

Ethnicity and marginalisation in South African liberation theatre: Dukuza ka Macu's *Night of the long wake*

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Introduction

South African contemporary history of racial segregation, whether cultural, political, social, or economic is a well-known narrative that needs no repetition here. Socio-political historians like Mafika Gwala, Tom Lodge, John Dugard and others have written at length about it. However, of importance to this paper from that history is the theatre for liberation created as a reaction to the apartheid motif (see Robert Kavanagh 1985, Bheki Peterson 1995, Ian Steadman 2000 among others).

The 1970s saw a theatre that agitated for political change in South Africa. Not that it had not been practiced before; rather that the 1970s practice was done with unsurpassed confrontational zeal. Before it, liberation theatre boasted such names as Herbert Dhlomo, Lewis Nkosi, Richard Rive, Athol Fugard amongst others, from as far back as the 1930s to the 1960s (Ian Steadman 1984, Martin Orkin 1991, Robert McLaren 1985). However, it was in the 1970s when the theatre was done with unsurpassed confrontational zeal, attracting iron-fist repercussions from the regime in power. A number of practitioners had been tried, or threatened to be tried for treason or literally killed, like Mthuli Shezi (Steadman 1984) for doing plays critical of the white regime's apartheid policy. This is also a well-known phenomenon. What is of interest however is the inside workings of the theatre movement itself, especially political 'ideologies' that underpinned the movement.

While the umbrella ethos for this movement was anti-apartheid, the anti-apartheid activities, including cultural resistance was done from slightly different political views within the protest camp (Peterson 1995). Those people who adhered to principles of Black Consciousness mostly practiced black theatre. The original meaning of 'black'

as per Steve Biko (1987) did not (strategically) worry about skin colour. Biko acknowledged people of all colours to have the ability to bring about change to the South African segregated society. However, black theatre movement's definition of 'black' made its point clearly different. It centralized indigenous black African people and people of colour - Indians and so-called coloureds- as the right people to do it (Gwala 1973). White liberal sympathizers were excluded. Gwala's contention, in the exclusion was that they lacked the lived experience of oppression black people and other 'non-whites' went through.

The second was African(ist) theatre. This group practiced its theatre with Pan-Africanism as a philosophical underpinning. Defined in its broad sense, Pan Africanism includes the call for unity amongst Africans within the continent and the diaspora. The South African definition of Pan Africanist politics however, mostly dwelt on issues of land dispossession by 'white settlers'¹, and erosion of African culture by western modernization.

The third grouping was the non-racial camp which espoused liberal white and African National Congress (ANC) liberation policies. In principle, this non-racial group included people of all colours. Whatever the skin colour, this grouping criticised apartheid and any kind of oppression, and social injustice. As an alternative to the system, it called for harmony between races.

Generally speaking, however, these three groups, despite the different ideological approaches in their work, performed for change in South Africa until the democratic elections in 1994. Some performed in the black townships, others in theatres and even went abroad to perform for the international community. With the coming of the ANC-led government, however, the differences within the liberation theatre camp became apparently clear. Some dramatists got recognition while others were left in the cold. This paper looks at one such marginalized dramatist, Dukuza ka Macu and his play *Night of the long wake*.

Dukuza ka Macu

ka Macu, an overtly outspoken Africanist - in the broader sense of the word - wrote over seven full-length plays in the period between 1974 and 1987. *Matter of convenience*, *Heaven Weeps for Tina Sonke*, *Worms*, *Gray Corner*, *Long hot weekend in paradise*, *Night of the long wake*, *Blackman's kingdom* are some titles he added to the list of black theatre of the 1970s and 1980s (Magalasi 1997, 1999). Escaping to Lesotho

for exile in 1978, ka Macu never joined any political party. He, however, continued to do the anti-apartheid plays he had started doing under Cornelius Mabaso while a student at Dorkay House. *Matter of convenience* was the first to put him on the anti-apartheid map in 1974². Then others like *Heaven Weeps for Tina Sonke*, done on the eve of the June 16, 1976 student demonstrations at the Wits University Box Theatre, and *Night of the long wake* followed. However, notwithstanding the number of plays he did, while in the country and in exile, or the critical reviews he received as both a playwright and director, he is still not duly recognized as an important South African anti-apartheid dramatist. If recognition was based on excellence of the plays that were created and performed, the question fit to be posed is: why do plays like *Night of the long wake* still remain unknown. For fear of running ahead of the debate, the necessary issue to raise is what lacked in *Night of the long wake* that made the other plays recognizable?

