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Rallying to a cause: the plays of Zakes Mda 1979-1989

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AZANIAN LOVE SONG

*Like a weeping willow
I drop my soul into a pool of fire
somewhere in a dark sanctuary
I hear the sound of a Freedom Song;
The Child has risen
and walks defiantly
towards the lion's lair
undaunted, unafraid...*

Muhammad Omar Ruddin

For Jack always

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Quotations at chapter openings are all from *The Tempest* and *The Return Of The Amasi Bird: Black South African Poetry 1891-1981*, edited by Tim Couzens and Essop Patel.



INTRODUCTION

O brave new world,
That has such people in't!

Tis new to thee.

The Tempest V i

Yesterday when we were proud,
And knew that we lived
In all the lands
And beyond all seas,
The earth lived in us.

'At The Dawn I Saw Africa' -John Matshikiza

Zakes Mda, dubbed one of South Africa's most prolific playwrights, produced his richest and most powerful theatre work during the 70s and 80s. Ironically, it is only in the 90s that he has been acknowledged in his own country as one of its foremost dramatists - ironic since he has recently moved away from drama into the realms of fiction. Fortunately Mda has accumulated a worthy canon of dramatic works, spanning radio and film, as well as theatre, and there is no reason to believe that he will not return to play writing (see interview Appendix A).

Zanemvula Kizito Gatyeni (Zakes) Mda was born in 1948 in the Eastern Cape province, a region that borders the southern part of Lesotho. Of the Basotho nation, the family were Roman Catholic, living in a predominantly Methodist area, although Mda now describes himself as an atheist (MacLiam 1995: 3). Zakes Mda's early years were spent in the Herschel District where his father, A.P.Mda, an early ANC activist, was a teacher at St Theresa Mission High School. In 1963 Mda senior emigrated, as a political refugee, to the country now known as Lesotho - the family following soon afterwards. There, as a student at Peka High School, Mda junior began his playwright's career working mainly on school productions, although *Dead End* (discussed in this thesis) was also written during this time, to be revised later.

His third level education is impressive: a BA in Fine Arts from Switzerland, an MA in theatre and a second MA in mass communication - both from Ohio University - and a Ph D in development communication from the University of Cape Town. This led him onto an academic career which included stints at the National University of Lesotho where he was Professor of English, Yale as a Research Fellow and as Visiting Professor at the Universities of Vermont and Witwatersrand. Since 1988 he has served as a UNICEF consultant on rural development and has presented papers and held workshops in many other

institutions in Africa and Europe. At present, apart from being dramaturge in residence at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, from where he also runs writers' workshops, he describes himself as a painter rather than a playwright. 'That's the main thing I do, really...I paint mostly for the European market'(3). There is a permanent exhibition of his paintings in Stockholm.

Mda has worked extensively in theatre in various capacities but most notably in the area of theatre-for-development. For example, he worked as director with Maratholi Travelling Theatre in Lesotho, an experience which contributed, in part, towards his book *When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre*. Mda's plays have been produced in the United States, Britain, Spain, France and Russia as well as in southern Africa. *The Nun's Romantic Story* has been translated into Castilian and Catalan and *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* and *Dark Voices Ring* have both been translated into Russian and French. In South Africa he won the Merit Award of the Amstel Playwright of The Year Society for *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* in 1978 and in 1979 he was Amstel Playwright of the Year for *The Hill*. For his novel *She Plays With The Darkness*, he won the Sanlam Literary Award in 1995.

But such acclaim has not always been the case. Mda has been largely ignored by the South African public, with the exception of a small academic group and some township theatres, until 1995 when revivals of three and premieres of five of his plays were staged in Johannesburg at the same time. In several interviews he has iterated his disillusionment with South African theatre. He has said:

There was a time when a particular kind of play was *the* play and producers were keen for me to follow that formula: clenched fists and slogans. I'm anti formulas, so I'd rather they didn't do my work (Anstey 1995: 20).

And again:

On countless occasions I have been told that my plays are not relevant because theatre management have a formula of what Africans should be writing about. Yes, white management has a firm grip on the cultural agenda of this country and they continue to dictate what genuine black playwrights should be writing about. It is true to say that I have been actively discriminated against as they have expected some slogan shouting, something which I am not prepared to do. I have never cared for white approval and have always been content with my plays being staged by small theatre groups. What I have always found strange is that foreign authors seem to be found more relevant by South African theatre management than those whose productions are directed at the majority. I remain bitter and angry about what has been done to us. We need a theatre that will mirror the inherent conflict in our situation and it is only when the imbalances have been redressed that African playwrights can surely be said to have returned to their home continent (*City Press* 1995: 25).

While in 1984 he dismissed the notion that 'artistic creation is an end in itself, independent of politics and social requirements' (Daymond et al 1984: 296) and emphasised that he did not believe in 'the universality of the human condition, for the human condition is always determined by social, political and economic factors' (296) nevertheless he has claimed recently that in his plays '[p]olitics is merely the background' and that his plays 'are about human beings, families and love...I never let apartheid write my stories for me' (Anstey 1995: 20).

Yet in South Africa this is a complex issue. In a country where the tradition has been that one's every action, almost, has been a political statement, Mda has had to admit that

artists will always respond to the prevailing political and social conditions because they select their material from society. They do not create their works about something that is divorced from their day to day reality. Politics is part of their intimate daily experience, and for better or for worse, politics will feature in their works' (Mda 1995: 38).

In his article 'Theatre and Reconciliation in South Africa', Mda makes a clear distinction though in the types of political theatre most prevalent during the 70s and 80s. He sees so-called protest theatre as but a pale fore-runner of the more powerful theatre-for-resistance. Protest theatre, according to Mda, disapprovingly depicts a situation of oppression but does not go beyond that point, its motive being to point out an unacceptable condition to the oppressor, appealing to his conscience but depicting the oppressed as passive, suffering in silence. Theatre-for-resistance, on the other hand, is primarily aimed at the oppressed with the intention of mobilising them to take agency in their own lives and resist oppression. Mda's political plays, unequivocally, fall into this category.

This clear literary definition has not always been the case, needless to say, of the larger African experience. Almost every country on the continent has been colonised at some time and African literature has struggled (as it still does) to define itself. Any one group of people, no matter how homogeneous it sees itself as being, draws on diversity for its definition by virtue of the fact that it is a group. Its literature then, as the vocal expression of its cultural identity, is a product of syncretism rather than idiosyncrasy. But literature is certainly not merely an end result or a by-product of a cultural process. Literature itself is conscious and deliberate. Writers choose to write, choose what to write and choose how to write, and often writers choose not just to reflect society but to change it. Even if literature 'is not seen as *productive* of meaning but essentially reflective or

expressive' (Bhabha 1984: 100), and as a social activity, it may reflect a group's attitudes and therefore it cannot but be partisan. Ngugi wa Thiong'O sees that

[t]he entire changing relations of production and hence the changing power relations consequent on mutable modes of production is a whole territory of a writer's literary concern. Politics is hence part and parcel of this literary territory (Ngugi 1981: 72).

Ngugi thus sees writers as two types, defined by their attitudes to society, i.e. those who 'assume that a society is basically static and stable' (75) and those who make no such assumption, 'either because of the nature of the period in which they live, or because of their instinctive or conscious dialectical approach to life and society' (76).

As Said has argued, colonialism has generally been interpreted from a European standpoint. Ethnographic representation has usually been presented against a western yardstick and most readers of colonial literature are familiar with the continual representation of the colonies as a contrast to the European experience. Rider Haggard, Josef Conrad, E.M. Forster and others, despite the best intentions, offer readers a cliché either of the noble savage in his exotic paradisaical landscape or else an essential Other, ranging from the merely strange to the downright brutal. The aim has always been to introduce readers to something that is interesting but essentially different in comparison with the European experience. Seldom has the experience of colonialism, whether from the point of view of the colonised or colonisers, been investigated as it stands without the constant need for comparison.

Criticism of colonial literature has largely been from a western perspective as well and, consequently, much criticism of post-colonial literature follows the same path. And yet there is, arguably, a divergence between European and African ontological attitudes towards the fundamental philosophies of life. Charles R.

Larson, for example, sees the general African attitude to nature as basically one of interpretation, whereas the European seeks to subdue it; and for the African there is an emphasis on the importance of the group over the individual. It seems probable then that culture, from whichever side of the divide, 'will be a determining factor in shaping one's interpretation of a piece of literature' (Larson 1973: 474).

Colonial literature has tended to present the colonised as an object of study rather than as a subject: 'passive, non-participating, endowed with a "historical" subjectivity, above all, non-active, non-autonomous, non-sovereign, with regard to itself' (quoted in Said 1991: 97). Flemming Brahms has expanded this concept, seeing colonial literature in the past as having been represented (largely, of course, from a European viewpoint) on three levels - not as parallels but 'within the context of dynamic change associated with the shift from centre to periphery in the Commonwealth' (Brahms 1982: 225). The first level, 'the wilderness experience,' is seen as 'a confrontation between European sensibilities and the realities of a new and different world' (225), i.e. a contrast between the known European world and the Other. The second, 'confusion of values', is an attempt by the (usually) European writer to side with the 'people in whose oppression he has taken an active part' (229). This is usually the impression the reader gets at a first reading, but on closer inspection 'an unconscious imposition of a European value scheme' (229) can usually be detected. The third level is termed 'demonisation' by Brahms. Despite an honest and conscious attempt by the author to represent dispassionately the reality that he encounters, ultimately his subconscious conditioned response to the Other pushes through and a European teleology is the final impression. Brahms describes it as

[t]he arrogance of believing that cultural and material progress, in Africa and elsewhere in the world, must necessarily follow the direction of European progress [and] has the equally arrogant implication that it

is the task of the white man to help the African catch up with this 'time lag' (231).

Traditionally, therefore, the colonial text concerns itself mainly with the representation of a contrast - an Other. It ignores 'the *origin* of writing as linear time consciousness' (Bhabha 1984, 98), it ignores historicism and only conceives of writing as a signifying practice: 'a process, which conceives of meaning as a systematic production within determinate institutions and systems of representation - ideological, historical, aesthetic, political' (98).

At this point it would be helpful to be clear on the complex subject of post-colonialism. Marxist thinking establishes a close connection between economics and politics and, therefore, a distinction needs to be made between colonialism and imperialism - terms often used interchangeably. Colonialism is said by Williams and Chrisman to be 'the conquest and direct control of other people's land' (Williams and Chrisman 1993: 2) while imperialism they see as 'the globalisation of the capitalist mode of production, its penetration of previously non-capitalist regions of the world, and destruction of pre- or non-capitalist forms of social organisation' (2). This definition is inadequate, however, unless communist forms of colonialism (sometimes termed imperialism) are borne in mind. Therefore, while colonialism and imperialism are often closely linked, it is not imperialism that is the concern of this essay.

The formal dissolution of the African and other European colonies began in earnest from 1947, but western influence cannot be said to have disappeared as well. 'Flexible combinations of the economic, the political, the military and the ideological' (3) aspects of western influence pervade most of the erstwhile colonies and there exists still a struggle for a selfhood, something which characterises most

post-colonial countries. But what selfhood? These countries are usually, perforce, pluralist and so the struggle for a new identity is complicated by the selection of what, culturally, is appropriate to the new state and what is not. There are positive and negative aspects to every culture and this is exacerbated in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-faith country such as South Africa. While it is laudable to aspire towards a non-hegemonic society, 'homogenised...identikit citizens,' are (according to Sachs) an impossibility and so the definition of a common identity is never simple. For instance even people who see themselves as united in a common cause may have slightly differing aims. Sachs cites the fact that whites joining the struggle to end racial oppression in South Africa may not all be doing so to help blacks gain their rights but may be 'fighting for their own rights, the rights to be free citizens of a free country, and to enjoy and take pride in the culture of a whole country' (Sachs 1990: 121-123).

According to Janmohamed, colonial society typically consists of a series of oppositions. The colonised at once admires and hates the coloniser. He admires the usually superior technology but he hates the system that subjugates him. The coloniser at once depends on and rejects the colonised. He rejects what he sees as inferior, base - even evil - while depending on the existence of the colonised to give definition to his privileged material and social status as well as his sense of moral superiority (JanMohamed 1983: 4). Colonisers are generally considered to be, or become, racist but, conversely, so do the colonised become racist or at least xenophobic. Often 'the colonised reacts by rejecting all colonisers *en bloc*' (Memmi 1965: 130). The colonisers persist in stereotypes of the colonised as inferior or degenerative while the colonised want to prove, at all costs, 'the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect' (Fanon 1967: 10). In post-colonial society the tension persists, but in the form of a striving towards an affirmation of ethnicity; yet, as Bhabha puts it: 'The place of the Other must not be

imaged...as a fixed phenomenological point, opposed to the self, that represents a culturally alien consciousness' (Bhabha 1994: 118).

Even for advanced theorists then, the difference between a colonial country and a post-colonial country is none too clear, other than that a foreign power no longer assumes direct political control. Post-colonial countries are, largely, of two types: firstly, countries where the bulk of the population are the descendants of settlers (countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many Latin American countries); and secondly, countries whose populations were controlled by a minority of colonisers, the bulk of their present populations being the descendants of those colonised (India, Ireland and most African countries are typical). The literature that emerges from these two types of post-colonial countries can be described generally. Literature emanating from former settler countries concerns itself largely with a moving away from the Old World and an embracing of the New, while literature from the invaded countries centres to a large extent on a struggle for a definition of national selfhood. However, Bhabha suggests that ethnographic representation is not adequately served by mere use of local settings, speech, characters, situation and conflicts but that

the character of literature, as of its history, is necessary and thoroughly mediated: that its reality is not given but produced; its meanings transformative, historical and relational rather than revelatory; its continuity and coherence underscored by division and difference (Bhabha 1984: 96).

Much of post-colonial literature reflects the depiction of a former dependency on an imperial centre and a subsequent move towards self reliance as well as 'a conceptualisation of race, ethnicity and ethnic identity' (Williams and Chrisman 1993: 17). Likewise, post-colonial literary theory developed as a response to this sense of newness and re-identification. Western theories, though

emerging from particular cultural traditions themselves, saw themselves as 'universal'. But because '[t]heories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies and value systems are all radically questioned by the practices of post-colonial writing' (Ashcroft et al 1989: 11), a post-colonial system of literary criticism had to emerge because of the inability of European theory to deal adequately with 'the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing' (11).

The brief of post-colonial criticism therefore is extensive. Not alone must the critic deal with historical, ethnographic and ontological factors but must also confront issues such as racism in language and religion for example, as well as 'metaphysical guilt'. English and the Christian religion are notoriously colour conscious. Ngugi reminds us that one need only think of 'black market, black sheep, blackmail, blacklist, black everything [in order to] testify to the value assumptions in that linguistic negative definition of blackness' (Ngugi 1981: 14), while 'God, Christ, angels [are seen] in terms of whiteness...the rejects of the white God would burn to charcoal blackness'(15). 'Metaphysical guilt' is a postscript to colonialism. Obviously, it is imagined that the colonisers would be the major sufferers in this regard if they have any moral sense at all, but some of the formerly colonised experience a sense of guilt too. If, by their collaboration, they have helped perpetuate a system to their personal gain but to their nation's detriment they are equally damned. As Fanon says: 'Every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every one of my silences, every one of my cowardices reveals me as a man' (Fanon 1967: 89). We are all guilty, he feels, on whichever side of the divide we find ourselves, not alone for what we did but for what we did not do.

And finally, the post-colonial critic may not ignore neo-colonialism, either in the form of a lingering western influence with economic control to greater or lesser degrees or a newer, more insidious injustice: black-on-black exploitation.

Further to the problem of post-colonial criticism is the placement of the African text with regard to historicism and organicism. The fact that the African writer finds himself continually struggling to establish his autonomy and refuting a tendency to be always viewed against a backdrop of Otherness renders the argument insoluble. His dilemma is that he may not feel able to allow himself the luxury of a holistic text if he feels he is an interpreter of the uniqueness of his culture and yet, if he feels that he has an obligation to be his culture's artistic representative, he must avoid being evaluated only in terms of Otherness. And this is not the end of the matter. Ethnographic representation and its criticism often result in a distortion 'in relation to a *given* norm or model' (Bhabha 1984: 105) which 'results in a mode of prescriptive criticism' termed

...normative fallacy, because it privileges an ideal 'dream image' in relation to which the text is judged. The only knowledge such a procedure can give is one of negative difference because the only demand it can make is that the text should be other than itself (105).

One of the major concerns of post-colonial writers seems mainly to be with a struggle for a valid sense of ethnic selfhood. Not only have the formerly colonised been through a political struggle, but they must now seek to overcome attitudes inculcated within themselves as a result of the experience of colonialism.

Chinweizu and his co-writers see the way forward for post-colonial literature as a deliberate and calculated process of syncretism. While they see it as desirable to 'destroy all encrustations of colonial mentality' (Chinweizu et al 1983: 239), they acknowledge that it is inadvisable to throw out the baby with the bath water, as it were. Post-colonial culture should sift through the past, welcome contributions from other cultures as well as foster its own inventive genius, resulting in a synthesis which is necessarily reflective of the syncretic nature of the

society as a whole. And to express his national selfhood it is essential that the post-colonial writer should, as Canadian poet Dennis Lee explains, listen to the cadence around him and express it. A poet (or any other artist) cannot write a poem, he says, but only 'help it stand free in the torrent of cadence' (Lee 1974: 153).

As Chinweizu and his colleagues point out, African literature today is written mostly in various European languages by 'a Western-educated African elite' (Chinweizu et al 1988: xvii), mostly for academic use 'to add a dash of local flavour to a standard classroom diet of Western literature' (xvii). However, the vast canon of pre-colonial written literature, not to mention the even vaster canon of orature, is largely ignored because it is generally considered non-academic. It is so often forgotten that 'darkest Africa' was in fact the cradle of western civilisation, that the ancient Egyptians were African and that Aesop was an Ethiopian. In fact, according to Chinweizu and his co-writers, literature written by Africans for African readers in African languages predates European literature by some 2,000 years (xviii). But this almost seems as if they are proving Fanon's thesis: the colonised's need to prove their equal worth with the coloniser. Popular literature today, written mostly in the various vernaculars and termed 'vernacular literature,' is also not considered academic enough. Chinweizu and his fellow writers are concerned that literary works from the westernised African elite, who constitute only about 5% of the African population, are the only works recognised generally as literary. And this situation is self-perpetuating because the readership of African literature consists mainly of Eurocentric critics, speakers of the European languages (usually Europeans and usually from academia) and Europeanised Africans, it is not surprising that African writers desiring critical acceptance present Europeanised works. Chinweizu and his colleagues lament this state of affairs but deem it possible to 'cure them [the writers] of their europhilia, and to wean them from the neo-colonial hegemony of European culture'

(Chinweizu et al 1983: 292). Although illiteracy is widespread all over Africa, they hope that government education policies will improve this state and that an African readership demanding Africanised literature will burgeon - with writers rising to meet the demand.

In a newly emerging or independent country the writer plays a crucial role. The writer is part of the machinery that shapes events because he is the eye and the ear of the nation, responding to the mood of society and assuming the roles of mediator, interpreter, spokesman. Mphahlele suggests further, that all writers should reflect a sense of commitment, even in exile (an all-too-frequent condition of pre-1994 South African writers). Even if in exile, if the African writer is committed, 'his creative instincts will drive him to African themes that demand his commitment, or those in which he has already taken a stand' (Mphahlele 1979: xiii). Yet, while the search for a cultural identity may be one of the priorities of a newly independent nation, it may become an unwitting pitfall if other issues are not faced. Many writers see socialism as the only alternative to neo-colonialism, but some do not see it as a desirable alternative and, instead, immerse themselves in blackism. If one considers that Africa has, in fact, been the basis for European capitalism - through slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism - then the racial aspect of the anti-colonial recedes when we remember that 'values, cultures, politics and economics are all tied up together, that [African writers] cannot call for meaningful African values without joining in the struggle against all the classes that feed on a system that continues to distort these values' (Ngugi 1981: 98).

It is often tempting for post-colonial writers, when confronted with an uncertain future, to hark back to a comforting and, often, romantic past - but Soyinka sees this as a dangerous exercise. While acknowledging the value of the past in 'clarify[ing] the present and explain[ing] the future' (Soyinka 1968: 13) he

sees an indulgence in the past as leading only to a destruction of the will for action. The test of whether a writer is realising his role is the breadth of his vision - 'whether it is his accidental situations which he tries to stretch to embrace his race and society or the fundamental truths of his community which inform his vision and enables him to acquire even a prophetic insight into the evolution of that society' (12).

Although the present situation in Africa as a whole was created by and is dominated by politicians, it is up to the writer to salvage Africa from descending into the same mire as the colonial past. By constantly reminding people that 'the black tin god' (13) is just as capable of degrading and dehumanising his victims as the erstwhile white oppressors, the writer is a key factor in extricating Africa from 'the current cycle of human stupidity' (13). If the writer's position is so untenable that he can no longer act as the vocal conscience of the nation, he is still its chronicler and his role remains to record the experience of his society; but, if he is up to it, his true function is 'the voice of vision in his own time' (13).

African literary expression has traditionally been largely oral (oral performance poetry in the form of praise singing, still being a vital part of contemporary culture), but there is often a denigratory attitude to this from the west - an implication that the oral canon is a lesser entity than the written. This attitude is surprising considering that all literary cultures have developed from the oral. 'The barrier between oral culture and English written culture is one of terminology, of custom, of political policy, of colonialism, of racial pride,' asserts Stephen Gray. He sees no aesthetic reason for this hostility but acknowledges that the distance exists (Gray 1979: 168). Once an African literary work is written, however, it becomes immediately acceptable and accessible; and when it can be read in a western language it gains respectability. However, unless it conforms to western standards of 'expression, appropriateness and even humour' (164), it

seems to be little more than a clever oddity. Translation though, from the point of view of the previously colonised, is - according to Gray - seen as 'an act of incipient language colonialism that [leads] to the down-grading of tribal art' (165). If the tradition of ethnographic focalisation is invariably from the viewpoint of the west, then the de-colonisation of literature has yet to be fully realised.

