's (1997) documentation of the history of South African theatre. *Theatre and society in South Africa. Reflections in a mirror* is a comprehensive study of South African theatre and also provides key methodologies for writing, analysing and interpreting theatre history. Together with Ian Steadman in *South African theatre. Four plays and an introduction* (1990a), Hauptfleisch also proposed methods to classify various forms of South African theatre. Subsequently, Homann and Maufort (2015) have pointed out that there are multiple theatre traditions in South Africa and definitions of theatre must take this into account. Indeed, Hutchison (1996), in the article *"Access to rather than ownership of": South African theatre history and theory at a crossroad*, points out that "the definition of 'theatre' has determined the kinds of histories that have been written." This study does not explore various permutations (or traditions) that have developed in South Africa but does aim to provide an open-ended description of Soweto-based community theatre. The term "township theatre" has been applied in the literature to theatre produced by black people in South Africa. In addition, Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya form the core of playwrights (belonging to the category of township theatre) who have been investigated.

Anne Fuchs, in an issue of *Cross/Cultures* 38 (Fuchs 1999: 127–131), titled "South African theatre as/and intervention" has written on the impact of apartheid, Black Consciousness, race and gender on South African theatre. "*A rain falls but the dirt it tough": Scholarship on African theatre in South Africa* (Peterson: 1995) explores the way in which ideology has influenced not only the making of South African theatre, but also the "reception of performance, including criticism." These themes are relevant to this

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[2] *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa*, edited by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (1998) and the Archive & public culture, a research initiative ("Archive & Public Culture Research Initiative" 2021) based at the University of Cape Town are only two examples that illustrate this rich area of study.

study. Loren Kruger (2005) and (2020) has contributed significantly to scholarship on South African theatre through various articles and books. The book *The drama of South Africa. Plays, pageants and publics since 1910* provides a socio-political and ideological context for the period in which Kente, Manaka and Maponya's work evolved. Kruger also writes a history of South African theatre in which she critiques cultural and artistic movements using postmodernist theories (among others). Lastly, Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays are discussed in surveys of South African theatre, with *The Methuen guide to contemporary South African theatre* (Middeke et al. 2015) including substantial contributions on their work.

Of the thirty-five plays, only one Gibson Kente script is published in *South African people's plays. Ons phola hi* (Kavanagh 1981a). The script of the play is titled *Too Late*. To make up for the lacuna, I have also read contemporary reviews of Kente's plays in The complete *S'ketsh'*. South Africa's magazine for theatre and entertainment (Kavanagh 2016a). This compilation covers the period 1972–1979. Furthermore, I have read contributions by journalists Elliot Makhaya and Victor Metsoamere who wrote about Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays in the Sowetan newspaper between 1984–1994. Finally, *Woza Afrika! An anthology of South African plays* (Ndlovu 1986) also contains Manaka and Maponya's plays.

1.7 Research problem and objectives

As represented by the recollections of interviewees and written sources, the collective memory of Sowetan community theatre revealed robust information on the playwrights and plays that were produced in Soweto during the period 1984–1994. This information underlined the fact that written texts from the past are inadequate as sole records of the past.

Halbwachs' concept allows one to emphasise the memories of contemporaries of Kente, Manaka and Maponya. Their recollections add value to existing written sources. This underlines the importance of theories of collective memory that advocate the separation of history from memory. History is contained in written texts and memory resides with people; the contribution of interviewees is thus invaluable to this study. A

further consideration is that collective memory is a reconstruction of the past (in this case through the memories of the interviewees) informed by (present) socio-cultural circumstances. This refers to the manner in which the interviewees have engaged – and continue to engage – with specific places in Soweto and have experiences that occurred over a number of years. Therefore, as Halbwachs suggests, collective memory takes place best as cadres sociaux. This includes the importance of time and space (geographical and metaphorical); these assisted in the writing of a narrative of Sowetan community theatre in the period under discussion.

Thus, the context outlined gave rise to the following research questions:

How can Halbwachs' theory of collective memory help a researcher to present a narrative of Sowetan theatre (during the period 1984–1994) by focusing on the contributions made by Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya?

How did the socio-political context between 1984–1994 influence Sowetan community theatre?

How does Halbwachs' theory of collective and historical memory contribute to an analysis and interpretation of Sowetan plays produced during the period 1984–1994?

How does Halbwachs' formulation of time and space assist in contextualising memories of Sowetan theatre during the period 1984–1994?

The aims of the study were as follows:

To demonstrate how Halbwachs' theory of collective memory can be used to present a narrative of Sowetan theatre (during the period 1984–1994) by focusing on the contributions made by Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya.

To show how the socio-political context between 1984–1994 influenced Sowetan community theatre.

To show how Halbwachs' theory of collective and historical memory contributes to an analysis and interpretation of Sowetan plays produced during the period 1984–1994.

To use Halbwachs' formulation of time and space to contextualise the memories of Sowetan theatre during the period 1984–1994.

1.8 Thesis statement

This study argues that the process of writing an historical narrative of Sowetan community theatre (during the period 1984–1994) requires a multi-pronged approach. A comprehensive narrative of Sowetan community theatre (1984–1994), with a focus on Kente, Manaka and Maponya has not been produced up to this date. The reason for this is that there are a number of gaps in the information available to researchers. This study aims to fill some of these gaps by applying concepts from memory studies, in particular Halbwachs' contribution of the processes of collective memory.

The study uses the work of three playwrights to anchor a discussion of the development and impact of Sowetan community theatre. The study proposes that looking at the plays produced in the period 1984–1994 brings coherence to the narrative of Sowetan community theatre. There are limitations to the availability of primary sources, in particular Gibson Kente's plays. Thus, a reliance on the memory of interviewees is crucial even if their recollections have gaps and are subjective. On the other hand, the plays of Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya are well documented, but not adequately represented in current research as main protagonists in the history of Sowetan community theatre in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, the memories of the interviewees provide a way of expanding on existing historical narratives and offering new perspectives on the work of these playwrights and the interpretation of their plays.

Conceptualising collective memory as a social interaction requires a study of (geographical) space in which events of the past occurred. Firstly, the study considers memories of past events from the perspective of Soweto as a macrocosm, and the way during the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, the memories of interviewees also indicate these "places of memory," which may be constructed both metaphorically and as real places. The written texts (sources) selected by the researcher are juxtaposed or correlated with the recollections of the interviewees. In collective memory, there may be a danger of looking at memories as a homogeneous account of the past, at the expense of

interrogating the differences in which these instances are part of the historical narrative of Sowetan theatre. Secondly, the study considers the memories associated with the venues (as a microcosm) in which Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays were performed at distinct places in Soweto and Johannesburg. Some of the sources mentioned above (i.e. the *Sowetan*, Kavanagh, Kruger and Solberg) have mentioned the places in which the plays were performed.

Time is also a factor when considering collective memory, since the interviewees recollect or remember in the present events that happened many years ago. Firstly, the study considers the period of 1984–1994 as a microcosm for this study, and secondly the study considers the recollections of events of that period from the vantage point of the present. Also, part of the historical narrative is a consideration of the socio-political era characterised by the Nationalist Party's ideology of apartheid (the past, the period of 1984–1994), versus cultural and socio-political developments in the new democratic dispensation (the present, at the time of writing the narrative). Furthermore, collective memory may arise out of recollections of events that are constructed according to the time in which they occurred in the past. Again, the interaction of an individual recollection may support or contradict the recollections of members within a social group.

1.9 Methodology

The theoretical framework used in this study, is the Theory of Collective Memory. This theory outlines four areas that are useful to this study: that collective memories are reconstructed, that separating the concepts of history and memory is useful in the writing of an historical narrative and that collective memories may be represented according to his concept collective *time* and collective *space*. Halbwachs' theory of memory outlines the interaction between an individual's memory and social frameworks and the way it takes various forms. This was valuable on overcoming some of the limitations that have hitherto prevented the writing of a more comprehensive historical narrative of Sowetan community theatre.

The study combines current research (written sources) with interviews with Kente, Manaka and Maponya's contemporaries and colleagues with the aim of producing an

historical narrative of Sowetan community theatre during the period 1984–1994. Since there is limited and fragmented written information available on Sowetan community theatre, the collective memories of the interviewees assisted greatly in the writing of such a narrative.

The study employs a qualitative research methodology. The information for the study was collected by analysing mainly the Sowetan newspapers published during the period 1984–1994. Information on the socio-political situation, information on Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays (and other Sowetan playwrights) was extracted from this newspaper. Other textual sources used were the scripts of plays, posters, theatre programmes and critical studies on these playwrights.

The second method of collecting information was through interviews with actors and colleagues associated with the playwrights. A list of questions was prepared, which allowed for the gathering of information by asking open-ended questions. The interviewees were recorded and the recordings transcribed so that the content could be analysed and interpreted in order to write a narrative of Sowetan community theatre. Thus, a discursive theoretical method (Collective Memory) was used to collect data.

A qualitative methodology is appropriate to this type of study. Kumar (2011: 394) notes that a qualitative research approach is flexible, descriptive and explanatory in the way that it promotes an in-depth understanding of a topic by means of a small sample. A qualitative analysis makes it possible to interpret observations. Thus, evidence is gathered by interweaving the written texts and the insights provided by the interviewees. It is through these methods that the research questions are addressed.

1.10 Conclusion

In Chapter Two, I discuss in more detail the theoretical elements of *collective memory*, namely the separation of history and memory, that memory is a reconstruction of the past and that the elements of time and space also contribute to the writing of a narrative of the past. In Chapter Three, I discuss Sowetan community theatre in the context of socio-political developments. Chapters Four, Five and Six apply the theory discussed in Chapter Two to investigate the interaction between personal and social memories,

thereby answering the research questions. These questions probe the manner in which Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays present a view of the prevailing socio-political conditions in Soweto through their incorporation of themes relevant to the community. The social context has influenced memories on community theatre; the various aspects of social context are part of the theory on which collective memory is premised and therefore inform the writing of this historical narrative of Sowetan community theatre. Chapter Seven concludes the study with a discussion the salient findings of the preceding chapters and concludes that the texts and interviews on the chosen playwrights provided the most informative way of writing a narrative of Sowetan community.

CHAPTER 2:
HALBWACHS' THEORY OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I posed certain questions about *collective memory* and its efficacy in writing a historical narrative of Sowetan community theatre during the period 1984–1994. I start this chapter with a discussion of how the merging of two approaches leads to the merging of personal experiences into collective memories. I then explore how the recollection of memories is the result of a reconstruction of the past as narrative. I also discuss the manner in which *collective memory* leads to examining the difference between history and memory. Towards the end of the chapter I discuss Halbwachs' concrete proposals regarding the expression of *collective memory* as aspects of time and space.

Collective memory, as a section of memory studies, features prominently in academic discussions that draw on recollections of the past. However, some writers, including Kansteiner (2002: 180), admit that it can be a "slippery phenomenon."

> Collective memory is not history, though it is sometimes made from similar material. It is a collective phenomenon but it only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals. It can take hold of historically and socially remote events but usually privileges the interests of the contemporary. It is as much of a result of conscious manipulation as unconscious absorption and it is always mediated.

Maurice Halbwachs' conceptualisation of *collective memory* bridges these complementary standpoints on the nature of collective memory and its constituent parts. Halbwachs' conceptualisation of memory incorporates Emile Durkheim's sociological approach to the interaction of groups within a society and Bergson's framing of memory as a function of the mind (Halbwachs 1992: 10). Durkheim studied human social relations, a concept that Halbwachs adapted as seeing recollections as shared within the structure of social groups, for example families, school and church groups. Therefore, experiences shared by groups become their collective memories later on. Bergson wrote of an individual's perception, which occurs when a person experiences an event or undertakes

an action. An individual's experience and whatever action he or she is engaged in becomes a part of the recollection of memory. In this way memory involves "the utilizing of past experience for present action" (Bergson 2004: 87). As a memory, the event concretises into an image, which is an operation of a person's mental capacity. Likewise, memories are the result of cognition. Halbwachs linked Durkheim and Bergson's concepts by observing that people remember as a collective and that the sum of their memories is encapsulated in consciousness (a function of the mind). These memories (or recollections) are a shared competency, since they are a result of shared activities within a social framework.

2.2 Halbwachs' contribution to memory studies

Halbwachs' (1877–1945) approach set out to propose a new cohesive theory of memory. His concept of *collective memory* has had far reaching effects on various fields that deal with collective memory. Lewis A. Coser (1992: 28–34) outlines various authors and studies that demonstrate the influence of Halbwachs' work, especially on contemporary sociology. I mention two below as they have a bearing on the topic of this thesis. Coser cites a study titled "Generations and collective memory" (1989), which was conducted by Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott. The study tests Halbwachs' contention that "autobiographical memories of directly experienced events do indeed have deeper impact than events of which people have merely read or heard" (1992: 29). Barry Schwartz is another significant scholar on Halbwachs' work. In his study, "The reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln," Schwartz (Coser 1992: 30) offers the insight that "collective memory comes into view as both a cumulative and episodic construction of the past." In relation to this study, Schumann emphasises that recollections by people who have direct experience of events have value since the narration of their experience reveals their personal recollections. As an aspect of collective memory these personal recollections are influenced by written sources (that people have read) and also augmented by other members of society (who share the same experiences). Schwartz's comment underlines Halbwachs' proposal that the generative value (of information and knowledge) results from social interaction.

Schwartz and Schuman (2005: 183) acknowledge that Halbwachs has made a "pioneering" contribution to memory studies. Their paper on the historiography and commemoration of Abraham Lincoln, also indicates a few elements that illustrate the effective application of *collective memory* to writing a historical narrative. They argue that most scholars have explored collective memory "through texts and commemorative symbolism." They also underline that "collective memory has a fuller meaning when it takes into account what ordinary people think about the past." Indeed (as will be demonstrated in chapters four, five and six) the contributions by the interviewees are important in this study. One of the reasons for their importance is that there is limited documentation on Kente's plays. The absence of theatre programmes means that biographies and curriculum vitae of actors, musicians and names of production staff that may have been included in such documents remain unknown. By the same token, the absence of posters means that information on performance venues and performance times is also unknown. Furthermore, during the period under review, Greater Soweto (Grinker 1986: 7) had three municipalities and the records of each of arts activities are lost. The paucity of documentation on Sowetan theatre may not be the only obstacle to collective memory.

Schwartz and Schuman's (2005: 184) argument also highlights the limits of the role played by historians in writing about the past. They mention an example where written surveys have been available but

> few collective memory scholars have shown an interest in pursuing survey evidence. Theoretical perspective, not methodological limits leads these scholars to emphasise hermeneutic analysis of texts and commemorative objects and to deemphasize, even disregard, what ordinary individuals believe about the past.

These writers emphasise that "Halbwachs saw individuals in groups as carriers of collective memory" (2005: 184). Halbwachs saw oral and written forms of memory as equally valuable. Halbwachs does mention the importance of testimonies as an aspect of *collective memory*. He maintains that (1980: 22), in an individual recollection, the person recalling an event appeals to "witnesses to corroborate or invalidate as well as supplement what [the person] somehow know[s] about an event that in many other details remains obscure." Even when the person has been a sole witness to an event, the

observer invariably draws on what s/he “may have seen in the past or formed an opinion in the testimony of others” (1980:22).

Subsequently, other scholars have commented on the value of analysing collective memories that are verbalised. Schwartz and Schuman (2005: 185) note that in preliterate societies “oral tradition is expressed in the form of myth and institutionalized through ritual,” and thus becomes the collective memory of a society. Langer (2007: 192–198) also analyses the shaping of (Holocaust) testimonies when they are verbalised.

Halbwachs’ concepts of collective memory are also comprehensively explored in various publications. I mention only a few below. Tota and Hagen’s (2016) *Routledge international handbook of memory studies,* in which various writers explore iterations of Halbwachs’ proposals regarding the individual and social framework(s) of memory provides a comprehensive analysis of collective memory. In a section titled “Theories and perspective,” the major contributors are Barry Schwartz, Patrick H. Hutton, Jeffery K. Olick, Jeffery Goldfarb and Ann Rigney. The topics they address investigate the application of memory studies to, inter alia, historical, cultural, heritage and Holocaust studies. Other important areas of study include the application of memory studies in embodied memory, memories of wars and conflict, as well as in studies on trauma.

Another important source for the commentary on Halbwachs is Rossington and Whitehead’s book, *Memory. A reader* (2007), which includes primary texts outlining the evolution of memory studies. Notably, Halbwachs’ conceptualisation of *collective memory* is present in discussions on modernity, “Jewish memory discourse” (2007: 157), trauma, identity and on race and nationality. In the same vein, Berger and Niven’s *Writing the history of memory* (2014b) illustrates that Halbwachs writings are contested and affirmed within a number of academic disciplines. *Media and memory*, by Garde-Hansen (2011:16) also offers an historical perspective and illustrates how memory studies are often “interdisciplinary” as some research incorporates various approaches within the study area of the Humanities. Lastly, Kansteiner (2002), in the article *Finding meaning in memory: A methodological critique of collective memory studies* summarises criticism of memory studies, wherein Halbwachs’ *collective memory* is discussed. He writes that there has been a “wealth of new insights into past and present historical cultures” (2002:179).

However, he is critical of Halbwachs' claim that memory studies cannot, in actuality, be said to represent memories of a social collective.

Halbwachs elaborated on the sociology of knowledge. Coser (1992: 2) writes that Halbwachs' follow-up book, *The collective memory* (1980) "contains many further developments of Halbwachs' thought in regard to such matters as the relation of space and time to *collective memory* as well as fruitful definitions and applications of the differences between individual, collective and historical memory." This book, which was a response to criticism of his theoretical concepts, was unfortunately still unfinished at the time of his death.

2.3 Memories in the mind of the person remembering

In his assessment of memory, Bergson (2004: 77–84) identifies three components that are also applicable to Halbwachs conceptualisation of *collective memory*. Bergson isolates the mind as a receptacle of memory; he surmises that "an independent memory [gathers] images as they successively occur along the course of time." In taking the form of images, memories are rich in narrative detail; Bergson also highlights the way in which temporality is an aspect of recollection as well as a factor in the narration of memories. Bergson formulated memory as a joint, cerebral operation. On the one hand a remembrance is retained in a person's brain as an image. On the other hand, a person perceives an object or another person, or engages in an activity in present circumstances. To illustrate: on meeting another person, an individual may perceive that person as friendly, antagonistic or indifferent. Perception is a way to describe how individuals experience "daily life" as it occurs in time (Bergson 2007: 111–112). Perception is also an operation of the brain and it is a singular occurrence, not taking place within a longitudinal span of time. Bergsonian memory comprises a combination of an image-recollection, which is prompted by perception. Both elements take place in the brain. Accordingly, Bergson (Malkin 2002: 23) proposed that memories are located and may be extracted from "within the ephemeral site of the psyche." Freud influenced Bergson in that he saw memories as invested in individuals. For Bergson, memories are important in so far as they can give an account of an individual's experience of the world. For Freud, the concept

of the psyche is a way to describe the "mental processes" in which an individual's behaviour becomes apparent (Wright 1997: 146–147).

Bergson points out that memory involves the "utilizing of past experience for present action" (2007: 109). Bergson wrote of "sensori-motor mechanisms" that arise out of memories located in the brain. While Bergson saw memory as originating from the operation of the brain, he proposed that memories were actualised by the actions that people take, as when performing a habitual task. For example, an experienced driver has internalised a number of actions that are repeated when driving a car (namely the sensori-motor mechanisms). There is a connection of the memory, which takes the form of an image in the brain, and its actualisation on the body. Thus, memories of performing tasks are automatically retrieved when a person is required to perform a task performed before. Memories of past occurrences (actions) are spontaneously retrieved when a person recalls information. This aspect of memory is the result of habitual actions that humans perform (Bergson 2007: 111).

Yet another aspect sees memories taking the form of images layered in the brain. This metaphor describes Bergson's account of the way in which memory is important for learning. For example, in analysing how memory functions, we may explain the way in which an actor commits a script to memory. Employing Bergson's approach, I point out that the actor's first reading forms an image that is "imprinted at once" on the actor's brain (2007: 111). Subsequent readings of the script are added onto the brain as images. Bergson's point here is that each reading of the script is a separate event. It is not as if each reading or image incrementally builds until all the elements of the image join together into a comprehensive whole. Here the memory is "entirely sufficient to itself, subsists exactly as it occurred and constitutes with all its concomitant perceptions an original moment of [an individual's] history" (2007: 110). In this way the recollection of the script may become fluent as a result of many readings, but the repetition does not lead to images being merged into a comprehensive narrative. The initial reading or perception of the text is sacrosanct and in the past. In fact, Bergson argues that nothing prevents the actor from internalising the whole script "instantaneously, as in one picture" (2007: 111).

Although Halbwachs incorporated part of Bergson's theoretical formulation on memory into his theoretical approach, he was critical of Bergson's view that memory

“involves a certain disinterest in present life.” He found fault with Bergson’s focus on memory as it pertains to people performing habitual actions (such as driving a car). Halbwachs was critical of Bergson who considered that individuals do not participate in activities in isolation but as part of a dynamic social structure. To explain Halbwachs’ reservations, driving a car involves an individual acceding to commonly understood driving conventions (1992: 47). For Halbwachs, memories may not be reduced to “habitual actions” of an individual but are a result of the individual interacting within a social framework or *cadres sociaux*. Yet Halbwachs retained, as Mary Douglas observes, parallels between his formulations and those of Bergson. Halbwachs saw Bergson’s “individualistic, psychologistic [and] subjectivist” (Douglas 1980: 7) approach as only one part of how memory should be approached.

In *A note upon the ‘Mystic writing–pad’* (1925), Freud envisions memory as a function of the subconscious. He writes (Freud 2007: 114) of memories as being “deposited” and reproduced. There are two layers of memory, one in the conscious mind and the other on a deeper level in the subconscious, which has “an unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces” of memories. The metaphoric “writing-pad” is the “perceptual apparatus of the mind” as it (2007: 116) incorporates the conscious and subconscious levels of the mind when recollecting the past. These perceptions (memories) are “permanent” and “unalterable.” Freud (2007: 115) emphasises the act of perception in the beginning of the process when an individual forms memory. He writes “our mental apparatus … has an unlimited receptive capacity for new perceptions” as well as an ability to retain “permanent traces of memories.” In this formulation, perception marks the beginning point for the recollection of an event. This implies the beginning point for the telling of the event, or a narrative of the past while the “retention” of a past event concludes the operation in the mind. Halbwachs acknowledges the act of perception as significant in how persons apprehend events that will later become memories. Halbwachs took this insight a step further by finding a means to link the perceptions of a number of people through the social framework, thus also enabling a collective narration of past events.

Another significant point in this discussion is the link between memory and “writing,” which Freud spells out explicitly. The inscription of memories on Freud’s

metaphorical “writing-pad” suggests the telling or writing of a narrative of these memories at a later date. Freud’s insights highlight the duration of the narration of memories; in a similar way, Bergson’s writes about images accumulating as a memory over a defined period of time.

There is a congruence between Freud and Bergson in the implication that firstly, aggregated memories are recollected as a narration. Secondly, there are similarities with Halbwachs in the recognition that the way in which a person perceives an event shapes his/her memory and his/her recollection of the event. It is also important to note that Halbwachs (Schwartz 2016: 11–18) recognises that even though perceptions are “subjective,” the persons are influenced by their social circle, as will be discussed below. Thus, Halbwachs’ approach allows for a view of subjectivity as a social element (as opposed to pertaining only to an individual) in memory studies.

2.4 The individual and the social framework

Society and culture are important signals of the social framework. Lewis A Coser (1992: 19) argues that Halbwachs emphasised the importance of class as an aspect of collective representations. He used static categories, for example occupation and income, which he called “behavioural correlates.” The “class consciousness” of the collective determined the “ways in which people classified themselves” within particular social strata “as well as their social relations with other classes and their participation in social life” (1992: 19). Coser (1992: 20) also endorses the view that Halbwachs “remained uncritically faithful to an inflexible model of working-class collective representations.” This criticism of Halbwachs is echoed by Jeffrey Goldfarb (Tota & Hagen 2016: 57) who writes of a tendency towards a “hegemonic mode of collectively remembering cultural accomplishment and the politics” in recollections of politically contentious events. On the other hand, a number of writers, including Rossington (2007a: 134), affirm Halbwachs’ insights that the “practices of remembrance are shaped and reinforced by the societies and cultures in which they occur.” While Halbwachs acknowledges that different groups within societies have different memories, Coser and Goldfarb argue that social structures do not necessarily have consensus on their memories. Their view is that Halbwachs’

formulation of *collective memory* does not allow for differences of opinion within a group to be discernible when memories are expressed. Even if these observations differ on whether Halbwachs' formulation of *collective memory* allows or does not allow for a nuanced account of the past, they do not, however, dispute Halbwachs' principle that memories are a collective endeavour within a group or society.

While not disputing the "cerebral processes" (1992: 39) in which memories are formed, Halbwachs (1992: 38) holds that "the greatest number of memories come back to us when our parents, friends, or other persons recall them to us." He observes that in

> psychological treatises that deal with memory … people are considered isolated beings. These make it appear that to understand our mental operations, we need to stick to individuals first of all, to divide all the bonds which attach individuals to the society of their fellows. Yet it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories.

Where Freud emphasised the perception and storage of memory in the mind (or subconscious), and Bergson (Halbwachs 1992: 6) explored "subjective perception of inner time," Halbwachs (1992: 38) emphasises material conditions within a society where, in remembrance, "we place ourselves in their perspective and consider ourselves as being part of the same group or groups as they are." While the individual places him/herself "into the perspective of the group or groups," by the same token "the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories" (1992: 40). For Bergson, the perception is concretised as an image in a person's mind. However, for Halbwachs (1992: 40), "collective frameworks are … the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of society."

In outlining *collective memory,* Halbwachs draws on how society functions. He (1992: 121) was interested in the way in which traditional values structured society and how these values were infused in key social institutions. Writing about developments in 19th century Western Europe, he writes about the organisation of social life through legislation. One example includes the laws of inheritance, which "establish degrees of kinship through reference to a general stereotype of family – a framework in which each individual family can be located" (1992: 127).

Here he was exploring how groups function and how they relate to each other. His study encompassed both material elements of the formation of groups, and the formation of "spontaneous human groups" (1992: 128). He was referring to groups that arise through abstract means, namely via commonly held ideals, shared values, conventions and loyalty to philosophical principles. Halbwachs conducted his study on the historical composition of societies, and on how the frameworks of social memory are modified and sustained between historical epochs (Halbwachs 1992: 133–6). He found that social frameworks are not rigid entities but, over time, evolve to accommodate socio-economic changes. He used the analogy of the transmission of beliefs "from generation to generation," wherein social paradigms are constructed and reconstructed. The social frameworks change through the participation of individual members. Memory enables the transmission of societal practices and rules of governance which, however binding, are not static and are adjusted to suit each successive generation. And within the social frameworks, it is "people … that modify their individual remembrances so as to synchronize them with what they are thinking at the moment" (1992: 135).

Halbwachs arrives at his insights through field observations (anthropological methodology), the study of data, reading memoirs and incorporating his personal experience. These elements point to the multifaceted nature of collective memory and how a process of reconstruction may mitigate absences and limitations of history. Thus, it is prudent to note that Halbwachs' theory does not discount individual recollections of memory. This is because individual and collective memory are complementary. Halbwachs (1980: 48) concludes that:

> While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember. While these remembrances are mutually supportive of each other and common to all, individual members still vary in the intensity with which they experience them.

Within the framework of *collective memory*, Halbwachs writes of a memory as a form of an image (1980: 25–31) that an individual's memory blends with another's into a mutual remembrance. Halbwachs sees individual memory as working in conjunction with group memory. Thus, an individual memory does not "merely" provide testimony and evidence but has elements similar to the memory of other members of the group or artistic

community. When collective memory is applicable, the individual and other's memory "remain in harmony." He (1980: 31) reiterates that:

> There must be enough points of contact so that any remembrance they [the collective] recall to us [the individual] can be reconstructed on a common foundation. A remembrance is gained not merely by reconstituting the image of a past event a piece at a time. That reconstruction must start from shared data or conceptions. These are present in our minds as well as theirs, because they are continually being passed back and forth. This process occurs only because all have been and still are members of the same group or collective.

This study's conceptualisation of a group considers individuals who were participants in the community theatre companies operated by Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya. Furthermore, this conceptualisation of a collective can be extended to include arts practitioners active specifically in Soweto and the surrounding geographical area during the designated period of 1984–1994. Considering Halbwachs inclusive conceptualisation of a collective, this study also includes the memories of theatre practitioners who have an interest and knowledge of Soweto-based community theatre, but may not, as individuals, have practised as members of community groups. Because of the collaborative nature of community theatre, this study draws on a purposive sample, to select participants based on their specialist knowledge of artistic and socio-political elements of theatre during the designated period. Community theatre is steeped in a dynamic where participants contribute to the theatre group as individuals, where a member may participate as an actor, writer or director. At the same time the person is part of a collective that may have contributed in a workshop to creating a play. Thus, the memories of the participating individuals may be considered individually and collectively as forming a narrative of the history of community theatre in Soweto. Similarly, both individual and collective memories will be considered in the analysis and interpretation of selected community plays.

Other writers explain further the interaction between individual memory and the social framework. John Sutton (2016), in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online* usefully sets out a paradigm for memory studies that considers a "totality of conditions." Following this method means seeing recollections as an interaction of "personal memory in an intricate interpersonal and cultural world" (2016: 1). This idea links cognitive

psychology studies, which consider the “individual mind,” with social sciences, which consider the operation of social processes. For Sutton (2016), this idea means seeing “memories as not fixed mental images or discrete items of any kind, permanently stored in the individual mind or brain, [but that] the relatively unstable individual memory may need support from more stable external scaffolding or props.” Sutton (2016) sees public scaffolding as consisting “of various forms, in the physical, symbolic, and social environment, [so that these] can shape the specific form and content of individual memory.”

2.5 Mediating between history and memory

Halbwachs differentiated between (collective) memory and history. In the first instance, Halbwachs (1980: 69) says that “a remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present.” Where history (for example in a historical document) provides a single point of view, memories may provide a nuanced rendition of the past. Memories are recalled by persons interacting within their social group or groupings. Halbwachs observed that memories are shared recollections between people who are still living as opposed to history, which is a documentation of past events without the input from older and younger members of a group or community.

Halbwachs (1980: 43) observes that “[n]o memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections.” Here the idea is that people “share a totality of thoughts” that are common to them as a group (1980: 52). The people who are living may be part of a family group, school, or perhaps, as in this study, part of a theatre group in Soweto. This gives the impression that collective memories are “localised” in a geographical area and are “contiguous” only within a specified time frame. Halbwachs extends understanding of the relationship of “living” people who share collective memories. The group may be seen as confined to one geographical area, perhaps within Soweto. In addition, the living group may have links to other groups within Soweto and have associations further outside their immediate realm to a town, city, country and even to countries outside South Africa. This is not to forget

that the living groups also have access to memories of "old people" within their community. Halbwachs' purpose here is to underline the different ways in which social frameworks are manifest.

In the Halbwachscian sense (Ricoeur 2006: 395–396), monuments, which have not been invested with the narrative of living people, are another example of "those islands of the past." It is through reading about the past (for example the *Sowetan* newspaper), in conjunction with absorbing the memories of people that have experienced Sowetan theatre (interviewees of this study) that "little by little, the historical memory is integrated into living memory."

In Halbwachs' terms, history refers to past events that are "no longer within the sphere of thought of existing groups … [and where] their thoughts and memory have vanished" (1980: 106–7). Thus, history needs "those traces of testimony about the past found in memoirs, newspapers and official documents." But this excludes "the opinion of that time, which no longer exists" (1980: 107). This avoids the living experience of people who may remember, and, therefore underlines the importance of including testimonies of interviewees in this study. Memory includes historical methods (written texts) as well as the viewpoint of a collective consciousness (1980: 107).

Halbwcahs (1980:51–81) sees history as an aspect of a "national society." For Halbwachs, the history of the individual person or autobiographical memory is closely linked with the individual's wider societal as well as national history. A wide range of sources constitutes "national thought." For example, national thought means having memories of events incorporating the whole country (South Africa), its provinces and townships. The Soweto uprising of 1976 is a good example in that it was a local event that has had ramifications for all of South Africa. This means that this occurrence is part of what Halbwachs calls national thoughts. This includes people who did not experience the uprisings first hand. Halbwachs argues that this *collective memory* extends to successive generations. Similarly, "tradition endures" in cultural organisations and establishments. In the context of the memories of Sowetan theatre, I can take Gibson Kente's garage, Eyethu Cinema, Funda Centre and the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) as Soweto institutions invested with national thought. Kente's garage, Eyethu Cinema and the DOCC are places of collective memory because Kente

conceptualised and performed his plays there. Furthermore, Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first democratic president, practised his boxing routines at the DOCC. The memory of this venue resonates not only with people interested in the arts but with a wider range of society. National memory is also invested in Funda Centre as it has been mentioned in the recollections of the interviewees as well as in newspapers and books on Sowetan theatre. It is also part of what Halbwcahs calls general *collective memory* or a "spatial framework" for the generation of persons succeeding Matsemela Manaka.

Halbwachs adds that national thoughts may also be subsumed within political parties, within a social class, and even within families. For the purposes of this study, not all avenues have been informative. Information for the period under review (1980s to 1990s) is missing from the archives of the Soweto City Council. These contained a history of drama groups that booked community halls during this period. On the positive side, two interviewees provided a collection of theatre concept documents, correspondence, posters, programmes and a limited number of scripts.

For Halbwachs (1980: 51), historical events are:

> events [which] occupy a place in the memory of the nation, but I myself did not witness them. In recalling them, I must rely entirely on the memory of others, a memory that comes not as corroboration or completer of my own, but as the very source of what I wish to repeat.

Although Halbwachs (1980: 56) acknowledges the "dates or facts" of material occurrences as a source for historical group memory, he also emphasises that abstract conceptions edify contemporary history. He proposes that abstract conceptions can add to the construction of a historical narrative. He discusses how an individual may supplement national history. He says that the individual may "look over the paintings, portraits, and engravings of the [historical] time or think about the books that appeared, the plays presented, the style of the period, the jokes and humour in vogue" (1980: 56).

He emphasises the elastic nature of history by saying that:

> Our memory truly rests not on learned history but lived history. By the term "history" we must understand, then, not a chronological sequence of events and dates, but whatever distinguished one period from all others, something of which books and narratives generally give us only a very schematic and incomplete picture (1980: 57).

Halbwachs (1980: 79) sees the writing of a historical narrative (which is only based on dates and facts) as having “a break in continuity between the society reading this history and the group in the past who acted in or witnessed the events.” He says that history can “bridge the gap between the past and the present” by supplanting “factual details” with memoirs, or in other words considering personal recollections as this is one of the ways in which “the image of the past [can have] a place in contemporary collective memory” (1980: 79–80).

In maintaining Halbwachs’ separation of history from memory, Nora (2007: 145) incorporates his prescription that the process of collective memorialisation is comparable to living. Nora declares that history and memory have been thought of as being “synonymous,” however, now “appear to be in fundamental opposition”. He (2007: 145–146) expands:

> Memory is life, borne by living societies founded on its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being dormant and periodically revived. History on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.

Here Nora develops Halbwachs’ ideas on *collective memory*. Nora makes it obvious that collective memory is constantly developing as it resides within the current social framework. People within a group, (society or community) constantly add to the memory as they interact in everyday living. Thus, it is not a static phenomenon, as is the case for example of a historical document outlining a set of dates or a chronology of past events.

Nora sees history as a “reconstruction,” but not in the way that Halbwachs conceived of memory as a reconstruction. For Halbwachs, memory is a reconstruction because the individual memories of the group’s members merge as an image. In addition, the older generation’s memories are also part of collective memory, as are those memories captured in history books. History does not have an input from the living generation and therefore its narrative is “incomplete.”

Schwartz and Schuman (2005: 185) draw a similar conclusion to Nora’s findings on the role of history. They observe that:

> the job of the historian is to enlighten by revealing causes and consequences of chronologically ordered events. The job of the commemorative agent [or collective memorialisation] is to designate moral significance by lifting from the historical record the events that best exemplify contemporary values.

Therefore, it is the contemporary generation that animates history into memory. This goes back to Halbwachs notion that memory consists of the recollection of past events, which takes into consideration present circumstance (or perceptions). It is also the people interacting within a social framework that lend meaning to the "historical record" allowing for memory to thrive.

Rossington (2007a: 135) argues that Nora extended and refined "Halbwach's argument that there is a distinction between the understanding of time in collective memory and history". Nora (2007: 144) separates "an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good," and "the remnants of experience still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral." Nora reconfigures Halbwachs' conceptualisation of history. Halbwachs said that history is contained primarily in written texts and physical institutions (for example the church, school and family). Nora suggests that history is contained in the broader realm of customs (which define societal cultural practice).

Following Halbwachs, Nora (2007: 145) emphasises that it is the relationship (rather than the buildings themselves) that people have with institutions of memory that defines these institutions as part of memory. Memories, which he sees as a valuable human development, are expressed via "remembered values, whether through churches or schools, the family or the state". Memory also incorporates "heroes, origins and myth" as well as "ideologies," the value of which is that it prepares "a smooth passage from the past to the future". (2007:145). Nora thus sees memory as incrementally textured.

This is not necessarily a clash with Halbwachs but illustrates how his innovation of locating memory within a social framework influenced a nuanced approach to memory studies. A dynamic approach to memory contextualises the recollections of interviewees and promotes a rich analysis of the information they provide. Memory serves not only as a vehicle for storing and merely retrieving knowledge as happened with ancient Greek and Roman scholars, but in its reconstruction, it enables the person remembering to identify "acts of meaning" (2007:145).

Halbwachs (1980: 51) emphasised that *collective memory* relies solely on recollected events and the testimonies of persons "directly involved." At the same time, memories "have a logic of [their] own" and differ according to the (family members) involved in recollecting shared events. (1992: 52). Halbwachs (1992: 46&49) notes that sometimes individuals are "incapable of reproducing all (past) events in their detail" and that individuals may embark on a "reshaping operation" when recalling the past. It is these social frameworks that mitigate lapses in individual memory. Individuals are subtly and overtly influenced by the people with whom they interact on a continuous basis. Furthermore, it is not only the individual's interactions with other members of their group that facilitates the sharing of collective memory. Halbwachs proposes that individuals "roam freely" within their social group and also among their related social groups. Ultimately. individuals are able to evoke places and times from different groups and incorporate these memories "with a framework which encompasses them all" (1992: 50).

From Halbwachs' insights it is evident that collective memories are not monolithic but are subject to fluctuation. Elaborating on Halbwachs (2007:144-145), Nora emphasises that memory is a lived experience that unfolds within members of a society. People create memories as they engage with each other on a daily basis.

Halbwachs' influence on memory studies is evident in the way in which Nora also sees a separation between history and memory. As with Halbwachs, Nora sees history as a narration that entails a chronological cataloguing of past events, but without explaining the meaning behind these events. Nora (2007: 145–146) frames his meaning of history differently from Halbwachs and says that the sole engagement with history is "nothing more in fact than sifted and sorted historical traces" which amount to an "incomplete reconstruction" of the past. To support this claim, he writes that "hopelessly forgetful societies, organize the past" in rigid plodding narratives (2007: 145–148). Nora (2007: 147–148) sees history as a long-established tradition that venerates "scientific methodology" thereby undermining memories which may, in one example be embodied in rituals (which are a form of memorialising the past). To illustrate, Nora mentions diasporic Jewish cultures, in which inhabitants adhere to dress, food preparation and religious practices that he calls "rituals of tradition" (2007:145–146). This is a way of actualising the past as a relevance for present-day society. He (2007: 147) also proposes

that, as an aspect of history, “Museums, archives cemeteries, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries [and] fraternal orders” are merely material representations of the past which have no meaning in present day society. Without the meaning imbued by memories, these edifices and “rituals of society without ritual” are a token, giving “illusions of eternity” (or history) (2007: 149). Nora proposed the concept of “*lieux de memoire*, sites of memory,” which is discussed below.

2.6 Other commentaries on separating history and memory

Ricoeur (2006: 120) also acknowledges Halbwachs’ contribution to memory studies and in fact also declares that Halbwachs’ formulation of “collective memory constitutes the appropriate counterpart to history.” Thus, a theoretical approach in which history and memory are seen as separate entities has become entrenched through the work of various writers in memory studies. Ricoeur (2006: 120) notes: “We owe to Halbwachs the bold intellectual decision to attribute memory to a collective entity, which he names a group or society.” He (2006: 299) writes, “The birth of the concept of history as a collective singular, under which the collection of particular histories is placed, marks the bridging of the greatest gap imaginable between unitary history and the unlimited multiplicity of individual memories and the plurality of collective memories underscored by Halbwachs.”

Echoing Halbwachs, Ricoeur (2006: 394–395) adds that history is concerned with “dates, facts, names, striking events, important persons [and] holidays to celebrate.” History is perceived by the person remembering as “external” as the person has not “been able to witness” the events recollected personally. On the other hand, memory is the recollection of events by people who share “a social bond.” Memory “underscores the role of narratives received from the mouth of family elders in widening the temporal horizon, central to the notion of historical memory” (2006: 395).

As Ricoeur explains, Halbwachs does not discard the role of history in the recollection of the past. Halbwachs’ theory enables a recollection that considers the social framework – here framed as the person remembering (autobiographical memory), as well as other members of a particular society (the memories of elders). Halbwachs underlines the importance of societal relations that assist in enhancing the narrative of the past.

Memory also permits the incorporation of the "narrative of ancestors," which would be "lost in the soil of history" should one consider only external sources when writing a narrative of the past (2006: 395).

Ricoeur (2006: 395) relies on Halbwachs' explanation of the complementary relationship between history and memory. Incorporated in "living memory" (or the current generation of society, who have memories of the past) are the memories of members of society who are no longer living. This is because the words of the "old people" are captured in written historical texts. These documents are merely a trace "of the past that is at once public and private." The memories of the previous generation are passed on to the new generation, not only when people read about past events, but also by stories passed on orally within society, and by the exhibition of artefacts and collections in monuments and museums. History is also imbued in the built environment. Halbwachs (2006: 395) gives an example of cities in which people live or have visited as retaining their "original appearance." It is in this way that history of past events is incorporated into the memories of the present generation.

Ricoeur (2006: 394) notes that a "filial bond" is established when an individual absorbs memory from previous generations. This occurs when "elders who are still living" communicate their experiences to the contemporary generation. Thus, the contemporary generation learns to "situate" itself in its "predecessors, contemporaries and successors." Therefore, it is *collective memory* that facilitates the passing on of a nuanced version of history that becomes the memory of the current generation. Halbwachs insists that this communication of information from the past to the present occurs because a group of people interacts in concert with each other.

Gedi and Elam (1996: 41) also write of "a gap between history and memory" but posit that the notion of "collective memory" itself "undermines the distinction between history and memory." These authors are critical of separating history and memory for the purpose of elucidating *collective memory*. This is because remembering is "in fact actualized only on an individual level … [it] can only be performed by individuals." Rather, they suggest that the "employment of 'collective memory' can be justified only on a metaphorical level." They say that *collective memory* should not refer to "any real, living substance that can be experienced separately or independently from the members who

comprise of …. [a] ‘Nation’, ‘tribe’ [or] ‘society.’” Gedi and Elam also argue that memories of members of a society may not be conflated into *collective memory* as “the individual take[s] precedence over society” (1996: 35). The writers categorically refute the claim that “individual memories are actually produced and formed in a social context.” They acknowledge that “everyone cites” Halbwachs, who advanced this proposition, but reject *collective memory* as without theoretical foundation and without a definition. The full extent of Gedi and Elam’s critique is captured in the article “Collective Memory – what is it?” (1996: 36), in which they refute Halbwach’s notion that memory (including an individual’s memory) “can be perceivable, verifiable and meaningful externally, within the ‘social frameworks.’”

Gedi and Elam’s view contrasts with prevailing acceptance of Halbwachs’ original theoretical approach. Klein (2000: 132) ventures that studies examining subjectivity as an entity that is socially constructed (or deconstruction of the self in poststructuralist discourse) or even examining the nature of deconstruction in terms of the modern self, are a result of research that links memory studies to “material objects.” Therefore, there is an association between memory and objects produced in society and in social engagement among people. Kansteiner (2002: 181) endorses Halbwachs as the foremost reference in studies dealing with history. He also accepts Halbwachs’ notion that collective memories are “shared representations of the past” that are realised in “everyday communication” within society.

Furthermore, Ricoeur (2006: 94–95) notes that Halbwachs’ theory is applicable across human sciences as it rejects “methodological holism,” therefore enabling the work of memory to be explained across a number of disciplines. In proposing that individual memory is supplanted by “collective consciousness” Ricoeur recognises the role of social relations as a group of people participating in collective memories. He (2006: 120) endorses Halbwachs by stating that “[w]e owe to Halbwachs the bold intellectual decision to attribute memory directly to a collective entity, which he names as a group or society.”

There are a number of other sources that see memory not only as a process within an individual’s brain but as externalised via social relations, among them Rossington and Whitehead (2007a), Favorini (2008), Garde-Hansen (2011), Berger and Niven (2014b) and Tota and Hagen (2016a). In sum, there is a general acceptance that collective

memory is actualised when people engage with each other within a social framework. Finally, Schwartz (2016b: 10–11) underlines the notion that individual memories are part of collective memory and that collective memory circulates in all areas of society. As if to refute Gedi and Elam's point of view, he states "it would be a mistake to conclude that the 'memory' of … [past] occurrences is merely a metaphor that simplifies a complex phenomenon" (2016b: 10–11).

Furthermore, Gedi and Elam's (1996: 35) minute dismantling of the components of personal and collective memory reveals the symbiotic nature of memories, either as a way of binding society through shared beliefs, "myths, traditions and customs," or in showing how the past is constructed by social interactions that are formed by people considering present day circumstances. This view supports Coser's (1992: 25) observation that "the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, formed by the concerns of the present."

For Halbwachs (1992: 40), the past is not "preserved but is reconstructed." It is important that "the collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are … precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of society."

Gedi and Elam (1996: 40) conclude by saying that Halbwachs' concept of *collective memory* "has become the predominant notion which replaces real (factual) history, on the one hand, and real (personal) memory on the other hand." What is useful is that their critique firstly explicates the forms in which *collective memory* – when it manifests as living memory– can be seen as a metaphor to describe how people interact in society (by sharing their recollections) to narrate the past. Secondly, their critique helps to tease out how "memory agents" (among them professional historians, politicians and social elites) collaborate to "shape the picture of the past according to the needs and agonies of the present" (Gedi & Elam 1996: 42). The authors suggest that the notion of a collegial narration of the past (as an aspect of *collective memory*) and the notion that memory can be seen as a "reconstruction of the past" are ideas that have taken root in historical as well as in literary studies, despite the problems they have identified in their

article (1996: 33). It seems there are areas of commonality between Nora and Ricoeur, and with Gedi and Elam and that the principle of separating memory from history was a productive step by Halbwachs.

2.7 Gaps in the recollection of past events

Halbwachs speaks of gaps in memory as acceptable because, ultimately, these gaps can be redeemed within the social framework, even if memory recovery is partial. He (1992: 45) provides an example in which aphasia debilitates the memory of an individual, "where a person cannot tell of their past owing to their lack of words, and because their relations with others are diminished, [and they] are likely to maintain only a vague sense of time, persons and places." Other members of society can help a person recover the past, even if this recovery "retains only isolated details and discontinuous elements." Despite aphasia, people are able to retain

> the conventions that allow the waking person to give names to objects and to distinguish one from the other by means of their names. Hence verbal conventions constitute what is at the same time the most elementary and the most stable framework of collective memory.

For Halbwachs (1992: 46–7), gaps are tolerable even within narratives traversing a large span of time, for example from childhood to adulthood. This is because memories are not intact and not in their original form. Evidently, "[i]n reality we would feel incapable of mentally reproducing all the [past] events in their detail, the diverse parts of the tale in proportion to the whole, and the whole series of traits, indications, descriptions, propositions and reflections that progressively inscribe a figure or a landscape in the mind of [the person remembering]." Thus, within an individual memory a gap may occur in the narration, however that gap will be moderated as the individual interacts within the social frameworks, or within family, church, school and theatre groups. Gaps in memory are tolerable because memories are a reconstruction of past events rather than an exact reproduction of past events that have been preserved in their totality.

In his understanding of *collective memory*, Ricoeur also modifies Halbwachs' wholesale acceptance that memories are the main source of information on the past.

Ricoeur (2006: 412) says that forgetting is an important aspect of the recollection of memories. His formulations have been insightful when discussing the manner in which an historical narrative may be selective. Ricoeur (2006: 413) sees a lacuna in memory as an opportunity for a more balanced narrative of the past. He (2006: 414) argues that forgetting does not indicate that memory is unreliable, but that, "the presence of absence" prevails in memory. The precedents for this argument are first found in Plato's *Theatatus,* in which an "imprint, after the model of a mark is left by a signet ring on wax." The imprint is not the real signet ring, but its presence is indelible in the mind of the person remembering it. Ricoeur uses this example to explain a "tie" between an image and its imprint on the mind of an individual (2006: 415). Another precedent is Freud's notion of the *Mystic writing-pad*, where one layer of memory is stored in the subconscious of the person remembering but is not immediately recalled in the conscious level of the mind.

Memory (or the partial lack thereof) serves to promote a "critical mode" for conducting one's life. It is "only through the power of employing the past for the purposes of life and of again introducing into history that which has been done and gone – [that] … man become man" (Nietzsche 2007: 105).

Thus Ricoeur (2006: 416) sees a memory lapse as a temporary state of mind where an individual will eventually recall the forgotten information. For example, a recollection assumes the form of an image that is prompted by a "physical/[neurological] trace" in the brain. A trace is a kernel of a recollection that he says can be reactivated or recovered (2006: 414). These memories, which can be seen as an aspect of Bergson's "unconscious" memories, can be reclaimed leading to a person "having the pleasure of what [s/he has seen], heard, saw, felt, learned, acquired" (2006: 417). This is a "positive figure of forgetting" or it is "reversable forgetting." Ricoeur (2006: 442) argues that anxiety about forgetting "nourishes recollection, reminiscence: it is thus possible to learn what in a certain fashion we have never ceased to know." Therefore, forgetting and remembering are complementary. Ricoeur (2006: 442) holds that "forgetting makes memory possible" and quotes Heidegger's proclamation that "Just as expectation is possible only on the basis of waiting, remembering [Erinnerung] is possible only on the basis of forgetting, and not the other way around."

According to Berger and Niven (2014c: 144), Ricoeur's commentary is a "call on historians to understand their profession as one that can support, correct or refute collective memories." In part, this observation justifies Halbwachs' differentiation between history and memory. Furthermore, another advantage of considering forgetting as an aspect of memory is that it helps to unpick the contingencies of individual (or what Halbwachs called subjective) memories.

Seeing the notion of forgetting as an edifying development has an earlier historical basis. Nietzsche (2007: 103) equates the ability to forget with happiness, thus enabling a capacity for humans to have a fulfilling life. He holds that "it is possible to live almost without memory, to live happily moreover." Rossington and Whitehead (2007: 93) note that:

> For Nietzsche a dialectical tension between remembering and forgetting, or past and future, is essential for what he terms 'life': 'the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people, and a culture.'

There are various ways in which gaps in knowledge of the past may be mitigated. Such endeavours may include the influence of past generations on the living as well the formulation of collective memories as an aspect of time and space. Halbwachs (1992: 47) also suggests that:

> We preserve memories of each epoch of our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had.

Halbwachs inherited the notion of memory as a form of repetition from Bergson (2004: 136-7), who said that repeating physical acts (demonstrates knowledge), which upon repetition are recalled (as "spontaneous" memory) when the person has learned a particular action. This idea that memory is a form of knowledge dates from Greek and Roman scholarship. Halbwachs here repositions this idea to say that it is memories themselves that are repeated and these eventually form a narrative of a one's history through different stages of one's life.

Halbwachs also positions the role of memory in the formation of a person's identity. Historically, John Locke (Rossington & Whitehead 2007: 2–3) pointed out that "personal Identity" arises when "a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places." According to Rossington and Whitehead (2007: 2), memory functions in this way to give people their "distinct identities over time." This happens through an individual's consciousness and proves that "memory plays a significant role in personal identity." In this instance, Halbwachs incorporated into *collective memory* observations from Bergson and Locke. In this way collective memory offers a more comprehensive explanation of social interaction, which is informative for this study.

Also, of interest is that collective memories have been used in contemporary scholarship to document ethnic and national identity. In one example, Nicholas de Lange (Whitehead 2007a: 160) argues that the identity of Jewish people may be determined in conjunction with "a strong sense of common origin, a shared past and a shared destiny." Similarly, Whitehead (2007: 160), notes that "Shared or collective memory has become predominantly associated with questions of space or territory." She adds: "in the work of Pierre Nora, memory is closely connected to national identity and a uniquely shared land and language." David Wiggins (Rossington & Whitehead 2007: 2–3) is among contemporary theorists linking "reason and reflection" in enabling humans to "consider themselves as themselves the same thinking things, in different times and places." In this way collective memories may also be reconstructed through identity, time, (geographical) space and language.

Remembering subjects "are not content to wait passively for memories to revive." These memories are recalled in the "framework of the present," where the remembering subjects confer with their contemporaries and may also consult old documents, letters and "above all, they tell what they remember" (Halbwachs 1992: 48). Therefore, the reconstruction of memory unites spoken or oral memories with those that are written or documented. Here Halbwachs includes informal forms of documentation, not necessarily limited to documents preserved in official archives or as museum artefacts.

Examining traditions within a community may be another source used in the reconstruction of memory. Halbwachs does not elaborate on this aspect, however. I argue

that Halbwachs's theory implies that traditions are a result of an accumulation of knowledge over years, decades or centuries. It is a memory of past practices that may be passively imbibed or explicitly taught within a community. Thus, traditions are the collective memories shared within a community. They may be practised in a contemporary situation (a "social milieu"), or relayed to other members of the community, therefore traditions are a reconstruction of memory (1992: 49).

Gedi and Elam (1996) and, to a greater degree Jan Assmann (2011) have elaborated on Halbwachs' initial premise. To this end, Jan Assmann (2011: 16) paraphrases Halbwachs remark that "Memory enables us humans to live in groups and communities and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory." Assmann (2011) expounds on *collective memory* as two streams of communication (every day and cultural memory). He notes:

> As the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs has shown, even our autobiographical memory is a social construction that we build up in communication with others… As a social construction, the past conveys a kind of connective structure or diachronic identity to societies, groups and individuals, both socially and temporally.

Assmann (2011: 16) stresses that:

> At the social level, memory is about communication and social interaction. It was Halbwachs' great discovery that human memory depends, like consciousness in general, on socialization and communication and that memory can be analysed as a function of social life.

In developing Halbwachs' theory, Assmann (2011) highlights communication as an aspect of memory because members of society interact within the social framework. Assmann also highlights the importance of cultural memory to show that cultural objects may also be "carriers of memory." This is to explain the principle that memory "enables us human beings to live in groups and communities and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory" (2011: 16). Therefore, communicative and cultural memory are "two different modi memoranda, or ways of remembering." He (2011: 16–17) observes that "the connection between time, identity and memory in their three dimensions of the personal, the social and the cultural" has become evident. He (2011:

16) differentiates between communicative memory "to delineate the difference between Halbwachss' concept of *collective memory* and the understanding of cultural memory." In his understanding, Assmann (2011: 19) proposes that cultural memory is a form of collective memory because it reveals shared past and present cultural practices, such as "oral myths, [also] conveyed in writings, and performed in feasts as they continually illuminate the present". Furthermore, cultural memory "conveys to them a collective (i.e. cultural) identity" (2011: 17). Halbwachs implied but did not elaborate on collective memory as a place in which "traditions, transmissions and transferences" of cultural memory occur (Assmann 2011).

Therefore, cultural memory may be seen as a material or a symbolic institution, whose values are transferrable between different social environments and may be exchanged between generations (2011: 17). As a material or "embodied" form, cultural memory may be expressed in "monuments, archives, libraries, anniversaries, feasts, icons, symbols and landscape [as well as] rites" (2011: 17). In themselves these objects and practices cannot be said to represent memory but may trigger an individual's memory because people within a society invest their memories in practices, objects and places they see as having cultural value. As a form of *collective memory*, groups "make themselves a memory by erecting monuments and by developing a variety of cultural techniques (mnemotechniques) that support memory or promote forgetting" (2011: 17). Here Halbwachs' notion of the social framework is given material expression through culture, as memory is continually exchanged among the people remembering as well as when they engage with its externalised actualisation in objects, spaces and via ceremonies. In this instance, Assmann sees memory as a "metonym for physical contact between a remembering mind and a reminding object" (2011: 17).

Assmann makes explicit the link between embodied memory carried in a person's brain (and collectively in people's brains) and the way that memories are embedded in social (what he terms cultural) frameworks. It is also possible to believe that the actions involved in the physical building of monuments, collecting of archives, creation of objects and practising of ceremonial rites may, in themselves, be seen as acts to reconstruct the past. This is in light of Halbwachs' overarching proposal that *collective memory* is a social process, and not solely a recollection that takes place in an individual's brain.

Assmann (2011) created the term communicative memory to elaborate on Halbwachs' implication that memories become collective as people cooperate verbally and physically within social frameworks. Referencing Halbwachs' notion of oral history, Assmann (2011: 18) emphasises that communicative memory "lives in everyday interaction and communication," where individuals share memories with contemporaries. These recollections are not based on "written sources of historiography but exclusively on memories elicited in oral interviews." This approach is also significant to this study. This serves to contrast or complement the relationship that Halbwachs identified between people and buildings.

Finding congruence in Halbwachs' *collective memory,* Assmann's proposes another way of looking at the role of Soweto buildings as cultural memory. The interaction between the people and the buildings also informs the reconstruction of a historical narrative of Sowetan community theatre. In this way, one may outline in the narrative a transition from "autobiographical memory and communicative memory to cultural memory" (2011: 22). For example, the initial memory of interviewees transforms into collective recollections that are spoken about within the Soweto community. Ultimately, these recollections may assume the mantle of cultural memory in that the recollections of interviewees supplement memories that are seen as embedded in various Soweto buildings where plays were written, rehearsals were held and plays were performed. Assmann's elaborations also emphasise Halbwachs' notion that the past is not preserved in its pristine form (in the mind) but is, in Assmann's word "galvanised" or reconstructed within a social framework of people and buildings (2011: 19).

2.8 Collective memory and time

In outlining the various components of the *cadres sociaux,* Halbwachs identified time as one of the ways in which *collective memory* manifests to quantify the human experience of time (1980: 88–89). This aspect of the theory draws attention to the notion that "social life implies that all men [and women] agree on times and duration and know well the conventions governing them" (1980: 88–89).

Halbwachs regards astronomy and terrestrial physics as outlining a general framework for organising human experience. This framework provides a background onto which "society superimposes … [socially determined demarcations that are] especially suited to the conditions and habits of concrete human beings" (1980: 89). He says that these demarcations organise years and days into an on-going, repeated temporal structure, and that time is similarly organised in periodic divisions, which are also repeated and regular. The consistent, regular and predictable nature of organising time has an impact on society. One example is that social interaction is organised in a way that allows for designated periods of work as well as designated periods of leisure and ceremony (such as religious holidays). Halbwachs (1980: 92–100) sees these temporal divisions as "a thought" of individuals because the divisions are agreed upon by society; divisions become "conventional" and are then "imposed upon us from the outside." Again, Halbwachs emphasises that the individual and the group interact not to "merely" identify divisions of time but to ascribe to "days, hours, minutes and seconds… a definite collective meaning."

2.8.1 Time as a form of duration

In reformulating the relationships between the person remembering (individual consciousness) and social interaction (the consciousness of a society) Halbwachs breaks from a long-standing tradition of what constitutes memory. Richards (2007: 20) highlights how ancient Greek philosophers recognised memory as an "'art' or 'craft.'" Similarly, Roman scholars emphasised the role of memory in rhetoric. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance people who could recite vast tracts of texts were admired. In antiquity and early modernity, memory was characterised by an action of the mind that involved

> first, the idea that "memory" is an active process which is defined by two activities of collection and recollection, of storing and retrieval; second, that these activities constitute the basis of knowing and understanding (Richards 2007: 20–21).