ka Macu's *Night of the long wake*

Night of the long wake is an intimate drama about a black family in Soweto. It is set on the eve of June 16, 1976. Frans Majola, a 1960 Sharpville Uprising veteran discourages his son Afrika Majola to be part of the 1976 student uprising. Afrika is a student leader, alongside others, working and planning for the June 16 student demonstrations. Afrika is aware that his father disagrees with his political stand on the matter. He, however, joins the underground activities because of the social pressure that comes from other black students. If he does not join, he risks being called a traitor to the liberation cause. The father, who has taken a stance against the demonstration, is described as a traitor to the 'cause'.

Another character, Petrus Lerumo, a friend to Mr. Majola and also a veteran from the Sharpville Uprising, thinks the students should demonstrate. He joins in the name-calling the students do on Mr. Majola, and Lerumo openly calls him a coward. Consequently, the students confer with him as their secret advisor. Lerumo does not, however, advise the students for free. From what Majola says about him, Lerumo is trying to clear his angst for running away from the police at the Sharpville demonstration, when he abandoned his wounded wife, who later dies, unattended.

Outside these characters, there is Lisbet, Majola's wife, who also thinks that her husband is a coward. Lerumo and Lisbet call him a coward despite the knowledge that Majola was one of the Sharpville Uprising's leaders. And they also know that at the demonstrations, Majola was captured and detained in solitary confinement for six

months at the notorious Marshall Square. On his release he gave up any involvement in liberation politics.

Another character is Maki, Lerumo's daughter. Lerumo looks at and protects his daughter as a living memory of his wife. The daughter, Maki, is however in love with Afrika and is expecting his baby. Traditionally, matters of marriage are supposed to bring two parent families together. But Lerumo refuses to leave his daughter at the Majolas. He openly despises Majola, for his current cowardice and that the relationship their children have can never bring them together. As Maki's pregnancy advances, the secret preparation for the June 16 demonstration intensifies, so does the name-calling and despising of Majola as a political coward.

At the demonstration, Afrika is shot and wounded in the leg by an equally wounded policeman. Afrika runs from the streets to his father's house to hide, with the policeman on pursuit. On entering the house, Afrika takes cover behind his father as the policeman opens fire. The bullet hits the father. In a split of the moment, the father disarms the wounded policeman and shoots the policeman. Because the father is also shot, he collapses to die as the policeman also dies on the other side.

This is a typical anti-apartheid play. There are agents of apartheid on one side, and the victims, who are black, on the other (Bheki Peterson 1991). June 16, a demonstration against use of Afrikaans in schools is impending. And Majola, Lerumo and Lisbet as characters are a living history of the black struggle. They survived the 1960 Sharpsville uprising. The children, Afrika and Maki, are a new generation of anti-apartheid protesters who have to continue where their parents left. And there is police harassment. Majola was detained and interrogated at Marshall Square, and an armed policeman, who pursues Afrika into their house, shoots the black father before he himself gets killed.

***Night of the long wake* and other anti-apartheid plays**

Comparing *Night of the long wake* to other anti-apartheid plays of the 1970s reveals a number of notable similarities. A quick look at Athol Fugard et.al's *Sizwe Bansi is dead*, or Workshop 71's *Survival*, or Gibson Kente's *Too late* reveals one similarity. They are plays about racial victimization of black people in South Africa. The government legislates laws that give privilege of movement, association, living, job opportunities and many other facilities to white people excluding 'non-whites'. *Sizwe Bansi is dead* is

about a black man, Siwe Bansi. Bansi cannot get a job in the city of Port Elizabeth. He was born in King Williamstown and his passbook was endorsed with a stamp that does not allow him to work anywhere other than his birthplace. He meets city sleek Buntu who sticks Bansi's picture in a passbook belonging to a dead person that they find murdered in the street by thugs. If Bansi has to survive in Port Elizabeth, he has to drop his name to be Robert Zwelinzima, as the passbook indicates. And with the passbook, his name Sizwe Bansi dies and he manages to get a job in Port Elizabeth as Robert Zwelinzima (Martin Orkin 1991, Ian Steadman 1984).