It is with exasperation that so many Africans reject the so-called universality of western criticism. Several African critics call, again and again, for a viewing of post-colonial literatures on their own terms. As Chinweizu and his fellow writers plead: 'It is a society's values that should guide its social criticism [literary criticism being a branch], not some other values allegedly universal, timeless, transcendental' (Chinweizu et al 1983: 303). They see western critics, when propounding allegedly universal precepts, as sounding ridiculously parochial. Exposure to non-European literatures would, they feel, 'cure [western critics] of a certain narrowness in their values, expand their understanding of what literature and criticism are all about, and help save them from the asphyxiation of Europe's rarefied Parnassus' (303). The requirement of Euro-centric criticism would seem to them to be that the African is required to shrug off his Africanness in order to be accepted on critical terms.

Another issue would be the seeming lack of evident post-modernism in African writing. Of course post-modernism exists within African literature but, according to Carusi, it has little immediacy in the experience of the African writer:

Undecidability, multiple and endless possibilities of meaning, the parody of the past...have no place in a context of real political urgency, where there is a need not for endless self-reflexivity, but for definite decisions to be made: in post-colonial literature the past is called upon, not as a parody, but in deadly earnest (Carusi 1991: 101).

The general conclusion then would seem to be that in order to be critically acceptable in the western world, post-colonial literature must conform to certain, invariably Euro-centred, parameters.

The South African writer's obligations are no different but the uniqueness of his societal existence necessitates a modification in his concerns and his responses. There is little unity in South African society. The black community comprises not only indigenous African peoples (among whom there is a multiplicity of linguistic and cultural groups) but also Asian and mixed-race peoples. The white community, though drawing from many European origins, is mainly divided between English- and Afrikaans-speakers. All these diverging groups have their own traditions, cultures and even audience and, consequently, critics. In 1984, White and Couzens found the economy of South Africa to be capitalist and largely unified so that, while the different groups might see themselves as separate, 'the pull of the economy is ultimately a stronger centripetal force than any centrifugal pressures at work' (White and Couzens 1984: 1); and this would appear to be still true. In other words, class is almost as dominant an issue as race in South African society. Consequently, South African society pre-1994 has not been a nationalistic-minded society because there has not been a coherent, cohesive national entity. Apart from the Afrikaner group, the nature of South African society has been fragmentary.

This sense of Othering has extended even as far as the revolutionary struggle. While most of the rest of the world sympathised with the lot of the oppressed in South Africa, the concentration was always on the suffering and deprivation experienced and not on the beginnings and development of a sense of agency nor on the slow but inevitable achievements. Mshengu lays the blame for this on the so-called white liberals - the interpreters and communicators - described by him as 'bourgeois intelligentsia' (Mshengu 1979: 31). While they professed

solidarity, Mshengu describes their response as a distancing from a moral stance. While expressing horror at the sufferings and denial of human rights of the oppressed, they, nevertheless, felt less able to condone an armed struggle and consequently could not sanction achievements which were due to such a struggle.

This kind of agency did not become manifest until the momentum of the Black Consciousness Movement (known as BCM) which was begun in the early 60s and reached its zenith in the 70s. Seen as the political coming of age of South African blacks, the BCM underscored, primarily, the need to conquer fear. Steve Biko, the 'father' of Black Consciousness stressed the imperativeness of self-liberation. While the oppressor had control of the mind of the oppressed, he was most potent. 'If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude' (Biko 1978: 92). And it is through culture that the seeds of protest were nurtured, when the group began to dispense with fear and express itself openly. It is no co-incidence then, that the 70s in South Africa saw a burgeoning of protest artistic expression. The hiatus occurred with the Soweto riots of 16 June 1976 and, although it was another eighteen years to democracy in South Africa, there was no going back.

Finally, South African writers find themselves in a unique position today because South Africa, strictly speaking, cannot be termed truly post-colonial, rather post-Apartheid. The whites in South Africa, there since the seventeenth century, have not really viewed themselves as colonists for some considerable time, neither have they left the country; therefore the usual post-colonial parameters are not entirely applicable.

Similarly, because of the separation of the racial groups in South African society and the consequent separation of cultures, so have the writers worked separately. There has been little contact between writers from the different groups,

so there has not been a recognisable cohesion in the writing. Because of Apartheid, writers have been cut off from each other; and the divide is most evident between Afrikaans writing in general and the rest of South African writing. This is understandable, initially, when one considers that the majority of Afrikaners would have been supporters of the National Party (the architects of Apartheid) but this becomes a paradox when viewed historically. Afrikaans developed as the language of the formerly oppressed.

Afrikaans literature evolved around suffering and patriotism...[it] has been hijacked by proponents of racial domination to support systems of white supremacy...[but] there is no reason at all why Afrikaans should not once more become the language of liberty, but this time liberty for all (Sachs 1990: 123).

A writer's themes normally arise out of the contemporary *milieu*. Seldom does a writer choose his themes, and this has been most evident in South Africa since the 70s. Most writers did not dare to ignore the issues that pressed themselves on their consciousnesses - these being political in the main. In the words of Carusi, the three main thrusts of South African literature during this time can be described as: 'militancy or the battle-cry for freedom; the revaluation of humanism and especially African humanism; and the position of Marxist discourse, especially the notion of consciousness' (Carusi 1991: 97). The changes arising out of such a worthy but narrow national engagement can be weakening when it needs to be at its most potent. If art (and writing in particular) is used solely as consciousness-raising, it can revert to mere propaganda, reaching only the already receptive and succeeding only with the frustrated. The reverse effect may ensue. If South African writing becomes too sombre and serious, it elevates Apartheid by giving it added importance and intensifies its seeming invincibility, paradoxically counteracting what it sets out to do. Art is not merely an instrument of change,

albeit a powerful one, but may also be a means of celebration, an affirmation of possible new beginnings.

No branch of writing reaches as many people as perhaps drama, in its many forms. It is immediate in the lives of so many, so that when it mirrors not alone man's nature but his struggles, it becomes a dynamic force for change. As Rabey asks: 'By what means does [political drama] convincingly illustrate the avoidability of social problems, or expose the contradictions inherent in the values of the established order? By being *dramatic*' (Rabey 1986: 2). It is not surprising that, since South Africa is such a heterogeneous society, there is such a variety of forms in South African drama. South African drama before the 50s was largely an imitation of British and European styles and themes; but after 1948 and the coming to power of the National Government, socio-political themes began to emerge. From then on, apart from the thriving commercial theatre, the focus has remained relatively constant but sub-categories have become definable.

Black theatre in South Africa, akin to American black theatre, is a general term meaning drama about blacks, dealing with black lives and the meaning of being black. This type of theatre developed from the highly successful black musicals, of which Gibson Kente has been the most successful proponent, until it was received and developed by the radical political playwrights of the BCM. The musicals began by offering merely an alternative to the status quo, while the later, polemical theatre was characterised by 'a common theme of protest and a common technique of didacticism' (Steadman 1984: 143). The eponymous Township theatre flourished from about 1969-1975, where it was patronised, in the huge sprawling metropolitan townships, largely by 'the vast number of workers in white industry, commerce and private employment; the youth; and the *tsotsis* and gangsters' (Mshengu 1979: 33). The characteristics of township theatre are that it is urban, commercial and expresses the condition of the exploited worker. It deals

with 'racial, moral, social and economic problems in the context of capitalist exploitation. It is about education, sex (adultery, promiscuity, rape), religion, crime, drink, the corruption and cruelty of the authorities' (33). It lost popularity as the more urgent issues began to be expressed in political theatre.

By the 70s the theatre had become almost the only outlet for expression for protest. As the BCM gained momentum, so did political censorship become more stringent, but theatre had many advantages: 'it was cheap, mobile, simple to present, and difficult to supervise, censor, or outlaw. Clearly it was the one medium left to the people to use to conscientise, educate, unify and mobilise both cadres and rank and file' (36). According to Steadman: 'Since 1976...theatre ha[d] emerged as a conscious signifier of South Africa's complex and contradictory society...[theatre] being a dynamic means of communication that transcends barriers of language and ethnicity, function[ed] as a consciousness-raising mechanism' (Steadman 1988: 31). Andrew Horn has described the material poverty of the theatre of this time, resulting in 'small-scale productions designed for ad hoc venues, relying on the simplest of props, costumes and technical effects...plays in which character and action, rather than spectacle, are central' (Horn 1986: 222).

Alternative theatre, on the other hand, though developing concurrently, is not synonymous with Black theatre. It offers 'a cultural protest defined by political and ideological factors' (Steadman 1984: 138) but cannot be defined by racial, ethnic or linguistic preconceptions. Also polemical, radical and revolutionary, it does not concern itself exclusively with the condition of the black but would concern itself more with the proletariat in general - both socially and politically.

As the developing political crisis in South Africa moved inexorably towards the 90s, four more divergences occurred. Trade union workers' theatre

emerged as a means of education by the unions; township musicals began to be supplemented by definitively political plays; a new wave of white Afrikaans innovative and experimental plays emerged, dealing with psychological and sexual taboos related to political anxiety; and a new generation of English-speaking playwrights investigated the fears and anxieties, hopes and aspirations of those facing a post-Apartheid society (Banham 1995: 1010).

Although he has lived many years in exile, Mda is unequivocally a South African writer. The fact that Lesotho, an independent kingdom, is situated almost in the very centre of the Republic of South Africa meant that, while he enjoyed political freedom, he was still able to keep his finger on the pulse, as it were, of the South African experience - something that has proved difficult for many more distant exiles. Mda, therefore, is one of the leading figures in contemporary South African drama. This drama has been rich in improvised and workshopped plays, one of the most notable being *Woza Albert!*, a hugely successful play workshopped by actors Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa and director Barney Simon. Ngema, a playwright in his own right, joins Mda and other major exponents of contemporary black drama such as Dukuza ka Macu, Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya, Mzwandile Maqina, Fatima Dike, Ronnie Govender and theatrical entrepreneur, Gibson Kente, as practitioners with international reputations. The best known internationally of South Africa's white playwrights are, perhaps, Athol Fugard and Pieter-Dirk Uys but major writers of equal calibre include Deon Opperman, Reza de Wet, Paul Slabolepszy and Sue Pam-Grant (Banham 1995: 1010).

There has been little academic assessment of Mda's work other than reviews of his texts and productions. Myles Holloway, apart from an MA thesis on the politics in the text of the plays, has written one article on the plays in general and one on *The Hill* in particular. Other than one other article by Michael Cosser,

also on *The Hill*, Mda has only been included in articles of a more general nature by various writers.

In this thesis I have looked at Mda's work from the viewpoint of post-colonialism. The mandatory reading on this subject would begin with Said's *Orientalism* and Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back*, dealing respectively with the concept of the Other, which is at the heart of the colonial/post-colonial experience, and with writing in and for that experience. Eric Hoffer, Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, between them, explain the condition of the oppressed, while Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha investigate the concept of Negritude. Chinweizu, Chinua Achebe, Flemming Brahms, Abdul JanMohamed, Phaul Egejuru, Ngugi wa Thiong'O, Wole Soyinka and Williams and Chrisman explore writing in the colonial/post-colonial *milieu* and Africa in particular and would be the main exponents in that area. The South African literary scene is covered most succinctly by Daniel Kunene, J. Congress Mbata and Ezekiel Mpahlele, while Ian Steadman, Andrew Horn and Temple Hauptfleisch are considered to be among the chief authorities on South African drama.

The seven plays by Mda that I have studied span the decade 1979 to 1989 and are:

Dead End - first produced at Diepkloof Hall, Soweto on 14 February 1979;

We Shall Sing For The Fatherland - first produced at Diepkloof Hall, Soweto on 14 February 1979;

Dark Voices Ring - first produced at The People's Space Theatre, Cape Town on 9 October 1979;

The Hill - first produced at The People's Space Theatre, Cape Town in February 1980;

The Road - first produced at The Little Theatre, University of Ohio
in March 1982;

And The Girls In Their Summer Dresses - first produced at the
Edinburgh Fringe Festival at Springwell House on 14 August 1988;

Joys Of War - first produced at the University of Zimbabwe on
26 August 1989.

Chapter 1 surveys the themes covered by Mda in the seven plays. It isolates and investigates the main strands, as well as looking at subsidiary themes and, ultimately, it attempts to identify a unifying concept. Mda's theatrical technique is investigated in Chapter 2. Brecht's characteristics of Epic theatre are identified and found to be applicable, although in a modified form, to Mda's plays. In their theatre practice, it is found that both Brecht and Mda share a concern for the empowerment of the disenfranchised and use theatre as a medium for the encouragement of a sense of agency. Chapter 3 concerns itself with the concept and creation of character in societies and, in particular, how character is viewed by the formerly colonised. It has three focuses: character types and naming; individuation; and elements of the political fable. It discusses the concepts of Negritude and black empowerment and applies these to Mda's methods of characterisation. Finally, Chapter 4 talks about language and the Africanness of African writing. It discusses, in detail, Mda's use of language, as well as his use of irony, which is a characteristic of his work.

Mda claims for Theatre for Resistance the goal of rallying or mobilising the oppressed - essentially it is a theatre that stimulates. Mda's personal impact, interestingly, goes beyond his own intentions because his plays (many of which belong clearly to this group) are, in fact, universal - they are far reaching in their effect and are certainly not confined, in their message, to Africa. That they have been translated into other languages attests to their relevance for other nations but

they speak, paradoxically, even to the unoppressed, if only to stimulate a further interest in matters African or matters Mdaian.

CHAPTER 1

Themes and motifs: the search for empowerment

**This will prove a brave kingdom to me, where I
shall have my music for nothing.**

***The Tempest* III iii**

**Oh People, if you have known struggle
Only then are you capable of loving.**

‘We Know Love’ - Noorie Cassim

The seven representative plays of Zakes Mda's that I have chosen for consideration show a remarkably varied content and innovative technique but yet maintain a unity of aim. They range across two broad philosophical and political spectra and address many issues but hold always within view the notion of what life is or should be, particularly in southern Africa. The evils in society and the quandaries of existence form the central recurrent underlying pattern and Mda deals with them with a deceptive sophistication within a seemingly simplistic mode of presentation. Discrimination in its many forms, most notably Apartheid, forms the political basis while the philosophical conundrum of ontological debate is pursued relentlessly, perhaps negatively coloured by the all pervading ethical theme of betrayal. These three issues comprise the major areas of conflict in all of the plays under consideration but there is a range of other major themes and motifs common to most or many of them. These are: exploitation from the viewpoint of both agent and victim, and the possibility of change; armed rebellion; and sexuality - in particular the relationship between poverty and prostitution; while individual plays have areas specific only to themselves or are shared perhaps by one or two others. Notions such as socialism versus capitalism, commitment in both concrete and abstract forms, idealism, self-deception, erosion of traditional values, disillusionment and a resulting loss of innocence, colonialism/post-colonialism and the questioning of history and religion are teased out with an understated relentlessness. What emerges then, overall, is a unique combination of the general and the particular. General, because Mda's philosophic concerns apply to all mankind; particular, because he iterates the plight of the colonised (especially the racially discriminated) and the struggles and pitfalls that the post-colonialist is prey to.

That he has hit the right balance seems borne out by the on-going debate on what constitutes 'good' literature *vis a vis* 'commonwealth' writing. A. Norman Jeffares says: 'To write, as Yeats puts it, for one's own race, is obviously the most satisfactory situation for a writer. And yet the audience outside his immediate circle of friends, outside his own region, is very important.' (Jeffares 1965: xiii).

Flemming Brahms, in his article on commonwealth literature, has no quarrel with this concept but takes issue with further implications that critical standards should be fixed and indisputable and, above all, Eurocentric. He is inclined to side with Margaret Atwood and Chinua Achebe who, 'working in very different *milieus*, [but] both feel the need to react against the same kind of absolutist cultural hegemony.' (Brahms 1982: 223). He quotes Atwood, who decries that: '[t]he tendency in Canada, at least in high school and university teaching, has been to emphasise the personal and the universal but to skip the national or cultural. This is like trying to teach human anatomy by looking only at the head and the feet' (222). Achebe, similarly, rails against the critic who: '...said the trouble with what we [African writers] have written so far, is that it has concentrated too much on society and not sufficiently on individual characters and as a result it has lacked "true" aesthetic proportions' (Achebe 1993: 223). Mda is quite unequivocal in his stance. He most certainly writes 'for his own race' but there is nothing naive, nothing blind about his portrayals of black society. Weaknesses, problems and possible future inadequacies are investigated with an honesty that is convincing and refreshing. His characters, although essentially types, clearly represent the reality of human situations and there is a consistency throughout, even in his realistic scenarios.

The earliest (and least sophisticated) of the plays that I am dealing with, *Dead End*, was written in the 1960s but not performed until 1979. It has the most parochial approach, yet it still deals at some depth with the trio of themes: ontology, betrayal and Apartheid. Set partly in an all-purpose furnished room in a South African township and partly in a prison cell, *Dead End* tells the story of Charley and Tseli in a series of flashbacks, role-playing, narration and straight scenes. Charley is a pimp who provides black prostitutes for Frikkie du Toit, an uneducated white Afrikaner procurer. Both men, on the edge of their respective societies, are graduates of the school of opportunism and seemingly know no limits in their willingness to exploit any person or situation to their own advantage and to save their own skins. Tseli is Charley's lover. She is not a prostitute but has been working as a house maid in several white homes. Charley, ironically unhappy with the exploitative circumstances of her job, has persuaded her to give up working for whites. There is conflict in their relationship in their mutual disapproval of each other's occupation and Tseli is particularly bitter that Charley will not use his Matric Certificate to get himself a respectable job. She tells him she is pregnant and his immediate reaction is, rather than marriage, to suggest a visit to Dr Zuma the local *sangoma* (herbalist/witch doctor) for a potion to bring on an abortion. On their return, Tseli begins to protest. Charley, at first, invites her to scream to release her feelings but, on second thoughts, says he does not like women who scream as he had had a bad experience when an older woman invited him up to her room for sex but screamed rape when her husband returned home unexpectedly. Charley served a prison term for this. Tseli begins screaming to taunt him but he explains his feelings of elation when the woman subsequently died. Charley now begins to suggest that the woman has been reincarnated in Tseli and eventually tries to throttle her, believing momentarily that Tseli is the woman. She passes out and in his terror, Charley promises her marriage, family life and a respectable job. This is, of course, all denied when Tseli comes to and he insists she take Dr Zuma's

potions which sicken her so much that the couple are forced to go off in search of more conventional medical help. On the way to the hospital they run across Frikkie who thinks Charley has brought him a new woman, infinitely superior to the prostitutes previously supplied. A fight breaks out during which Tseli, already dangerously ill from the *muti*, is punched viciously in the belly and ends up in hospital with her life in the balance. When the police arrive, Frikkie - being white - finds it no trouble to get Charley arrested for Tseli's assault. The play closes with Charley anxiously begging God (with whom he has been having a conversation in his prison cell throughout the play) not to let her die, as he will then be indicted for murder.

The dominant theme in this play is betrayal. All the characters, except Tseli, betray and/or are betrayed. In the opening scene, when Charley is already in prison and proceeds to tell the story in flashback, he asserts: 'I dare not desert her now' (DE 5). This sets the tone for his other assertions and his definition as an individual. He has already betrayed Tseli doubly. She had been a virgin when she fell in love with him but not only has he denied her marriage when she becomes pregnant (a crucial issue in the 60s when the play was written) but he has pushed her into abortion. As far as the abortion is concerned the suggestion of Dr Zuma is a betrayal in itself. He is not a qualified doctor and is therefore dangerous, especially in view of the fact that Tseli has already been to the Victoria hospital to have her pregnancy confirmed and her health properly checked and monitored. Also, Charley recommends him on foot of the successes he, Charley, has had with Dr Zuma's ministrations to his prostitutes when matters haven't gone right, thereby subconsciously equating Tseli with the prostitutes. Despite his protestations to Frikkie that 'This is my girl, Frikkie...This is Tseli. She is a decent type' (19), his actions say more about his exploitative and denigratory attitudes to women in general. Finally, and perhaps more cruelly and callously, he reneges on his promise

of marriage to Tseli made seemingly sincerely and certainly emphatically when he thinks she is dead.

Charley himself is the victim of betrayal. He is firstly betrayed by a society that doesn't recognise and reward his education (and by implication his abilities) but relegates him to menial positions because he is black. It is ironic that his canniness enables him to rise above passive acceptance of his lot and improve his position by fair means or foul. Charley's view of life is essentially subjective, though. He is incensed at the betrayal he suffers when the old woman invites him into her bedroom and then yells rape. He fails, however, to see that he himself has taken advantage of the old woman with whom he says he is only able to have sex if he 'doesn't look' (13) as she is so repulsive - and that her husband is betrayed by them both.

Both Frikkie and Charley between them betray society in their nefarious activities but there is no loyalty between them. Frikkie, surely with good reason, is convinced that Charley is doing him down when he says, 'Come now. Don't play smart. You are taking her to some other whites, eh? Frikkie is not good enough for her. Frikkie is an old customer. He will get the dregs' (19). However, he gets his ultimate revenge when he 'shops' Charley to the police and puts the boot in with his whiteness - '*Vang 'om* (catch him). What are you waiting for? I will report you to the big *baas* at the station' (20).

Charley's ambivalent moral position perhaps mirrors his societal one. He has not yet clarified who he is. Flemming Brahms again says:

...one can choose to act on the basis of necessity, or one can remain passive....And the element of deliberate choice leading to action is important because it exemplifies the concrete action that is necessary in order for any human object i.e. victim of circumstances, to transform itself into a human subject i.e. master of its own destiny. (Brahms 1982: 236).