In the ideas expressed above, consciousness is absent in the formulation of memory. The mind is seen as facilitating the relaying of knowledge by an individual to other people in

society. In these approaches the individual and society are separate entities that do not collaborate in the creation of memories, nor in their retrieval and recollection. While Freud showed the importance of the subconscious to memory, it was Halbwachs who attributed a collective consciousness to memory and externalised the relationship of the mind and the individual remembering. The narration of memory, whether as rhetoric, or simply the narration of past events and the relaying of knowledge about the past, thus became a social enterprise.

Halbwachs proposes that people within a society experience events (and past events, memories) as occurring within a duration of time. Past events occur in periods of "fixed partitions of durations" and these are derived "from conventions and customs and express order … of the successive phases of social life" (Halbwachs 1980: 88–89).

In living life, people as a collective agree on the manner in which time is constituted or organised in society. Thus society decides the convention of what constitutes a duration and Halbwachs (1980: 88–89) sees this way of organising time as constituting a "traditional" social practice. As an example, the organisation of the "temporal structure" of one day, from morning to noon and night, is an expression of social conventions as it is constant, predictable and heterogenous. Societies tend to have an unspoken but mutually agreed upon "common law, that many people, many social milieus, many urban districts" adhere to. Within the social milieus people perform allocated tasks, for example office work "during business hours, when other employees are present." Other durations of time, such as a weekend, may be designated as a time for recreation. The tasks and leisure activities thus occur at designated times, and with specified durations that have been determined by society, thus they are a form of social organisation.

These activities are also the basis for collective memories of particular events or activities. Halbwachs declares that the division of labour (between work and recreation) "involves men in a mechanical interlinking of activities," where persons within a group "regulate [their] activities" to be in "accord with a rhythm adopted by others without consideration of [their] own preferences" (1980: 89). This reflects European social conventions and customs at the time of writing (the text was published in French under the title *La Memoire collective* in 1950). Despite the fluidity of social norms in Soweto during the 1980s and 1990s, Halbwachs' concept of expressing *collective memory* as an

aspect of time (or "social time") is informative in that it allows for a systematic account of collective memories of Sowetan theatre.

Interviews with past participants in Soweto theatre reveal points of commonality in the way the past was recalled within specific time durations (or experiences narrated as occurring within measurements of time). In narrating the memories of past events, the individual's consciousness is subsumed within a collective experience and conceptualisation of time. Halbwachs' memory studies enable the writing of a narration in which an individual's "discontinuous reference points" are harmonised because individual remembrances "evoke one another" (1980: 94). Halbwachs postulated that, if we see memories as taking place in the mind, this reflects a partial, abstract representation of the past. Therefore, his theory offered a critique and expansion of what he called Bergson's subjective approach to memory studies. Halbwachs' contribution is that he saw memory as a result of a reconstruction (in which the individual experiences are seen as shared social experiences) allowing for a more comprehensive account of the past that corresponds to the social reality in which the people remembering have lived. Thus the circumstances in which past events took place are informed by a common consciousness (Halbwachs 1980: 92–5). The consciousness of an individual "is an external action of another consciousness." Through daily interaction, members of a society influence each other's perceptions rather than relying on their subjective sensory perception of human interaction and experience. Similarly, material objects and other experiences of the "external world" are "imposed on a person's consciousness," thereby influencing how different members of society see the world. Individual traits are common to "several consciousnesses" or are related through a "society of consciousness" (1980: 96).

Halbwachs held that society expresses time as a collective experience by establishing relationships as persons "whose thoughts simultaneously become aware of one another" (1980: 93). Memory includes the passage of time through day-to-day occurrences to longer periods measuring experiences that take place over generations. Within the social framework, people operate "in a temporal line joining any two moments (which can be represented as a uniform movement or change completed between them), temporal divisions – such as years, months, days, hours, minutes or seconds" (1980: 93).

In the case of history, time may feature in such a way that the written history assumes a chronological order of events (Langer 2007: 194). The current, living generation formulates the memories of their predecessors as history and because these events are not recalled within “their milieus,” they are hampered by gaps (1980: 105). In contrast to memory, the expression of time as an aspect of history means that there is a lacuna in how people remember. This is because looking at events through the prism of history means that events of the past are “considered independent of the real time to which they belong,” thus they become an inadequate “chronological succession of facts” (1980: 105).

Memory invests meaning in how people express past experiences as an aspect of time. Individuals experience time as constructed through their interactions with family members and as experienced in social gatherings (the school, church and theatre groups, among others). Thus, individual memories are enfolded by the larger groups, thereby becoming collective memories. Furthermore, the social framework, agrees on a “temporal framework” that helps “us best remember an event occurring in a group” (1980: 88–9).

As an aspect of collective memory, for example in the telling of past trauma in Holocaust studies, “durational time” refers to a recollection of events in which “the past disrupts the present and is re-experienced in the telling” (2007: 188). In literature, time may be represented as “simultaneous actions [and memories] in homogenous empty time” (2007:245).

As a collective, social groupings have a common understanding of duration. This formulation of time is an abstract concept that community members adopt and voluntarily function within. The temporal framework helps community members to remember events that have occurred. Recalling Bergson’s theory, Halbwachs posits that these recollections take the form of (mental) images but adds that images are recalled by “traversing the framework of time” (1980: 99). Halbwachs declares that “time has significance only so far as it permits us to retain and recall events occurring within it” (1980: 98). Looking at time as duration in which events may occur is one way of speaking of the period of time (for example seconds, minutes, years and decades) in which an event happened in the past. Some interviewees recalled their memories as occurring over a specified period of time. For instance, one actor mentioned that she was in a play for a number of years or months.

2.8.2 The configuration of time as *collective memory*

"Lived time" – that is, time as experienced by people within a community, is shaped by what Bergson called a "void of consciousness [where people in a community] leave behind their own particular thoughts to place themselves within more extensive groups and totalities" (Halbwachs 1980: 99). In this way, members of society synchronise their experiences into "homogenous time," a process that Bergson quantified as "mechanical time" – a metaphor to account for brain activity. Halbwachs applies the abstract configuration of time to analyse the practicalities of social interaction. As an example, when people learn that a train is due to leave at 15:00 hours, they "are obliged to translate this fact" into action by agreeing – if they need to travel – to congregate at the station at the appropriate hour (1980: 101). Individual members of society do not oppose this socially agreed time frame but adjust their activities to adhere to this notion. This abstract timeframe is stable in the community as collective memories arise from social interactions that have taken place within a certain timeframe. Therefore, as an example, "days, hours, minutes and seconds are not mere divisions of homogenised time, for they actually have a definite collective meaning" (1980: 100).

"Universalize[d] time" represents "a wholly uniform milieu, very similar if not identical to the representation of space" (1980: 100). Collective memories, then, arise from how people within society have engaged in actions in which time was a factor (for example going to the station at an appointed hour). Thus, "in abstracting from particular events experienced by the individual consciousness, we represent time as a homogenous medium similar to geographic space" (1980: 100). Here Halbwachs revisits Aristotle's (2007: 35–36) similar equation of a "time-lapse" (what Halbwachs calls duration) and spatial magnitudes. Aristotle notes that "[r]emembering involves time-lapses, like different spatial magnitudes [which are] presented by differing small scale models in one's thought." This describes how an individual experiences the passing of time from one point to the next. Halbwachs modifies this idea to explain how time is a factor in how individuals remember the past. His innovation is that memory involves more than the thoughts of one individual experience, therefore memory is a collective endeavour because it manifests

within a social framework (*cadres sociaux*). This insight allows for analysis that sees the contributions by this study's interviewees as cohering in a narrative of Sowetan theatre.

The universal nature of time explains "a very imperfect organic unity" between events "that have occurred in the world, on all continents, in all countries, to all groups within each country, and thus to all individuals" (1980: 101). In this blanket statement Halbwachs does not interrogate different cultural modes of conceptualising time. This concept also presents a rather unitary view of what events or actors constitute history; In addition, it also does not question the notion of "civilisation" and the assumptions embedded therein.

On the other hand, making a point about "contemporaneous" experience of world events is valid. As an example, Maishe Maponya's play *Gangsters* (1984) speaks of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's rejection of sanctions against apartheid era South Africa in 1984. Thatcher had made her pronouncements in the United Kingdom and her views were recorded in the *Sowetan*, among others. Her stance was also well known and condemned by people in Soweto. Thus, memories of this world event are shared by people in Soweto, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the world, even if each society interprets the political stance differently. Therefore, memories are reconstructed through the purview of time. Referring to recollection, people lend meaning to the events of the past, thus elevating a view of the past as a list of events that does not always cohere into a comprehensive narrative. Halbwachs (1980: 113) proposes that "the same event can effect more than one collective consciousness simultaneously, then these consciousness are, at that moment, interrelated and unified by a common representation."

In contrast, historical time is captured in "written documents, annals or monument inscriptions," but without considering the social milieu in which the event occurred. For Halbwachs, historical time may incorporate events "whose date and temporal ordering have been approximately determined by historians" (1980: 102). However, no universal time exists here because these events do not involve people who share or have shared "common thought[s] even temporarily" (1980: 103). Universal time becomes apparent through the recollections of people, who may describe memories, thereby relaying minute changes in past occurrences. People, or in the context of this study, interviewees, are

able to give the "content of the group consciousness or the various circumstances within which this group was still able to recognise" changes in society or in institutions (1980: 106). Here Halbwachs is saying that interviewees' narration of their experiences (the content of the group's consciousness) is informative because it provides an account of changes in society or institutions. It is in this way that Halbwachs' concept of time assists in contextualising the memories of people talking about or referring to Sowetan theatre.

Another variant of the conceptualisation of collective memory as an aspect of time involves interviewees who spoke of the events of the 1980s and 1990s as having occurred "a long time ago." As I am writing in the year 2021 it is indeed twenty-seven years since 1994. The socio-political context is different from the apartheid era (1984–1994) when the events took place and the post-apartheid era (2020) when the interviewees conveyed their recollections of those events. Halbwachs' conceptualisations are that, firstly, memory is a reconstruction of a past event, within the context of present circumstances. Thus, the present social framework touches on the interviewees' reflections of recent developments in Sowetan theatre. Secondly, the time lapse between the interviewees taking part in Sowetan theatre and their recollections is an example of "duration."

In this way the emphasis is not on analysing individual memories for unique elements but on seeing the recollections of the interviewees as an agglomeration in the writing of a more comprehensive narrative of the past. Halbwachs (1980: 59) notes that "the thoughts" of a person are adaptable to "a collective space and time". The formulation of "thoughts" and "images" describes how the collective memory conceptualises time and space. Halbwachs (1980: 59) adds that "the thoughts of all persons come together within … [the social] framework". He says that individuals connect their remembrances to reference points, in this instance to Soweto, which served as a shared "milieu" for all interviewees. A historical study would only consider the chronological unfolding of events, in contrast to a narrative based on memories, which reconstructs the past by considering experiences of events as recounted by the interviewees.

2.8.3 Collective groups and time

The social framework, which is the gathering of individuals cohering into a society, may also be configured according to "distinct groups" who organise their lives according to their own collective time. Individuals may belong to different social configurations, being part of a drama group, while in another context, they are members of a church. This concept may account for people travelling between countries. Halbwachs considered the importance of real time, which has "enough continuity to enable thought [or consciousness] to move throughout [many different social groupings] without losing a sense of its own unity" (1980: 107). He notes that this view does not deny that individuals in groups relate to each other within time frames divided into years, months, days and hours. However, different groups are able to correlate the different understandings of time that may exist within themselves. People within different groups synchronise time by anticipating differences of time between one group they are leaving behind and another group they are about to join. This may happen equally when considering a person leaving a church group to join a drama group.

Other configurations of time may be defined without stating the precise moment an event begins or ends. On some occasions, members of a distinct group may speak of meeting "one of these days," thus without defining specific dates or time frames. In fact, some groups may not necessarily be physical groups, but "ephemeral relationships of people in the same occupation, village, city, or of friends involved in social tasks, artistic activity, or 'just getting together'" (1980: 109). Halbwachs holds that because people in a group interact with one another, they share "common thoughts" (even if this is fleeting), as well as "many characteristics and concepts" (1980: 109). He (1980: 111) argues that people within a group or groups share a "rather exact correspondence between all [their different conceptualisations] of time. The concept of time remains constant because they agree to adjust to one another's social conventions. All groups divide time in roughly the same way because they have inherited the same tradition." Halbwachs last statement can only be partially applied to contextualise the memories of Sowetan theatre mainly because a purposive sample has been chosen for this study. Otherwise, in the

multicultural context of South Africa, different communities may insist on foregrounding their unique (cultural) traditions.

People may also accumulate memories in the course of rapid or slow social processes. Halbwachs comments on what should be considered a "common measure" to quantify social change (1980: 115). He proposes that measuring the "speed of time according to the number of events it encompasses" is not an appropriate method of calculation because time is not a successive series of facts or a sum of differences" (1980: 115). He (1980: 116–117) argues that whether memories are accumulated over "years or decades" or whether it is a case of time between societies considered to enjoy a slow pace of life (for example rural communities) or a rapid rhythm of life (in cities) does not necessarily equate to a fast or slow social change. In both social settings, time fits the "needs and traditions" of each social framework. However,

> in the act of remembering, thought is remarkable in its ability to travel quickly over large intervals of time. The speed with which it goes back in time varies, not only among groups but also among members of a group and in the individual himself in different moments (1980: 117).

Mentioning that the act of remembering may be rapid does not mean that Halbwachs regards memories as being stored in the brain in the manner of Freud and Bergson. At the same time, there is an affinity with Bergson (2004: 25), who believed that memory consists of a recollection of past events, which considers present circumstances (or perceptions). Halbwachs notes "in reality the mind does not review each image" of the past. Rather, the mind "anchors itself in time, the time of a given group, and seeks there to recover, or rather to reconstitute its remembrances" (1980: 117). As an example, in recalling past events, interviewees represented time as a "continuous and unchanging medium," in that the recollection of events that had taken place on a particular day would maintain a stable time line.

In *De memoria et reminiscentia* (2007: 28), Aristotle declared that memory "is the past, not the future, or present, nor what is present as an object of perception." However, both Bergson and Halbwachs saw the past and the present as engaged in a dialogue. Halbwachs insists that a day (today) "would be the same today as it was yesterday," so

that, for instance, the interviewees of this study were able to “retrieve the yesterday in the today” (1980: 117). For Halbwachs the social context makes it possible to have memories.

When recalling the past, groups share the same conceptualisation of time. An individual within a group may be regarded as part of a group even if other group members are not actually present. Halbwachs (1980: 118) holds that the mutual influence of group members is carried in their consciousness. Group members share a common “group viewpoint,” and a common “milieu and time.” This means that interviewees who had not been in contact with one another could see themselves as being part of the group many years after they were contemporaries in the Sowetan theatre of that period. This is because they shared a “body of concerns and ideas … some common thought is present” (1980: 118–119).

Halbwachs’ proposal above builds on his initial demarcation of memory as lasting a period of three generations (Olick 2016: 46). He regards events that have taken place over a longer period than three generations ago as part of history and therefore captured in history books. Orlick agrees with Halbwachs’ time span of three generations for memories and explains that the period begins with the oldest living generation and ends with the youngest members within a particular community. Taking the notion of duration in memory further, Olick (2016: 46) suggests that there are “different temporalities of collective memories;” there are a number of possibilities ranging from a specified time frame of forty years to give an account of the negative impact of memories in society. He mentions how some memories may be seen to last an individual’s lifetime. Yet, as examples in trauma studies show, the impact of memories has been seen to last over generations, while some memories of trauma may not be quantified according to the number of years that have passed since an event occurred. Olick (2016: 46) compares Halbwachs’ expansive time frame of three generations to research that sees a “floating gap” between memory that is being “communicated” and that which has already “sedimented into culture.” Halbwachs referred to the former as *collective memory* and the latter as “history.” Halbwachs’ finding was that both current memories and history could be synchronised when the older generation narrated their history to younger members within a social group.

2.9 The *cadres sociaux*: the relationship between people and space

A social framework may also be an aspect of space. This goes back to the idea that memories are a reconstruction. Halbwachs proposed that people within a community construct space in their consciousness, or in their "thoughts." At the same time, the space in which people live, namely the geographical environment, physical spaces (the built environment) and objects they use (for example household furniture) provide opportunities and limits to the way in which people live. As an example, the space in which family, friends and colleagues frequently socialise and assemble for leisure, work or to rehearse plays becomes engraved in the minds of the individual participants. These images, although separate, harmonise because the group has a common understanding of the way in which the space is used. The group also has similar ways of assessing the aesthetics informing the chosen furniture in the room and also shares a common motivation to be present in that space. A drama group that meets regularly to rehearse a play develops an emotional and intellectual bond. The group manages feelings of (mostly) goodwill in their endeavour to stage a play. As a collective memory, these emotional attachments may vary in their intensity, but they are one way to account for the bonds that Halbwachs says "circulate" within the group (1980: 129). Another aspect of *collective memory* is the images that are conjured up in the brain. As a recollection, the combination of the feelings and images is not an exact replication of past feelings and images but these aspects describe the way that the group evaluates, compares, gains new insights, adopts old customs and accommodates new social ways of engaging amongst itself and with members of other groups within a community and society.

Halbwachs (1980: 128) notes that "our habitual images of the external world are inseparable from our [sense of] self." Ultimately, the experience of living in certain spaces influences the memories of individuals.

In the first instance, the connection between society and its environment (the collective *cadres sociaux*) assumes several forms. The environment and objects that people use "bear our and other's imprint" (1980: 128). The space and objects in the space which the individual sees and uses invoke thoughts of shared memories, which may be intimate, such as those between family members, but also abstract, in "bonds attaching

us to various groups.” This implies that these bonds take on a psychological, emotional form, but Halbwachs ultimately emphasises practical everyday social interaction so that “each object appropriately placed in the whole recalls a way of life common to many men” (1980: 129). The way in which space is invoked within the collective also spans generations to include “older customs” as well as current social practices. It is through people’s memories of how their lives are lived and how everyday objects are used that invests meaning in geographical space or in objects. For example, it is the actors’ memories of Gibson Kente’s garage that, in a reconstruction of the past, renders the space as collective memory. Similarly, the use of everyday items of furniture as stage props also renders those objects part of collective memory (unfortunately none of these items have survived). The material objects (especially those in Kente’s garage) have been lodged in the consciousness, not only of his actors or people who had direct interaction with him while he was still alive, but also in the minds of subsequent generations of Sowetan residents (or people interested in Sowetan theatre).

In reconstructing the past, thoughts of Kente are inscribed in the physical buildings as memory. The group “not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted, but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings” (1980: 130). Halbwachs’ argument is that even though the people remembering no longer share the physical space, they “remain united” because “the group’s image of its external milieu, and its stable relationship with this environment [is] … paramount.” This comes about in the reconstruction of memories, where the initial experience of an event is combined with the current perception of changes in physical environment to become part of collective memory.

Halbwachs’ propensity to smooth out differences is challenged by Linda Anderson (2007: 273), who points out that “the same geographical space, therefore, can articulate different histories and meanings.” Writing about autobiographical memory (or a recollection by an individual), Avtah Brah (2007: 288) notes how “the same geographical space comes to articulate different histories and meanings” in how people write about space. For Brah, maintaining that different peoples, groups or communities do not have the same associations with a geographical space allows for the emergence of historical narratives that would otherwise be subsumed in a larger, all-encompassing recollection.

Brah writes specifically about different racial groups having contrasting memories associated with a place and also mentions that gender plays a part in how a social group relates to a space. While Brah does not dispute that, in Halbwachs' terms, individuals (or groups) "are connected naturally to a certain place because spatial proximity has created social relationships between members" (Halbwachs 1980: 136), she nonetheless challenges the notion that space is heterogenous. Her formulation of space also calls into question the notion that differences in relating to a space (and memories thereof) can be harmonised into what seems to be a general human experience.

In specific ways, the built environment as exemplified by Soweto indicates that *collective memory* is based on "spatial images" (Halbwachs 1980: 132–133). For example, streets and historical theatre performance venues (community halls) create a "stable" memory and are a continuous reminder of past theatrical activities. Halbwachs asserts that this connection persists even when society evolves much faster than the changes in the physical environment, when older buildings are demolished, for instance (1980: 132–133). Habits formed in the manner that people use the surrounding streets and buildings link people to these structures and to their community. Thus, the experience of going to Eyethu Cinema to see a performance in itself ascribes a relationship or "habit" to the venue. By the same token, the way in which the venue is configured imposes a habit in the way in which the community experiences the venue. This is apparent in the way they perceive the building externally, as part of the landscape, and also by the way the community uses (or has used) its interior, and how the configuration of the building dictates the movement of people within it. In other words, when entering a theatre, the audience is channelled to enter the foyer before proceeding to the auditorium. The emphasis here in on the building itself, rather than how the performance of a play is influenced by a building or analysing the way in which the building evokes past performances. Halbwachs (1980: 133) writes that "[w]hen a group has lived a long time in a place adapted to its habits, its thoughts as well as its movements are in turn ordered by the succession of images from these external objects."

Groups without a "spatial basis" may also have an affinity with a space. Halbwachs argues that these groups are not formed through "living in the same place." Specifically, their recollections need not include shared remembrances consisting of images of the

same place (Halbwachs 1980: 136). Theoretically speaking, a theatre group may align itself to Soweto, or to Kente, Manaka or Maponya's (physical) spaces, not because they have lived in Soweto but because of similar artistic competencies and values. Halbwachs' examples include groups constituted by legislative decree, economic activity or through religious organisations. Therefore, (Halbwachs 1980: 136) finds that:

> Legal relationships are based on individuals having rights and being able to contract obligations independently of their physical location (at least in the Western world). Economic groups are based on positions in production, not space, on the diversity of occupations, types of remuneration, and distribution of goods. Economically speaking people are defined and compared on characteristics of person and not place. This is even more true of religious groups. They establish invisible bonds between their members and emphasise the inner man. Each of these groups is superimposed on localized groups.

As evident above, Halbwachs anticipates the limitations of specific theoretical concepts outside a Western cultural and ideological paradigm. Relevant to this study is his way of thinking through various facets of collective memory and how these might assist in formulating a more comprehensive narrative of Sowetan theatre. In the first place, Halbwachs (1980: 137–8) acknowledges that disparities within societies are mitigated. Thus, to explore the applicability of conjured space and "superimposition" on a "localised" Soweto group, I consider recollections of two interviewees, one who worked with the playwright Maishe Maponya, and the other an academic and anti-apartheid cultural activist who was Maponya's colleague. In the Halbwachscian manner, both may be seen as belonging to the same group: differences in socio-economic background, training in theatre and domestic residency (under apartheid, racial classification determined where people lived) are diluted by their progressive political (as opposed to ideological) convictions. Their belief in theatre as an agent for social change temporarily places them in a single group. In an interview with Malcolm Purkey and Maishe Maponya, it could be said that their recollections are "connected with different parts of the land" (Halbwachs 1980: 137). The material spaces connected to their recollections are Soweto (where Maponya lived), the Market Theatre (where Maponya's plays were performed) and the city of Johannesburg, a place traversed by both on their way to and from the theatre and their homes. In memory these places are reconstructed in the thoughts and imagination of Purkey and Maponya. Memories are not limited to the two individuals' recollections but

are included within a larger social framework because other people also have memories of Soweto, the Market Theatre and Johannesburg. These different life experiences (or different social frameworks) of South Africa

> reinforce one another because the parcels of land to which they relate are side by side. The remembrances are preserved in group thought because they are founded on the land, because the image of the land endures outside them and may be recaptured at any moment (Halbwachs 1980: 138).

Halbwachs (1980: 140) adds that it is "the image of a place that conjures up thoughts about an activity of the group associated with that place." This is an abstract notion (about mental frameworks or group consciousness) in which the construction of collective memory is built on ideas and images that need not have a "strict and necessary relationship" between the image (of a specific place) and the mental framework. This framework does not evoke a specific image in the people remembering (1980: 140). In Halbwachscian terms, the interviewee who has not been to Soweto finds affinity with the Sowetan group by "feeling an impulse" from the society of theatre practitioners. She does not necessarily "view things as they really are … but as they appear to one trying only to reproduce an image of them" (1980: 141). Even though this process is "less natural," it is a credible construction of space and "no less real" than the image of Soweto in the thoughts of people who have lived in Soweto (1980: 141).

Lamenting what he sees as their decline, Nora celebrates the role of the real environments of memory or *milieu de memoire* as an aspect of *collective memory*. He sees material space in the same way as Halbwachs. To highlight the way in which *milieu de memoire* function, Nora (2007: 144–145) uses as the example of "peasant culture" (in France), which he sees as a repository of collective memory. Without using the same words, he describes a social framework just as Halbwachs does, in terms of key social institutions: the family, the church, school and the state. Nora is describing self-referential groups of people, in that members of a family are likely to see each other daily and members of a church and school would have designated and regular interaction. Therefore, these people consciously interact with the intent of building meaningful social relations. Similarly, by living in the same country, citizens will have some common areas of sharing traditions, heroes and myths (2007: 145). It is in these environments that "the

transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values takes place." In the environment of peasant culture, there is close social interaction in which a collective heritage thrives. Close social relations between members of that community enable the transmission of traditions and the passing on of ancestral practices from the older to the younger generation (2007:149). In the *milieu de memoire*, the experiences of members of society give rise to "spontaneous memories" (2007:149), a state of affairs, that is no longer possible since the rise of modern culture.

Peasant culture, along with other purist societies, has been supplanted by technological development, which is inadequate because it has eroded a culture that nurtures "reserves of memory." In practical terms, older societies venerate ritual practices that lend a natural continuity to society; contemporary society, on the other hand is steeped in "artifice" with the result of constant "transformation and renewal … a society that values the new over the ancient" (2007: 149). When society prioritises the recording of events by the media, it provides a limited historical view of the past. He says that historical perception is limited because this form of recording the past lacks the familiarity that comes about when the information and knowledge is shared among people on a one-to-one basis (as in older communities). Where memory allows for "the intimacy of a collective heritage," a historical narration of past events is akin to an "ephemeral film of current events" (2007: 145). This means that when significant events are not memorialised, their importance can be diminished when they are structured and recorded (by the media) as a fast-repeated sequence of news items.

Thus, capitalizing on Halbwachs' insights, Nora proposes that in the modern era *collective memory* is best served by *lieux de moire,* or sites of memory. This includes a conscious act of reconstruction. Thus people "must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organise celebrations … because such activities no longer occur naturally" (Nora 2007: 149). The *lieux de memoire* express a residual memory and represent "the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness" (2007: 149). Halbwachs sees space in itself as inadequate in conveying collective memory. The social framework is a complete universe describing how people in a community are part of space and are also part of the objects they use. Their memories are created in space and in objects but they also evoke a space. In his description, Nora's spaces have a cultural bias and the spaces

are linked to collective memory because ritual can be performed there. Ritual involves the celebration of festivals, the recognition of anniversaries and the bestowing of fraternal orders, among others (Nora 2007: 149). Most important are the associations the groups (what I call communities) have with space. Halbwachs sees associations as "thoughts" or the consciousness of a group, whereas Nora regards these associations as a form of "ritual" that engenders meaning in a space.

Assmann also draws upon and extends Halbwachs' theory that *collective memory* is a social construction. Assmann's (2011: 17–18) critique is that Halbwachs acknowledged social frames only, and he proposes that:

> human memory is also embedded in cultural frames, such as the landscape or town-scape in which people grew up, the texts they learned, the feasts they celebrated, the churches or synagogues they frequented, the music they listened to and especially the stories they were told and by and in which they live.

In setting out his theory, Halbwachs mentioned the important role of institutions (the home, church and school) and here Assmann sees the "interaction between a remembering mind and reminding object." This is a diversion from Halbwachs who emphasises that human experience of institutions is the basis for *collective memory* (in the form of space). Indeed, Assmann sees these buildings as "mnemonic institutions." Assmann calls this type of *collective memory* "communicative memory" to emphasise that it "lives in everyday interaction and communication." This is his first formulation of collective memory. At the same time, Assmann (2011: 18) does not want to see buildings in themselves as setting a dominant discourse. He says that communicative memory "is not supported by any institutions of learning, transmission or interpretation, nor is it cultivated by specialists or summoned or celebrated on special occasions. It is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization."

Assmann (2011: 20) also speaks of cultural memory as a social construction "in that a number of people share cultural memory and in that it conveys to them a collective (i.e. cultural) identity." This is his second formulation of *collective memory*. Assmann posits that we can see cultural memory as organised by (as opposed to organised within) society. It emanates from ideas society commonly agrees upon and actualises in buildings, objects and social practices that they create and which they invest with

meaning (2011: 17). Furthermore, cultural memory is “disembodied” since it does not manifest solely in the brain (as with Freud), nor is it exclusively evident in the replication of past actions that individuals perform (as with Bergson). Since society invests buildings and objects with cultural memory in, it is free to choose which entity to bestow with cultural memory, depending on the (social) circumstance prevailing at that time. Society does not have to transfer the status of a building as a receptacle of memory but may preserve it and hand it over to the next generation. Interestingly, Assmann argues that entities that symbolically represent cultural memory become “re-embodied in society” when people visit the monuments and archives and when they celebrate anniversaries and make use of space designated as cultural memory (2011: 17).

In Assmann’s assessment (as indeed in Halbwachs’) buildings, ceremonies and people comprise *collective memory*. He (2011: 17) notes: “[g]roups do not have memory in the way that an individual does, but they may make themselves a memory by erecting monuments and by developing a variety of cultural techniques (mnemotechniques) that support memory or promote forgetting.” In this way *collective memory* is “re-embodied” in society. Assmann (2011: 17) notes that monuments serve to prompt the mind of the people within a community to remember culturally significant events that have occurred in the past (cultural memory). The memory is triggered in the brain of the person remembering. Assmann believes that this illustrates that memory is a result of the interaction between a monument (a symbol created by members of a community to memorialise culture) and the person’s perception of that monument (an activity of the brain). Memories are not simply retrieved in the brain, but are a result of interaction between people and the objects they have created.

Both Nora and Assmann’s formulations on the way in which *collective memory* can be expressed via space flow from Halbwachs observation that space can articulate meanings and memories to social groupings. In their recollections. the interviewees of this study indeed reflected on Soweto as an important place of memory in the socio-political context and spoke of the way in which community theatre was associated with various spaces.

2.9.1 Collective memories inscribed and invoked in space

Halbwachs (1980: 140) contends that *collective memory* "unfolds within a spatial framework." Communities "occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can … reconstruct in thought and imagination" memories of significant space. Halbwachs tests scenarios to explore the concept that the memories of groups that exist on a conceptual plane are as valid as memories of a group that has existed through physical contact. For example, "legal space is not an empty milieu merely symbolizing a still undefined possible relationship among men" (1980: 141). Rather, it "results from society's having adopted an enduring attitude toward a certain piece of land or a physical object" (1980: 141). Thus, it is an enduring attitude (or thoughts or ideas) that conjures up this legal space rather than a particular space (for example parliamentary chambers) inspiring the conjuring up of a legal space.

Similarly, where economic space draws from economic activity between members of a group, it is defined by previous activity (for example buying and selling) amongst members of this group. The prices for which items are sold "has no relationship with the objects' appearance or physical properties" but are a result of the views held by the group. These views are informed by the memories of the group, which collectively are part of their consciousness and do not emanate from their physical action involved when they were engaged in economic activities (buying and selling items in a building or in a geographical space). He adds that "the remembrance of exchange activities and the value of objects – that is the whole content of memory of the economic group – is normally evoked within the spatial framework made up of these places" (1980: 147).

Schwartz (2016: 11) suggests that Halbwachs ascribes a "transcendent condition" as a common element of collective memory even to geographically dispersed communities. He (2016:11) says: "Collective memory must therefore be treated as an *emergent* entity, a *social fact* connecting separate and often distant communities" [Schwartz's emphasis]. This last assertion is important for this study, since the sample of interviews includes individuals (who are the units of analysis) who have similar, transmitted collective memories of Soweto-based community theatre, but have not

necessarily been present as audience members at the same venues or even witnessed the same performance of the plays under discussion.

As an example of Halbwachs' formulation of space, Gibson Kente's garage may be given value as a "theatre space" on the basis that collective memory (of Kente's actors and his colleagues) accords the space the character of a theatrical venue when they relate their recollections. (1980: 142). In the present day, even though the garage has not been used for theatre purposes in the past seventeen years, the memories of the interviewees secures the space permanently as part of Soweto history. It is the way in which those remembering think and feel about past activities (for example rehearsals) that validates the memory of this particular space. In this way the garage as space that is being memorialised becomes part of "signs and symbols" that society attaches to its thoughts or consciousness (1980: 142). In the Halbwachscian manner, these thoughts are not external to the physical structure of the garage but are "related only artificially and arbitrarily" to the garage (1980: 142). Therefore, the physical garage on its own is not the basis for collective memory; rather it is the concept of the garage as a theatrical space that solidifies the contextualising of memories of Sowetan theatre during the period 1984–1994.

2.10 Conclusion

Collective memory transformed the notion that memory is a process taking place only in an individual's brain. Halbwachs conceived of *collective memory* as an inclusive endeavour involving an individual in association with his or her social group. The interaction within the group is an important element as it underlines his proposal that present circumstances in conjunction with recollections account for collective memory.

Memory studies is an appropriate theoretical approach for this study because it sees objective and subjective elements as contributing to writing a narrative of the past. Halbwachs' theory of *collective memory* is particularly informative as its various components best suit the writing of a narrative from multiple sources: spoken memories, written histories as well as texts produced for theatre. Several writers, including Gedi and Elam (1996), Ricoeur (2006) and Schwartz and Schuman (2005) acknowledge

Halbwachs' contributions to memory studies. His theory is the most suitable for this study in light of the relative scarcity of written and archival information regarding Sowetan theatre.

Halbwachs' separation of the operation of history from memory has had a far-reaching impact. The division of history and memory was to account for the involvement of people (as part of the *cadres sociaux*) in mitigating (but not necessarily) eliminating gaps in information available on the past. Ricoeur (2004) also argues that forgetting can be a creative process in the composition of a historical narrative. Hutton (2016: 31), too, posits that individual and collective memories are intermingled so as to test the way in which individual memories are corroborated to the point of making memories "precise and even to cover the gaps in remembrances." Assmann (2011) also suggests that the dichotomy between communicative and cultural memory may be resolved by the involvement of people. Communication memory describes daily communication (people's personal experience and social interaction) between members of a group, and cultural memory refers to shared recollections when members of a group relate their memories to an institution (Berger & Niven 2014b: 11).

Thus life, or the memory of people who are living, is an important aspect of *collective memory*. Halbwachs says that the living experience is captured in the memories of the current living generation who have internalised the experiences of elders in their society. Contemporaries have their own memories and they incorporate these when they formulate the events of the past as an aspect of time and space.

In conceptualising collective memory as an aspect of time, Halbwachs sets *collective memory* apart from history in that history is associated with time in the form of a chronology and the listing of past events. As opposed to history, memory studies is a suitable approach for this study in that incorporating memories allowed for an analysis and interpretation of Sowetan theatre (1984–1994).

Halbwachs proposed that collective remembrances are best captured by analysing the duration of events. Understanding the passing of time as an aspect of duration helped to find commonalities in the narratives of the interviewees of this study. Analysing memory time, through the lens of duration also allowed me to see the current generation as "contemporaneous" with their ancestors. Ricouer (2004:395), quoting Alfred Schutz,

extends Halbwachs' temporal horizon to considering the current and previous generation to be cognisant of the memories of the current generation's "predecessors, contemporaries and successors." Whitehead (2007b: 188) refers to "'durational time' in which the past disrupts the present and is re-experienced in telling."

Halbwachs' concept of duration implies that the impact of events is measured not only as having happened within a fixed historical period. For example, in memory studies the socio-political impact of apartheid is part of the contemporary post-apartheid discourse. This flexible approach to time adopted by Halbwachs and his successors allowed for a rich analysis of the participants' memories in this study as well as an equally rich analysis and interpretation of Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays.

As with the conceptualisation of time, Halbwachs challenged the notion that the material aspect of space is the only way in which society (or community) can engage with space. He proposed that the group could also relate to space abstractly, in their "thoughts" or consciousness. Memories emanating from the use of a building do not have to be prompted by an individual having used the space before. But these memories may arise out of an affinity that the people (within the social framework) have with each other. This conceptualisation of space is liberated from the tyranny of proximity to a building (in this study, community halls) and a geographical space (Soweto).

This inclusive approach to space means, for example, that individuals who may not have been to Soweto, can speak about their impressions of Soweto. This is because Halbwachs proposed that individuals may belong to several groups, thus sharing thoughts, values and memories. Halbwachs' notion that collective memory or memories are homogenous can be challenged. Gedi and Elam (1996: 35) write: "The employment of 'collective memory' can be justified only at a metaphorical level." They maintain that Halbwachs fails to account for the manner in which individual memories correspond to those of other people within the social framework. Their article further disputes Halbwachs' separation of history and memory. They write that "'collective memory' has become the all-pervading concept which in effect stands for all sorts of human cognitive products generally" (1996: 40). Arising from Gedi and Elam's research is a focused and far reaching critique of collective memory, which also underlines Halbwachs' considerable influence in memory studies. Halbwachs' *collective memory* offers a multi-faceted

approach to investigating the role of memory in writing about the past. As Berger and Niven (2014b: 14) observe, “Halbwachs’ thinking … [reveals] the complex and shifting relationship between individual and collective, past and present.” Halbwachs’ concepts are flexible (as I have hopefully been able to illustrate through my examples from the Soweto experience above) rather than rigid, that is they will assist in producing an informative study of Sowetan community theatre in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 3:
SOWETO'S COMMUNITY THEATRE

3.1 Introduction

The Community theatre was the prevalent cultural expression in Soweto during the 1980s and 1990s. There were both non-professional and professional groups that performed on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays during these years. I use the terms professional and non-professional to differentiate between Kente, Manaka and Maponya as preeminent playwrights who developed Sowetan community theatre by providing training for actors, writing scripts and performing in and outside Soweto. Professional community theatre groups were also involved in community development and functioned as (limited) commercial enterprises; they produced a large body of work that has been studied by academics. At that time, there was no theatre in Soweto and plays were performed in classrooms and in community halls. In most instances, non-professional theatre groups were formed by the youth as recreation. In general, their plays were performed in Soweto and they did not have long careers as playwrights or directors.

In this chapter I discuss Soweto's community theatre during the period 1984–1994. I start by introducing to sources available on Sowetan community theatre. In most instances, information on Sowetan theatre is embedded or included in larger historical narratives and published research on South African theatre. Following that, I refer to the socio-political context, which provides a background to the theatre produced in the mid-1980s and -1990s. Here I discuss the impact of apartheid laws on the lives of ordinary people. I use various themes to distil this research, namely, transport, schooling, infrastructure, and the influx of migrants. A delineation of the socio-political context has not been made in this way before and it is the result of sifting through various reports on Soweto and then choosing themes that reflect the complexity of Soweto life during the period under review. The information on these aspects entailed synthesizing various sources, mainly the archives of the *Sowetan* newspaper from the period 1984–1994. I have also incorporated information from books on history (I mention these where applicable). In this way the information is easily accessible in one document and hopefully provides a substantial background for the reader. In this chapter I also discuss the way in

which prevailing ideological beliefs were a factor in the lives of the community. In conclusion, I discuss the cultural venues that were used by community theatre practitioners.

3.2 Sowetan community theatre

There has been a steady output of writing on Sowetan community theatre in the period under discussion. It is useful to give a brief introduction to those sources already available on Sowetan theatre in light of my study that aimed to present a more comprehensive narrative of Sowetan community theatre. A number of authors have focused on Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya, but without categorizing the playwrights according to their life and work in Soweto. Scholars suggest that Kente's plays concentrated on entertaining audiences, and that Manaka and Maponya's plays focused on communicating an ideological message to audiences. The academic writing of the 1980s onwards includes these Soweto playwrights within a larger historical narrative or analysis of South African theatre.

S'ketsh' magazine provides first-hand accounts of a number of Soweto theatre productions. The publication called itself "South Africa's magazine for theatre and entertainment" and was started by Rob Amato and Robert Kavanagh. It presents an eclectic collection from a number of writers. The theatre reviews, photography, interviewees with playwrights featured in the magazine assessed contemporary culture from an Africanist perspective. A collection containing six editions of the magazine, from 1972 to 1979 was republished in 2016 (Kavanagh 2016a). In this publication, Kavanagh separates "Township theatre" denoting plays written, directed and performed in the township by black playwrights, "Town theatre" describing plays with black actors but directed by white directors, and "Theatre of black consciousness," describing dramatic works containing a message of black upliftment. Lastly, Kavanagh describes Kente's plays as professional theatre in that Kente ran his theatre group as a financial enterprise (2016a: xii–xiii).

Another writer has offered her perspective primarily as an observer of Sowetan theatre. Bernadette Mosala outlines contemporary events taking place in the township in

an article entitled “Theatre in Soweto” (1973). In this article she mentions the prevailing social conditions in Soweto, for example the demographics of the population and notes that there were limited leisure opportunities for residents. She highlights Gibson Kente as a preeminent playwright and describes his style as one that makes use of “gospel singing” (1973: 65). Mosala also comments on Sam Mhangwane’s plays, and provides a first-hand account of some theatre activities she participated in. Mosala was a school teacher and took part in a “Shakespeare ‘quatercentury festival” in 1964 (1973: 65). She was also involved with a school drama group performing plays in isiZulu. It seems she did not see a future in plays written by Sowetans, therefore she encouraged the group to perform Shakespeare’s plays instead. She (1973: 67) writes that in 1965

> [t]heater hadn’t by any means taken root in Soweto, so for the audience we needed to rely on the solid core of schoolchildren who would almost certainly come to see one of their setworks performed on the stage; moreover, in this way one might be able to build up a taste for theatre in the young that would sustain a permanent audience in the future.

Her observations belie the trajectory along which Sowetan theatre developed. As early as 1984, Hauptfleisch and Steadman observed that there was a “long theatrical heritage” and that there were “diverse theatrical styles and forms” that co-exist in South Africa (1984: 2). Their starting point was that the diverse cultural traditions in South Africa have informed the development of different theatre styles. They also mention that there are common elements marking these plays as originating in South Africa. Their research found that South African theatre was influenced by and therefore may be classified according to ideological orientations, race, literary approach, language of the playwrights and whether the plays can be classified as popular or political theatre (1984:3). This approach has influenced subsequent investigations on Soweto playwrights.

In the following discussion, I start my discussion with books published in the 1980s, followed by the 1990s and lastly the 2000s. Hauptfleisch and Steadman’s book, *South African theatre. Four plays and an introduction* (1984), provides a historical background and rationale for the development of various theatrical traditions including “Black Theatre” in South Africa. They discuss the challenges of defining theatre produced by black or African playwrights. They mention the important contribution by H.I.E. Dhlomo and discuss the socio-political background that supported the rise of “black theatre.” Their

survey provides information on the growth of “black theatre” in metropolitan urban areas, and they make specific mention of Gibson Kente’s contribution to the development of black theatre and his output while at Dorkay House. They (1984: 143–44) also offer insights into the development of the township musical, as popularised by Gibson Kente, and on how the Black Consciousness Movement from the 1970s spurred a reaction against the township musical. It is in this context that they analyse Maishe Maponya’s *The Hungry Earth* as a literary expression within South African culture and the socio-political context of the time (1984: 147).

Coplan’s (1985) research elaborates on the black personalities and organisations who were part of the process in the development of “black theatre” during the period from the 1940s to the early 1980s. For example, he discusses the way in which the Bantu Dramatic Society promoted African theatre. He reiterates that Black Consciousness gained prominence in society and therefore also influenced township plays in the 1970s. Coplan (1985: 203) finds reciprocal influences between dramatists, choral music, dance and jazz musicians as an example of an artistic expression rooted in both rural (for example, in indigenous songs) and urban (for example, in the use of western instruments) forms of expression (Coplan 1985: 203–206). He observes that the popularity of Gibson Kente and Sam Mhangwane’s plays was an expression of confidence by the emergent “black middleclass” in the 1970s (1985: 210). He argues that in township theatre “emotional and dramatic conflict are more often expressed through vocal quality and physical movement than in dialogue or psychologically intense posing or naturalistic action” (1985: 214).

The view that the South African socio-political context shaped the development of a multiplicity of theatrical traditions is reflected in Kavanagh’s (1985) research. He highlights how Africans have participated in theatre developments in rural and urban areas and in the townships from the 1920s. Operating under apartheid era race-based classifications, class structure was a factor in the development of various theatrical enterprises in South Africa. Kavanagh (1985: 49) argues that “multi-racial” theatre productions (mainly during the 1950s) enabled white theatre impresarios to control black artists, while in the 1960s the influence of black nationalism in theatre was curtailed by “English speaking white hegemony,” as well as by the “Afrikaner Nationalist government”

(1985: 51). The development of Black Consciousness theatre in the 1970s was an unintended consequence of black theatre practitioners being prevented by government legislation from participating in multiracial theatre. There was also a growing movement by black playwrights "in favour of black material – American, West African or Caribbean" (1985: 53). He gives a detailed analysis of how theatre was an expression of hegemony organised along class divisions, between whites as well as between the black proletariat and "intermediate classes" (1985: 56). The intermediate classes may be described as black people who had been educated for a specific profession, for example, teachers, nurses and lawyers. Kavanagh's reading takes on a Marxist approach but does not differ from the writers above in finding that Kente was among a handful of black playwrights (with Sam Mhangwane, Ben Masinga and Bob Leshoai) staging plays in the township. Kavanagh's survey of "black theatre" elaborates on Gibson Kente's contribution to township theatre without going into detail on other Soweto playwrights or the socio-political context of that time.

Ndlovu (1986), like Kavanagh, emphasises that theatre activity in Soweto predates the musical *King Kong* (1952). Ndlovu wishes to dispel the notion that *King Kong* was the spark igniting township musicianship, dancing and theatre. Without elaborating on the details, Ndlovu notes "[f]or as long as there had been black townships in South Africa this theatre existed as an extension of the oral tradition that is so much part of the African way of life" (1986: xix). He mentions Kente, Manaka and Maponya and identifies Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa as having produced "Black South African theatre" while based in the townships. Living in America in the mid-1980s, Ndlovu used his book to inform the American public of developments in South Africa. He also organised performances of South African plays in New York.

The connection of race, ideology and social and economic power is a common thread used in the classification and description of Sowetan community theatre. Steadman (1988: 115) also uses race as one variable to denote "the phenomenon of black theatre on the Witwatersrand." He looks at class dynamics and briefly mentions Kente when analysing Matsemela Manaka's plays. Steadman provides a succinct analysis of political relations in Soweto, as well as of how Black Consciousness ideology

inspired the plays produced and how its message was translated in the plays of Manaka (1988: 115–117) and Maishe Maponya (1995: xix).

In tracing the roots of “black theatre in South Africa,” Peterson (1990a: 203–204) describes the development of black theatre as “burgeoning nationalism” (in the 1960s) and how in the 1970s Black Consciousness influenced townships artists. Subsequently, censorship (1975–1980) was a tactic used by the state to undermine theatre that was constructing “a reality for township audiences.”

In his analysis of township arts in the 1980s, Peterson observes:

> Black performance in the townships is generally performed in local community and church halls and cinemas. These venues are literally empty spaces, or all-purpose venues if you prefer, with no stage facilities. The paucity of performance venues is the result of the state’s policy that black cultural practices had to be catered for by their respective racial or ethnic administrations. Since urban Africans were regarded, in accordance with Verwoerdian ideology, as temporary sojourners [therefore the state did not see the need to build arts venues in the townships]”(1990a: 233).

In talking about the direct marriage between theatre and the social construction of its immediate community, Peterson points out that black theatre made “increasing visits to the terrain of political rallies” (1990a: 237). Indeed, an excerpt from *Woza Albert* was performed at a political rally in Soweto in the mid-1980s. Steadman (1990a) emphasises Kente’s contribution to “black theatre,” and also repeats that race and class are important factors in analysing the output of African playwrights. Black playwrights of the 1980s created a theatre with a “social consciousness” (1990a: 216). This includes their role in opposing (and being seen by the community to oppose) “repressive legislation and hegemonic co-option” (1990a: 209).

The way in which Kente created a performative theatre style, the way in which he navigated the socio-political forces in the community, and the way in which his plays were received by the community, denotes the nature of Sowetan community theatre and has become a yardstick by which to compare and contrast other playwrights working in Soweto. It is interesting to note that the most prominent township playwrights were not born in Soweto; Kente was born in the Eastern Cape, while Manaka and Maponya were born in Alexandra township. Mbongeni Ngema was born in KwaZuluNatal and his collaborator Percy Mtwa was from Daveyton. From the beginning of its gradual formation

as a township, Soweto has always been a place for migrants and this is reflected by its theatre practitioners.

The way in which ideology, such as apartheid, intersects with theatre, Black Consciousness and democracy has been a consistent factor considered by researchers of theatre produced by African playwrights. The prolific urban musical culture of Johannesburg has had a significant influence on "popular theatre." Kerr prefers this term to "black theatre" or "township theatre" when categorising plays produced by Sowetan playwrights. Kerr (1995: 215), as Coplan (1985) before him, argues that there is a link between musicals produced by black performers from the 1920s (*marabi*), the 1930s (*mbube*), the 1940s (*mbaqanga*), *kwela* (1950s) and *smanje manje* (1960s), and plays produced by African playwrights up until the mid-1980s. As evident in the plays of Gibson Kente, Sam Mhangwane, Solly Magoe and Boikie Mohlamme, local jazz also influenced the musical elements of these plays (1995: 219). Kerr discusses Kente's early plays as an example of popular theatre. He also considers the intricate township political affiliations, by which Black Consciousness was sustained in the community. Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya were influenced by this ideology. Kerr engages in a Marxist analysis of Sowetan community theatre. Hauptfleisch (1997: 15) observes that a Marxist approach to analysing theatre may present "an inherent danger of bias," however, this approach has "led to a much clearer recognition of [the] role played by the socio-political and cultural materialist context in the development and impact of a particular work or [theatre] system."

In the 1990s, research on theatre was still being conducted under the influence of ideology and politics. In an issue of *Cross/Culture 38. South African theatre as/and intervention*, Ian Steadman (1999: 33) briefly revisits the challenges of categorising "black" versus "African" theatre without discussing Sowetan theatre in detail. Speaking within a broad "socio-historical context" he notes: "the label 'black theatre'… reflects not a nationalistic image of the politically defined [South African] State but a nativistic image of a racially defined essence" (1999: 33). To illustrate the argument, I differentiate between two types of readers: a reader who stereotypes "black theatre" (theatre produced by Africans) as inferior to "white theatre" (theatre produced by whites) and a reader who may use the label "black theatre" to foreground plays that promote the Black

Consciousness (BC) ideology; in other words, who uses the label to proclaim that black theatre is not subservient to "white theatre," thus following the ideas of Biko (2017: 52).

Steadman argues that labelling plays produced by Africans/blacks as belonging to a racial category invites the reader to make positive or negative assumptions about the nature and quality of the plays. These assumptions originate from "an extra-artistic notion of rules of order derived from both material social relations and ideological projections of the State." In this way, Steadman is examining whether ascribing the term "black theatre" directs the reader to assess a play according to assumed cultural traits that can be used to label the playwrights.

In *Theatre and society in South Africa. Reflections in a fractured mirror*, Hauptfleisch (1997: 15) provides an update of contemporary developments and publications on South African theatre but observes that there is a paucity of research that is focused on theatre theory. He also (1997:3) makes explicit the relationship between (African) theatre and society. He sees this as a complex interaction that involves not only "studying theatre and its impact on society" or solely the writing of a history of theatre, including listing theatre performances. Thus the link between theatre and society is more than "compiling biographies of artists, providing plot summaries and analysis of plays." He proposes that theatre should be seen as "part of a discussion of the theatrical system and its place within the socio-cultural and socio-political system(s) of the particular country or region." Hauptfleisch indicates that a multifaceted array of contingent factors (including the socio-political context in which a play is produced) is initiated when a play is produced (1997: 3–4). He examines the link between society and theatre within the wider South African context, which he says provides a paradigm in which theatre is produced. This includes playwrights who were active in Soweto, namely, Kente (29), Maponya (36), Sam Mhangwane and Boikie Mohlamme (41), as well as Reverend Mzwandile Maqina (42), Matsemela Manaka and Mbongeni Ngema (43).

Providing a new perspective, Loren Kruger (1999) interrogates the stability of received concepts regarding nomenclature used to classify South African theatre. Her research shows that there have been multiple influences on theatre practised by Africans. She also notes that the urban environment (in the sense of the geographical location of Soweto), as well as socio-political developments, has historically contributed to the

development of theatre produced in South Africa, thus expanding on research by Hauptfleisch, Coplan, Kavanagh and Kerr and others. Kruger engages with “the difficulty of defining theatre” in the South African context with the attendant impact of the socio-political sphere. She shows that the definition of African drama has been challenging not only to researchers but equally to African playwrights. This is exemplified by Dhlomo’s attempts to marry “African and European cultural practices” when defining theatre in the 1930s (1999: 60). Other elements connected with defining African theatre include theatre associated with the anti-apartheid movement, the so called “protest” and resistance” theatre (1999: 13), and the evolution of a “syncretic music-theatre” (1999: 15). Kruger questions whether “aesthetics is the most appropriate criterion” to use when discussing African theatre (my term) (1999: 17). Kruger also writes about the experience of African playwrights in Soweto venues and discusses community theatre in the context of activism and the social development needs in South Africa in the early 1990s (1999: 199–204).

Since 2000, more writers have widened their scope from using primarily Soweto as an example in their discussions of the development of black theatre and have sought to include in their writing a more national purview. Solberg’s research provides a link between the 1990s and the 2000s (from Hauptfleisch 1997 and from Kruger 1999). In his initial publication, *Alternative theatre in South Africa. Talks with prime movers since the 1970s* (1999), Solberg revisits South African theatre history to provide a socio-political context in his interviews with playwrights. Sowetans Kente, Manaka and Maponya are interviewed along with Sikhala Leslie Xinwa, who worked in the Eastern Cape in the 1970s (1999: 74), Fatima Dike, based in the Western Cape (1999: 111) and Thulani Sifeni, who was born in KwaZulu Natal, but was resident in Soweto (1999: 209). In *South African theatre in a melting pot* (2003), Solberg asks the question “What has been achieved after independence?” (2003: 7). He adopts the same approach as Hauptfleisch and Kruger in providing a contemporary view of theatre developments in South Africa. In both publications, the themes explored may be seen as providing a progress report from the perspective of history, ideology, politics, new arts legislation and gender relations. Likewise, Lindfors, in *Early black South African writing in English* (2011) draws a minute sketch of the “emergence of popular protest poetry and drama” in South Africa. The

research repeats information published in previous books on theatre history, such as Mosala's commentary that Kente incorporated gospel singing in his plays.

In 2011, Rolf Solberg published *Bra Gib. Father of township theatre,* which focuses on Kente's contribution to South African theatre. The book provides information on his personal life and examines his plays, mentioning Soweto theatre venues and containing information on actors who took part in Kente's plays. Solberg's book contributes additional information on Sowetan playwrights. There are similar books on Maponya (Maponya 1995) and Manaka (Davis 1997). Maponya's book is a collection of his plays with a contextual introduction, while Davis's book is also a collection of plays but includes contemporary newspaper reports on Manaka's plays. In 2016 Kavanagh published *A contended space. The theatre of Gibson Mtutuzeli Kente*, which set itself the task of assessing Kente's theatrical legacy. I discuss these publications in chapters four, five and six, where I discuss my own research on Kente, Manaka and Maponya respectively.

Perhaps as a consequence of its popularity in South Africa and internationally, Mbongeni Ngema's , *Sarafina* was published in 2012. The introduction provides a socio-political context for the play. Among the major themes in the play are the involvement of school children in anti-apartheid protests, as well as their hopes for democracy. These themes are contextualised by a recapitulation of historical events from the 1970s to the 1990s. The published play (Villiers 2012: 1–31) provides a summary of events that occurred before democracy in 1994, for example the growing adoption of Black Consciousness ideology by Soweto youth, the 1976 Soweto uprisings, the death of Steve Biko in 1977, and the release of Nelson Mandela from Robben Island in 1990.

Publications from 2000 onwards have focused increasingly on the post-apartheid era. It seems that a direct juxtapositioning of apartheid and democracy becomes secondary to interrogating the state of theatre in the context of new arts legislation and recent socio-political developments (Kruger had already signaled this change in thinking in 1999).

Two publications in particular encapsulate the shift in the research paradigm in South African theatre research. Contributions by scholars in *New territories. Theatre, drama and performance in post-apartheid South Africa* (Homann and Maufort, (2015) and *The Methuen drama guide to contemporary South African theatre* (Middeke et al. 2015)

illustrate the decentering of Soweto as primary area of investigation (as regards theatre by African playwrights). At the same time, Kente and to a much lesser extent Manaka and Maponya are still mentioned in these renderings of the history of African theatre in South Africa. Included in the former publication, for instance, is research on (community) theatre developments in Cape Town and the Eastern Cape. Similarly, in the latter publication information on theatre activity outside Johannesburg is included. It becomes apparent that these scholars have shifted the emphasis to an investigation of the way in which theatre makers (belonging to diverse racial identifications) are grappling with representing the changing South African democratic society. *Magnet Theatre. Three decades of making space* (Lewis & Krueger 2016) provides a comprehensive history of this Cape Town-based company and its community work. The authors state that the socio-political environment was important in shaping the way in which professional playwrights and academics interacted with community members and produced plays in townships near Cape Town. Magnet Theatre approached their collaboration with township actors and playwrights as both a platform for conducting theatre research and for innovating "African productions" (2016: 5–7). This has been a way of engaging with the Cape's past, for example, the memorialisation of //Xam as history. The group has also engaged with more recent socio-political developments, such as the issue of migration. The company has set itself a broad mandate for its theatre productions. These include experimental plays and those that are "theatrical and pedagogical." They have also been involved in staging "public performances as well as cultural interventions as part of outreach programmes, including educational workshops around the pressing issues of xenophobia and migration" (2016: 6).

A century of South African theatre (Kruger 2020) surveys the whole spectrum of South African theatre. Kruger analyses theatre productions, as well as the way in which events that signify a political or cultural shift in South Africa take the form of spectacle and ceremony. There have been a number of such cultural shifts over a period of a hundred years. As an example, two pivotal events, namely the Pageant of Union in 1910 (the establishment of a whites only central government as opposed to federal states) and the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first democratic era president (the removal of apartheid and the forging a society based on equal rights for all peoples) may be used to

illustrate the connections of social power, politics and pageantry. Kruger (2020: 9) notes that the "1994 inauguration bears comparison both with the Pageant of Union in 1910 and its theatrical legacy in staged fictions of empire and the nation embedded in performances announced as pageants in English, Afrikaans and African players" before and after democracy.

The book not only updates the earlier *The drama of South Africa. Play pageants and publics since 1910* (1999) but offers new insights into recent and past developments in the longitudinal context of how South African theatre makers have responded to a tumultuous century. The book explores Soweto as a space where black citizens were settled under apartheid, as well as how their access to the city of Johannesburg changed incrementally before and after democracy (1994). The book also explores the history of South African theatre, prevailing ideologies, themes tackled by playwrights and governance of the arts in the first two decades since the African Nationalist Congress replaced the Nationalist Party in government. Theatre is a product of and also a force in shaping socio-political conditions. Even in the period after 1994, the longstanding influence of apartheid, the Black Consciousness Movement and the central figures of Kente, Manaka and Maponya are still relevant factors when analysing new developments, for example township plays dramatising the challenge of AIDS (2020: 145), and a new generation of black playwrights exploring new theatre directions. Kruger (2020: 4) sees these plays as a form of testimonial theatre. She notes that the use of this classification considers "the different rhetorical emphasis signaled by 'protest' or 'resistance' [theatre] … but also stresses the *act* of testifying more directly than the less active phrase 'theatre of witness.'"

Despite the fact that various black playwrights and actors have participated in the creation of plays exploring current themes (other than apartheid issues), significantly, no new Soweto playwright has appeared to eclipse the standing of Kente, Manaka and Maponya. Black playwrights who are developing and aiming to surpass the favoured township model of community theatre are no longer resident in Soweto. For instance, the Kruger refers to Aubrey Sekhabi (2020:153), Paul Mpumelelo Grootboom (2020: 153–156) and Duma Khumalo (2020: 161–162) who have little material connection with Soweto. Sekhabi and Grootboom work in Pretoria and their plays probe the themes of

domestic violence (*On My Birthday,* 1996) and the sexual abuse of women (*Foreplay,* 2009) respectively. Khumalo, who created *The Story I Am About To Tell*, in which he recounted his testimonial at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), was based on the East Rand. The production was a part of Khulumani, a project to promote social justice to heal traumatised South Africans after the end of apartheid. *He Left Quietly*, a play conceptualised with director Yael Farber was based on Khumalo's testimony (2020: 161–163).