Survival, on other hand, is about four characters who find themselves in prison for crimes they committed because of racial laws. For example, Slaska Mphahlele is in prison for killing other black people who did not agree with the strike organized for workers at their workplace against the employers. Another character, Themba gives a report of how Habbakuk Ngwenya's mother slept with pass officers for a favour. She later picks up a brutal lover who beats up the mother all the time. The son, in protecting the mother, kills him. This lands the son in prison for murder (Orkin 1991, Magalasi 1999). It is clear here that the play is about crimes perpetrated by apartheid.

Too Late is about a government system that dumps people in a segregated environment, and they survive on 'illegal' dealings. Madinto sells liquor illegally. The police catch up with her and is arrested, leaving behind a disabled child, whose only guardian becomes Madinto's nephew, Saduva. Interestingly, Saduva was born in a Pretoria location and can't live or work in Johannesburg city. The law does not allow it. When a policeman challenges Saduva, he also gets arrested (Kente et.al 1981). In this connection therefore, *Too late* can also be grouped in the anti-apartheid plays' category. It is about victimization of black people by apartheid laws.

When these plays are compared with *Night of the long wake*, they can all be clearly characterized as anti-apartheid plays. Black people find themselves at the receiving end of laws that do not consider them as citizens of the country, but as belonging to local authorities. And the enforcement of these laws turns the black people into criminals.

The structure of *Night of the long wake* is predominantly linear and its content has a realistic subject matter. The realistic story is, however, broken by an inclusion of reports, that act as interludes of the main scenes, extracted from newspapers, delivered direct to the audience. The actors, outside the characters that they play, deliver the reports to the audience. Despite the interludes though, the realistic scenes make one complete story from start to end. Closely looking at this style, ka Macu attempted to

adopt a Brechtian style which practitioners like Robert Mshengu McLaren of Workshop '71 and Barney Simon of Phoenix Players used in the early 1970s. ka Macu, who started to practice around this time may have been influenced by this conscientising method of performance.

Workshop '71's *Survival* uses an episodic form. The difference between *Survival* and *Night of the long wake* nevertheless is that the story in *Survival* is not from the perspective of one character. It does not adopt the Aristotelian one main character structure. *Survival* is a story of four different people and their experiences under a racial discriminatory government. *Night...* is about one man, Majola, who is confronted by the black society for talking down an impending student demonstration.

Besides the anti-apartheid issues and structure, family is at the center of ka Macu's plays (Peterson 1997). *Night of the long wake* deals with the effects of apartheid on a black family in an intimate way. The argument is between Majola and his son Afrika. Majola has first hand information about the brutal reprisals of trying to fight against apartheid. He was tortured at Marshall Square. But the son undermines this. He openly calls him a coward. Majola's integrity as a father is undermined. Apart from the son, Majola's wife Lisbet, also despises him for being a political coward. However, Afrika proves this to be wrong at a later stage. In spite of the courage he showed by rebelling against his father's word of advice, he runs back home, shot in the leg with a policeman on pursuit. Bheki Peterson, in an introduction to Zakes Mda's collection of plays, *Girls in their Sunday dresses*, compares ka Macu to Mda as the few amongst black anti-apartheid dramatists who centralize family in their plays.