Here lies also the beginning of Mda's ontological analysis. Only touched on in this play, Charley's dilemma is secondary, in his eyes, to his state of being. His conversation with God in his prison cell is largely an attempt to cope with his embryo conscience, but he and Tseli also discuss the possibility that either or both of them could be dead but have no way of proving it (DE 14,15). Charley concludes the conundrum in what is later to become typically Mdaian: 'Look Tseli, maybe we are dead...maybe not. We are not sure, you can't be sure of anything these days. So let's forget it' (DE 15,16).

Apartheid sits in the background of the play: the social positions of the protagonists defined and circumscribed by it. On the surface, Tseli's job at the Koornhofs would appear to be infinitely better than that of a prostitute, but on closer inspection we discover that she is almost as much at the mercy of her male employer as Charley's and Frikkie's girls are. The subservient position of the black housemaid leaves her no recourse to defence. If she objects she will surely lose her place. She is also subject to the unthinking carping of Mrs Koornhof: 'What's wrong with you Bantu girls? You have set a wrong knife here out of place...' Charley quotes her as saying... 'You are dirty. *Kyk hoe vuil is jou* overall. (Look

how dirty your overall is.)' (7). But after all that she can only muster an abject, 'Thank you, missis' (7).

Social advancement for the black person is almost hopeless. Frikkie, despite apparently never having finished primary school, enjoys a position of status in his legitimate job, while Charley leaves his job in the bank in disgust after being offered the job of tea boy despite his Matric Certificate.

The reaction of the crowd when Tseli collapses can be seen as typical of a disempowered group in the face of the law. At all costs, although there are suggestions as to how to help her, the main concern is to keep on the 'right' side of the law and not to become involved - 'Want to be witness in court?' (19) is the most potent injunction against interference. There is an all-round deference then to Frikkie's assumption of rights. He is challenged by no one and Charley assures God in his final conversation... 'He was in the right' (20) because of his whiteness. It is almost an afterthought when he asks God, 'Say, what is your colour?'

Voice: Eh?

Charley: Now don't get embarrassed.

Voice: What colour?

Charley: Don't pretend you don't know. I mean the colour of your skin. Are you black like me, or white like Father Joseph - and Frikkie - or yellowish like Mr Lai down at the laundry?

Voice: I have no colour.

Charley: How come you have no colour? Everybody seems to have colour these days.

Voice: Perhaps I am old fashioned. (20).

The issue remains unresolved but it has been raised.

Part and parcel of the Apartheid issue is poverty and the attempts to rise above one's situation or merely to survive. Prostitution is a theme explored several times by Mda and usually in the context of poverty. Charley asserts that 'I have lived in dustbins before' (12) but then finds it possible to say, apparently unwittingly, 'I have been toiling, walking the streets for you' (6). He seems not to be aware of the contradiction of his position. In a world of dog eat dog he is the middle man *par excellence*. Frikkie the pimp uses a pimp - Charley. Charley is therefore both pimp and prostitute himself. Is Charley therefore subject or object? If the object is passive and the subject active (Brahms 1982: 236) Charley is both. Apart from his ambivalent relationship with Frikkie and the prostitutes, he tells us of one of his early memories of white Father Joseph who, like Jesus, loved little children. Father Joseph (subject-active) saw fit to toss sweets from his moving car all over the road for the children (object-passive) to scramble for. Charley's contradictory position appears to have been emerging even then with his ambiguous statement: 'survival of the fittest' (11) - the implication is that he was one of the successful ones - therefore subject-active. Tseli, of course, is always object-passive. Her treatment at the Koornhofs is the least of her worries. Frikkie and Charley see her as a possession. She is obviously too 'good' to be a prostitute and both men want her for themselves. They are not in the least concerned about her wishes and feelings and she becomes the epitome of the object when Frikkie and Charley literally fight over her as if she were a rag doll. As Charley describes it, 'a tug of war' (19).

Dark Voices Ring, also produced in 1979, is ostensibly about the contract and convict farm labour system as practised widely in South Africa from about the mid 19th century. However, what emerges alongside this topic is a far more cogent analysis of cognitive dissonance, so that the purport of the play is both didactic and cathartic for the protagonists and audience alike. While Charley and Tseli, in the previous play, are depicted as helpless victims of racial discrimination, in this play it is suggested that the role of victim is not inevitable but that it is possible to take agency in one's own existence, to whatever extent it might be necessary.

Set in a hut on a white-owned potato farm in South Africa, *Dark Voices Ring* tells the story of an old couple, Woman and Old Man. Psychologically and physically incapacitated, they rely on the Man for their survival in the outside world. The play opens with the Man arriving to inform the Woman that he will be leaving soon for the North but she immediately admonishes him for leaving his wife, Nontobeko (her daughter), behind and unprotected. During the ensuing conversation between the two, several things emerge. The Old Man is catatonic. He neither speaks nor moves for the entire play and we learn that the Woman must minister to even his most basic functions. Nontobeko is, in fact, dead but Woman has never accepted this and behaves as if she is still alive. Young Man was Nontobeko's intended husband, a match arranged, when they were still children, by their parents. Through the devices of role playing, narration and questions we learn that the Old Man had been a foreman on the potato farm, responsible for the control of the gangs of contract labourers initially, and later replaced by the system of enforced convict labour. The foreman or 'baas boy' wielded considerable physical power by means of whips or clubs to force the labourers in their hours and hours of back-breaking work and to prevent trouble. For this he received

questionable privileges. The Woman tells us of their bag of mielie meal every month, their vegetable patch and milk cow, as well as their hut - a pitiful enough recompense for the antagonism, ostracism and downright hatred he experiences from his own people. The Woman relishes their privileged position in retrospect. She feels that her child has a privileged position having been born in the white man's house (she had collapsed in the fields nearby in labour and been taken by default to the missis's house). The convict labour proves more troublesome than the contract labour and the Old Man has to wield his whip all the more in face of the recalcitrance, egged on by the white farmer and warders drinking brandy on the *stoep* of the *huis*.

Eventually there is a mutiny. The Old Man is beaten unconscious and the convicts make for his hut where they burn it to the ground, unaware that the infant Nontobeko is sleeping inside. Having done that, they march to the farmer's house and burn that too. Since then the Old Man has been no more than a vegetable and his wife has lived a life of paranoia and denial. The Man forces her by the end of the play to face the truth and he re-affirms his intention of joining the armed rebellion in the North where he intends fighting for all people and for justice. At this moment the Old Man's face lights up and he smiles. The Man leaves with their tacit approval

The theme of Apartheid and its attendant issues are obviously centred in the whole subject of forced labour but, more subtly, Mda also investigates people and their attitudes. The Woman, at the beginning of the play, focuses on the elevated position her husband has enjoyed but fails to see the anomaly and even the precariousness of his position, although she unwittingly defines it in her own words, proudly quoting the labourers' answer to him when called to work '*Yebo*

'nkosi ... Ewe, 'nkosi ...Morena" [Oh yes King/Chief, Yes King/Chief (Zulu) ... King (Sesotho) (55) which has a somewhat cynical ring in the light of their work and his anomalous position. This is further compounded when she follows it immediately with Baas van Wyk's slightly deprecating 'my faithful *induna*' (headman) (50). His compromised position is made starkly clear, not only by the different levels of the epithets but by the fact that it is the Woman who utters them. Mda uses her as a demonstration of the principle of manipulation:

One of the methods of manipulation is to inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for personal success. This manipulation is sometimes carried out directly by the elites and sometimes indirectly, through populist leaders. As Weffert points out, these leaders serve as intermediaries between the oligarchical elites and the people. The emergence of populism as a style of political action thus coincides causally with the emergence of the oppressed. The populist leader who rises from this process is an ambiguous being, an 'amphibian' who lives in two elements. Shuttling back and forth between the people and the dominant oligarchies, he bears the marks of both groups (Freire 1972: 119).

Similarly, the Woman emphasises Nontobeko's privileged position on the farm as being not only the daughter of the *baas*-boy but the only child to have been born in the house of the farmer. As she says with dramatic irony, 'Of course as the wife of the *induna* my child could not be an ordinary child' (DVR 56). Later when she and the Man are discussing his betrothal to Nontobeko the question of *lobola* or bride-price arises and she answers his query as to how many head of cattle his parents were supposed to pay for Nontobeko: '[But] I know that it was more than the usual number because the Old Man said he was not only giving you a wife, but

also a position on the farm' (59). The old couple seem to have been the only ones to value this promise of an inherited job sometime in the vague and distant future. That they are envied they are well aware of but they seem not to recognise that they are also despised. The whole emphasis is on the success of the Old Man's work in getting more out of the convicts than out of the labourers. The abjectness and subservience is epitomised by her proud assertion that '...the missis gave me more of her old dresses than she had ever given me before' (62). Mda's investigation of the role of the collaborator, the middleman, comes to its climax when the Man finally breaks out into a forceful diatribe against the 'black officials of the regime ... civil servants who carry out the repressive laws...chiefs...policemen...in Soweto...Langa...New Brighton...throughout the land...They are doing their duty' (64).

In this play Mda implies that Apartheid can really only be tackled by armed rebellion. The Man is never challenged by the Woman when he raises the subject. Although she is certainly more concerned with her own subjective state, she never takes him up on any of his declarations or intentions of joining the armed rebellion and the author allows him to iterate his dreams for every black person, by going up North 'where people are translating [their dreams] into reality...with their guns'(57). Indeed, the denouement is brought about when the Man tells the Old Man (in the Woman's absence) of his militaristic intentions. When she enters, having heard the last part of his speech, she questions him as to his intended actions but offers no criticism and is only concerned that he take Nontobeko with him. The ensuing dialogue builds up to a climax when the Man challenges her with: 'War is brewing up North and it is not a war of dreams. You are on your own now, and as I told you the first step is to accept that Nontobeko is dead' (61). Only now can she confront reality and face the future, and the Old Man as well, is jolted out of his catatonic state and smiles his blessing on the 'just war' (64) the

intended vindication of the sufferings of all the immediate oppressed and, by implication, the oppressed of all of South Africa. The only move in the play by the Old Man is symbolic. Holloway suggests that this symbolises 'the rejection of an earlier servility and, more importantly, the move to a reconstructed life as a consequence of militant black nationalism' (Holloway 1989: 33).

Interestingly and not surprisingly, the published play was banned and, interestingly and surprisingly, unbanned within five months in 1981. In the collection *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland And Other Plays*, *Dark Voices Ring* was singled out initially as 'undesirable' and then later, on appeal, it was found that although the play 'contained the language of protest', the setting and references were too vague and the form of the play - a one-act - too brief to have any profound or lasting effect that could 'incite or inflame the feelings of blacks so much as to justify the need for it to be prohibited' (*Report of the Publications Appeal Board*, Case No. 53/81). The fact that the board exempts itself from commenting on a stage production of the play as not being its brief, and the fact that I could find no evidence of any production occasioning official intervention, does not take from the impact of the play.

The ontological discourse in *Dark Voices Ring* is quite complex, incorporating, as it does, themes of isolation and sexuality. As Andrew Horn says in the introduction to *The Plays of Zakes Mda*:

Mda presents a detailed and convincing study in cognitive dissonance. Normally, with individuals, as with groups, once a decision has been made or an action taken, a housing of rationalization is constructed to defend that decision or action, to prove its validity against all contrary evidence unless and until such evidence overwhelms the defenses, at

which part either the attitude is adjusted or the individual goes mad
(xxiv).

The fiction of Nontobeko's death must be maintained at all costs if the Woman is to maintain her all too precarious sanity, while the Old Man has already retreated into a half life. Their paranoid behaviour alone, at the start of the play, is enough to convince the audience that the equilibrium of their lives is decidedly in the balance, but when we hear:

Man: And you can hear his cries like the cries of an abandoned baby
[he does not mean that she can hear them literally but is aware of the
Man's cries].

Woman: We do hear voices from the dead. They communicate with
us.

Man: The Old Man has become an ancestor in his life time. (58)

We are reminded all the more just how tenuous that equilibrium is. The Woman has built her fragile hold on sanity by means of a fiction of dreams and, although her dreams obtrude on her sense of order with disquieting regularity, so far she hasn't sunk to the depths of the Old Man. But her dreams do obtrude in the form of sexual aberration. All her suppressed guilt and suffering on foot of her neighbours' censure has caused her to misrepresent their disgust at her husband's collaboration with the hated oppressor to the sexual ogling of her in her imagination. When the Man claims that his dreams (for a better future) include everyone, including herself and her neighbours, she sees fit to misinterpret this as a sexually perverted fantasy. However, her sexual obsession is not pure fantasy, as we find out later. The Man is safe in the knowledge that there will be no more

daughters for him to be affianced to. He muses: 'Those prisoners saved me. I suppose you don't know what that means [to the Old Man]. Poor old lady. She has to put up with a gelding. Well, she gets it all in her dreams'(63).

Finally, the theme of betrayal is a minor one in *Dark Voices Ring* but is still evident. In her convoluted thinking, the Woman, when expanding on the envy of her neighbours at the position of the *induna* and his family, sees the catastrophe as their will brought about through envy. But actually, the real betrayal has been on the part of the Old Man. Initially he has betrayed his own people by being a go-between, the perpetrator of pain and suffering on a poverty-stricken workforce that had little agency in their own lives. Worse still was his collaboration for a 'mess of shadows' (as Yeats would have it) against the almost completely disempowered convicts for whom forced labour was a form of parole - the alternative being further incarceration. When the *blou -baadjies* (blue jackets - a slang word for convicts) rise up in insurrection and burn the *induna's* hut, they are also guilty of betrayal. But somehow, theirs is of a lesser kind than the Old Man's. They may betray the status quo but they pre-figure the expected armed uprising.

We Shall Sing for the Fatherland (WSF) completes the trilogy of plays produced in 1979 and stands out amongst the seven as the least confined of the selection. Less claustrophobic in mood than the previous two and ensuing works, *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* opens up not alone in setting (a city park rather than indoors) but also in the political issues raised. Not essentially - though possibly - South Africa, the setting could be attributed to anywhere in post-colonial Africa, nor is the time limited. Described in a review as 'a brave and honest play - exploring the dark side of independence in Africa' (*The New Nation* 1989) -the events could as easily take place in the future, past or present,

depending on which African country the reader or director has in mind.

Colonialism and post-colonial theory are examined, as are socio-political ideologies in a broader sense. Set against this background the familiar philosophical themes of poverty, ontology, identity/self-deception and survival are investigated while the constant, betrayal, is developed to some depth, using greater sophistication than that seen in *Dead End*.

The curtain rises on two hoboes or tramps in an unspecified city park (though suggestive of Uhuru Park in Nairobi - see introduction to *The Plays Of Zakes Mda* 1990: xii) in an unspecified African country. They are veterans of the 'Wars of Freedom' of ten years earlier during which one has lost a leg and now, disabled, depends on his colleague for survival. That the moment is ten years after the Wars of Freedom precludes it from being South Africa, but the many uses of South African terminology, such as *mataliana* shops, *mashangana* polony and 'tickey' as well as several phrases from the Sesotho language (spoken only in Lesotho and South Africa) and recognisable suburban Maseru, form deliberate links with that country. The conclusion must necessarily be a) that it is not South Africa but another post-colonial African country or b) that it is South Africa in the future. In a letter to Andrew Horn (xiii), cited in the *Plays of Zakes Mda* dated 27th March 1982, Mda asserts as much.

The two protagonists, Sergeant and Janabari, are managing to survive - just about - by stealing unmissable rubbish from lower middle class backyards and selling it to back street mechanics. They are homeless and are residing in the main city park on a bench. Sergeant, although disabled, pulls rank and organises 'strategies', 'manoeuvres' and 'operations', carried out by the ever-faithful and ever-loyal subordinate Janabari. From time to time they are hassled by Ofisiri, the

local policeman, but they maintain their position in the park by offering bribes to buy a never ending stream of bottles of stain remover, ostensibly to keep his uniform dapper. Not only have they patently not been rewarded by society for their obvious efforts in its freedom but they are continuously ignored, as evidenced by a series of citizens who either fail to see them at all or who make it plain that they are less than pleased at the hoboes' importunity. A white banker and a black business man pass by ignoring them totally but for a patronising smile from the banker; a beautiful young woman is almost insulted by their greetings and a civil servant makes excuses when importuned by an old lady for help for the veterans. She (one of the weakest members of society) is the only person to show any compassion for them when she offers them the use of her garden shed for the night which promises to be bitterly cold. Ofisiri has been trying to evict them from the park so that they will not spoil the city image during the imminent International Environment Conference. As the evening draws in and they light a fire against the intense cold Ofisiri stamps it out and forbids them to light another. They will not leave their 'post' and take shelter in the old woman's shed but attempt to 'sing for the fatherland'(44). When they open their mouths they find that their voices will not emerge - in effect, they cannot celebrate their country's freedom as they have been negated. The final scene sees them witnessing their own funerals. They have died of exposure during the night and Ofisiri, now bitterly resentful, has been relegated to an inferior position of overseeing convicts dig their paupers' graves on foot of his having allowed them in the park. They have suffered every indignity, even to the extent of being buried with no ceremony, no mourning relatives and their last few cents stolen from their corpses by the convicts. The final irony is the funeral, in the distance, of the black businessman who is being buried with every state and religious pomp.

Mda's political concerns in this play centre on the idealist or 'true believer', neo-colonialism and the relative merits of socialism versus capitalism. Armed rebellion in this play is a *fait accompli*. The two veteran soldiers affirm the link between independence and armed struggle and, while their militarism is to the forefront throughout the play through their ancient army uniforms and militarist rhetoric, it is not an issue. Rather, Mda investigates the lot of the proletarian in post-colonial society and tests his idealism.

The idealist or 'true believer', as defined by Hoffer (1952), is exemplified in Sergeant. Sergeant, it seems, will not countenance any divergence from acceptance of the status quo and his admonitions of Janabari for insubordination (WSF 29) affirm his stance. It is not until just before their death that he finally capitulates and begins to accept that perhaps he too has rights: 'We have been pushed around and shitted upon too much. That is why I am holding my ground in this park, and I am not moving away from it today or any other day. And I am not paying any more rent for it' (43). Alas, it is too late. Sergeant, up until this point, has exemplified what Hoffer describes as the 'abject poor':

The poor on the border line of starvation live purposeful lives. To be engaged in a desperate struggle for food and shelter is to be wholly free from a sense of futility. The goals are concrete and immediate. Every meal is a fulfillment; and every windfall a miracle. What need could they have for 'an inspiring super-individual goal which could give meaning and dignity to their lives'? They are immune to the appeal of the mass movement. (Hoffer 1952: 40).

Janabari, on the other hand, sees the gross unfairness of their lives. He is the one who makes cynical comments and recognises the inequalities of their existence. With reference to the Environment Conference he says: 'Serge, where was the Environment Conference when we fought the Wars of Freedom?' (WSF 38), and again of the young lady: 'She would have been more beautiful had she shown a little bit more of her teeth' (41). When Sergeant proudly says: 'We can sit back and gaze endlessly at all the beauty we have created,' Janabari answers: 'And we have earned the pleasure' (41). Janabari epitomises what Hoffer means when he is describing the 'new poor' who 'throb with the ferment of frustration. The memory of better things is as fire in their veins. They are the disinherited and dispossessed who respond to every rising mass movement' (Hoffer 1952: 39). The discarded and rejected 'are often the raw material of a nation's future' (38). Janabari does not get the opportunity to rise with any mass movement but he does succeed in rousing Serge to rebellion, as we have seen, albeit a mild and futile one.

Although Sergeant's and Janabari's country is, to all intents and purposes, 'free', Mda questions the notion of freedom. Throughout the play we are given hints that it is not as free as it would like to see itself. The economy is certainly not in the control of the indigenous population and where else lies the real power but in money? Mr Mafutha (Sesotho for Mr Fat), the black businessman, - 'They say he is worth millions. He is in all the big companies. White companies too' (WSF 36) - is successful, but only through white condescension. This has been made patently clear earlier, during the conversation between himself and Banker. The discussion concerns Businessman's election to the post of chairmanship of the Stock Exchange but this seems possible only through white backing - and that is not so easily obtained. Banker indicates that he has to use his position of power over loans and overdrafts to coerce white business interests to support Businessman.

The cynicism in the tacit acceptance of the situation by both black and white concerns emerges when Banker tells him: 'The only thing you have to do is to listen to our advice' (34). Businessman comments most succinctly on the state of all Africa when he says, further on:

Africanisation seems to be failing when it comes to commerce and industry, eh. Look at the Chamber of Commerce - it's all in the hands of the Twiddles [whites] and their friends.

Banker: What do you expect, my friend? All big business is in foreign hands.

Foreign investment, you know (34).

It was foreign investment that maintained colonialism, and neo-colonialism today depends on it. It was, in fact, foreign investment in South Africa that enabled the Apartheid regime to last for so long and it was the withdrawal of foreign investment that contributed greatly to its final collapse. Corporate consciences overcame corporate greed in the end.

Foreign interest and especially foreign exploitation in a country can obviously be undesirable, but Mda seems to be suggesting that it is just as insidious when the same schemes are perpetrated by one's own kind. Businessman is happy enough to be patronised and controlled by his erstwhile coloniser, obviously still not free of the slave mentality described by Ngugi: '...a slave who accepts not only that he is a slave, but that he is a slave because he is fated to be nothing else but a slave. Hence he must love and be grateful to the master for his magnanimity in enslaving him to a higher, nobler civilisation' (Ngugi 1981:12).

Businessman, who might have had aspirations towards socialism in his early days - who knows - now typifies the middle-aged well-to-do person who has acquired much materially. He suddenly finds sharing of the country's wealth not so desirable and that capitalism and the class system suit him admirably. Under neo-colonialism the successful proletarian begins to find that he has become bourgeois and in Africa, as any where else, most likely:

...the political and economic struggle assumes its true class character despite any and every attempt at ethnic mystification. It is now African workers and the peasant masses, together with progressive intellectuals, patriotic elements, students and their class allies from other parts of the world, pitted against the native ruling class and its international imperialist class allies (Ngugi 1982: 26).