3.3 The Socio-political context of Soweto 1984–1994 .

Soweto residents faced constant turbulence during the period 1984–1994. The socio-political background in which community plays were performed was fraught with violence and other forms of social instability. Workers in various sectors of the economy (in industry, transportation, education and especially mining) voiced their opposition to apartheid (Raboroko 1985a: 2) by engaging in work stoppages throughout the decade (Raboroko 1985b: 2). Despite this instability, community theatre prevailed. Below I provide a brief overview of the socio-political context as a way of illustrating the impact of apartheid laws on the lives of ordinary people in Soweto. I focus my discussion according to the themes of transportation, schooling, infrastructure, the influx of migrants, and the prevailing ideological beliefs that informed the plays produced in the community.

3.3.1 Transport

In the early part of the 1980s, the main means of transportation for Soweto residents were trains and busses. In Carr's (1990: 119–121) explanation of the way in which transport infrastructure was developed for the township, it becomes clear that the apartheid era government underestimated the numbers of people who would be using the railway lines, bus network and roads provided for private vehicles. Therefore, by the mid-1980s, mini-bus taxis assumed a bigger role in transporting the community to the city and within the township. Although this introduced more choices for commuters, it led to conflict between taxi drivers over certain routes, and also between residents and the taxi drivers when the drivers did not participate in work stoppages called for by township comrades.

A case that exemplifies the frustrations of the residents involved a strike organised by the South African Taxi services during this period, as Mandla Ndlazi (1988: 1) reported. The court case concerned the violence (between taxi drivers and the community) that resulted from the strike. Another incident involved Putco bus drivers (*Sowetan* 1988a) who were found guilty of murdering a fellow bus driver who refused to take part in a strike. Despite the violence, taxis steadily became more and more important for transporting Sowetans. Taxis were useful because they collected (or "picked-up") and "dropped off" residents close to their homes. They were also more frequently available to transport commuters and they had longer operating hours than busses and trains. The government struggled to regulate what became a rapidly expanding industry. As a consequence, the authorities resorted to imposing punitive legislation on taxi drivers (*Sowetan* 1988b: 1) by introducing, for example, an R8000 fine for illegal taxis during this period.

The taxi problem did not start in the 1980s, as Bonner and Segal (1998: 95–155) have noted. It had its roots in stayaway campaigns dating from (and even before) the 1976 uprisings. The instability in this section persisted. In another example, Abbey Makoe (1992: 5) reported how commuters "were split" on a train boycott. The boycott had been called by the ANC, PAC and AZAPO as a call for police action to stop violence on trains. Commuters complained that they could not afford the more expensive transport (in other words, taxis) to get to work. In the end, commuters stayed away from work in big numbers, although their complaints were not resolved. These boycotts were not isolated events but were part of a broader strategy to undermine the apartheid economy. More significant protests included a "chalks down" (*Sowetan* 1992: 8) protest by teachers. Motsapi (1992: 8) writes about a "mass action" campaign by the recently unbanned ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Unions (Cosatu). Problems in the regulation of and government investment in transportation meant that the Soweto community could not travel easily at night to attend theatres in Johannesburg or in the township.

3.3.2 Schooling

After their uprising in 1976, the youth took on a bigger role in opposing apartheid. In the 1970s, the government had embarked on a project to build schools in the township and this provided an opportunity for vast numbers of black youth to meet with their peers. This meant that millions of young people had access to education, in contrast to their predecessors. Nieftagodien (2017: 8–9) argues that the numbers of students in the schooling system made it possible for them to have an impact on resistance politics in the townships. Young people were able to bring Black Consciousness ideas to poetry and drama, as these ideas presented the youth with a new and urgent political message. Thus, it was in local schools that opposition to apartheid gained momentum. A newspaper report in 1984 (*Sowetan* Reporters 1984: 1) set the scene for the coming decade. It noted that Dr Gerrit Viljoen (acting minister of Education) "warned that boycott of classes would lead to closure" of schools. There were numerous protests throughout Soweto and Eldorado Park (Rabothata & Qwelane 1984: 1), one involving police who "fired teargas at students" who had boycotted classes to protest the elections for the (Coloured) House of Representatives. Reports also indicated that "thousands of students stayed away from school." Even though there were stayaways, students used the schools (and churches) for political recruitment and organisation.

As if anticipating the future, the *Sowetan* (1984a: 1) announced that there had been "Shock matric results". In his report, Sello Rabothatha (1984: 5) noted that township schooling presented a "grim situation for blacks". He quoted a survey saying that "figures show whites had 100% pass while blacks had a 50% failure" in this period.

This decline persisted throughout the 1980s and 1990s, despite interventions by Sowetan parents as exemplified by the efforts of the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee's appeal in 1986 to political leaders and teachers to "let our kids write exams," and "not to disrupt exams," as Mzikayise Edom (1986: 1) reported. Shafa'ath-Ahmad Khan (1989: 6) observed that "[t]he black education crisis had deepened over the last decade." Soweto schools suffered from a shortage of qualified teachers, were without teaching materials such as laboratories and facilities to teach sport and the arts. Instability in schools also curtailed recreational activities. In the early 1980s, pupils staged "s'ketches" (or short

dramatised narratives) on Friday afternoons but these activities became progressively fewer because schooling was disrupted.

The *Sowetan* (Makaringe et al. 1987: 1) newspaper noted that over the years, the commemoration of the 1976 Uprisings became a rallying point for protests organised by students and the labour movement. These stayaways were organised by the South African Youth Congress and the Azanian Youth Organisation (Rabothata & Makobane 1987: 1) in Soweto. While it was still banned in the country, the African National Congress also called for peaceful commemorations (Sowetan Foreign Service 1987: 1). The instability in schools continued until 1994. As events progressed, other interested parties joined in negotiations between scholars and the government to try to resolve long standing problems. For example, in 1990 the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) was established by the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee (which itself had been launched in 1986) (South African History Archive 2020). In an outcome of interacting with parents, the Department of Education and Training, which was overseeing education in black residential areas, pledged to repair Soweto schools damaged during protests.

The situation in schooling is summed up by developments in 1991, which give a historical perspective as well as outlining future challenges. Education and schooling was still an area of conflict between the authorities, parents and pupils. For example, in 1991 teachers embarked on another “chalk down” strike against the authorities despite an appeal from parents not to strike (Makobane & SAPA 1991: 2). Other problems included the backlog in infrastructure development. An important milestone was achieved in 1991; Ismail Lagardien (1991: 24) reported that government had approved a new plan for a non-racial education curriculum. This meant that the substandard Department of Education and Training (DET) system, which had been designed for black pupils, was to be abandoned in favour of a common system for education for all race groups. This was a victory for students as the much-despised Bantu education was the original source of contention fuelling school boycotts. This was also a victory for the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) who had been demanding equal teacher pay across all races.

In the coming years the material conditions within education remained unchanged for Soweto pupils. The pass rate remained low (Nkomo 1992: 1), and there were even

fewer spaces in schools as the demand for education increased in the community (1992: 1). Despite signs of school improvements, for example the Urban Foundation pledged to invest in education (Mtshali 1992: 1), there was conflict among government, the Congress of South African Students (Cosas) and the South African Democratic Teachers Union (Tsedu 1992: 8). An important milestone for schooling was the announcement by the democratic era education minister Dr Sibusiso Bhengu (Charle 1994: 1) that all education systems would be amalgamated to replace previously race-based education departments. Nevertheless, problems continued and schools remained a site for protests (*Sowetan* 1994a: 1).

3.3.3 Infrastructure

Numerous reports carried by the *Sowetan* attest to the fact that the infrastructure in Soweto during the period 1984–1994 did not meet the needs of the community. Nieftagodien (2017: 14) explains that townships like Soweto were controlled by the state, who also put in place local administrative structures to apply apartheid legislation. Under apartheid the state used military coercion as well as negotiations when interacting with Soweto residents. However, the state's actions were usually met with resistance from the community. In addition, the business community also found limited means to counter the adverse effects of apartheid laws on ordinary people. Clark and Worger(2016: 99) sum up the state's approach to Soweto (and other townships) in the period of the mid-1980s as engaging in "[r]eform and repression."

As regards infrastructure for theatre, there were no theatres, music or art venues in the township. Instead, community halls served as venues for art and entertainment. During this decade, there were eight active community halls, namely Diepkloof, Meadowlands, Phiri, Jabavu, Tshiawelo, Kopanong, Entokozweni and Uncle Tom's halls. Another important venue for theatre was Eyethu Cinema, which was owned by the controversial two-time mayor of Soweto, Ephraim Tshabalala. He was accused by the community of manipulating the political system to benefit his businesses (*Sowetan* 1984b: 1). But he was also important in the development of Soweto. Besides owning Eyethu Cinema, in which a number of plays were performed, his business empire included

several shops and a restaurant and therefore provided employment for locals. Eyethu Cinema was an alternative venue to government-controlled community halls.

Playwrights and other people wishing to use the halls were required to book these at the municipal office in person and with payment in advance. Thabiso Leshoai (1986a: 15) reported that, owing to a shortage of venues, these halls became "a bone of contention" between township residents competing to use the venues. These halls were in demand for civic meetings, church meetings, choral music groups, ballroom dancing and other entertainment activities.

The state exerted its authority in the township by employing strict security measures. In 1984, Ali Mphaki (1984: 1) observed that the "government yesterday tightened its grip on this country's black areas when it gave 32 newly established local authorities powers to establish their own police forces." The policemen were colloquially known as "Black Jacks" and were the subject of satire in Gibson Kente's plays. Both Worden (2012) and Clark and Worger (2016) give an informative timeline as well as analysis of the broad impact of state security, and of the instruments the state employed (for example the imposition of a state of emergency during 1984–6) to subjugate the Soweto community.

Activists and some business leaders called for the scrapping of the Pass Laws[3] (South Africa 1952) (Raboroko 1984: 1), because of their deleterious impact on the black population of South Africa. The laws were scrapped in 1986, as Joe Thloloe (1986: 1) reports. Broadly speaking, during this decade, residents registered their protest against the housing shortage. The government's response was to use force to suppress resistance and but also to pledge an improvement to housing and a solution to the high crime rate in the township. A number of sources, among them Nieftagodien (2017), observe that a crucial lack of infrastructure constituted a crisis in Soweto.

In order to look at the extent of the shortages as early as 1984, the *Sowetan* carried a report that R500 million was needed to address the lack of housing in Soweto (*Sowetan* 1984c: 1). In the coming decade the government made sporadic efforts to address the housing shortage, but never quite met the demand. An important step for Soweto

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[3] The authorities used *The Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents Act of 1952)* (South Africa 1952) to restrict business opportunities to Africans.

residents was the holding of talks on the introduction of a 99-year leasehold system[4] (South Africa 1978), which began in 1985. Nevertheless, this still did not give residents an option to own their homes although it did guarantee families the right to stay in houses in which they had lived for generations. Throughout the decade various reports indicate large sums pledged by the government to solve the housing problem on the West Rand: R327 million (Own Correspondent 1985: 1) in 1985, a pledge to build 1870 houses in 1987 (*Sowetan* 1986a: 2) and the Central Regional Services' announcement that it was to spend "R66 million to improve essential services in black townships" (*Sowetan* 1987a: 5). The private sector also indicated its interest in solving the housing problem when Bob Tucker of the Urban Foundation announced (Pela 1989: 1) that the organisation had sourced a billion rand to build low cost homes in black metropolitan areas. In addition, the state also revealed plans to expand Baragwanath Hospital, the only public hospital in the township. In the last days of apartheid, the Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA) pledged R128 million to build houses in black townships, as Isaac Maledi reported (1993: 4).

These government intentions did not change the experience of the Soweto community, even as council officials promised an improved standard of living. The *Sowetan* reported that there were 20 000 people on the housing waiting list in 1986, and this grew every year. Consequently, a number of "squatter camps" (*Sowetan* 1986a: 2) appeared in the township. By the 1990s Phangisile Mtshali (1990: 1) reported on a study showing that informal settlements were on the rise in townships in the Transvaal.

Another problem for the city council was that if it evicted families that were not paying rent it was met with fierce resistance from township residents. For example, there were prolonged clashes between municipal police and residents in White City (an area in Jabavu) and Mofolo (*Sowetan* 1986b: 1). Some of the violence in White City had long-standing origins in fights between residents and hostel dwellers, which were the result of differences in political allegiances. Criminality was also a significant problem, as Ali Mphaki (1988) reports.

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[4] This system was governed under the Black Urban Areas Consolidation Amendment Act of 1978 (South Africa 1978).

In the 1990s, with a new political dispensation on the horizon, a new dialogue on scrapping more discriminatory legislation gained currency. For example Esme van der Merwe (1990: 6) wrote that scrapping The Group Areas Act[5] was key to social and economic progress. She argued that scrapping the Group Areas Act would "create efficient, equitable and compact cities" that were better equipped "to provide jobs, services and shelter for an expanding population."

By 1993, new shopping malls had been built by the private sector in Soweto, indicating that there was a lessening of violence and also that the number of Sowetans participating in the economy was growing. Ultimately, the lives of the community would improve with the removal of apartheid legislation. In 1993, the Interim Measures and Local Government Act provided for the establishment of a single local authority to replace the racially based councils[6]. This meant that by 1994, Soweto (which was declared a city in 1984) would be incorporated into other, wealthier municipalities, paving the way for the city to draw from a larger financial pool to fund infrastructure development. Housing was important to all Soweto residents as it represented the biggest infrastructure investment by the government and private sector. Photographs showing rows of four-roomed houses are often used in visual depictions of the township. At times, the set design in Kente plays featured a backdrop of houses built with bricks as well as those constructed from corrugated iron. Issues of housing were not prominent as a theme in plays but it is significant that Gibson Kente used his house as a rehearsal space, as did Maishe Maponya. Matsemela Manaka ran the Creative Youth Association, a youth organisation, from his parents' house in 1977 (Davis 1997: 2). In the 1990s he operated an art gallery from a rented house in Soweto. In fact, the *Sowetan* (Metsoamere 1991a: 12) reported that *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto* was a celebration of the establishment of a museum of the arts in Soweto.

3.3.4 Influx of immigrants

[5] This legislation was known as the *Group Areas Act No.36 of 1966* (South Africa 1966).
[6] The *Local Government Transition Act No. 209 of 1993* (South Africa 1993) allowed for the incorporation of formerly African and white residential areas into an amalgamated city of Johannesburg.

South Africa increased its international profile when Nelson Mandela was released in 1989, an unexpected occurrence that was followed by the unbanning of pre-liberation era political organisations by the Nationalist Party government. The impending political transformation attracted international media organisations to create a base in South Africa and also attracted immigrants from the African continent. Thus, Soweto experienced a visibly growing population of Angolans, Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and Malawians. Their presence caused some resentment from township residents who objected to the increased demand on housing, garbage collection, sewerage and water infrastructure, especially in areas where informal houses were located. The *Sowetan* (1991a: 11) reported that increasing number of refugees were “flood[ing]” South Africa. The newspaper warned that they faced a “life of fear, abuse and exploitation.” At the same time, the *Sowetan* (*Sowetan* Correspondent 1990: 1) carried reports that police suspected that guns from Mozambique were being traded in the township. These weapons were often used in armed robberies.

Furthermore, the country was expecting a large contingent of returning exiles, a group of South Africans that had fled the country during apartheid. In 1991, Themba Molefe (1991a: 1) wrote that more than 24 000 SA exiles were expected to return home in the coming months. Their transportation was arranged by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. He wrote:

> The first group of 120 – consisting of children and former students at the ANC’s Solomon Mahlangu freedom college – arrives at Jan Smuts airport in an UNHRC chartered flight from Tanzania today. At least 20 000 of the exiles are from African countries while about 4000 have been in exile in Europe and North America. All have volunteered for repatriation in terms of UNHCR requirements.

The UN had made R30 million available to manage the repatriation process. In addition, the exiles were to receive a monthly grant of R300 for four months. However, as Molefe (1991b: 2) notes, in effect exiles were “returning to a bleak future” as they had limited “employment prospects.”

Dr Mario Piersgille, the Italian Ambassador at the time announced a R10 million donation (*Sowetan* 1991b: 7) for the building of a community development centre for exiles in Soweto. This was a positive development to address the needs of the so-called “returnees.” It was apparent that some of these returning exiles were impoverished. “Too

hungry to live," was the *Sowetan's* headline of a report indicating that "death and disease [were] stalking returning refugees" (1991c: 9).

In some respects, the returning exiles were something of a novelty in Soweto as local relatives and exiles had had different life experiences. There was also anecdotal evidence that returning family members experienced social discord upon having arrived with foreign nationals as spouses. Some exiles arrived at cramped accommodation, putting a strain on family relations. The Lalela Theatre Group offered a creative response to the anxiety of coming home or arriving to start a new life in South Africa. They created a play entitled *Karibu*. Elliot Makhaya (1991a: 15) wrote that this was about "a child born in exile." Thus it "depicts life in exile through this child. It takes a look at the training camps and the works – a nostalgic musical." The writer/director, Lucky Mvundla, told Makhaya that Karibu was a Swahili name for welcome. Lalela Theatre Group held rehearsals at a farm in Zuurbekom, from where it moved to Durban. Some of the actors in the play included Vusi Mcube, Lulu Nohenda, Sipho Majola, Lucky Mavundla, Zakhele Luthuli, Moretsi, Letsi (no surname provided), Darlie Mcube, Mandla Tom and Apollo Tshuta.

However, as reported in the *Sowetan* the ongoing return of exiles continued to be a difficult process in Soweto and other townships. For example, Lulama Luti (1992: 1) writes of exiles reporting that they were harassed and tortured and forced to "flee" their homes. Pearl Majola (1992: 9) wrote that exiles found it difficult to find employment, accommodation and schools for their children. Complicating the situation, some Soweto residents made counterclaims that foreign nationals were "posing" as exiles to gain public sympathy.

3.3.5 Ideological beliefs in Soweto

Speaking broadly, during the period 1984–1994 the Soweto community coalesced around three ideological orientations. Firstly, the community came together in the expression of Black Consciousness, which involved articulating a black identity to resist the subsuming of black culture into what they saw as hegemonic Eurocentric culture. From the 1960s and early 1970s the number of African students (in Soweto and other townships) in secondary schools increased from hundreds of thousands to millions in the education

system. Nieftagodien (2017: 8–9) suggests that this increased number of students laid the foundation for the youth to organise themselves politically, thus becoming a factor in the Soweto uprising of June 16 1976. Most significantly, he notes that:

> Black Consciousness provided young black students with the political tools to understand the nature of their oppression and inculcated in them a spirit of defiance. It also provided political cohesion to what was initially fragmented and dispersed resistance and it openly challenged white hegemony.

These ideological orientations were visible in political movements in the township and Nieftagodien outlines how the student movement was at the forefront of opposing apartheid. On the other hand, the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) was one of the most prominent party political expressions in the township. In a paper he wrote in 1971, Steve Biko (2017: 52–57) provides a definition of Black Consciousness. Out of this manifesto, two ideas, namely that the expression of blackness goes beyond skin pigmentation and should be reflected in a person's mental attitude, and that black consciousness compels a person to achieve self-emancipation, inspired the Soweto community and playwrights. In the *Black Consciousness reader*, Ndaba et al (2017) expound on Biko's idea that blacks must be self-reliant in bringing about social and political emancipation. The idea that in Black Consciousness ideology the arts were a means of expressing the humanity of black people inspired Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya (2017: 202–221) in their work.

Secondly, also represented in Soweto were liberal approaches to opposing apartheid, in which a racially, socially and economically diverse group of South Africans collaborated in opposing apartheid. In other words, they espoused non-racialism and formed a loose confederation of "community, youth and trade union organizations" (Worden 2012: 138). For example, the United Democratic Front (UDF)[7] espoused non-racialism.

The third ideological orientation in the township was the Inkatha Freedom Party and its emphasis of the expression of Zulu culture in society. This was expressed primarily

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[7] According to South African History online, the UDF was "an anti-apartheid body that incorporated many anti-apartheid organisations."

in the hostels where workers from Natal lived. They presented an essentialist view of Zulu identity, in which the preservation of language and cultural practices was emphasised. Bonner and Segal (1998: 18-41) give a vivid account of the establishment of single sex hostels in Soweto and how apartheid ideology engendered fractious relations between hostel dwellers and the Soweto community.

These three ideological perspectives took on their own distinctive forms. They differed in how to relate to government and on which methods to employ to protest against apartheid. The competitive nature of ideologies in Soweto is explained by Jeffery (2009) as well as by Worden (2012).

Ideological orientation was a factor in the theatre produced by Sowetan playwrights. Gibson Kente professed to be apolitical although his plays included the recognition of racial solidarity in opposing apartheid, as well as the espousing of a common humanity among all South African designated racial groups. *How Long* (1973) is an example of a play in which ideals of Black Consciousness are incorporated. Twenty years later, *Mfowethu* (1993) explored commonalities among people from diverse cultures in Soweto. In this play, the character of a white man takes up residence in the township. This shows that Kente believed that ethnic and racial diversity was a positive factor in South Africa.

Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya were adherents of the Black Consciousness ideology, and this is apparent in the way in which their plays assert positive elements from black history, culture and intellectual tradition to counter what they saw as the dehumanising influence of Western culture on black people. Kavanagh (1985), Kerr (1995) and Steadman (1995) provide more detailed discussions of the historical reasons for these ideologies taking hold of the Soweto community in general and for their inclusion in the plays of Manaka and Maponya in particular.

In the township, differences in political ideology manifested in violence. Some instances involved clashes between Inkatha Freedom party aligned hostel dwellers, Azapo, and ANC aligned Soweto residents, where violence would be sparked when a Soweto political formation had issued calls for a stayaway and hostel dwellers did not support it (Rabothata, Maseko & Makobane 1984: 1). There were indeed many reports that ideological differences had led to violence. At one point, the IFP leader Chief

Mangosuthu Buthelezi (*Sowetan* 1988c: 1) voiced his opposition to what the media called the "war" between the IFP and UDF. The *Sowetan* (1988d: 1) had reported that police were accused of supporting the IFP in situations where there was conflict between the two political formations. In *People's : New light on the struggle for South Africa,* Jeffery (2009) describes how politically motivated differences ignited fierce divisions among township residents.

At other times, differences in anti-apartheid political tactics would not be expressed in violence. The occasion of the commemoration of the uprising of 1976 was an event that allowed for a truce among political organisations holding varying ideological standpoints. For example, on the 12th commemoration of the uprisings, Themba Molefe (1988: 1) observed that "many employers" were willing to recognise the day as a paid public holiday, even without government permission. Therefore, there was no occasion for a potentially violent strike and in time people in Soweto subscribing to different ideologies promoted the commemoration of June 16 as a day for peaceful co-existence.

After many years of state domination, socio-political change in South Africa happened rapidly at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. This is illustrated by the two occurrences discussed below. In 1988 public meetings between the UDF and other political formations were banned, thereby curtailing consultative political strategising on how to oppose apartheid (*Sowetan* 1988e: 1). Organisations across South Africa were banned, among them the Azanian People Organisation, the Azanian Youth Organisation, the Detainees Parents Support Committee, the National Education Crisis Committee, National Education Union of South Africa, the Soweto Civic Association, South African Youth Congress, and the United Democratic Front.

In 1989 President de Klerk unbanned political organisations and released from Robben Island political leaders[8] sentenced in 1964 during the Rivonia treason trial. Worden (2012) gives a comprehensive outline of events leading to South African democracy in 1994. However, as South Africa moved closer to all-race elections and well into the mid-1990s, violence intensified (Clark & Woger 2016: 122).

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[8] Among those released on the 15th of October were Ahmed Kathrada, Jafta Masemola, Raymond Mhlaba, Wilton Mkwayi, Andrew Mlangeni, Elias Motsoaledi, Oscar Mpetha and Walter Sisulu.

3.4 Cultural venues

3.4.1 Eyethu Cinema

Operating from 1969, Eyethu Cinema was the biggest and most popular venue in which community plays were performed in Soweto. As it could accommodate approximately 1000 people, Eyethu was used for various functions and entertainment including beauty pageants, promotional evenings by clothing stores and music concerts by South African and international musicians. Gibson Kente, by virtue of his plays attracting large audiences, was the playwright who made most use of the venue.

Sam Mhangwane was another active playwright in the Soweto arts milieu. Although he does not have as large an oeuvre as Kente, his plays were popular and generated large audiences. Mhangwane saw drama as a means to communicate ideas leading to the correcting of social ills in black society. His signature play, *Unfaithful Woman*, was also presented at the DOCC Hall and was filmed by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (Makhaya 1985a: 20). This popular play, which was first performed in 1965 and closed in 1981, was revived intermittently during the 1980s. Peggy Ncube, who died in 1984, was the first actress to play the lead role in *Unfaithful Woman*. Sophie Pretorius, who took the lead in a 1984 version, had joined the cast as part of the chorus in 1967 (*Sowetan* 1984d: 18). In 1975 she was given the lead which she shared with Ethel Tshabalala.

Pretorius and Tshabalala also shared the lead role in Mhangwane's *Blame yourself* which alternated with *Unfaithful Woman*. Occasionally, Sonto Mazibuko also played the role. Joining Sophie Pretorius in the cast were Peter Boroko, Collins Mashego, Solaish Mhangwane and Bushy Mpye (Leshoai 1985a: 13). Mhangwane's other plays were: *Ma in Law* (date unknown) and *Thembi* (1976).

Other plays performed at Eyethu were *Bopha* (in 1986), which was written and directed by Percy Mtwa. This play gained international prominence and itself became a message advocating the global isolation of South Africa. In May (*Sowetan* 1986c: 12) the actors Aubrey Radebe, Aubrey Moalusi Molefe and Sydney Khumalo gave what they called "a farewell performance" of *Bopha* at Eyethu Cinema before leaving to perform in

Scotland. It is significant that this was the first ever performance of the play in Soweto. The play had opened in 1985 but had been performed at the Market and Baxter Theatres in Johannesburg and Cape Town respectively.

3.4.2 Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC)

The Donaldson Orlando Community Centre had rehearsal rooms that Kente rented to stage his plays, as well as a dance studio, a hall and administration offices. Eyethu Cinema and the DOCC were important cultural landmarks in Soweto. Principally, the venue was used for the performance of plays, theatre workshops, and by ballroom dance clubs. As Nieftagodien (2017: 79) points out, the DOCC was also used for political meetings.

The Soweto Dance Theatre (SDT), which was started by the charismatic Jackie Semela, was also based at the DOCC. In the early 1990s, The SDT was one of the organisations instrumental in making modern dance a viable profession for Soweto dancers, and it hosted several events that helped build awareness of modern dance in Soweto (Makhaya 1992a: 35). In some respects, the SDT capitalised on the popularity of Pantsula jive, which was demonstrated at street parties, other social gatherings and in township clubs. Pantsula jive was a group activity, usually involving six to eight members. This collaborative and egalitarian form of dance slotted in well with the then nascent development of contemporary dance.[9] In Pantsula jive there were no star soloists; each member had an equal role to display his unique technical expertise in front of an appreciative audience. Street Beat, a dance company, also operated out of the DOCC. This group fused contemporary dance, American style street beat (a form of hip-hop dance) with Zulu-style ethnic dance.

At the same time, Uncle Tom's hall in Phefeni was an important venue used primarily for training in ballroom dancing and for community theatre (Makhaya 1984a: 10). Dance was very important in township community plays that were modelled on Gibson Kente's works. As a choreographer, Kente delighted his audiences with his innovation

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[9] The Dance Umbrella, a yearly festival accommodating non-traditional dance forms and groups started at the Wits Theatre at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1988.

and eclectic fusing of traditional ethnic-based dance forms with contemporary Soweto styles.

A number of plays were performed at the DOCC, among them Mbongeni Ngema's *Asinamali* (Makhaya 1984b: 15), which was also performed at Eyethu Cinema after a lauded American tour. In 1986, a theatre festival titled "Dramfes '86" (Makhaya 1986a: 11) took place across three venues, namely, the DOCC YMCA Hall, Lionel Kent Hall in Daveyton and Jiswa Centre in Lenasia. Participating were groups from Nyanga Township in the Western Cape, Sharpeville, Mafeking, as well as some plays offered by drama students from the Federated Union of Black Arts. Included in the programme were Matsemela Manaka's *Vuka*, Percy Mtwa's *Bopha*, and Maishe Maponya's *Hungry Earth*. *Give us this day*, a play by Port Elizabeth based playwright Mzwandile Maqina was also included in the programme. Maishe Maponya, along with Matsemela Manaka and Walter Chakela were some of the conveners of Dramfes '86. Interestingly, this festival was not held at Funda Centre, Manaka's base for theatre training. This may be because Funda Centre was not a "people friendly" venue; the community could easily walk into the DOCC, whereas the Funda Centre was fortified by a security gate controlling access, and the arts centre occupied only one or two buildings in a large complex.

In 1989 Sol Rachilo's (popularly known as Solrah) play *Grounded in Mshenguville*, was presented at the DOCC. Kahn (1989: 26) described him as an "activist playwright." There was also a revival of Percy Mtwa's *Bopha*. The 1989 cast consisted of Aubrey Radebe, Aubrey Molefe and Sydney Khumalo.

In the same year, Dukuza ka Macu's drama *Shades of a conflict* was presented. In 1990 ka Macu produced a play entitled *Night of the long wake*. Metsoamere (1990a) said that the play "examines the life and death of a notorious man." It is set in two alternating periods, namely the 1960s and 1976. The play examines the consequences of the 1976 uprisings. Ka Macu's other plays were: *Matter of convenience*, *Death of a rebel ghost* and *A dark grey corner*, which was inspired by Leroy Jones's *The Dutchman*.

The following plays were also performed. Vusi Shashu's *My desire*, about which Victor Metsoamere (1990a) wrote that it was a drama "portraying the painful growing years of an orphaned black teenager." The character grows up living "in a shanty town and struggling to get a job to sustain himself." He is exploited in low paying jobs, but

ultimately triumphs when he achieves his dream of "becoming a professor." In the cast were Themba Mabaso, Zwelibanzi Maseko, Elinor Motshweneng and Shashu (no surname provided). The play was also performed at the Bona Secondary School, Vista University (Soweto campus), Musi and Immaculata High Schools, at the Pace Community College, Diepkloof Hall, Kopanong Hall, Meadowlands Hall, Entokozweni Community Hall, and at the Soweto College of Education. Lastly, *Isililo*, a play by Jerry Pooe was on the roster of plays at the venue. Ali Mphaki (1990: 3) also reported that Reverend Obed S.D. Mooki who was part of the committee that established the DOCC hall in Orlando had died. Mooki was once a chaplain in the ANC.

The African Writers Association (AWA) also used the DOCC. For example, AWA held its third general meeting at the DOCC. The *Sowetan* (1985a: 3) reported that:

> AWA aims … to establish a bond of fellowship among African writers in South Africa; to promote and protect the best interests of the members in their craft and to advise and protect its members against exploitation in the dealings with publishers, literary agents and the mass media in South Africa and abroad.

AWA also facilitated a workshop (*Sowetan* 1985b: 9) for playwrights at the University of the Witwatersrand, in which the playwrights Zakes Mda, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya interacted with prospective writers.

Black Consciousness artists made deliberate efforts to synergise their messages through theatre, poetry and other forms of writing, such as in the work of playwrights and poets Manaka and Maponya. Besides being a playwright, Manaka was also a musician and a painter. Artists who leaned towards Black Consciousness ideology cultivated the reading of politically educational texts (such as literature on Marxism) and also paid attention to writing as a craft. To this end, they forged connections as writers; the institute for black research which was based at Funda Centre participated in the launch of a Writer's Forum (Makhaya 1985b: 22). Another group started the JM Nhlapo-Selope Thema Adult Book Reading and Debating Club at Phakamani Combined School in Mofolo North. Other events, involving black consciousness aligned poets, fine arts practitioners and educators were held in the city centre, for example at the Cambridge House in Johannesburg (Makhaya 1985b: 22; (Makhaya 1985c: 13). The point here is that black

consciousness aligned artists actively sought to formulate a coherent anti-apartheid message across all artistic disciplines.

3.4.3 Funda Arts Centre

Based on reports in the *Sowetan* newspaper (1984-1994), writing on Funda Arts Centre outnumbered writing on other Soweto venues in which theatre was performed. This can be attributed to the fact that the arts centre had designated publicity officers who wrote and sent press releases to the media. Also, the centre was specifically dedicated to the arts. In contrast, playwrights such as Gibson Kente and Sam Mhangwane hired community halls on an ad hoc basis. Another reason is that Funda Arts Centre cultivated a literary culture and developed the capacity to document its activities by writing funding proposals, management reports and minutes for meetings. Matsemela Manaka was the coordinator at the Funda Arts Centre. The ethos at Funda was to decolonise African theatre and to create original theatre productions that did involve Eurocentric themes or formats. This also applied to other art forms that were taught at Funda, namely dance, music and fine arts. The centre framed its ideas on socio-political interaction (within urban and rural communities), academic discussion and art making from an Africanist perspective. The Funda Arts Centre comprised the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre, the Soyikwa dance programme and the Madimba Institute of African Music.

The centre did not attract large scale participation from the community, but its staff, namely Professor Es'kia Mphahlele, Matsemela Manaka, Sibongile Khumalo, Ali Hlongwane, Job Kubatsi and Motsumi Makhene, among others, achieved renown in academia and the arts, and the Funda Centre benefited from their prestige. The management of Funda Centre envisioned the courses they taught as having academic worth, as opposed to simply providing student training for actors in the craft or skill of acting. To illustrate this, the *Sowetan* (Makhaya 1985d: 16) reported that Funda Arts Centre had concluded a working arrangement with the University of the Witwatersrand's (Wits) School for Continuing Education to form the African Institute of Art. This arrangement allowed Funda graduates the opportunity to register at Wits for a Fine Arts degree when there were limited training opportunities for black students in the 1980s.

Several plays were hosted at Funda Arts Centre. *International hot talk '87* was a political satire written and performed by Andrew Chabeli and John Ledwaba. According to the *Sowetan* (1985c: 9), the play mocked South Africa's homeland system. These homelands were regarded as puppet states invented to legitimise Influx Control laws;[10] the actors created an "imaginary visit" by homeland state leaders to the United Nation of Nations (UNN). The UNN was a comical proxy for the United Nations. The report said that the actors gave "riveting impersonations" of homeland leaders.

Crisis of conscience (1986) by Black Consciousness aligned playwright Walter Chakela problematised interactions between black and white citizens (Makhaya 1986b: 30) by exploring multiracialism from an Africanist perspective. The play's theme suggested that the changing status quo, that is, the shift in the socio-political terrain from exclusive political power by whites and increasing political assertiveness by blacks, could only lead to "problems" in everyday social interaction. In the cast were Pinky Morule, Leslie Lesenyane, Irene Komane, Hanna Moroeng, Gomotsegang Moagi and Israel Mokone.

In 1987, an example of Workers Theatre, that is a drama created by (and primarily for) people working in the various sectors of the South African economy, was performed at Funda. *The Clover Play* (first performance date probably in 1986) was based on the experiences of 168 striking workers at the Clover Dairy in Pietermaritzburg. The *Sowetan* (1987b: 4) quotes George Nene, who was the Transvaal vice-chairman of the Food and Allied Workers Union as saying that "the aim of the play was to counter propaganda by the company claiming that the strike is over." In 1986, the men had gone on strike and the play aimed to provide a record of the Clover management's dismissal of workers as a way of "handling their grievances." The play, which had performed in front of large, approving audiences in Durban and Cape Town, was also performed at Wits' Box Theatre, as well as in venues in the Vaal and East Rand.[11] The national tour was part of

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[10] The *Group Areas Act No. 36 of 1966* (South Africa 1966).

[11] Under apartheid, the West Rand consisted of these towns: Johannesburg with Soweto Townships. Here I may also mention Eldorado Park (township for "Coloureds") and Lenasia (a township for "Indians"). These racial classifications are according to apartheid stratification and racialised human settlement practice. I mention these townships here because Kente, Manaka and Maponya occasionally performed their plays in

a fundraising campaign to help workers to be reinstated at Clover. Kerr (1995: 230–231) gives an overview of the manner in which black playwrights and workers have instilled a sense of protest and resistance through theatre.

Writer and publisher Mothobi Mutloatse's performed two plays at Funda (1988 and 1990). The first, *Lakutshon' Ilanga* epitomised the philosophical approach followed at Funda. The musical play was inspired by McKay Davashe's song of the same name. Metsoamere (1988a: 13) explained that *Lakutshon' Ilanga* "chronicled the black man's struggle since the white man set foot in South Africa." The play aimed to explore "the various methods of attaining freedom." The musical was directed by the actor James Mthoba, and the musical direction was provided by members of the respected "Afro fusion" soul band Sakhile as well as by Motsumi Makhene, who directed the music programme at Funda Centre's Madimba Institute of African Music. The cast included musicians and actors Aubrey Maasdorp, Bheki Khoza, Steven Mofokeng, Sibongile Khumalo, Lynette Leeuw, Zoleka Duma, Sol Rachilo, Owen Sejake and Babsy Selela.

Later, Mutloatse returned to Funda to stage the musical *Baby Come Duze.* In this production, Mutloatse sought to canonise African writers and African jazz. The musical was a homage to "heroic journalists" and "versatile musicians and short story writers" of the 1950s. Metsoamere (1990b: 13) mentions Casey Motsitsi, Can Themba, Todd Matshikiza, Nat Nakasa, Zakes Nkosi and Henry Nxumalo. Mutloatse called the production a nostalgic musical drama and he gave it the subtitle "Jamming down memory lane in a shebeen in Sophiatown." The cast included the singers Mara Louw, Sibongile Khumalo and Stella Khumalo. The band comprised members of the band Bayethe, who called themselves the Mbombela Blues Band, with invited guest musician Joanette Tsagane, a saxophonist. In the cast were the actors Owen Sejake, Patrick Shai, Ramolao Makhene and George Lamola.

In the years approaching democracy in 1994, Funda Centre was attempting to consolidate its role as the foremost multidisciplinary arts centre in Soweto. Black Consciousness was a thread that ran through all the plays that were produced by the

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community halls there. The town of Roodepoort was allied to Dobsonville as its township and Krugersdorp had Kagiso as its township. Community plays were also performed in Westonaria, which is located on the furthest western point of the Rand.

institution, as illustrated in the visiting productions of Bachaki, a group started by playwright Thulani Sifeni. He formed the theatre group in 1987 with Jake Chika, Muntu wa Bachaki and Mavuso Mavuso. Metsoamere (1991b: 12) provides short biographical notes on the group members. Chika studied theatre in education in America and when he returned to South Africa, he started a project conducting drama workshops for street children in Hillbrow. Mavuso had toured internationally in a play produced by David Brooks. Metsoamere also reports that Mavuso performed in several plays in London. However, I have not been able to find the names of these plays.[12] Muntu wa Bachaki was the director of the Akudlalwa Communal Theatre (ACT) on the East Rand. ACT's first play was the student production of *Menetekel.* The group produced several plays which were commissioned by democratic era local government for health awareness campaigns. The fourth member of Bachaki, Thulani Sifeni, appeared in a play titled *Prison Walls*. The play was written by Strini Moodley (a journalist and prominent member of Azapo) and was performed at the Afrika Cultural Centre in Johannesburg. Sifeni also conducted drama workshops at several universities in England and recited poetry at various political functions in London with South African poet, artist and lecturer Pitika Ntuli.

Bachaki's first play at Funda was *Top Down* (1988). Metsoamere (1991b: 12) describes it as a "thought provoking examination of a teacher in the black education system". *Top down* also toured in England and Switzerland in the late 1980s (exact dates unknown). Their second play, *Mr Golden Gloves* (1991) is about "a young man who begins to look down on his people after passing matric." However, he does not manage to achieve his dream of attending university. On his way to registering for a university degree, he becomes a victim when a "trickster" cheats him out of his university fees. The play describes how the character spirals into a series of misfortunes. Sifeni told Makhaya that the play was "a portrayal of the exploitation of Africans by Africans." The play was directed by Thulani Sifeni. Both plays were also performed at the Presbyterian Church in Hillbrow, the Market Theatre in Johannesburg and at a human rights and arts festival in Port Elizabeth during the course of 1991 (no actual dates available).

[12] As noted in the previous chapter, the process of memorialising is an on-going project and gaps in the historical narrative will hopefully provide impetus for future research.

Solomzi Bisholo presented *Channel 48* at Funda. Shafa'ath-Ahmad Khan (1988: 10) describes this play as a "moving tragic comedy about Steve Biko and Neil Agget." Steve Biko died in police custody in 1977 as a result of injuries incurred while in police custody. Niel Aggett died in detention in 1982 after being arrested by security police. The play even included the *Drum* writer Henry Nxumalo "as a disc jockey" (a character in the play). Another character was a caricature of BJ Voster. Balthazar Johannes Voster was South African Prime Minister during the years 1966–1978 and State President from 1978–1979. In Bisholo's play the apartheid era state leader is called to account for the "unexplained deaths" of Biko and Aggett. Metsoamere (1988b: 21) assessed Bisholo's solo play as a "funny [and] bitter sweet revue" suggesting that the production prioritised entertainment rather than portraying the tragic events as a drama. Metsoamere also called the actor-director "brave" for using community theatre to confront the state apparatus. *Thina Bantu* was performed in the same year (*Sowetan* 1988f: 15).

In 1989, Walter Chakela directed Zakes Mda's *We shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1973). The play was performed by the Mafeking experimental theatre group. It examined the neglect of former "freedom fighters" in a post-independence southern African state. Metsoamere (1989a: 10) pointed out that Soyikwa provided a positive environment to "nurture talent for the upliftment of our culture". The play was also performed at the DOCC in Orlando.

Wits School of Dramatic Arts students Aubrey Sekhabi and Victor Moloka performed in a play titled *Stronghold*. This play was written and directed by Sekhabi and dramatised a "kidnapping in Hammanskraal" in Pretoria (Metsoamere 1990c: 12). Other Wits students, Lebogang Ramagoko, Mlesabane Thabe, Meshack Xaba, Abia Litheko and Victor Moloka also performed at Funda. Their play was entitled *Moloko my Home, my Prison*. In 1991, a reworked version of Maishe Maponya's *Jika* was performed at Funda. Wits School of Arts students, Vusi Kunene and Alfred Lekalakala took the principal roles of politically frustrated teenagers who were part of the fractious political situation in the township between residents and hostel dwellers (the play was first performed in 1986). The friends covertly cross the South African border to receive military training in a neighbouring African country. They prepare to come back into South Africa as "guerrillas"

(Kahn 1991: 17). The staging of these plays in Soweto was part of a project to forge links between Funda Arts Centre and the University of the Witwatersrand.

The renowned actor Owen Sejake directed a play entitled *Last down* at Funda. Metsoamere described it as “a poetic musical journey”. It was codirected by Poppy Taira. Two Funda graduates also presented plays in 1990. The first was an actor/ director named Kgosana, who had made his way from Mohlakeng in the then Northern Transvaal to study at Funda. His directorial debut was called *Fair is Foul*. Kgosana was a graduate of the two-year drama course offered at Soyikwa. His courses included acting, playmaking, improvisation, directing, set design and lighting. The play addressed cross-border “drug trafficking” between South Africa and Mozambique, which was a topical issue as migrants were making their way into South Africa in the 1990s. Metsoamere (1990: 23) mentions other plays by Kgosana: *Blessed Candles* and *Ah! My brother*. In 1990, *Dinishobishobo tsa bo Julius Kusaro*, which was a translation of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* was performed. In the cast were Ephraim Magagane and Alfred Moagi as Brutus and Leslie Lesejane as Caesar.

3.4.3.1 Music, dance, art and workshops at Funda Arts Centre

To fulfil their aspirations of establishing Funda Arts Centre as a nexus of African culture, the centre invited the Soweto community to Saturday readings and debates on various cultural topics. At one such event (Metsoamere 1988c), the works of Richard Rive (*Writing Black)*, Can Themba (*The Will to Die*), Bloke Modisane (*Blame me on History)* and Todd Matshikiza (*Chocolates for my Wife*) were read. Don Mattera read from his book, *Memory is a weapon* and Es’kia Mphahlele read from *Down Second Avenue* and *Africa my Music*. At other events, literary texts by writers from Zimbabwe, East Africa, West and North Africa were included for discussion.

The AWA often held public meetings at Funda. The association also collaborated with the Council for Black Education and Research to present short story and poetry awards (*Sowetan* 1988g: 17). In 1988 the winners were Thomas Redair and Tshidiso Moloka. Es’kia Mphahlele and Njabulo Ndebele judged the submissions.

In 1989 AWA hosted a workshop titled “Bridging the poetry gap.” The event offered a platform for the cross-pollination of ideas and the dissolving of (Western-style) artistic formats and genres. At one event, Don Mattera (*Sowetan* 1989a: 2) said that holding the session was in line with the AWA’s commitment to present and articulate the African oral tradition in the field of poetry and storytelling. The workshop was divided into three sections, namely, “Amasi,” a session focusing on the *Drum* writers. The second session consisted of “Post-Sharpeville poetry”. In this session the work of James Matthews, Sipho Sepamla, Essop Patel, Cosmo Pieterse and the Medupi poets (Mafika Gwala, among others) were analysed and discussed. The third session was called “Voices from the flames: The new generation,” where post 1976 poetry was discussed. Similar events were held at community halls in Kagiso and Tembisa. The session in Tembisa was dedicated to the editor, author and one of AWA’s founder members, Jackie Seroke, who was in jail. The *Sowetan* reports that the literary magazine “*Classic*” and other African books were on sale at these workshops.

The description of these events provides an insight into the cultural life of the townships. Authors and playwrights were concerned with expressing political ideas with refinement and intellectual rigour. The AWA devised a nationwide writing competition and also collaborated with the Congress of South African Writers (Cosaw) (Metsoamere 1991c: 28). Another discussion held in 1991 was entitled “Return to source.” The seminar was organised by the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre. Ways of using African themes as a source for critical thinking, analysis and the making of African arts were discussed at this seminar. Discussions were also held at the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in Dube.

Interestingly, Victor Metsoamere (*Sowetan* 1993a: 19), the *Sowetan* arts journalist, was one of the winners in the AWA Literary Competition Awards in 1993. The competition was aimed at bringing together writers from southern Africa. The judges awarded prizes for short story writing and poetry. In addition, the Association for Creative Artists (Makhaya 1993a: 27) announced bursaries for artists.

The dance component at the Funda Arts Centre was also active. *Amagoduka*, an African dance show, was performed in September 1989. This show was written by dancer and actor Soentjie Thapedi, a member of the Soyikwa Dance Project. The title refers to

itinerant mineworkers who travelled from South Africa's rural areas and from southern countries bordering South Africa to various mines in the country. The men were yearly economic migrants who were housed in hostels, some of which were located in Soweto and Johannesburg. *Thapedi* (*Sowetan* 1989b: 11) told the migrant's story through dance, movement and poetry. *Amagoduka* focused on the experience of a rural family of twelve. The narrative followed the character of the mother who was "left behind when all her children move(d) to Johannesburg in search of work in the mines, following drought and dispossession in the area." The dance follows the way in which the character "suffers the trauma of the separation." The dancers were drawn from the Soyikwa Dance Project. The same group of dancers had also been part of Soyikwa's *Domba – The Last Dance* (1986), *Toro – The African Dream* (1987) *Sego – The African Calabash* (1987). In 1990, Thapedi presented *A Flame is not a House*, which represented African history through dance.

In 1991, the Soyikwa Creative Youth Association presented a dance programme choreographed by Soentjie Thapedi and Nomsa Kupi Manaka. The programme consisted of the following items, *The path* (which was a revival of the original 1988 production) and *Sego – The African Calabash*. Nomsa Manaka had just arrived home from a ten-week study tour of the United States. The dance programme was performed at the Funda Arts Auditorium.

In 1992, the Madimba Institute of African Music devised a programme of free public performances. Motsumi Makhene was the leader of the music section at Funda, and Mhlanganisi Masoga was on the teaching staff. Masoga told Victor Metsoamere (1992a: 16) that "Madimba was formed to redress the existing imbalances between cultural, vocational and academic development of the African child." He added that under apartheid, education for black people was structured to serve industrial needs. "As a result, students [have been] cut away from their cultural heritage and their community," he said. Madimba aimed to provide a rounded music education, as a means "to redirect the process of change in black education." Another free public event was *Melodi Festival of African Music,* which featured The African Jazz Pioneers, the Afrojazz band Thayima and Sibongile Khumalo. Besides its focus on jazz, the Melodi Festival included several Pedi, Sotho and Xhosa traditional music groups and a Mozambican marimba band.

During the same festival, choreographers and dance tutors Nomsa Kupi Manaka and Soentjie Malebatsi (her work was titled "Obe") presented dance programmes. Matsemela Manaka's *Ekhaya – Soweto Neighbourhood Museum* produced an exhibition at Funda Arts Centre entitled "Decades of fire". In 1993, other interesting arts developments included a performance by Funda Centre-based choir, Imilonji kaNtu at the Vista Arena in Soweto.

Funda Centre also hosted an art project called "Khula Udwabe" in 1989. This was an outreach programme, and one event in October involved 300 children. One of the stalwarts at the Funda Art Centre was Durant Sihlali. By 1991, Sihlali had been an art tutor formally for 35 years and held an exhibition at the Thupelo Gallery in Newtown.

In closing, by 1994, theatre activities at the Funda Centre had moved to the Windybrow Theatre in Hillbrow. This was part of a wider migration of Soweto families (those with financial means) who moved to formerly whites-only suburbs. Black actors were also moving from Soweto to the city centre. There were a number of drama and theatre workshops held at Windybrow for the benefit of young actors and playwrights. Since there were no similar programmes in the townships, nor theatres, young actors and playwrights looked to practice their craft in the city centre rather than Soweto. Moreover, the Windybrow Festival (*Sowetan* 1994b: 21) that year simply took over productions from the Funda Arts Centre. This was of benefit to Soweto arts practitioners in that the festival was supported by the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT) as well as by the Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation (DALRO).

The festival's mission was to bring black playwrights from various townships to the city. There Gamakhulu Diniso presented *Ikasi* (1994) and *Igazi* (1994), and Aubrey Sekhabi from Soshanguve presented *Roadhouse* (1994).[13] The advantage for township playwrights in moving their plays from the township to the city centre was that it was easier to access funding. For example, this festival was sponsored not only by PACT (as a state funded entity) but also by First National Bank who sponsored five awards directed

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[13] Incidentally, in reviewing the play or "revue," Victor Metsoamere (1994d: 18) wrote that Sekhabi was "following the trend set by township theatre pioneer Gibson Kente." Metsoamere observed that Sekhabi presented the drama in the Kente mould, thus marrying music, dance and spoken dramatic scenes. "The choreography bears the hallmarks of the Kente influence," wrote Metsoamere.

specifically at Funda Art Centre productions (plays from independent producers were also part of the festival). Significantly, the sponsorships were tied to the Windybrow rather than to Funda Centre. Therefore, financial incentives as well as the opportunity to work in a theatre with technical and marketing support contributed to the dissipation of theatre in Soweto and other townships. Gibson Kente's actors, John Lata and Don Eric Mlangeni, also performed at Windybrow rather than in community halls in Soweto and Mamelodi. Their play was titled *Desiring souls* (Metsoamere 1994a: 19).

In 1994, Funda Centre changed its name to Funda Community College. The centre had always had a dual focus. The first was to provide classes to assist matriculants who had failed and wanted to rewrite their examinations. There was also a well-equipped library on the premises. The second focus was an arts centre where drama, dance, music and fine arts were taught. Claire Keeton (1994: 15) reports that an event was held to honour the Funda chair, Professor Es'kia Mphahlele. This event was organised to celebrate the centre's 10th anniversary, and it was on this occasion that it was announced that Funda was to be restructured as a community college. Funda saw its new mandate as facilitating "lifelong learning opportunities" for young and older township residents.

3.4.4 Other Soweto venues used for theatre performances

Playwright Stan Mhlongo (*Sowetan* 1984e: 7) produced three plays, *Witness*, *what we see* and *Jwala* to introduce young people (as actors and performers) to theatre. He wrote cautionary tales warning children about the dangers of smoking and drinking and showing that drugs lead to bad behaviour. He collaborated with Sedumo Miya, a fine artist, who taught children to draw during the pair's workshops and performances. The plays were performed at the Orlando, Othandweni, and Bethal children's homes.

Peter Ngwenya (Leshoai 1984a: 8) was also active in children's theatre in the township from the 1970s. He produced plays at various venues from 1984 to 1991. His first stage production was *Who'll Regret*, which he wrote for a church youth guild. This was followed by *Save the Child*. His play *Qinisela* was intended to highlight "the plight of underprivileged children." Community theatre in its many forms was concerned with the upliftment of the community and employed themes that led to political consciousness as

well as spiritual and social edification. Theatre practitioners aspired to improve the material conditions of black people. As its title suggests, "*Have Strength,*" the play was directly aimed at children as an audience. Often drawing from his personal experiences, Ngwenya did not only write his plays about children but also sought to include them in the creative process, shaping his plays to speak to the children's sensibilities. Ngwenya believed that children's theatre was integral to developing culture in the Soweto community, as Elliot Makhaya (1986c: 11) reported.

In the early 1980s informal settlements, or "squatter camps" in contemporary parlance, were appearing in Soweto. The central theme in *Qinisela* is how children living in impoverished homes, as well as homeless children, suffer from the cold in winter. Leshoai (1984a: 8) relates that the play is about a child from the eastern Cape, whose parents move to the city in search of jobs, but the family becomes destitute. Subsequently the child is orphaned. Ngwenya believed strongly in the redemptive power of faith in God. The child is adopted and put through school where he subsequently becomes a student leader who inspires his peers. The play was performed at the Inkanyezi Youth Club in Moroka North.

Ngwenya also used performances to raise funds for organisations working with vulnerable children in Soweto. A year later Ngwenya formed the Student/Youth Drama Society. He told Makhaya (1985e: 16) that the aim of the organisation was to foster drama and music at black schools. Ngwenya resolved to "close the gap between black and white schools." The play was also performed at the Sekano Ntoana High School, Phafogang Junior Secondary, the Methodist Youth Centre, Mafori Mphahlele Senior Secondary School, Anchor Senior High School, Ndodo High School, Orlando DOCC, and at Funda Centre (Makhaya 1985f: 10).

The concept of multiracialism gained social value in mid-1980s South Africa. This came about as public institutions and legislation were coming under pressure from society to be more inclusive. At this time, the government was considering abandoning the pass book, allowing for selected mixed race (government) schools and had ceased prosecuting infringements of influx control laws in selected areas, for example Hillbrow in Johannesburg. Exploring this theme, Peter Ngwenya wrote *The Telephone* (1986), a play

"about a community councillor who lives in fear because of death threats" when his son is enrolled in a multiracial school. The play was performed at the Jabavu Community Hall.

Makhaya (1988a: 12) reports that Ngwenya wrote a book on children's theatre. In the same year (1988b: 12), Ngwenya was awarded a three-month scholarship to study theatre in London. In 1988 his play *Save the child* toured Germany and Holland where it was received with critical acclaim. In 1989, the play was taken to Canada to tour Toronto, taking part in an international children's festival (*Sowetan* 1989c: 15).

Ngwenya's productions include two plays written for Radio Zulu, namely *Hamba juba bokucutha phambili* and *Logotshwa lisemanzi*. Ngwenya's other plays were *Vendetta*, *Darkness and then Light*, and *Mother-in-Law*. In 1990, he produced a play titled *Where is my Son*? He told the *Sowetan* (1990) that the story "revolves around the inexplicable disappearance and deaths of young political activists." Ngwenya hosted a number of free performances in Sowetan schools and the following year also toured Finland, Sweden and Denmark with the play. After the European tour, the play was performed in Zimbabwe as part of a programme of South African plays. He said that he performed in schools because he wanted to get feedback from "community-based audiences" as reported by the *Sowetan* (1990).

In the play *Where is my Son*? the main character "disappears after men posing as policemen abduct him from his home". His mother embarks on a desperate search, including inquiring at a police station, where the police deny that he was arrested. The *Sowetan* writes that ultimately,

> [t]he whole saga angers the community and members of Sizwe Local Youth Organisation stage numerous protest actions, demanding a sound explanation from the police.
> A while later a note lands in the house from the police informing Sizwe's parents that he has been found dead in a field with his private parts missing. The gruesome discovery points to a ritual murder but the community takes it as a cover up.

In fact, during 1990, the *Sowetan* carried a number of stories of a school pupil who had disappeared and was later found to have been murdered. There were violent protests when police attempted to break up a memorial service for the victim. Similar to Sizwe, the character in the play, the pupil was politically active at his school. Ngwenya acknowledged that his fictional storyline and underlying message in the play resonated with the youth.

The play was performed at Dlambulo Primary School among others in Soweto and at the Alexandra Arts Centre. The play also went on tour to the United Kingdom and was booked for performances in youth and community arts centres as well as at various education institutions. One of these was the Zabalaza Arts Festival in London. The play was also performed at the Back to Back Theatre in Education Company and the West Yorkshire Playhouse, where it was part of the Mayhem Festival. The play was also taken to to Switzerland and Canada. The cast was made up of Thandi Mthimunye, Thoko Mbongwa, Sindi Mangwa and Busi Nkosi, the same actors who had appeared in Ngwenya's plays *Qinisela* and *Save the Child*, both of which toured Europe in 1989.

By 1991, Peter Ngwenya had written 17 plays; his most recent play was titled *Heita daar bra Spinks* (1991). Metsoamere (1991d: 16) describes it as a youth drama about "unruly behaviours in township schools." While *Qinisela* and *Save the Child* were ongoing, Ngwenya also conducted drama workshops at White City Jabavu. Metsoamere reported that Ngwenya's two students, Nomsa Makhubela (nine years old) and Phumzile Mbele (twelve years old) had recently won roles in *Okovango*, an international film. Nomsa Makhubela also had a role in *Heitah daar bra Spinks.*

Another development was that, almost on a monthly basis, local drama groups initiated theatre festivals in various parts of Soweto. In 1986, one (*Sowetan* 1986d: 11) was held at Thabisong crèche in Diepkloof and included a variety of drama and poetry. Participating in the programme were playwrights Butiza Ndlela and Sabata Sesui of the Thabisong Youth Club. The latter was the leader of the theatre group and a graduate of the drama school at the Federated Union of Black Arts (FUBA).

The playwrights proclaimed that they formed the drama club "to keep youth off the streets." Their plays were titled *Toshiba* (1986), *Umuntu Akalahlwa* (1986) and *Dikeledi* (1986)*.* The cast of *Toshiba* included Banza Ndlela, Mandla Mdlalose, Kgomotso Ntwale, Irene Maluleke, Mduduzi Nene, Isla Mahobe, Muntus (surname not provided), Richard Skhosana and Khulu Mahlanga. The play was a dramatisation of the story of Nongqawuse. The story of this Xhosa historical figure, perhaps because it presents themes that starkly illustrate colonial injustice, was popular with community playwrights in the 1980s.

Dikeledi (1986) was a one-man play written by Willie "General" Tshaka and directed by Sabata Sesui. It concerns a protagonist who has "memories of growing up in a country that one loves" and which is "under political conflict" (*Sowetan* 1986d: 11). There were obvious parallels with present-day Soweto, showing that playwrights used fiction to critique the political landscape. Other plays presented at the festival were *Set me Free* (1986), *I Believe* (1986)*, and Believe in Me* (1986). Rishile Poets presented a programme of poetry. The plays were performed at the Jabavu Community Hall in 1986.

The area of Molapo in Soweto was not usually associated with the arts in the manner that Mofolo (where Eyethu Cinema was located) or Diepkloof (where the Diepkloof Hall and Funda Community Arts Centre were located) were associated with the performances of plays. It was an exception when Lucky Shao (*Sowetan* 1987c: 15) from Molapo wrote a play titled *The Danger of the Earth* (1987) and sought actors from the area to participate in the play. The subject matter of the play addressed the then topical issue of homelands or Bantustans (South Africa 1959).[14] In the play, a young wife from the rural areas journeys to Johannesburg to look for her husband who is working in the mines. Instead of finding him, her life is ruined when she is sexually violated by "city slickers."