As regards black politics, ka Macu turns the tables in *Night of the long wake*. Petrus Lerumo, who pretends to be all knowing to the student leaders of the June 1976 demonstrations inwardly knows that he is a political failure. He could not face the police during the Sharpsville demonstrations. ka Macu makes Lerumo walk around with false arrogance as a political veteran, yet weakens him by bringing up reminders of his political failures. Pretending to speak for the whole black community, Lerumo cleverly hides his own iniquities behind rhetoric. Lerumo emphasizes the type of punishment 'sell outs' face. When he gets fired besides nine others, after being caught stealing at the work place, he states that:

"Nine men want to live; they want their children to live, and their wives and daughters to get off the streets of Hillbrow and they will kill any man who tries to take away their right to live" (*Night* pp. 18-19)

Lerumo's hideous nature in the speech exposes his deeper psychological hate for 'sell-outs', which his daughter later questions. She confronts him using moral principles against theft and killing, which he taught her as a child. But Lerumo responds when pressurised 'but that is what they (the black community) do', pushing the authorship of his judgement to the black community to make it look acceptable.

Making the character of Lerumo a black political charlatan who uses the black political platform for his own psychological iniquities, ka Macu exposes those involved in politics with such questionable motives. And this is one element many anti-apartheid plays left out. In *Survival*, for example, what the characters like Slaska Mphahlele did in killing other black people for disagreeing to be part of a strike is justified by apartheid. When the play opens, the characters ironically call themselves 'criminals', as a way of patronizing themselves as heroes of anti-apartheid. The aim behind the irony is to down play the wickedness of their deeds when apartheid is seen as the cause. ka Macu questions such generalization and thinking as regards the black liberation struggle in *Night of the long wake*.

In terms of plot, *Night* has a main and sub-plot. The main one is about political activism amongst urban black people. This is set against a poetic sub-plot. Maki, Lerumo's daughter is pregnant by Afrika. The advancement of the pregnancy towards the birth of a child runs concurrently with the advancement of plans for the demonstrations. Both plots end on the day of the demonstrations. There is an explosive clash of students and the police in the streets, and a moment later Frans Majola dies with a police bullet, in place of Afrika. It is important to note here that the demonstration comes about as an end-result of underground planning done by Afrika, amongst other student leaders. On the other hand a child, who was fathered by student activist Afrika, is born to Maki on the day of the demonstration. This juxtaposition of plots, which makes the play to stand out artistically, was not common amongst many anti-apartheid plays.

Another aspect worth noting is how ka Macu sets the dialogue in the play. He structures the central speeches that carry the story as dramatic set up for each other, in which black and Africanist political, moralistic and ethical ideas of a preceding dialogue are counter-posed with even greater ones in the next. For example Majola, in his practical existentialist admonishment against political activism, lectures Afrika on the so-called past African heroes like Mandela, Luthuli, Lumumba and others. who got nothing but death or imprisonment out of their activism. Afrika responds, dramatically using the same names, that they did not die or get imprisoned in vain, as the father reckons. Rather they died or were detained to fertilise the tree of liberation. Instead it is he,

Majola, who is dead for not seeing the significance of their actions.

Another aspect is how ka Macu uses music and sounds. A clock ticks throughout the play to symbolize passage of time. Such usage of a ticking clock had various connotations. Firstly, it symbolized the explosive racial tension that captured the atmosphere of the period. Secondly, it also pointed out the commonly used device, timed bombs, that were set and placed in different places to fight white rule. Beside the clock, another sound device ka Macu used was a tolling church bell. It was sounded to announce impending deaths on the day of the demonstrations. Keyan Tomaselli, Gerhard Muller (1987) and Ian Steadman (1984) recognize this clever usage of metonymic setting and environment as metaphor in many black theatre plays of the 1970s and 80s.