We Shall Sing For The Fatherland makes quite clear that neo-colonial attitudes can be just as repressive as those of the erstwhile colonial masters. Real independence means freedom for all peoples and, unless there is honesty and equality in economic affairs, all people cannot be free and the notion of independence is a fallacy. J. Congress Mbata sees fundamental change as possible only if it includes:

the formulation of a theory of political development for the African that clearly identifies the link between political power and economic power. Thus it will mean new and radical arrangements for the redistribution of the country's wealth and resources (Mbata 1975: 202).

Again he emphasises the image of the rich. 'Businessmen who are seen "playing up" to the establishment are dubbed satisfied stooges who have no commitment to change' (214). Mda's Businessman certainly fits this description.

But Businessman's attitude to Sergeant and Janabari is perhaps his greatest indictment. It becomes evident that not only does he symbolically look the other way on stage but, according to Janabari, this is what he usually does. In other words, he is now assuming the role of the coloniser. He is now taking on the persona of the oppressor and is enjoying an exalted position at the expense of his fellow Africans. How is this possible? Hoffer analyses the notion of hatred in all its complexities and comes to the conclusion that 'we do not look for allies when we love. Indeed, we often look on those who love with us as rivals and trespassers. But we always look for allies when we hate' (Hoffer 1952: 111). He identifies the source of feelings of hate less in the wrong done to us than in the feelings of 'helplessness, inadequacy and cowardice' (112). Consequently, it is not difficult to trace the path leading towards an 'undercurrent of admiration' (114) in our hatred and from there a wish to imitate those we hate. As Hoffer says: 'It is startling to see how the oppressed almost invariably shape themselves in the image of their hated oppressors' (114). Sergeant and Janabari are no better off and will be no better off after the Wars of Freedom than they were before while the leaders of their society, in the shape of Businessman and Young Man (a civil servant) are reincarnated, and happy to be so, as the new colonisers. Janabari's words ring depressingly and prophetically true when he says:

That is what I have been saying all along, Serge. I have been trying to show you that we have not been getting any share of whatever there is to be shared. That is what the learned ones call capitalism, Serge. It has no place for us...only for the likes of Mr Mafutha and the other fat ones in the Chamber of Commerce and the Stock Exchange. Serge, I have been trying to tell you that our wars were not merely to replace a white face with a black one, but to change a system which exploits us,

to replace it with one which will give us a share in the wealth of this country (WSF 43/44).

The open-endedness of the play seems to suggest that Mda is issuing a warning of what could happen, rather than of what is inevitable

The strongest psychological theme in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* is that of betrayal. Although consistently evident in all of his plays, Mda has analysed this concept most thoroughly here. The play is peopled with betrayers and betrayed and there are several versions of and degrees of betrayal. At its highest level Sergeant and Janabari play out a game of suspicion. Sergeant insists on total adherence to their survival strategy and will brook no deviations. When Janabari is discovered with unaccounted-for money he is accused of 'betrayal and disloyalty to your superior officer'(29). This happens several times but, of course, there is no question of Janabari's loyalty. His extra earnings are always shared but, more potently, his utmost loyalty is demonstrated when he refuses to leave the park at the end of the play for the Old Lady's warm shed. What these altercations amount to is a dignified attempt, on Sergeant's part, to cling onto some form of agency. By pulling rank and controlling Janabari's actions he still retains, albeit tenuously, a grasp on a mastery of his own destiny - he is a subject rather than an object. Of course, as he is disabled, he needs Janabari physically but their combined sense of integrity, exemplified by their refusal to beg, underlines this need for a sense of agency. They try as hard as they can not to be victims. Their pathetic and, paradoxically, 'honest' attempts at survival will only allow them to take from society as much as they need, not as much as they want. They only steal rubbish from people's yards that will not be noticed. Technically it is stealing but morally, since it will never be missed, are they not as entitled to the rubbish since the selling of it will buy them means for their immediate needs?

Sergeant and Janabari are obviously victims of Ofisiri's petty bureaucracy. They are forced to go through the charade of the stain remover in order to bribe him into allowing them to remain in the park, a right that they have already earned by virtue of their veteran status. But Ofisiri is a victim too. A member of the lower middle class, he has to cling tenaciously to his position, answerable always to his bosses and afraid always of losing his job. In the end, because Sergeant and Janabari have died on his beat, he is demoted to guarding convicts digging their graves. Ofisiri, then, is both subject and object - he betrays his fellow men by exploiting them shamelessly and arbitrarily increasing the price of the bribe and he is in turn betrayed by society which demotes him for an occurrence which is really society's responsibility.

Sergeant and Janabari are betrayed by all aspects of society. The country in general has betrayed them by not honoring their efforts, at great personal risk, during the war of independence. They should not be homeless hoboes scrabbling for an existence but should be nurtured and cared for by a grateful country. They are betrayed by the city fathers who will not allow a life saving fire in the park for fear it might spoil the effect for the international Environment Conference. In other words they are a blot on the landscape and their deaths are a welcome solution to an irritating problem. They are betrayed by their own people in the shape of Businessman representing the commercial world, and Young Man representing the civil service - both of which could and should be of service to them. The Young Lady, also one of their own, spurns them, thus showing that they are betrayed even in terms of human warmth and affection. Finally, even the church has betrayed them. When they witness their own funerals at the end of the play, they become aware that Businessman has also died - of the middle class

disease of 'gastric ulcers'. They note the vast difference between his funeral and theirs:

Janabari: But whose funeral is that? I mean with music and all the trimmings.

Sergeant: One of the big brass in town. The priests have decided that he was wealthy enough to go to heaven. (WSF 47).

The systematic pattern of betrayals in this play serves to underline the failure of Freire's contention that:

[i]t is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as Subject of the transformation. If they are drawn into the process as ambiguous beings, partly themselves and partly the oppressors housed within them - and if they come to power still embodying that ambiguity imposed on them by the situation of oppression - it is my contention that they will merely imagine that they have reached power. (Freire 1972: 98)

The ontological theme in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* is evident in Sergeant and Janabari's quest for a sense of identity. They need to define and redefine themselves and they do this through a last ditch adherence to military jargon and behaviour and self deception. Their 'strategy' is to survive as best but as modestly as they can by taking only what they need and 'never be carried away by enthusiasm' (WSF 28). Sergeant has to remind Janabari, 'When we were in the bush it was me who taught you the art of survival under hostile conditions. After

the Wars of Freedom it was me who taught you the art of survival among civilians' (29), but they find that all their upright intentions are untenable in the paradoxically hostile world of peacetime. They must resort to bribery in order to stay in the park and stealing in order to get money but, in order to maintain some sense of dignity, they must use euphemisms for their practices. Their sense of self worth is thus meagrely bolstered as, to them, the abject passivity of begging would be untenable. Sergeant feels the need, against much opposition from Janabari, not only to pay compliments to Businessman, Ofisiri and Young Lady but to make excuses for them when they snub him. If there is a reason why they haven't been acknowledged, the snub ceases to be a snub and they maintain their dignity but Janabari finds it difficult to reconcile himself to this kind of behaviour and finds Sergeant 'too loose with [his] compliments' (31) and goes on to accuse Sergeant of prostituting his compliments.

Eventually, when they find themselves completely destitute, their sense of commitment, somewhat misplaced previously, centres on their own ideals and they decide to remain in the park - not because of pig-headedness but because 'a good soldier does not desert in the face of whatever mounting pressure' (43) and they will not desert their right to remain in the park. Their triumph proves hollow however because now they find themselves unable to continue with their philosophy of commitment to their fatherland, symbolically depicted in their loss of voice when they attempt to sing, and practically demonstrated when they die of exposure. Their commitment lasts to the end, it is true; but their weakness and vulnerability win out. Eventually they do question the validity of their commitment, symbolised by Sergeant's leg. In the beginning of the play Sergeant says: 'And we should live, man. Enjoy our freedom - for haven't we achieved what we were fighting for? Look, I lost a leg in that war. A whole leg. It was not for naught, Janabari' (32), but, after they are dead and he finds he has his leg back,

he comments: 'Funny, isn't it? I didn't have it when I needed it in life. What good will it be now that I am dead?' (46). The question is never resolved. The play is open-ended as the two heroes, now lost souls, continue to wander who knows where:

Sergeant: What about us, Janabari? Where are we going?

Janabari: How the hell do I know. Let's go. (47).

Ofisiri continues to watch over his prisoners who continue to dig. Nothing has changed and life goes on.

The Hill (TH), first produced in 1980, narrows and specifies the focus both as to location and theme. Not only is this play definitely set in southern Africa but it takes place on a specific hill outside Maseru, the capital of Lesotho. No longer concerned with broader problems it looks specifically at the economic dependency of Lesotho on South Africa and the plight of the migrant worker. Lesotho, an impoverished mountainous kingdom, depends on South Africa as a source of employment for its men and consequently much needed foreign revenue. Lesotho suffers, as a result, from breakdown of the family and erosion of traditional values, but betrayal, religion, poverty and loss of innocence are also themes. When it was first produced it was well received as 'the emergence of African theatre, spoken in English, which is unique to our place and time' (Fletcher 1980: 14) but was found to be dated at a revival in 1995. Although not an indictment of the play, 'in fact, it is a positive aspect for, at a time when most cultural creators are concerned with reconstruction, development and celebrating how good it is to be free...it is necessary to note that the destruction is in full swing' (Khumalo 1995: 35). Freedom does not necessarily mean that everyone will feel the change.

The story centres around two men - Man and Young Man. Man has been a migrant labourer in South Africa's gold mines in the past. He came home to try to make a go of farming but, due to crop failure, drought and impoverished land, is forced to return to the mines. Young Man is setting out for the first time as a migrant labourer and has high hopes for a better way of life. The men are encamped on the notorious Hill outside Maseru waiting for a contract from the Native Recruiting Corporation. They have been put off for so long that all their funds are gone and they are destitute, reduced to odd jobs or, when that fails, raiding dustbins. They cannot understand the delay in securing contracts, but Young Man sustains his spirits with dreams of the riches he will have in the form of material goods. Man warns him with cynical realism of some of the pitfalls of the life of a migrant worker, not least of which is the bachelor life in all-male hostels. They are joined by Veteran who has just returned on leave from his contract, but, instead of going home laden with gifts and money for his family, he is broke. He has been robbed of everything by prostitutes in Maseru where he was tempted to spend a night of pleasure before returning to his home. He has no alternative but to return to the mines and start all over again. He very quickly disillusiones the other two about working conditions and is able to explain at last the delay by the NRC. They have failed to include the 'green paper' (a cash bribe) in their passports. Three prostitutes arrive, one of whom turns out to be related to Young Man. They take pity on him and give him the money necessary for the bribe and he is able to go to pursue his dream, leaving Man and Veteran accumulating the necessary 'green papers'.

The linking theme of Apartheid per se does not appear in *The Hill* but the major theme of Lesotho's economic dependence on South Africa and the attendant

theme of migrant labour are only extant because of Apartheid. The Apartheid system allows for and, indeed, depends on the exploitation of cheap labour from neighbouring countries, its own indigenous population loath to work in the mining industry - only resorting to it when all else fails. In *The Hill* Mda shows how extreme destitution, as experienced by an impoverished rural people, makes them extra vulnerable to exploitation, not only by a foreign but by the home country. The scene never leaves Maseru so that experiences in South Africa must be discussed at length but the audience is shown, palpably, the exploitation experienced in Maseru itself.

The extreme destitution of the protagonists, Man and Young Man, is established most graphically in the opening pages. A strong proprietorial argument about the relative quantities of their faeces both then and on preceding days serves to highlight the precariousness of their existence. What comes out depends on what has gone in and the list of 'scraps of samp' (a derivation of Maize), '*papa* (crumbly maize porridge) with cabbage' and 'peels of oranges' testifies to the paucity of their diet. That they must resort to hand-outs and raiding dust bins is bad enough but we learn later on that what really keeps their spirits going, not to mention their bodies, is the sale of their blood to the blood bank - Trans Africa Biologicals - every two weeks. For this they get '[l]ots of crisp rands, tins of fish and milk' (TH 85) but the reality is, as Young Man says, 'This is the day we eat and drink our blood' (85).

Poverty of course, is not theirs alone: both have dependent families in the rural villages who, apart from modest luxuries such as fashionable clothes, depend on whatever the men can earn to keep life going. Luxuries such as school fees are the first to be relinquished under straitened circumstances, in favour of food and

medicine, and Young Man is mortified at the thought of his sister having to run a shebeen to sell her illicitly brewed liquor (79). The men of the villages have no choice but to seek an alternative means of subsistence even if it involves degradation. Freer in society than other groups, such as the very young, elderly and women, they must swallow their pride and face the degradations that are their lot. Theirs will not be an easy path to follow: they are already enduring the indignity of living from dust bins and depending on people's good will, but have also been reduced to selling their blood and comparing their faeces. These are as nothing, however, when compared to the hardship and indignities that they will experience as migrant mine workers; and they are well aware of them. Yet still they persist in going. They can choose to starve alongside their families or they can try something better. Theirs is the freedom to choose between Scylla and Charybdis:

Freedom aggravates at least as much as it alleviates frustration.

Freedom of choice places the whole blame of failure on the shoulders of the individual. And as freedom encourages a multiplicity of attempts, it unavoidably multiplies failure and frustration. Freedom alleviates frustration by making available the palliatives of action, movement, change and protest. (Hoffer 1952: 44).

Life in Maseru is certainly frustrating. They are at the mercy of the better off who, 'the richer they get, the stingier they become' (TH 74), hold the whip hand. The once-off menial gardening jobs that they are able to pick up do not pay well but they must make do with the five rands per month which promises the dubious incentive of 'a fat increment of one rand each per month' (75) if they prove reliable, not to mention the 'bonuses of clothes from my own wardrobe' (76) at Christmas. Added to this is the anomaly of Man being pursued for tax arrears,

knowing all the while that 'the safest place in the world when there is a tax and radio licence raid' (84) is the affluent suburb of Maseru West as '[t]he cops never go there because that's where all the fat ones live' (84). It is no wonder then that they opt for work in the gold mines of South Africa if they can only get it.

The evils of the life of the migrant mine worker are a major issue in this play. Well aware that the mine pay will mean the difference between life and death to their families back home, they are also tempted by a certain cachet to being a 'man of gold' (74) rather than a coal mine worker. Nevertheless, the litany of evils associated with the miner are detailed throughout the play. Not alone is the work physically demanding and uncomfortable but the life style of the worker in the all-male hostels is humiliating at best and degrading at worst. Poor living conditions appear as lesser evils when compared with the humiliation of communal medical examinations and the pain of injections with unchanged needles (in pre-AIDS days). Worst of all is the shame of life without their women:

He talks of degradation. What does he know of degradation? We leave our wives at home because the white man doesn't want us to bring them with us to the land of gold. We live in hostels where we fuck each other when the desire comes upon us. And he calls paying a small bribe to secure a good job degradation (96).

Some exploit the situation by becoming male prostitutes, as Veteran warns Young Man, and others abandon the family and start a new second family at the mine, which appears to be what has happened to Young Man's father - not heard of in sixteen years.

Consequent to this enforced exodus of the young men and fathers from the rural communities is the break down of family life and the erosion of traditional values. Freire maintains that '[w]hether urbane or harsh, cultural invasion is thus always an act of violence against the persons of the invaded culture, who lose their originality or face the threat of losing it' (Freire 1972:121).

Not only are the communal washrooms and medical examinations personally degrading, as we have seen above, but they also flout cultural taboos. Man informs Young Man: 'We all shit in open lavatories there. Father and son together. We all wash in communal wash rooms' (TH 77), and Young Man fully understands the implications of this. In *Gold and Workers* (Volume 1 of *A People's History of South Africa*) the history of the migrant worker is well documented, including: 'It is against the tradition that a son sees his father naked or on the toilet' (Callinicos 1981: 44). But the cultural invasion does not only affect the lives of the men in the mines. It invades the villages as well. The Man is compelled to condone the birth of his wife's baby by another man (TH 100) because of his long absence and his wife's needs. Young Man, in his dreams of the riches he will gain in his new life on the mines, sees the value of cattle diminish rapidly in favour of his new car and record player - symbolised by a steering wheel, {'[i]t's name is Valiant' (79)} and a battery {'my *gumba-gumba*' (80)}. He tells his younger brother, 'When the time comes for you to go to the mines you will know that a car is more important than cattle' (80). Finally, the time honoured traditions of rural hospitality are eroded. It has not taken long for Young Man to fear that Veteran will impose on their hospitality. Man has to remind him that '[i]t is unheard of to expel people from one's house, child of my mother. It goes against the tradition' (88). The cultural invasion seems to have taken root in Young Man and, by Freire's definition, is therefore successful: 'In cultural invasion

it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own' (Freire 1972: 122).

Young Man, through the combined experiences of Veteran and Man as migrant workers, coupled with his own experience at the hands of society, develops the theme of betrayal. The whole system of labour recruitment makes victims of the people it purports to serve, in its tacit insistence on bribery, and Young Man is only able to overcome this by the generosity of one of his relations. His own father has betrayed his family by his disappearance, thus forcing Young Man to resort to life in the mines. But Veteran embodies the betrayal theme more thoroughly. Not only is he betrayed by the prostitutes (who strip him of everything, including his trousers despite having been paid for their services) but he himself betrays his family by allowing himself to be the prostitutes' victim. He is never able to resist the temptation 'of a little clean fun before going to my home village in the mountains' (TH 103). He claims the excuse that the men are easily tempted 'after all the months in all male company' (103) but he seems to forget that his own wife is waiting for him at home, just as deprived sexually as he has been.

Because of all his experiences, at both first and second hand, Young Man becomes thoroughly disillusioned. His loss of innocence is expressed in his rejection of the value of cattle in favour of the car. Symbolically he is rejecting his entire way of life and embracing a hollow, materialistic, alien value system. This concept is potently encapsulated in the sentences: 'I have more important things to live for now. My Valiant and my *gumba-gumba*' (86). His Valiant is represented by the car steering wheel and his *gumba-gumba* or record player is represented by a car battery - essential in a rural area without electricity. Both are crucial symbols

and represent several aspects of the process: the ease with which the Young Man is deluded by the desire for a car; the fact that his treasures are no more than scrap remnants of a wealthier culture; and the folly of his notion that he can somehow acquire these luxuries piece by piece. His disillusionment is consolidated during the long role playing scene where Veteran teaches him the realities of the miner's life as well as the corruption entailed in the need for bribery, so that ultimately most of his former innocence is lost and he becomes adept at playing the same games as all the others. He is able to recommend Maseru West as a safe haven from the police and it doesn't take the prostitutes long to overcome his scruples about his father's likely disapproval of using bribes. By the end of the play he has become a cynic. When Man questions why the prostitutes have helped him, he replies: 'Is it my fault they were not attracted to you?' (112). And he is not at all perturbed at the warning that he is no more 'than a good investment. They will be waiting for you when you come back from the land of gold' (112). His conscience is now a poor shadow of itself as he feels that no matter how he transgresses he has nothing to fear: 'I'll confess, eat the sacrament and ask for forgiveness' (114).

Young Man has now embraced the every-man-for-himself maxim symbolised by the pair of trousers (a man without trousers lacks agency and dignity). In the beginning of the play he appears without trousers as he has just defecated, the Veteran arrives having been stripped of his by the prostitutes and in the end Veteran steals Man's. But Young Man redeems himself at last by giving Man his small change and encouraging him to save his blood money for the extra 'green page' for his passport.

A strong theme running parallel with all of the above is the role of organised religion both in the lives of the men in Lesotho and in the mines. An

enigmatic nun appears on stage several times, praying fervently in Latin but always totally ignoring the men despite their urgent pleas for blessings. She leaves behind her a plastic rose and a rosary. The implication here is of a remote church, not in tune with the real needs of its adherents but content to 'bless' by remote control, focusing almost exclusively on its icons, jargon and platitudes. The rosary, though highly representative of religious faith and attitudes, is, without the human belief with which it should be imbued, a meaningless string of beads. Likewise, the plastic rose - symbolising blessing - is artificial and shallow. The use of Latin by the nun implies an imposition by the church of a foreign ideology out of reach of a largely uneducated and simple congregation.

Without a full understanding of his religion Young Man is reduced to mouthing platitudes - 'You need faith. I survive on faith. That is why I don't despair....Faith can do anything. They teach us that it can move mountains' (82). To Young Man, the blind acceptance of religion is still an opiate, dulling his senses to the real problems in his life and he does not respond to Man's 'faith doesn't fill my empty stomach' (82). In fact, Mda makes the point that religion can even be a distraction. In our striving after the metaphysical we can be oblivious to the wrongs in our lives:

Young Man: (*shouting after Nun*) He has eaten all my food, mother. Whilst I knelt down for your blessings he ate all that was left of my blood! Visit him with your wrath, mother! Curse and haunt him to his grave!

Veteran: She did not cleanse you?.....Do you mean for two months you have been chasing an illusion? (91,92).

To Young Man's incomprehension at the futility of clinging onto a faith that may even be deleterious, Veteran explains:

I'll tell you why she has not blessed you.

Man: What? Is she blind?

Veteran: She doesn't know that you exist. She knows about your soul. Not about you. She is concerned with saving your soul. Not your flesh (97).