Qhewukazi Magwalandini by Doreen Mazibuko was performed at the YWCA Women's Residence Hall in Dube in 1989. In addition, during 1991 a number of Soweto-based community theatre groups were expanding their horizons (as had Kente, Manaka and Maponya nearly two decades before) by performing in Johannesburg. Actors Buhlane Hlati, Sibusisi Dlala and Tshepo Manyatso wrote a play called *Such a Life*. They had been granted rehearsal space at the Roman Catholic Church in Dobsonville. However, their ambition was to perform at a theatre in Hillbrow. The young actors (their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years old) told Victor Metsoamere (1991e: 13) that their play was about "bogus white cops attacking blacks in Hillbrow at night." They added that the drama was not anti-white or pro-African but examined interpersonal relations between the

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[14] According to Worden (2012: 119), the 1959 *Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959* allowed for the setting up of "eight (later extended to ten) separate 'Bantu Homelands' out of existing reserves, each with a degree of self-government" and organised according to apartheid era ethnic classifications. Worden observes that this helped the government to "locate African political rights away from the urban centres to the peripheries thus counteracting the nationalist goals of organisations such as the ANC and PAC."

police and ordinary citizens. Another play, *We've had Enough* (1991), by Soweto actor-playwrights Don Masenya and Ali Segoai, was performed at the Johannesburg City Hall.

A Pretoria based drama group, the Mamelodi Theatre Organisation (MATO) presented two plays in Soweto. The first, *Uzenzile*, was written by MATO's prolific writer/actor/director Junior Makhoere. According to Victor Metsoamere (1992b: 12), the story involved a woman pursued by three suitors. The men end up "in a tragicomic tug of war for her attention." A performance was held at the Dube YWCA Hall. The second play, *Blues train*, was described as a twenty character "experiential production" with the characters represented by five actors. The actors were Junior Makhoere, Thulani Mkhize, Mbulelo Vena, Calvin Ngcaku and Jacky Rathoko. Elliot Makhaya (1992b) wrote that the play examined "the new South Africa," in which citizens were disappointed by depressed social conditions after the end of apartheid legislation. MATO's other play was titled *Isinamova*.

The People's Cultural Organisation (PCO) organised the "Back to School Art Festival," which took place at the sports ground in front of Mafata Trading Store in Emndeni Soweto. PCO was one of a number of youth theatre groups in Soweto. Saduma Miya of the PCO told Victor Metsoamere (1992c: 16) that the organisation was committed to promoting talented youth who were active in culture and sport. The activities at the festival included a performance by a reggae band, ballroom dancing and a display by drum majorettes. Saduma Miya had also written the plays *Tears of Umfundi*, *House of Joy* and *Is this Life*? There is no indication of when these plays were written, however.

The PCO may be said to represent an example of a non-professional community group. I separate the work plays of Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya from those of lesser known playwrights exemplified by Saduma Miya. This does not necessarily imply that the latter produced plays with less polished writing, aesthetics or inferior staging. The "professional" community theatre of Kente, Manaka and Maponya indicates that these playwrights had longer careers in the arts, and used the arts as their primary source of income. Thus, there was a commercial element in their artistic relationships. For example, they paid their actors a salary, they booked community halls and paid for advertising and marketing of their plays. They produced written scripts. Their plays were not performed only in Soweto but were known in other parts of South Africa,

in southern Africa and in some other countries as well. For Kente, making a profit was crucial in order to pay his actors, as well as to fund various productions and the company's tours. Another example on the importance of finance is the fact that when Maponya toured England and Scotland in the 1980s he requested that all the venues at which he was booked to perform guaranteed him a sum of one hundred pounds per performance. This amount covered the cast's expenses while on tour.

In fact, two interviewees made a distinction by identifying various permutations of Soweto-based community theatre. In a telephonic interview I conducted with Bennette Tlouana (Maishe Maponya's associate) on 29/03/2019, he classified Athol Fugard's plays as "professional" and Maponya's plays as "amateur" because, he said, the former playwright's dramas had a more cogent structure. In this way he devalued Maponya's workshop writing process, even though Fugard also collaborated with John Kani and Winston Nthsona on *The Island* and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (both 1974). Makhaola Ndebele, in an interview at the Civic Theatre on 29/11/2017, offered the view that Kente' s plays can only be classified as community theatre because the playwright did not have easy access to well-equipped theatres, unlike white playwrights under apartheid. Ndebele directed *The Gibson Kente Tribute* (2017), which was presented to critical acclaim at the Civic Theatre and at the Soweto Theatre. Ndebele emphasises that there was a commercial element to Gibson Kente's acting company. He also mentions that Kente's plays enjoyed high production values, thus rendering his output professional theatre. His reasoning is that community theatre is distinguished by the fact that no payment is expected from the audience,[15] although, as a rule, community theatre groups in Soweto charged an entrance fee during the 1980s and early 1990s. In both instances the arts practitioners regarded community theatre as a lesser form of artistic expression.

In contrast, what I may term non-professional drama groups performed their plays primarily in Soweto. In these instances, the playwright and cast were not full-time theatre practitioners, although they were as passionate and committed to producing high quality drama as their "professional" counterparts. Common to both types of community theatre

[15] This is a model outlined by Ann Jellicoe (1987) in which professional directors and playwrights travelled outside of the main cities in the UK to stage, write and direct plays after conducting interviews and workshops with local communities.

makers was the fact that their plays involved local community members in the production or staging of the work. The other commonality is that the playwrights regarded the message contained in the play as a crucial element of drama. In addition, in both types the playwrights saw their potential audience as black Africans to whom they wanted to communicate their play's message.

The PCO also performed some of their plays at the Diepkloof Hall, as Metsoamere (1992c: 16) reported. In one festival, poets and dancers were part of the programme. Sithembile Poets, Kuzobonga Poets, Kuyasa Poets and Strangers Youth Club Poetry Group participated. The poems recited were written by Saduma Miya, Malesedi (surname unknown), Baboyi Thabethe and John Maleya.There were also performances of modern and traditional dances. Dance was produced by the following groups: the PCO, Izwe, Tiny Dolls and Strangers Youth Club Dancers. Other youth clubs active in the early 1990s included the Emndeni Youth Club and the Sakhiwe Youth Club.

Other artistic events in 1992 (Metsoamere 1992d: 35) included Oupa Sikhakhane's play *Wash' Umkhukhu* that was about "the misery of squatter camps." It was performed at the Meadowlands Hall. The Indlamu Cultural Dance Association hosted festivals at the Amphitheatre. John Sithole (*Sowetan* 1985d: 8) managed the association.

Another interesting development was that a film titled *Stoney – The One and Only* was filmed in Soweto in 1984. This was inspired by an American film *Rocky* and appearing in the film was the much-loved Kente actor, Ndaba Mhlongo as well as Sol Rachilo (who was in Maishe Maponya's play, *Gangsters*). It was filmed on location in Soweto (Leshoai 1984b: 10) and the main actor was Treasure Tshabalala, a presenter on Radio Metro.

Sabelo Nkosi and Nomazizi Williams' *Malose*, a play about "poverty" was presented in Soweto (venue unknown). The *Sowetan* (1991d: 24) reported that it included "energetic dancing and songs" and that "the choreography bears a strong influence of Gibson Kente and Mbongeni Ngema."

The Zakheni Cultural Group was based in Dobsonville. This group performed a "docu-drama" entitled *Living in Fear*. They called it an "anti-violence production with tragic inter-organisational conflicts forming the integral part of the story line" (Metsoamere 1991f: 18). The play was written by Boy Bangela whose previous plays were *Children of Buntu* (no date), and *Ma it's You* (no date). The Zakheni Cultural Group was also involved

in youth training programmes in music and dance to “keep them off the streets.” Bangela’s productions were performed in Dobsonville, at the Open School in Johannesburg and at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival.

Ahapa was another Soweto-based theatre group. It produced a play *The cure* (1991) that was performed in Soweto. The cast included Johannes Masenogi (Metsoamere 1993a). The Diepkloof Devoted Artists, another group, staged a play called *Child of the Soil* (1991). Other active playwrights include Joe Thungo, who wrote a play *The reflections* and Patrick Mofokeng, who wrote *Fallen Giant Statue* (1991). These plays appear in the entertainment listings section of the *Sowetan* but with no additional information.

3.4.5 Community theatre at venues outside Soweto: the Federated Union of Black Arts (FUBA)

The Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) was based in Newtown, Johannesburg, opposite the Market Theatre . FUBA was among the first private organisations to provide training in acting, music, and fine arts for Africans during the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, their student body was drawn from the townships. At that time,[16] there were no galleries in Soweto and FUBA was a viable outlet for Soweto based artists and those seeking instruction and exhibition space. Elliot Makhaya wrote extensively about their endeavours (Makhaya 1984c: 14) in *Sowetan* (1984f: 3).

This organisation does not seem to have had a sustained community theatre programme during the period under review. One notable production was Wole Soyinka’s *The lion and the jewel*, directed by Lourens Cilliers. The cast consisted of Ernest Ngcobo, Lesego Motsepe, Robert Aphane, Sinah Molefi, Zonke Hlatshwayo, Rapulana Seiphemo, a combination of full time and part-time FUBA drama students. It is significant that the performance took place in FUBA’s dance studio, as they did not have their own space for theatre productions (Metsoamere 1988d: 11).

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[16] Matsemela Manaka did open a short-lived gallery at his home in Soweto and at the Southgate Shopping Centre in Mondeor, a suburb in the South of Johannesburg and about 20 kilometres from Soweto.

In 1994, FUBA celebrated its 16th anniversary by staging an art exhibition, hosting music shows and a panel discussion. This was titled "Reclaiming the African ethos." At the event, the founder Sipho Sepamla remarked, "the community halls in the townships were burned because of apartheid. Our culture also suffered as a result. We have to rebuild our culture and youth activism." However, it seems that the bias towards the city was persistent. Very few intellectual debates on arts and practice were taking place in Soweto. In fact, there was no new infrastructure development in the township. Another consideration was that the community halls that had been destroyed were not replaced before the democratic elections in 1994 (the Soweto Theatre was built in 2012). Other speakers in the discussion included Gibson Kente, Z.B. Molefe, Thamsanqa Khambule, Ramolao Makhene, Pitika Ntuli and Sipho Hostix Mabuse.

3.4.6 Community theatre at venues outside Soweto: the Market Theatre

Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya had started presenting their productions at the Market Theatre in the 1970s (the theatre was opened in 1977 and was a multiracial venue). However, it only formalised its relationship with community based theatre practitioners in 1993 when it launched the Market Theatre Laboratory (Metsoamere 1993b: 24). "The Lab" as it was colloquially known employed "scouts" to work with community based drama groups and to help them develop their plays. The Lab also offered a programme to train township theatre groups. Once a year, these groups were invited to perform at the Zwakala Festival. Thus, community theatre in Soweto was progressively eroded in favour of Johannesburg.

The Market Theatre actively recruited township community theatre groups by hosting "tryouts" for drama that were offered as a series of performances in a technically equipped theatre (Metsoamere 1987a: 12). In 1994, Alistair Dube, who had been trained at the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre in Soweto, wrote and directed *Man Friday*, which was presented at the Market. Included in the cast were Ignatius Qulu and Lucky Ngojo, who had been trained by Gibson Kente in Soweto.

Another significant play at the Market Theatre was by James Mthoba, who was a drama tutor at FUBA. He collaborated with the Transvaal Association for Black Blind

Artists to workshop a play titled *Mehlondini* or *Bloody Eyes* (1987), and the cast was made up of blind people. The *Sowetan* (1987d: 10) reported that the play was "a dramatization of the personal experiences of the actors" as a way of showing that "they are human too." The play was used to raise funds for the association.

Another outlet for black playwrights in Johannesburg was Dhlomo Theatre, which was based at the Africa Cultural Centre in Johannesburg (Leshoai 1987: 9). It had a mission to provide an African centred approach to theatre. Anti-apartheid activist Benjy Francis founded the theatre in 1983, which was named after activist, poet and playwright I.K. Dhlomo (*Sowetan* 1988h: 17).

In another development, the appointment of noted South African actor John Kani as Chief Executive Officer at the Market Theatre and the Black Consciousness-aligned playwright Walter Chakela at the Windybrow meant that these institutions intended to enhance how they presented the black experience in their programming.

3.5 Conclusion

The socio-political changes in the decade 1984–1994 encompass events that are historically significant in the development of South Africa as a democracy. For the purposes of this study, Worden (2012) gives a comprehensive account of how the macro political movements had ripple effects on the lives of ordinary people in Soweto and other townships. These events are framed by, in1984, widespread resistance in the townships, the declaration of the state of emergency and the deployment of the South African National Defence Force in Soweto, and in 1994 by the election of the government of National Unity along with the African National Congress into government. Historical documents of the era, including contemporary *Sowetan* newspaper reports, Grinker (1986) & 1987), Dubow and Beinart (1995), Bonner and Segal (1998), Tomlinson et al. (2003), Jeffery (2009), Worden (2012), Clarke and Worger (2016) and Ndaba et al. (2017) indicate that the socio-political situation was complex in the country and in Soweto. Despite the social instability, written reports and analyses of the era, among them contemporary reports in the *Sowetan*, Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984), Kerr (1995), Hauptfleisch (1997), Kruger (1999 & 2020), Solberg (2011) and Middeke, Schnierer and

Homann (2015) indicate robust community theatre activity. When the period began there was much township community theatre activity; however, as restrictions on blacks in Soweto were ending, new opportunities for community theatre materialised in the city centre of Johannesburg. In addition, there was no new investment in infrastructure for community theatre in Soweto in the immediate post-apartheid era.

Halbwachs (2007: 139) argues that *collective memory* is not the same as formal history. For Halbwachs, the process of writing history involves gathering the most prominent facts on events that have happened over a particular time in the past. Indeed, as evident in the discussion above, key socio-political events, for example the imposition of the state of emergency in 1984 and the unbanning of political organisations in 1989 marked an important shift in the lives of ordinary people in Soweto and also in the subject matter of community plays produced during this period.

Halbwachs argues that history arises from selecting specific events, as is evident in the way that I have divided the considerable topic of the Sowetan socio-political context into various themes. Therefore, the analysis of past events under the themes of transport, schooling, infrastructure, the influx of immigrants and ideological developments assists in establishing a narrative of the past. This chapter encapsulates a historical narrative but which does not generally incorporate collective memory as proposed by Halbwachs.

A number of theorists agree with Halbwachs' position that it is not beneficial to write history while people who can provide a first-hand account are still alive. Amos Funkenstein (Schwartz & Schuman 2005: 184) proposes that collective memories are inscribed in "memorial dates, names of places, monuments and victory arches, museums and texts." Schwartz and Schuman observe that this formulation of collective memory excludes the participation of individuals, a factor that Halbwachs sees as crucial for *collective memory*. But for Funkenstein, the capturing of memories in text may be useful in the collective memorialisation of the past in that these texts offer a record of testimonies from different individuals. Klein agrees and suggests that textual records of history may be construed as part of *collective memory*, because texts are not instruments illustrating memory but are "embodiments of memory" (Schwartz & Schuman 2005: 184).

Ricouer, while supportive of Halbwachs' idea of uncoupling history from memory, has a more sympathetic role for history in *collective memory*. Firstly, Ricoeur's veneration

of history is premised on the notion that written historical texts are not only a report but provide proof for the memory of past events. He notes that a written narrative is a result of a conglomeration of a number of documents (as Halbwachs also attests) and that this process is a construction arising from selecting information and establishing the factuality of past events (2006: 179).

Secondly, in addition to being seen to corroborate or to provide a record of the past, documented history illustrates a continuum in which the oral recollection of the past (from testimonies of individuals) progresses to the writing of a more comprehensive record of the past (2006: 180). Thirdly, the construction of a written narrative is a creative process, because the writer sifts insights from a number of available facts and arranges these into a readable narrative. Therefore, the "writing of history becomes a literary writing" (2006: 190). In support of the notion that history is a creative process of reconstructing the past, Ricoeur (2006: 235) suggests that interpretation of the past is part of writing history. Thus, history is not a list of events nor a bland relaying of factual statements.

In the end, Halbwachs presents a way of resolving the dilemma between history and *collective memory*. He ventures that the writing of history is necessary when (as is the case in this study) information on the past "has become scattered among various individuals, lost among new groups for whom these facts [memories of the past] no longer have interest because the events are definitely external to them" (2007: 139). He insists that history cannot bridge the gap that exists between the text (of events that have occurred three generations earlier) and the people remembering as individuals or as groups (in other words the current generation) (2007: 140). On their own, texts are not able to restore coherence or a sense of continuity between the past and present circumstances in which the recollections take place. The greatest advantage that texts have is that they can "make us understand how distant we are from those who are doing the writing and being described" (2007: 140). Therefore, history is only of interest to a small group of people (namely historians), as opposed to *collective memory* that takes place within a social framework and is of value to ordinary members of the community. In this way, Halbwachs does not discount historical texts altogether but their usefulness is

superseded by the recollections of individuals remembering in concert with the groups to which they belong.

CHAPTER 4:
GIBSON KENTE

4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter I discussed how the socio-political context influenced Sowetan community theatre during the period 1984–1994. Many authors on community theatre describe Kente, Manaka and Maponya's plays as being aligned to contrasting political orientations. In this chapter I focus on Gibson Kente. I do this to contextualise Kente's place in the development of Sowetan community theatre and I draw on archival sources and interviews that I conducted. I also discuss the manner in which Kente influenced other Soweto community playwrights.

4.2 Writings on Kente: his place in South African theatre history

Kente's name is invariably mentioned when the history of Sowetan theatre is being narrated. Anticipating future discourse on the development of Sowetan theatre, Waren (1968: 413) outlines theatre practice in the Johannesburg city centre versus activities in Soweto. Waren writes about Kente's involvement with the Union Artists and how he subsequently established his theatre company in Soweto. He writes about Kente's *Sikalo* (1966) and Mofolo Hall, a community venue which was a centre for cultural activity before it was burnt down during the 1976 Soweto uprisings. Also of interest is that, owing to , apartheid legislation in the 1950s and 1960s African artists were migrating from Johannesburg to Soweto. A great number of theatre historians acknowledge that Kente's plays, along with those of Manaka and Maponya as were of importance during and after apartheid. From the 1970s onwards, Soweto theatre was generally analysed as a form of protest against apartheid; by the early 1990s, it was analysed to see how democracy influenced its direction. Louw (1984: 111–112) has also described how, during apartheid, state-funded Performing Arts Councils (PACs) encouraged black theatre practitioners to join them as a means to demonstrate that these PACs were supporting political reform. This is important in that Kente and Manaka together with a number of other black actors participated in the PACs.

In the 1980s and more so in the 1990s, Kente's name tends to appear in relation to a wide range of issues, some of which are discussed in more depth by Kavanagh (1985), Kerr (1995), Hauptfleisch (1997) and Solberg (2011). Hagg (2010) proposes that there should be community arts centres in the townships to develop cultural activities conducted by community based artists. Steinberg and Purkey (1995: 36) examine the way in which the end of apartheid legislation encouraged playwrights to explore new themes in South African plays. For example, they write about their play *Tooth and nail,*which aimed to straddle anti-apartheid theatre (in which theatre responded to state oppression) and theatre in the era of democracy (a period in which financial resources were required to enable more black and alternative theatre practitioners to create new plays). Van Heerden (2011: 86) also assesses emerging trends in African theatre but focusses his research on the period of democratic elections in 1994. Oppelt (2012: 300) as van Heerden, studies developments in South African theatre to determine if there is a continuity between apartheid and post-apartheid era South African theatre.

Lastly, Peimer (2016: 404) observes that Kente taught his actors before he allowed them on stage. He mentions that Kente worked in Soweto, but without discussing the playwright's training methods and their value to the community. In the short survey of articles dealing with the history of Sowetan theatre, Kente's mode of theatre serves to orientate, to compare and to contrast his style with that of several township playwrights. This tends to be done without dedicating substantive research to his methods or to justify his influence on other township playwrights.

4.2.1 Writings on Kente: theatre from different perspectives

Kente's name arises in writing that explores a number of contexts of South African theatre and arts. My discussion develops chronologically, according to the decade in which these were published, roughly from the 1980s to the 2000s. Kente has come to represent a general standard in the creation of African arts. For example, Gray (1977: 1) writes about him in the context of South Africa's literary tradition that includes novelists (Solomon Plaatje and Olive Schreiner) and dramatists (R.R.R. Dhlomo). Without providing evidence, Gray also makes the statement that Kente and other township playwrights did

not take on board Shakespearean dramatic techniques but based their plays solely on American musicals and the Blues genre, which incorporated song and dance.

Kente is also included in a list of African film makers, as he turned his play *How Long* into a film in 1976 (Pheto 1981: 43) . In the 1980s there was commentary on how censorship affected Kente and Matsemela Manaka's plays, articulated by Sepamla (1982: 15), the director of FUBA. Kavanagh (1981b: xv) and Davis (1998: 191) reported on Kente's harassment by the authorities in the 1970s. *Too Late* was banned in 1975 and a filmed version of his play *How Long* was confiscated by the police in 1976. Kavanagh (1981a: 86) reports that township authorities used legislation of the Publications Control Board, under Section 12 of Act 26 of 1963, to ban *Too Late* for its protest against apartheid and for supposedly violating the state's moral code on homosexuality. Kente reacted to the banning of his plays in two ways. First, he challenged the state in court (Kavanagh 1981a: 86) and secondly, he emphasised that his plays promoted harmony across all racial groups. Commenting on his detention in 1976, Kente said: "I have no idea why [I was detained]. I am not a politician, you understand. I love people and I love all people" (Hollyer & Luther 1985: 85). The linking of ideology and Sowetan theatre is a recurring theme in the analysis of Sowetan theatre, with some researchers even suggesting that Kente's plays (and those of other playwrights not linked to the Black Consciousness movement) embodied "however unintentionally, forceful ideological misrepresentations of their audiences' worlds" (Horn 1985: 2). In his introduction to Kente's *Too Late*, Kavanagh (1981a: xxvi–xxiv) provides a rationale for his argument that Kente's inclusion of music and a performative quality of acting undermines Black consciousness ideology. He suggests that Kente adopted human interest themes in his plays to appease the authorities during apartheid.

In the 1990s, academic articles and studies mentioning Kente took cognisance of the changing socio-political context. In addition, in writing on South African theatre, researchers compare Kente's plays to the work of other playwrights. For example, Colleran (1990: 83) contrasts Kente and Athol Fugard when discussing the evolution of anti-apartheid plays. She sees Kente's plays as projecting overwhelming "spectacle at the expense of political commentary," and Fugard's plays as "eloquent, dilemma-ridden dramas, though more explicitly political." In "Theatre beyond apartheid," Steadman (1991:

84) remarks on twin themes that researchers have immediately noticed in Kente's work; that he was popular in Soweto and that Kente's "popular township musicals have been criticized for being escapist and insufficiently politicised." This stems from 1970s era Marxist analyses of Kente's plays, where Kente was criticised for excluding direct political messages from his plays, thereby failing the (black) working class oppressed under capitalism. These criticisms also illustrate that, despite being adopted only by a small number of Soweto residents, Black Consciousness artists successfully articulated their message through drama, poetry and other arts. Steadman (1994: 28) attests to the influence of Black Consciousness by pointing out that these playwrights explored the ideology in different contexts: urban, rural as well as through oral and written texts. It is also apparent that in emphasising scribing and writing, the Black Consciousness message was not diluted as had happened in Kente's plays. This is because Kente did not leave behind a body of written work that articulated his ideas from his perspective.

In investigating the development of workshop theatre in South Africa, Fleishman (1991: 51) sees the development of Kente's style of theatre as syncretic, in that it incorporated dramatic, musical and dance influences from African and Western cultures. He notes that this helped Kente to draw a new (African) audience to theatre, since the playwright was operating in the townships. Furthermore, "Kente also introduced the broad, physical acting style which was later to characterise many workshop theatre productions" in South Africa (1991: 57 and also in Fleishman, 1990: 88). In his discussion Fleishman briefly describes Kente's use of language, music and methods of structuring his plays as an aspect of a carnivalesque mode of theatrical expression, which was ideal in workshopped theatre productions.

In her study on South African theatre, Duggan focuses on the playwright Zakes Mda. Here again Kente's name, rather than his plays, is used to demarcate the scope of South African theatre. Duggan (1997: 21) sees Kente as an exponent of dramas "about blacks, dealing with black lives and the meaning of being black" in South Africa. In outlining South African theatre, she also makes a distinction between Kente and playwrights influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement.

In the first decade of the 2000s, researchers were still including Kente, Manaka and Maponya in their surveys of South African theatre. Barriors Herrero (2000: 496) looks

at elements of satire in their plays, while Piciucco (2000: 76) analyses Mandito, a character in Kente's *Too Late* (1975), in terms of how feminist issues are treated in selected South African plays. Gunner (2000: 232) suggests that Kente's plays of the early 1970s incorporated the same conventions as radio drama. This meant exploring themes that dealt with morality issues within African society and the expression of fictional events in a melodramatic fashion.

There have been a number of more substantial investigations that have incorporated Kente's plays. These were conducted in the first decade of the 2000s. These studies consider the development of South African theatre in the context of colonialism and later socio-political developments as South Africa progressed from apartheid to democracy. Thus, issues of ethnic identity, racially based social stratification, language and Western and African-centric cultural practices are seen as important to African playwrights. Researchers also mention that Kente's plays were performed in community halls and speculate that this led to Kente adopting a showy performance style to compensate for poor theatre facilities. Litkie (2003), in a thesis titled *Selected black African dramatists south of the Zambezi*, includes Kente in a cohort of playwrights to investigate playwriting (by African dramatists) in selected countries located south of the Zambezi river. This study found that Kente's playwrighting incorporated elements from African oral traditions, which was a common element in work by dramatists from southern Africa. Specifically, in a comparison between Kente and Mbongeni Ngema, the study reflects on Kente's performative style adopted by actors on stage as an element that Ngema inherited from Kente. The writer proposes that a more complex analysis of African theatre is needed and that this should consider how indigenous African theatre practices influenced plays produced in the 1980s. As Fleishman (1991) has pointed out, Kente's use of certain theatrical codes, such as the way in which actors assumed exaggerated facial expressions in performance, was adopted by other African playwrights.

When analysing works by African playwrights (including Kente and Manaka) Litkie adopts the approach of a comparison to investigate their styles of dramaturgy (2003: 56). Other than performative aspects employed by Kente in *Too Late* (1975), a discussion on the constitutive parts of this play serves to illustrate the way in which Kente wrote it. Among these constitutive parts are elements of traditional dance, live music and

vaudeville (63-64 & 66), as well as an energetic performance by the actors that incorporates melodramatic elements (66–67). This study also reiterates the observation that *Too Late* relied on music and dance to communicate socially relevant themes. Looking at audience reception, the study notes that it is the entertainment value to which the audience had a significant response (2003: 176).

In contextualising the plays discussed, the study provides an exposition on the various ways of identifying the term community theatre, including conceptualising community theatre as an outreach programme (11) and as a means of identifying plays jointly developed within a community (12). The study also usefully outlines the nuances in the use of the terms "African" and "black" (2003: 23–26) and of "drama" and "theatre" (2003: 27–37), while considering the influence of colonialism on African theatre and literature (2003: 171).

With regard to Kente, a study entitled *Theatre of the imagination: The theatre of Ellis Pearson and Bheki Mkhwane* (Aitchison 2008) acknowledges Kente as an important inspiration for Mkhwane and Pearson's formulation of "Theatre of the Imagination." The playwrights incorporated Kente's performance style (for actors) and what they saw as "Kente's musical theatre style" (Aitchison 2008: 5). In contrast to Litkie, Aitchison says that Kente's strength is that he created "vibrant, socially aware theatre," a quality that was emulated in the Theatre of the Imagination. Another element of this form of theatre is its "physicality" and use of stock characters (2008: 5–6). Where Fleishman sees Kente's physicality as an aspect of the carnivalesque theatrical technique, Aitchison attributes it to Grotowski's concept of poor theatre and, in particular to the Theatre of the Imagination, and inspired by Jaques Lecoq's "physical vocabulary" (2008: 6).

In explaining the success of Mbongeni Ngema's theatre style, in his study titled *Sounding the body's meridian: Signifying community and "the body national" in post-apartheid South African theatre*, Mtshali (2009) also identifies Kente's theatre as the source for a number of African playwrights. He also observes that Ngema (as an example of other African playwrights) has not revised Kente's original theatre format (2009: 45). This implies that Ngema has specifically not succeeded in enhancing this format or making it relevant in a new socio-political context. In 2009, Picardie's study, *The drama and theatre of two South African plays under apartheid* (2009), he employs

poststructuralist theory (particularly psychoanalysis) to investigate the expressive use of gender in Fatima Dike's *The first South African* (1979) and Gcina Mhlophe's *Have you seen Zandile?* (1988). Kente features very briefly in the former and in the latter studies as a means of providing a context in which to frame a discussion on African theatre aesthetics, character development and gender relations.

In the following decade, from 2010 onwards, the dialogue on Kente does not change radically. *From the people to the people: South African fringe theatre* (Coray-Dapretto 2010) discusses the history of African theatre as "fringe theatre" to emphasise community involvement. Christopher John's study *Catharsis and critical reflection in isiZulu prison theatre. A case study from Westville Correctional Facility in Durban* (2013) illustrates that Kente's theatre continues to be considered relevant in post-apartheid society. This view is echoed in Gibson Alessandro Cima's (2014) discussion of a revival of Mbengeni Ngema's *Sarafina* in 2014. From the 2010s onwards, researchers identified Kente as an influence on *Sarafina* (Charlton 2015: 832), also mentioning Ngema's connection to Kente when discussing *Woza Albert* (Havenga 2020).

4.2.2 Books on Kente's oeuvre

In 1981 Kente's *Too Late* was published in a collection by Kavanagh*, South African people's plays. Ons phola hi.* Kavanagh (1981a: viiii–x) describes an African theatrical tradition that he sees as completely independent of Western influence. He argues that this tradition evolved from Khoikhoi communities, from black pastoral and agricultural societies and was expanded by black dramatists from the 1920s onwards. In its later development (in the 1950s) African theatre incorporated influences from Western culture as formed by "a polyglot modern culture" as well as the Union of South African Artists (1981a: xi). Importantly he locates *Too Late* within this tradition. He (1981a: xi) sees Kente as instigating "the rise of the independent majority theatre," as Kente developed the means of production and capital resources to establish his theatrical company from 1967.

The establishment of Kente's theatre company took place within the accelerated implementation of apartheid from the 1940s onwards. The South Western Native Townships or Soweto was the result of a racially-based settlement programme of

apartheid. Black Consciousness gained momentum in Soweto from the 1960s to the 1970s through students' organisations (Kavanagh 1981a: xiv). At this time Kente produced plays that urged defiance against oppressive ideological forces, as illustrated most prominently in *How Long* (1973). The play helped Kente's company to become "the most popular" theatre company in South Africa (1981:xxii). In particular *How Long* was admired in Black Consciousness circles. Kavanagh states that township theatre, as it developed, "owed its basic form to *King Kong*" and that Kente developed this form of theatre further. Kavanagh emphasises Kente's business acumen and attributes his commercial success to his productivity. Initially, Kente's plays were not overtly political (the period 1968–1970), but more direct political messages were incorporated in *How Long* and *Too Late* (1975). He also praises *Too Late* because the play "demonstrates the people's poverty and suffering [and yet] balances this by revealing their strengths" (Kavanagh 1981: xxiv). In his analysis of class interaction in the play (1981a: xix–xxvi), Kavanagh acknowledges that Kente's plays highlighted the importance of family as the basis of a strong black community, even though he does not regard Kente as part of the working class but places him as a "member of the emergent black intermediate classes." Kavanagh notes that Kente's plays made him a wealthy businessman (1981a: xxiii).

Kavanagh distinguishes between playwrights affiliated to Black Consciousness and those who were associated with Kente's township theatre, most notably Sam Mhangwane. Falling into the former category would be Workshop '71 and the plays of Manaka and Maponya. Kavanagh suggests that the "political statement" in Kente's plays was weak, a line of argument followed by later writers on Kente, most notably Kerr (1995) and Solberg (2011). He says that Kente's commitment to black nationalism was compromised by his commercial aspirations after *Too Late*. Kavanagh also questions Kente's ability as a playwright and surmises that Kente's plays were "effective in the non-literary, non-intellectual, unarticulated areas of communication" (1981a: 87). Kavanagh underlines that Kente emphasised the actual performance by the actors (for example the use of facial expressions and gestures) and musicians to create a vibrant atmosphere in the auditorium. While he is critical of the final product produced by Kente, Kavanagh acknowledges his professionalism. He notes that the actors were "full-time professionals and their rehearsal schedule was extraordinarily taxing" (1981a: 88).

In an interview with Rolf Solberg (1999), Kente explains that script writing is an important element of creating theatre and that his inspiration for theatre work comes from observing the lives “of ordinary people” (1999: 82). He maintains that his plays focus “on issues that involve people, both politically, socially and sociologically” (1999: 83). Kente also readily admits to incorporating various musical styles in his plays. For Kente, music engages the “mind as well as satisfying social needs and aspirations” of his audience (83). Even in post democratic South Africa Kente cautioned that the government did not have sufficient programmes to develop township youth (Solberg 1999: 83–84); he believed that training was important for actors and he was familiar with the Stanislavski acting method (1999: 86). However, in reviewing his output, there is a long held view by many commentators that Kente’s incorporation of socio-political issues in his plays was superficial, as reflected in the discussion of the work by Kavanagh (1981a), Kerr (1995) and to some extent Steadman (1990a).

Solberg’s *Bra Gib. Father of South Africa’s township theatre* (2011) is a more comprehensive study on Kente. It incorporates photographs, interviews, books and newspaper articles on Kente. Solberg uses these sources to analyse and provide a socio-political context for the plays. In part one, the book gives an assessment of Kente’s plays from the 1960s to the 2000s. This section includes a biographical sketch of the playwright, from the beginning of his musical career at Dorkay House in the late 1950s to the 1960s. Solberg (2011: 8–22) provides a description of Kente’s plays between 1961 – 2004. The first four plays, *Manana the Jazz Prophet* (1961), *Sikalo* (1965), *Lifa* (1968) and *Zwi* (1970) were first performed in the city of Johannesburg and went on a tour of the townships. But as Kente moved his operations form Dorkay House to Soweto, he prioritised township audiences. During this period he established a life-long pattern of producing his plays and training his actors, as well as writing and directing his plays.

Solberg (2011: 22–30) analyses *How Long* (1973), *I Believe* (1974) and *Too Late* (1975) and concludes that Kente fashioned themes that disguised anti-apartheid “political statements” to evade the authorities (2011: 26). The socio-political context was that Black Consciousness was gaining momentum in the township. In summing up Kente’s plays, Solberg includes contemporary newspaper reviews, as well as Kente’s observations on his own work. Solberg sees Kente’s plays as employing the use of “stock characters” (8),

"mild satire" (28) as well as "music and comedy" (31) to communicate an anti-apartheid message.

From 1977 to 1981, Kente produced eight plays amid township political strife. These were*: Can You Take It?* (1977), *Laduma* (1978), *Taximan and the School Girl* (1978/79), *The Load* (1979) *Mama and The Load* (1980), *Hungry Spoon* (1980), *Lobola* (1980) and *Going Back* (1980/81). It is testament to the loyalty of the Sowetan community and the relevance of the themes he pursued in his plays that audiences filled community halls to see them. In Solberg's (2011: 32–50) interpretation, Kente's plays of this period are without a potent inspirational political message. They explore family relations from various perspectives, namely, domestic violence (*Can You Take It?*), brothers who hold conflicting political ideals (*Laduma*), sisters who share a secret (*Taximan and the School Girl*), a mother's commitment to the education of her children (*The Load*), romantic love between lovers from different social groups (*Hungry Spoon*) and families negotiating marriage between their children (*Lobola*).

Kente's next set of plays, in the 1980s, was performed amid township violence in general and also during a call by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) to boycott plays (2011: 51). COSAS was unhappy that Kente was working with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) on *Going Back* (1981), a television series, and it also argued that *Hard Road* (1981) did not portray the negative effects of apartheid on the township community. The plays written in the 1980s were: *Now is the Time* (1982), *Bad Times Mzala* (1982)/ *Things are Bad Mzala* (1982), *Sekunjalo* (1987), *We Mame!* (1987), *Sekunjalo –The Naked Hour* (1988) and *What a Shame* (1989) which was reconceptualised as a television series *Lahliwe* in 2000. There was also *Give a Child* (1989), *Mama's Love* (1989) and *We are the Future* (1990, which was an updated version on *Give a Child*. During this period, Kente started a project called Help to Help Ourselves (HHO) to raise funds for student bursaries; however, he still faced the criticism that he was not committed to the anti-apartheid struggle. Solberg (2011: 36) observes that in plays produced in the 1980s, Kente gave more prominence to "cultural issues than to the power game between the white minority tyranny and the ANC-led anti-apartheid struggle." For example, Solberg (2011: 57) points out that *Bad Times Mzala* contained a message opposing the call by anti-apartheid groups for international sanctions against South Africa.

Kente was also criticised when *Sekunjalo* was performed at the State Theatre. In particular, *Sekunjalo* created a scenario in which a post-apartheid African country was beset by corruption by the new black elite. In addition, *Sekunjalo* and its expanded version, *Sekunjalo –The Naked Hour*, were seen by a number of contemporary arts reporters as poorly conceived dramas (2011: 62).

In the 1980s, Kente's plays presented township social relations in a light-hearted manner. These include *Now is the Time*, in which a former student activist expresses mild disapproval of black political leaders (55) and *We Mame!* which is a comedy involving three women characters who have a romantic interest in the same man (71).

In the 1990s the prominent works were the play *Mfowethu* (1993) and two television series, *Mama's Love* (in 1989, as a play and in 1995 as a television series) and *Lahliwe* (2000). *Mfowethu* portrays cultural interactions within a township community when a white Afrikaans man comes to live in the township. This indeed was a topical issue given the socio-political changes (from apartheid to democracy) occurring in South Africa at that time. Kente's television works were always based on his plays, and on television *Mama's Love* faced criticism from newspaper reviewers for being technically inferior and politically insensitive. Solberg (Solberg 2011: 82–86) notes that Kente was criticised because a character in the play suggested that black South Africans received sympathy from the international anti-apartheid movement because of apartheid. The implication was that there was a positive element to black oppression.

In 2001, Kente presented *Ezakithi*, in which he examines whether the term "African" should be exclusively applied to black people in South Africa (Solberg 2011: 91). In his analysis, Solberg sees this play as a reworking of *Mfowethu*, in that it features a white character who attempts to immerse himself in black township culture. The play also examined the practical application of the African renaissance, a topical issue in 2001. The play was performed at the Market Theatre but was not well attended by audiences, as had been the case with Manaka and Maponya's plays (but which received positive media reviews). *How Long 2* (2002), was an updated version of the the story of youth activism, where the characters faced challenges of "poverty, unemployment, crime, HIV/AIDS and child abuse" (Solberg 2011: 96). Solbergs' analysis was that the play "crammed too many major issues" with the result that the script lacked depth (2011: 97). Kente's final play *The*

Call (2003/2004) had personal resonance for him as it included a character who was HIV positive; Kente had disclosed in 2003 that he had HIV or seroconverted. Solberg also reflects on Kente's legacy by reprinting photographs from Kente's plays. As is to be expected (and as Solberg acknowledges) there are a number of gaps in the information available as Kente operated without institutional support.

In part two, the book provides a perspective of Kente as a "theatre artist," teacher, musician and entrepreneur. Here Solberg (2011: viii) comments that Kente combined music, dance and dramatic elements in his plays and notes the absence of scripts for Kente plays. In discussing Kente's "artistry," Solberg makes some interesting observations. He mentions that Kholofelo Kola indicated to him that at times Kente wrote his plays by building a narrative from a song or a melody, after which he would write a script from this process (2011: 116). Solberg also recalls Kavangah's observation that Kente did not regard dialogue as important to relay substantive themes in his plays (2011: 118–119). Another important characteristic is Kente's commitment to theatre as a craft and his training of his actors to adopt an exaggerated performance style, which was apparent in the their exaggerated movements and loud voices on stage (2011: 124–126).

Another interesting aspect of the book is the inclusion of interviews that Solberg conducted with Vusi Dibakwane, Kholofela Kola and Dixon Molele, from which Solberg learned how Kente trained actors in performance. Dibakwane revealed that there were no scripts offered to the cast at the beginning of rehearsals; Kente dictated the dialogue to each actor while developing the play (128). He also reported that Kente trained his actors over a three week period when preparing for a play. Kente conducted acting lessons using humour and taught the actors music using the tonic sol-fa method. The rehearsals took place at the DOCC (130). Dibakwane confirmed Kola's comments about the rehearsal space and that Kente offered rudimentary music training to his actors (131–132). He added that rehearsals could sometimes take more than twelve hours. Solberg also writes that Kente employed competent musicians to play in a band that was featured in his plays (140–141). He also indicates that Kente operated a successful theatre enterprise from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. He (2011: 149) notes that Kente had "established a business that was independent of the state and other public funding; he paid his artists and employees, a decent regular salary; and he caught the attention of

serious arts critics and the media.” Another informative aspect of the book is that it includes a comprehensive list of Kente’s plays.

In *A contended space* (Kavangh, 2016) aims to provide an updated, comprehensive assessment of Kente’s plays. The book draws on Kavanagh’s earlier publications on Kente (1985 & 1997) as well as on Larlham (1985) and Solberg (2011) and repeats common themes used in Kente’s plays. Using the earlier books, Kavanagh provides an overview of the development of black theatre in South Africa and restates Kente’s biography. He repeats that the period 1966–1976 was a major one for Kente, one in which his plays were aligned to the prescripts of the Black Consciousness ideology (2016b: 174–175). He describes the period 1977–990 as a “long decline” (2016b: 176), in which Kente’s plays maintained popularity but his reputation was compromised because his plays undermined anti-apartheid messages (2016b: 186–186). Kavanagh also provides a survey of developments in theatre from 1990 to 2004. He observes that township theatre had been transformed into community theatre and theatre for development. He notes that community theatre refers to “theatre of the oppressed” or plays that are not performed in mainstream theatres (2016b: 348). Theatre for development refers to plays that are commissioned to build awareness of issues specified by the funder, for example HIV/AIDS, the environment, gender and youth training programmes (2016b: 348).

Kavanagh also describes the plots and dialogue of four of Kente’s plays; he describes *Sikalo* (1965) as a “narrative play” that engages a storytelling format (192). He remarks that *Lifa* (1968) is “remarkably less developed than *Sikalo*” (203). He says that *How Long* (1973) uses realism to depict the way in which blacks lived under apartheid (213). He notes that there were three versions of “script texts” of *Too Late* (1975) which were published in *S’ketsh’* magazine in 1981 (224). Kavanagh uses his impressions and draws from long playing recordings, reviews from *S’ketsh’* magazine and Kente’s texts in his private collection.

4.3 Research from archival sources: texts (*Sowetan* and PACT Archive)

In this section I present archival material that contributed to the writing of a more comprehensive narrative of the history of Sowetan community theatre. I chose the *Sowetan* newspaper as my main source because it reported daily on a wide spectrum of township arts, politics and social activities in the 1980s and 1990s (the newspaper is still in existence). I also include information from a theatre programme (there is only one theatre programme, which is located in the PACT Archive) as well as interviews I conducted with Kente's colleagues and contemporaries.

Below I discuss Kente's plays that are mentioned frequently in the archives. In the decade 1984–1994, sixteen plays were performed in Soweto and other townships. These are: Things A*re Bad Mzala* (1984), *Take It Easy Papa* (1984), *No Peace in the Family* (1985 to 1989), *She Fears the Night* (1985), *Bad Times* (1986 to 1987), *Sekunjalo* (1987*), We Mame!* (1987 to 1988), *Sekunjalo – The Naked Hour* (1988 to 1990), *Mama's Love* (1989), *Give a Child* (1989), *What a Shame* (1989 and in 1991), *Mgewu Ndini* (1990), *We are the Future* (1990), *Hard Road* (1991*)*, *Mfowethu* (1993 to 1994) and *Touch My Heart* (1994). These plays were performed at Eyethu Cinema and various community halls in Soweto and other townships in the Pretoria Witwatersrand Vereeniging (PWV) area, and in other parts of the country. In the interests of brevity I do not list all the venues at which these plays were performed.

4.3.1 *Things Are Bad Mzala*, *Take It Easy Papa* and *No Peace in the Family*

Things Are Bad Mzala was a highly successful play, and the cast was required to travel to various townships in the PWV area. Makhaya (*Sowetan* 1984g: 15) writes that the "storyline is based in [sic] a character from the bundus who is ambitious and courageous [and is] aiming to make it big in the bright city lights. He does achieve his goal, but fate catches up with him". It seems the character experiences misfortune. Makhaya assesses the play, saying that:

> In *Mzala* Gibson Kente has introduced a new dimension. The dance and song routines are out of this world. There's the gripping and throbbing "dust-bin" dance laced with criss-cross Xhosa rhythms.

Kente's signature "dust-bin" dance sequence became popular with audiences. Makhaya added (Makhaya 1984d: 7) that the play was "highlighted by its electric dance routines and soul-embalming music."

On July 24, 1984, *Take It Easy Papa* opened at the DOCC Hall in Orlando in Soweto. Describing the play, Kente told Elliot Makhaya, (1984e: 9) that it was based on "cultural conflict." The play concerns a clash between Christian values to do with love and marriage and also discusses conservative or patriarchal views of sex and youth in the township. A review in the *Sowetan* (1984h: 35) described it as having "down to earth humour...[and that the] music is as strong as ever and dance sequences [are] captivating."

Despite the popularity of his plays and the willingness of audiences to attend shows despite the increasing violence in the townships, Kente decided to cut short the tours of *Things are Bad Mzala* and *Take It Easy Papa* on the East Rand and in Soweto. The *Sowetan* (Makhaya 1984f: 12) reported that Kente "arrived at the decision following the uncertain climate in the townships. [And that] shows were cancelled at the last hour and this has become costly." However, Kente pledged to "still run stage shows in the townships but on a smaller scale ... I must think of an alternative for the actors because they make a living out of that [plays]…".

The third play of 1984 was *No Peace in the Family*, which Kente saw as a light "filler" between what he considered substantial dramatic works. The comedy had detailed plot twists and turns as well as a serious moral message. The play involves a rivalry between brothers who are competing for their mother's good favour and love. In this play Kente wanted to tease out ridiculous, absurd situations and even physical humour to maintain comedic elements throughout the play. In Makahaya's (1984g: 12) gleeful review of the play, he mentions a sequence in which the elder brother, Shandiz, "puts a heavy purgative into milk knowing that Smoko [the younger sibling] will gulp it. He does this and there's a riot in his stomach." Makhaya (1985g: 9) observes that *No Peace in the Family* is a "slight departure from Kente's usual format. It has been hailed by both critics and theatregoers as one of the best productions from his pen." Makhaya then quotes Kente

as saying that he “wanted to have the storyline uppermost and supported by the music and not the other way around. That makes it different from my other productions.”

On average, Kente’s plays involved fifteen actors and instrumentalists. The band typically consisted of a rhythm and lead guitars, a drum set and an electronic keyboard and saxophone. The prominent members of the cast of *No Peace in the Family* were Zakithi Dlamini, who portrayed the mother, a character named Metsi. Dumakude Mnembe played Chundu, the elder brother, and Mzala Sugar Langeni, the younger brother Smoko.

4.3.2 *She Fears the Night*

Kente introduced *She Fears the Night*, his last play, while *No Peace in the Family* was winding down. In this way, his actors were always employed and he was ensured a constant cash flow to maintain his company. Although it had musical, dance and comedic elements, the play had a serious subject; a young woman is coerced into sex by her stepfather. Elliot Makhaya (Makhaya 1985h: 14) said that the play

> has left audiences talking and arguing. It’s about a young girl who fears the night because she is being haunted by her step-father who wants to be intimate with her. If this is too much for your eyes, these things happen in real life and are now enacted on stage.

Among the cast were Linda Sebezo and Tonique Phala. As there are no theatre programmes or other related documents, the two actors are the only names I have been able to verify as cast members. The subject matter resonated with the community. A stampede to get into Eyethu Cinema occurred during one performance of the play. Speaking to Elliot Makhaya (Makhaya 1985g: 9), Kente explained

> [t]he show was scheduled to start at 8pm, but by 7pm, the cinema was already packed. There were people in the foyer dying to see the play. We just couldn’t let [additional people into the venue] because we want our patrons to feel respected and comfortable. We regret the whole thing hence we’ll be getting back to the same venue with the same play… I strongly wish to apologise to patrons who couldn’t make it into the cinema. But we’ll make sure that we’ll be back there.

As indicated by Solberg (2011), Kente encountered criticism from township youth as he was regarded as minimising the anti-apartheid message in his plays. Also, some township

comrades sought to curtail arts and entertainment. The *Sowetan* (Makhaya 1985i: 13) reported that South African artists in general were "caught in crossfire" and were prevented from performing in the township. Township artists also suffered during successive "Black Christmas"[17] campaigns, which were an anti-government protest.

4.3.3 *Bad Times*

In the play *Bad Times* (1986), Kente adopted an overtly political approach, for which he received unfavourable commentary from critics and arts practitioners. Leading up to the play, in January of 1986 he was asked by the *Sowetan* about his views on the cross-border raid into Botswana by the South African Defence Force (SADF). Aircraft had bombed houses, which the SADF said posed a security threat to South Africa as they harboured ANC military operatives. Political organisations in Soweto condemned the government for initiating the military offensive. Speaking to Joshua Raboroko (1986: 5), Kente said that it was "useless for government to fight neighbouring states." He suggested that the government should negotiate with anti-apartheid organisations in South Africa rather than engaging in military action against Botswana. The tone of the article was that "blacks have condemned SADF raids on alleged ANC bases in neighbouring countries." There was a lot of anguish in Soweto as many people had relatives living in Botswana.

Kente not only criticised the government for military action in Botswana but was also critical of violence instigated by blacks in the township, as portrayed in the play *Bad Times*. According to Makhaya (1986d: 9), in this play, Kente condemned necklacing, petrol bomb attacks and other violence by blacks against fellow township residents. Kente also "preaches the power of education" and urged reconciliation between opposing township political organisations. The play also had a message advocating human rights.

Although Makhaya praised the play for its use of humour to deconstruct the relationship between township women and alcoholism – he admired Kente's talent for tuneful songs that were enhanced by clever word play – he had grave reservations about

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[17] During the mid-1980s, the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) called for a "Black Christmas." The purpose of enforcing a "Black Christmas" was meant to curtail social activities and spending by black consumers to pressure white businesses to support the anti-apartheid cause.

what he saw as the superficial political content of the play. In the review, he reflects on how the play trivialises the historical encounter between Noqawuse and British colonialists in the 19th century[18] (Worden 2012: 22–23). Apparently, a character in the play sees the call for sanctions against South Africa as erroneous as Nongqawuse's false revelation calling for the Xhosa nation to destroy their cattle to ward off an invading colonial army. Thus, in the play, activists that seek to destroy state institutions as a means to oppose apartheid are called "lackeys" and "yoyos." Makhaya objected to this use of demeaning terms and what he saw as one-dimensional characterisations of township activists. On the other hand, reflecting on the play two years later, Kente (Pact / Truk 1988) wrote that the play "mocked the necklace, petrol bombing, sanctions and the entertainment boycotts."

The cast included Duma Mnembe, Mingi Sebezo, Susan Teletshane and Bobam Catherine Willem. The latter three portray hapless "drinking ladies" who have turned to drink to assuage life's difficulties. Makhaya noted that the "controversial play" attracted large appreciative audiences "around the Rand."

4.3.4 *Sekunjalo*

In 1987, Kente was winding down *Bad Times* and preparing for *Sekunjalo*. He hoped this play would be performed at the *Woza Afrika!* Festival.[19] Kente relished the challenge of writing for an American audience, but unfortunately, his plays were not performed in North America during his lifetime. Makhaya (1987a: 15) reported that Kente was asked to "write, direct and present a production for the festival because of his status among SA playwrights." Kente expounded on *Sekunjalo* to Moseki (1987: 17), saying that "the play is not only about what people are doing to us but mainly about what we are doing to ourselves and what we can do [to uplift ourselves]." Kente said that it would be

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[18] The Nongqawuse tragedy refers to a Xhosa historical narrative explaining large scale cattle killing and starvation in 1856 Transkei.

[19] *Woza Afrika*! A Festival of South African Theatre was organised by (self-imposed) exiled South African playwright Duma kaNdlovu. In the 1980s kaNdlovu invited South African playwrights to participate. Performances were held at the Lincoln Centre Theatre using the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre as a venue.

> foolish to imagine that freedom would be paradise. We need to prepare ourselves for the day we shall be liberated. Some of our brothers in Africa learned bitter lessons because we were not prepared for liberation.

Kente (Makhaya 1987b: 26) added that "I wrote [*Sekunjalo*] not only as a work of art, but something my people can be proud of," thus emphasising the importance of aesthetics in theatre making. Kente said: "we do not want to take a sympathetic production to New York, but something the Americans can respect as both artistic and highly entertaining."

Writing in the *Sowetan* newspaper, Mojalefa Moseki (1987: 17) called *Sekunjalo* "one of Kente's best". Moseki writes that:

> *Sekunjalo* is a play about the challenges of freedom. [The play] takes an in depth look into the future of blacks in SA after having been liberated. The play is punchy and Kente tackles the subject with sarcastic beauty and humour even during troubled times.

Victor Metsoamere is both complimentary and critical of the play. In 1988 He (1988e: 22) classified the play as a "tragicomedy" and pointed out that the play explored themes of inter alia discrimination, so-called "black on black" violence, sanctions, nepotism, tyranny and disregard for human rights.

Metsoamere was critical of what he saw as Kente's pessimistic view of blacks. At the same time he provided a colourful description of the play, saying that Kente's creativity

> abounds and astounds. The language is rich with metaphor and rhymes beautifully. The songs, with the impressive accompaniment of the six musicians are most entertaining. Lata's singing and comical antics throughout have the audience going wild with laughter. But few must have realised that the songs the boy sings, one about the folly of burning a school yet expecting to rule, and the other, about a man who expects others to work for him while he lays idle, are quite serious from a man taken less seriously by his community.

Metsoamere reproaches Kente for using "beautiful" words and music to dilute an important (political) message in the play. He (Metsoamere 1988f: 18) points out that the play is "packed with humour and exhilarating dance routines." Metsoamere's (1988e: 22) review of the play is informative, since no written text or recording of the play exists. He also discusses Kente's performative style of acting and observes that:

> Mpondo, Phala and Dlamini make acting and singing look so easy. Dlamini, as the troubled maThwala, tugs the heart strings with her convincing performance.
> She symbolises the mothers of this troubled land, whose sons are compelled to forsake education and fight for the liberation of their people.
> Dlamini goes on to perform like the veteran she is when she delivers two haunting songs, *My Right is My Right*, and *It Is Not Easy Getting to the Top*. The first is the most touching.
> The refrain, no guns, no force will break the will of the people… Give the people what they want" says volumes and is a lesson to whomever it may concern.
> *Don't Let my People Die* and *Why is there so much Crying in Africa* are two songs which single out Tonique Phala's vocal range.
> Mpondo as father Do or Die shines particularly because he seems to read his role with better understanding. His movements and mannerisms give the role the respect it deserves. He rates second best to energetic Lata – in my book that is.

Sekunjalo was a topical and popular play. It attracted the attention of township activists who accused Kente of being naïve. At the same time the police banned the play on the basis that it would incite anti-government protest, as Metsoamere (1987b: 25) and Makhaya (1987c: 11) report. Sonti Maseko (1987: 1) reported that "12 actors in controversial play *Sekunjalo* were arrested in Potchefstroom's Ikageng Township after a performance on Saturday night." Kholofela Kola, John Lata and Dumakude Mnembe also had recollections of the play. Page 19 of the Standard Bank Arts Festival programme for July 1988 also provides explanatory notes on the characters, and outlines the names of the various fictional political entities contesting power in the play. In the absence of a script this is a useful source should there be a revival of the play. The programme (1988: 19) serves as a source to augment collective memory. A note also mentions that in the play John Lata performed as a "Dancer doubling up as Bishop Brian Mazibuko;" however, this information contradicts information Lata provided in an interview. He said that in the play, the character was named Bishop Tutu.[20] It may be that I misheard Lata. It is also likely that Kente changed the name of the character, especially since a performance at the high-profile festival could have brought objections by Bishop Tutu on the use of his name. The other possibility is that Lata misremembered the name of the character.

This example demonstrates that the writing of a narrative of the past is not straightforward. Collective memory not only assists in present a smooth narrative of the past but also opens up a discussion on how these discrepancies help us to understand

[20] I had conducted a telephonic interview with Lata on 18/03/2019.

the nature of collective memory. Furthermore, this discrepancy helps to construct a deeper analysis of the play. For example, it may promote a discussion on why Kente changed the name of the character as the play moved from the township community theatre to the larger mainstream stage of the national festival. In this way we have more information on Kente and the way he engaged with social issues.

4.3.5 *We Mame!*

In 1987 Kente also produced *We Mame!* Elliot Makhaya (Makhaya 1987d: 21) wrote an informative review that provided a succinct description of the play. He wrote that the play was "contagious and hugely entertaining. It is a down to earth production with no solid storyline," and it takes "the mickey out of superstition." He wrote: "The story revolves around three women, Noverbs the sly loudmouth, Stew the nag and Gudu the woman with principles." Makhaya praised the singing and dancing in the play. In addition, Victor Metsoamere (1988g: 16) praised Tonique Phala, noting that she moved with the "agility of a ballet dancer and conveys emotions with ease." He also appreciated the way she spoke isiZulu, seSotho, English and Afrikaans as demanded in Kente's plays. In the absence of recordings or a script of this play, Makhaya and Metsoamere's descriptions allow the reader to gain some insight into the interaction between the audience and the cast. Performativity contributed greatly to the popularity of Kente's plays in the township. These plays created a sensory experience in which the actors and the audience exulted in mutual recognition of shared joy or pain.

In early 1988 Kente donated the proceeds from designated performances of *We Mame!* to schools in Soweto and other townships where the play was touring.[21] In this instance, the money was to help alleviate a shortage of furniture and other educational materials in township schools. He told Makhaya (1988c: 14) "While I do not exempt anybody from our children's sufferings, I believe we have *to do something for ourselves for our own children* [my emphasis]." Core to Kente's life philosophy and creative impulse was that blacks should uplift their own society as part of undermining apartheid.

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[21] The *Sowetan* (1988j: 4) also reports that Kente donated R200 to the Orlando High School Trust Fund, which had been established to rebuild damaged buildings at the school.

4.3.6 *Mama's Love*

Mama's Love (1989) was a reworking of *No Peace in the Family*. Writing in 1989, Mtsoamere (1989c) praises the play for its comedic elements as had Elliot Makhaya in 1984. Metsoamere observes that the latter version is much improved. However, it is impossible to see the differences between the two plays from reading the reviews, which are five years apart. Solberg (2011: 82–85) provides a comprehensive discussion of the television series. The 1984 and 1989 versions of the play were the source of the television drama. The complete reviews of both plays, that is, "A bellyful of laughs" by Elliot Makhaya (1984g: 12) and "Kente is back and taking the mickey out of parents" by Victor Metsoamere (1989b) are informative in that they describe different aspects of the storyline, the performances and include information on the songs, dancing and dialogue. From the reviews one can gain a better idea of Kente's plays. For example, it is apparent here that one of the sources of Kente's comedy was superstition. Although the Soweto community was urbanised, there was widespread belief in the religious authority of ancestors. It was common practice in Soweto for residents to perform ceremonies to honour their ancestors, according to African beliefs. On the other hand, within the context of Christianity, African religious practices and beliefs were seen by some community members in Soweto as superstition. In some respects the root of Kente's comedy was the tension between African and Western values, which represented the reality of the Soweto community. Perhaps this explains the disjuncture in how Kente's plays resonated with township communities but were characterised as frivolous entertainment (or as without a socio-political context) in some academic discussions.