Outside music and sounds, the use of newspaper extracts, which in performance at the 1998 Wits University production (*Citizen Newspaper*, 6/5/1998), seemed to irritate many people who wanted the realistic flow of the story, reminded the audience of real events that happened during this period. This political conscientising aesthetic got intensified as the actors, momentarily out of character, delivered them to the audience as real historical narrations. How then does ka Macu compare to other dramatists of the period?

ka Macu and other dramatists

With individual idiosyncrasies just like the other dramatists, ka Macu has several elements he shares with the rest of the practitioners from the anti-apartheid tradition, as shown in the analysis above. His political themes are unmistakably anti-apartheid. In *Night of the long wake*, contrary to the general belief, ka Macu questions ethics of black liberation politics. He exposes such black characters like Lerumo who uphold ideas that stealing from the workplace, and arbitrary killing for reprisal to sell-outs is justified because apartheid is unjust to them. ka Macu creates characters like Majola who work as expected by his employers, and others like Lerumo's daughter to question the father's seeming immorality. The dramatist creates other characters that did things differently to the popular liberation thinking. This is an element that was overlooked in many anti-apartheid plays (Magalasi 1999). For the thematic condemnation ka Macu does on characters like Lerumo, he implicitly celebrates virtues of brave characters like Majola who go against the popular tide for what they personally think is right.

ka Macu renders the plays by other dramatists as more propagandistic than his. He balances characterization to make the spectators form their own judgment on issues of

apartheid and how black politics and its actors went about it. Plays like *Survival* presents and argues for popular beliefs of the liberation struggle. The play condemns prison life under apartheid, including its warders. Constable Visagie who is Afrikaans speaking is portrayed as more than happy to take black people to prison. The play sees the prisoners as victims of an evil system, therefore, noble. The ugliness of black people's behaviour is seen as justified, as long as they don't work for the system. For instance, Slaska, though frowned upon by the government for beating up fellow strikers, presents himself as a victim when he says '... A few of the workers decided to give up and go back to work. We got angry and beat them up. That made it easy for them. The police arrested me for breach of contract, incitement to strike and assault. It doesn't work. We struck for higher wages. Here [indicating the cell] we get nothing'. And Leroi commends what Slaska says by adding one insulting word to those who operate the apartheid system: 'Bastards' (*Survival* pp.143-4).

In *Sizwe Bansi...*, what Bansi does to beat the system is presented as the right thing to do by Fugard et.al. Bansi's weakness and probably his own contribution to the situation he is in are never explored. It is left to the town-bred Bantu, and the photographer Styles to explore how bad the apartheid system was to black people. This makes these plays pass for propaganda plays. In *Night of the long wake*, black propaganda against the system takes a back seat. ka Macu forces black people to look at their own relationships. Majola who is seen as a political coward turns out to be the brave hero in the end, despite being called a sell-out by the community and his own family. When things get tough and the police are chasing Afrika, Majola stands to take the police bullet in his chest, disarms the policeman and shoots the policeman with his own gun. The other characters are then forced to review their position as heroes of black politics. In *Too late*, Kente as well shows that gangsterism should not be allowed to contribute to the struggle, just as ka Macu questions the psychological terror some black people unleash on fellow blacks in the townships, in the name of liberation.

The Form that ka Macu comfortably uses is Realism, except for a few theatrical intrusions. Unlike Workshop '71 which experimented with a combination of musical and Brechtian episodic forms, and Kente who specialised in musicals, ka Macu is comfortable with realistic drama based on family relationships. ka Macu expresses issues of the public space with voices from the private home. And while Kente works well with township language, almost in a conversational manner, ka Macu mediates the dialogue to reflect black African themes and their deep psychology in the face of apartheid, just like Fugard et.al. Kente achieves this psychological depth through liberation songs and music. And yet despite all these comparable similarities, ka Macu still finds himself

and his practice as an 'absence' in the theatre of the new South Africa. Probably an exploration of how marginalisation in South African liberation drama was done might offer answers.

Ideological ethnicity and marginalisation in South African anti-apartheid drama

Marginalisation in South African liberation drama happened more as a process. It involved many factors, much more than one single activity. Even though the process itself was underlined by one major determinant: the political camp the dramatists belonged to within the anti-apartheid theatre movement, many factors orchestrated to help the formulation of 'the big boys'³ of South African liberation drama. The first factor was political ideologies within the anti-apartheid camp. As indicated above, there was black theatre, Africanist theatre, and liberal and non-racial theatre. The second was venues. Some dramatists were restricted to the township and others managed to perform in town venues. This made critics to have access to the latter group that performed in town venues. The critics highlighted their plays thereby 'mainstreaming' them, leaving those that were not performed in town and not written about on the periphery. These plays that performed in town were the ones that ended up having overseas invitations. However, an understanding of the historical background to the anti-apartheid theatre movement then shall partly clarify ka Macu's marginalisation in anti-apartheid theatre.