Apart from its role in the lives of the poor of Lesotho, the church's role in the lives of mine workers does not escape criticism either. Veteran describes it as 'part of a system which strives to castrate us. They have been specially groomed by the white man to teach us that we are happy with our lot' (97). The next pages involve a role playing scene, with the Veteran taking the part of the priest and the men and prostitutes, the mine congregation. The basic message from the priest is that the mine is a benevolent, paternal benefactor that demands obedience from its children. When the members of the congregation try to complain about conditions, the priest either ignores them altogether or glosses over the complaints with facile interjections such as 'God loves you, my children' (99). They are reminded of how much better off they are than everyone else and admonished, above all, never to strike. In simplistic language the message is plain: obey the church and all will be happy and successful (even though God is patently a white man) and confession will overcome all difficulties. However, when the confessions become more and more personal, the priest is unable to offer either help or a solution. When the men confess that they are forced to resort to homosexual practices because of the lack of women on the mines, the priest can only scream: 'Sodomy! Buggery of the first order!' (101) and when the women begin confessing and he is implicated in their

sins, i.e. sexually, he silences them with: 'Stop! You wicked women! God is not interested in your confessions' (100). The conclusion then is that the church is of no value as it stands in the lives of these people and, in fact, as Mda presents it, the Church at best ignores and at worst colludes with and partakes in the oppression of these people.

Having focused in this play on more specific political and social issues, Mda's next play, *The Road* (TR), looks specifically at Apartheid and the black/white relationship between the migrant agricultural labourer from Lesotho and the Afrikaans farmer. The whole scenario is a microcosm of the institution of Apartheid and the two protagonists are broad representatives of their respective races but the supporting infrastructure such as history, sexuality, lack of communication and prejudice, are also investigated.

The Road finds a migrant farm mechanic from Lesotho, who travels from farm to farm fixing and servicing farm machinery, resting under a tree in the middle of the Free State province - the heart of South African Afrikanerdom. He has lost his dog, Bekhile, whom he saved from urchins, but he is tired and his journey is still long. He is joined by Farmer whose car has run out of petrol and who is now walking to the nearest filling station to get fuel. They begin their conversation at cross purposes about the dog - a situation which recurs frequently throughout the play. After some conversation about communists, Jews and other 'liberal' types, Farmer begins to ask Labourer about his attitude to blacks. He is astounded to learn that all of Labourer's friends are black but he is sufficiently encouraged to confess some intimate details of his life. It appears that his wife has been unfaithful to him - he caught her *en flagrante* with his foreman - and since then he has been unable to make love to her. He has finally found himself a black mistress in

Maseru, where he goes periodically to overcome South Africa's strict censorship and gaming laws. His sex life is now quite satisfactory despite his qualms about defiling the 'volk'.

It is quite some way into the conversation when he suddenly discovers that Labourer is black and he is horrified at not having been told this before. This seeming surrealist touch is crucial to the theme of Apartheid, depending as it does on the visual aspect of colour. Farmer's immediate solution is to banish Labourer to the other side of the road in the sun as, of course, a black man and a white man cannot possibly share the same shade. Despite Labourer's protests, he will not allow him back nor will he let him go about his business. He has power of enforcement because he has a gun. When Labourer leaves the stage for a call of nature, Farmer steals his bundle and refuses to hand it back on the grounds that Labourer is not entitled to it, although he finally concedes by letting Labourer work for him with Labourer's own goods as payment. On another sortie off stage Labourer finds an old history book about colonial South Africa. The two act out the story of Livingstone's missionary expedition and another section on the Kaffir Wars.

Eventually Farmer discovers that Labourer is from Lesotho and, because a 'foreign Bantu', is technically able to share the shade of the tree. They talk of Lesotho and before long it emerges that Farmer's mistress and Labourer's wife are one and the same. Labourer is finally goaded into taking action and a fight ensues. At the last moment a gun goes off and we are left with the impression that Farmer has been shot. The stage directions merely state '*Gunshot simultaneously with sudden black*'.

Clearly, this story is a political allegory, not only of Apartheid, but it also touches on the relations between South Africa and Lesotho. Impoverished Lesotho has had a long and continuing history of migrant labour into South Africa, as we have seen (see also Wilson and Thompson 1975: 267-271) and Mda continues this theme in *The Road* but now transferring his attention to the farm labourer. Ostensibly an independent and democratic state, Lesotho also suffers, at second hand, the effects of Apartheid, through the migrations of her people in the form of labour and through contact with the many South African visitors who flock to its unfettered, unrestricted, libidinous capital. However, the main thrust of the play deals with the concept of Apartheid - in fact the play itself could be described as a microcosm of Apartheid, every aspect dissected and examined.

The set itself is also highly suggestive. The road through farm lands suggests the way forward through South Africa. The part of the road on stage is the present but it leads to the horizon suggesting the future. The tree represents all that is desirable of life in South Africa and the two protagonists represent their respective races - although the Farmer is not just any white man but a Free State Afrikaner - perhaps the most right wing example of the supporters of Apartheid. The Labourer is not just black but a migrant from Lesotho, a fact that lends itself to other areas of investigation.

Through their conversation we learn that the Farmer is suspicious of the motives of black people and black sympathisers, always suspecting some act of subversion. He suspects, for example, his labourers' confidence in the quality of education he provides in the farm schools. His vehement defence and dismissal of

his labourers' tacit criticism of the school, as mere 'communism,' implies that his conscience knows better. The fact that he is deprived of after school labour by the school children if they are sent elsewhere seems to underline his motives. But, any time he must contend with rebelliousness, the cover-all epithet of 'communism' is bandied about. At heart the problem is 'this beautiful tree God made in our beautiful land' (TR 124). Farmer is not prepared to share it on any terms with Labourer after he discovers his blackness and, later, when he suspects that Labourer might be plotting to overthrow him he '*...runs to his tree and hugs it, still holding his gun.*) I am going to defend you. Nobody is going to take you away from me. I'll die fighting for you, my beloved tree' (142).

Prior to his discovery of Labourer's blackness however, Farmer is content to share the shade. He makes allowances for Labourer's increasingly suspect behaviour on the grounds that he may be a 'liberal communist in Lower Houghton' (126) - a wealthy Johannesburg suburb - or even a 'communist Jew in Sandton' (127) - ditto. A wry comment is made about the quasi liberality of these groups in the number of token multi-racial dinners they give per month - a conscience salving doff of the cap towards racial integration. The climax, of course, for Farmer comes when he discovers for the first time that labourer is black:

The Farmer looks at him closely and discovers to his utmost shock and disgust that the Labourer is indeed black.

Farmer: You are black!

Labourer: (*amused*) Yes.

Farmer: (*as if to himself*) You are black. (*Then yelling*) Why didn't you tell me you were black you bastard? (131).

The extreme irony and humour of the situation serve to underline the irrationality of prejudice of any kind. Prejudice according to one's colour is obviously the most visible form, but if one takes away the visibility the whole concept becomes ludicrous and, by implication, so do all other forms of prejudice. This point seems to have been lost on one reviewer of a production who criticised the miscasting of a black actor as the white Farmer. This is actually essential in order to highlight the incongruousness of colour prejudice. Again, the critic decries the 'initial hypothesis that they do not see each other [as] rather hard to swallow' (Elahi 1991: 15). This is a valid criticism, as the motif of colour prejudice hinges around Farmer's failing to 'see' that Labourer is black. The bizarrerie of not realising that Labourer is black until he is told underlines the bizarrerie of feeling superior (or inferior) because of skin colour. This, then, is the lynch pin of the play - everything else is subsidiary, either as a result of or reaction to this discovery.

Farmer reacts immediately, putting into practice the tenets that form the foundations of Apartheid. Labourer is summarily banished to the other more uncomfortable side of the road, to go and 'sit there and develop yourself separately' (135) because, as Farmer tells him, 'This is a white area, you know' (133). But Farmer can only maintain his position and keep control over Labourer because he has a gun and threatens violence continually. He suspects, continually, that Labourer is a terrorist and, when Labourer intimates that he might take action, exclaims: 'Do you mean you are going to use violence on me?' (135). He cannot see the anomaly of their positions, nor the irony of his greatest fear being what he himself has used - 'anarchy and bloodshed' (135).

Farmer, later on, steals the Labourer's bundle, telling him that he has no right to it and, if he wants it back, must work for it. The contents of the bundle are symbolic of what the National Government has taken from the black population. The food itself, in the form of a bottle of Coke and a loaf of bread, symbolises his immediate means of survival, the cooking implements represent his control over his survival in the future and his overalls symbolise his right to work and therefore moral and economic independence. The fact that Farmer wants Labourer to work for what is his by right shows farmer's need for the labour and inferior position of the Labourer, which provides the infrastructure of racial superiority.

The untenability of Apartheid is alluded to when Labourer mentions that he is from Lesotho:

Farmer: (*coming over to him and looking at him closely, just as he did when he made the discovery that he was black*) My God, you are right! You are from there.

Labourer: How can you tell just by looking at me?

Farmer: (*mysteriously*) We can always tell, you know. We have ways and means. We did it with the Japanese when we declared them honorary whites whilst the Chinese remained non-white. We are doing it again with the Chinese from Taiwan whom we have now declared honorary whites and those from the mainland who will always remain non-white because they are communists and we don't trade with them. We are very clever, you know (149).

If a country is to survive economically it must trade. The complications that Apartheid imposes become even more labyrinthine and undermine the economic

fabric of the society - not to mention the moral. Ultimately, the many concessions which Apartheid is forced to make erode its foundations until the whole idea becomes irrelevant.

The scene in the play where the Labourer reads aloud from 'Chapman's Travels in the Interior of South Africa' comments on the subjectivity of history and its use and misuse. Mbata asserts that '...the Black man has never accepted his subjugation as ultimate. For him, therefore, the struggle has never ended, even though it has become considerably circumscribed by the application of a host of legal devices by the government' (Mbata 1975: 204) - one of the circumscriptions being the representation and interpretation of history. He goes on:

Scholars generally agree that there is little likelihood that White attitudes, in terms of which White dominance is regarded as essential for tolerable existence in the country, will suddenly change as a result of a floodlight of enlightenment or in response to what has been called a 'moral revival'. Explicitly or by implication many authors recognise the significance of historical continuities. (205)

The subjectivity of historical interpretation is illustrated clearly in the passage in this play describing Livingstone's much documented missions. The fact that Hollywood has also had an input ensures that attitudes to and perceptions of Livingstone's contribution in Africa are defined and fixed. It is only when one analyses Livingston's contribution in the light of this play that the African version begins to emerge:

Being, as they find, a doctor, he has also the reputation of being a wizard. This makes him either feared or admired and gives him a

certain influence. They give him credit for being a good doctor and say he has cured many, but killed some natives. They do not believe in natural deaths; when a man dies he has been killed. By all accounts the doctor's preaching is barely tolerated by the chief, who is at heart highly displeased at the doctrines concerning rain and polygamy.(TR144)

At first sight the Eurocentric/white reaction would be concerned with the African superstitiousness, lack of scientific/medical knowledge and primitive mumbo jumbo. But, if one attempts to take an African perspective, a completely different picture emerges. African witchdoctors - a combination of herbalist, psychologist and magician - have been practising their trade reasonably successfully for centuries and right up to this very day. Livingstone would have been judged, of necessity, by African parameters and would have, justifiably, been seen as something of a wizard. Naturally, with nineteenth century knowledge of and standards in medicine it is conceivable that he would have 'killed some natives'. If the Christian ethic of 'God's will' is taken to its logical conclusion, then no one dies natural deaths and the African attitude to Livingstone's failures is, at least, understandable. But his short sighted blundering into the realms of rain making and polygamy are inexcusable. Far from being an example of native primitiveness they are both sensible, practical methods of dealing with African life. Dance is the most important art form and general means of expression in African culture and it is intrinsic to African spirituality that a dance for rain (vital for survival) would be a form of supplication to a higher being - no more bizarre than voices chanting in unison for, say, peace. As for polygamy: in African society, men - the hunters - see to animals while women - the gatherers - till the fields. Tillage is far more labour intensive so it makes economic sense for there to be as many women as possible in the family group. It also ensures survival - both of the individual and the species,

in times of high infant mortality and possible infertility. The point must, however, be made that misrepresentation alone cannot convince, nor can it inculcate something new. As Hoffer explains: 'It penetrates only into minds already open, and rather than instill opinion it articulates and justifies opinions already present in the minds of its recipients' (Hoffer 1952: 124).

Farmer's already nurtured and developed sense of innate superiority sees no irony in his remark at the beginning of the 'expedition scene': 'Guide me whilst I discover your continent.' (TR143). Finally, it doesn't exactly require a Herculean effort to connect with Keats's Chapman - a translator of Homer, whom Keats connects with the coloniser Cortez.

In *The Road*, Mda explores, concomitantly with Apartheid, the fundamental issues of prejudice and her more virulent twin, racism. These issues have been comprehensively analysed by Said - metonymically as the Other (Said 1978) and re-appraised later as 'not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent other' (Said 1985: 93). Not only is Farmer anti-black but he is anti-Jew, anti-English and anti-communist - in his eyes, a more vehement form of liberal, which he is also anti. Unreasoned and unquestioned, his muddled political thinking is only part of his muddled ideology which is focused in an all-embracing hatred: 'It is my hatred, man. It doesn't concern you...I shall hoard my hatred (TR 127). When challenged on religious grounds he replies: 'I say love your enemy, but shoot him all the same' (127). He is not only 'anti' everything himself but he is 'anti' anyone who thinks or behaves differently from himself. Boetie Van Rensburg, seen as 'dirty and unkempt. A disgrace to the Afrikaner race' (129) is Othered not alone for seducing his wife but for being like the liberal Jews, a *Kaffir boetie* (pejorative

slang: literally Kaffir Brother). His all-pervading prejudices are manifested most potently in his racism which pervades the play from beginning to end.

JanMohamed emphasises the fact that:

...race is pivotal to the relations in colonial society, in order to provide a phenomenologically accurate description of colonial experience and to avoid two types of distractions. One view misrepresents reality by pretending that racial differences are unimportant in colonial society and thus need not embarrass or concern us; while the other view distorts the world by perceiving everything in terms of class conflict and thus becomes callous to the complexity of lived human experience. (Jan Mohamed 1983: 7/8)

Farmer feels fully justified in his unChristian behaviour towards his fellow man because his views on racism are fully justified. He sees no dichotomy in his statements: 'I am one of the most respected elders [of the church], you know' (TR128) and 'you are a fine upright Christian who believes in solving the problems of our country by shooting' (127). JanMohamed explains this as the Dutch Reformed version of colonialism practised by the majority of Afrikaners, which sees Biblical justification for their sense of superiority. Any outside threats from Others, in the form of English or African aggression, was seen as a 'divine test and assurance of God's favour' (Jan Mohamed 1983: 83) and '[i]n time the uniqueness of their culture acquired a religious significance, and its separation from possibly contaminating agents became a sacred duty: anyone who tried to overcome their separation was considered demonic' (83).

The distance between the two protagonists is further underlined by their lack of communication. They often talk at cross purposes, carrying on separate, parallel monologues - linked perhaps by a word or phrase - but essentially isolated from each other. For example, Bhekile the dog is discussed by them both, but on two levels. To Farmer, he is a former labourer with leftist tendencies and - consequently - Bhekile the 'communist dog' (TR 123) whom he later admits to having shot. To Labourer, he is his little pet dog that he has saved from urchins and is bringing home as a present to his wife. By the end of the play the image of the dog has shifted from the innocent to the insidious when it becomes apparent that there is a link between Farmer, the dog and Lucy the Labourer's wife (q.v.).

The ever-recurring theme of betrayal is couched, in this play, in sexual terms. Naturally, the whole of Apartheid can be seen as the betrayal of one group by another, but Mda lays emphasis on the sexual elements within the men's lives. Farmer has betrayed his wife sexually through his forays into the low-life by consorting with prostitutes, at first in Swaziland and later in Lesotho. His wife has betrayed him by having an affair with his foreman and he, in turn, reciprocates by acquiring a regular black mistress. While the labourer is forced away from home to look for work, his wife becomes the Farmer's mistress. This is the ultimate betrayal for the Labourer. Farmer has taken from him everything he owns, everything he has by right, his dog (which Farmer shot) and now his wife.

The sexual infidelities used as metaphors for betrayal do not stop simply there. Mda depicts the notion of sexuality in this play as something depraved, unwholesome - thus underlining the depravity of the various betrayals and, ultimately, Apartheid. The language used by both men in connection with sex is

usually obscene and all sexual encounters are described in negative terms. Both speak in an offhanded manner about their casual sexual encounters, but it is left to Farmer to find expression for his repressed sexuality under the strict South Africa censorship laws as well as the puritanical attitudes of the Dutch Reformed church. He is a seasoned visitor to the neighbouring states of Swaziland and Lesotho - 'Casinos? Movies! Dirty magazines imported from Scandinavia! Women?' (TR 150) - especially black women, prohibited to him in South Africa. He and his mistress go to see *Deep Throat* at the Kingsway cinema every time he visits her and - the final cut - he has taught her how to involve dogs in the sexual act and she has learnt to enjoy it. Labourer connects this admission with the request from his wife to find a dog for her, a male dog, for company (hence Bhékile) and is finally goaded into action. Labourer, representing the black peoples of South Africa, has taken as much as is possible from his white oppressor and has rebelled - with disastrous consequences.

The white controllers' incursions into the lives of blacks is represented, in part, by the two wives. Unable to have a successful sexual relationship with his own wife, Farmer feels entitled to appropriate the wife of someone else. He feels no guilt about it but readily boasts of his black mistress. Both wives are deemed possessions, chattels. Farmer feels entitled to have a mistress but his wife may not have an affair with the foreman. Similarly, Labourer sees no harm in his peripatetic amours but is prepared to kill his wife's lover.

And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses (GSD) first produced in 1988 continues themes first mooted in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* and confirmed in *The Hill*. The notions of capitalist exploitation and bureaucratic competition in newly democratised post-colonial countries are developed further in this play. But

Mda in this play, for the first time, examines gender - specifically femaleness - and the familiar themes of prostitution, poverty and betrayal are viewed from the feminine point of view. *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* finds two women, Woman and Lady, waiting in a queue to buy foreign aid rice at a Lesotho government depot. The rice has been donated by a foreign country - in this case Italy - but is being sold in bulk to large business concerns, to be retailed in the shops at inflated prices. What is left is being sold (not donated) cheaply to the populace. The two women have been waiting in the queue for four days, sharing 'the chair of patience' and their meagre supply of food. At the end of the play they find that they have to endure so much nonsensical red tape in the shape of forms in triplicate with terms of irrelevant detail, rubber stamping, and more queues that they give up the idea and leave together in a mood of shared experience and sisterhood.

The Lady is a prostitute. From a wealthy home, she dropped out of university to marry an Italian chef who subsequently abandoned her to run off with their housemaid. She has been a successful high-class prostitute or courtesan (as she terms it) but is now finding, at forty, that she is losing business as the 'johns' will always gravitate towards younger women. Her own daughter, whom she trained, is now a very successful prostitute but will not help support her mother. The Woman appears at first to be humble and a victim. She is about the same age as the Lady but, in contrast, is dowdy in appearance and is described in the stage directions as looking '*like someone's mother*'. She has been the housemaid of an Italian chef who fell in love with her (perhaps the same man the Lady married - all the details are the same but the idea is never pursued and it would appear that he is merely symbolic [q.v]). When his restaurant business in Lesotho failed, he persuaded her to run away with him and set up home in a Cape Town flat. They cannot live as man and wife in South Africa as this has occurred before the

Immorality Act was rescinded, so she continues to act as his house maid. Before long he begins affairs with many different women, eventually abandoning the Woman and running off to sea as a chef on an ocean liner. The Woman, destitute, must work as a cleaner to pay off the overdue rent to the owner of the block of flats. She eventually gets her own room in Cape Town, continuing in her domestic work but becomes involved in civil rights and trade union movements. Why she returns to Lesotho is not clear but she sees the problems of South Africa and Lesotho as mutually affective and, indeed, affecting southern Africa as a whole. By the end of the play she manages to motivate the Lady into joining her in assuming agency for their whole lives, not just in refusing to stay in the rice queue.

The thesis postulated in *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland*, of neo-colonialism being an unacceptable alternative to colonialism, is again suggested in this play and, again, we see the ordinary person no better off under his own people than he previously had been. Corruption and exploitation are not confined to one race alone but seem rather to be the preserves of whoever is in power. In this play the petty bureaucracy of the civil service and the misappropriation of what rightfully belongs to the ordinary people (here, the donated food aid rice) are specified and so we see both a reiteration and development of this theme. In both plays the lowest rungs of society are no better off under their new masters. They are still living at subsistence level, and, in both plays, are reduced to the status of beggars in practice, if not in name. Sergeant and Janabari refuse to call themselves beggars and resort to a euphemistic definition of petty thievery for their existence, while the Woman and the Lady should be receiving the donated rice free (which would, in fact, make them actual beggars but for the corrupted civil service). In the latter play this issue is developed in that Mda takes a detailed look at corruption (which is only hinted at in the former play) and then shows how the exploitation works under this system. Not only is the free

rice stolen by the civil servants but excess rice is then sold to the rightful recipients for pure profit.

Lesotho is the unequivocally the country in question in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* and, unlike *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*, there is no ambiguity about the setting. South Africa is the venue for the runaway lovers but its relevance is to serve as a commentary on Lesotho and, by inference, the rest of southern Africa. Although the Woman and her lover are at the mercy of the Immorality Act specifically, it is, rather, the use of the Apartheid system as a symbol of oppression that highlights the inequalities of life in Lesotho. The Lady does not wish to discuss South Africa, dismissing it with: 'They are not our politics. They are politics of another country' (GSD 26) but Woman rounds on her and, while admitting that because she works there South African laws affect her, reminds Lady that:

It affects you too, although you've, like most others, decided to wear blinkers and pretend that you live in a never-never land that will smoothly map out its destiny irrespective of all the turbulence surrounding it. One day it's going to dawn on you, and on the rest of all the others who think like you, that this struggle is not just South African. It is southern African (26).