Another source of comedy in the play was "the effective use of body language," the dialogue and the performances, as Metsoamere (1989c) noted. He also mentioned that in the play Kente created a moment "that was saddening and pleasing" when the character of the mother realised the negative consequences of favouring one son over another. Furthermore, the setting and the characterisation that Kente created (of the family relations, and people selling food on the streets) allows a glimpse into the lives of the Soweto community during the 1980s.

4.3.7 *Give a Child*

Give a Child (1989) incorporated the themes of the depressed social conditions in informal settlements, interruptions in township education and political strife, as was happening in Soweto in 1989. The play was widely reviewed and Solberg (2011: 72–73) says that the critics were receptive to Kente's message. Interestingly, in a newspaper article, Metsoamere (1990a:24) also highlights a scene in the play that portrays the "jackrolling" phenomenon – which was the kidnapping from school and assault of young women by thugs in Soweto. Metsoamere interprets the play as illustrating the dehumanisation of the community in Soweto, as opposed to the criticism that Kente blamed the community for township violence (as was implied by the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Star*). Metsoamere's review of the play illustrates that Kente examined several facets of the social context in Soweto. As an archival source, the reviews from the *Sowetan* provide rich descriptions of the play and in the absence of written or electronic recordings, these reviews enrich our understanding of Kente's plays.

4.3.8 *What a Shame*

Late in 1989 Kente produced his third new play titled *What a Shame*. Elliot Makhaya (1989: 14) writes that the story involves "a woman who abandons her daughter and makes a desperate bid to win back her love". Kente produced the play to provide entertainment for the December holidays. He remarked to Makhaya that "[t]heatre is all about entertainment" and elaborated by saying that "[a]s long as my people are entertained I am happy." Makhaya wrote:

> *What a Shame* does not have an innovative [dramatic] plot but the production is well packaged and the audience at Rabsotho Hall in Tembisa was on its feet throughout the performance.

A photograph accompanying Makhaya's report on the play captures Kate Makola and Tonique Phala in costume with a buckets on their heads, arms outstretched and with delighted smiles, in the manner of a vaudeville performance. The cast included actor and

musician Supra Mlangeni (whom Makhaya says is a “stage veteran”), Tonique Phala (originally from Hammanskraal) and Linda Sebezo from Rockville in Soweto. Vusi Tshabalala and Chunky Mtshali were also part of the cast. Solberg (2011: 88–89) also provides information on disagreements between Kente and the SABC regarding *Lahliwe* (2000), which was the television adaptation of the play. These disagreements were prompted by media criticism that the programme was of inferior quality because of an inadequate budget allocated to the eight-part series.

4.3.9 *Mgewu Ndini* and *We are the Future*

Kente told Makhaya (1990a) that the musical *Mgewu Ndini* (1990) “has a simple storyline highlighting our social problems.” He added, “[i]t centres around a boy who is a ‘won’t work’, so much is this boy a problem that his father wishes he [the boy] could die. He prays for his death.”

With *We are the Future* (1990), Kente was broadening his political horizons, at the same time that South African was transitioning form apartheid to democracy. Public discourse of the day incorporated messages promoting a racially unified post-apartheid society. Kente held the first performance of the play at the Market Theatre Warehouse. This is another indication that Soweto was no longer the centre for black community theatre and also suggests that Kente was attempting to reach a multiracial audience. Makhaya (1990d) described the production as a musical with “slick dances, beautiful songs and powerful dialogue.” The message of the play was that society should nurture township youth. Long-term Kente actor Zakithi Dlamini performed alongside a youthful cast. In his review, “Kente tells it as it is” (*Sowetan*. 26 October, page number not available) Makhaya provides a list of the actors and the characters they represent. A compact disc was also made, featuring songs from the play (Solberg 2011: 143).

4.3.10 *Mfowethu – My Brother*

Mfowethu – My Brother (1993) was the result of a commission by the Performing Arts Council of the Free State (Pacofs). At this time the Performing Arts Councils, which had

been funded by the pre-democracy state, were actively looking to diversify their white only programmes.[22] The play is discussed by Solberg (2011: 78–82), who describes its theme of multiculturalism as it unfolds when the character Peet Snyman becomes a valued member of a township. The way in which the character Snyman is accepted by township residents reflected the discourse on the creation of a democratic South Africa premised on racial equality.

In 1994, Kente he devised a musical revue or roadshow titled *Touch my Heart*. In the show were a number of "his famous songs throughout the decades," as Elliot Makhaya (1994: 31) notes. The show was recorded by RPM records and Elliot Makhaya writes, "It's an album many fans have been waiting for. So good is the music that some of the tracks are riding high on the music charts … *Biza longoma* is now … on the Radio Metro charts." Kente told Makhaya that "People have clamoured for [a collection which encapsulates] my work over the years. Now this is it." Makhaya praised the music and dance routines, saying that these "bear [Kente's] stamp."

4.4 Research from archival sources: interviews

Below I discuss the memories of actors who participated in Kente plays. They are Mabutho 'Kid' Sithole, Kholofela Kola, John Lata, Dumakude Mnembe and Darlington Michaels. I start by discussing their recollections of Kente's way of working and then the focus shifts to the factors they emphasised in our individual discussions. Their memories and insights are important in the writing of a historical narrative, as is their analysis and interpretation of Soweto-based community theatre.

4.4.1 Kente's way of working

[22] In 1993, Pact relaunched the Windybrow Theatre as a "Centre for the Arts," with the aim of serving "multi-disciplinary" art forms and a "diverse range of cultural and political groups." As in concert with arts practitioners across the political spectrum (those who received state funding as well as anti-apartheid artists) Pact stated that it was concerned "about the future of the Arts in our country and the need to nurture all facets of creative expression at a time when such need could easily be overlooked." Walter Chakela was employed as the first African to manage Windybrow (Pact/Truk 1993: 32–3). There was widespread anticipation and anxiety among arts practitioners about a new arts dispensation in the democratic era.

Mabutho Sithole provided a lucid and immediate recollection of the training he received from Gibson Kente as a teenager in 1973. I quote from our interview on the 14/03/2019 in Roodepoort:

> With BraGib, I'm saying he's an institution. You'd go in there and start by voice training, [and then] physical exercises… So we would do that. Voice exercises. The next thing BraGib would go to the [black] board. So that he writes the concept there. So when he says [adopts Gibson's inflection] "pause," you must understand what pause means. When he says "levels" [another Kente inflection and uses hand gestures to indicate high and low levels]. You must understand what levels means.

All the interviewees at some point in the conversation attempted to recreate Kente's persona. These interviewees not merely want to act as he did or copy his gestures and voice and vocal inflections; they wanted to completely embody him as if to recreate his body, soul and mind. Sithole continues:

> When he says that quality service delivery of the line, what does he mean? He tells you about breathing, he tells you about the pause, he tells you about the levels. All those are part of the class.

By "levels" Sithole is referring to the loudness or softness of the spoken dialogue. I then ask whether Kente actually used those words "quality delivery of line." Sithole responds:

> Before you go to the actual stage he would indicate on the [black] board what is "top left, middle, left, bottom left … Top right, middle right, bottom right. Centre, top centre, below. … Those are the dynamics of the stage and when he directs you and he says bottom left, you must know where it is, where you'd need be standing [in a scene].

Kente indicated the length of time it should take the actors to deliver a line of dialogue. To give me an example, Sithole said that Kente could tell the actor that dialogue should be spoken while the actor was moving "from centre left to bottom left [of the stage]." All the interviewees attested to Kente's rigour when training and directing his cast. He had a definitive vision of what he wanted to achieve onstage and, as also reported by Solberg, Kente held classes to teach the script to the cast when they were beginning a new play. Sithole also reports that Kente held performances at Soweto schools on Fridays where he tried out new material and where understudies performed the main roles in a play to gain experience performing in front of an audience.

In the interview, Sithole revealed that Kente also used an "artistic committee," which comprised senior members of the acting company. They also advised younger members of the acting company on finances and other personal matters. Sithole says that "if you had any problems, you could communicate with them and they would help you." He adds, "they embraced us, moulded us and made sure we were part and parcel of the [company], delivering quality performances." The committee also screened recruits for the company.

Kente required actors to present a monologue, a dance and a song for the audition as they were required to be adept at all three aspects of performing. While Kola was auditioned by Kente, Lata was auditioned by Susan Theletsane and Tonique Phala. When recruiting actors, Kente auditioned them to see how they would fit into his company, rather than assessing them based on one role. It is significant that women assumed prominent roles on and off-stage in Kente's company, as Theletsane also oversaw money collected from bookings. In the late 1980s Mnembe took on this role until the 1990s.

As Kente toured with each production (sometimes he had two plays in performance at the same time) he created the role of a production manager who would phone in advance to confirm the availability of performance venues and other logistics. The production manager also helped Kente with allocating roles to cast members. Besides booking venues, a person was designated to count and record tickets sales per night. These monies would be banked, and the production manager would prepare a financial report for Kente. It seems for the most part Kente paid the actors personally, but at other times the production manager paid the actors' salaries and other costs. Sithole indicated that the cast would arrive a day before the performances were to start and they would go to local shops where people used to congregate, wearing tee shirts bearing Gibson Kente's name and the name of the play to be performed.

It is apparent from Sithole's recollections that Kente had devised a method of teaching specific skills to actors with a goal in mind. This suggests that Kente was aiming to develop his own means of theatrical expression. He was not trying to replicate mainstream theatre as produced in well-resourced theatres in city centres. Kente's theatre can be seen an alternative form of expression as opposed to a simplified version to mainstream theatre as produced by formally trained actors, playwrights and directors.

Above, Sithole speaks about how Kente conducted rehearsals with a group of actors. In his recollections, Kholofelo Kola when interviewed (conducted at the State Theatre on 8/03/2019) spoke about Kente's interaction with individual actors. For example, he recalled the way in which Kente tested various scenarios and story permutations with his cast while conceptualising a play:

> Gibson Kente was giving us scripts [laughs]. That man was funny. Er, you know what he would do? We would have scripts. But the script is not final. It was just drafts, drafts, drafts, drafts. That is why we don't have a final script that we can say this is Gibson Kente's script. He would give us notes … he would write a few monologues or lines in the car. He is sitting with you. He would get a piece of paper and a pen and he writes whilst you are going to the performance. And you just grab the words and you memorise it you go on stage and you crack it. The nightmare was when we were performing at Umlazi Cinema, Eyethu Cinema, DH Williams Hall, Rabasotho Hall. [These were venues] that you know that when Gibson Kente was playing it was going to be packed.

As is clear from the above quotation, Kola organised his recollections of the past according to space. In the Halbwachscian (1980: 150–158) sense, the venues and the memory of the plays staged at these venues are linked as one recollection.

It is also true to say that the memories of the interviewees could take the form of a series of impressions, where they resist coherence or a narrative with a beginning, middle and an end. I say this because in some instances Kola (and other interviewees) recalled only approximate dates, but their memories of the play (dialogue and the circumstances of a performance) were recalled with sharp clarity. At times the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee guided the nature and structure of the recollections, yet at other times, the recollections assumed only in retrospect a coherence as a story or narrative.

Kola also gave me insight into what a typical day at the acting studio (Kente's garage) entailed, namely:

> I stayed with Gibson Kente, he had some rooms at the back [of his house]. It was hard. We wake up at six in the morning. Eat breakfast, do the scale to warm up our voices. [Sings]: do re mi fa so la ti do ti la so fa mi re do. We'll do theatre, *ko badi nyana* [which included] tongue twisters in the morning like "Betty bought a bit of butter. Butter – better – bitter – better – bitter …

Lata informed me in a telephonic interview on 18/03/2019 that actors stayed in the backrooms only for a limited period and vacated their room after a few months to make space for new company recruits. Kola adds:

> After finishing the dances and music then we'd go on stage and he'd start blocking without lines. He'd say Hiki Hiki will come from downstage, then go upstage to start your song, and later we would discuss play [in the evening].

Kola elaborates saying, "in the evening we'd go to his bedroom and we'd start discussing the play and he would start giving us the plays' lines." I can confirm this, as I recall seeing a newspaper article illustrated with a photograph in which Kente is sitting on his bed, and he has a sheaf of papers in his left hand and is gesticulating with his right hand. Cast members are standing around him. In the years that have passed, this image of Kente and his actors has been incorporated into my personal store of memories about the playwright. My own memory was prompted by Kola's description of his experience in the past. Following Halbwachs (1980: 25–81), I can say that history can "bridge the gap between the past and the present;" that is, past occurrences and the recollection of the past in the present where I, as a remembering subject, join together Kola's past experience and my recollection in the present day. Halbwachs also writes of supplanting "factual details" with memoirs, or in other words taking into account personal recollections as this is one of the ways in which "the image of the past [can have] a place in contemporary collective memory."

Halbwachs writes of a memory as an image in which an individual's memory (Kola's recollections) blends with another's (Mabutho Sithole, and my own) into a mutual remembrance. Halbwach sees individual memory as working in conjunction with group memory. Thus, an individual memory does not "merely" provide testimony and evidence but share similar elements with the memory of other members of the group or artistic community. When collective memory is concerned, the individual and the other's memory "remain in harmony."

According to Kola, Kente always "had the whole play in his mind." He adds that Kente "did everything, the marketing, the choreography, the dance, the costumes, the set and props. Everything that you see [onstage] is Gibson Kente." The playwright designed

the stage set and called in his actors to build the items required. In fact, John Lata had studied carpentry at Isidingo Technical College in Daveyton and used his skills as an actor, singer, dancer and carpenter while in the company. In an interview on 8/3/2019 at the State Theatre, Kola pointed out that all the actors helped to build the set; he says they all had a "passion" for community theatre:

> I think people spoiled Gibson Kente, because you know, after the show [the audience would approach Kente and the cast to enquire] 'where are you sleeping? Come sleep at my home...' Wherever we go, East London, people just wait for the actors after a show. Where are you going to sleep, guys? Can't you sleep at my home? Even if I go to Durban I know that I'm going to sleep at mam' Thandi's place … when I go to East London I know I'm sleeping at mam Dlamini's place. They know that Kholofelo is coming.

Kola explains that there was a network of volunteers[23] that assisted Kente's theatrical enterprise. Connections within the community were instrumental in overcoming limitations in infrastructure and communication resources (for example not everyone had a telephone or transportation). Thus, the community recognised the value of theatre in that it brought them together to express common concerns. Community theatre was also recognised as a legitimate artistic expression, and youngsters from different parts of South Africa aspired to join Kente's company. Indeed, all the interviewees confirmed Kola's recollection. Although these networks fulfilled an important function, they dissolved easily, however, because there were no formal structures for community theatre.

Despite this, there were also difficult times. Bafana Khumalo (1993) [page number not available] writes that the actor Nomsa Nene complained that at times it was difficult to find accommodation while on tour. During the interview Kola agrees that there were difficult times:

> Sometimes . I remember with *Mgewu Ndini*. It was freezing and the Kombi got stuck somewhere in Durban and we had to wait for the mechanic from Soweto to come and fix the Kombi. Fortunately we had blankets. We had to wait for Thurusa.

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[23] Dumakude Mnembe recalled that Winkie Direko, a schoolteacher who later became premier of the Free State in democratic South Africa, had been a volunteer.

Thurusa was a mechanic. In the 1980s, Kente had two Kombis to transport his actors on tour and each one would tow a trailer for the house lights and a stage set. All interviewees emphasised that Kente required actors to achieve high artistic performance standards on stage. Kola mentions that Kente taught the cast a “dog snarl” and emphasised “deportment,” a state of being that actors were required to observe at all times while on stage. Thus, the actors might use “the dog snarl” to punctuate a sensuous dance routine. “Deportment” was important equally when actors were portraying a righteous priest, a wayward alcoholic doctor or even a scheming shebeen queen. Kente’s technique demanded that the actor remained conscious of being on stage.[24] The audiences loved these characters and in performance the audience’s reaction showed that they were experiencing the emotions along with the character onstage. In Kente’s plays, the actor was required to perform as a means to elicit a response that was quantifiable, demonstrative or visible. The audience in Kente’s plays was never quiet, not in comedic situations nor in intensely dramatic sorrowfulness. Kholofela Kola says that Kente gave his actors a recognisable quality that resonated long after they were first taught by Kente.

4.4.2 Mabutho “Kid” Sithole’s memories

Mabutho “Kid” Sithole is a television and film actor who was given his first acting role by the playwright. Sithole was in Kente’s company from 1973–1975 and stayed in contact with him as a colleague throughout his career. Sithole gave a comprehensive account of Kente’s training method for actors, which is informative since actors and writers often mention his training method without giving details. Kente’s procedure has not been recorded and he never explained his method in writing. Therefore, Sithole’s account is important as a record of Kente’s theatre. Sithole’s recollections are corroborated, amplified and complemented by information supplied by other interviewees. Sithole spoke in Xhosa and some Zulu. When quoting him I try to convey the way that he formulated his sentences. However, I translated all text into English and edited it for the sake of clarity.

[24] Kente (Solberg 1999: 82–90) also speaks of the importance of deportment and cultivating a specific mode of presentation to be adopted by an actor onstage.

During the interview, I asked Sithole if he saw Kente as an "institution". Sithole sees Kente's achievement from a historical and contemporary perspective. He spoke of the physical institution that Kente had tried to establish. It was out of necessity that Kente recruited and developed a programme to teach actors, musicians and theatre "technicians." As he developed as a playwright and director, he attempted to formalise his training through various permutations of theatre schools, whether it was at his home, the DOCC or at Dorkay House. Sithole considers Kente's contribution to Soweto as going beyond training artists in that Kente wanted his theatre company to be involved in activities that would lead to the betterment of township communities in general. Sithole says that Kente included messages of black autarchy and that he had a life-long commitment to improving the life of "the black child."

When discussing space and *collective memory*, Halbwachs suggests that the collective representation of space (as a memory) may assume a concrete or abstract form. Gibson Kente's garage, the DOCC Hall and Eyethu Cinema are prominent landmarks or "spatial frameworks" in the memories of those who remember Kente's plays. Thus, even though Eyethu Cinema is now a derelict building and the Mofolo Hall no longer exists as a cultural space, their important role is validated by the memories of Soweto community members, both those who experienced the plays directly and those whose knowledge of Kente was passed on to them by the older generation.

In extending Halbwachs' concept of a "spatial framework" that is mentally constructed, one can also regard Kente as a living repository of Soweto history. A number of sources[25] write of Kente as important in developing community theatre or theatre in the township. In the absence of a written record focusing on his thoughts and ideas, I suggest that the person was the institution (as Sithole says). Kente may also be seen as an embodiment of "the book." The book is a metaphorical repository containing his ideas about theatre. In speaking to interviewees it became clear that Kente had developed a "virtual" manual. The collective memories of the actors who interacted with Kente make it possible to reclaim some knowledge of his contribution to South African theatre and to

[25] For example Kavanagh (1981a) and Solberg (2011).

inscribe this knowledge in the narrative of the history of South African theatre in general, and of Soweto-based community theatre in particular.

Sithole says that playwrights in the 1980s and 1990s saw theatre as integral to developing the communities in which they lived. He notes that Kente, Boikie Mohlamme, Sam Mhangwane, Ben Nomoyi and Burke Tshabalala (who operated in the Free State), were creating "theatre productions for the entire country" and they formed theatre groups entirely "out of their own pockets."

Sithole also links spaces in Soweto and in other townships. Besides linking performance venues to collective memory, his recollections highlight the intersection between churches and theatre groups. Sithole speaks of his experiences as a member of the Methodist Church, noting that he attended the Methodist church in Soweto. He told me that in the seventies it was difficult to get accommodation while on tour and recalls that he used to request a letter of introduction from his minister so that he and a few colleagues could be accommodated overnight at a church while on tour.

Sithole explained that typically, the cast would perform for one or two nights in a town, with a break of one day to travel to the next town. However, where there was "popular demand," the company would stay one more night, then arrive at their next destination and go straight to the performance venue.

4.4.3 Kholofela Kola's memories

Kholofela Kola began his thirty-three year career in the theatre as a teenager in Kente's acting company. Kola appeared in *Bad Times* (1986), *Sekunjalo* (1987) and *Sekunjalo – The Naked Hour* (1998), *Give a Child* (1989) and *Mgewu Ndini* (1990).

In *Sekunjalo* (1987), Kola took the role of a character name Hiki Hiki (as did another interviewee, John Lata). I asked him what he remembered about the play or the character. He responded:

> I remember the song. I remember the song. It was a funny song [sings]:
> Everything is my Hiki Hiki mhh
> I think I'd better kwa kwa kwa…
> Yaka thsing thsang,
> Ah ma Hiki, ki ma nyova nyova yi…

Kola laughs. "It says everything is chaos and trouble in the country. That was the language that he gave it." He says that comrades were unhappy that *Sekunjalo* (1987) depicted post-apartheid South Africa as riven with political rivalries and incompetent (government) officials. He says of the play:

> Knowing Gibson Kente I think he, er, he was like was predicting something that was going to happen in South Africa, you know that there will be clashes between political parties. He was predicting that Zaya Zaya and Comrade Namanga are going to fight. He was predicting what is happening. That is why some people said that they didn't like it because he [was] predicting something [he thought was] going to happen… That the ruling party is going to fight, you know? In *Sekunjalo* he was just saying that.

Kola's recollections confirm a newspaper report that some comrades were opposed to *Sekunjalo*. He remembers comrades halting a performance because of the declaration of a "Black Christmas." Kola also shares indirect or secondary memories with his acting colleagues. He recalls that he was pained when Kente's company was arrested in Potchefstroom. Kola remembered the occurrence of this event even though he was not in Kente's company. At that time Kola had left Kente to work with Darlington Michaels.

In *Mgewu Ndini*, Kola took the role of the priest in the Zion church. He wore a blue and white robe and carried a crosier, as is customarily carried to signify authority within the church. He recalls that the costume was bought from an Indian merchant who made and sold uniforms at the Oriental Plaza in Johannesburg. Kola says that the play was about "gangsterism." One of the main themes involved "a priest and other members of the community who were saying that gangsterism is bad," says Kola. Also, in the cast were Jabu Nkosi, who later became a television actor, and Sandile Dlamini who played the eponymous thug.[26] In the play Kente was exploring how the soaring crime rate in Soweto was affecting township citizens. Kola notes:

> Sandile was a township thug, stealing cars and robbing people. My role was the pastor, the friend to the father. So, the father said I must talk to Mgewu to leave this gangsterism behind.

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[26] In *Mgewu Ndini* the lead guitar was played by Peter Molobedi and the bass by Themba Mokoena, who went on to become a highly respected jazz musician, performing in South Africa and in international jazz clubs. Mokoena played in a number of Kente's plays.

In *Mgewu Ndini*, Kente spoke out against the injury and grief that gangsters brought to their victims, and also demonstrated to the community how gangsters spin out of control and cause their families to be ostracised. The play contained a great deal of dramatic action, comedy, dance and music. Kola indicated that audiences spent approximately two and half to three hours at the venue, including the interval. Kente did not want to short-change his audiences and therefore wrote substantial works allowing time to develop a number of characters and as a credible story line. In this way, the protagonist was shown as being part of a community. As exemplified in *Mgewu Ndini*, the gangster has a father who cares about him and wants him to be integrated into society through the intervention of a priest. It is in this way that Kente's audiences saw themselves represented on stage. The play dramatised the manner in which people from different socio-economic backgrounds crossed paths: medical doctors and shebeen queens; teachers, nurses and domestic workers, dustbin men (refuse collectors) and school pupils. Kente's plays represented the full spectrum of society, and this was also reflected in his multi-ethnic and economically diverse audiences.

Looking back, Kola declares that Kente's plays had a positive social impact. He says, "Gibson Kente's plays usually were the mirror of the society. People would see themselves on stage. And you know, people would come to Dube [his house] and say "'ey man BraGib, *leya play ing tachile'* [that play has touched me]." As with Lata, all the interviewees spontaneously remarked that Gibson Kente "was an inspiration" who lit the spark of the desire to be in theatre in them. Evident in Kola's recollection of his interaction with Kente is a sense of intangible feelings and thoughts. Here I extend Halbwachs' (1980: 185) analogy on the spiritual nature of remembrance to include inspiration. Kente's plays inspired exultant emotions in his audience, actors and musicians. Gibson Kente's charisma in his daily interaction with the community of Soweto also sometimes inspired awe and fraternal interpersonal interactions. Thus, this aspect of *their* recollections also binds Kente's performers in what Halbwachs calls "a society of actors."I venture to add that these intangible bonds existed not only in Kente's company but also included Soweto community members affiliated to and interested in Kente's theatre. Kola observes that the community "had passion. You'd get [that] from people all over the country."

Pondering Kola's reflections on his time spent with Gibson Kente's company, I thought of Halbwachs' assertion that although memory takes place in the mind (and in society), there is is also an intangible quality of feelings and thoughts (as mentioned above) in how interviewees reconstruct the narrative of the past. Halbwachs says that memories are preserved when the participants' thoughts "fasten" to the feelings and ideas they have. This may happen within a theatrical performance, where a member of the audience experiences an emotional connection with a character or an event in a play. Or it may occur when interviewees relate their positive experiences of the past. During the interview, Kola easily recalled and sang one of the songs from the play. His recollections were accompanied by vocal inflections and body movements originally created for the character.

Halbwachs notes that *collective memory* involves an individual sharing material experiences as well as belonging to a group consciousness. In the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Sutton (2016) expounds on this idea to explain how an individual's personal memory is part of his/her interaction with other people in the bigger "cultural world." Thus, the social process of remembering includes considering that Kola's memories share elements on an "interpersonal" level with the memories of other actors who share Kola's past. At its inception, different parts of Soweto were zoned according to language groups. However, residents generally formed relations across imposed ethnic demarcations. This contributed to the vibrant culture of Soweto and it also enriched Kente's plays. By this I mean that actors from KwaZulu-Natal brought their own dances and songs to the plays, as did actors from the Pretoria area. This is one explanation of why Kente's plays were effortlessly multilingual. Part of the audience appeal was that although the plays were predominantly performed in the English language, they employed idioms, phrases and also some dialogue in African languages and *Tsotsitaal*. This underlines the fact that Kente's plays were about township residents. However, their stories were used to tell the bigger (socio-political) narrative of South Africa, without being didactic.

4.4.4 John Lata's memories

John Lata was part of the cast of Kente's *Sekunjalo* and *We Mame!* During a telephonic interview on 18/3/2019, Lata informed me that Vosloorus playwright Paul Rapetsoe, who was an established playwright in the area, encouraged him to audition for Kente. At that time, community playwrights and actors regarded joining Kente as the equivalent to being part of a national theatre company. Lata joined Kente's company when he was nineteen.

There is some overlap in the recollections of all the interviewees, especially between Kola and Lata as they were in Kente's company during the 1980s, but not at the same time. Below I discuss Lata's recollections of *Sekujnalo* and *We Mame!* In the process, I attempt to avoid repetition. John Lata and Dumakude Mnembe were in Kente's acting company when the cast of *Sekunjalo* was arrested in Potchefstroom in 1987.

Each of the sources offered a different perspective of the event of the arrest. However, neither of interviewees readily divulged the dates of the arrest. I supplemented my information from them by consulting the *Sowetan* newspaper of the time, where I found concrete information on the date of the arrest, the name of the duty sergeant at the prison where the cast was held, as well as the efforts of the *Sowetan* editors to pressure the police to release the actors. The interviewees told of Gibson Kente's efforts to secure a lawyer and his communication with the actors' families. Dumakude Mnembe related the specifics of the arrest. John Lata provided the context of the play. Kola confirmed some of the details of the arrest. He was not with the cast at the time but was close to many actors who were arrested. Those directly affected were reluctant to talk about their time in jail, as if words were not adequate to give a full account of their fear during incarceration. They were willing to talk about their sense of comradeship during arrest; however, thirty-three years later, they chose to minimise the material and psychological impact of their arrest during the tour.

As was the case with Kola, in recalling *Sekunjalo* Lata's memory incorporates the past (of the play itself) and present circumstances. For example, he draws parallels between the fictional in-fighting of political parties in the play, and contemporary political developments in South Africa. Lata describes his character *Hiki Hiki* as "a smart guy," though people "thought that he was just a hobo who did not think about the world around him". Lata recalls that the character was not meant to represent a simpleton. This contrasts with Kholofela Kola's interpretation of the character; he saw Hiki Hiki as

representing social instability. Here I choose Lata's interpretation of the character for the reasons outlined below.

At times Kente included a "street philosopher" in his plays. This was a lone male character who was not "well educated" but rather offered comedic but insightful comments when interacting in social circles with people with formal education. This type of character was somehow on the fringe of society, as he did not participate in accepted social rituals. In Gibson Kente's plays, as in real life, the shebeen, the queue at the bus stop or taxi rank was a place in which social status was equalised. All Soweto residents stood in the same queues and faced the same discriminatory laws, whether they had a high or low level of education and whether they worked as domestic helpers or occupied clerical positions in businesses in Johannesburg.

Lata describes Hiki Hiki as:

> one of the intellectuals who are free spirited, who would do things the way that they want to do them. He's artistic as well and expresses himself the way he wants to express himself. He wouldn't mind wearing a torn trouser and because he'd ask you "why not?" Because who said that clothes must be sawn [sic] this way? So why not? He'd defy the old norms of society [laughs].

Lata's recollection of the play provides insight into the layers of meaning in Gibson Kente's work. As apparent in *Sekunjalo*, Kente constructed his plays to go beyond the binary of whites as oppressor and blacks as the oppressed. *Sekunjalo* explored the agency of black people by examining the experiences of residents in townships. As an aspect of collective memory, Lata's memories add to Victor Metsoamere's description of the themes of the play. These personal recollections enrich the interpretation of the play and help us to understand how Kente's plays (and other community theatre) were preoccupied not only with protesting against apartheid but also with examining social norms within the community. Kente included a great deal humour in his plays. The source of this humour took several forms. It might be the caricature of a priest or policeman as exemplified by the character of Sergeant Nyakanyaka in *How Long*. Another instance of humour results from sibling rivalries as exemplified by the interaction between Shandiz and Smoko in *Mama's Love*. In some cases it arises from eccentric members of society (for example the character Hiki-Hiki). Lata recalls Hiki Hiki's song more readily than he remembers the dialogue. He says the character's song included some "sort of gibberish." At a certain

point in the play, Hiki Hiki is seen adopting "his own language." This is not only for comedic effect but as a way in which Kente used ungrammatical sentences to comment on the socially and politically unstable nature of the fictional democratic South Africa.

Lata informs me that Kente brought the real world into the fictional space when teaching and directing actors. As an example, Kente requested Lata to study Bishop Tutu as part of the preparations to represent him onstage in *Sekunjalo*. Kente did not aim to recreate the real man, nor was it his intention to create comedy by making a caricature of Bishop Tutu. Rather, it was to highlight chosen character traits in his portrayal.

When I asked Lata how the actors felt when comrades disrupted the performance of *Sekunjalo*,[27] he pointed out that they were threatened but never attacked or harmed. He stressed that they generally avoided "no-go areas" and that in certain areas in the townships they were "protected at all costs" by comrades. During the interview he shared his thoughts on how the socio-political context influenced community theatre. He observed that in the 1980s:

> theatre contributed so much to the upliftment of everything else that was happening [in the townships] because it was the consciousness of the people. So most of the people would identify with the messages that came out of from each theatre piece. It did a lot. It played a huge role in the conscientisation of the minds of the people. It kept them in touch with what was going on at that time. It was also liberating as well. Ja, theatre did a lot in those days. What's even profound was that it went to the relevant people who needed to hear these messages. You know because the theatres in town, they wouldn't even take these [community] plays. They wouldn't take any of these plays because, you know ... white people and they wouldn't take kindly to some messages.

Sometimes interviewees spoke of past events as having taken place "a long time ago." In discussing how collective memory can be seen as organised through time, Halbwachs (1980: 88–89) suggests that there is a collective representation of time. He writes that people may collectively recall events and their duration and their frequency (or the societal conventions governing these events). For example, interviewees may reconstruct their memories according to events that happened around meal times or around times for going to school or to church. This was Halbwachs' way of emphasising that memories are social in nature (or along the lines of the *cadres sociaux*). For Halbwachs, construction of

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[27] One of Kente's most vocal critics was Percy Mtwa, whom Kente had trained as an actor. He accused Kente of perpetuating apartheid by staging *Sekunjalo* at PACT, as Bongani Hlatshwayo (1988: 6) reported.

memory here is informed by social conventions that are prominent in the functioning of (Western) society. Here I am referring to the regimentation of time according to prescripts of the industrial economy, specifically the allocation of time to denote the starting and finishing of work, as well as designating time for breaking work for food. Certainly, the division between work and leisure is not confined to Western economy; here I am merely pointing out that Halbwachs emphasised the link between memory and the duration (how long it takes to execute certain tasks) according to the prescripts of the industrial economy. In an industrial economy, working life is organised to start and end at designated hours or times of the day and according to the Gregorian calendar.

The prescribed time and duration of events or memories was not an important aspect for the interviewees. For example, not a single actor had a memory of how long it took them to master a role in a play. What was important was the fact that the plays were performed "a long time ago." In some instances, thinking about the length of time that had elapsed since they were much younger caused them to question their memories. They became conscious of the passing of time in their lives and that made them feel insecure and that, somehow, their memories needed to be checked against another source. I should also add that where the interviewees at first doubted their memories, they later self-corrected and became more emphatic when recounting the events they recollected.

4.4.5 Dumakude Mnembe's memories

One of the interviewees on the subject of Kente, Dumakude Mnembe, was one of Kente's "trusted right-hand men." As an actor, he was in *How Long* (1973), *Beyond a Song* (1975), *Can You Take It* (1977) and *No Peace in the Family* (1985). As time passed he took on more technical and managerial responsibilities, including travelling to various parts of the country to pay the weekly wages of actors when different plays were on tour. He also served as lighting technician for the company. He left in 1989 to team up with Darlington Michaels to produce *Ababhemi*. Mnembe has a considerable network of contacts and knowledge of Kente's theatre company. He assisted the playwrights Maishe Maponya

and Duma kaNdlovu[28] when they were attempting to notate all Kente's plays. Mnembe, along with the actor Peter Sephuma, provided the dialogue for the recording of Kente's early plays. Maponya and kaNdlovu were part of the Gibson Kente Foundation, which was formed in 2003 to safeguard Kente's legacy. Unfortunately, these texts have not been made available to researchers.

During our interview, which was conducted at the DOCC and at Mnembe's home in Soweto on 20/03/2019, he was able to recall long sections of dialogue and songs from the plays in which he had appeared. He also gave descriptions of the plots of these plays, and expanded on the cast's arrest in Potchefstroom while on tour with *Sekunjalo*. For instance, he reported how plain-clothes policemen always monitored the performances of Kente's plays, even in remote areas, during their tours outside Soweto. Somehow, the cast suspected certain people in the auditorium, but they were never questioned or evicted from the venue. The arrest occurred when a police van intercepted the cast after they had packed the bus and were about to drive to their accommodation after a performance. Police escorted the bus to the local prison where they were detained along with members of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Mnembe makes an approximate guess that they spent twenty-one days in prison. At the time, they were fearful that the government would invoke a law permitting ninety days detention without trial. They were stranded, away from home and without legal representation. Fortunately, Percy Qoboza, the editor of the *City Press* newspaper at the time, intervened by contacting Priscilla Jana, a human rights lawyer based in Durban to help secure their release. Qoboza also helped by publicising the arrest and assisting Kente in informing the families of the cast of the arrest. Mnembe also recalls that a journalist based in the town, whom he remembers only as Dlamini, helped plead the case with the authorities in Potchefstroom. Mnembe also says that the black prison warders were sympathetic to the cast. They allowed the actors to send them to buy food and bring it to the cells – thereby undermining their white superiors. Says Mnembe:

[28] kaNdlovu is a later variation of the surname Ndlovu as used by Duma Ndlovu.

> they only detained actors, those that were on stage, males and females. Cabanga obo mama abalingana no mama Mary Twala, abo Zakithi Dlamini bavalelwe. Obo Suzan Theletsane, babe valelwe lapho obo Tonique Phala babevalelwe.

In the quote above Mnembe laments that the arrest was a painful and humiliating experience. He told me that seeing senior members of the cast being imprisoned, particularly Mary Twala, was "distressing". He has always called Mary Twala "sis Mary" as a sign of respect for an older person whom he held in high regard. Mnembe recalls that there was a scene in the play which approximated an anti-apartheid protest. A character on the stage shouted: "Amandla!" and the audience responded: "Awethu!". He believes that it was this blurring of reality in the play (between a fictional and real protest) that got them arrested.

Mnembe took the role of Shandiz in the stage play *No Peace in the Family*, an playing the same character when the play was adapted for television as *Mama's Love*. Also in the drama was Don Mlangeni, who took the role of Smoko. The plot revolves around a mother and her sons, Shandiz (who is diligent) and Smoko, the irresponsible son.

During the interview with Mnembe, he ably reconstructed some of the dialogue from the play, which was mostly in the vernacular. It seems there was much jesting in the play, some of which invited audience participation. In one scene the diligent brother attempted to get revenge on his brother by spiking a carton of milk with rat poison. "Rattex" was a common brand used in Soweto as a result of the poor infrastructure endured by residents. In the play, Kente achieved comedy by bringing events and objects from real life into the fictional world, as well as by creating tension arising from whether Smoko was going to drink a spiked pint of milk. Mnembe effortlessly recalled an example of the dialogue, which reveals the use of alliteration (*Smoko*/*s'mokweni* and *gundwane*/*gijima*) as one of the devices contributing to the entertainment value of the play. In translation, the dialogue may seem banal; however, in the original vernacular it was indeed humorous.

Mnembe asserts that Kente's plays had a positive impact on communities in townships because his plays "made people politically aware." He cites the powerful effect that *How Long* had on Soweto, as do Kavanagh (1985), Kerr (1995) and Solberg (2011)

He adds that Kente's activism went beyond the seminal plays *How Long* and *Too Late*. Mnembe says that Kente's writing style not only influenced community playwrights during the 1980s and 1990s but extended to television scriptwriters. He cites one example from a television drama called *Zone 14* (2005–2008) in which Patrick Ndlovu played a character who was an "umloyi," or a "witchdoctor". This character owned a funeral parlour and operated an illegal scheme from this to undercut legal restrictions required to operate a funeral home. Mnembe observes that there were a number of characters in Kente's plays who were not criminals but had to resort to breaking apartheid era laws to survive. I should point out that Patrick Ndlovu's character seems to be at the extreme end of the spectrum of subversive characters. *Zone 14* was made eleven years after democracy and therefore does not portray life under apartheid.

4.4.5.1.1 Darlington Michaels' memories

Darlington Michaels is a popular television actor. He joined Kente's company as a teenager. He performed in *How Long* (1973) and *I Believe* (1974). During the interview which took place in Soweto on 14/12/2016, he said that his parents believed that Kente was a "nurturer of talent". He says:

> I was one of the luckiest few who got a part at Gibson's company. Not everyone was accepted to join Gibson Kente's stable. He was very very particular, and he would scrutinise you very carefully. But I got a part in 1974 in *I Believe,* and I played one of the main parts.

Michaels was also in *Beyond A Song (1975)*, where he portrayed a character named Haikona – who was **"**a father of this little girl who was a singer," who was spotted by promoters to join one of the white music groups." He said the father refused as "he didn't want to see his daughter as an actor or as a singer." In *Mama and The Load* (1979) he took on several small roles (among them a policeman and a father, whose former girlfriend had two children from different men). He says his character was a no-good dad, who gambled, "playing dice for cash on street corners." His character sold clothes to people in the township to put his child through school. He named his son "Doctor," an

aspirational name. The character of the clothes seller was based on real social circumstances in Soweto.

In *Too Late* (1975), Michaels played Doctor Phuza. Michaels says that *Too Late* was the story of a youth called Ntanana, who was from a poor family. Ntanana's family sold liquor or "ran a shebeen" to "make ends meet." Doctor Phuza was a regular customer at the shebeen. In *Can You Take It?* (1977) he had a role as one of the comrades. He says that this play was about a generational battle over methods to resist apartheid. The older generation preferred negotiation, while the younger generation advocated participating in work and school boycotts as direct opposition to apartheid. In 1978 he had a part in *Laduma*.

Forty years later Michaels, epitomised Kente's stylised form of enunciation, as Kente coached his actors to deliver dialogue. The use of rhyme was endemic in his dialogue and audiences responded with appreciative laughter to the comic sequences. Michaels recalls that Kente shaped his plays during rehearsals. The actors were positioned on stage, from where Kente would demonstrate or explain the movements he required the cast to perform. Typically, Kente arranged his dancers into small (two, three and four people) to larger (up to eight or twelve people) units. As for the music, Michaels says that Kente taught the cast the melody by singing and playing the melodic line on the piano. He would then add the words to the music as he refined the play during rehearsals. Once the music was written using the piano and voice, he would then include the band to develop the musical arrangements. Michaels told me that at times, the company would spend three days just practising to sing the middle C musical note on the piano (as "do" in the tonic solfa scale).

In the early days, Kente wrote his scripts in long hand, while neither the choreography nor the music were notated. It emerged from the interviews that Kente adopted two methods of scriptwriting. In the first approach he gave his cast an overview of the play and described the scenes from memory. Following that, he dictated to each actor his/her dialogue. One interviewee explained this process by saying that Kente "gave us the lines" whereupon the actor would write out (by hand) his or her part. In the second approach, Kente showed his cast a complete hand-written script. Actors then would copy their own parts or share a script. Kente operated in an environment in Soweto where there

was little technology available. It was usual for texts to be written by hand, with a copy being made with carbon paper. It is also true to say that by the beginning of the 1980s while telephones were quite prevalent in the township, few professionals owned typewriters. Kente used an office centre in Dube, which was close to his house, where a stationery shop sold books, newspapers, magazines and offered facsimile services that he used. Kente rejected oral literature as a method for producing plays. He thought of himself as a playwright and therefore composed scripts (Khumalo 1997: 22).

Kente favoured not only the written word, but also insisted that his plays were written primarily in English, save for some dialogue that he wrote in isiZulu. What is interesting here is that Kente saw his script as a fixed entity. As is evident, all his plays toured extensively in South African townships, and in each township a different (African) language was dominant. Actors were permitted to translate only the vernacular part of the script into the predominant language spoken in a township. Darlington Michaels, along with Dumakude Mnembe and Kholofela Kola confirmed that actors always translated what amounted to a few lines of dialogue in a play.

4.5 Kente's influence on township playwrights

Kente's influence on the township community was tangible in that he trained a number of people who went on to have successful careers, with some even starting their own theatre groups. Darlington Michaels and McIntosh Khoale (*Sowetan* 1985e: 10) are Kente alumni who wrote, directed and acted in *The Eye* (1982). They formed a group called Melisizwe Community Theatre. Their play toured extensively in South African townships. Also in the cast were Boitumelo Dijo and Dumakude Mnembe, the latter returning to Kente's company in 1984.The subject and style of presentation of the play was unapologetically influenced by Kente. Eddie Jayiya (1982) noted that "'The Eye' had elements of comedy, pathos and sentiment." These qualities were resembled Kente's acting style. They advertised themselves as the "Ex-Kente" players on their banners.[29] Their marketing strategy was successful, since the play enjoyed full houses wherever it was performed.

[29] Gibson Kente and other drama groups used painted cloth banners that were placed strategically around the township to market their plays.

Elliot Makhaya (Makhaya 1985j: 10) writes that the play involved “a white ‘missus’ who marries a black man.” Comedy, dance and song ensued when a bumbling and terrified minister reluctantly marries the couple. The minister fears the consequences of the Immorality Act,[30] an apartheid era legislation that prevented conjugal relations and marriage between people classified in different racial categories. Makhaya writes that it is an “experimental play full of tragedy, humour and hilarity.” The play satirised apartheid by setting ridiculous scenarios where the couple were compelled to sleep on separate bunk beds and use different entrances into their home, even after marriage. Indeed, general dealers and cafes and shops in Johannesburg assigned entrances and pay points according to racial designation. The trio performed with a limited stage set and mimed most of the props required, incuding a tea set, a “rickety lorry” and a mineshaft. Although it does not seem to show restraint, Makhaya (Makhaya 1985k: 10) also called *The Eye* a “subtle dig at apartheid,” which took “a swipe” at homeland leaders and the then South African President, PW Botha. The play was also performed in Durban and other townships (Makhaya 1985l: 10).

Recalling his time with Kente, Michaels informed me that he had a long-standing friendship with and admiration for Kente that survived their disagreement over Michaels’ unauthorised use of Kente’s name to market *The Eye*. He estimates that they performed the play for “close to three years.” The cast was detained briefly by authorities “for questioning” when they performed in Natalspruit. Michaels’ other productions were, *Jack Roll* and *Who’s to Blame?* Michaels could not recall the dates of these plays. In between performing *The Eye,* Michaels joined the State Theatre for a role in a production of *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* / *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena* (1983), based on Elsa Joubert’s book. Another former Kente actor Nomsa Nene played the leading role.

Also active in 1985 was former Gibson Kente actor Themba Nowana. He wrote a play titled *Migration to the New World*. Previously, Nowana had had roles in Gibson Kente’s *Too Late*, *I Believe, Beyond a Song* and *How Long*. Like Darlington Michaels' Melisizwe, another group of actors called themselves “Ex-Kente players” (Leshoai 1986b: 15). They presented a play called *Our Love in Flames* in 1986. The play toured the West

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[30] This legislation was governed by the *Immorality Act No.23 of 1957* (South Africa 1957).

Rand. It was testament to Kente's popularity and reputation in the township that dramatic groups used this epithet to market their plays. Unfortunately, the newspaper review of this play does not name the actors.

The Soweto playwright Boikie Mhlamme was a popular playwright and director and yet his plays were still compared to Kente's plays. For instance, in 1987 the *Sowetan* (Khan 1987: 18) described the play *Mahlomola* as a "musical drama" in the mould of Kente. In the cast were Jabu Nkiti Mehlomakhulu, who had been in Gibson Kente's *How Long* (1973), Peggy Makgabo who had been Kente's *Mama and The Load* (1979 and 1980), and Ruben Senne, who composed the music. In 1988, Darlington Michaels conceived *Ababhemi*, which toured Soweto and other townships. The play follows a young protagonist who was born in the Free State in socially depressed circumstances. A summary (*Sowetan* 1988i: 13) of the plot reveals that the boy's mother was "seduced by her employer" and cast off when she fell pregnant. The mother dies when the boy turns six and being fatherless and feeling unloved living with "strict" extended family, he flees and fends for himself. Somehow, he ends up on the Johannesburg streets, where he joins one of a number of glue-sniffing bands begging on the city streets (1991e: 28).

The cast consisted of Pat Mashigo, Kholofelo Kola, Lufama Yamani, and Ellen Billie. By this time Darlington Michaels, Duma Mnembe and Kholofelo Kola had left Kente's acting company. In 1991 (*Sowetan* 1991e: 28), Tilman Hanckel, the cultural counsellor at the German Embassy in South Africa organised a visit by the cast of *Ababhemi* to the centre for African Culture and Communication in Dusseldorf. Besides performing in community centres and festivals in Germany, Melisizwe took part in discussions and interacted with members of a German theatre community. After the tour, one of the original founders of Melisizwe, Dumakude Mnembe, formed his own theatre company, Emzini Dramatic Arts Society.

After leaving Kente's company, John Lata teamed up with Don Eric Mlangeni between 1992 and 1994. Their collaborations *Pikinini* and *Desiring Souls* were performed at the Windybrow, as reported by Metsoamere (Metsoamere 1994a: 19). Kenny Majozi was another theatre name that is mentioned in contemporary reports of Soweto community theatre. Victor Metsoamere (1993c: 21) writes that he was a "veteran" actor trained by Gibson Kente. Majozi had prominent roles in Kente's plays *Zwi* (1970), *Give a*

Child (1989) and others (this is a gap in the historical narrative in that there is no comprehensive record of his involvement in Kente's plays). Subsequently, he appeared in *uDeliwe* and *Ngwanaka,* two popular films that were shown in the townships, produced by Heyns Films. The *uDeliwe* series of films made Cynthia Shange a popular actress in the townships, although she never appeared on stage. Majozi also appeared in the film *Shout at the Devil* in which American actors Roger Moore and Lee Marvin (1976) had leading roles. Later in life, Majozi had a recurring role in *Sgudi S'nayisi* (1986-1993). In 1993, Majozi started a community project with the aim of "keep[ing] the youth off the streets." He operated from the Orlando Community Hall and his play *Do or Die*, which he revived a number of times, was seen in several of South African townships. Majozi was in the cast, along with Matau Mofokeng.

4.6 Conclusion

Gibson Kente's career covered the years 1961 to 2004; during this period he wrote approximately thirty-five plays. He has been called the father of township theatre because in addition to writing and directing his own plays, he built an infrastructure and enterprise to sustain a self-funded theatre company. In the process of developing his form of theatre he developed actors, some of whom are still active in television dramas today.

Yet Kente's contribution to South African theatre has been questioned by Kavanagh (1985), Kerr (1995) and Solberg (2011), who argue that the majority of his plays were weak as dramatic productions, since they emphasised entertainment. This critique is based on their division of his output into three phases. They see the first phase as the years form 1968 to 1970. The plays in this period examined the breakdown of family bonds because to weaknesses in society. This era is framed by *Manana the Jazz Prophet* (1961) and *Zwi* (1970). In these plays the bond between family members is threatened by an outside force, for instance gangsterism or witchcraft. The second phase is distinguished by what Solberg (2011: 23) calls the era of the "Political Trilogy". This period is framed by *How Long* (1973) and *Too Late* (1975). In this period, Kente presented onstage characters voicing opposition to apartheid in direct political messages in the dialogue and songs. The last phase framed by *Can You Take It?* (1977) and *The Call*

(2003) is seen by these scholars as Kente's decline, suggesting that Kente maximised profit at the expense of a coherent political message and an absence strong dramatic plots. Some of the plays in this period contained comedy, music and what is seen as a conservative political agenda, which tacitly supported apartheid. Reviews of *Sekunjalo* (1987 and 1998) seem best to encapsulate this critique of Kente.

Following Halbwachs, the narrative above encapsulates a historical assessment of Kente, in which the writing of a narrative is informed mostly (but not exclusively) by textual sources. Halbwachs proposed the separation of history and memory because collective memory allows for a more nuanced recollection of the past. In this thesis, *collective memory* allows for a more comprehensive discussion of Kente's work and its contribution to Sowetan community theatre. Archival material is included in the writing of the narrative, while the recollections of the individuals I interviewed include their relationships with other members of the Soweto community. I included reports and theatre reviews from the *Sowetan*, which illustrate that Kente's plays were criticised but also admired for how they presented a complex picture of Sowetan society through drama. For instance, while *Sekunjalo* was criticised for its purported conservative political content, contemporary reviews by Elliot Makhaya and Victor Metsoamere showed that the play provided a forum in which contesting political ideas could be explored through different characters and fictional situations. These interviewees voiced similar sentiments; by incorporating the lived experiences of the interviewees, I avoided a one-dimensional understanding of Kente's plays. For example, both Kholofela Kola and John Lata related that a character like Hiki Hiki introduced an element of absurdity into the drama, which neutralised the political content that offended the writers of many newspapers that Solberg quotes in his analysis of the play.

When talking about Kente's plays over a long period of time, it became apparent from Mabutho Sithole's recollections (of the 1970s and 1980s) and Dumakude Mnembe's recollections (of the 1980s and 1990s), that Kente insisted on producing well considered performances in particular and was generally cognisant of the highest aesthetic standards possible in the context of the impoverished and technically limited community halls. It was thus not the case that Kente's community theatre was a lesser form of theatre that was

produced to emulate mainstream theatre performed in well-resourced venues in Johannesburg.

Looking beyond 1994, one can speculate whether his theatrical method would have been suitable for presentation in well-resourced theatres and whether a younger generation of Sowetans, more exposed to American films and television programmes would have found his plays as arresting as the older generation had. What is indisputable is that the memory of his plays is evident in the present generation of Sowetans. The value of *collective memory* is emphasised by Halbwachs when he proposes that memory is a result of the interaction of people within a social construct. Halbwachs also proposes that people in groups share common “thoughts” or consciousness of how they interact socially and how they remember their past as a society.

Assmann (2011: 18) articulates *collective memory* as a cultural memory invested in how people experience their culture in a social setting. The way in which Kente and his company used his garage and the DOCC as rehearsal spaces, for instance, and the way in which thousands of Sowetans experienced Kente’s plays at Eyethu Cinema designates these spaces as important cultural sites. Assmann (2011: 17) argues that the buildings themselves are an embodiment of *collective memory* because they are part of the social framework. All cultural spaces and buildings were not built for an artistic purpose; however, Kente inspired other township playwrights to appropriate the community halls to express the humanity of black people through theatre in the townships. One of the edicts of Black Consciousness was that blacks should assert their humanity. In this way we can expand our view of Kente and recognise his wide ranging contribution to Soweto during apartheid.

I also suggest that there was synergy between the themes explored on stage (political ideas) and the Soweto community. The audience supported Kente’s plays not because they wanted to escape the reality of oppressive apartheid or the competition among political formations in Soweto, but because they ascribed to the inclusive socio-political philosophy espoused by Kente’s plays. This is borne out by the prevalence of discourse on the “rainbow nation” (or multiculturalism) in South Africa following the democratic elections in 1994.

I also use Halbwachs' observation to explain how the interviewees recalled their time with Kente as an enriching period in their lives. Halbwachs writes of memories as occurring within a defined time period (or duration of time). To explain, John Lata left to perform in Ngema's *Asinamali* in New York and returned to Kente's company in Soweto. Darlington Michaels and Dumakude Mnembe also left Kente's company to start their own groups, which were successful. These individuals were members of Kente's company at different times but all the actors expressed their memories in similar terms, namely the time they spent in Kente's company. They each described their unique experience as a period of learning new acting skills and developing as artists. According to Halbwachs' theory, in telling their stories, their individual memories or "discontinuous reference points" are harmonised as collective memory because they were part of the same social group or theatre collective (Halbwachs 1980: 94). Their collective narrative of events provides more detail on the day to day activities of the theatre company and offers concrete evidence of the fact that the group needed resilience and commitment to maintain the theatre company. The actors were a supportive network of each other, but they were linked to their community in their daily interactions. During its zenith, Kente's company provided a positive atmosphere, as well as generating developmental opportunities and commercial benefit for Sowetans; Kente offered bursaries and training opportunities for the youth, and the performances of his plays provided township folk with economic opportunities (such as selling refreshments).

Since the uprising of 1976, Soweto has been alive in the collective memory of South Africans because it was one of the sites in which opposition to apartheid became more visible. This opposition to apartheid has long been an important aspect in plays dramatising the lives of Sowetans and other township communities. This allows for the reconstruction of a memory that includes both the physical environment of Soweto and also how people think about Soweto (conceptually or consciously) as a cultural space. I argue that the memory of Kente's plays captured in the archival material and in the oral recollections of the interviewees helps us to see Soweto as a cultural space. In this way we are able to have a richer discussion of Kente's contribution to theatre and the way that his plays benefited all Sowetans, including thepeople not involved in the arts.

Schwartz and Schuman (2005) remark that Halbwachss approach recognises the value of what people think about the past. Memory studies has also enabled me to track down information not only on Kente, but on “non-professional” playwrights as well. It is through *collective memory* that I have been able to identify the playwrights, titles of plays, actors in various plays and information on where their plays were performed in Soweto. In the 1980s, there was a theatre circuit in the township. This shows that Soweto had a thriving community theatre, despite the fact that the country was in a state of emergency and despite general climate of violence in the country during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, theatre performances were held at Diepkloof, Meadowlands, Phiri, Jabavu, Tshiawelo, Kopanong, Entokozweni and Uncle Tom’s community halls. Halbwachs points out that *collective memory* involves an interaction between people and the buildings they use. This helps us to understand that Soweto theatre venues have cultural value and also carry the social history of Soweto because they are associated with the (ideological) beliefs of the community of Soweto. Nora argues that places of memory resonate deeply within the consciousness of a community. Community halls can also be seen as sites of memory because Kente’s plays were performed there. Community halls are the sites where we can see that Kente contributed to the community because he invested these drab, utilitarian spaces with culture.

Kavanagh and Solberg have pointed out that Kente’s company was an enterprise. Memory studies helps to explain the manner in which Kente’s work brought value to township communities. The main reason for creating his company was not to extract finances from the community but to build a sense of community. This is evident in the network of Public Relations Officers whose actions within a community contributed to social cohesion, since townships were without an arts and sports infrastructure. Kente’s theatre provided a creative outlet for youth in Soweto and also brought different generations in the community together. Several people in the community indicated that they went to see the plays as family units.

In conclusion, collective memories assisted me when writing a continuous narrative of Kente’s plays in which the playwright emphasised his messages of opposition to apartheid, the development of youth and African economic self-sufficiency by balancing serious drama with comedy, music and expressive dance. Plays in the third phase (1977-

2003) for instance, contained serious messages even if the plays were regarded as superficial. In one, *She Fears the Night* (1985), the drama presented the perpetrator of violence and abuse against a young woman by a family member. This message is still relevant today (2021) in that it informs current discourse on gender-based violence in South Africa. Also, as John Lata's memories established, *Sekunjalo* presented a post independent African society in which there was a contestation of how society should be governed, based on clashing political ideologies. Perhaps *collective memory* can help us to re-evaluate *Sekunjalo* and Kente's other plays from the perspective of his inclusive, humanistic philosophy. Therefore, the recollections of interviewees assisted in the writing of a rich and informative narrative of Kente's practices.

CHAPTER 5:
MATSEMELA MANAKA

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 I discussed Kente's contribution to the development of Sowetan community theatre. In the process, I demonstrated that memory studies could assist in the writing of a more comprehensive history of his contribution in this regard. In this chapter I focus on Matsemela Manaka to contextualise his place in the development of Sowetan community theatre. start by discussing how my research drew on archival sources and interviews that I conducted and I discuss the manner in which Manaka influenced other Soweto community playwrights.

5.2 Writings on Matsemela Manaka: the evolution of his writing style.

Manaka was primarily a playwright, but he also expressed his belief in the Black Consciousness ideology through projects that involved music, poetry, dance and art. His name arises in writings on publishing, theatre and art. I group my discussion according to the decade in which these items were published, that is, from the 1980s to the 2000s. In the 1980s, Manaka was involved with the *Staffrider* literary journal as well as with Ravan Press, both of which brought together writers on Black Consciousness who formulated an assertive and defiant anti-apartheid message. Manaka was the editor of *Staffrider* (1970–81) and was part of a writing circle that included Mafika Gwala, Mothobi Mutloatse and the Creative Youth Association, of which he was one of the founder members in the late 1970s. Kirkwood (1980: 22) describes Ravan Press "as a publishing house that would not only listen to black writers but would do at least some of the things that black writers wanted to do." Ndebele (1989) agrees that *Staffrider* was important in bringing black writers together to craft a coherent message inspired by Black Consciousness ideology. Therefore, Black Consciousness writers gave culture (the arts in general and creative writing in particular) a role to redevelop black society in the face of colonialism.

In articulating his vision of "black theatre," Manaka (1984: 33) sees the actor as an important aspect of theatre in that s/he is the conduit through which to communicate and

develop the fictional "physical world" for the audience. He also wanted his theatre to articulate ideas from a specific African perspective, despite using English, which he denigrates as a colonial imposition on Africans. Theatre, as an inclusive social endeavour, expresses "various ideas, thoughts, feelings and experiences" of Africans (1984: 35). In the 1980s, Manaka wanted his plays the provide "a reflection against racism" and to show that the essence of black theatre was to use artistic means to "conscientise" the audience by presenting a "library of evidence against racism" (1984: 35–38). Steadman (1984: 13) analyses *eGoli – City of Gold* (1972) to illustrate how Manaka wrote about characters that show the audience how black men are oppressed. The characters are John and Hamilton, whose long friendship dates to their youth when they were convicts. Their friendship is expressed in the dialogue of the play. For example, Hamilton knows that John sexually assaulted a woman and was jailed for his crime (Davis 1997: 55). Their friendship is also expressed physically, in that, as they escape prison, they are shackled and work together to dislodge the chain around their necks. Having broken the chain, they do not part and years later they share a room in a mining compound. They call each other "wethu" or "brother."