Brief historical outline of anti-apartheid theatre in South Africa

There was no clearly articulated anti-apartheid theatre philosophy until Mafika Gwala put the ideas in his seminal paper, 'Towards a national theatre' in 1973. Before this, there were only unwritten traditions that came from the 1960s. The liberal tradition, water-shedding from the late 1950s with Union Artists' *King Kong*, and Athol Fugard's early plays continued in the 1960s with such plays as *The Blood Knot*. In these plays, the core idea was the bringing together of the different races. This was done through the challenge of the official Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal's (PACT) dominant theatre policy. In PACT's policy only white people could participate, and the plays it did were written by white people or had to be European classics (Carol Steinberg 1993). As a challenge to this official policy, Fugard performed with black actors like Zakes Mokae, and the plays they did talked about humanity of black and white people on equal terms, just as the ANC's non-racial policies. The other tradition was the township musical championed by Gibson Kente and Sam Mhangwane. The plays focused

on life in the black township, and avoided direct political didacticism. Their central occupation was to entertain and make profits, and were performed in black townships. The other, which was never strictly adhered to was the black political plays done by such intellectuals as Lewis Nkosi and Richard Rive amongst others (Steadman 1984, Magalasi 1997). The authorities banned these plays outright because they were critical of the government and its apartheid policies. So, by the end of the 1960s, though not clearly written down, these theatre traditions are traceable, though done on the periphery, as PACT practiced solely in, and as, mainstream theatre (Steinberg 1993). Apart from this, the colonial period witnessed three types namely, the black African traditional performances, the mine and township dance festivals, the Marabi dance, and the theatre of the black elite championed by Herbert Dhlomo. Bheki Peterson in his book, *Monarchs...*, mentions that the upsurge of black dramatic performances was preceded by Christian drama done by Father Bernard Huss and black students / converts at Marianehill in Natal.

But in the early 1970s, Gwala in 'Towards a national theatre' argues that only black people should do black theatre, because they are the ones who experienced oppression under white rule. He thought white people could only sympathise and that was not good enough to articulate the suffering black people went through in their lives. And, of course, a variation of this came from Workshop '71 and Robert McLaren. McLaren's approach was Marxist and the plays the group produced tried to follow this as a principle. His involvement in the practice, as a white person, can also be seen as both a challenge to PACT's 'whites only' policies, and Gwala's 'blacks only' theatre.

The battle of ideologies reached its peak by 1980 when a number of scholars took it up to either critically analyse the plays or articulate definitions and principles that were used in anti-apartheid theatre. In *Theatre and the cultural struggle*, Robert McLaren did a study of four plays: *Survival*, *Too Late*, *Shanti*, and *Blood Knot*. His Marxist perspective allowed for a study of the plays within their apartheid socio-context. Generally, he saw the plays as valid and worthy their salt, despite a few aesthetical mishaps. And Ian Steadman, picking up the thread, studied black theatre from 1960 to 1984, from Lewis Nkosi, Gibson Kente, to the 1970s with works of Reverend Mzwandile Maqhina, Matsemela Manaka. Before this, Steadman had challenged mainstream critical commentary to move away from 'prescriptive' criticism to 'descriptive' criticism in his 1980 and 1981 articles published in *Critical Arts*. However, evident throughout this critical activity is that the studied plays were mostly in text form, with a few caught in performance like Mzwandile Maqhina's in Steadman's 1984 study.

The biggest battle, however, were fought over what name to use to best describe anti-apartheid theatre. Tomaselli (1981) felt that to call a theatre 'black theatre' is reductionist, and was a continuation of segregative nomenclature. Challenging the homogeneity in 'black' as also erroneous because of class differences within it, Tomaselli felt that the term centralized black practitioners as if they were the only ones who did anti-apartheid theatre. A process-oriented name like 'Alternative theatre', for him, was inclusive of all practitioners despite the colour of their skin. And for him, this name included both black African and white liberal practice.