That the two women represent victims of oppression in Lesotho is made patently obvious. As in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*, there has been no real lifting of colonialism. White faces have merely been replaced with black ones. The civil servants whose job it is to distribute the rice are obviously economically better off as symbolised by their regular, well paid jobs and attractive clothing - the



beautiful Sunday dresses of the title and referred to several times within the play. That they have also assumed the role of the privileged is made clear in the off hand treatment they mete out to the patient queue. They are seen by the women going back and forth for meals and home at half past four, while the women have to share what little they have between them and sleep out of doors in all weathers for four days, just to get one bag of rice cheaply. The filling in of the forms, with all its attendant derogatory side-sniping comments, serves to emphasise the abjectness of the recipients' positions. There is no acceptable answer to any questions and comments such as '...Why do you stand there staring at me as if you have just swallowed a rat...You people like wasting time...Do I have to prompt you all the time?' (35) will be the response no matter what. Eventually, the recipient is asked to fill in the form herself, while the clerk can 'finish eating [her] fat cake' (35), thus spotlighting the inequality but focusing on the food. The recipient queues for days to buy basic food while the clerk munches away at a luxury - and it is not even a meal time.

But the off-hand manner of the civil servants is mild compared to the bureaucratic corruption described earlier in the play. The rice has been donated by first world countries for distribution amongst the neediest (Lesotho is one of the world's poorest countries) but the capitalist (by inference) leaders are selling it to 'wholesalers, general dealers and jobbers' (14) and there is not enough left for the ordinary people. As the Lady says: 'They had to send trucks to fetch more rice from other loading places throughout the country'(7). Not alone does the country suffer from this kind of corruption but Mda criticises the inefficiency of all public services. The Lady describes post offices, banks or any public government office as places of waiting while officials continue private conversations, are missing and can't be found, where files go astray or people are attending interminable meetings. The general populace feel powerless in circumstances like these and, like the Lady,

have no recourse but to the 'chair of patience'. There is no good in getting angry. Both women make elaborate shows of politeness with exaggerated greetings such as '*Morena*' (King) and '*Nkosi yamakosi*' (Lord of Lords) (11); as the Lady says: 'Listen, I know the system, okay?...Those people are civil servants, do you hear that? You don't just talk to them as though they are the woman who sells fat cakes at the street corner' (16).

In other words the question begs to be asked: is Lesotho a liberated country? Do all its people enjoy the same opportunities and quality of life? Mda would, along with Freire, seem to be saying no:

We can legitimately say that in the process of oppression someone oppresses someone else; we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, nor yet that someone liberates himself, but rather that men in communion liberate each other (Freire 1972: 103).

Unless all of the people of a country attain similar rights and quality of life, they cannot be termed liberated. Unless, as Freire says, the people of a country all work together for their communal liberation, they are not free. And one of the reasons for the failure of true liberation would be as the Woman says:

We say: Well, this is home, we are prepared to accept shoddiness. We are still a young nation so these things are expected to happen. In other words what we are saying is that we don't think we are capable of producing the best results, so we are prepared to tolerate inefficiency and corruption (GSD 28).

As long as people are prepared to provide excuses for inefficiency and corruption they are in collusion with their oppressors, whoever those are.

The weakness of this play, though, lies in its seemingly extraneous didacticism. In a play of this length (37 pages), Mda covers his themes well and even minor themes are dealt with in a satisfactory manner, but having Woman harangue Lady blatantly on concepts such as Trade Unionism and *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* undermines his usual subtlety. Woman, and perhaps Mda himself, should heed her own words: '[i]t is as if when you are forced to sit on a hot coal stove someone else must come and tell you your buttocks are burning' (GSD).

However, when he tackles the theme of poverty, Mda is again three-dimensional. He sees clearly the desperation of the poor who cannot act according to reason but to need. It makes sense for people to band together and refuse to buy food that was donated and meant to be free; but if you are at the end of the chain of corruption you join the queue and, as Lady says: 'Let's face it, you came because you heard it's a bargain...Man, you shout at those big guys, but you are no different from them' (14). She is not justified, however, in her criticism of her daughter's every-man-for-himself attitude. Her daughter, apparently, 'gets laid all over town and doesn't bring a cent home. Spends it all on herself. Flashy clothes and jewelry' (15) - reprehensible indeed but understandable in view of her mother's own attitude to the Italian chef. At no time does she mention any tenderness or feelings for him but tells us that '[h]e lavished all his love and money on me. I always had booze and cigarettes for myself and my friends. I even left varsity for him. I gave birth to his daughter. Then the bastard left me' (20). Bastard indeed! But poverty is real, grinding and hopeless. The desperation of people prepared to wait in a queue for four days speaks volumes but when Woman complains: 'If it's food aid it must be given to the poor free' (14) she compounds her case by adding, 'And in many cases it helps to keep them where they are - poor' (14).

Prostitution, in this play, is an issue of poverty, not of sexuality. The Lady is at first presented to us in negative terms. She is described in the beginning as attempting to make herself appear 'chic and sexy' (4) but we know what to expect when the Woman criticises her make up for making her look like a whore. By the end of the play the defences are down - she is, literally, covered in mud from sitting on the wet ground and she looks dishevelled. By the same token, the front she has put on (mirrored by her physical appearance) in the beginning, by describing her background: 'We were not millionaires, but we had enough to eat. You can even say we lived almost on the wealthy side of the street' (13) - and her private school and university education, has crumbled and she has to admit her desperation. She reveals that she is destitute. Indeed, she has to share her chair with the Woman in exchange for food. All she has is enough money to buy the bag of rice. Her pseudo pride about being a 'high class hooker', a 'courtesan' (18), breaks down when she has to admit that she can't get any customers any more because the 'johns' don't want to 'screw us old whores any more' (18). That she is also a whore at heart is evidenced, not only in her attitude to men - 'I have been used. So I use them' (20) - nor by her idea of revenge - 'I wish I had AIDS, then I'd spread it like wild fire. Kill all the bastards' (20) - but in her general philosophy. The Woman recognises this in her answer to the Lady's plea of 'How am I going to live without you?' (17). She says: 'It is my money you are so much interested in. If I go you'll have to find another victim who'll buy you meals while you wait in your perpetual queue' (17).

The two women, however, manage to retain some sense of dignity in the face of poverty. The Lady initially keeps up a presentable physical appearance for instance, while the Woman refuses to 'wallow in degradation' (16) for the rice,

preferring to give up and go home. In fact, the Woman, despite her didacticism, sees through the Lady's weakness. That she will always be a victim is symbolised by her 'chair of patience'. As long as she has it as a prop to keep her going in the face of all the degradation, she will always be a victim - an object. The Woman tells her:

When they violate you, you wait. You patiently wait until such time as they come round to doing something about it. You have the patience of a saint. When they violate you, you avenge yourself by laying men all over the place. Then you hope things will be all right (33).

The theme of betrayal is only touched upon lightly in this play and then only as an adjunct to the more major theme of gender. The Italian chef betrays both the women by deserting them and leaving them destitute. Indeed, their attitudes to men seem to be coloured by their similar experiences. They both agree that 'these *mataliana* are all like that' (24), like other men, 'bastards' and, as we have seen, nothing will stop the Lady in her quest for revenge. The Woman, however, although her low opinion of men will not sink as far as 'scum' (26) still sees them as victims, dwelling on the glories of their ancestors. 'We do not see much of what they are doing for the future,' she cynically remarks. 'It is as if the past will take care of the future without any effort from the present' (27). Apart from denigrating men, the women see them only in terms of salvation or 'insurance' for themselves through marriage and foreign men, such as the Italian and the Swiss who married the gospel singer/preacher, are seen not only as a passport to financial security and status but as a gateway out of their impoverished and corrupt country. But men are fickle and cannot be relied upon, due to their propensity for young girls.

As far as the women's relationship with each other and with other women is concerned, a certain amount of emphasis is laid on appearance. The Lady's real reason for her obsession with appearance, of course, is the nature of her work. She tells us that '[w]e have to be recognisable to prospective clients. At the same time we have to be sexually attractive - physically I mean. It's all part of the job. Like a uniform or something' (29) - and when the appearance isn't alluring, the johns take their business elsewhere.

The office girls, initially, are seen as beautiful and, by inference, superior in their summer dresses and the Woman is also described by the Lady as 'Miss Perfect' (23), but in the end there is a mutual recognition of a camaraderie - not only in strengths but in weaknesses. Like the Woman, the office girls have been unofficially prostituting themselves to get either their jobs or promotion and so, therefore, are all 'in the same profession' (19) as the Lady. 'Only I do it openly and on my terms, as a free agent. They get laid and still have to sit behind office desks and typewriters before they can get their porridge' (19), she says.

The two women start off antagonistic towards each other but the Lady begins to call the Woman 'sister-woman' and invites her to reciprocate. The explanation and reason for the soubriquet are, initially, trite - the Lady picked it up from some Afro-American tourists - but as the play progresses, the two women's lives and philosophies move closer together and the use of the phrase increases. By the end of the play it is perfectly believable when the Woman exclaims: 'You know what? I love you. I think you are a great human being' (37). As they hold hands in the final scene, it is evident, apart from the stage direction of '[t]here is a great warmth between them' (37), that they will face the future together as a unit

with a sense of identity and belonging. The men have been well and truly 'othered' in the final lines: 'Men...They are the same. They are like children of one person' (37). And consequently the Italian could never be identified. He is evidently the same person but he is not meant to be seen as an individual. He represents men as seen by the two women - all the same - identical - interchangeable. Through each other they have forged a sense of self and seized an agency. In typical Mdaian mode their fate is open-ended: 'I know that never again will I need the food-aid rice, and my chair of patience. Are you coming or not?' (37).

The final play under consideration, *Joys of War* (JW), was first produced in 1989; it marks in some ways a clear departure from Mda's previous works and in other ways continues and develops themes. More experimental in form, it is the most confined thematically. The play is set on three levels on stage so that events in the play may represent a flexibility as to time and place. Simultaneously, scenes may be in the past, present or future or may be taking place in opposite parts of the country - in fact, the effect is cinematic. Two guerrilla soldiers, Soldier One and Soldier Two, are on a mission of sabotage. They occupy the uppermost level and spend the play whiling away their tense but tedious vigil in swapping anecdotes and re-enacting scenes from their past. These scenes take place on the middle level. On the lowest level a grandmother and twelve year old girl, Mama and Nana, are searching for Papa (Mama's son and Nana's father). Mama believes he has been detained by police after a riot and Nana believes he has deserted them. They are from a squatter camp and during the journey express the hopes, fears and frustrations of their lives of precarious poverty. The squatter shacks have been continually burned to the ground and bulldozed only to rise up again almost immediately, while the inhabitants, caught in a treadmill of destruction, can only cope with the other exigencies of their lives as best they can. Nana, for instance, is constantly worried about her rag doll which is either sick, dying or dead - only to

emerge the next day as a new 'baby' - thus commenting on infant mortality and health amongst the very poor and displaced. She and Mama must contend with neighbours' speculations on the whereabouts of Papa as well as their own fears, as they go about perpetually rebuilding.

The two soldiers are presented as contrasts. Soldier One is out-going, open and chatty. He wants to tell his own story and wants to hear about Soldier Two. The latter is taciturn, morose and secretive. He does not want the conversation to be in any way personal and becomes quite aggressive at any praise. It appears that he is one of the best soldiers: with no thought of personal safety, he is always volunteering for the most dangerous missions and is constantly being held up as an example by senior officers. The two soldiers display different attitudes to life in general but it is only when Soldier Two's life story is prised from him that the real divergence is appreciated. Soldier One, it seems, has been a rebel by circumstance. Fed up with the constant burnings by the government of the squatter camps and following the death of his wife and baby, he finally rebels, only to be imprisoned where he must endure the torments of interrogation and torture. He learns from fellow inmates of the prison how to control the adverse situations by becoming an 'actor' - exaggerating his responses to the violence and so satisfying his tormentors. He is eventually released but the next time he is imprisoned it is, unexpectedly, only for a few hours. He decides to leave the country and join a guerrilla group in a neighbouring state. Leaving his remaining child, Nana, in the care of his mother, he disappears. Later he is sent back into the country on a sabotage mission. The country is never actually defined but it is understood to be South Africa.

Soldier Two, after much prevarication, reveals that he joined the armed rebellion after being disappointed in love. Soldier One is disappointed at such prosaic motivation for someone of whom he has been in the habit of thinking with awe struck admiration, but his sordid story eventually clarifies the situation. The woman concerned, though professing to reciprocate his feelings, is lured away and marries a much richer man - an owner of a fish and chips shop, a fleet of taxis and a Mercedes Benz. Soldier Two decides on a terrible revenge. He betrays the two to the secret police, accusing them - quite falsely - of traitorous behaviour by funding the guerrilla movement and recruiting young men and women as members. The man is arrested, interrogated and tortured but cannot withstand the violence and dies in the hands of the authorities. The woman continues to run his businesses in the township. Soldier Two has thus joined up in order to atone. At the end of the play Mama and Nana eventually meet up with Soldier One (Papa) and Soldier Two is finally able to complete his atonement through suicide. Nana will take his place as a soldier.

In agreement with Nelson Mandela's statement in 1964 at the Rivonia Trial it would seem that Mda is re-iterating in this play that '...our policy to achieve a non-racial state by non-violence, had achieved nothing...' and that eventually '...the time comes...when there remain only two choices - submit or fight' (quoted in Benson 254). The policy of Umkonto we Sizwe (the military wing of the ANC - meaning Spear of the Nation) was one of controlled sabotage and, although never explicitly stated, these notions seem to be central to *Joys of War*. A lesser known accused at the same trial, Elias Matsoaledi, stated:

When I was asked to join Umkonto we Sizwe it was at a time when it was clear to me that all our years of peaceful struggle had been of no

use. The government would not let us fight peacefully any more, and had blocked all our legal acts by making them illegal (257).

Mda, in this play, seems to be asserting the relevance of 1964 ideology to the late 1980s (see Mda's views on armed resistance, Appendix A). Armed struggle is not called into question. There is no debate as to its necessity nor about alternative means of resistance. It is a fact and is, instead, shown to be the only effective way forward, especially when compared to the struggles of ordinary people. Metaphorically, this can be seen in the privileged position of the Soldiers on the highest level adopting the positions of statues in a war memorial whenever the focus is not on them. This serves to remind the audience perpetually of their exalted position - a powerful icon for eulogising armed insurrection. Yet the violence of every-day life is constantly foregrounded. Throughout the play we are reminded also of the violence of the burning of people's homes in the squatter camps, the use of tear gas, stones and dogs during protests or riots, the so-called 'suicides' of prisoners in detention, the 'state-of-the-art' torture paraphernalia and so on. Armed resistance then is seen as the only answer in face of violence and is powerfully encapsulated in Soldier One's statement: 'But it looks like all that is left for us to say is "from flowers bullets shall bloom"' (JW 100). The inference being that 'flowers' - peace, a better way of life, equality or whatever - must come inevitably through armed rebellion. So that it is quite logical for Soldier One to say when Soldier Two asks for 'some little peace' (104): 'Oh no, we are not going to have a little peace around here. We are not going to have a little peace anywhere in this country until we win this war' (105).

However, the horrors of war are not overlooked. While there is constant reference to arms in the play, there must inevitably be cognisance of casualties.

Both men regret the killing and maiming of civilians during their acts of sabotage, but agree '...This is something we all learn to live with. It cannot be avoided. It is painful, but it cannot be avoided' (124). Nevertheless, Soldier Two has slightly more ambivalent feelings. Despite the civilian casualties, he sees the pyrotechnics of war as invigorating and seems to enjoy 'the deafening music of the bombs' (122). Soldier One accuses him of seeing war as a 'festival of fireworks' (122) but he agrees that '[a]ll wars are games. Like pieces of draughts on a board' (123).

Of course, Apartheid is the reason that war is necessary, and, in particular, is the cause of the land question. The fact of the squatter camps is an issue in itself but is expanded into a metaphor for the landlessness of South Africa's indigenous people. In the squatter camps there are no facilities, no infrastructure as found in the townships and cities, as that would give cognisance - definition even - to the squatters as having some kind of rights over the land. In the same way, the inferior infrastructures in the Homelands and the townships - the legitimate domiciles of the African people of South Africa - mirror the squatter camp situation and therefore, make the whole country of South Africa a squatter camp. By definition then, the people are 'squatters in [their] own land' (109).

The themes of commitment and betrayal are consequent. The commitment of the two soldiers, though different in nature, is constantly alluded to. Both are volunteers and both have been specifically chosen for this particular mission. Soldier Two's motives are unclear for most of the play, but Soldier One leaves us in no doubt of the high opinion that Soldier Two is held in by his peers and superiors. Soldier One's motives are clearer and simpler. He is fighting for civil rights and the right of control over his own labour - of necessity both, paradoxically, altruistic and selfish. By the time Soldier Two's story comes out,

we find that he has proved himself committed as a soldier and, personally, to the woman he fell in love with; but the latter is a false commitment as he is able, on being jilted, to transform his commitment into betrayal.

Betrayal, the alter-ego of commitment, is thoroughly developed in this play. Initially, Soldier One appears to have betrayed Mama and Nana as the child is always convinced of his desertion; but as time passes we find that he is the least likely to betray anyone, having proved himself loyal to family, comrades and country. The theme of betrayal is manifested mainly in and around Soldier Two. At first he is betrayed by the woman who rejects him for material gain. In fact, she betrays the rich man by marrying his wealth. Soldier Two then betrays the two of them by falsely informing on them to the secret police and thereby destroying their lives. His betrayal, though, is doubly insidious. Not only does he betray them falsely but he obtains his revenge in an underhand way by allowing 'the system' to do his dirty work for him. His voluntary informing is highlighted in marked contrast to Soldier One's integrity in the face of the interrogators. In retrospect, though, his behaviour has been hinted at: very early in the play he threatens to shoot Soldier One for getting on his nerves and then later on sees no significance in glossing over the inevitable civilian deaths in acts of sabotage. Surely his commitment to the cause would have him envisage it for all people and not condone any expendability of any lives.

Although the play is called *Joys of War* and the soldiers are foregrounded, the struggles of ordinary people cannot be ignored because of the parallel story of Mama and Nana. A minor, though cogent, theme - personified in Nana and her dolls - is the precariousness of childhood and children. Nana's concern for her doll which is always ailing, dying and being reborn symbolises the inevitable

hopelessness of the plight of the rural peasant as represented by the squatters. Lacking basic facilities infant mortality is an accepted fact of life. Soldier One's baby died because of inadequate medical attention. The only clinics are in towns and cities and Nana's tearing up her doll and then getting Mama to help her make a new one emphasises the hopeless relentlessness of it all:

Mama: We make another one, yet we know that sooner or later it's going to die.

Nana: Is that not what always happens, Mama?

Mama: Maybe you are right. Sooner or later they die, and we know that even when we make them (107).

There is no place in the lives of the poor for children or childhood. If they do not die, they are denied their childhood and forced into adult life before their time. Nana, although she adopts the role of a mother throughout the play, makes it clear that she would rather remain a child: '...I don't want to be a young woman, Mama. I want to be a child' (87). By the end of the play she has bowed to the inevitable by refusing to go home. She insists on staying with her father and becoming a soldier with him.

Finally, the play embodies the quest motif - in this case the quest for truth. Mda was inspired to write this play on meeting an old woman in South America who had travelled from town to town in search of her son (*And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses: Four Works* 1993: xiii). Here Mama and Nana are not only looking for Papa but they want to know the truth about him. Has he deserted them as Nana and the neighbours suspect or has he been interned as Mama suspects. In fact, he is neither as they discover and their pride and relief are restored.

Soldier One and Soldier Two are also concerned with truth. Soldier One investigates the truth both of his situation and of himself. Through role playing and telling his story he is able to define his motives and establish his goals, i.e. commitment to his ideals. Soldier Two conceals the truth. He refuses to talk about himself and, when he finally does, reveals that he has not only concealed the truth but distorted it. His quest then becomes modified into atonement for his treatment of the truth. He joins the army in a misguided notion of purging himself of guilt, but finally achieves catharsis by being able to commit suicide without deserting his post. He believes he has atoned, saying: 'I want my last mission to be a triumph, whatever fate awaits me' (140).

In conclusion, although the seven plays display such diversity in subject matter, situations and settings, an overall cohesion may be detected which hinges around a unified aim. The basic philosophy that pervades all the plays seems to be an ontological contemplation of our state of existence as human beings. Are we important as human beings and should our experience of life be what it is? Are we worthwhile or do we deserve to be betrayed? The philosophical and political bases for this debate may therefore be summed up in the central issue of betrayal. The same contention holds true on both personal and political levels because racial discrimination and deprivation of human rights are still a betrayal of humans by humans. All other themes covered are subsidiary but subsequent.

Mda, in this dramatic sequence, expects a great deal from his audience - not only intelligent critical appraisal but the will to act. Under no circumstances

should people accept the unacceptable, but neither should they wait for others to right their wrongs. We are all agents of our own destiny.

CHAPTER 2

Strategies in staging: theatre for resistance

Spirits, which by mine art
I have from their confines call'd to enact
My present fancies.

The Tempest. IV i

Let us create and talk about life
Let us not admire the beauty
But peruse the meaning
Let art be life
Let us not eye the form
But read the content
Let creativity be a part of one's life.

Untitled - Matsemela Marraka

In 1936 H.I.E. Dhlomo (quoted in Barnet) claimed that, while he accepted that all modern drama has developed from similar disparate roots, he nevertheless decried a clinging to the past simply for the sake of the past, especially if it gives rise to a xenophobic, inward-looking cultural expression. Dramatic expression, he maintained, benefits from outside influence and, paradoxically, we become better able to express our selfhood when there is an outside reference. More specifically, African drama should not be exclusively African. Dhlomo avers that African drama:

...must be grafted in Western drama...It must borrow from, be inspired by, shoot from European dramatic art forms, and be tainted by exotic influences...The African dramatist cannot delve into the past unless he has grasped the present...To do this the African dramatist must be an artist before being a propagandist, a philosopher before a reformer, a psychologist before a patriot (Barnet 1983: 228).

de Graft, forty years later, concurred, but identified dilemmas confronting contemporary African writers. While embodying a fierce pride in their individualism - a natural development from the emerging national confidence of successively independent nations - these writers feel obliged, nevertheless, to respond to the general call to a return to roots. Some writers are able to do this, while some are not, as the call entails a return to 'attitudes and modes of creative thinking more in consonance with a folkist milieu' which is becoming less and less relevant to more and more writers. The old Africa is perforce changing and, with it, its artistic expression. de Graft lists the forces for change as including:

...disbelief in magic and religious ritual; active rejection of the claims of the clan and folk wisdom; a new psychology fostered by the competitiveness attendant on urbanisation, and a ruthless cash

economy; and, last but not least, a growing belief in the almost limitless possibilities of technology (de Graft 1976: 17).