Steadman compares the way in which two sets of male characters are constructed as being "inextricably linked" to each other. He approximates Manaka's characters to Samuel Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot*. The connection between Vladimir and Estragon is expressed through their dialogue. For instance, towards the end of Act One, it transpires that the characters have been in each other's company for approximately fifty years (Beckett 2010: 51). In *eGoli*, Manaka's characters talk about how as miners they are forced to live away from their families (Davis 1997: 55) and while together, they also learn that Hamilton's son has died in a mining accident (Davis 1997: 69). Against the background of these events they lament that racialised capitalism prescribed for them a lower social status than whites. In addition, the social conditions at the mine compound undermine African values of group reciprocity. The play expresses a message of Black Consciousness in that the characters of John and Hamilton are portrayed as an example of the bad treatment Africans endured under apartheid. *eGoli* then, speaks of the character's disenfranchisement and uses that to expound on the importance of (what have been) traditional social practices among Africans. Therefore, theatre becomes a

vehicle to "reconstruct a people's history and cultural values" as opposed to providing entertainment for the community (Steadman 1984: 14).

Wakashe (1986) classified Manaka's *eGoli* (1978) and *Pula* (1982) as typical of "Black protest theatre," which was a strategy to resist "white domination"(1986: 36–37). Wakashe underlines the point that Black Consciousness not only reject apartheid itself, but also opposed what it saw as a project by liberal whites to assimilate blacks, thereby weakening collective anti-apartheid action. Wakashe notes that Manaka conceptualises theatre as a "political platform" in which improvisation is used as part of the writing process. Manaka was also influenced by Stanislavski's acting method in which the actor is required to incorporate his personal experiences when creating a character, as well as Grotowski's articulation of "poor theatre." Wakashe (1986: 41) explains that for Manaka, poor theatre referred not only to the conditions in which theatre was produced but also to the requirement that actors "show their most personal selves as well as express their own moral values in their art."

In the 1980s, the common thread in analysing Manaka and Maponya's plays, and to some extent Kente's, was to write about the manner in which black writers used theatre to oppose apartheid. Horn (1986) revisits Wakashe's observation that black playwrights responded to apartheid by using theatre to confront it. Hlogwane (1988) adds that Manaka called for theatre that reclaims African culture; desiring to empower rural communities to devise ways to protest against apartheid (such as organising gatherings to sing freedom songs) (1988: 166). This was part of the rural theatre project organised by the Soyikwa Institute of African theatre, of which Manaka was one of the founder members in 1978.

In the 1990s, Peterson (1990a) used one of Manaka's early plays, *eGoli*, as an example of "working-class theatre." He (Peterson 1990a: 321) says that this form of theatre originated in the 1980s and dealt "with labour, social, and political themes". Peterson (1990a: 323) points out that Manaka's *eGoli* and Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* were about "class-specific experiences and political prerogatives of the black working class," told from the perspective of Black Consciousness. In both plays the plight of miners illustrates the economic exploitation of black men who are employed in life-threatening work. As an expression of apartheid oppression, the hostel compound where the miners lived is depicted as a dehumanising experience. These places had poor living conditions

and, as male only enclaves, led to anti-social behaviours that contributed to "the disintegration of African values" (1990a: 324).

Davis, in *Repainting the damaged canvas: The theatre of Matsemela Manaka* (1991) acknowledges Manaka's commitment to Black Consciousness ideology. Davis points out that in the late 1980s, Manaka had started to travel to Africa, to north America and to Europe and this led to his transcending "the stark format of protest theatre" (1991:84). Changes he notices in Manaka's plays are that he began to adopt developmental projects, as exemplified in the plays *Koma* (1986), which was linked to a literacy campaign in a Soweto hostel, and in *Siza* (1987), which exhorted blacks to help each other. Another example is *Domba – The Last Dance* (1986) which involved training students from Funda Centre's dance school. Other plays explored ways of reclaiming African tradition, namely *Goree* (1989), *Blues Afrika Café* (1990) and *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto* (1991).

Davis also observes that Manaka's plays followed a trajectory from engaging in what he called "theatre of the dispossessed" to engaging in "theatre for social reconstruction" (Davis 1991: 85). *eGoli* is an example of the former type of theatre as it dramatises the deleterious effects of apartheid on miners. In the play, Manaka depicted depressed material conditions and the emotional turmoil arising from racial oppression. *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto* is an example of theatre for social reconstruction because the play's message was that African art has a positive social impact.

Manaka also adopted a "comprehensive philosophy of Pan-Africanism" (Davis 1991: 84) in his plays. This meant that he wanted to find common experiences shared by all Africans on the continent, a theme which he explored in *Goree*. Manaka's approach in his later works also had an element of "*Gesamtkunstwerk*," or synthesised mime, music and dance (1991: 85). Davis argues that this lent visual interest to his latter plays; this was not a coincidence because Manaka was also a musician and painter. In Davis' substantial article he explains how, in *eGoli*, Manaka blended music, mime, dance and poetry in order to engage the audience. He used sound effects and miner's headlamps to simulate the actions of men going into a dangerous mine, for instance. In *Children of Asazi*, he choreographed dancers to mime rhythmic and repetitive movements to

approximate an African ritual. This was a fictional representation of a ceremony to protect a child against evil spirits.

Davis notes that Manaka regarded his plays as “works in progress” (1991: 85). He responded to negative newspapers reviews by rewriting *Toro – The African Dream* (1987) and turned it into a “full scale musical,” whereas before it had made use of incidental music to punctuate the drama. In another example, the narrative structure of *Domba – The Last Dance* (1986) was restructured to explain in more detail the Venda cultural ceremony marking the onset of womanhood in young women. This suggests that Manaka saw the written response to his plays as more valuable than the audience’s response.

In the 1990s academic commentary on black theatre, researchers examined how Manaka and other playwrights responded to the socio-political changes brought about by the dismantling of apartheid legislation as democratic governance was implemented. Steadman (1992) conducts a historical study by (re)looking at Maponya’s *The Hungry Earth* (1979) and Manaka’s *Pula* (1982). These plays illustrate inequality (according to race and class) under apartheid. Steadman (1992: 208) (re)emphasises that colonialism and apartheid “will remain with us for generations as a determining influence on South African discourse.” He suggests that in writing the history of South African theatre, new ways of categorising theatre productions should be considered. For example, he questions the value of classifying theatre in terms of race-based terminology. He sees the use of the terms “black” and “English” (as a substitute for theatre produced by “whites”) as inadequate in describing types of South African theatre produced during apartheid.

Larlham (1992) also provides a survey of South African theatre history and mentions Manaka and Maponya’s plays. He proposes that the removal of apartheid may allow for “increased collaboration among artists of all cultures” as a basis for introducing a robust theatre culture in South Africa (1992: 48). Still on the subject of new developments in South African theatre, Davis (1995: 16) sees Manaka’s *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto* as the fulfilment of multiculturalism, which was part of the discourse in the early 1990s. A production of the play was presented by black and Indian students at the University of Durban-Westville. This included Indian cultural influences, for example mixing Indian and Zulu music and dances, being incorporated in the work. Fleishman (1997) elaborates on Davis’s observation that Manaka created strong visual imagery in

his plays. Fleishman (1997: 207) refers to *eGoli* to show how South African theatre used "physical imagery" in plays to visually portray the South African landscape. He describes how two actors were "chained together with collars around their necks" to represent the manner in which black miners were dehumanised in South Africa. Lastly, during the 1980s and 1990s, Manaka was also a practising painter. Mdluli (2015: 58) briefly mentions him in her doctoral thesis on South African art. She writes that in 1987, Manaka was part of a team of researchers who were investigating a method of writing a (racially) inclusive history of South African art. The research was to foreground the contribution made by black artists who had not been trained in academic institutions.

In the 2000s, research on post-apartheid theatre continued to investigate how playwrights juxtaposed the old apartheid regime and the new democratic era in the themes they chose to explore in their plays. Davis (Jeffrey 2004: 179) revisited his work on Manaka to emphasise that *Ekhaya – Going Home* (1989/1990) was concerned with the theme of the return of (former) political exiles to South Africa. In the play, a South African artist exiled during apartheid returns to the country at the end of apartheid. In another approach, Duemert (n.d.: 6–7) briefly refers to *The Babalaz People*, an essay Manaka wrote in 1981. Duemert writes that Manaka valued *tsotsitaal* because on stage it signified characters living in impoverished townships. In its original context, this form of expression was used primarily by criminals as shorthand among themselves to hide their intentions with regard to a victim they had identified. By the 1970s, *tsotsitaal* was widely used within all sectors of the township community; it was often used by youngsters and older people to show that they were "cool" or "hip."

5.3 Books on Manaka's form of theatre

Children of Asazi was published in *Woza Afrika! An anthology of South African plays* (1986). This anthology was compiled by Duma Ndlovu, who had also organised performances of South African plays at the Lincoln Centre in New York in 1986. There was a brief introduction to the play in the book noting that the it dealt with apartheid era forced removals in Alexandra Township, which had occurred in1977 (1986: 91).

Manaka also wrote *Echoes of African Art* (1987), which was a compilation of works by black artists. Included are illustrations of graphics, paintings, sculpture as well as "traditional art" (1987: 20). The latter category demonstrates the intention of the publication, which was to include objects made by Africans as art. For example, in traditional Zulu culture, wooden headrests were constructed to support a person's head during sleep. Patterns were carved into these objects, which were indented on the horizontal part of the headrest. These patterns lent an aesthetic quality to the object. Similarly, Venda traditional mud homesteads were (and still are) decorated with colourful murals on either side of the front door. These patterns were for decoration to beautify these huts in which people lived. Manaka included photographs of both types of objects in the book, thus signifying them as artworks. He saw the headrest as a work of art because it was no longer used as a utilitarian item in present day society. A photograph (in an art book) showing Venda murals also directs the reader to look at how rural communities brought art into their home environment, in a similar manner as the Western practice of hanging paintings on walls inside a house.

The publication of *Pula* (1982) in 1990 includes an introduction to the play. This provides information on Manaka's writing process. The actors in Manaka's early plays contributed to the script by adding their own experiences to the creation of characters and the story. For instance, although Manaka is recognised as the writer of *Pula*, at some point he considered himself rather as a "scribe," in recognition of the contributions by the cast (Steadman 1990b: 4). Over a number of years, Manaka also made substantive revisions of his plays and he recorded each version of his play on video and wrote different scripts for each iteration. He saw the very latest version of any current play as an improvement on past versions.

The introduction also provides a socio-political context for *Pula*. It points out that, in addition to hunger, the drought of 1981–2 in South Africa damaged the social structure of black people living in rural areas (Steadman 1990b: 5). Steadman suggests that Manaka presented a "deliberately romanticised view of tribal life" (10) in which an African community was thriving because it shared in the production and gathering of food. Because they had a common goal in fostering prosperity for all members of the community, there was unity in society (21–22). In the play, a drought forces young men

to seek work in Johannesburg, where social instability results from competing ideological beliefs. Some characters believe in making money by any means necessary, including selling alcohol (6). Others believe that shebeens represent a bourgeois exploitation of the working class (7). The play ultimately makes an appeal for unity among Africans because, as Africans, they are all oppressed by an unjust system. In the rural areas, blacks were exploited by white farmers (7) and in the urban areas they worked for low pay in the gold mines (9). The process of creating the play, that is, combining the experiences of four principal actors into a collective narrative, was equally important in the conscientisation of actors and of the audience (1990b: 7–14).

Beyond Echoes of Soweto (Davis 1997) is an expansive book that includes the scripts of the following plays: *Egoli, Pula*, *Children of Asazi*, *Toro – The African Dream* and *Goree.* There are also cast lists, and introductions to each play, photographs from the respective productions, related newspaper reviews. The introduction to the book provides biographical information on Manaka, and outlines the social circumstances in which Manaka co-founded the Creative Youth Association in 1977 (3). In addition, Davis briefly mentions the Madimba Institute of Music (22), which was based at Funda Centre when Manaka was the arts coordinator there in the 1980s. Davis introduces the plays and recounts that *eGoli* won a Fringe Theatre award at the Edinburgh Festival in 1982 (6), including information on Manaka's tours to Germany and England (6–7). Davis discusses influences on Manaka's work, namely Black Consciousness, African music, jazz and Manaka's philosophical belief that African culture should be at the centre of cultural expression in South Africa. Also of interest is Manaka's own essay; in "Theatre of the Dispossessed" he pledges his support for experimental theatre (36), without specifying its components, save that it is the opposite of conventional theatre in that it prioritises African themes and is anchored in African culture. "Theatre of the Dispossessed" may be performed in African languages and in English, as long as it "integrates the past, present and future" experiences of Africans and represents these faithfully on stage (38). This may be actualised in the use of struggle era (anti-apartheid) songs, for instance. Perhaps Manaka's overarching concern was that this form of theatre should communicate positive ideas about African culture to the audience. Manaka identified "The Babalaz People" as representative of a section of the dispossessed within a community. Here he was writing

about excessive alcohol consumption, which he saw as threatening the project to conscientise or galvanise Africans to act against oppression (43).

5.4 Research from archival sources: texts (*Sowetan*, PACT and Ali Hlongwane's archive)

In this section I present archival material that contributed to the writing of a more comprehensive narrative of Sowetan community theatre. I include information primarily from the *Sowetan* newspaper but also from assorted documents from the Funda Centre (Ali Hlongwane's archive). I also conducted interviews with Manaka's colleagues, the responses to which are discussed below.

In 1984, after spending 18 months on an intermittent but well received international tour, actors Ronnie Mkhwanazi, Makarios Sebe, Danny Moitse and David Sebe returned to stage Matsemela Manaka's *Pula* at Funda Centre in Soweto. Praising the play's European success, the *Sowetan* (*Sowetan* 1984i: 12) emphasised that the play highlighted the "position of blacks in their own society," and that it used mime, dance, language, song and music in the manner of Peter Brook[31] and Antonin Artaud. Having been involved in theatre as a professional since 1978, Manaka was at the time influenced by Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" and preferred political theatre as opposed to "the agit prop" art form. Manaka saw "drama as a means to [political] liberation" for black South Africans.

Manaka's commitment to a political cause and its ideology did not detract from the artistic merit of the play. The *Sowetan* (1984i: 12) called *Pula* "a gem." The Black Consciousness philosophy permeated Manaka's artistic output. In September, he participated in an art exhibition by "Artimo," a society of black artists which he had cofounded. Manaka (Khumalo 1984: 16) said that the aim of the exhibition was to "instil the spirit of self-reliance and initiative among artists and to let artists share expression and opportunities". They held an exhibition at the Market Gallery in Newtown, Johannesburg. Also participating were Kay Hassan and Phillip Malimuse. The exhibition was also an attempt to "make African art popular to the African community". Artimo

[31] The theatre director Peter Brook also wrote the preface to Jerzy Grotowski's *Towards a poor theatre* (1995). Both Gibson Kente and Matsemela Manaka cite Grotowski as an influence.

referred to “art in motion,” which emanated from the Creative Youth Association (CYA) he had formed when he was 19 years old. The CYA was a Diepkloof-based organisation that endeavoured to promote the arts, drama and poetry disciplines in Soweto (Khumalo 1984: 16).

Manaka also contributed to contemporary debates on the arts. For example, in August (*Sowetan* 1984j: 8) he joined Sipho Sepamla (director of the Federated Union of Black Arts or FUBA), John van Zyl (from the Wits School of Dramatic Arts) and Michael Venables, the *Rand Daily Mail’s* arts editor in a debate held at the Rheinhalit Jones Memorial Hall in Johannesburg.

The debate was on the merits of the cultural boycott imposed on South Africa by banned political organisations and local arts practitioners. Manaka stated his opposition to apartheid. He said “I think there will be benefits if the boycott adopts a pragmatic approach. Music, drama, art and literature institutes started the cultural boycott and the political organisation took over. We must make a decision whether it is the politicians or artists who will make the cultural boycott work.” He emphasised that international artists should boycott the country, to isolate South Africa politically as well as to deny the country financial gain . However, he exempted Africanist writers such as Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong’o as he felt their presence in South Africa would benefit black people. He added that

> We must educate the masses. We have a tendency of telling people to boycott or not to do certain things without explaining why we say they must not do this or that. I think we need something more dramatic than the cultural boycott. We need something that will affect the economy of this country (Sowetan, 1984g:1).

Elliot Makhaya (Makhaya 1985m: 15) also writes about a seminar held at the Funda Centre in 1985 to gather input from the public, artists and art educators with which to devise strategies for arts education and, secondly, “to create a forum for the discussion and identification of existing resources.”

On the panel were staff from Funda: Lebomang Sebidi, Motsumi Makhene (a music teacher) and Jerry Raletebete (a drama teacher), as well as Steven Sack, a fine arts lecturer from the University of the Witwatersrand. Manaka (in Makhaya 1985h: 15) observed:

> It's important to argue the case for art education in black schools because so many educational planners see it as an unnecessary and expensive luxury. We must show that art is fundamental to a qualitative educational programme and cannot continue to be neglected.

In March 1986, Manaka reprised *Vuka* (1981/2), which was performed at the Downstairs Wits Theatre. In the original cast were Fats Bookholane and John Ledwaba (here I am unsure whether Manaka appeared on stage with the cast). The play had toured locally and was performed at the Edinburgh Festival. This newly revised and expanded version of the play featured Ali Khangela Hlongwane, Job Kubatse and Danny Moitse and was directed by Manaka.

5.4.1 *Domba – The Last Dance*

In May, Manaka staged *Domba – The Last Dance* at Funda. The play was a culmination of a six-year research project. As *Domba* married acting, dance and music it was a collaboration between the Soyikwa Institute for Drama, the Madimba Institute for African Music and the dance section at Funda. Manaka was also a percussionist, and the choreographer was Ellington Mazibuko. The different art forms were used to conjure a spiritual gathering between the actors and the audience. Thabiso Leshoai (1986c: 12) quotes Manaka as saying that:

> *Domba* is a Venda word for the third and final stage in the initiation rites that symbolise the liberation of a girl into womanhood. Because it is set in an initiation school the play is also concerned with giving new meaning and value to traditional African forms of schooling and socialisation, which include dance, music, and oral historical narrative.

Manaka added, "*Domba* was conceived as a statement of the crisis" facing African culture. Manaka believed that South Africans were hostile and misinformed about African art forms; his plays were meant to be an antidote to Western-centric cultural expression. He also believed that arts institutions should be created to teach African arts, especially in rural areas, as Makhaya (1986e: 11) reported. The programme of the play serves as a guide to how the play was to be performed. In it Manaka stated that Africans "should get sustenance from African culture." The story of *Domba* was told primarily through music

and dance. Structurally the dance performance was arranged into four scenes. Six themes were outlined in Scene One, namely “Nyungwe Pipe Song,” “Namae ‘Kgaotse,” “Romance,” “Fairness in Love,” “Vukani” and “Mukolwedzi”. These themes express emotional states that the young inductees experience on their developmental path from girlhood to womanhood; as the programme notes, the purpose of initiation is to “prepare girls for marriage” and teach them “about the role and status of women in society.” It is striking that the musical inspiration for the representation of these themes (in Scene One) is eclectic, ranging from “a 15th century guitar piece” to songs from “central Africa” and Uganda. Represented in Scene Two is a “school band meeting” where the song *Ntyilo*[32] is performed as an instrumental by the Madimba Band. Scene Three elucidates themes using the “Mortuary Song” and the “Tribute Song”. In Scene Four, the themes are “Rato (song)”; “Thebalethu I,” “Thembalethu II,” finally culminating in the initiation dance “Domba”. There were twelve characters represented by eleven actors. There were also approximately 26 dancers and 30 musicians in the cast.

5.4.2 *Children of Asazi*

Children of Asazi was performed both at Funda and at the Theatre and Upstairs at the Market Theatre. Although he was living, teaching and writing in Soweto, Manaka’s main audience was in the city. The Soweto audience was small, politically astute and artistically inclined but not his primary audience. His main audience was made up chiefly of whites who held progressive political beliefs (the Market Theatre’s traditional audience). The play is set in Alexandra Township when shacks in the area were being demolished. The protagonist, Diliza, explores “the contradictions of everyday life through the everyday life of the homeless, the unemployed and the young people in love” (*Sowetan* 1986e: 21). The production included Peter Boroko, Thelma Pooe, Soentjie Pooe, Ali Hlongwane and Khaya Mahlangu. In September, the play was performed at Funda Centre before the cast

[32] *Ntyilo Ntyilo*, composed by Allan Silinga, was first recorded by the Manhattan Brothers, with Miriam Makeba singing. The song has subsequently been performed continuously in the repertoire of South Africa African jazz musicians.

left for (the then) West Germany and New York. Davis (1997) writes at length on this play. Below, my interviewee, Ali Hlongwane, shares his memories of working in this production.

5.4.3 *Toro – The African Dream*

Two actors, Ali Hlongwane and Job Kubatsi were both part of Manaka's *Toro – The African Dream*. They were also close associates of Manaka. The play touches on (rather than exploring in depth) various themes. Among them, was the notion of promoting African unity with a message that (black) South Africans with different political beliefs should find common ground and re-establish ancient cultural ties to overcome apartheid. Not all these themes are spelled out didactically in the play, but they are suggested by its use of African-centric music and dance from various parts of the continent.

The plot of the play involves two male characters, Thabo and Muntu, who are confined in a house in an undisclosed geographical location. The two South Africans have paused their journey to an unnamed African country to join the Afrika Network, an organisation opposing apartheid. Presumably, this organisation is banned in South Africa but operates in countries that support anti-apartheid liberation movements. Although the characters and the events of the play are localised in South Africa, the play links the oppression of blacks in South Africa to other damaging actions by colonisers on the continent (for example the slave trade). In various speaking turns, Thabo mentions that Europeans have stolen land from Africans, that Europeans have metaphorically "raped" the African continent and dehumanised its population for generations (Davis 1997: 157–159). Summing up the magnitude of their loss, Thabo remarks: "I am so much used to dispossession that I no longer feel when there is anything taken away from me" (165).

The play is structured as a continuous narrative present in which the characters' ongoing angst is broken by projections representing different versions of an affirming African dream. As Thabo notes: "Yah! One day we will celebrate this [or these] dream[s]" (Davis 1997: 156). Music, poetry and dance sequences are used to project a future in which all Africans are united, having defeated apartheid rulers. Other temporal deviations take the form of flashbacks to an imagined contented, pre-colonial African society. These temporal deviations undermine a linear presentation of the story, which allows for the

themes to be dispersed in brief scenes throughout the play. Therefore, I suggest that *Toro* is a musical play as Manaka did not emphasise presentation and resolution of events in a strictly dramatic plot. It is also evident that there are two stories unfolding simultaneously in the play. The first story involves Thabo and Muntu leaving home and stopping at a halfway house on their way into self-imposed political exile from apartheid South Africa (narrative extension one). The second story is an actualisation of the titular "African Dream" (narrative extension two). I call these narrative extensions as they are not presented as cohesive stories with a beginning, middle and an end.

Besides directing *Toro,* Manaka also facilitated a playwriting workshop at Funda in 1987. He told the *Sowetan* (*Sowetan* Reporter 1987: 9) that the purpose of this workshop was to "explore and expose the theoretical and practical experience of writing for the stage" and also to encourage other playwrights to publish their plays. After the workshop, one play was staged as a production at Funda (unfortunately the title is not indicated).

5.4.4 *Koma* and *Mdala*

Performed in 1988, *Koma*, subtitled "a musical play on literacy," was part of Manaka's vision to establish "an urban-rural literacy programme" (mostly at Soweto hostels). Manaka argued that the programmes (as expressed through the plays *Siza* and *Koma*) he had developed were not condescending to rural communities but were aimed to promote the importance of African culture and to foster self-reliance. He explained to Davis (1997: 9) that *Koma* used various South Africa languages and incorporated African dance forms. Metsoamere (1987a: 25) noted that *Koma* had "humorous dramatization[s]" and "convincing miming". Manaka (Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre 1988) wrote in the programme:

> Illiteracy denies people the right to determine their own destiny. It often denies them an effective participation in the democratic process towards the building of a new nation in South Africa. For the purpose of this project, literacy goes beyond an ability to read.

"Soyikwa 88" was a fifteen-day festival held in 1988 to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the theatre company. Several plays as well as dance and music productions were on

the programme. Soyikwa's graduate Job Kubatsi directed *Mdala*, which dramatised ill treatment of "the aged" in modern African communities. In their research, the cast highlighted the manner in which black senior citizens were badly treated by "corrupt and disrespectful" officials at pension pay points. The play proposed that the youth ought to "look up to" and "respect" elders. The play toured rural areas as part of the Rural Theatre Programme in 1988 and 1989. An expanded version of *Toro – The African Dream* was also included in "Soyikwa 88". Later in 1988, Sipho Buthelezi, Allister Dube (former Soyikwa students) embarked on a three-month tour with *Siza* to Germany, the Netherlands and France.

5.4.5 *Goree*

The exploration of themes in *Goree* (1989) was structured to link the enslavement of Africans in the nineteenth century slave port of Senegal to the oppression of blacks in South Africa. It was performed in 1989. Manaka had visited the island of Goree, first as member of Caiphus Semenya's musical entitled *Buwa,* and later in a pilgrimage he made to the island before writing his play. The geographical location and its attendant history helped Manaka to express his desire that Africans should unite to overcome colonial divisions that, according to him, served the Western economy. Manaka explained to Victor Metsoamere (1989c) that *Goree* was both a metaphorical and a physical journey of discovery. On a philosophical level, Manaka valued indigenous knowledge systems as a source for his creative output. Metsoamere said that the play was "about being African" and about "being self-assertive." On a concrete level, the play expressed Black Consciousness by using the visual, dance and linguistic tropes borrowed from various parts of Africa. He incorporated West African dance, music and the localised history of slavery to increase the repertoire of seSotho and TshiVenda linguistic formulations, melodies and dance sequences. Manaka said that the play was "a dramatic piece to commemorate the hardships Africans have gone through throughout the centuries." Rather than dwelling on the hardships of slavery, Manaka said that he wanted to emphasise "the immense durability, physically and emotionally, that Africans possess."

The protagonist in the play is a young woman from a village in South Africa. Nomsa's "yearning for discovery brings her to Johannesburg where she excels at an academy for dance." As she explores her craft, Nomsa desires to express herself in an African dance vocabulary rather than in a Western form of dance, which has been the basis of her knowledge and training. To overcome her lack of knowledge, Nomsa embarks on a trip to Goree, where she "meets herself" and a knowledgeable older woman. In the play, the woman, named Oba, is the "last inhabitant" of Goree" and she serves to guide Nomsa on her discovery of African art, dance, culture and traditions.

Manaka told Metsoamere (1989d: 11) that he found that the people of Senegal embodied a "spiritual air," and "a sense of freedom and a deep love of history." *Goree* was a way to explore the methods through which "colonialism has worked in all these years." Therefore, he incorporated "the slave experience through the body [via dance]" as a metaphor for his own intellectual and psychological emancipation from Western forms of thought and artistic expression, which he saw as damaging to the African spirit, intellect and cultural practice.

The character of Nomsa was structured so that the dancer and choreographer Nomsa Manaka could find areas of commonality. She preferred African dance as she believed it best form of expression for the body of African women in the township. She eschewed the then prevailing "Western centric ballet moves and modern dance in South Africa" (Metsoamere 1989f: 11). The character of "a good woman" (Oba) in the play was used to convey the message that African women are the custodians of spirituality and cultural knowledge, an important role in developing African communities. Manaka felt that it was through African women that values that had been "eroded by Western influences" could be reclaimed and promoted to the wider community. Manaka told Metsoamere that "the production would also help throw a light on our political differences" because it emphasised the need for a communal bond in spite of "conflicts of thought" among Africans. Here Manaka was referring to the prevailing township violence, the result of political rivalries prompted by different ideological allegiances.

Structurally, *Goree* follows *Children of Asazi* and *Toro – The African Dream*. It is focused primarily on two characters who exchange a number of speaking turns. These are broken up by poetic stanzas that are incorporated in the dialogue of each character.

Unlike other plays mentioned above, *Goree* is a one-act play, with continuous interaction between the characters Oba and Nomsa. Their dialogue is punctuated by an *a capella* solo as well as by accompanied song. Although some of the music is accompanied, it seems to keep the structure and essence of African vocal music (for example a harmonised melody line).

I can only guess the nature of the music that accompanied the script as I have not been able to locate any recordings. However, Sibongile Khumalo did sing a brief motif when I interviewed her. Recalling Halbwachs (1980: 106–7), memories are incorporated not only in "traces of testimony about the past found in memoirs, newspapers and official documents" but are also to be found "within the viewpoint of a collective consciousness." Firstly, the island is introduced into public consciousness as the site of the Atlantic slave trade between the 15th and 18th centuries. Secondly Halbwachs (1980: 23–32) notes that collective memories also arise out of ephemeral (social) relations, meaning that persons who may not have experienced an event firsthand may be part of the collective memory since they belong to that society. It is in this way that collective memory of African slavery permeates throughout South Africa.

5.4.6 *Blues Afrika Cafe*

Victor Metsoamere (1990d: 19) described *Blues Afrika Café* as a "cabaret with a cast of 16." The play is part of a "blues trilogy;" the first part is called *Blues Africa* and was staged in Germany in 1980. Manaka still had to write the last part, provisionally titled *Blues Africa Children* by the end of 1990. He had hoped to stage the complete trilogy; however, by the time he died in 1998 the trilogy had not yet been performed. Manaka (Metsoamere 1990e: 13) said that the musical was based "on the blues as experienced in America and South Africa". He added, "it is also an exploration of the blues as a form of music and a state of mind. It is centred around the title of an African-American blues singer who now lives in South Africa …. Through music, dance, poetry, drama and art she celebrates the story of the blues in an African restaurant setting." The play celebrated the establishment of an African restaurant which served dishes from various parts of the continent. However, the emphasis was on South African foods, and meals were served during performances.

Manaka wrote the play as a corrective measure to address the lack of prepared "indigenous African food" available in Soweto shops and Johannesburg restaurants.

Manaka stipulated that African dishes should be served when *Blues Afrika Café* was performed as a practical measure to expose audiences to African food. He expanded the theatrical experience for the audience in that issues discussed in the play were also experienced by the audience when the play was performed. He believed that the preponderance of Western style restaurants in South Africa was cultural imperialism in the same way that the majority of American and European plays were staged in Johannesburg theatres. He did not speak of food as a gastronomic experience, but as defining a person's culture, hence he accentuated African foods in *Blues Afrika Café*. Indeed, in the 1980s and 1990s it was common practice for Sowetans to prepare African dishes as an important component of traditional ceremonies. This shows that society differentiated between "European" and African dishes and used the latter in family gatherings, hence Manaka thought that food was a good medium through which to reinforce the importance of African culture. He regarded social reconstruction as important for reclaiming African cultural practices that he believed had been subsumed into Western cultural practices through colonialism and apartheid.

Manaka constructed the character of an "Afro-American woman to expose the discrimination by restaurants of African dishes." The audience witnesses the character challenge "the subtler class discrimination by restaurants which ensures that blacks are kept out as patrons by charging exorbitant prices affordable only to the affluent few in the townships." He advocated that African dishes should be easily available and affordable in restaurants and hotels. "In South Africa, we lack a strong tradition of having typical South African dishes being served properly with respect," he said. Manaka said that *Blues Afrika Café* was an attempt to marry theory and practice to help reconstruct African society.

5.4.7 *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto*

In *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto*, Manaka continued to explore new forms of theatrical expression by dissolving boundaries bewteen various art forms. He brought fine arts and

theatre together as watercolours, oil paintings and pencil drawings were exhibited and sold during the run of the play. Secondly, he weakened the boundary between the playwright and the fictional world created onstage. The fictional museum in the play was later actualised into a physical manifestation when Manaka opened a gallery in Soweto and later at the Southgate shopping centre.[33] Manaka (Manaka 1991) invited "a group of local artists," namely Gcina Mhlophe (a story-teller), Alistair Dube (an actor), Mokale Koapeng (a pianist) and Matome Manaka (who played the flugelhorn) to officially open the gallery in 1991. Manaka used the words "gallery" and "museum" interchangeably.

Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto was conceptualised as a trilogy. The first in the series was *Ekhaya – Going Home*. It was not performed in South Africa but the play was published in London in 1991. The second was *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto* and the third play was titled *Ekhaya – Blues for Dr X*. In 1991, the latter was still a work in progress.[34] Manaka (Metsoamere 1991a: 12) described *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto* as a celebration of African culture. He remarked that "even though [the play was] set inside a museum, the performance of the music and dance serves as an art gallery inside a theatre space." In addition, although Manaka wanted to achieve a synthesis of different art forms, he preferred working in a physical theatre that had proper lighting and sound equipment and the traditional separation of the stage from the auditorium. Manaka placed clay pots of African beer and a melange of African objects d'art on the stage. By taking this approach in the play, Manaka opened himself up to the criticism that he was trivialising African culture. For example, upon going to see the production, the reviewer from the *Sowetan* (Makhaya 1992c: 35) joked that he was "only here for the beer … and theatre." However, when the play was performed at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in 1992, Mannie Manim, a member of the festival committee observed that *Ekhaya* had crafted a "very affirmative statement … to show the unifying power of culture. It is a strong plea for the country to come together to share and learn about one another." As reported by Metsoamere (1991a: 8), Manaka said that:

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[33] Manaka opened the Ekhaya Soweto Neighborhood Museum at number 973, Phase 3, in Diepkloof extension, a rented house, on 30 November 1991. I am not sure how long the gallery remained active. In 1994 he established a gallery at the Southgate shopping centre.
[34] In the end, Manaka wrote *Yamina* (1993) to conclude the trilogy.

> A theatrical performance is a form of theory, a celebratory revelation of the issues that confront-society. It is often envisaged by the artist or dramatist that such issues will be taken up by the community and put into practice. Yet it is important for the artist or dramatist to remember that he is also part of the community.

Metsoamere (1991g: 10) wrote a favourable review of the play. In the play, a character named Gari (a Ghanaian man), leaves his home to study abroad. There he befriends Mampaki, "an elderly South African artist." While abroad, Gari "grows to love her" platonically. Gari also forms strong filial bonds with other South Africans comprising the exile community in the United States. However, Mampaki is granted indemnity by the South African (apartheid) government and "decides to head back home after many years in exile." This results in Gari experiencing "great emotional pain" at Mampaki's departure. Metsoamere writes that "before long, instead of returning to his home country, Gari heads for South Africa where he reunites with his idol. He settles in South Africa after marrying Shoes, the older woman's daughter."

On reading Metsoamere's analysis, one could say that the play explores the theme of what is "home" and the way in which people (or communities) may be said to "belong" to a geographical space. One could ask the question whether the character Gari is affiliated to the country where he was born? Or is his home the country to which he has been exiled? Alternatively, home may be constructed as an emotional place in which he decides to plant his roots (in other words, South Africa). After all, the title of the play can be translated as "Home," a concept that has philosophical connotations.

Metsoamere was impressed that the play/musical was presented in an "entertaining fashion." He also said that the choreography was "exhilarating" and that there were a number of "informative songs, some of which have been made popular by great South African singers such as Letta Mbulu and Miriam Makeba." Metsoamere concludes his review by saying that:

> Manaka highlights the need for a better treatment of the cultural life of the black man. The show also makes a desperate call for the establishment of a venue where all our creative endeavours will be displayed for the enlightenment of future generations.

Like *Ekhaya*, traditional African foods were served during the performances of *Blues Afrika Café* in 1991. Undoubtedly, the link between art and commerce was foregrounded,

even if the scale of the financial transactions was relatively modest. Metsoamere (1991a: 8) reports that Manaka wrote the play to give work experience to students at Funda as well as to create a platform for different generations of artists to interact.

5.4.8 *Yamina*

Yamina was first performed at the Windybrow Theatre in 1993. According to the report in the *Sowetan* (1993b: 12), the play was "about a young dancer (Reginah Ndlovu) who isolates herself from society after she discovers that she has contracted HIV. Her only lifeline is a witty and humane disc jockey of the Ekhaya Neighbourhood Station." Music and dance were also part of the play. The lead actor, Orlando-born Regina Ndlovu (at times her first name is spelled as Reginah), was trained by Gibson Kente. Her previous roles were in Kente's *What a Shame*, *We are the Future*, and *Sekunjalo – The Naked Hour*. Her other performances in Soweto were in Ali Segoai's *We've had Enough* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horsemen* (at Funda Arts Centre) (Metsoamere 1993d: 25).

Manaka (Metsoamere 1992e) saw the play "as an encouragement for people who suppress their feelings [to express their grief]" after having HIV seroconverted. In the programme the play is described in this way:

> Yamina, in an exciting fusion of drama, dance, song and poetry, tells the story of a young dancer supposedly stricken by Aids. Living alone in the densely crowded and violently alive Hillbrow, she severs ties with family and friends and waits to die. Isolated and afraid, her only lifeline is the "non-stop and collect" neighbourhood radio station, Ekhaya, whose witty and humane DJ reaches out to the dispossessed and the depressed.

The play was loosely modelled on a popular talk show on Radio Metro. The English language station was aimed at a middle income black audience. In *Yamina*, Manaka wanted to communicate with an urban community living in Johannesburg, as opposed to the Soweto community. Manaka said that the play "becomes a celebration of the survival instinct of the multi-coloured people of this place [South Africa], because if you can survive in Hillbrow, you can survive anywhere." Victor Metsoamere (1992e) said that, in an echo of Kente's *Mfowethu*, the play "tries to unite races". This shows an interesting

convergence of messages from two different theatre makers. Here Manaka's purview has shifted from an exclusively Black Consciousness focus to an exploration of how the realities of marginal white people (a character in the play is a dissatisfied Caucasian male) intersect with those of marginalised black people (there is character who is a prostitute in the play).

5.4.9 *Drums and Dreams*

A long-time supporter of Matsemela Manaka's works, Victor Mestoamere (1994b: 21) was more restrained when Manaka's musical *Drums and Dreams* was performed at the Newtown Galleries in Johannesburg. Metsoamere said that there "was something seriously lacking on the opening night." The programme described the show as "a theatrical exhibition of paintings," which Metsoamere found "striking." Metsoamere does not talk about the subject matter of these paintings and he found that the play did not have a narrative thread. However, the reviewer found the music to be "powerfully nostalgic."

From Metsoamere's description, it appears that the show had a loose structure in which the audience was presented with a band (including Manaka on drums) and singers on stage. During the proceedings the cast provided intermittent narration, alternated with songs. Metsoamere notes that Manaka intended to "celebrate the unbreaking spirit of his fellow Africans across the political spectrum in fighting oppression." The cast chanted a refrain, "we are the drums and dreams of freedom … Peace … Justice" intermittently as a way of reinforcing the theme of the show. The story involves an tragic episode in the life of a man (Kutloano) and his daughters (Khotso, Kagiso and Kopano). When the daughters are killed, their deaths are found to have been "ritual murders." Their father Kutloano "loses his mind" in grief.

When appraising media reports, it seemed to me to be inappropriate to call *Drums and Dreams* a play. Victor Metsoamere (1994c: 13) saw it as a "celebration of life through drama, music, poetry, dance and artwork." Metsoamere's review is aligned with Ali Hlongwane's assessment of Manaka's theatrical output from 1990 onwards. A long-time collaborator, in the interview for this study Hlongwane maintained that Manaka had "lost

his way" as a dramatist in the 1990s. With no script to assess, one has no choice but to depend on newspaper reports and Hlongwane's recollections of that period. In the programme for the play, Manaka indicated that he was moving away from writing plays with structured dramatic plots. Speaking of his approach to theatre in the 1990s, Manaka said (*Yamina* Theatre Programme, 1993):

> I am not interested in a theatre that alienates through words. I don't like too many words – just enough to establish a frame of reference … music and dance tell the story. The written text is merely a guide.

In June 1994, Matsemela Manaka achieved his ambition of opening a gallery at Southgate Shopping Centre, which was located ten kilometres east of Diepkloof, where Manaka had a house. The *Sowetan* (1994c: 22) notes that, through the gallery Manaka "aims to bring art closer to township communities by removing the chasm that has existed between black people and their culture." Manaka staged an exhibition of his works as an opening to the Ekhaya Gallery. The paintings spanned the period 1976 to 1994. Two paintings are discussed in the *Sowetan*, the first titled "Rediscovery" and the second "African heritage." The reviewer sees these as "emphasising [Manaka's] passion for our people to rediscover their roots." Manaka said that the gallery was intended to attract a wide spectrum of the population. He told the *Sowetan* that "Art captures our perceptions: it is a documentation and celebration of our lifestyle to be passed on to future generations. It will be a pleasure therefore, to see our works hanging in more black households in the future."

5.5 Research from archival sources: interviews

In this section I discuss the memories of Manaka's colleagues, Ali Hlongwane, Sibongile Khumalo, McCoy Mrubata and Mostumi Makhene. I start by discussing their recollections as individuals and then discuss their collective memories of Funda Centre and provide a brief discussion of women's roles in community theatre.

5.5.1 Ali Khangela Hlongwane's memories

Along with Manaka, Ali Hlongwane was a member of the Creative Youth Association. He participated in the following plays at Funda Arts Centre: *Children of Asazi* (1980, 1984 & 1985), *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1985), *Vuka* (1986), *Toro – The African Dream* (1987) and *Five Million Souls* (1987). Hlongwane also managed student productions and coordinated the Rural Theatre Programme at the institution. He also functioned as a theatre set designer, lighting designer and stage manager. As a playwright, Hlongwane wrote *Bhambatha* (1985), which was part of the Rural Theatre Programme, and *Awakening* (1986), part of a programme called "Return to the Source," which was aimed at cultivating knowledge of Black Consciousness ideals in the African community.

All interviewees described Matsemela Manaka as a gifted artist. In theatre he was also an actor in his own plays, an artist who produced a large body of work, a poet, composer and musician. In this thesis I focus primarily on his endeavours in theatre. I interviewed Hlongwane on 12/03/2019 at the University of the Witwatersrand. In his recollections, Hlongwane attributes Manaka's output of plays to his "energy." Manaka was seized by a sense of mission as he felt that South African artists should contribute to "the struggle" against apartheid in society.

In our interview, Hlongwane spoke about Manaka's ideas. In the Halbwachscian sense, I see Hlongwane's memories as a reconstruction of the past in the context of present social circumstances. Hlongwane's memories (as was the case with other interviewees) corroborate or supplement the recollections of his colleagues. Following Halbwachs, I also conceptualise collective memory from the perspective of a social grouping, namely the collective of artists based at Funda Centre. As I regard the Funda collective as a subsection of the larger Soweto community, it appears that participating members shared certain conventions or even a "system of material symbols or signs with a well-defined meaning" (1980:183). For example, Hlongwane told me that Manaka and his band of actors addressed each other as "umAfrica," that is to say "one who belongs to the land" or even "son of the soil" in contemporary parlance. In this way the participants at the Funda arts centre linked themselves to each other, to the Soweto community and to the African continent as a whole.

Significant in Hlongwane's recollections is that his account took the form of a summation of Manaka's ideas. In speaking about the language employed in Manaka's plays, Hlogwane affirmed that the playwright emphasised the poetic form in dramatic dialogue rather than constructing dialogue to mimic realism. He says: "Matsemela tended to write like a poet and a composer and that [was prominent] in his dialogue. So, if you read a play like *Vuka*, it reads like a poem. The emphasis on ideas was quite strong."

However, Hlongwane also says that towards the end of apartheid Manaka fell into "some kind of crisis moment." He says that the late plays relied on music and less on philosophical ideas and dramatic tension to propel the story (what Hlongwane calls "weak content"). Hlongwane is adamant that the transition from apartheid to the post-apartheid era was difficult for theatre practitioners. He says Manaka (and Maishe Maponya) "had reached some kind of intellectual dry season and he was struggling to find a footing, particularly with the transition that was emerging." At this time, some theatre practitioners (including Hlongwane) ceased creative work and "got drawn into admin." Hlongwane joined the Windybrow theatre in a managerial position.

Speaking of the early days of Manaka's creativity, Hlongwane observes that "like Gibson Kente, Manaka combined being a playwright and developing his work in the rehearsal." Manaka constantly revised his scripts. At times, Manaka changed the dialogue in a play a few minutes before a performance. Says Hlongwane:

> He would come backstage and say 'hey 'mAfrica, we must change these lines and these movements…' So, as a result the plays that got published would have other versions. The unfortunate part is that many of those versions have not survived because we didn't have the concept of the archive. I had kept quite a lot of those versions. But there was a time when papers started piling up and I said, this is too much. And today I regret it. There is no way I can get that material back.

Hlongwane was not only a collaborator and colleague of Manaka's but is also very concerned about Manaka's legacy. He has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Manaka's work and understands Manaka's motivations for writing the various plays. He also has thoughts on whether these plays had the desired impact on their audiences and society. In narrating his memories, Hlongwane offered an assessment of Manaka's plays. I discuss some of his impressions below.

In *Children of Asazi*, Manaka draws on the rich history of resistance by township residents who were objecting to the resettlement of Alexandra by the apartheid-era government. There is also a biographical element here in that both Manaka and Maponya had spent their early childhood in Alexandra. Speaking of the play, Hlongwane observes that "unity was one of those themes that preoccupied Matsemela a lot. He also put a lot of emphasis on the family as [a holding vehicle of unity, which is why the young character in the play is looking for [her] parent." One of the main characters in the play, Charmaine is looking for her mother who disappeared some years back, possibly due to political violence in the township. In addition, her father is in political exile outside South Africa. Another aspect of the drama involves the romantic relationship between Charmaine and Diliza, who is the protagonist in the play. Diliza is an activist coordinating protests against apartheid era forced removals. When Charmaine gets pregnant it emerges that the couple may have the same biological mother. For some time each character seeks to establish contact with their biological parent. Fortunately, it turns out that they are not siblings. While the family drama is resolved, the political turmoil in Alexandra continues as the forced evictions do not stop.

Hlongwane suggests that it is through the search for his family's origins that the character Diliza builds a new consciousness as an activist. The theme of unity is symbolised in the drama when "a broken family" reunites (Diliza's mother is found). Hlongwane says that the play constructs a healing relationship between long lost family members to symbolise the unity of "a bigger family, which is the African nation."

Regarding *Vuka* (1981–2 & 1986), Hlongwane recalls that the version in which he appeared was "almost the third version." Hlongwane could not quite remember where the play was performed, as he said the events took place "so long ago." At one point he says, "let me remember correctly" and informs me that *Vuka* was first performed as a solo by Fats Bookholane, who was later replaced by John Ledwaba. I asked him what the play was about, as I have not been able to locate a programme for the play. The absence of a programme is unusual for Manaka's plays. Hlongwane describes the play thus:

> What did I understand *Vuka* to be about? Mmm [long silence]. Look I think was er – what is the English word? I didn't want to use the word symbolism. Because the word is not coming in my head … but it was kind of reawakening of consciousness. The main character there is supposed to have

> died but he is – not really resurrected in the Christian sense but he rises to tell his story and in the telling of that story suggests that ideas live even if you kill the body. That's what we were attempting to tell.

In the story, a young man has died and his soul wanders the earth and experiences various apartheid era scenarios. A number of theatre reviewers complained that the narrative was convoluted. Looking at photographs from the performance (*Times of Swaziland* 1985: 9), it is apparent that Manaka created iconic images onstage to distil apartheid era iniquity. There was a scene in which fellow workers discover the corpse of a young man in a mine shaft; There is also a representation of policemen wielding *sjamboks* at political demonstrators; Furthermore, there are images of students holding placards reading "away with Bantu education" standing in front of a superimposed image of a gravesite.

I can incorporate memory into a historical narrative of community theatre by considering what Halbwachs (1980: 79–81) calls "factual details." Regarding Manaka's *Vuka*, some contemporary newspaper articles are useful in this regard. For example, Garalt MacLiam (MacLiam 1986) recounts that the play was forty minutes long and was performed Downstairs at the Wits Theatre. MacLiam also points out that the play was performed as a one-man show, and that there was another version involving five actors. The production under review had three actors. In his review, Gordon Englebrecht (1986) mentions that the play was performed at the Fringe at the Edinburgh Festival "with some kind of success." Adrienne Sichel's (1986a) review provides the additional information that the actor John Ledwaba performed the original solo version of the play in Edinburgh in 1982. She also provides information on the play's Swaziland tour. The facts about the play (that is, without considering Hlongwane's recollections) represent what Halbwachs calls "a break in continuity." In this instance I would say that the break is between my (or present day society's) reading of this history and Hlongwane's (or the group that participated in the play) experiences of when he was performing in the play. Halbwachs (1980: 71–81) suggests that history functions to "bridge the gap between the past and the present." In this instance, Hlongwane is relating his memories to me in present day South Africa. His narrative brings together the past and the present and this helps us to gain a fuller (but not necessarily a complete) picture of the play.

Hlongwane confirms newspaper reports that Manaka created *Domba – The Last Dance* for teaching purposes. According to Hlongwane, Manaka often said, "we must not create boxes, or ghettos for the different art forms. The different art forms should work together so [that] in a play you'd have the role for the visual arts, for music, for movement, dance and drama." In his own words (Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre 1989) Manaka explains his creative ethos in this way:

> My involvement in various art forms is … a confirmation of the statement that 'Theatre is a totality of the arts'. I started as a painter. Because there were and there is still no art galleries or exhibition spaces in the black residential areas, the stage became an exhibition space for my paintings. Together with the Creative Youth Association, we created a play with an art exposition on stage.

Judging from the programme, it seems that Manaka saw the production as one large symphonic composition in which elements of dance were juxtaposed with words and music to match the Venda traditional dance sequences. In her review, Adrienne Sichel (1986b) said that Manaka succeeded in creating an "authentic" theatrical experience.

Siza was performed at the University of Durban Westville Cultural Festival in 1987 or 1988 (the programme is undated). The play was workshopped by Manaka and the cast. It was directed by Raymond Hlongwane. The programme (University of Durban-Westville SRC n.d.: 11) describes the play thus:

> This production is based on the concept of self-reliance. An exploited furniture worker decides to join a union and becomes aware of the exploitation. It answers the question of how one can create employment for oneself. The substance of the play is the celebration of African culture.

Hlongwane points out that for Manaka, culture and politics were intertwined. In the production's programme , Manaka wrote, "*Siza* means help. It is created with the aim of providing a forum for discussing issues that confront the rural community and how such communities could initiate self-help projects." Hlongwane did not immediately recall the finer details of the play. Eileen O'Carroll (1987) (no page number available) said that it was "a charming one act play" and classified it as "grassroots theatre" on the basis that it was "designed for rural communities." While O'Carroll emphasised the comedic elements of the play, the *Sowetan* (Metsoamere 1987c) emphasised the dramatic elements, which, as Metsoamere reports, involved the exploitation and degradation of a street trader. The

theme of the play was captured in the dialogue: “you can help yourself and your brothers with your own hands. Your hands are your means of survival.”

Multilingualism was common in community theatre, therefore South African theatre reviewers did not comment on it, while an international theatre review (Foss 1988) highlighted the use of isiZulu, se Sotho and isiXhosa. Foss also observed what he surmised as African story-telling techniques (he does not outline these elements). In a discussion with Foss, Hlongwane (who was a cast member when the play was performed in New York) talks about the reception of the play in South Africa and says that rural audiences were reluctant to participate in the play when there was singing of “freedom songs.” In contrast, audiences in urban areas readily demonstrated their support when anti-apartheid messages were expressed onstage.

In a programme for a performance held at the Market Theatre, Matsemela Manaka described *Toro – The African Dream* as “a search of self.” The play tells the story of two male characters who are confined inside a house somewhere in South Africa. The pair, who are said to be “paranoid” yearn to leave South Africa and join the anti-apartheid liberation movements outside the country. Dance, music, mime and poetry are used to portray the vision (or dream) of an independent South Africa. The play suggests that “the African dream will be realised if we unite in struggle,” as stated in the programme. Hlongwane notes that Manaka used the term “struggle” to promote artistic protest and did not encourage military action against apartheid.

Dramfes was a Funda Centre initiative in which various playwrights contributed plays for a weekend event. In Hlogwane’s private archive are theatre programmes from 1980 and 1986. Conceived as “theatre of the people, by the people,” the organisers stated that they wanted art to “arouse emotions [because] unless thought and emotion are aroused [a creative expression] cannot be classified as a work of art.” In their manifesto the organisers said that they wanted to produce “theatre with a purpose” in which drama would “stimulate” the consciousness of the individual. They declared that good drama would motivate Africans to protest against oppressive socio-political forces. Their view was that “Black theatre” should facilitate the “psychological liberation of the mind.” To serve this purpose, drama should make the individual “angry and boil your soul propelling you to do something about the evils that exist in life.” They wanted to produce an

"uncompromising theatre of truth and naked facts. Nothing else but life in the past, present and future."

Manaka and Maponya participated in the programme as did Mzwakhe Mbuli, later known as "the people's poet". Hlongwane remembers performances of Manaka's *Vuka* and *Toro – The African Dream*, Zakes Mda's *The Road*, as well as Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*. The theatre festival was also open to dance groups based in Soweto. Other playwrights who participated include Boikie Mohlamme, Grace Senne, Sam Mhangwane, Jerry Raletebele and Peter Ngwenya. *Dramfes* was not a provincial festival as at times playwrights from the Cape participated, as did drama and poetry groups from Nyanga, Uitenhage and New Brighton and parts of the Transvaal. Poems were also included in the programme and some were performed to musical accompaniment.

Looking back, Hlongwane says that the Rural Theatre Project was "the most exciting engagement" they embarked on as a collective at Funda Centre. The project involved drama tutors identifying and staying with rural communities. In 1985 a theatre festival was held at the Funda Centre, at which all the rural theatre projects for that year were performed. There were projects from Driefontein (directed by Ali Hlongwane), Swaziland (directed by Kenneth Nkwenyane) and Mafeking (directed by Walter Chakela).

Hlongwane's play was entitled *Bhambatha*[35] and was also performed occasionally at other venues between 1985 and 1987. In the rural theatre programme, a director chose a rural community and went to live there for at least three months while developing a play. The director and community jointly identified social issues that were "troubling the community" and developed a play in a workshop. Hlongwane says that "instead of sitting around and discussing" these issues, the community were encouraged to enact them in order to devise solutions. The play was produced during the State of Emergency in 1985,[36] and at that stage the community faced threats of forced removals from authorities. Hlongwane says that "we had to negotiate our work with school kids and work with the local community." He remembers that the play drew on historical events initiated by

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[35] In 1906 Bhambatha kaMancinza led a rebellion against British rule and taxation in the Colony of Natal. See Worden (2012) for a comprehensive history of the rebellion.
[36] A State of Emergency was declared in 1985 and in 1987.

Bambatha ka Mancinza to tell a contemporary story on the threat of forced removals, which the community was facing.

5.5.2 Sibongile Khumalo's memories

Sibongile Khumalo is a distinguished South African singer working in jazz and classical genres. She worked with Manaka on *Toro – The African Dream* (1987) and on *Goree* (1989). She was also recruited by Manaka to work as a coordinator at the Funda Arts Centre. I had a telephonic interview with her on 16/05/2019.

During our discussion, she tended to refine and refashion her answers on her Funda Centre experiences. She mentioned several times that the events happened "a long time ago." She often used the phrase "I'll remember, I'll remember" as a memory aid.

Khumalo says that she had a "small cameo role" in *Toro – The African Dream*. Adding to the information in the *Sowetan* (1987) and in Davis (1997), and the recollections of Hlongwane, Khumalo recalls that she had few lines of dialogue towards the end of the play. She says that she often stumbled on these, but that Manaka was happy when an actor conveyed the sentiments of the character within a scene, rather than strictly adhering to a script. She noted that Manaka worked in an "organic" and collaborative way with actors.

After *Toro*, Khumalo was cast in a substantial role in Manaka's *Goree* (1989). Khumalo recalls that:

> Goree [island] fascinated Matsemela no end. That's how *Goree* was born. Nomsa [Manaka] also had her own impressions and perceptions about how *Goree* affected her when they went to visit the island. The storyline was based around the journey of a young woman called Nomsa who goes to Goree. Nomsa [the character] is a dancer who has studied modern dance and a bit of ballet and so on. She ends up in Goree and suddenly ... I guess the phrase would be 'I have found myself'. Or she finds her self-expression by learning about dances from Goree/Senegal and broadly finding out about African dance.

Goree was declared a "memory island" by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). This organisation noted that the island cultivated an appeal to a "universal conscience" against the dehumanisation and lasting effects of the slave trade. In the play, Manaka uses the geographical space as a starting point in telling

a story, appealing to South Africans to rediscover their African roots. In the Halbwachsian (1980: 58–129) sense, Manaka as a playwright recognised that the collective memory of African people is represented in part by the concepts about the island they hold in their minds.

For Khumalo, Goree island is part of an expansive memory that includes the play and its author. Extrapolating from Halbwachs' theory, I surmise that the memory of the play, which was performed in 1989 and 2004, is also embedded in the recollections of people who attended the performances of this play at Funda Centre and the Market Theatre. This is a practical demonstration of how collective memory can be sustained across generations. The memory of the slave trade (and the long-term effects of racial inequality) is not limited to the physical space of Goree but has become embedded in public consciousness. Memory not only filters through personal conversations, as in the one I had with Khumalo, but also into present day discourse on migration and into the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States in 2021. In this way, collective memory allows the writing of a richer history of Sowetan community theatre and helps us to recognise the importance of Manaka's contribution to this theatre.

5.5.3 McCoy Mrubata's memories

McCoy Mrubata is one of South Africa's most respected jazz saxophonists. Manaka loved jazz music, and he invited Mrubata to join *Yamina* (1993) as an instrumentalist. Mrubata also performed in Manaka's *Drums and Dreams* (1994). The band and the cast met regularly at Manaka's house in Diepkloof, Soweto, and in Bophuthatswana, where they recorded some of the music from both plays at Bop Recording Studios. Bophuthatswana was officially designated a Homeland under apartheid, which meant that the South African government declared it a nominally self-governing territory between 1977 and 1994. I conducted a telephonic interview with Mrubata on 19/03/2019.

I use the words "dramatic productions" to describe Manaka's output, rather than classifying *Yamina*[37] and *Drums and Dreams* as fully realised plays. *Yamina* received

[37] Manaka referred to *Yamina* as a "show" (Vinassa 1993).

positive newspaper reviews for its innovative dramatic structure and its use of technology and music to address Aids as a theme in a dramatic narrative. But both plays were criticised by newspaper reviewers for weak dramatic structure.

In his defence, Manaka did not see his plays of the 1990s as falling within a periodisation of apartheid and post-apartheid eras. Speaking about *Yamina,* he said that the "issues I raise will still be raised in the post-apartheid situation" (*New Nation* 1993). He added that "Each time I write, I write beyond the trappings of apartheid. I believe in the kind of theatre that can stand the test of time, that can still have relevance and raise issues that are topical." Observing the meagre audiences attending performances of "serious theatre," Manaka was not positive about the future of South African (community) theatre. He called for good scripts and good theatrical productions. He added, "I have a belief that people are willing to go out of their homes to the theatre if they believe the work is good" (Vinassa 1993). He summed up his belief by saying that "as a dramatist, you must always search for new forms of how to say things." He (Vinassa 1993) described *Yamina* in this manner:

> The show is not about Aids, I use it as a metaphor … our freedom is already HIV-positive already. We must never fool ourselves into thinking that it will be nice when we have a black government. The struggle will be more difficult…

By 1993 Africans had been living in so-called "whites only" area of Hillbrow since the mid-1980s as the Pass Laws[38] had been repealed following public disobedience of the law. Manaka chose the setting deliberately as he said, "Hillbrow is one of the most populous multiracial areas in South Africa … [and] it is not so much a place of decadence. There are clear-minded and self-respecting people among the prostitutes and so-called degenerates here" (Metsoamere, 1993: 12). In the play he wanted to celebrate the inhabitants of Hillbrow and to celebrate them as an example of multiculturalism, which he believed was a positive development for South Africa. Most significantly, he told Andrea Vinassa that *Yamina* was

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[38] The *Abolition of Influx Control Act No. 68 of 1986* allowed for the limited repeal of segregationist laws during aparthied (South Africa 1986).

> also inspired by the myth about the cultural differences between black and white people living together in mixed neighbourhoods. Sometimes we get so obsessed by the race issue we forget that certain cultural practices have nothing to do with race.