Maponya (1984), however, in an interview with Carola Luther, had a different view. He thought what he practiced was African theatre. For Maponya, this theatre raised issues about black people's situation in South Africa in a non-compromising way, as opposed to the so-called liberal black theatre in which liberal practitioners used western conventions of theatre. Maponya's contention was that African theatre pays less attention to western aesthetics and uncompromisingly focuses on the message of change: an emphasis the liberal practice paid less attention to, thereby diffusing the urgency for political change in South Africa.

While this ideological debate was taking place, the practice itself splintered even more. Interesting to note is the consequences this splintering had for the practice, and the consequent validation or marginalisation of practitioners. Many Africanist and black theatre dramatists refused to perform with their liberal counterparts (Peterson 1991). Anne Fuchs (1984) relates advice embarrassingly given to Barney Simon at a Black theatre festival in Durban in 1974 that liberal white practitioners should perform for other white people to conscientise them. The black theatre practitioners, in principle as articulated in Gwala 1973 saw an interaction with liberal practitioners as diffusing their mission. They then confined their performances to school and community halls, churches and other centres. in the townships, as an implementation of their struggling-blacks-only principle. The result of this was that such playhouses like Market Theatre and the Space Theatre allowed mostly those plays and practitioners falling in the liberal tradition like Athol Fugard, and others. Barney Simon and Mannie Menem formed the Market Theatre in 1976 and the performances done there were initially by liberal white practitioners. Most of the ultra-left practitioners could not get to these venues, let alone the State Theatre where PACT practiced mainstream theatre. But later, with imposition of State of Emergency by Vorster after June 1976, the black and African theatre started to meet iron-fist confrontation in the township from the government. Ultimately, most of their performances started to be strictly regulated and others got banned. Suddenly, the ultra-leftists had nowhere to go with their performances. By the

end of the 1970s, a few of the young ones like Maishe Maponya, Matsemela Manaka, Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa and Aubrey Moalusi started to work with the liberal white playhouses, though preceded earlier by actors like John Kani, Winston Ntshona and Zakes Mokae. And also by this time, these liberal playhouses had contended with PACT for mainstream attention, and they started to be looked at as part of the mainstream. And all this time, the only liberation plays that went overseas had at least a white person involved, even if it was only at organizational level (Anne Fuchs, 1984). These black and Africanist practitioners who played at the liberal houses consequently started to come to the attention of the liberal press which started to acknowledge their practice. At the same time the liberal white plays that went overseas became validated as speaking for the anti-racism cause because they came from a mixed black and white practice.

On the other hand, publishing houses, which had already started to accept anti-apartheid plays from mostly the liberal practitioners, took a commercial interest in these 'new' anti-apartheid play texts. As these black and African(ist) practitioners joined their liberal counterparts, many others remained behind in the townships. As a result, those that the world saw as doing anti-apartheid theatre were mostly the ones that joined hands with the liberal practitioners, for bad or for good. And this validated the liberal practice even more, because in the eyes of the world audience, the liberals were doing a good job, not only by doing non-racial anti-apartheid plays, but also by allowing indigenous African practitioners to interact with them in the practice.

As regards publishing, in which mostly liberal practitioners had a chance (Isabel Hofmeyr cited in Phaswane Mpe 1997), the new comers started to join in the ranks⁴. In the real sense, the liberal practitioners, and the liberal playhouses started to be seen as valid authorities of anti-apartheid theatre practice. Consequently, the names that associated with the liberal practice got critical attention from the liberal press, and slowly, with the regular mention of their names, they began to be seen as other giants of anti-apartheid theatre, alongside the liberals themselves. Priya Narismulu (1998?) however, in responding to how aesthetics of black poetry were effected by liberal white critics, be-moans the situation. He states that the liberal white criticism of this period was a continuum of conservative western aesthetics, which David Schalkwyk describes as 'Leavisite principles of literary criticism' (Schalkwyk 1986:183). Narismulu feels the liberal critics manipulatively mediated the conservative western aesthetics for acceptability in the eyes of the black African critics who rejected them. And Schalkwyk saw a deliberate depoliticisation of political plays created by liberal practitioners. The intention of the critics, for Schalkwyk, was to make the most conservative amongst

them to accept the liberal political plays as non-political therefore artistic, differentiated from the weak black political plays.