The scenario, twenty years on, does not seem very different.

This change, of course, has been gradual (over sometimes hundreds of years) under the ravages of colonisation but it is now, in the latter half of the twentieth century, that the successively independent African nations must suddenly, as it were, confront an almost unrecognisable world of the arts which is, nevertheless, essentially African. And African drama depicts this change perhaps more pungently than other art forms because not only does drama draw on life for its source, but its raw materials are 'actual human bodies, attributes, and behaviour' (3). Drama always has held up the mirror to life, and still does so. A distinctive feature of African society as a whole is the anomalous mix of the traditional and tribal, on the one side, with the most up to date thinking and practice on the other. Far from being an incongruity, there emerges a concomitance between the two, which not only enriches the ensuing culture but is, in fact, a necessary nexus - not least so in the realm of drama.

In the case of Zakes Mda this dichotomy is self-evident. Mda is essentially a serious and intellectual writer. It would be very easy for him to be self indulgent and write elitist works for the educated bourgeoisie, but to do so would be to negate his intentions entirely. In his own words theatre, for him, is 'an instrument of liberation' (Mda 1990: 358) and therefore to ignore the call of his roots would be at his peril. Consequently, we find his characters, themes, and settings all firmly rooted in the proletarian. All these features are instantly accessible to his audience, whoever and wherever they are. It is in his theatrical technique (language aside) that Mda turns to Europe. And this is fitting. Ari Sitas acknowledges that in South Africa the theatre, as such, is not an indigenous institution but is seen rather as 'part of *okunjengokwabelungu* (the light that "shines" from the white man)'

(Sitas 1986: 90) - an inheritance from the white man, as it were, tempered and adapted for the black man's purposes. From the 70s, black drama in South Africa became more and more useful to the purposes of the black man, that is, as a tool of liberation and it needed, therefore, to move away from being, as previously, merely an entertainment - the issues of living were too vital. It was not enough that white liberals, whether politicians or dramatists (such as Athol Fugard) should lead blacks towards freedom. In fact, Mda sees Fugard's plays, no matter how radical, as depicting blacks as 'helpless, dispirited, dumb and bereft African workers, suffering in silence and stoically enduring their tragic situation' (Mda 1983: 14), consequently unconsciously discouraging a struggle for autonomy. Fugard 'does not rally men to any cause' (14), a role Mda sees as belonging naturally to that of the playwright. Quoting from a conference in Gaborone, Botswana, he declares '...any person who stands behind a pen (a brush, camera, or saxophone for that matter) must be just as effective as any person who stands behind a gun in the service of progress' (15). In 1995 Mda had not changed his opinion of Fugard. In an article of that year he was still bemoaning the lack of agency in Fugard's black characters:

The oppressed suffer in silence, and are not involved in any struggle against oppression. Instead they are involved in a struggle to accommodate oppression and survive it, not to confront it. They are endowed with endless reservoirs of stoic endurance. The spirit of defiance that exists in the South Africa we all know is nonexistent in these works. The oppressed let oppression happen to them, and all they do is moan and complain about it, and devise ways to live with it (Mda 1995: 40).

Because he wishes to spur people on to action, Mda requires a reasoned response from his audience. Whatever attitude, policy or ideology he is promulgating, he demands a concomitant reaction. His audience must differentiate

between reality and illusion; they must observe, think and then take agency in their lives. With this purpose then, Mda's technique is an adumbration of that of Brecht. Both practitioners have similar aims and, therefore, it is no coincidence that they should espouse similar techniques. That both Brecht and Mda would seem to espouse Marxism as their basic political ideology is less material than that they use similar dramatic techniques to promulgate their philosophies; and Mda, at least, would seem to see the value of Marxist criticism as ineluctable (Mda 1993: 33). His close involvement in Theatre for Development (described fully in his *When People Play People*), as well as the changing South Africa, has focused Mda's concerns, not only with racially-based but also class-based inequalities. The 1970s saw the rise of Trade Unionism in South Africa, epitomised perhaps in the mass stoppages of 1973 and 1982, and the rapid growth of industrialisation and the consequent changing life styles of the workers - all reflected in the so-called 'working class theatre' of the time (Sitas 1986: 85-7).

Brecht's involvement with Marxism is well documented and for him there were three essential points of contact between it and his Epic theatre: 'a materialistic conception of man, the primacy of reason, and an unshakable belief in the possibility of changing the world' (Dickson 1978: 230). Influenced and inspired by the sociologist Fritz Sternberg, Brecht rejected the concept of individualism as outdated - collective man being the dominant idea of the age in his eyes. He argued, therefore, that Epic theatre was the only dramatic form adequate to such a conception and claimed that wherever historical materialism predominates, Epic forms emerge in dramatic writing (231). Mda also, in *When People Play People*, found that, in order to raise consciousness in an audience, the form of the play should suit the ideology. Not only should situations not be removed from the audience's experience but the audience should not be allowed to be passive consumers of a finished product. They should be encouraged to judge for themselves, draw their own conclusions and then be motivated to act on what

they have experienced. Consequently, if the existing forms are found to be inadequate, the dramatist is forced to substitute a new one.

Brecht's Epic theatre has proved an excellent basis for Mda. Like Shaw, both dramatists have sought to place their plays in an historical context. These events and these people are interesting for many reasons, but most of all for the political insight gained through the social circumstances in which they find themselves. However, unlike Shaw, both Brecht and Mda seek to stimulate a desire for change. The emphasis is on the spectator and the final effect of the play is to 'leave him productively disposed, even after the spectacle is over' (Subiotto 1982: 41). Because the spectator has, perforce, a wider view of events than the protagonists, he is able to 'assess the evidence presented and adopt an attitude as to its significance' (41). If thus roused, it is hoped that the spectator will not only be stimulated to change his own thinking but be encouraged to intervene. The spectator can therefore not sit passively and absorb an entertainment. On stage are social issues that impinge directly on his own existence and have a relevance that must be acted upon. He cannot sit as if drugged. He must remain detached although engaged. Brecht blamed the general passivity of audiences on the effects of Aristotelian philosophies of empathy and catharsis and Stanislavsky's developments in the realm of naturalistic acting methods. Therefore, the only solution was to disabuse the audience of any sense of illusion. The audience were constantly to be reminded that this was a theatre and that they were not to suspend disbelief. Every effort was made and every method was developed to distance the audience from the play and, eventually, the details of the Alienation-effect were developed. Later in his career, Brecht found it necessary to modify some of his more rigid views. For example, he found that it was neither desirable nor possible to eliminate all emotional involvement by the actors in their roles and that it was actually 'artistically important to leaven dry didacticism with the life blood of human emotion' (Eddershaw 1982: 141). Another danger of his earlier views (also

modified later) was the emphasis on form. The focus had become deflected from what he was saying to how he was saying it. He attempted then to emphasise the importance of the dialectics so that the political, sociological and economic issues regained their original significance.

In developing his methods, Brecht found that the greatest enemy to reasoned judgment was an empathy on the part of the audience with the characters and a subsequent catharsis. As clarified by Keith Dickson, Brecht was totally against duping an audience - empathy, for example, may even work to the extent of having the audience rooting for a hero even in a well known play, e.g. will Hamlet kill Claudius at prayer when he has the opportunity...the subsequent sympathy at not wishing to speed Claudius to heaven...the final frustration of the audience when they hear that the prayers have been fruitless. And this even though many of the audience may be able to quote sizable portions from the text. But this was not the main problem for Brecht who rejected 'the illusionistic effect, a synthetic product of script, decor, acting and artistic direction' (Dickson 1978: 233). Far more significant was the catharsis resulting from such empathy. If catharsis means purification or, more significantly, purgation of negative or non-social emotions (pity and fear for Aristotle), Brecht found it to be a waste. The audience are not entitled to a feeling of relief but should have their emotions channelled - they should be roused to action rather. Brecht was, perhaps, being a little unfair to Aristotle. Theatre is certainly about change and although social issues were of paramount importance to Brecht they are not the only issues. As is well known, the Aristotelian hero experiences change (and, at second hand, so does the audience). This is perfectly consonant with what Augusto Boal (and, in fact, Brecht) explains when he says: 'Bad playwrights in every epoch fail to understand the enormous efficacy of the transformations that take place before the spectators' eyes. Theatre is change and not simple representation of what exists: it is becoming and not being' (Boal 1979: 28). Further, if catharsis is examined in its

entirety, especially with further reference to Aristotle, we must admit that, when man fails to achieve his legitimate and reasonable objectives, tragedy occurs. 'Tragedy, in all its qualitative and quantitative aspects, exists as a function of the effect it seeks, catharsis' (27) reasons Boal and goes on to claim: 'Catharsis is correction: what does it correct? Catharsis is purification: what does it purify?' (27). The effect, therefore, on the spectator is profound and not merely at the level of illusion. Aristotle's three interdependent stages in tragedy - peripeteia, anagnorisis, catastrophe - have the ultimate goal of provoking catharsis in the spectator, i.e. producing a change in the spectator. The spectator is coerced into changing. Boal argues logically, then, that although Aristotle claimed that Poetry, tragedy and theatre have nothing to do with politics, '[h]is own *Poetics* tell us it is not so. We have to be better friends of reality: all of man's activities - including, of course, all the arts, especially theatre - are political. And theatre is the most perfect artistic form of coercion' (39).

In all seriousness, Brecht really had no great quarrel with Aristotle. If an audience has experienced change during a performance, even though it may be cathartic, they may feel stimulated to action after the performance is over. Catharsis does not necessarily preclude action. Where Aristotle's theories may be at variance with Brecht is, as Boal explains:

[the Aristotelian coercive system] is designed to bridle the individual, to adjust him to what pre-exists. If this is what we want, the Aristotelian system serves the purpose better than any other; if, on the contrary, we want to stimulate the spectator to transform his society, to engage in revolutionary action, in that case we will have to seek another poetics (47).

Brecht has often, erroneously, been interpreted as having eliminated all emotion from the theatre but time and time again he refuted this accusation,

stressing that emotion for emotion's sake was what he objected to (Dickson 1978: 237). Brecht understood the danger of excessive rationalism. As de Graft cautions, drama and the theatre cannot 'begin to make any impact, cannot survive' without emotional involvement (de Graft 1976: 19). Ultimately, the intention of Epic theatre or 'dialectic' theatre (as Brecht later termed it) is to focus on the audience; but it is not without limitations, in practice, if not in theory: 'It depends entirely on the acceptance of a particular political philosophy, Marxist dialectical materialism; any other springboard would result in a purely formalistic employment of epic techniques' (Subiotto 1982: 43).

Epic theatre, then, cannot but be an excellent medium for Mda. His philosophy is appropriate and the formal techniques are admirably adapted to his intentions. The most effective alienation techniques are evident in all of the seven plays in question, but individual plays have individual strengths. *Dead End*, the earliest play, is the most tentative, while *Joys of War*, the latest, is the most innovative and daring; but all the plays succeed in drawing on the various techniques which are the most beneficial for emphasising Mda's message i.e. empowerment.

An overall distancing effect is most potently perceived in *The Road*. Because the play is a direct confrontation with the theme of Apartheid and because this theme is explored most searchingly, ranging from its absurdities to its cruelties, it could and should be a highly emotive play. Any play dealing with the anomalies of Apartheid, especially with a South African audience, is going to stir up high emotions which, according to Brecht, will cloud or numb judgment. By translating the entire concept into symbols, Mda forces the audience to interpret, assess and judge. The enormity of Apartheid, sometimes too vast to assimilate and appreciate, is, through symbolism, reduced to manageable terms. An entire race is encapsulated in one man. Farmer represents the Afrikaner Nationalist - Labourer

represents the indigenous South African. The interaction between the two enable entire political policies to be encompassed and applied within ordinary lives so that the direct effects may be judged. If Farmer steals Labourer's bundle, he steals his means of living. If the choice is between autonomy in his own life or a living of sorts at the whim of Farmer, the extent of the effect of a loss of agency in an entire race becomes obvious to the audience. The black race loses dignity, initiative, responsibility - its entire quality of life is undermined. Having made the judgment of the basis of this minimalisation, the audience is then easily able to maximise (as in a photographic enlargement) and see the issues for what they are.

In *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* another overall distancing technique is used. The symbolic nature of the protagonists and the situation, while effective, is not foregrounded. Again, the likely empathy of the audience is diffused by the ambiguity of place and time. This could be South Africa - everything points to it - but the time is wrong. This is ten years after the Wars of Freedom - so is it another African country? Either way the audience is made to observe objectively that, if this is South Africa, this is what could happen in the future if care is not taken. If it is not South Africa, then this is what has happened in other countries and we should learn by their mistakes.

Paradoxically, *The Hill* is, overall, the most realistic in presentation and the play that permits its audience to empathise the most, but it is the play most likely to stimulate the audience to a reasoned response. *Man* and *Young Man* are extremely engaging and the playwright allows, indeed consciously manipulates, emotions in the spectator. The audience cannot help empathising with the two men but yet is taken, step by step, through a logical process which demands decisions and judgements. The frustration of the two men prior to the discovery of the efficacy of the magical 'green page,' is the main focus of a kaleidoscope of emotional changes that they undergo - it is perhaps the most emotional of the seven plays.

However, the scenes involving the Nun serve to disrupt any development of a sense of illusion. The attack on the church is really one of the side issues, but the almost surrealism of the Nun scenes alters the perspective. The Nun, herself, is unworldly, dreamlike. She seems not to see or hear the men but mumbles on and on - incommunicado; yet she is important to them - they make desperate attempts to reach her. The contrast in the method of treatment of the two themes serves to highlight each by juxtaposition.

Similarly, although Mda seems still to be exploring technique in *Dead End*, the scenes between Charley and God break from the straightforward telling of the story. When Charley tries to justify himself to God, the audience enters the 'confessional' and, through its privileged position, may, indeed must, make value judgments. Again, Charley is a likeable, witty rogue and the audience is allowed to teeter dangerously near empathy with him. Without the God scenes, all the blame may be laid on Frikkie. With the God scenes, Charley's culpability emerges.

As far as staging is concerned, six of the plays are presented in a realistic fashion, although none is illusionist in effect. *Dead End*, *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* and *The Hill* all have extra surrealistic scenes involving God, the protagonists at their own funerals and the Nun, respectively, while *The Road* is entirely symbolic. Symbolism disguised as realism asks the audience to stretch their powers of acceptance. *Dark Voices Ring* and *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* are staged realistically but the lack of a conventional set in each play (as in all the plays) counteracts any visual temptation of illusion.

Joys of War is the most innovative of all the plays as far as staging is concerned. The play is set on three distinct levels or acting areas which allow for the separation of time and place. The two soldiers are placed on the uppermost level, and when not active assume poses in silhouette, as if statues in a war

memorial. This potent image, as well as the title (which is partly ironic), serves to remind the audience constantly that the issue of armed insurrection is a possible answer to an impossible situation and cannot be condemned out of hand. The fact that this is the top level also places the soldiers on a pedestal, as it were: they are to be admired, aspired to, supported. At the bottom level are Mama and Nana. Apart from being the least significant or powerful in society (old people and children), they have the furthest to go. They have a long and arduous journey ahead of them and it is only at the end that they can climb up to the ironic safety of the soldiers. The middle level is the realm of dream, imagination, memory. The demonstrations of the past may be observed independently at this level or the protagonists may take an active part, willingly or unwillingly. Funerals, weddings, interrogation chambers or police cells - the shadowy figures of the mind move at this, not always tangible, level which is always between states of consciousness. Although the scenes on the upper and lower levels usually work independently of each other and most of the time the characters are unaware of each other, there are times of interaction between the two. Very early in the play the soldiers' conversation is interrupted by Mama's laughter. They react in amazement at her short interchange with Nana but resume their conversation as if nothing has happened (JW 91/2). They register the presence of the others but it is not until the end that the four actually meet up and there is no acknowledgment of the previous encounter. This is perhaps a cue for the audience that there is a link between these two groups, although there are several clues dropped during the course of the rest of the dialogue.

Usually, if the intention is merely to relate either an incident or a complex story, a logical and progressive sequence of events is followed. But when the ultimate intention is didactic, moralistic or revolutionary a logical sequence is immaterial. It is enough that the points are made and that the necessary outcome, i.e. the persuasion to action or agreement of one's audience, is achieved. The

order of the points is less important than the impact of each. Consequently, according to Brecht, the scenes in a play need not be in any specific order. It would seem that Mda also sees scenes as not necessarily sequential, plot development being of less importance than thesis. As far as scene arrangement is concerned, *Dead End*, *Dark Voices Ring*, *The Hill* and *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* are sequential and linear. The other three experiment with three different types of scene arrangement. *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* is ostensibly the story of the predicament of two veterans who are spurned by society and who eventually die of exposure. However, if the incidents during the course of the play are examined, it soon becomes evident that they are not vehicles for the development of the plot but rather commentaries on society in general and society's relationship with the soldiers. It is of no significance in what order the scenes appear. They are entirely independent of each other and, although not extraneous to the plot, do not propel it forward. Businessman and Banker's conversation may occur at any stage in relation to the Young Man, the Young Woman and the Old Woman. Even Ofisiri's scenes, while he does become more and more ruthless, do not really demand specific positions, whether in relation to each other or to the scenes involving the other characters. Even the final stamping-out of the fire and the Old Woman's offering of shelter may be interchangeable, just so long as they both occur near the end of the play because they result in the deaths of the two heroes. Of course the funeral scene must come last.

The Road presents an interesting pattern as far as scene arrangement is concerned. As in the previous play, the various scenes, such as the re-enactment of history, Labourer's 'singing' for his supper and so on, need not be in any particular order. The various confessions and activities within the play are presented to the audience for assessment without sequential direction. The initial setting of the

scene and the final shot serve as a framing device to illustrate the inevitable outcome of such a system as described within the play.

In *Joys of War* the juxtaposition of scenes has a more specific purpose. It serves as both a tension breaker and a means of retaining links. For example, in the first conversation between the soldiers, Soldier One discusses, firstly, the unnecessary death of his baby, because of a lack of health facilities in the squatter camp, and the bureaucracy responsible for it. They then go on to the subject of the so-called suicides of political and other prisoners. These two subjects are critical in the lives of both the protagonists and the audience and they are also potentially inflammatory. Mda does not permit either his characters or his audience to become emotionally unfocused. He has Mama suddenly stand up in the middle of the discussion and 'laugh aloud for a long time' (JW 91). The soldiers look at her in amazement and then, after her short dialogue with Nana, resume their conversation. They have not forgotten their topic but the tension has been defused. Later on, when the two soldiers' conversation becomes heated, Soldier Two threatens to shoot Soldier One. The latter tries to make light of it but obviously feels seriously threatened:

Soldier One: You must be crazy. Of course you are joking, eh? You are serious then? I am sure you are joking. Ha! What a joke. It's a joke, isn't it? Just a joke? (94)

After Nana's interruption, Soldier One's next words are: 'Tell me, man, have you ever been in love?' (94). This breaking of tension by change of scene occurs several times throughout the play.

Sometimes the break is abrupt but at others Mda allows the scenes to be linked, usually by means of a common word. While Soldier One is telling his story of being held by the police and interrogated, Mama and Nana are still puzzling over what has happened to Nana's father (Soldier One). Soldier One says: 'You know,

when they ultimately released [e.a.] me I kept on thinking about the big map on the wall' (115). The scene changes abruptly to the two women and Mama remarks: 'I don't think prison agrees with your papa. He was never the same after they released [e.a.] him from the local prison' (116). The linking word (in this case 'released') is a device used several times. Early in the play the link is more elusive. The audience are beginning to suspect a connection between Soldier One and the women when Soldier One describes the effects and aftermath of a police raid on a squatter camp. Immediately Nana, who feels that her father has betrayed her by deserting her, says: 'But others say they saw him run away. Then again they saw him at a bus stop with a luggage...running away on us' (102). But we know he is a soldier and we may safely fill in the blanks in the story and arrive at the right conclusion.

Mda's control of form is perhaps most evident when he allows his separate scenes to merge at the end of each of the two acts in *Joys of War*. The end of Act One sees a linked but separate discussion of why Soldier One/Papa has deserted his family and joined the guerrilla army. At the end of the play the two women climb up the stage levels to the 'safety' of the soldiers - ironically, to them, safety means freedom from the dangers of criminal types and police and what safer place for this would there be than with the underground army? They physically and metaphorically reach the same level as the soldiers.

If Mda does not use the independence of scenes solely to break the tension, conversely he does not break tension only by scene change. Although traditionally, humour has been treated with great suspicion in political theatre, it seems to work well for Mda as a defusing device. Evident in *Joys of War* on two occasions, it is used more extensively in *The Road* and in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*. The use of humour in *The Road* is the most delicate. He is dealing with a serious and humourless subject, highly emotive whichever side of the divide

the audience sits. The use of symbolism throughout the play could serve to render it pedantic and overly didactic. However, the treatment of the notion of discrimination according to skin colour as a matter fit only for derisive laughter is as effective a denouncement as is possible, as well as a means of keeping the audience in check. If all possible members of the public are going to allow themselves to judge the situation clearly, they simply cannot have their faculties clouded by high passion.