Generally, in all the reviews I read the authors profess to have enjoyed the play because it featured excellent performances, good music and broke away from a traditional play structure. It was not structured as a chronological narrative with a beginning, middle and end. Rather, the story was divided into brief scenes expanding into larger acts. Garalt MacLiam went as far as to say that the format of the production "defies description within the traditional theatrical structures, but it is entertaining for the most part." Charl Blignaut (1993) wrote that the story (Yamina's interaction with the radio presenter) and theme (HIV/Aids) were "stretched too thin" and were "awkwardly developed." Raeford Daniel (1993) identified a "freewheeling narrative style" which gave way to numerous listenable interludes from a talented jazz quintet" and "some virtuoso cameo performances." Daniel also contrasted "a succession of highly diverting digressions" with the character Yamina's impactful dance sequences. MacLiam explains that during the course of the play, residents from a block of flats in Hillbrow "act out vignettes of their life styles.". The stage set was constructed as if it had "working balconies" from which the actors performed these diverse characters.

I asked Mrubata about the rehearsal process when putting on the productions and whether he remembers the story line of *Yamina*. He responded that "to be honest I do not know," which highlights the notion that memory is not infallible and that participating in an event does not mean that you will necessarily remember it. He guessed that the rehearsal for *Yamina* took place "over a week." Later he said that "two weeks or more" were allocated to rehearsals.

Collective memory acts as a link between various sources (inter alia the archive) that can be used to analyse a play and to write a narrative of the past. As regards *Yamina*, the file from Pact's[39] archives contains a programme of the play that provides information about the actors and the production team, together with photographs from the play. It also includes a poster and information on the prevalence of HIV/Aids in South Africa. In 1992,

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[39] The Performing Arts Council Transvaal, which staged the production. The Pact Archive is now housed in the Unisa library archive.

Johannesburg and Soweto had the highest numbers of infections and Aids-related deaths in the country. Along with a short biography on Manaka, there is also a timeline of apartheid era legislation, namely the Immorality Act, Group Areas Act, Pass Laws and other related laws. Also included in the file are a stage manager's report, production costs and correspondence.

The information above illustrates the importance of the archive as a source; even though there is no script and that the playwright has since passed away, researchers are able to analyse the themes in the play, the audience response (from newspaper reviews) and the context in which the play was produced. As an aspect of collective memory, the archive forms a dialogue with the interviewees, in this instance Mrubata. By the same token, the written text is also not infallible, as Mrubata's name is not included in the archive. Spoken memory reveals that Mrubata joined the play after initial rehearsals had begun.

Mrubata says that *Drums and Dreams*, was "more about music than it was about acting." Indeed, Metsoamere (Metsoamere 1994b: 21) found that in *Drums and Dreams*, the use of painting, music, drama and poetry was an unsatisfactory substitute for a narrative. In addition to playing himself, Manaka recruited Carly Molepe and Jethro Shasha, a Zimbabwean drummer, to be part of the production. Mrubata recalls that South Africa welcomed musicians from other parts of Africa. Indeed, in the early 1990s, the country was enriched by artists from the continent, giving South Africans an opportunity to reintegrate into a multitude of African cultures, having been shunned during apartheid. He concludes his recollections of Manaka by saying that Kente and Manaka "conscientised the masses. In fact, there was awareness about stuff [socio-political issues] through their plays and music. It played an important role in showing the people what was happening in our lives."

5.5.4 Motsumi Makhene's memories

Mostumi Makhene was a coordinator at the Madimba Institute of African Music at Funda Arts Centre. He collaborated with Manaka on the following projects: *Koma* (1988), *Goree*

(1989), *Blues Afrika Café* (1990) and *Lukutshon' Ilanga*, (1995). I conducted an interview with him on 29/11/2016 at the Funda Centre.

Makhene recalls that Manaka acknowledged the contribution of Gibson Kente and Sam Mhangwane to black theatre as these playwrights developed a touring circuit in the townships. At the same time, Makhene is adamant that Manaka was "critical of Kente" as he saw his plays as politically conservative.[40] He says Manaka held "more radical" political and ideological beliefs. Makhene observes that "Gibson Kente was more mature and professionally qualified." However, he holds that Kente "set up a commercial enterprise in Soweto" and did not ascribe to artistic and altruistic values. He offers another opinion that township arts as "a commercial enterprise had a lot of challenges." The arts "from the business point of view have always been dominated by the Market Theatre." He adds: "Matsemela's fire was about 'why can't we create parallel black-owned theatre companies in the township to compete and cooperate with the theatre in Johannesburg?".

Makhene reports that Manaka was critical of the term "community theatre" when applied to his plays. He suggests that Manaka's colleagues at Funda Art Centre objected to the term because it implied that theatre produced in the township was inferior to plays produced in the city centre. As a theatre institution, Soyikwa wanted to differentiate itself from other township playwrights, which is why it developed a comprehensive training programme for its students. Its reticence to use the term was that, for Soyikwa "community theatre" implied that the directors, actors and playwrights were untrained. Therefore, Manaka wanted to "go beyond community theatre," says Makhene.

He notes that there was "a perspective of liberal theatre activists who pushed a particular line of using the arts as an instrument of political resistance." By this he means that Manaka was against the idea that his plays were created solely to resist apartheid. In creating his theatre, Manaka wanted to discredit expectations that black theatre should be seen solely as an instrument to oppose apartheid. In addition, Manaka was also "very vocal in his opposition to CASA." *Culture in Another South Africa* was a pre-democracy conference held in Amsterdam in 1987. In it the banned African National Congress (ANC)

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[40] With the benefit of hindsight, it seems that there were more parallels than differences between Manaka and Kente. Both playwrights were committed to black economic self-sufficiency and both felt it imperative to advance black youth. Subconsciously borrowing Kente's terminology, Makhene also speaks of how at Funda they aimed to uplift "the black child."

(then based in Lusaka) held discussions with black and white arts practitioners. It was a wide ranging gathering that included practitioners of various art forms. Participating were South African-based artists as well as those working in exile. The conference was organised by the Anti-Apartheid Movement Netherlands. It proposed ideas on how to structure a non-racialised arts sector in a future, democratic-era South Africa. In opposition to this, Makhene, Manaka and Maponya argued that democratic era arts policy should have an Afrocentric imperative and exclude an internationalist outlook. Manaka and Maponya did not attend the conference.

5.5.5 Memories of Funda Arts Centre

The Funda Centre was developed with funding from the Urban Foundation (Funda Arts Centre 1984). At its inauguration, J.H. Steyn, the executive director of the Foundation, envisaged that the centre would enrich the Soweto community by hosting lectures, plays, discussions and exhibitions. Es'kia Mphahlele, the chairman of the board of directors, saw it "as a physical place where various interest groups can mould and generate creative ideas" in education. The brochure outlines a comprehensive programme for formal and non-formal education in the arts and sciences. Noticeably, there was a multi-purpose auditorium, which would be used to host conferences as well as exhibitions, films and plays. There was also a dedicated Arts Centre (Funda Arts Centre 1986) and Manaka was appointed as its coordinator. He created the Soyikwa Institute of African theatre to fulfil the following mandate:

> The institute believes in positive art, theatre or purpose, communal theatre, theatre of survival and liberation and indigenous African theatre that is original and relevant. It also aims at uplifting and motivating the interests of the Black youth in dramatic arts and provides professional dramatists with opportunities in all aspects of theatre.

Theatre programmes and newspaper articles record that Motsumi Makhene and Sibongile Khumalo were directing the music programmes at Funda, while Matsemela Manaka was responsible for theatre studies and training. However, excluded from the written historical narrative is that Ellington Mazibuko and Jackie Semela (who later formed the Soweto Dance Theatre at the DOCC) had been responsible for dance before Nomsa

Manaka assumed a leadership position in dance. In their recollections, the interviewees stressed that they saw Funda as a centre for promoting black intellectuals. Hlongwane adds:

> There was a lot of emphasis on reading at Funda. People like the Professor Mphahlele were arguing that you don't only have to be good at the craft, but [that] you need to be able to theorise as to why you are doing the work that you are doing. To such an extent that they introduced English as part of the course which was taught by Mphahlele. The idea was that a lot of young people [had] dropped out from Matric [and] were unable to engage with the material because they didn't have the command of the language.

Khumalo says that audiences appreciated Manaka's plays for expressing intellectual ideas and pa positive message about Africa. Some people would come and see their plays a number of times. She says that in the early 1990s,

> people were looking for hope. People were looking for something to relate to. People were looking for something that reflected themselves and their reality and how they understood or how they saw themselves. While the audiences were not great – [it was a discerning audience]. We had reasonable houses at Funda. People were extremely appreciative of what we were doing. Even if *Lakuthson' Ilanga* for instance started with a small audience, it ended up with a fairly decent one. The word would spread. *Abantu betshelena, bebizana, beyi phinda*.

5.5.6 The role of women in community theatre

In contrast to Gibson Kente's plays, the actors in Matsemela Manaka's (as well as Maishe Maponya's) plays were predominantly male and even some women's roles were played by men. I asked Hlongwane about the decidedly masculine nature of their community plays. He responded that the relative invisibility of women was,

> partly because we did not create an enabling environment for them to be both women and artists. The same challenges that women are still grappling with today. They also needed space to have children and still be part of the work and that was seen as an inconvenience. In the end … even our notion of women's liberation was still very suspect, and we found it easy to then have a man playing the part of a woman.

Hlongwane also adds that Manaka was cognisant of this shortcoming and attempted to balance the gender scales. For example, in *Children of Asazi* Fumane Kokome played the leading female role. In the second version of the play (1980), Soentjie Thapedi had a

leading role. In latter plays, for example *Goree*, Nomsa Manaka and Sibongile Khumalo had leading roles.

In an interview, Manaka (*Sowetan* 1982) decried the absence of a women's township based theatre group. He said:

> We don't have more than five dedicated black actresses. We need a lot of ladies dedicated to the theatre, such as Thoko Nthsinga and Nomsa Nene. A number of people often ask me why we never have female actors in our productions. It is a difficult question to answer. But without sounding like an expert on women's issues, I would say there is a need for a female theatre group.

Speaking in 1982, Manaka observed that female actors in community theatre were overshadowed by men, as Hlongwane confirms. In the interview, Manaka mentions that "various reasons," perhaps originating in cultural expectations, were hampering the development of black female actors. He notes that *Pula* (1982) called for a female character to give birth and look after her child. He said that in the end Manaka cast a male actor in the role instead. He notes that community plays "needed to reflect the plight of black women" and casting men in women's roles was not a good artistic choice. He says "who are we to talk about the pains of giving birth? We can only imagine them."

Khumalo observes that:

> The narrative of women's issues or women's rights was not as strong as they are now. It's not that women were not present. But we were not consciously advocating for women's rights. We were doing what we needed to do as women, as part of a broader narrative of liberation, of freedom [from apartheid]. I was not a freedom fighter, I was not an activist, but one did the work that one needed to do to deal with the issues of the day, to address politics the way I understood them.

Khumalo says that there were no female role models in the theatre. Nevertheless, she says that "subliminal messages" of female strength were passed on to her by women in society. She stresses that she was supported in her family and was not prevented from doing anything "just because you are a girl." She mentions the author Ellen Khuzwayo and businesswoman Marina Maponya as being among prominent women who presented "a gentle, graceful, elegant – but very strong" vision of what a woman should be.[41]

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[41] Here I can point out that in the 1980s and onwards there were several women involved in workers' unions, civic organisations and political formations in Soweto.

5.6 Manaka's influence on township playwrights

In 1984 Funda Arts Centre invited Sipho Sepamla, the director of FUBA to participate in a conference "Teaching of the arts in the black community". Makhaya (*Sowetan* 1984k: 8) noted that at the conference ways of providing a comprehensive arts training programme in the city of Johannesburg were discussed. This was one way to encourage the youth to participate in the arts.

Thabiso Leshoai (1985b: 9) reports that the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre invited township groups to perform at its premises in February 1985. One of the groups that responded was the Busang Drama Group, which presented a play entitled *Black Nighted* by Matsemela Manaka, which I was not aware of before reading Leshoai's report. The group also performed *Naked Truth,* which was written and directed by Gamakhulu Diniso. This play was produced by Gcina Mhlophe, a respected actor who originally played the leading role in Maishe Maponya's play, *Umongikazi* (1982). Funda Centre also hosted a production of Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. Acting in the production were Paul Leruli and Jeremiah Mofokeng, who were students at the University of the Witwatersrand. Interestingly, in 2004 Mofokeng directed a revival of Manaka's *Goree* at the Market Theatre.

Thabiso Leshoai (1985c: 20) notes that artists from the Funda Arts Centre were part of a "United States – South Africa leadership exchange programme" in 1985. The US embassy initiated an "Incentive programme" to support black artists in creating works for an exhibition in honour of the sculptor Sydney Khumalo. As part of the programme Khumalo and David Koloane (a fine artist) conducted workshops with students from FUBA, where an exhibition was held from 15 March. Afterwards, three artists were chosen to exhibit at the Triangle Arts Workshop in New York.

Job Kubatsi, who had been an acting student at Funda, appeared in *Dark Voices Ring* and *Dead End* at the theatre in 1987 (unfortunately, no other information is available). Also in 1987, Makhaya (1987e: 8) notes that *Five Million Souls,*[42] which was

[42] The play was a tribute to African refugees fleeing areas of conflict. It was directed by filmmaker Ray "Mzizi" Hlophe who was also head drama tutor at Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre.

an adaptation of his poems into a play format, was performed at Funda. Black Consciousness poet and author Ingoapele Madingoane inspired Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya and several township poets to become full time artists. Madingoane composed earthy, melodious poems that invoked the ancestral spirit of Africans to promote self-reliance among black youth.

5.7 Conclusion

A historical study on Manaka may be composed according to the narratives developed by Wakashe (1986), Peterson (1990) and Davis (1997). This kind of study has positive elements in that it helps to construct a chronology of past events. In this narrative, the writers above also analysed Manaka's output in order to give an account of the way he incorporated music, art and dance, as well as the manifestation of Black Consciousness ideology in his plays. Although this establishes a foundation for the recollections of Manaka's plays, it largely ignores interpretations and observations by the people who lived in Soweto.

Writing about the early days of Manaka's evolution as a playwright, Wakashe points to the effectiveness of Manaka's *eGoli* in expressing the manner in which Africans protested against apartheid. Peterson describes the theme of *eGoli* from the perspective of the working class. He writes that the play is a "typical example of black theatre which attempted to foreground the struggles of black [mine] workers" (1990b: 324). Davis provides a historical interpretation of Manaka's plays from 1977 to 1989 and published scripts of five of his plays. All three writers assess Manaka's plays through the prism of the objectives of black consciousness: "self-definition, solidarity, determination and liberation" (Peterson 1990b: 322).

Davis explains that Manaka's plays capitalised on demonstrating the damaging effects of apartheid to an international audience. For example, he relates that *eGoli* made a significant impact on audiences in Germany and in the Netherlands. A Dutch production of *eGoli* in 1984 communicated an anti-apartheid message so effectively that it was included in a campaign lobbying for economic sanctions against South Africa (1997: 7). Similarly, *Blues Afrika Cafe* was staged in London and was received positively. *Children*

of Asazi was performed in New York as part of the *WOZA Afrika* festival, which included plays by Maishe Maponya and Mbongeni Ngema. These performances attracted the attention of the public and the media , and contributed to providing "an overview of contemporary South African theatre, mainly by blacks" (Ndlovu 1986: 8).

Davis' thesis is that the performance of Manaka's plays in Europe, where theatres were well-resourced and where he saw well-crafted dramas, contributed to his artistic development. Davis (1997: 7) adds that Manaka's international tours heightened his interest in European experimental theatre. He (1998:8–9) cites Brecht and Grotowski as influences on Manaka and suggests that Manaka's European tours led him to adopt a more experimental theatrical language. For example, *Domba – The Last Dance* (1986) is loosely structured as a series of unfolding events as opposed to a narrative with a beginning, a middle and an end. At the same time, the production had a "more pronounced African orientation" in that it celebrated indigenous African knowledge through Tshi Venda culture (dance and music). Davis also sees *Siza* (1988) as experimental production in the European theatre tradition because it allowed actors to improvise during the performance of the play. The 1987 version of *Toro – The African Dream* is in the same experimentalist category as *Siza* in that it assumed the form of a collage of "drama, dance, music, mime and poetry" to represent African culture. Davis (1997: 9) argues it leant towards a European dramatic format in that two characters were expressive in a way that avoided a linear narrative, which was similar to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Furthermore, Davis sees the story of *Goree* (1989) as adopting surrealist elements, particularly the representation of the character Oba. In the play, this character has the same mystical powers as a Boabab tree that lives for centuries. Davis argues that despite the play being an examination of the negative impact of colonialism on African culture, Manaka's theatrical language contained "many symbolic elements." In this reading, the characterisation of Oba is expressed in a Western style as opposed to that of an indigenous South African theatrical language.

The *Sowetan* was an informative source that gave an account of Manaka's contribution to Sowetan community theatre, since it offered the perspective of writers living in the township. In their reviews of Manaka's plays, Elliot Makhaya and Victor Metsoamere tended to show how they explored relationships of solidarity among Africans.

For example, in accounting for the mother-daughter relationship (the characters Oba and Nomsa) in *Goree*, Metsoamere's (1989e) observations are that Manaka represented an enduring spiritual connection between two Africans who had never met each other before. His analysis reflects the prevailing discourse (in the late 1980s and early 1990s) articulating a desire for fraternal unity among Africans with the end of apartheid. Regarding *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto*, Makhaya (1992a: 35) also stresses that mutually supportive social interaction was important for township residents. He quotes Manaka, who said that "it is important for an artist to remember that he is part of a community." Metsoamere's (1991c) review of *Ekhaya – Museum over Soweto* also suggests that Africans need to nurture positive mutual regard to assert an African-centred development for the continent.

Research on Matsemala Manaka has revealed a corpus of theatre programmes, concept documents, reports, posters and miscellaneous documents on the playwright. The latter include funding applications and reports to donors, press releases and newspaper cuttings as well as curriculum vitae of dramatists associated with Soyikwa. This is because Manaka purposefully aimed to develop an archival tradition at Funda Arts Centre. The collection belongs to Ali Khangela Hlongwane, whom I interviewed on 12/03/2019 at the University of the Witwatersrand. Programmes included those for *Imbumba* (1979), *Pula* (1982), *Koma* (1986), *Domba – The Last Dance* (1986), *Toro – The African Dream* (1987), *Blues Afrika Café* (1990) and *Yamina* (1993). There are also theatre programmes for *Dramfes* (1980 & 1986), which was staged in Soweto, and for *Woza Afrika* (1986), which was performed in New York, and programmes for various drama productions staged by Soyikwa students and teaching staff in the 1980s. There are several information booklets on the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre in the collection. One pamphlet indicates that Soyikwa had a wide scope in its theatre training programme, as it included training in workshop methodology, an approach to creating theatre in rural areas, Wole Soyinka's drama, as well as lectures on understanding Shakespearean drama. In the majority of instances these documents are undated, and therefore required input from interviewees or even, in some cases, an educated guess on how each document fitted into a chronological narrative of the history of Sowetan theatre.

There are similar programmes for the dance, music and arts programmes at Funda Arts Centre.

As in the case of Maishe Maponya, Manaka was part of civic initiatives within the arts community. Included are a programme on a seminar titled Black Artists Unite, which was held in Soweto in 1988 to discuss a campaign calling for international artists to participate in an anti-apartheid boycott of the South African government. Manaka was also interested in the development of an Afrocentric curriculum for the teaching of all arts disciplines, and was also part of the organising committee foe Art In Motion (Artimo), which was a society for African artists. An information pamphlet outlining the activities of Artimo is included in the archive. This rich store of information requires a full inventory and promises further research opportunities on Sowetan community theatre.

The interviewees' recollections of Manaka's oeuvre addressed various aspects of his work. Hlongwane and Makhene used the context of black consciousness to review the past. Hlongwane emphasised the philosophical content of Manaka's plays, while Makhene spoke of Funda Centre in the socio-political context of Soweto. Khumalo spoke of Manaka as an artist and indicated that he aimed to capture a sense of spirituality through the combination of African music, dance and words in his plays. It appears that *Goree* represents Manaka's highest achievement, in which he fused Black Consciousness' notion of nationalistic self-reliance with articulating the importance of African spirituality. My observation comes from synthesizing the contributions from the archives and from interviewees who regarded Manaka not simply as a solitary playwright reaching out to the black community; his compatriots (at Funda Centre, the *Sowetan* and Soweto residents) regarded his plays as of a collective using theatre to empower Africans spiritually and to oppose apartheid. Halbwachs (1980: 51–81) speaks of a "national society" in which the memory of an individual person is linked to his/her wider societal impact as well as his place in national history. To illustrate this point: in collective memory *Goree* serves as a catalyst for memories of the subjugation of blacks not only by the people who participated in and saw the play, but also the wider Soweto community. Halbwachs (1980: 94) wrote of memories of individuals invoking one another's recollections.

CHAPTER 6:
MAISHE MAPONYA

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed Matsemela Manaka's contribution to the development of Sowetan community theatre. In this chapter I discuss Maishe Maponya's contribution in order to show that memory studies can assist in the writing of a more comprehensive history of Sowetan community theatre. I refer to writings on Maponya to contextualise his place in the development of Sowetan community theatre. I proceed by drawing on archival sources and interviews that I conducted.

6.2 Writings on Maponya

I start by referring to earlier research studies on Maponya, looking at studies conducted during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. In 1984, Carola Luther and Maishe Maponya published a paper, "Problems and possibilities: A discussion on the making of alternative theatre in South Africa"(1984). The writers state that black playwrights could be categorised as falling within into the category of "alternative theatre." They regard plays performed by the Performing Arts Councils as representing the canon of mainstream South African theatre during apartheid. Maponya (1984: 19–20) made the point that Black Consciousness playwrights were denied performance venues and financial support because of the apartheid funding policy but also because the "liberal" business sector dismissed him and Manaka on the grounds that their work was "not seen to be a good business proposition." Maponya believed that the business sector was complicit with the apartheid state, therefore excluding anti-capitalist black playwrights because they challenged racial inequality and the class stratification of the black community (for example *The Hungry Earth* implicated mining companies in the oppression of black people). Maponya said another limitation of "alternative theatre" was the lack of African-centred training for playwrights, directors and actors. Maponya felt that even though alternative theatre practitioners were against apartheid, as white people they had social and economic privileges.

Interestingly, Maponya also points out that it was not economically viable to stage his type of theatre in Soweto. He refers to the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) as an example, saying that the costs of hiring the venue could not be recouped because of low audience numbers (1984: 24). He points to audience apathy towards serious theatre plays and media disinterest in "committed African playwrights." He also criticises Kente for being "a shrewd businessmen" who had the monopoly in Soweto and other townships (1984: 25–26) as he saw Kente as being undeservedly supported by audiences and the media. One positive aspect of his critique on South African theatre was that being excluded from the mainstream allowed his productions to be "more universal" as they were not created for consumption by a specific racial or social group. This allowed him to stage *Umongikazi* (1983) (and other plays) at the Market Theatre, even though he says white patrons criticised his representation of medical staff as racist in the play. This critique from the audience did not diminish his resolution to use theatre to resist apartheid. His (1984: 31–32) ethos has always been that:

> Politics and art cannot be separated, especially here in South Africa. So the work done at the moment [the 1980s] by African artists can hardly be called art for art's sake. It is always connected with education, apartheid and labour. My work is always researched, and deals with immediate and relevant issues.

In 1993, Stephen Gray wrote an article, "Problems of compiling a collection of plays of the 1980s" (1993) in which he includes Maponya's work in a list of plays that articulate an indigenous South African theatrical style. Among playwrights that achieved this distinction are Athol Fugard, Mbongeni Ngema, Paul Slabolepsky, Guy Butler, Pieter-Dirk Uys, Deon Opperman, James Whylie and Sue-Pam Grant. All these playwrights included themes that challenged the discourse by the state that gave the impression that there was a hegemonic white society, which supposedly had common conservative beliefs on racial hierarchies and adhered to conformist religious values. Gray chose *The Hungry Earth* (1979) as an example and said that when performed it was "breath-taking. Its essential metaphor illustrates what may be achieved when performers (the phrase of the day was 'cultural workers') come together with a joint purpose."

A Master's dissertation, "The notion of commitment in selected works of Maishe Maponya" (Moorosi 1997) analyses *The Hungry Earth* (1978), *Gangsters* (1984) and *Jika*

(1986) to elucidate the meaning of “commitment” in drama. Moorosi argues that in Marxist terms, these plays may be regarded as a “weapon for liberation of the oppressed masses” (1997: 1). Moorosi also considers how an "Africanist sociological perspective on art and literature” influenced Maponya and how the plays “can be constituted as Literature of Commitment.” In this approach to theatre, the dramatist has a role to “conscientise the society of its problems and inspire them to fight against economic exploitation, political oppression and racial discrimination” (1997: 6). In summary, this form of theatre indicates a commitment to an agenda defined by the playwright. Indeed, included in Maponya’s vision were visceral statements of resistance against apartheid. The depiction of the lives of miners in *The Hungry Earth* conscientises the people of South Africa and serves to encourage all the working classes (or Africans) to oppose apartheid. In portraying the harsh living conditions that the miners face, Maponya simultaneously makes Africans aware of racial iniquity and also motivates the audience to oppose apartheid (Maponya 1995: 53). This analysis is supported by the way that Maponya incorporates poetry and song in the dialogue to issue a direct call to audiences to show their opposition to apartheid (Maponya 1995: 57). For example, a line reads: “Stand up and get to battle / Where our brothers die in numbers” (1995: 57).

In *Gangsters* Maponya aimed to expose the violent tactics applied by the state to suppress opposition from anti-apartheid activists (1995: 121). The play dramatises the death of Steve Biko in police custody and urges Africans to confront state oppression. The character Rasechaba (a poet in police custody) is intended to communicate Biko’s ideas of Black Consciousness, which were banned by the government during aparthied. Maponya circumvented government strictures by presenting Black Consciousness ideas as part of the fictional world in the play. Similarly *Jika* adopts this strategy of conscientisation as well as issuing an injunction for anti-apartheid action (1995: 120). This observation is supported by the fact that *Jika* shifts the site of oppression and resistance from the mining compound to the school because in the 1970s students were at the forefront of agitating against apartheid. In the play, students are arrested for opposing the state, but they remain steadfast in their commitment to opposing what they see as an unjust ideology.

In “The number of girls is growing – an interview with Gcina Mhlophe” Dennis Walder (1999) reports that Mhlophe was approached by Maponya to appear in *Umongikazi* (1983). The play dramatises the life experiences of black medical staff in a fictional township hospital during apartheid. They are protesting their lack of professional recognition, and demanding what their white colleagues recieve. This play followed the internationally recognised *The Hungry Earth*, a play that successfully communicated an anti-aparthied message on international platforms. Mhlophe reveals that Maponya did not have a formal training method. She notes (Walder 1999: 32):

> we just rehearsed. He directed, did the lights, told me where to stand, and things like that. We went to Baragwanath Hospital and talked to the nurses there, so I got a sense of the character, I didn't want just to say the lines. The last week of rehearsal was at the Market and we did a technical run and I got a sense of how big the stage is, where the spotlight is. I never thought of that before.

In “Private trauma, public drama: Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona's *The Island* and Maponya's *Gangsters*” (2005), Shane Graham analyses *Gangsters* in the context of “theatre of testimony,” in which the voices of marginalised subjects are asserted as an aspect of “resistance literature” (2005: 109–110). Graham argues that in representing the prison experience of the poet Rasechaba, the play also foregrounds the subjectivity of the character as a means to convey a narrative of “trauma and loss experienced by black people under apartheid” (108). Graham also sees the structure of *Gangsters* as displaying a hybridity “between European theatrical forms and African storytelling and oral poetry” (108). He argues that Maponya was influenced by Samuel Beckett's experimental style as well as by the oral forms of protest that were prevalent during apartheid (such as political rallies and African oral poetry as declaimed by the character Rasechaba) (116). Graham suggests that Maponya's play (as well as other protest plays) helped South Africans to channel their collective experience of past trauma and “to come to terms with the terrible violence and repression” during apartheid (120). In the play, the policemen are shown treating the anti-apartheid protestor brutally. Graham observes that the dramatisation of police brutality (for example the torture of Biko), highlighted the fact that individuals were vulnerable to state authority. He argues that the portrayal of these subjective elements in Maponya's plays (and those of other dramatists) can be seen as

a "valuable stage in the development of anti-apartheid theatre and of resistance culture in general" (121).

In the article "Re-remembering protest theatre in South Africa. A gendered review of the historical and cultural production of knowledge around two plays, *The Hungry Earth* and *You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock*," Lliane Loots acknowledges that *The Hungry Earth* (1973) was considered a "landmark play in terms of South African protest theatre" (1997: 146). However, she is critical of the fact that while protest theatre provided legitimate opposition to the "ideological prerogative of white state nationalism," oppressive acts were presented as if black men were the main targets and that resistance to apartheid was rendered from the men's perspective (143). She argues that the play foregrounded the character of a black male worker as a "powerless victim" of the apartheid economy, but in fact the play "did give voice to [the] black male (working class)" as Maponya was quoted in the media as an authority on the dispossession of blacks (146-147). She adds that the play subsumed the unique social and economic suffering of women into a generic category of apartheid transgressions. As an example, she says that the depiction of a woman who is forced to become a sex worker at the mine workers' compound is not treated with depth in the play. Lastly, she argues that Maponya was complicit in the patriarchal system in that the only female character was also the only one generally identified as "Woman" and not given a name in the play (147).

A doctoral study, *Political shifts and black theatre in South Africa* (Rangoajane 2011) assesses the "current state of Black Theatre in post-apartheid South Africa [and conducts] a critical analysis of selected plays written in this era" (28). Rangoajane discusses Maponya's *Letta* (1996) and *A Song for Biko* (1997). He acknowledges that *Letta* is "more a documentary of Letta Mbuli than a fictitious story." Indeed, the play is a faithful rendition of Mbuli's life beginning with her early days in South Africa, moving to her joining the cast of the *King Kong* and her subsequent exile in 1957 to the United States of America (USA) to escape apartheid. It was while she was in the USA that Mbuli built a substantial career as a singer and in this sequence of the play familiar characters, namely Miriam Makeba, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King help to give a broad historical overview of Mbuli's life. Rangoajane quotes extensively from Maponya's text, which itself provides information about the character and the events approximating Mbuli's life which

are relayed via the dialogue. In one example the character based on Miriam Makeba proclaims (151):

> MIRIAM – What did they do a few months ago? Kill Martin Luther. I guess as we sit as South Africans, we cannot be spectators. The scourge of the white race is upon the people even here in America.

Rangoajane observes that Maponya's post-apartheid plays continued to call for unity among black people, in Africa and in the rest of the world (151). He points out too that Maponya retrospectively (by looking at Mbuli's years before she left South Africa) criticises the apartheid system (146). For example, the play makes a general statement about the killing of blacks after they had been arrested at John Voster Square. In another example, a character representing Mbuli's mother pronounces that blacks are under "constant harassment by the police" even when they are performers (Mbuli, Makeba and others) and not politicians (146 & 149).

Rangoajane also writes that *A Song for Biko* uses excerpts from *Gangsters* (1984) by quoting the dialogue of the characters Major Whitehead and Masechaba, the latter being refashioned as Frank Talk.[43] As with *Gangsters*, in this new production Major Whitehead conducts an interrogation of a political detainee (153). During the interrogation, Frank Talk declaims struggle poems that represent his distressed psychological state (154), while Major Whitebeared, as in the previous play "reflects the white fear that Marxism advocated equality, while apartheid was the opposite" (158). In an interview quoted in Rangoajane's thesis, Maponya says that theatre should be "a catalyst" encouraging society to think about ways of challenging government injunctions (347–348).

A second doctoral thesis, *The postdramatic theatre of Athol Fugard and Maishe Maponya: Comment, collaboration and experiment in apartheid South Africa* (Shamsuddeen 2016) examines Manaka's plays *The Hungry Earth* (1978), *Gangsters*

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[43] In the 1970s Steve Biko used Frank Talk as a pseudonym when expounding his ideas on Black Consciousness. Biko's writing under that name are published in *I write what I like* (2017). Subsequently, the name was adopted as the title of a journal published by the Natal Region of Azapo. For a more detailed discussion of the journal please see the website of South African History Online: https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/frank-talk

(1984), *Umongikazi* (1983), and *Jika* (1986) to discuss various aspects of his plays. Echoing Moroosi's (1997) observation, Shamsuddeen notes that Maponya's theatre was an expression of his commitment to communicating anti-apartheid messages. She writes that through his plays, Maponya was committed to his community. Maponya structured his plays to inform audiences about apartheid thus directing them to oppose this ideology, as she says that Maponya urged black playwrights "to rediscover themselves and to speak for the dispossessed in their societies" (92 & 227). She also restates the approach of Steadman (1994) and Moroosi (1997) who say that Maponya's plays foregrounded a Marxist point of view because his plays were "designed for the liberation of the masses" (84). Furthermore, she notes that Maponya's plays were "radical" and gives as an example the fact that *Gangsters* dramatised the life of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko who was killed while in police custody (86). Implied in this reasoning is that protesting Biko's death in the 1970s was brave as he was killed while in police custody. She also suggests that Biko's death was a "controversial murder" (239).

Furthermore, Shamsuddeen argues that Maponya's plays were collaborative in that, for example, the playwright incorporated the experiences of nurses in the play *Umongikazi.* Indeed, Maponya conducted interviews with nurses at Baragwanth Hospital in Soweto which informed the workshop process between Maponya and the actors in the play (126). During his research, Maponya found that black nurses were forming a union to represent their resistance to their unequal treatment. Drawing on Steadman (1995), Shamsuddeen (97) adds that Maponya workshopped *Jika* with the actors in the play, thereby incorporating their experiences. The actors Ndizimisela Badesho and Mthuthuzeli Sozwe are said to have "contributed critical materials during the work;" however, the thesis does not elaborate on the process or the nature of the information they provided (150). She also quotes Maponya who revealed that the actor John Maytham, who created the sole white character Pieter Hannekom in *Dirty Work* drew largely from his own experiences in creating the character (150).

In another aspect of her argument, Shamsuddeen again draws from Steadman's (1995: xvi) analysis that in its composition as a drama, *The Hungry Earth* adopted Brecht's experimental approach. This is an elaboration of Hauptfleisch and Steadman's earlier analysis in 1984, in which they found that *The Hungry Earth* functioned as a "lecture

demonstration" in which the audience witnesses the harmful effects of apartheid on Africans as they are presented on stage (97). Another factor which Shamsuddeen mentions is that the scripts of Maponya's plays was often changed during their performance. Steadman (1995: xiv) points out that the playwright continually restructured his plays throughout the rehearsal process and likened the script to "the score of a performance created in a workshop."

Shamsuddeen (2016: 87) also recalls Walder's analysis that Manaka and Maponya drew on indigenous theatrical traditions (perhaps oral literature) to represent the lives of marginalised subjects. I found two good examples of how Maponya adapted oral literature in *The Hungry Earth.* There is the use of a group singing in harmony when the play begins. The five members of the cast exhort the spectators: "Wake up, Mother Afrika / Wake up / Before the white man rapes you" (Maponya 1995: 3). later. the dialogue adopts a call and response format with a member of the group speaks a line of dialogue and the group affirming this utterance. An example reads:

> ONE: We will rise up.
> ALL [singing]: We will sing while we crawl to the mine.
> TWO: We will rise up.
> ALL [singing]: Bleeding through the days of poverty (Maponya 1995: 3–4).

In *Acting up against apartheid: Listening to the Market archive* (2018), Cynthia Kros and Vanessa Cooke survey views of actors and playwrights who worked at the Market Theatre during apartheid. In a brief contribution, Maponya argues that, in general, democracy-era theatre is poor in that it lacks the "vibrancy" which drove the earlier generation of playwrights to challenge audiences with a social critique (2018: 44). He believes that democracy-era theatre practitioners are not independent minded and suggests that they seek to align themselves with government by being subservient "to political whims and [to influential] individuals" (44).

6.3 Books on Maponya's form of theatre

The script of Maponya's *The Hungry Eart*h is included in *South African Theatre. Four plays and an introduction* (1984), which was edited by Hauptfleisch and Steadman. The

authors proposed that Maponya's play illustrated elements of "Black Theatre," a category that was not necessarily linked to the skin pigmentation of the playwright but rather a theatre that was aligned to principles held by black South Africans. They stated that Maponya's play addressed "the lives, the needs and the aspirations of the majority of South Africans, [and that it tried to] instill a consciousness in the audience of what it means to be 'Black'" (1984: 140). The authors also made the oft-repeated observation that Maponya's script served as an approximation for the play and that *The Hungry Earth* achieves its full expression of the message when it is performed on stage (1984: 147).

In *Alternative theatre in South Africa. Talks with prime movers and shakers since the 1970s* (Solberg 1999) reiterated the view that Black Consciousness ideology tried to build affinity among black people (especially the working class) in South Africa. Like Manaka, Maponya believed that Pan-Africanism was the best way to overcome colonialism, especially given the fact that the ideology deprived Africans of land, and because the colonists abused human rights (Solberg 1999: 180–181).

Maponya differentiates his theatre style from that of Kente, saying that he used a smaller cast than Kente who typically had approximately seven musicians and fourteen actors in his plays. For Maponya, this smaller scale theatre was ideal as it allowed him to embark on tours to the United Kingdom and North America (strictly speaking to New York) with a reduced financial burden. Maponya also mentioned that he was inspired by "performances of the ritual, you know, during birth, death, weddings or whatever kind of celebration" as well as storytelling (Solberg 1999: 185). I have not seen a replication or performance of ritual in his plays, but storytelling techniques are evident. For example, the opening sequence of *Umongikazi – The Nurse* (1983) features a character who laments in isiXhosa (Maponya 1995: 30–31). The poem opens with these lines (translated by Maponya):

Ntsikana said
The son of Gabha said
That the black home will be spilled
And truly it was spilled like water
He said that you will sell each other

In this context, the lament draws on Xhosa oral literature, in which the diviner of eighteenth century Chief Ngqika ka Mlawu warns the Xhosa nation that it will be vanquished by the colonial influence (citing the introduction of currency into society).[44]

Similarly, the opening sequence of *Gangsters* (1984) features Masechaba who recites a poem in the mould of a praise poem, which is indicated by the following tropes: "Sisi Phithiphithi" (line 4) which is reinforced by "Sisi Wiliwili" (line 9) and "Izwe liya nyikima!" (line 16), which is emphasised by "Izwe liya shukuma" (line 21). These lines are rendered in isiXhosa and the repeated vowel sounds, namely "Sisi" in lines four and nine serve to emphasise that land or South Africa is in a state of turmoil as a result of colonialism. The following set of vowels "Izwe" in lines sixteen and twenty-one emphasises that the land is in a state of agitation, owing to the actions of the working class in countering apartheid oppressors (Maponya 1995: 78–79). Maponya sums up his vision by saying that South African theatre should

> address that issue of land. We need to redefine our position in the new dynamic that is taking place, that is shaping our lives, and theatre needs to be an agent within that, what is happening to African values of life, morals, etc.

Five of Maponya's plays were published in *Doing plays for a change* (1995). Included are *The Hungry Earth* (1979), *Umongikazi – The Nurse* (1983), *Dirty Work* (1984), *Gangsters* (1984) and *Jika* (1986). In the preface to the book, Maponya writes about rehearsing *The Hungry Earth* with the Bahumutsi Drama Group during the late 1970s and also mentions the performance of *Umongikazi* at Glynn Thomas Hall in Soweto. He also recalls the withdrawal of his and lead actor Gcina Mhlophe's passports when they were on the verge of departing on a tour to the United Kingdom in 1983. Maponya mentions that his inspiration for *Dirty Work* was Samuel Beckett's *Catastrophe* and relates that *Gangsters* was inspired partially by his own experiences as a poet, as well as by the death of Steve Biko in police custody (1995: x). He reveals that *Jika* was a workshop production created in collaboration with the actors in the play. One of the aims of Black Consciousness was to educate black people to confront overt and subliminal messages that were designed

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[44] This saga in Xhosa history is captured in various links on the South African History Online website: https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/makhanda-nxele (Accessed: 13 July 2021).

to reduce their self -esteem. Maponya makes the point that this awareness was a constant as he navigated all aspects of his life during the writing and performing of the plays (1979–1983); he writes that it was these “thought-processes” that helped him to distil a message of Black Consciousness applicable to all his plays (1995: vii).

In *The Methuen drama guide to contemporary South African theatre*, Sarah Roberts (2015: 28) updates the information included in *Doing plays for a change* and mentions that Maponya’s new works were *Place of Rock* (2005) and *Bombarded* (2010). *Place of Rock* drew on the writings of Thekiso Solomon Plaatjie, which opposed the imposition of the Land Act of 1913[45] and the way it disenfranchised black people (28–9). Roberts writes that *Bombarded* was a play about people on the streets of Johannesburg being faced with a deluge of posters advertising faith healers who claimed to cure HIV Aids, among other aliments. Roberts observes that both plays attested to Maponya’s willingness to engage with present-day social crises facing black people in post-apartheid South Africa. *Place of Rock* alluded to contemporary debates on land in South Africa (as evidenced by the proliferation of informal settlements in urban areas) and *Bombarded* was a response to South Africa’s high numbers of HIV infections.

6.4 Research from archival sources: texts (*Sowetan* and Maponya Archive)

In this section I present archival material that contributed to the writing of a more comprehensive narrative of Sowetan community theatre. I include information mainly from the *Sowetan* (1984–1994) and the Maponya Archive at the University of South Africa. I also include input from John Maytham (2019) with whom I had a telephonic interview on 11/03/2019. Besides Maytham, I conducted interviews with another four of Maponya’s colleagues, as well as interviewing Maponya himself. I discuss these interviews in a separate section below.

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[45] According to Wodern (2012: xiii), the Natives Land Act segregated land ownership and restricted African land ownership to ‘native reserves’. See the publication for more details on the act. The full name of the legislation was *The Natives Land Act of 1913* (South Africa 1913).

6.4.1 *Dirty Work*

The title *Dirty Work* is a metaphor for the function of the apartheid state and in the play the state is embodied in the character Pieter Hannekom. It is a one act play, and in the paragraph below Maponya (1995: 62) summarises the themes explored in the play:

> HANNEKOM: My cousin Koos … has just completed a survey which shows that 86.4 per cent of every white South Africans [sic] talks about strikes and boycotts for an average 17.6 minutes on an average day. Now that means that, quite apart from the money lost from the strikes and boycotts themselves, this country loses 300 million rand every year in wasted man hours. The economic prospects are well known to you. Now that the exchange rate of the rand and the price of gold being what they are today that is a lot of money! And let us not forget the theatre of sanctions compounded by our commie-loving friends in the West.

The character, Pieter Hannekom, is constructed to communicate to the audience that there were racial and ethnic dynamics in the implementation of apartheid because people were separated according to defined racial and ethnic categories. In addition, while the ideology was not exclusively legislated and implemented by men it foregrounded masculine power and authority. For instance, church and political leaders, policemen, as well as government officials were mostly male.

Maponya infused a message of resistance in this play, but highlights that black people also served in the implementation of apartheid legislation. For example, Hannekom (Maponya 1995: 60) acknowledges the participation of "black delegates from our neighbouring states, Ciskei, Venda, Bophuthatswana, KwaZulu…" In this way community theatre not only protests against an oppressive regime but also examines the way in which state authority was expressed in different ways during apartheid.

Dirty Work satirises the state security agencies operating in South Africa at that time. In the play, Hannekom presents a lecture at a security conference. Some of his proposals are absurd and self-aggrandising, for example the title of his session is "In-House Training Scheme," while he has also devised a "Human Access Control System – HACS" to control the movement of black youth in the townships, and a "Union of Guards Human – UGH" (Maponya 1995: 61–66). The character also speaks of developing a "Hominoid, Unique Featurisation". The following themes run through the play (Maponya

1995: 62–69): strikes and boycotts, industrial action, youth attacking school property, and the "intimidation" of non-striking workers by youth activists, etc.

In comparison to his other plays, *Dirty Work* is underrepresented in academic discussion and this is also seen in the reviews of the play printed in the *Sowetan* (one of my primary archival sources). The play is usually given less prominence in joint reviews, perhaps because *Gangsters* (which it preceded in performances) dealt with the widely-reported and historically significant death of Steve Biko in police custody. In one report, Elliot Makhaya (1984h: 4) observed that "Maishe Maponya sets a precedent by being the first African playwright/director to direct a white actor in one of his double-bill productions – *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters.*" The programme for the Dublin performance of the play cements the dominant tropes that Hauptfleisch and Steadman used to analyse Maponya's plays in 1984 (in *South African Theatre. Four plays and an introduction*). It summarises Maponya's work as intended as a "vehicle for education and enlightenment of people" and points out that both plays have an affinity to Brecht's form of theatre and that Maponya aims to "awaken the consciousness of many of his spectators" (*Dirty Work* / *Gangsters* Theatre programme, 1985).

Talking about the process of creating the production with Maponya, Maytham observed that:

> it is very new to have two completely different ways of South African life on stage at the same time, as we work we discover more differences. For example what I would regard in Western theatre as political sloganeering, in African eyes is a hard daily reality. We have to come to terms with that. So more than just working on your character and text we have to deal with these problems. I'm not sure how successful it's going to be (Sichel 1984: 8).

In *Drum* magazine (Shuenyane 1984: 149) Maponya complained that "the media has been making a lot of noise because e hired and directed a white actor [and this] says a lot about the state of South Africa." Maponya told the reporter that he hired a white actor for the roles of Pieter Hannekom (in *Dirty Work*) and Major Whitebeard (in *Gangsters*) to undermine racial hierarchies, which he saw as working in favour of white actors and directors in South Africa. He also said that he wrote the plays not to express anger against apartheid but as an act of "desperation." He described the South Africa of the 1980s as a "sinking ship" and regarded his plays as serving to warn the government of the impending

destruction of the country. Maponya also told Tyrone August (1985) [page number not available] that "all my plays have a political message, everything we do is governed by the political set-up of this country," and added that he considered aesthetics to be as important because "politics and art can't be separated." In the Maishe Maponya Archive a number of theatre reviews of performances in the United Kingdom also show an appreciation for the way in which Maponya's plays reflected an oppositional stance against apartheid.

6.4.2 *The Hungry Earth*, *Gangsters* and *Jika*

The Hungry Earth, *Gangsters* and *Jika* are well represented in academic writing on Maponya. Besides publications by Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984) and Steadman (1995), these plays have been analysed in comprehensive studies by Moorosi (1997), Loots (1997) and Shamsuddeen (2016), as well as in an article by Graham (2005); all these publications converge around the importance of Black Consciousness in Maponya's plays. The archival material also confirms that Maponya consistently addressed this theme in his plays.

Maponya used the title *Gangsters* to reposition the moral equation of apartheid. Here he argued that the state was illegitimate, and highlighted the way the state used brute force to implement apartheid laws. He posited the notion that it was the police (and the state) that were "gangsters" and not the oppressed (black citizens). In an interview on 7/11/2016 in Johannesburg, Maponya indicated that he had "made a resolution to deal with issues that were more confrontational" in his plays, and in this example, he was objecting to the securitisation of South Africa. He said that he wrote *Gangsters* to "resist" state pressure and to illustrate that black people as a community had a way of being "resilient to challenge the status quo."

The play has three characters, namely two policemen, Major Whitebeard and Jonathan, and Rasechaba, a young poet. In a later version of the play (circa 1990), the gender of the character of the poet was changed to female and she was named Masechaba. The story reveals how the security police monitored artists, in this instance a poet, and relates the poet's detention, interrogation and ultimate death while in police

custody. The play is structured with a prologue and epilogue and there are seven sections, which are labelled "encounters," in between. In the prologue, the character Masechaba (as quoted from the latter version of the play) speaks to the community. The stage directions (Maponya 1995: 78) advise the actor to:

> move in any direction she wishes, through the seats of the auditorium, walking and sometimes running depending on the mood of each poem.

The seven sections entitled "Encounter" portray the interaction between the security police and the poet. At the beginning of these sessions Major Whitebeard's solicitous manner is sinister as he questions Masechaba about performing at community events. In the early encounters, the poet "voluntarily" submits to being questioned at the police station. However, as the plot unfolds she is arrested and does not leave her cell alive. I provide my own quotation marks to highlight the fact that the text conveys that the security police possessed coercive power that was used within or outside the bounds of existing legislation.

In between these encounters there are several time shifts, where Masechaba's interrogation is paused and the character switches the mode of performance from verbal sparring with Major Whitebeard to conjuring up a powerful orator holding the community spellbound. Masechaba's poems range from laments about the lack of human rights for black South Africans to calls to her compatriots to resist political oppression.

John Maytham, who originated the role of Major Whitebeard, told me that he had limited memory of the play because these events occurred many years ago. But he did recall that there would be tension on the stage during performances. He said: "We were never sure who was in the audience … at times I would just think 'did I just say that?'" Indeed, one scene in the play depicts in graphic detail the torure of Masechaba by Whitehead and Jonathan:

> WHITEBEARD: Poor Miss Masechaba has been treated so badly. Jonathan, what have you done? [Jonathan does not respond. He knows WHITEHEAD'S tricks during interrogations. WHITEHEAD changes moods.] Weren't you taught manners, kaffir, that when you're in the presence of the white man you must stand up? [He kicks her] Up! Up! I can't talk to a grown woman on the floor. Up! [Masechaba stands.] Who is LMA? (1995: 103–104).

Maytham is reflecting on what he describes as a “frisson” of excitement that was present during the state of emergency in South Africa. There were no Casspirs[46] present at the Market Theatre and black and white audience members attended performances unencumbered by social and legislative prohibitions on racial segregation. Yet he recalls that there was tension in the audience, because the dialogue in *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* was forceful and confronted them with a political conundrum. He says that during the performance, “sometimes there would be a collective intake of breath … we never knew if someone would get up and say something [in objection] …”.

6.4.3 *Umongikazi – The Nurse*

In November 1984, Maponya directed a revival of *Umongokazi – The Nurse* at the DOCC Hall in Soweto. Thoko Ntshinga took over the role from Gcina Mhlophe, who had originated the role in 1982. Other cast members were Nomhle Thokwe and Oupa Mthimkulu.

Newspaper reviewers appreciated that the play foregrounded the nurses’ strike at Soweto Baragwanath Hospital, which was an iconic institution for Sowetans. For instance, Thoko Nthsinga received resounding support from Thabiso Leshoai (1984c: 19), who wrote that the actor was excited to be performing for “an all-black audience.” Similarly, Pam Kramer (1984) [no page number available] also praised the play for adopting the format of a “documentary drama” to communicate what Maponya said were the grievances of the nurses.

Four actors represented the main characters in the play. These characters were a married couple, Fezile and Nyamezo, the latter the titular nurse at a “black hospital” who instigates the formation of a union to represent nurses’ interests. Maria (the third character) is also a nurse, and describes, together with the other characters incidents of racism taking place at the hospital. “Actor Four” is thus named in the script because he played a number of characters in the play. In fact, up to twenty-six characters populate

[46] This was an army vehicle used to transport troops. It could hold approximately 12 soldiers. It was about a metre off the ground and soldiers could fire guns from various apertures. I recall that the vehicles were called “mellow yellows” by Soweto residents.

the play, with the result that all actors portraying between five and seven characters, namely patients, a security guard, as well as African and white doctors. In the play, racial categorisations are used to signify uneven racial hierarchies during apartheid. The central story line revolves around the character Nyamezo and the presence of multiple characters serves to illustrate the conflicts she experiences at the hospital. In the 1982 version, "Actor Four" was played by Bennette Tlouana, with whom I conducted a telephonic interview on 29/03/2019. Tlouana remarked that he had absolutely no recollection of any dialogue from the play. He had been in the play 35 years earlier, and he framed this aspect of the past by saying that the play occurred "a long time ago."

Despite his plays being successfully staged at the Market Theatre, and the attention they received from *The Citizen*, *City Press*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *Sowetan*, *The Star Tonight* and *Sunday Express*, *Sunday Tribune* (and others), Maponya spoke of tension between black playwrights and newspaper reporters. Journalist Thabiso Leshoai (1984d: 8) writes that Maponya hosted a discussion between his cast and journalists before a performance of *Umongikazi* at the DOCC. Its purpose was to find ways of "[bridging] the gap that exists between artists and critics." According to the report, Maponya's discussion centred on the need for "self-criticism and self-analysis" from artists and newspaper reviewers. Maponya saw theatre making as a form of "spiritual growth," here linking his play with the spiritual and intellectual development of black society. Leshoai implies that newspaper critics were averse to Maponya's play(s); however, the reviews I saw were positive about *Umongikazi* and his other plays. Leshoai reports that some township artists reacted to criticism by threatening newspaper reviewers with physical violence.

It is apparent that in the climate of violence in the township, artists held strong views that community art had a role to play in liberating society from what they saw as white domination. It also seems that arts practitioners in the community demanded that there be a uniform response to opposing apartheid, especially in township theatre. In this instance, the meeting resolved to convene an African Writers Association (Leshoai 1984d: 8) in order to involve critics and playwrights in outlining the role of the "writer in society." Maponya's political beliefs were channeled by forming organisations; he believed that blacks must take collective action to oppose apartheid. Hence, in October he proposed the formation of (Leshoai 1984e: 25) an organisation he called "Actors

Unite." He saw this organisation as a vehicle to consolidate the views of individual actors who disagreed with newspapers or the authorities.

6.4.4 *Busang Meropa – Bring Back The Drum*

Maponya presented (*Sowetan* 1986f: 9) *Busang Meropa* at Funda Centre, from where it moved to the 1986 Grahamstown Arts Festival. This production was not a play, but rather a "show" in that Maponya staged poems and songs, fusing melodies and rhythms from Venda, Zulu and Sotho traditional music styles. Impressed with the mix of musical and dance styles, Metsoamere (1989e: 18) described it as a "socio-political musical drama."

However, another newspaper critic's review (Venables 1986) of a performance at the Wits Downstairs Theatre was ambiguous. The headline summarises the theme as "Black anger in poems and song." Venables continues that, for the most part the text was in isiZulu and isiXhosa. The report notes that the "performers shout[ed]" when intoning the poems that were delivered in English. Venables' impression was that poor delivery of the English language rendered the play devoid of meaning. He also claimed the that there were "distorted acoustics" at the venue. In this review, Venables contrasted the way in which political messages are received by black and white audiences. He implied that as a white (South African) male, he had different (or better) artistic sensibilities than the "Black majority in the audience," who issued a "vociferously enthusiastic response" to the show. This is despite the fact that the "English sections were rendered [in a manner that was] largely unintelligible."

This cultural aspect to the audience's response underlines the way in which apartheid had systematically divided society. Venables categorises audiences according to irreconcilable racialised aesthetic sensibilities. Ironically, theatre was one of the avenues facilitating contact between South Africans from different races (as defined by apartheid legislation) as social equals. At this time, both the independently financed Market Theatre and the state funded performing arts councils were staging plays with multiracial casts.

Venables sees the production as a form of "township theatre" expressing a "defiant message." He also mentions that the songs and poems express "Black anger, grief,

frustration and scorn – as bitter a protest as I have yet heard in township theatre." As for the music, Venables records that "the singing is tuneful, the dancing is infectiously energetic, the declamation forceful and the drumming exciting." Speaking to the *Sowetan* (1986g: 10), Maponya remarked that *Busang Meropa* "is a call to black South Africans not to forsake their culture." He added: "When people have been colonised, their culture and traditions are oppressed … if you take the drum away from the people you take away their rhythm and leave them with nothing." Matsemela Manaka expressed a similar philosophical urgency throughout his career, but more forcefully when he was creating *Goree* (1989).

At a 2017 event, at which Maponya donated his archives to the University of South Africa,[47] he remarked on his dexterous dancing (in 1986) and ruefully noted that the events of the past had indeed occurred "a long time ago" as he could no longer dance with such energy.

6.4.5 *Jika*

Between 1985 and 1986, Maponya studied theatre, writing and directing in Britain. He had won a scholarship (*Sowetan* 1986g: 10) from the British Council. He graduated and again left South Africa in September 1986, returning in February 1988. During this period he read for a Master of Arts degree at the University of Leeds in Britain; it was during his stay in Leeds that he directed and wrote *Jika* (with the original cast Ndizimisele Bhedesho and Mthuthuzeli Sozwe) (1986).

In July of 1988 Maponya was invited to the New Federal Theatre for New York to present *Jika* (1986). Performing in the play were Fana Kekana and Jerry Mofokeng, who played the roles of various unnamed characters. Victor Metsoamere described a performance as involving two "politically frustrated" characters. The unnamed characters are involved in fractious political machinations that take place between residents and

[47] The South African drama and theatre heritage project is in the Department of Afrikaans and Theory of Literature at the University of South Africa and is concerned with the preservation of scripts, theatre programmes and related material. Professor Marisa Keuris and Andile Xaba are involved in the project. The archive itself is located at the Unisa Archives, which are housed at the Unisa Library in Pretoria. Interested parties can access the collection by making an appointment with Anri van der Westhuizen, at: avdwesth@unisa.ac.za or Alicia Peter, at: peterma@unisa.ac.za as well as by phone: 012 429 2560.

hostel dwellers in a township. In Scene One, we meet the characters as school friends who take the lead in organising anti-apartheid school protests. In Scene Two, the audience sees the friends "months later" as they attempt to covertly cross the South African border to undertake military training in a neighbouring African country (Maponya 1995: 119). Their ultimate plan is to return to South Africa as "guerrillas" after their military training (Kahn 1991: 17).

The play locates the action in two significant spaces in the townships, the school and the hostel, to convey how township 'comrades' resisted the security police. In reality, the school was the site of the anti-apartheid struggle since schoolchildren mounted protests against what they saw as a discredited schooling system. In addition, much of the action in the play unfolds in a workers' hostel (located in the township) as well as "the township" as a general place in which African people were confined by legislation.

For the most part, the story unfolds chronologically and the scenes tend to be initiated and or concluded by "freedom songs." The language of the play is literal, and the characters speak of real places and mention two people: Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu and former South African Prime Minister BJ Voster, who was born in Uitenhage (as were the original actors in *Jika*). Therefore, the fictional world and the real world intersect to show that the socio-political context was important in the writing and production of Sowetan community theatre during the 1980s and 1990s.

Jika is structured as eight short scenes. The last scene is the longest, amounting to eight pages, while the rest average between two pages and four pages. Thus, the pace of the drama is quite rapid, emphasising the unfolding political events rather than character development. In light of the surfeit of socio-political content in the play, at times *Jika* reads as if it is a diary of the times.

In the play, a message about the value of collective community action is elucidated (Maponya 1995: 120):

> SECOND COMRADE: He [a wise elder disseminating pollical education to rural youth] enriched us with *Classics of Schools Revolution*.
> SECOND COMRADE: And for the first time in our lives, we learnt about co-operatives and communes as an integral part of land redistribution, agrarian reform. He taught us that there is no way we could achieve liberation and freedom without revolution. Reform, he taught us, was the

> most dangerous step that would accelerate the process of the creation of class within the dispossessed.

The dialogue above is didactic; however, there is also humour in the play and the lifting of the human spirit, which comes from the singing of freedom songs. One of the songs quoted in the play has a refrain: "Sizo Bashaya/Sizo Badubula [or] We will beat them/We will shoot them," which invokes a memory for me, as I grew up in Soweto. Adopting Halbwachs' memory scheme, I can see that my personal memory of this struggle song is intricately linked to my own social and cultural world. The playwright and the actors are part of my cultural world. When they were creating the play they relied on their own memories of hearing the song at political rallies or during protests. This recollection thus encompasses different generations (the 1976 Soweto Uprising, 1980s social instability in the township and the present day, at the moment of writing this thesis) and geographical locations (Uitenhage, where the original actors were born, Soweto, where Maponya wrote his plays and Pretoria, where the thesis was written).

The recollection of the song is captured in the text of the play, as well as in my memory and body (as my body recalls the movements associated with the singing of this song). The memory also exists across time as *Jika* was written in 1986 and I am recollecting the song much further away in time from when the song was originally sung in the 1980s. The song is embedded in collective memory, not only of the people who heard the song sung in the 1980s, but also of people who have lived in Soweto or those who are aware of anti-apartheid community activism.

Maponya's strategy of "naming" various aspects of the "struggle" against apartheid in *Jika* was analysed by Moorosi (1997: 67). For instance, throughout the play youth activists are given generic character names and it is significant that they are called "comrades" as this emphasises the fact that solidarity was highly valued by anti-apartheid organisations (1997:67). One student is named "Mayibuye," an allusion to the struggle-era motto of "Mayibuy' iAfrica!," which was used at political rallies as a call to reclaim Africa (67). For Moorosi, the use of these names n the play is intended to inspire "the people in their liberation struggle, which promotes their solidarity." Shamsuddeen (2016: 274) endorses this idea and posits that Maponya's point was to say that, although the

characters (or township communities) were not named in the play (or not recognised in society as heroes), their contribution to the anti-apartheid movement was valuable.