Liberal practice contextualised

However, though the criticism sounds scathing to liberal practitioners and institutions, the role the liberal white people have played in South African liberation theatre is mammoth. The leeway that they were given by the government, for being white, played agency to a lot of change and development of the theatre movement itself. Anne Fuchs (1984) and Bheki Peterson (1991) state that overseas trips of the liberation performances had white people connected to them in one way or another. The government banned black organizations and it was left to this slightly privileged group to play some leadership role. Outside that, the liberal playhouses, whatever problems they had, managed to put some black and Africanist performers on a pedestal for the world to acknowledge. Apart from that, this grouping pushed the educational aspect for some of the practitioners. And their contribution should not be invalidated but applauded. It is just that in the activities, many of those that could have been included within those ranks, therefore validated, were left out, maybe also because of the different ideological stands. And it is the contention of this paper that, the goodness notwithstanding, the serious error of marginalisation of some dramatists from the liberation theatre movement in the new South Africa is in urgent need of rectification.

Conclusion

It is within this contextualisation that one prods the anomaly of ideological ethnicity in South African anti-apartheid theatre practice. Dramatists like Dukuza ka Macu, with such plays as *Night of the long wake*, which do not differ much in standards to the acknowledged anti-apartheid plays are left out in the cold for one reason or another. And apart from that, how many playscripts are still buried in the *zabalaza* - liberation - stampede of the 1970s and 1980s? This poses a question of whether a re-examination of the ideological ethnicity of that time shall not reveal more names like Dukuza ka Macu, Benji Francis, Mike Manana, Khayaletu Mqayisa, Mzwandile Maqhina, Zakes Mofokeng, Cornelius Mabaso amongst many others.

In the New South Africa, one of the major questions that people do not seem to be asking is what is happening with these forgotten practitioners and their plays. Athol Fugard, late Barney Simon, Robert Mclaren, Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa, John Kani, Winston Ntshona and Pieter Dirk Uys are known the world over as anti-apartheid

theatre practitioners. They are studied in academic institutions, not only at South African major drama schools at Universities of Witwatersrand, Rhodes, Durban-Westville, and Cape Town, but also in academic centers of American and European metropolises, and even in other parts of Africa. Some of these acknowledged practitioners continue to be invited either to talk or do plays around the world on the strength of their conferred status. In South Africa itself, these are mainstream household names. They are given positions because of credentials they acquired during the hectic times of anti-apartheid theatre. In all this, what is not being mentioned is that they were given the status, not only because of mastery of their craft, but also because they associated with the acceptable non-racial sect of anti-apartheid theatre movement, while those that had different views like Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism were frowned upon and left in the cold despite their mastery. And the current reality is that while these 'acknowledged leaders' of anti-apartheid theatre enjoy the fruits of their labour in the new South African theatre, the forgotten ones still scratch in squatter camps, dark dungeons, and still queue up for meager funding from the cash-strapped donor agencies (Magalasi 2000): all that because their theatrical ideological perspective did not compromise but quested to 'truthfully', from their perspective, state the reality of South African black life in categorical ways.

Notes

1. Examples can be seen from performances by Maishe Maponya, Ingoapele Madingoane, Matsemela Manaka, Mafube Dancers etc.
2. Joe Tholoe. *Sket'sh*, 1974
3. Bheki Peterson in an unpublished interview with the present writer (1991) says 'the big boys' refers to anti-apartheid practitioners who paid actors handsomely and afforded overseas trips.
4. Maishe Maponya gets his plays published after the European tour in the early 1980s.

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