6.4.6 *Kuyanuka – Stink For Us All*

I found no reports of Maponya's activities in Soweto in 1991. However, his play *Jika* was performed at Wits, and at that time he was lecturing in the drama department (from 1991–1993). At the same time, Gamakhulu Diniso, a playwright from Tembisa (located to the north-east of Johannesburg) stages a play called *Kuyanuka – Stink For Us All*[48] at the Dalro Potpourrie Festival, which was held at the Windybrow Theatre in March 1991. Elliot Makhaya (1991b: 27) wrote that the play is

> a trilogy [that] focusses on the generation gap, the baas-employee conflict and high school pupil's dilemma – using the bucket system as metaphor throughout. "The stinking system changed the bucket system and installed the sewerage system. It removed the black buckets and replaced them with white buckets. But the toilets are the same old ones and the seats are still facing the same direction. The stinking system call them reform. It stikns for us all."

Maponya put on an excerpt from this play in 2019 at the Soweto Theatre. In 2018 Maponya had published a poetry collection, *Da's Kak in die Land*, which addressed political malfeasance in South Africa Thus, Maponya used memories of Diniso's play when creating the new theatre show. Writing in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, John Sutton (2016) observes that *collective memory* encompasses an "intricate" relationship between personal memories and the "interpersonal and cultural world." The title of the poem, also the title of the anthology, *Da's kak in die Land* (*There's shit in the land*) is in Afrikaans. Maponya incorporated the poem as a dramatised segment during his performances in Soweto. In the show, this segment prompts a discussion of the manner in which collective memory manifests. Halbwachs' concept of the social process of remembering helps to analyse the manner in which Maponya in 2017 includes

[48] It was not uncommon for apartheid era artists to use faeces as a metaphor to dramatise the extreme effect of apartheid legislation on Africans. Victor Metsoamere (1988h: 10) quotes from the play *Top Down*, which communicates the theme that "[t]he system stinks." The "system" refers to apartheid. According to Metsoamere, the play uses "mime and witty dialogue" to "symbolise the authorities' unwavering stand to cram junk education down students' throats." *Top Down* was directed by Muntu wa Bachaki and Thulani Sifeni and Mochidi Chika were in the cast. The play was performed at the Market Theatre.

Gamakhulu Diniso's play in his new work. This idea is explored in Sutton's commentary when he describes collective memory as an interaction between an interpersonal remembered experience that is part of the broad cultural milieu of the person remembering.

Maponya's recollection of *Kuyanuka* is an aspect of interpersonal memory, since the playwrights were colleagues in the 1990s and supportive of each other's artistic expression. Also part of collective memory are newspaper reports on the death of Michael Komape, who fell into a pit latrine and died in 2014. At that time the child was at a primary school in rural Mpumalanga. This tragic occurrence sparked Maponya to compose a poem protesting his death. Recalling the past – the bucket system to which residents of Alexandra township were subjected in the 1980s – Maponya restates the original message of Diniso's play that "apartheid oppression was shit," because it subjected Africans to inhumane living conditions. Maponya repeats and also recontextualises Diniso's message, saying that an African child (and by extension Africans in general) is subjected to the same inhumane conditions in post-apartheid South Africa.

Analysing Maponya's new work using Sutton's idea of collective memory, it could be said that Maponya's recollection of the past (as interpersonal memories) resonates with the wider cultural world in South Africa. Thus, *Kuyanuka* of 1991 is compared with current events of 2014 and both occurrences are part of collective memory. By juxtaposing his recollections from twenty-eight years ago with current events, Maponya is able to articulate a sobering message about the constant nature of poverty. Moreover, he wishes to emphasise his disproval of the democratic government (in post-apartheid South Africa) by using poetry, music and drama to protest about what he sees as social injustice today.

6.4.7 Directing and publishing

In 1993 Maponya directed *The Blinkards*, which was a student production presented as part of the 10-year anniversary of the Wits Theatre. Elliot Makhaya (1993b: 20) writes that the celebratory programme included drama, comedies, satires and dance. *The Blinkards* was written by Ghanaian philosopher and sociologist Kobina Sekyi. Maponya

(Metsoamere 1993e: 13) also directed *The Encounter*, a play by Kenyan playwright Kuldip Sondi. This play, which had been banned in 1988, was performed at the Mabana Cultural Centre in Mmabatho. Metsoamere reports that the play was a depiction of the Kenyan Mau Mau's struggle against British colonialism and imperialism. The cast included Nene Mathebula as General Nyathi, the rebel leader. It seems 1994 was a year of consolidation for Maponya. His collection of plays, *Doing plays for a change*, was to be published in 1995, as was a short story titled *Give the fire* (no other details of this work are available).

6.5 Research from archival sources: interviews

Below I discuss the memories of Maponya and his colleagues Bennette Tlouana, Maile Maponya, Malcom Purkey and Sibongile Nojila. I start by discussing their recollections of Maponya's way of working, their impressions of some of his plays and then I focus on factors they emphasised in our interviews.

6.5.1 Maponya's way of working

Recollecting *The Cry* (1975), Tlouana, in a telephonic interview on 29/03/2019, admits that he had never been trained in theatre. At that stage, Maponya had also not received any formal training. However, Maponya had a deep love for theatre and attended several plays in Soweto and in the city to learn as much as he could. Maponya's younger brother, Maile, told me that as teenagers Maishe initiated a self-education programme in which they attended several diverse plays in Soweto and Johannesburg to learn all the aspects involved in making theatre. Maponya also approached Sol Rachilo and other Soweto-based playwrights to advise him on how to write for the theatre. He then used this information to write, produce and act in his own plays. Maponya was impressed by the plays of Sam Mhangwane, and he attended Mhangwane's drama workshops at the DOCC. He was also inspired by Reverend Mzwandile Maqina whose play *Give Us This Day* was popular in the late 1970s.

Tlouana recalls that Maponya advised him to memorise the whole script (for *The Cry*) to understand all the elements. Tlouana learned the script over a period of three weeks. When rehearsals began, he switched from playing a policeman to playing the role

of an activist. This new role was diametrically opposite – from acting as a person enforcing apartheid legislation, to portraying a character who protests against unjust laws. Therefore, it helped that Maponya had told him to learn all the dialogue in the play. This modus operandi was useful to Maponya on several occasions. Sometimes cast changes forced him to create a different version of a play and this explains why he wrote several versions of his plays.[49] These rewrites were done both by happenstance and design. Maponya was a collaborative playwright in that different actors brought their own personalities into the play and shaped the dialogue and storyline. Secondly, as was apparent in *The Hungry Earth* and *Umongikazi*, the cast was unexpectedly reduced, necessitating that the dialogue spoken by the missing actor be spread among the remaining characters. For example, the cast for the international tour of *Umongikazi* was a reduced from five to four members.[50] This meant that the play was shortened (but not completely rewritten) so that it maintained its logical sequence of events. In an interview on 29/03/2019 in Johannesburg, Maile[51] corroborated Tlouana's recollection that the playwright gave the actors leeway to alter the play. Maile described the process thus:

> Frist, I read the whole thing to understand what the context of the whole [play] is. And thereafter, [I ask myself] is this who I'm supposed to be? What is it about him that makes him to be part of this story? Those are the things you do and then you start memorising the lines. Why? Because English is not my first language, so you memorise. But thereafter, take the lines and make them my own. That's what I always do. And then Maishe would be telling me whether I'm going off the script.

Maile says that Maishe initially corrected him when he did not speak the dialogue as written. He says, however, that after some time the director "came to realise what I meant" and allowed him to give the dialogue his "own personal flair". He gives me an example:

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[49] In another example, Ezra Mantini (1984:[no page number available]) writes that Maponya rewrote *Umongikazi* within the space of a few months in 1984 and said that the new version was an improvement. Mantini also questioned Maponya's artistic sensibility for casting a bearded male actor (the character named Actor Four) to represent a pregnant woman on the verge of childbirth, despite there being two female actors in the play. His criticism was based on social conventions of gender rather than looking at the ability of the actor to perform this role.

[50] Initially, the authorities refused Maishe Maponya and Gcina Mhlophe passports to travel with the rest of the cast to perform in the United Kingdom in 1983. Mhlophe's role (Nyamezo) was filled temporarily by Peggy Phango, a South African actor based in London. This meant that there were three actors in the play.

[51] I am using the first names to differentiate between Maishe and Maile Maponya.

> Let's say the script reads: "Hey, what is it Mgani, tell us quickly". But I would say: "Hey, *mfowethu awu s'tshele* what's happening?" I would go that way because that's how I would feel … I would naturally respond that way [in a real life situation]. Therefore, I would like the natural emotion to [be reflected in the dialogue]. I used to look at actors and say that "this one is mechanical because he memorised the lines the way they were written."

Maile recalls that other actors followed a similar approach. Below he recalls rehearsals by him and Sidwell Yalo in *The Hungry Earth*:

> Sidwell was also a natural actor. The rehearsal helped us quite lot. We would rehearse the parts to such an extent that even from sleep, you could wake me up and we could start doing our parts. Sidwell also liked to deviate [from the script and from what he had said in a previous rehearsal]. Sometimes he went far … He would deviate but we'd have to know how to improvise around his deviation.

Maile recalls that improvisations would occur even during performances. He says that "Sydwell was that type of an actor." He says that spontaneous improvisations during performances were plausible because they spent a long time in rehearsals preparing in this manner. Maile recalls that at times character, actions and events would emerge dynamically in performance. These fictional events would be incorporated into a play and they would try to recreate special moments in subsequent performances.

6.5.2 An early play: *Peace and Forgive*

Tlouana recalls that the plot of *Peace and Forgive* concerns two tribes, the Mtsime and the Ndlela. The latter, under the sovereignty of King Dlamini "oppressed the Mtsimes." As the story develops, the Mtsime tribe mounts a successful rebellion and defeats its oppressors. As the new rulers, the Mtsime do not seek to take revenge on the deposed king and competing tribe, but instead call for peace and unity of all African tribes. This allows for celebrations by dancers from both kingdoms.

The tribal setting of the play allowed Maponya to depict pre-colonial African culture, untouched by Western civilisation, and in the play both tribes represent their respective kingdoms through ethnic dances and costumes. The message was that before colonialism, Africans were able to negotiate their differences and live in harmony, and the

play also suggested that, as a united group, Africans had a greater chance of defeating apartheid.

Maile's reading of *Peace and Forgive* was that its message was grounded in apartheid-era racial categorisations. He said that the action of the play was centred around a fictional kingdom in Lesotho that was targeted by a Zulu military campaign in order to "make slaves of the Sothos." After some time "a young man from the Sothos" starts agitating for the overthrow of the oppression by the Zulu Kingdom. The young man's message to his compatriots is "we cannot let this [oppression] continue" and "these people have overcome us and we must fight against them." Maile says that the message was a "camouflage" or a parable to urge the Soweto community to "fight" against apartheid even if they had political differences. He says that they did not want to proclaim a "blatant message" against apartheid.

Maile also recalls that the stage set consisted of young trees that were arranged onstage to depict valleys and to approximate homesteads in a rural setting. The cast harvested the trees from a forested area in Diepkloof. This early play is without any complexity in its plot and characters, and Maile says that they wanted to communicate a message of African togetherness. The play enjoyed a number of "sold out" performances in township halls in the Transvaal.

During the interview, Maile could not remember the exact dates on which the performances of the plays had taken place, but he had a clear memory of the titles of the plays. Maile used his own personal life experiences, particularly the years doring which he was at school to help him sequence the chronology of Maponya's plays. However, even using this method did not help him as he could not remember the performance dates of *Peace and Forgive*. My interview with him demonstrates that memory can be fallible. The interaction also illustrates that the process of remembering can be circuitous and the person remembering may make false starts before correcting himself. We can understand the Halbwachsian conceptualisation of *collective memory* as taking place within the social framework or *cadres sociaux*. Here, personal recollections (or autobiographical memories) may be corroborated by the memories of other people in one's social group as well as by archival material. In this instance, a newspaper report confirmed the dates when *Peace and Forgive* was performed. It is important to reiterate here that on its own,

the newspaper report remains a static memory that records certain facts. It is the personal recollections that assist us to gain a better understanding of Maishe's method of writing, the circumstances in which the writing occurred and his ideas that informed the writing of *Peace and Forgive*.

6.5.3 *The Hungry Earth*

Tlouana recalls that European audiences went to see performances of *Umongikazi* and *The Hungry Earth* to gain a deeper insight into the lives of ordinary South Africans during apartheid. He found that German audiences in particular were eager to interact with the South Africans. The strength of the plays was that black South Africans were telling their own stories, using their own words and representing South African people without the filter of the media. Originally, Tlouana worked as a lighting technician during the performance of the plays, but when Maponya was denied a passport by the authorities he joined the cast. Tlouana says that he "had to improvise" his roles in the play. One narrative thread of the story involved tourists visiting the Durban Deep mine to witness a traditional dance competition held by the miners. Tlouana says that in the play he performed dances drawn from Zulu, Swazi, Xhosa, and Shangaan ethnic groupings. He would also enact (through mime and dance) the way in which tourists responded to the dance as well as the manner in which they would tip the actors. The actors created an ebullient atmosphere which invited audience participation. It was his task to leave the stage and interact with audience members chosen at random. He cajoled the chosen patrons into a "theatrical contract" where they were incorporated into the play as international tourists visiting South Africa. Tlouana recalls that he would say to a man "You look like Karl Marx," then approach someone and say, "this one looks like Lady Diana," and so on. He remembers that this sequence received the "biggest laughs" from an appreciative audience.

I conducted much of the interview with Tlouana in isiZulu, interspersed with Sepedi. I asked Tlouana whether he recalled the story of *The Hungry Earth*. He says that "Maishe was speaking about life in the mines of South Africa." His recollection follows the sequence of events in the play closely as it is published in the book *Doing plays for a*

change (1995). He effortlessly recalls a plaintive hymn sung in two melodic phrases, with the second phrase responding to the first (also known as a call-and-response melodic arrangement). Conjuring a masculine choir of miners, he sings:

> Ngizwa ngobani,
> Kumnandi
> Ngizwa ngobani
> Kumnandi, ngizwangobani, [tenor voice]
> Kumnandi ngizwa ngobani, kumnandi [basso profundo]
> Sesi hlukazile thina
> Kumnandi ngizwa ngobani

Here Tlouana tells me that he learnt to sing when he was in a church choir as a youngster and that the mineworker's song was his contribution to the play. Interestingly, the hymn is omitted from the published version of the play, where Maponya (1995: 18) replaced the mournful note of the miner's suffering with a hymn with a more direct political appeal:

> What have we done?
> What have we done?
> God, our spokesman
> We put our faith in You
> Why have we to live this way?
> Release us from these shackles.

Tlouana informs me that in the dialogue of *The Hungry Earth*, the characters used a mix of English and African languages. He says the fictional miners also spoke in *fanagalo,* a pidgin mixture of Afrikaans and African languages that the illiterate African miners spoke when communicating with their superiors. In an indication of racial hierarchy, black miners were compelled to refer to white superiors as "Baas" – a term denoting one's superior position in the mine. Yalo played the characters of both a "Baas-Boy [an African supervisor]" as well as "Baas-Jan," a white Afrikaans-speaking supervisor whose task was to issue instructions. In one instance, the Baas-Boy instructs the (black) workers to "drill a hole here, there and there." Then the workers respond "yeka ukuba yiBaas, Baas-Boy!" [stop acting like a Boss, Boss-Boy!). Tlouana informs me that a glossary of terms as well as a summary of the play was provided in the theatre programme when they toured internationally.

Maile replaced Dijo Tjabane when *The Hungry Earth* went on a tour to Britain, Switzerland and West Germany in 1981. In January 1982, the play was performed at the Market Theatre. Initially, Maile could not recall the character he played in *The Hungry Earth*. He taps his foot as a memory aid, but after a long while, he abandons this attempt to remember and consults *Doing plays for a change* (Maponya 1995: 2–6), a published collection of Maishe's plays. He then recognises Bheshwana, his character in the script. When I ask him what he recalls about the character, he takes a long time attempting to remember. At length he says that Bheshwana "was just one miner who … er, a vulnerable miner like the other guys who was shocked by what happened while he used to work at the Orkney Mines, if I'm not wrong…". Mentioned in the play is a fatal accident that happened at the Orkney Mine in the 1980s. Maile laughs and adds that "After all these years, yo! You must remember that it's about thirty years since I was in that play."

It is clear that different sources are useful to provide a narrative of the history of community theatre. In this instance, Maishe, Maile, Bennette Tlouana, as well as the script, may be collated to give a more comprehensive narrative of history. Maile (like other interviewees) also wanted to dwell on that fact that the events of the past "happened a long time ago." It is as if the interviewees sensed something intangible and unreal about the past, and that they wished to be fully immersed in their memory to reconnect emotionally with their younger selves.

In an interview on 7/12/2016 in Johannesburg, Maponya's recollection of the play focused on the goals he had set for himself. He wanted *The Hungry Earth* to "be a platform for people to speak" and to be an instrument to generate social discourse. The main message of the play was that "apartheid should stop." The opening paragraph of *The Hungry Earth* is a poem that captures his ethos (Maponya 1995: 3):

> Wake up, Mother Afrika
> Wake up
> Time has run out
> And all opportunity is wasted.
> Wake up, Mother Afrika
> Wake up
> Before the white man rapes you
> Wake up, Mother Afrika

6.5.4 *Umongikazi – The Nurse*

In *Umongikazi*, Maishe played a character named Fezile. His wife Nyamezo, the nurse, faced discriminatory working conditions in a hospital in Soweto that drove her to become an activist . Gcina Mhlophe played the role of Fezile, with Fumane Kokome, a teacher from Soweto playing "an old woman" and Tlouana playing various incidental characters. Tlouana describes the play as "experimental theatre." The German tour included both *Umongikazi* and *The Hungry Earth*. Tlouana recalls that a female actor by the name of "Pretty" was temporarily cast in the play as a stand in for Mhlope. There is some inconsistency here in his memory because Maishe Maponya recalls that Peggy Phango[52] took the role. This discrepancy may be merely a mis-remembering of the actor's name; actors had to be flexible and change roles quickly.

In *Umongikazi,*[53] Tlouana played the roles of police officer and represented a pregnant woman who goes into labour at the hospital but does not receive immediate assistance. The third character he played was a doctor who interacts with a character called "Mahlalela". This patient never left the hospital ward after he recovered and took on washing the doctors' cars to supplement his free food and accommodation. Tlouana did not recall much of the dialogue his characters uttered in the play.

Although Maile performed in *Umongikazi – The Nurse*, both in South Africa and internationally, he has very little memory of the play (I have not come across documentary evidence that he was part of a South African or international cast of the play). He simply recalls that Gcina Mhlophe, the actor who originated the titular role, was denied a passport when the play was invited to perform at the Edinburgh Festival in 1983.

I ask him about the fact that men represented women characters onstage. He replies by laughing and pointing out that "those were the times." He says that there were practical reasons for men playing women characters. "We had a small cast. In *Umongikazi* there are four actors, they [had to] play several parts. Even in *The Hungry Earth*, a woman's part was played by a man. You could not have a huge cast." However,

[52] Peggy Phango, a South African-born actress based in the UK, replaced Miriam Makeba as Joyce in the musical *King Kong* (1961).
[53] Thoko Nthsinga took over the role played by Gcina Mhlophe in a subsequent European tour. Ntshinga later reprised the role in South Africa.

this does not explain the fact that there were more male than female actors (and sometimes only male actors) taking part in community plays.

6.6 Bennette Tlouana's memories

Tlouana was invited by Maponya to perform in *The Cry* (1975) and in *The Hungry Earth* (1979). Along with Maile Maponya and Sidwell Yola, he toured Germany, Holland and Switzerland with the latter play. He also had a role in *Umongikazi* – *The Nurse* (1983). After performing in these plays, Tlouana left acting but remained friends with Maponya.

6.6.1 Bahumutsi – The Comforters

The *Bahumutsi Drama Group* was started as a response to the violence in Soweto and the group adopted the mission of "comforting" the community. Tlouana recalls that Sowetans were under duress as a result of the presence of security forces and the army in Soweto during the late 1970s and 1980s. The group attributed a political and spiritual role to the arts. Theatre had ameliorating characteristics that could heal a wounded community. Tlouana recalls (as did Maile Maponya in a separate interview) that the Bahumutsi group was influenced by Gibson Kente, particularly his play *How Long* (1973), as well as by the Workshop '71 play *Survival* (1976), which was created by Robert Kavanagh, Selalelo Maredi and Fana Kekana. They also admired Boikie Mohlamme's *Mahlomola* (1977), and *The Hero* (date unknown), a play by Casey Govender. Naturally they also attended the performances of plays by Matsemela Manaka's, who was also based in Diepkloof. The theatre venues they frequented were the Diepkloof Hall, the Box Theatre and the Market Theatre. Tlouana also recalls that there was a theatre in Lenasia that frequently hosted plays (it was called the Jiswa Centre, as I discovered from a poster in Manaka's archive). He did not recall the name. He also informs me that, rather than being performed in Soweto community halls, *The Cry* staged most of its performances at the Central Methodist Church in Braamfontein. The group rehearsed at Maponya's home and also at the Khomane High School in Zone 4 Diepkloof most of the time.

6.6.2 Community theatre

Talking about the logistics of staging Maponya's plays, Tlouana recalls that Maponya occasionally rented Sam Mhangwane's Combi when they had performances at the Market Theatre. Looking back, Tlouana believes that the plays of Manaka and Maponya had an "impact" on the Soweto community. He says that, considering prevailing media censorship, their theatre "conscientised people about things that were happening in the country," a view also expressed strongly by Maile. In light of Tlouana's declaration of the importance of community theatre, I asked Maponya whether he felt that community theatre of the 1980s and 1990s should be commemorated, and how he would want it be archived. He observes that community theatre "does not exist anymore." He says:

> You are not going to find people who are committing themselves [to community theatre]. Unfortunately, we are suffering from the problems of not having proper resources or no resources at all. Because where do you get those resources, you can't get it from big capital to be able to do this. You can't get it from the current Department of Arts and Culture. Because it's [government funding organisations] basically saying that we should not be critical. I am an *ad hoc* member of Unite Against Corruption. In the organisation we are saying that we don't deserve such a leadership. Zuma and [his government]. All those guys who are ministers and those guys who are implicated in scandals of corruption [should be ejected from government]. I think it's important that we as artists can express ourselves.

South Africa was in political turmoil in 2016 when I interviewed Maponya. Information had been exposed in the media that Mr Jacob Zuma, the former president, had been overseeing a corrupt government. Maponya was involved in a civil society organisation that called for the former president to be legally held to account. Maponya believes that contemporary township playwrights are not providing a critique of government and other socio-political tribulations. This belief stems from his conviction that community theatre should be used to comment and help to improve the lives of township communities. He notes that the Save South Africa Campaign[54] has protested against reported government corruption, whereas township drama does not reflect this method of analysing society, especially as it pertains to township life. Maponya implies that the best way to

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[54] According to its website (Save South Africa n.d.), Save South Africa was a civil society grouping which aimed to "hold leaders accountable to the values of the Constitution." The organisation is no longer active.

commemorate community theatre of the 1980s and 1990s is to have the necessary infrastructure for regular performances of community theatre.

6.6.2.1 Describing community theatre

Maishe Maponya is the only playwright from the group of playwrights chosen for this study who is still living (subsequently Maponya passed away on 29 July 2021). Since he has been involved in community theatre from the 1970s, I am keen to hear what he thinks are the components that constitute community theatre of the 1980s and 1990s. At the time of the interview, Maponya had been involved in (community) theatre for 42 years (1975–2017).

He notes that his plays were "community theatre in the sense that they dealt with the content that the community was needing to be addressed for the community's development." In Soweto, issues of schooling and infrastructure development (inter alia, roads, availability of water and electricity), crime, lack of human rights and oppressive government legislation were some of the community concerns that became apparent to me as I examined the socio-political trends (1984–1994) primarily in the *Sowetan*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *City Press* and *Sunday Times* newspapers.

Maponya also suggests that groups that were based in the township may be said to have produced community theatre by virtue of their geographical location, even if their plays were performed in Johannesburg. In his plays, he used a simple stage set featuring realistic objects and where appropriate the characters would be dressed in the actors' own clothes. Furthermore, performers were required to play multiple roles and to be able to sing and dance. In *Peace and Forgive*, branches of trees were used to mimic pre-industrial African homesteads. In *Umongikazi – The Nurse,* nurses' and doctor's uniforms were sourced from industry suppliers. Also, a factory-produced desk and a blackboard were used to represent the real items in *Dirty Work*. Maponya says that he wanted to keep the essence of his plays intact when they were performed in the city centre, and this was the reason he refused when the management at the Market Theatre offered to "improve" the way in which his plays were staged.

6.7 Maile Maponya's memories

Maile Maponya participated in Maponya's earlier plays *The Cry* (1975), *Peace and Forgive* (1977/78) and *The Hungry Earth* (1979). The musical productions *Busang Meropa – Bring Back the Drum* (1981/1983/1985/1987) and *Aziko* (1986) were the final projects on which he worked with Maishe. *Busang Meropa* was recorded as a long player (LP) record. This music album was produced by EMI records in London and most of the songs in the second album, *Aziko,* were also on the *Busang Meropa* LP. Maile studied music at Dorkay House, first in the late 1970s and again in the late '80s when he studied piano, flute and music theory. He also plays guitar.

6.7.1 Music composition in Maponya's plays

The Cry featured several songs and Maile recalls in an interview conducted on 29/3/2019 in Johannesburg that the music for the play was composed collaboratively with his brother. He remembers several episodes during the time Maishe was writing:

> I would be at home practising the flute. Then I would improvise and Maishe would say "ja, I just want to hear that again" [Maile imitates Maishe, by adopting his brother's vocal timbre]. I would do it and there and then he would try and compose a song, based on what he heard. Then I felt "oh! I can use this to be able to compose music for the play."

Maile recalls that during the 1970s the community of Soweto was enthralled by Gibson Kente's *How Long*[55] and it is this work that inspired him "to start composing songs." He adds that "in *Busang Meropa*, I was involved in almost all those compositions." He also composed on the family's upright piano.

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[55] The play was first performed in 1973, and it remained topical in Soweto for several years afterwards. On September 3 1976, Kente was detained in Zwelitsha Township in King William's Town under the Internal Security Act. Kente had converted the play into a film. According to the *Rand Daily Mail* (Own Correspondent 1976: 1), Kente used high school pupils in the film to play roles of young pupils protesting against the pass laws. This was one of the reasons the play resonated with young people in townships across South Africa. The West Rand Administration Board also banned performances of the play.

6.7.2 The Allah Poets

Maile recalls that "around 1970 … 79, 80" Maishe included him in the Allah Poets with whom he played the xylophones and sang. He says that the group was "very influential" in the township as they were invited to perform at (Marxist-inclined) political gatherings at schools in Soweto. They recited poetry which was accompanied by and also interspersed with music. Other members of Allah Poets were the brothers Moses or "Moss" (he played drums and flute) and Matsemela Manaka, and Makhaila Ledwaba (his stage name was Zezero). The poet Ingoapele Madingoane often appeared with the group. The group often performed at events organised by the Creative Youth Association, who rehearsed at Matsemela Manaka's parents' home.

6.8 Malcolm Purkey's memories

Malcolm Purkey has taken on a variety of roles in the arts sector. He is an acclaimed playwright and director, most notably as part of the *Junction Avenue Theatre Company*, which produced the popular *Sophiatown* (1985). He was also a lecturer in the Department of Drama at the University of the Witwatersrand and for a period the artistic director of the Market Theatre. He has known Maponya since the 1970s.

6.8.1 Involvement in the arts

Malcom Purkey, in an interview on 13/12/2016 in Johannesburg, recalls seeing the Allah Poets at the Market Theatre; the year might have been 1984, 1985 or 1986. Purkey recalls that Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya and Ali Hlongwane were part of the group and that they gave an "extraordinary" performance. He says the group "were chanting revolutionary poetry and they had drums and they had flutes and it was a very African production. And it was very militant."

Purkey has had considerable interaction with Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya at the Market Theatre and at Funda Centre. He told me about debates in the 1980s in which playwrights aligned to Black Consciousness had rejected non-racialism. In theatre, non-racialism involved collaboration between white and black actors as co-

creators of plays. Malcolm Purkey's *Sophiatown* (1985-8) is one such example, in which apartheid as a theme is explored from the point of view of black and white characters.[56] One of the aspects explored in the play is the way in which the apartheid government disrupted the lives of black and white characters and divided a burgeoning intellectual and hybrid urban culture in 1950s Johannesburg.

Purkey held that nonracialism was the logical development for South African society and theatre, the same the view espoused by the African National Congress, then in exile. Here I should point out that Kente, Manaka, Maponya and Purkey did not use their theatre as a mouthpiece of political parties; I am simply outlining the socio-political context as it affected the plays produced during the 1980s and 1990s. I asked Purkey whether he saw performances of Kente, Manaka or Maponya's plays in Soweto. He replied that he did make visits to Soweto, especially in the 1970s, but the township was volatile in the 1980s so understandably he did not visit it then. Against this background, Purkey says that some township theatre was in effect "the cruder end" of community theatre. Here he is contrasting Manaka and Maponya's plays to township theatre that provided a simplified anti-apartheid message. This was known as sloganeering in the township, according to him, although he did not provide an example of it. He also remembers seeing Sam Mghangwane's play and what struck him then was how the playwright successfully employed elements of *comedia del arte* to portray intimate relations in *Unfaithful Woman*. During our discussion, Purkey reflected on the role of theatre in the anti-apartheid struggle:

> Barney Simon and myself, Rob McLaren, Rob Amato – you know, [we were], all white males. And obviously, as much as we wanted a liberated theatre and to a large extent I think we created very important works [that are now part of] the history of South African theatre, we were products of an historical moment.

He also suggests that as white theatre directors they had a limited personal experience of the effects of apartheid and he therefore understood Maponya's initial refusal to participate in non-racial theatre (later on Maponya worked with white actors as happened

[56] Black South Africans were forcibly removed from Sophiatown, which under Influx Control laws, was considered a white residential area.

with *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters* in 1984). He says that the relations between the Black Consciousness and non-racial movements "fluctuated between warmth and great coldness – icy relations."

Indeed, speaking to me in 2017, Maponya was adamant that the concept of non-racialism "was a myth." He says he believed that "you [could not] have whites and blacks sitting and discussing the union of artists when whites [had] all these privileges and theatres that exist in their areas … And they [were] much more organised than black people and we did not have the resources they had." He says that in the end PAWE members agreed on non-racialism and also made efforts to form closer ties with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), which was a problem for Maponya as he saw that there was an alliance between Cosatu and the African National Congress. His view was that PAWE should not have been affiliated with Cosatu but should rather have remained a "a non-aligned, non-partisan union." He says that he and Manaka "never took up membership of any political party. We wanted to operate independently and to continue to be critical of anything that we felt we needed to criticise." PAWE is also mentioned in the newspaper archives, notably by the *Sowetan* (Makhaya 1990b: 4) where the way in which South African artists were collaborating to develop a common approach to arts policy in the democratic era was covered. But it is Purkey's and Maponya's spoken memories providing the nuances in the opposing views that assisted me in the writing of a more comprehensive narrative of the past.

6.8.2 Migration from Soweto to Johannesburg

Purkey witnessed the way in which Soweto playwrights were transplanted to theatres in Johannesburg, among them the Market Theatre. Both Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya's plays were performed at the Market Theatre more frequently than in Soweto. He notes that: **"**I think one of the thoughts that Maishe didn't say directly but was alluding to was that, things like the Market Theatre really prevented development in the townships." Inevitably, community theatre was transformed when plays were moved from a backyard garage or township hall and performed in a fully equipped theatre. Performing at the Market Theatre brought a new set of expectations from Soweto playwrights. For

example, Sibongile Khumalo revealed that Matsemela Manaka and the Funda group felt that the Market Theatre failed in its marketing of *Goree* (1989), resulting in a financial loss for them. Similarly, Maponya revealed that he hired the theatre on an ad hoc basis and never managed to recoup the money he invested. Thus, there were financial implications for these playwrights who operated with no government or corporate funding. Perhaps this is why Purkey speaks of community theatre as being "done for love." He says that participants in community theatre expected "no money" and that it was "amateur theatre, in the proper sense of the word amateur meaning for love." Another view is that we should consider that Soweto community theatre playwrights had a more expansive understanding of the theatre they were creating. Community theatre in Soweto arose from and was sustained by people-to-people networks, both in Soweto and in other townships. Gibson Kente was the writer and director of his plays but there was a network of teachers (and some nurses and priests) that contributed to their staging and the success of his tours. Kente set a mandate for himself to develop social relations, to create innovative plays and independently to sustain his theatre company financially. Manaka also had a developmental agenda, to create theatre that would engage the audience visually and intellectually. Maponya prioritised the delivery of a message calling for black anti-apartheid resistance in his plays, and it seems aesthetic elements were for him a secondary concern.

In recalling his interaction with Manaka and Maponya's plays, Purkey says that he "never really believed in the label 'protest theatre.'". His view is that "it was just very good theatre engaged in a social crisis." Therefore, resistance theatre incorporated the "need to talk about freedom and overthrowing state oppression." He remarks that "many of those plays are now part of our cannon." For Purkey the designation of "protest theatre" applied to plays that made liberal comment as opposed to resistance theatre; that is it is characterised by plays that "are genuinely revolutionary" like *Dirty Work* and *Gangsters*. He adds that 1980s community theatre was part of a "big conversation about reimagining the state."

6.9 Sibongile Nojila's memories

Sibongile Nojila worked with Maponya in *Two Can Play* (1991), *Encounter* (1993), and *Bombarded* (2010). She is still a stage actress.

6.9.1 Maponya at Mabana Centre (Mafeking)

Two Can Play was presented at a Mabana Centre located in Mafeking. There were smaller satellite Mabana institutions located in various districts of Bophuthatswana. These centres were government sponsored and housed permanent music and theatre companies and were modelled on the Performing Arts Councils. Initially, they were boycotted by actors and playwrights opposed to the homeland system. However, by 1993 it was clear that a new political order was afoot and Maponya participated in their programmes. Walter Chakela, the director of Mabana Centre, later became the director of the Windybrow Theatre.

In the early 1990s, the political situation was fluid as the Bophuthatswana government was still in control of the centre and restricted any plays that were critical of apartheid or the homeland system. McCoy Mrubatha, interviewed about Manaka's plays, indicated that the Bophuthatswana government censored Manaka's plays when they performed there. Commenting on Gibson Kente's plays, Kholofela Kola told me that the playwright was required to stage a special performance of the play so that government officials could vet the production. Sibongile Nojila, in a telephonic interview on 3/4/ 2019 from Pretoria, also informed me that Walter Chakela at times faced government interference when it dictated the type of plays allowed at Mabana.

6.9.1.1 Two Can Play and *Encounter*

In 1991, Chakela invited Maponya to direct *Two Can Play* and conduct theatre workshops with the students at Mabana. Nojila acted as an assistant stage manager of the play**.** The principal roles in the production were performed by Nthatho Moshesh and Leslie Muthojane. Nojila and Tebogo Mabuo were understudies when the play transferred to the Wits Theatre in 1991. Nojila remembers this as a learning experience for a young actor

at that time, as she had “not been formally trained.” She recalls that the play was “set in Jamaica and there was also war [which] broke out … I remember, because the guy’s father was killed and we had to go and bury him alone. I don’t remember that much probably because Nthathi and Leslie performed it…”. Gaps in the narrative caused by missing information are unavoidable.

She recalls that *Encounter* was about the terrorism in the jungles of Kenya. But, as had occurred with Maile, when speaking about Maishe’s plays, her memory was rather vague and she said that her roles in both plays were small and that she had spent no more than six weeks at a time participating in these projects (however, she and Maishe have kept contact to the present day). It was apparent that since the interaction with Maponya was slight in comparison with working with other playwrights, her memory of Maponya’s plays was on the periphery of the more vivid memory of other productions in her career as an actress. As an aspect of collective memory, it is apparent that not all members of the remembering group will reveal the same investment in and commitment to past shared experiences.

6.9.1.2 Bombarded

In the 1990s, Nojila moved to Johannesburg and worked with Maponya in *Bombarded* (2010). In this play she took the role of a character named Mathoto, who is pregnant and HIV positive. I asked her about Maponya’s directing style. Unfortunately, Nojila joined the cast in the middle of the production, as another actor had left. She had to learn the part quite quickly and slot into performances, where other actors had already solidified their approach to creating their characters. Forefront in her recollection is that she did not have the opportunity to develop her character along with her colleagues. She also recalls that the play was about the number of pamphlets on the streets of Johannesburg printed by people offering untested cures for the Aids virus. Nojila recalls that Maponya had observed “how the people with pamphlets stand on the streets, how [they were] literally bombarding people because they would say ‘there is a doctor so and so he cures this …’”. The play was performed at the State Theatre and each performance was followed by a discussion. I asked her whether she remembers the nature of the discussions. Her

response is: “I think there were some question and answer sessions. Even though I’m not sure. It’s likely. It’s a long time ago.” She adds that she “didn’t stay with the character” long enough to remember her dialogue, gestures or wider purpose of the play.

In concluding my discussion with her, we talked about the way Maponya regards drama as an ideal vehicle to express his commitment to Black Consciousness ideology. She notes that Black Consciousness is “something that’s embedded in Maponya.” To give me an example, she talks about *Da’s Kak in die Land* (2017). She says that the title of this theatre production was an analogy to describe what Maponya saw as poor socio-economic conditions for black people in post-apartheid South Africa and suggests that his work is still relevant as it is “bringing consciousness” to a new generation of South Africans.

6.10 Conclusion

In *South African Theatre. Four plays and an introduction* Hauptfleisch and Steadman (1984) articulate key ideas on Maponya’s plays that have influenced subsequent analysis and interpretation of his work. The authors write about the influence of Black Consciousness on Soweto playwrights and argue that their plays incorporated a mandate to encourage black people to assert the importance of their own identity and culture in order to resist colonialism and apartheid, and to form a united front against oppression (1984: 144–145). They write that *The Hungry Earth* involved a cast of non-professional, fulltime actors who presented a “view of life about working-class Black people” (148). This implies that the cast and the playwright-director shares the same artistic sensibilities (of what constituted theatre) and also that they came from a similar socio-economic background and shared the same ideology. These conditions made it possible for Maponya to draw on the personal experiences of his cast when he was creating his plays. Another element identified by Hauptfleisch and Steadman in Maponya’s works was his commitment to experimental forms of theatre to dissociate himself from prevailing mainstream theatre or what the authors call “English theatre” in Johannesburg. But Brechtian experimental theatre was also an effective method of conveying an unambiguous anti-apartheid message to the audience.

These authors add that Maponya was concerned with addressing issues that had to do with the working class. Therefore scholarship on Maponya, including Gray (1993) Moorosi (1997) Graham (2005) and Shamsuddeen (2016) has capitalised on this point that Maponya's plays reflect his commitment to the Black Consciousness ideology and that they were generated from workshops with his actors. Both Solberg's (1999) interview with Maponya and Rangoajane's (2011) survey of his plays reveal that Maponya advocated a continuing a social critique under democracy to challenge socio-economic inequality.

In terms of Maishe Maponya's plays, collective memory encompasses archival texts, namely the reviews, photographs, programmes and posters from his collection as well as information gleaned from interviewees. Unlike Kente and Manaka, Maponya also published a collection of his plays, *Doing plays for a change* (1995), in which he outlines his rationale for playwrighting and provides a socio-political context for his plays. Ian Steadman (1995: xiii–xxiii) also provides an analysis and context for these plays. In addition, unlike Kente and Manaka, I was able to interview Maponya to gain his insights into Sowetan community theatre. These complementary sources enabled me to understand his contribution to Sowetan community theatre more fully, thus allowing me to provide a more comprehensive narrative of the past.

Maponya did not have a permanent base that is associated with his playwrighting in the way that Kente is associated with his garage and the DOCC and Manaka with the Funda Arts Centre. Furthermore, Kente's influence is significant in that a number of groups were formed by people who had left his company; people he trained have gone on to have successful careers in theatre and television. Nonetheless, Manaka's influence is noteworthy in that a number of his collaborators (for example Ali Hlongwane, Sibongile Khumalo and Motsumi Makhene) have been active in various fields in the arts. As for Maponya, collective memory reveals that his singular voice of Black Consciousness has been influential and as is evident in the academic studies in the years between 1984 (Hauptfleisch and Steadman's analysis) and 2016 (Shamsuddeen's study). Maponya's plays are part of the South African cannon, exposing Black Consciousness ideas to a wider South African and international audience. The interviewees also underscored the importance of the political message in Maponya's plays, since for him aesthetic

considerations functioned chiefly to facilitate the conscientisation of his audience. For example, the minimal set design in *The Hungry Earth* foregrounded the deplorable living conditions of the miners, and therefore invited the audience to empathise with their opposition to apartheid. Similarly, the funereal staging of *Gangsters*, particularly the use of the cross and the death of the poet, focused the audience's attention on Maponya's idea that the poet's death (as a stand-in for Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko) was a loss to the black people as a nation. Masechaba's death is arranged in a way that resonates with the death of Jesus Christ, who is said to have died for the sins of humanity. In the play, the character of Masechaba was constructed to serve as a spokesperson for all black people because apartheid laws condemned them all collectively.

This aspect of collective memory is close to Halbwachs' understanding that class was an important signal of the cultural framework. For him, shared remembrances happened through social relations, namely going to school, to church, and occurred during shared meals and in communal living spaces. For Halbwachs, these interactions fostered a "class consciousness" (1992: 19), which was one of the enabling factors for collective memory. Important in the analysis of Maponya's plays is that the memories of the interviewees highlighted the point that recollections may be attributed to a social class, in this instance to the Soweto community. Bennette Tlouana, Maile and Maishe Maponya, and Sibongile Nojila spoke of their recollections as memories of how they have experienced life as black people. Their experience of the past is unique to them as black people because apartheid laws affected the lives of black people in a specific way, regulating where they lived, which school or church they attended and with whom they could socialise and collaborate in making art. Malcolm Purkey, one of the two white members of the research cohort, also acknowledged that as a black playwright, Maponya experienced apartheid in a way that he as a white, English-speaking man could not. However, at the same time Purkey felt an affinity with Maponya's plays. This is because in Halbwachs' terms he belonged to Maponya's cultural group as they had interacted for many years at the Market Theatre, at the University of the Witwatersrand and through the Performing Arts Workers' Equity. These recollections of Maponya's plays show that the class consciousness of Sowetans is an important factor that must be kept in mind when writing a narrative history of Soweto community theatre.

CHAPTER 7:
CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to write a narrative of the history of Sowetan community theatre in terms of Halbwachs' memory studies. The study argued that a multi-pronged approach was necessary to write this narrative, with a focus on the contributions of Gibson Kente, Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya. The purpose was to see how writing on their plays, including archival materials (inter alia the *Sowetan* archive, Pact archive, and Ali Hlongwane's archive) and interviews with them and their associates would contribute to a more comprehensive narrative of Sowetan community theatre during the period 1984—1994. Thus, the memories of the interviewees and other archival materials,[57] namely posters, theatre programmes and photographs of past productions have enriched a narrative of the past. The creation of a South African theatre archive is not the main objective of this study, but the study may be seen to be part of the process of preserving and bringing to the fore theatre activities in Soweto during the 1984—1994 period.

Collective memory and writing a narrative of Soweto community theatre

One of the reasons memory studies has become prevalent in academia is that it allows marginal groups of people in society to bring to the fore their history and to tell of their stories using their own voices. As Barry Schwartz (2016: 19) notes, "there can be no history, without memory." Therefore, collective memory has a role to help "knit together" (or to assist in the "construction") of various strands of information to form a more comprehensive narrative. When speaking of a specific place, for example, Soweto, it is important to bring to the fore the memories of people who were in Soweto and who had seen these plays within the socio-political context of the time. In this study, this cohort is exemplified by the articles in the Sowetan (primarily through the journalists Elliot Makhaya

[57] Keuris and Krüger's articles *South African drama and theatre heritage (part I): a map of where we find ourselves* (2014) and *South African drama and theatre heritage (part II): what does the future hold?* (2014) identify the limitations facing the archiving of theatre materials in South Africa, and advance possible solutions in this regard. A key initiative, the SA Drama and Theatre Heritage Project was launched at Unisa in 2012.

and Victor Metsoamere), the interviewees as well as myself, as I have had first hand interactions with Kente, Maponya and other Soweto-based playwrights. It is important to assert this experience from the vantage point of people that have lived in Soweto. In this study, collective memories convey shared experiences and values which help to frame the narration of Soweto community theatre.

This approach is an increasing trend in memory studies as there are a number of examples in which collective memories of a social group assists to define an historical narrative of that social group. The importance of claiming an original voice is evident in the way in which (collective memories) have assisted to define Jewish memory discourse and Jewish identity, to name two methods that have been appropriated to position memory studies (Rossington and Whitehead (2007). Anne Whitehead (2007: 158 -160) writes of memory discourse as being influenced by Jewish "beliefs and attitudes." She argues that collective memory has been incorporated in Jewish memory discourse as the memories of people within that society binds them as a social group. It is through their memories that the society expresses its "common origin, a shared past and a shared destiny." Additionally, space or territory (as has been proposed by Halbwachs) is also important in Jewish memory discourse and identity, as exemplified by the "attachment to the land of Israel" in discourse about Jewish identity.

Chedgzoy (2007: 216) argues that in historical narratives, different stories from a number of interest groups within a society "compete for a place in history" with the result that women's voices and feminist viewpoints have been subsumed by masculine voices in the shaping of a "culture of memory." As an example, she notes that recent key texts in the field of memory studies, namely Raphael Samuel's *Theatre's of memory* series and Pierre Nora's *Lieux de memoire*, give privilege to what men have said and done as an unchallenged source of historical narratives. Chedgzoy (2007: 217) also makes an interesting point that feminist scholarship is "itself a work of memory that has retrieved many women from oblivion as historical actors and recorders." In this way gender plays an important role in how recollections are shaped within a narrative of a society. Thus "who remembers" and "who recounts the recollections" is imbued with power because the person writing the narrative of the past has a say in how past events are remembered. In

a similar fashion, this thesis, argues for the writing of a Soweto theatre history from the perspective of people that have lived there.

This study employs Halbwachs' approach as it proposes a methodology for collective memory that prioritises the act of remembrances with a view to synthesising them into a narrative. Halbwachs' theory de-emphasises ideological imperatives as the basis for writing an historical narrative. This is a suitable approach for this study because it avoids a bias that could have overshadowed the different ideological beliefs that were expressed by Kente, Manaka and Maponya. I endeavoured to represent their ideological beliefs in the study as part of analysing the themes they explored in their plays.

In his theory, Halbwachs proposed separating history from memory. This was to explain the way in which *collective memory* gives continuity, without necessarily eliminating gaps, to an historical narrative and this helps to present a more comprehensive narrative of events. Following Halbwachs' theory, the most informative way to relate a narrative of the past is to include the memories of interviewees because, as living members of the Soweto community, they are part of the *cadres sociaux* or social framework that enables collective memory. In relation to their memories, it is important to point out that they share "thoughts" or common consciousness with the people with whom they interacted in shared experiences of the past and with those who have an interest in Sowetan theatre in the present day.

Part of the social framework is the manner in which they recall the *period of time* when they were active in theatre, and their thoughts on the specific geographical locations that were significant in the development of Sowetan theatre. As Schwartz and Schuman (2005: 183) point out, Halbwachs' *theory of collective memory* enables one to gain a fuller meaning (of the playwrights and their plays) because it considers the views of ordinary people, in this case, the interviewees, in contrast to historians. Halbwachs recognised that the past is experienced by people engaged in social processes, therefore the social framework in which they live and interact on a day-to-day basis is important in their recollections. Halbwachs points out that memories are a reconstruction of the past and in this study, written, published and archival material and oral recollections have allowed me to see Kente's, Manaka's and Maponya's contributions not only from the perspective of individual interviewees but also from the view of their social interactions as part of the

wider community of Soweto (and of South Africa). He also added that individuals belong to a number of social groups and their recollections reflect their multifaced experiences as well as their shared beliefs, “myths, traditions and customs” (Gedi & Elam 1996: 35). Within this social framework, the interviewees have experiences of interacting as members of the same theatre group, with Kente, Manaka and Maponya, as well as with audiences, journalists and other township arts practitioners. Their recollections include beliefs, values and social practices in, for example, the theatre, creative writing, acting, singing, dancing, fine arts and poetry fields, as memories that have been passed down to them by the preceding generation of theatre practitioners and their community networks.

In this study, the social framework includes the written memories of community theatre in Soweto as captured in the *Sowetan* (1984–1994), and archival material that includes scripts, posters, programmes and photographs from Kente, Manaka and Maponya’s plays. All these elements provide insight into the contribution made by these playwrights and thus assisted in the writing of a narrative such as this. For instance, interviewees talking about Kente provided information on the playwright’s systematic theatre training method, which he never recorded in written form. Kholofelo Kola and Dumakude Mnembe also expounded on the cast’s arrest during the tour of *Sekunjalo* and this supplemented information that was reported in the *Sowetan* newspaper. Memory studies enabled me to understand that although Kente wrote, directed and produced his plays, his success in township communities was sustained by mutually beneficial relationships between them and his work. His plays thus actively promoted social cohesion in these communities. Furthermore, the information from the archives and from interviews with people with whom Kente worked enabled me to reassess Kente’s legacy, and to come to the understanding that his plays were more than simply a vehicle providing entertainment and spectacle to the Soweto community. *Collective memory* made it possible to defend his contribution to South African theatre as a whole. Halbwachs’ *theory of collective memory* has shown that Kente, created an artistic community in the townships, that sustained not only his own company and actors, but also small-scale traders supporting the arts, such as seamstresses and food vendors.

Halbwachs' theory that *collective memory* is facilitated by a social framework has also enabled me to gain insight into Manaka and Maponya's contributions. Manaka (and his colleagues at the Funda Arts Centre) developed and left behind a substantial archive consisting of theatre programmes, concept documents on their approach to acting and theatre at Funda, annual reports, press releases and paintings and scripts. As he was also active as an editor at *Staffrider* literary magazine, Manaka purposefully developed a literary tradition that inspired his students at Funda. I also learned that Manaka, as well as Kente, developed theatre that was concerned not only with resisting apartheid, but also with reflecting the aesthetics of Pan-African (in terms of shared dance and music tropes and poetic forms of expression) and Africanist (in terms of the economic self-sufficiency of Africans and Black Consciousness ideology) perspectives. Specific to Manaka is that he advanced African spiritualism while promoting intra-continental solidarity in his plays. That their influence is enduring is particularly apparent in the productions *Goree – A Tribute to Matsemela Manaka* (2002) and *The Gibson Kente Music Tribute* (2017), the revival of *How Long* (2018) and in the reissuing of *How Long – The Album* (2018).

The application of Halbwachs' *collective memory* has also shown that both Kente and Manaka influenced other artists who later formed their own theatre companies. In the case of Kente, direct offshoots from his theatre company were the Melisizwe Community Theatre, and a similar group that called themselves the "Ex-Kente Players." Kente was also an inspiration to young, non-professional township playwrights in the 1980s and early 1990s. As for Manaka, he enjoyed a special rapport with colleagues Sibongile Khumalo, Siphiwe Khumalo and Mostumi Makhene, and also with his students Ali Hlongwane and Job Kubatsi, and helped to solidify the commitment to Pan-Africanism in their works. A different aspect to the contributions by Kente and Manaka is that it can be said that Maponya's plays offer an unambiguous illustration of why it is important to take cognisance of the prevailing class consciousness in the community when analysing Sowetan theatre.

The socio-political context

During the research process, it emerged that the socio-political context has played a significant role in the creation and production of Sowetan community theatre. The 1980s, in particular, were a tumultuous time in the township, which was characterised by politically motivated violence and crime which affected the community as a whole, including the functioning of theatrical companies and the performance of plays. Actors in plays were arrested (as happened to Kente and his actors). Furthermore Sibongile Khumalo related that actors were also harassed by the South African Defence Force, the state's special branch unit and the police. Additionally, the *Sowetan* newspaper of the era is replete with examples of various forms of social instability.

Looking back, the era presented challenges, which are articulated via selected themes which describe the socio-political context in the thesis. The first was transportation; a lack of transport at night meant that the majority of Sowetans could not go to evening performances of plays in Soweto, or in Johannesburg. As the majority of Sowetans did not own cars, public transport was essential to their day-to-day life.

Secondly, schooling affected theatre as schools were often the site of protests against authorities, especially in the 1980s. In some instances, school-going comrades (anti-apartheid activists) disrupted the performances of Kente's plays as part of a larger campaign to curtail arts and culture in Soweto. They devised the "Black Christmas" campaign, an anti-government protest preventing residents from engaging in anything that the comrades saw as celebratory. This was a means of maintaining a heightened level of protest in the township. Added to this, some comrades disrupted Kente's *Sekunjalo* because they objected to the way in which the play depicted post-apartheid society as riven by political rivalries. On the other hand, in an illustration of Kente's commitment to youth development, he donated money to various schools to upgrade infrastructure damaged by protest action, and to provide bursaries for school and university students.

The third socio-political theme that emerged was infrastructure in the township; there were no theatres in Soweto and living conditions in the township were poor. Significantly, both Kente and Maponya (to a lesser extent) appropriated community halls

as theatre venues, but they had to compete for the use of these buildings as they were also used for weddings, ballroom dancing, choir concerts, and other community activities. Since his plays were primarily performed in community halls, Kente developed a performative style that was suited to engaging with an audience in venues without terraced seating, light or sound equipment, and with poor ablution facilities.

Despite these infrastructure shortcomings, and despite the high crime rate in Soweto, Kente and other non-professional community playwrights were part of a thriving theatre circuit. Various plays were regularly performed in approximately ten community halls in Soweto, all of which had been built by the government. Besides theatre, there were music festivals and dance shows taking place in various venues around the township. Having looked at the *Sowetan* over the ten year period, the newspaper had a high number of pages dedicated to township theatre, music and dance (sometimes as much as six pages[58] dedicated to the arts, which was a fifth of the newspaper). However, closer to 1994, the Sowetan published less articles on theatre and concentrated on television programmes and international news.

In the intervening 27 years between 1994 and 2021, the arts in the township have increasingly played a minor role in society. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, the democratic era required accelerated racial inclusivity in theatre, and this created a number of opportunities for experienced township theatre practitioners in Johannesburg and surrounding cities. Secondly, stage actors from Funda Centre and Gibson Kente's company found consistent work in South Africa's burgeoning television industry. Notably the formation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's TV2 in 1996 brought in a more equitable distribution of language that was represented on the channel. This increased the production of content (dramas and soap operas) in African languages. Indeed, a number of Kente actors are still active in television (as of 2021)[59].

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[58] The *Sowetan* newspaper is a daily newspaper published from Monday to Friday.

[59] Kente's actors have appeared in a number of popular television programmes, including *Generations*, *Scandal*, *The Queen*, *Rockville*, '*Sgudi 'snaysi*, *Gazlam*, *Muvhango*, *Soul Buddyz*, *Isidingo*, *Backstage* and *Rhythm City*.

The interviewees

One of the most critical insights that has emerged from this study has been the information provided by the interviewees. The actors in Gibson Kente's plays provided valuable information on Kente's method of training actors, information on how he managed his theatrical company as well as recollecting dialogue and songs from Kente's important productions. The memories of the actors, who are in their senior years, has not been brought into a comprehensive narrative of township experiences of the past before this endeavour. They provided information that challenged the arguments that Kente's plays were primarily about entertainment and that the playwright devised plays only according to a commercial imperative. Most of the actors Kente trained (even those not interviewed in this study) are still active in the arts.

Indeed, the information captured in the thesis indicates that an archival research project, focussing on Soweto playwrights is a viable one, as there is much material still to analyse and interpret. My interaction with the interviewees was initiated from a place of shared cultural memory of Soweto and of playwrights that were active in the township. As Assmann (2011: 11-16) observed, culture engenders a feeling of community and shared identity. During the interviews, having similar values as the interviewees allowed me to prompt discussions arising from my own knowledge and lived experience of these plays and playwrights. This underlined Halbwachs belief that social engagements occupy a central role in collective memory. Growing up in Soweto, I have vivid memories of Kente's plays and an awareness that in the 1980s (as well as previously and beyond), his name invoked admiration within all strata of the Soweto community. As evident in the literature surveys, the plays of Kente, as well as those of Manaka and Maponya, still attract scholarly enquiry and continue to inspire a new generation of South African playwrights.

The interviewees on Manaka and Maponya were considerably younger than Kente's actors, this is because Kente was from an earlier generation of playwrights. Similar to the playwrights they had adopted Black Consciousness as an ideology that informed their belief systems, as well as their own theatre making. This commitment generally persisted into the democratic era in South Africa. Most of Manaka and Maponya's colleagues had long stopped being active as artists, though they maintained

an interest in the arts and politics. The exceptions were Sibongile Khumalo, who had been active as a singer, and Maishe Maponya, who continued to work as a drama lecturer, playwright, poet and was an arts activist. Both passed away in 2021 and, by then, had not written their memoires. This study was indeed opportune, and in my conversation with them, both intended to collaborate with a writer in future to capture their unique experiences.

The interview with Ali Hlongwane, who collaborated with Manaka, during the playwright's creative period in the early to mid-1980s, illustrated the importance of the archive to the understanding and interpretation of Manaka's plays. In one example, his memories (what he narrated to me and the archival material he has collected) provided interesting insights into workings of Manaka's rural theatre programme. None of the written reports in the 1980s speak of the challenges which the actors faced when based in rural communities during the genesis of their plays. Challenges resulting from the unstable political climate were a result of suspicious community members who were apprehensive about participating in plays with an anti-government message. The Funda Centre personnel (who conducted the projects) also experienced generosity from the community, as they lived with local families during the development of the plays. The development of a rural play could take up to three months. It is clear that Hlongwane's vast archive requires an institutional home, where it may be presented in its fullness to a wider community of scholars.

One of the insights gained from interviewees on Maishe Maponya, was that they elaborated on the playwright's complete trust in the rehearsal process as important in enriching his initial text when writing a play. Specifically, Maile Maponya revealed that at times actors improvised dialogue while on stage; Maponya himself gave credit to John Maytham, saying that the actor contributed much of the dialogue of the character Hannekom in *Dirty Work*, a one character play. This information assists one in understanding the playwrighting process and also suggests that Maponya's plays employed elements of polyvocality as a means to portray the contemporary South African socio-political context. Indeed, there is much information that is contained in the interviews that suggests that this information will need to be further analysed in the future.

Hopefully, this thesis has served as a starting point in which a basic narrative of the history of Sowetan community theatre is established.

In revisiting the central endeavour of this thesis, namely to find a method that facilitates the writing of a more comprehensive narrative of Sowetan community theatre than has been done previously, it is opportune to take cognizance of the totality of the interviewees' inputs. Underlying their comments was a disquiet that in the democratic era, there are no plans or innovations on the horizon to revitalize thriving theatre practice in Soweto. Below, I reformulate their thoughts as recommendations for future action on Sowetan community theatre:

(1) That a research project or study group be established that looks at the playwrights that have played a role in Soweto and to outline their contribution to South African theatre.

(2) That the research group approach the national, provincial and local governments and the private sector with the proposal that a theatre heritage route be established in Soweto, to recognise the contribution made by Kente, Manaka and Maponya to the vibrant culture and economy of Soweto during the 1980s and 1990s. Although this study focuses on Soweto, the playwrights have a national significance. One can link such an endeavour to include more contemporary playwrights and other theatre practitioners too).

(3) That the research group begin the process of developing special plans and programmes to revive community theatre in the township. Ultimately managing these plans will be responsibility of the provincial arts and culture government department. Therefore, it is important to explore ways of collaborating with provincial and local government structures. This project will hopefully support recent developments that are already in place, namely the building of the Soweto Theatre and the re-development of the Jabulani Amphitheatre (in the past a popular venue for music and traditional dance performances in the township).

(4) Another recommendation is to look at the feasibility of archiving theatre material by Soweto playwrights in a theatre museum that would be based in the township. This archive may be linked to the Soweto Theatre in Jabulani, for example.

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