The play abounds with reference to colour and, in the beginning, Farmer and Labourer talk at cross purposes with reference to their respective relationships with blacks (as indeed they do on most topics), beginning with the caution against hitch hiking by Farmer. 'You never know man, you might be stopping a black car for a lift' (TR 125) he says. All South Africans would know that this means a car driven by a black person, but Labourer (a foreigner from Lesotho) says: 'A hearse!' The tone has been set. The humour is wry but it is humour, nevertheless, so that the audience reacts, not with a sense of outrage but - more potently - with a sense of the ridiculous. That Farmer, later on, realises that Labourer is black only because he has been told so is ludicrous. 'Why didn't you tell me you were black, you bastard?' he yells (131). Labourer attempts to mollify him by saying: 'Now look, don't get emotional about this' - but it is too late; and it is too late for the audience as well. However, it is laughter that will be elicited from them here and this is important if they are to assess and judge. The message they get is: colour discrimination is totally ludicrous - how can we allow ourselves to be made a laughing stock? The duplicity of the pre-1994 National Government is then driven home in the later discussion on government policy towards foreign non-whites. Because of trade, i.e. money, the National Government declared the Japanese honorary white but the Chinese non-white. Then again, the Taiwanese, being non-communist, were honorary white while the communist mainland Chinese were not. Non-South African blacks, also for reasons of trade, were given privileges not

privileges not accorded to South African blacks. As it stands, this is irrational; but when Farmer is able to look closely at Labourer and tell that he is from Lesotho and not from any other neighbouring black state, when previously he was unable to detect his blackness, this makes the whole issue laughable. Making fun of something is a powerful method of reform, as all famous satirists have found.

The emotional control in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* is of a different kind. Throughout the play it is the humorous banter between Janabari and Sergeant that engages the audience in their dilemma. Derelicts though they are, and physically repulsive as the other characters find them, we - the audience - care about them and we are concerned for their future. However, lest we concentrate too strongly on their individuality and lose sight of the issue at hand, Mda will not allow any inappropriate emotion in their death scene. Here are two war veterans who are not only forgotten by a society that owes them everything but are actively rejected. Because of the inhumanity of this ungrateful society, the two men are about to die of exposure, yet they will not sleep before singing a patriotic song to 'the fatherland' (the irony of the supposed caring and protecting 'father' is not lost on the audience) (WSF 44). Before the audience can lose itself in empathy with these two, Mda jolts them into laughter. The veterans, in all seriousness, stand mouthing the song - their voices will not emerge. The scene is funny. The situation would be funny were it not so serious.

The more easily detectable A-effect Brechtian devices such as narration, role playing, music, special effects and use of props are all part of Mda's dramatic repertoire as well, although (with the exception of *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*) narration and role-playing play the major parts.

Direct narration is a major feature of *Dead End*. Charley narrates anecdotes and explanations to God, while Charley and Tseli swap experiences,

either shared or individual. The action of the fabula is told rather than acted out. *Dark Voices Ring*, to a slightly lesser extent, also has Man and Woman narrate the story of Nontobeko - her birth, her expectations and her demise. The other four plays, *The Hill*, *The Road*, *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* and *Joys of War*, use narration mainly to fill the audience in on the history of the various characters, but it is the area of role playing that is most developed, both as a narrative technique and alienating device, in these six.

In *Dead End*, two of the instances are mere dramatic anecdotal excerpts when Charley acts out both parts in a scene. He is both Mr Koornhof and Tseli/Anna (DE 7) and he acts out Tseli's future problems in having to cope with a baby. It is only very briefly (5 lines) that he and God act out the parts of priest and altar boy (11). Again, in *Dark Voices Ring*, initially, Man merely impersonates Woman on the telephone to van Wyk (DVR 55/6), but later Mda skilfully interweaves narration and role-playing when the treatment of prison labour is depicted. Woman, taking the part of her *induna* husband, wields an imaginary whip while she shouts at Man (as the prisoner): '*Voetsek Janfek! Move on!*' (62). She and Man mime the whipping scene whereupon he goes on to mime digging the potatoes while she narrates the next part. Man intervenes, as Janfek, and they resume their roles, reverting again to narration. And so it goes on, moving smoothly from narration to role playing over the course of two pages.

The Hill shows a degree of sophistication in the dramatic use of role-playing not quite achieved in the previous two plays. Young Man acts out his supposed return to his family with the fatuous symbols of his success (the steering wheel and the car battery), simultaneously contrasting the hollowness of this success with the abjectness of the reality of their lives (TH 79). The scene showing the rich doctor negotiating for gardening work with Young Man (15/6) emphasises the contrast in their social situations. It highlights the lack of concern by the

doctor, who actually does the comparing with cool disregard for the anomaly of the five rand per month he offers for labour and the fifteen hundred rand per month he expects himself.

The other scenes, with Man and Veteran in the roles of NRC recruiting officer and prospective recruit, and later with Veteran as a mine evangelist and the rest of the cast as congregation, deal graphically and yet subtly with corruption and hypocrisy, respectively. A mere narration in these instances may seem like biased misrepresentation, but the re-enactment is much more convincing and far more conducive to judgment-forming on the part of the audience.

In *The Road* Mda makes use of role playing only twice but in very different ways. The first example is the scene when Labourer reads from 'Chapman's Travels In The Interior Of South Africa' (TR 143) and the two men act out the roles of explorer and slave bearer/guide. The impact in this instance lies, not so much in role playing nor in the actual roles played, but in the irony of Labourer, representing the colonised, reading out the story of his subjugation. The other role-playing scene is, typically for the characters in this play, at cross-purposes. Labourer acts out his conversation with his wife Lucy about her request for 'a big male dog' (151), while Farmer acts out his wife's recognition of him in a magazine photo taken at a Swaziland 'house[s] of sin' (151). It is well that neither man is concerned in the other's story but tells his own independently, because both stories concern their sexual relations with their wives - did they but know it. And their sex-lives are interlinked - did they but know it. The role playing makes the events immediate, but their presentation highlights the subtlety of the relationship between the two.

In *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* we also find two instances of role playing, both with similar purpose. The first scene sees Woman as an

evangelical preacher - a prostitute made good. She has 'seen the light' and now sings at evangelical rallies all round the world, having married one of her 'johns' who fell in love with her. She urges her congregation to see the error of their ways but the message is clear to them in the words of the Lady:

I will repent. I feel the spirit. I will repent. But first let me find myself a john who will marry me and take me to Europe with him, or who will build me a house in Maseru West, and furnish it. Then I'll repent! And be saved! And work for the Lord... (GSD 22).

The second instance of role-playing in this play shows the Lady as one of the civil servants and the Woman as a purchaser of a bag of 'free rice'. The necessarily obsequious attitude of the Woman with her repetitive 'me' (35) contrasts with the callousness of the person with power. The desperation of someone prepared to queue for four days for a bag of black-market rice is emphasised when it contrasts starkly with an interchange such as

Lady: You can write, can you?

Woman: Yes.

Lady: Then you can fill in the information yourself while I finish eating my fat cake (35).

In *Joys of War* there is a development in the technique of role-playing. Not only do the characters act out, between them, incidents in their lives, but other characters join them to re-enact their experiences in order to elaborate a point or explain an action or attitude to the other - a device not seen in the other plays. Soldier One, for example, acts out his own interrogation experience (112), while Soldier Two acts out his rejection by his erstwhile lover (128) and then his own scene relating his betrayal, with false information to the police, of his betrayers (134).

Narration and role playing can be seen, then, to be valuable devices in Mda's technical repertoire - not only for the frequency in which they appear in all the plays but also for the variety and efficacy with which he uses them. Conscious formal role-playing, particularly, is an effective device, not only for the showing of events but also for the working through and therefore clarification of motives, emotions and the effects of those self same events.

Music is used in a very minor way in Mda's plays, but the fact that, of the seven, all except *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* feature at least one song - even if it is only a silent one as in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* - bears some comment. The songs are largely atmospheric, taking the form of lullabies, wedding or funeral songs and the like. Two of them are ironic: the praise song Veteran sings on his entrance in *The Hill* is ironic because it is a joyful song of optimism sung to young men on their initiation into manhood; while Labourer's song in *The Road* as he sweeps the road for Farmer, though typical because 'we always sing and dance to make our labour more enjoyable' (TR 140), is ironic because of the outrageous liberties Farmer has taken.

Usually in theatre, props are an adjunct to the realism of the action or are used as a reinforcement of the text. In Brechtian theatre props draw attention to themselves because they are an intrinsic part of the dialectic. Although Mda makes sparse use of props, when he does so, the impact is powerful. In *The Hill*, the symbolism of the flower and rosary (grace and blessings from the church) and the steering wheel and car battery (spurious riches from the land of gold) are self-evident, but the possession of a pair of trousers has a sizable impact. Initially, Young Man appears on stage sans trousers, emphasising his vulnerability and his dire circumstances in which the size of his excrement denotes the size of his success in life. Then it is the turn of Veteran to enter without trousers; he has been robbed not only of his possessions but also of his dignity. He remains trouserless

for the duration of the play - a visible reminder of the indignities he has suffered and still must suffer in the mines as a migrant worker. Finally, he steals the trousers from Man, who must finish the play in total humiliation. The other two have separately stolen a march on him; he is as low as he can go and we are left with the reminder, continuous throughout the play, of the right of a man to his dignity and of its fragility.

In *The Road*, *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* and *Joys of War* props are used symbolically. The book in *The Road*, the 'chair of patience' in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* and the doll in *Joys of War* are all self-evident. That they are used so sparingly does not diminish their importance - on the contrary, they are fore-grounded by their minimal use.

Brechtian technique is better known for its devices, simply because they are a little more accessible, but the essential Brechtian technique lies more in the A-effect of the construction of its text. In inexperienced hands an imbalance can sometimes degenerate into mere gimmickry. That Mda's emphasis is on the A-effect achieved within the writing of the text shows that he understands fully what van Dijk means when he criticises 'the overwhelming tendency to see Brecht's theory and practice as a style rather than a method' (van Dijk 1990: 121).

CHAPTER 3

Characters: instruments and agents

What have we here? a man or a fish?

The Tempest II ii

**...a brother of Man
in the human family.**

'How Was I Born' - Jaki waSeroke

An important dialectic in western-based studies of African literature concerns the problem of the so-called weakness in character construction. The camps are divided but the two main opposing views, while they agree on the outcome, differ as to the reasons. The Albert Gérard camp would maintain that character depiction in African literature is defective in the main:

In tribal societies, little attention is paid to individual inwardness. A person's awareness of self is primarily as a member of a group, and not - as is the case in Western society - as an autonomous individual whose chief legitimate preoccupations are with his own personal identity, rights and privileges. This fundamental culture trait has many literary implications. Not only are African writers notoriously clumsy in the expression of strictly personal emotions such as love but also, more generally, their interests are ethical rather than psychological, and they are seldom able to present convincing individual characters. Their societal outlook drives them to turn character into type, so that the reader's response is one of moral edification rather than one of imaginative empathy (Gérard 1971: 111).

Fanon, on the other hand, describes the state of the colonised person as one of 'absolute depersonalisation' (quoted in Bhabha 1994: 110) and Bhabha goes on, in the same essay, to discuss and attribute to the effects of colonialism 'this colonial alienation of the person - this end of the "idea" of the individual' (114). They all seem to agree then, on the absence of a clearly defined sense of individual self in African society and consequently in African writing, whatever about the causes.

On first reading Mda's plays, the initial impression would be that here is a perfect set of proofs for the above hypothesis and that all that remains to be done is to decide on the camp affiliation.

This would be a big mistake. Of course one is a product of one's history and one's culture, and Mda would surely be no exception, but I would protest that there is a deliberateness in his lack of 'individual inwardness' or 'awareness of self', not only as this is a trait of the Brechtian theatrical technique which is evident in his plays (as we have seen) but because his plays are essentially social and political in purport. Yes, there is a weighting in favour of the ethical over the psychological, but the main reason he does not write about the individual is because the individual is not his subject; his subject is people in groups - society. It may be argued again that this is merely further proof that Mda, along with other African writers, does not write about the individual because he cannot; but, again, I would contend that it is not possible to make such a judgment by means of the plays under discussion because it is very clear that Mda has taken every opportunity to avoid inwardness in his characters for fear of clouding the main purpose i.e. the analysis of a society.

Mda's characters are, without exception, types. One need not go further than the *dramatis personae* of all of the plays to identify this pattern. Mda places great importance on the names of characters by virtue of the fact that he goes to great lengths not to name them. Even when he goes so far as to introduce a name, that very fact is highlighted by means of juxtaposition and consequently the name loses its impact as a means of identification; the focus intensifies on the fact that here is a name and the question is posed: why? Generic names such as Man, Young Man, Old Man, Woman, Lady etc, abound and it is blatantly obvious that these characters are broadly representative of their types. Young Man in *The Hill*, for example, although the play is specifically set in Lesotho, is Everyman and need not be confined even to Africa. He is typical of the young - innocent, idealistic and enthusiastic - and is only specific in that he is desperately poor. The details of his existence are peripheral, the essence is universal to the deprived. From a small

rural village he must make his way in the world to help support his family - a tale told the world over. There is hardly a country that escapes the drain away from its countryside of the young in general and young men in particular. Post colonialist countries, in particular, seem peculiarly susceptible to this kind of denudation, in a human sense, of their terrain. Of course his situation is exacerbated by extreme poverty - again a common experience of Third World countries.

Although Mda sets up his characters as types, this does not preclude their individuality. While he observes generalised situations and conflicts, he engages his audience through the quirks and foibles of his individuals. Personally, Young Man, for example, exudes an innocence and touching trust in humanity. Things will come right because he has been told to have faith and he believes what he has been told. In the first part of the play he displays this naiveté with an assurance that is typical of the young. His reassurances, for example, to the Man (and, obliquely, to himself) are sprinkled with optimistic clichés: 'We must retain our faith, child of my mother...You need faith. I survive on faith. That is why I don't despair...Faith can do anything. They teach us that it can move mountains...We have retained our faith for two months, child of my mother. We must not lose it now. They promised me at the NRC that things will be right soon. I shall see them on Monday' (TH 82,83). All this even in face of being fobbed off by the NRC for two months and being ignored by the Nun (symbolising religion and the church).

His enthusiasm is unquenchable and he looks forward to his life in the mines, despite warnings from Man and Veteran. 'I am ahead - reaching for success' (83), he says and will not be deterred by the Man's comments on his lack of experience. He looks for the positive and focuses on that. 'I have not served them [the mines] yet, but I am young and strong. And I don't have tax arrears' (84).

His confidence only falters when he discovers the underhand methods needed to secure the NRC contract but, again with youthful self-righteousness, he proclaims: 'I am not going to take part in bribery...It is my right to get a contract' (95). He is unable, however, to maintain this stance for long - his mood swings, along with the twenty rands and the support of the prostitutes, lift him and he is once again able to look at his future with starry eyes: 'Look at me now. I am surrounded by beautiful women, like the man in the deodorant advertisement' (109). His view is, perforce, idealistic and fantastic: 'I am a man. Do you hear that? A man. I am going to the land of gold' (114) - this, despite all the horror stories he has heard from Veteran and the Man. This is his rite of passage and he has yet to encounter what the Man knows only too well - experience. The Man embodies for the audience, in his posture, all that lies ahead of the Young Man. The stage directions indicate: '*Man is dumbfoundedly staring - at nothing in particular*' (114).

Even when Mda becomes a little more specific, his characters are still broadly representative. The Lady and the Woman in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses*, apart from representing prostitutes and housewives respectively, are defined by their names. The Lady attests, by her name, to the importance she needs to place in her appearance but she also serves as an example of pre-feminism. Feminists disapprove of the term 'Lady' as biased and judgmental, but its role here is ironically reversed. She is anything but a lady in the old sense of the word. She is described in the stage directions as:

...a bit overdressed, albeit in the latest fashion. One can see that there was a conscious effort on her part to make herself appear chic and sexy. Her mannerisms are of a sophisticated woman of the world, but of course, at the end of it all she appears pretentious - even ridiculous (GSD 4).

She wears make up, she tells us, like most people do 'to improve their looks' (8), but hers is applied thickly in order to cover up bad skin. However, the end result is ironic - according to the Woman, it makes her look even more like a whore. We are not at all surprised at the Woman's dowdiness and her initial appearance of subservience is not incongruous. Of course she is only a maid and of course she is exploited sexually by her employer, only to be deserted. Of course she must resort to domestic work to survive - isn't that the lot of a woman? But then when she turns to political rhetoric and trade unionism we are not surprised - especially when we consider the political correctness of her name.

Other characters are defined by their occupations and we are very clear what to expect from characters who rejoice in designations such as Banker, Businessman, Sergeant, Ofisiri (Officer), Farmer, Labourer, the Nun, the Veteran, Soldier One and Two, not to mention Mourners, Interrogators and Wedding Guests. The stereotypical pictures we are able to call up at the mention of these names are important. They need to be stereotypical because Mda is commenting, as we have seen, on their roles in society. The petty bourgeois servant in the form of Ofisiri in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* is prepared to exploit his inferiors in the way he has learned by experience. His feelings about the bribery by the hoboos seem quite ambivalent and he has no qualms about raising the price of the bribe from twenty cents to fifty cents in one week. Having got them to give him the required amount, he allows them to stay in the park with surely the most understated cynicism: 'Ofisiri (*taking the coin*): Well, I'll have to leave you. At least you haven't littered the place' (WSF 31). He understands well that he must retain the upper hand despite having been 'only an upstart trooper' (32) to Sergeant's NCO status. When he fails to do this at the end of the play, he is relegated to the role of prison warder supervising prisoners digging graves because the hoboos froze to death on his beat - surely harsh punishment by his superiors for something not exactly in his control.

Our initial expectations of Banker and Businessman, two cronies in the same play, are modified when we discover that Banker is white in this ambiguous African country ten years after independence. The question is immediately raised as to why this banker is white and not black, especially in view of the power he claims and the control he has, not only over individuals but over the running of the country. Despite Businessman's obvious prosperity, his success is suspect and begins to seem hollow when we discover that he, representative of the commercial success of the formerly colonised, is a mere puppet, still under the control of outside (i.e. foreign) and, most likely, western and white influence. Initially one would be inclined to sympathise with him, but the scenario is not so simple, by virtue of the fact that Mda gives him a name. He is called Mr Mafutha by the hoboos - meaning 'Mr Fat' in Sesotho. Allied with the other 'fat ones' (WSF 44) of Maseru West, he has obviously achieved his position at the expense of others in this capitalist society. The huge divergence between his life-style and that of the two hoboos, as well as his deliberate snubbing of them, is adequate evidence for this.

That the two hoboos have names too, also serves to foreground their plight. To be called Sergeant-Major ten years after the Wars of Freedom and to be still dressed in army uniform (notably tattered ones) has a two-fold effect. The audience are constantly reminded that the hoboos once had status and social function during the war, but that these are now robbed of meaning by the total indifference displayed by the other characters. None of the other characters addresses them by name nor is there any reference by anyone to their military record. Their personal risk for their country's freedom has dwindled into insignificance and, more insidiously, the tattered uniforms seem to suggest that the ideals of revolution have fallen by the wayside.

Janabari (a corruption of January) is merely a joke name and so, therefore, no name at all. He doesn't even have the dignity of a designation such as Veteran or Soldier, nor even a general name such as Man or Young Man. His name isn't a person's name and it isn't even pronounced properly - he is nothing in the eyes of society. The only affirmation of his existence is his relationship with Sergeant and it is a warm one. Their good-humoured banter is comradely and Sergeant, at one stage, calls him Janie, thus attesting to his humanness and personal right to compassion - a nickname is more human than a generic label.

Charley and Tseli in *Dead End* appear to have definitive names, but when one considers the pronunciation of Tseli one realises that there is some ambivalence in them. The first two letters in Tseli are pronounced in a similar way to the English 'ch' and so their names are almost identical, thus blurring their identities as individuals. The most individual of all Mda's main characters, they are, nonetheless, approaching anonymity as a result of this phonetic manipulation. Similarly in *Joys of War* the child, Nana, appears to have a name, but when it is put alongside her grandmother's and father's names - Mama and Papa - we realise once again that they are, at best, generic. Although Nana is a real name it has a childlike ring and the character becomes representative of the plight of children and childhood in rural South Africa. Her individuality is thus negated alongside the other two.

When characters address each other, Mda neatly side-steps the problem in many ways. In *Dark Voices Ring* the Man calls the Woman 'mama' or 'ma' while she calls him 'child' - not unusual practice in black South African society. In *The Road*, Labourer and Farmer call each other nothing throughout the play except for the Jim/*bwana* interlude. In *Joys of War* Mama and Nana call each other those names, while the two soldiers use 'pally' or 'mate' to each other - most of the time they don't call each other anything. In *The Hill* Man and Young Man constantly

use the phrase 'child of my mother', which has a two-fold effect. On one hand, it establishes a comradeship between them and suggests a fraternal caring relationship while, on the other hand, its irony is underlined when, in the end, an 'every man for himself' attitude towards the NRC contract supplants all other considerations. Similarly, in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses*, the Lady calls the Woman 'sister woman' and invites her to reciprocate. She says she learned it from American tourists, which suggests a tenuous sophistication through a brush with the exotic. Initially, it is simply a convenient tag, but by the end of the play it has come to suggest an aspiration towards a feminist autonomy as well as an acceptance of mutual dependency.

The only individual names that Mda allows are for off-stage characters or for whites. It does not matter that off-stage characters may acquire individuality in this way as they have no autonomy in the action of the play or in the minds of the audience. Dr Zuma, the *sangoma* in *Dead End*, needs his name to conjure up his Zulu cultural 'otherness', thus setting up a confidence, in the minds of the audience, in his medicinal powers. In the end, neither Charley nor the audience is clear about the culpability for Tseli's tragic situation. Is she dying because of Frikkie's blow to her stomach or from Dr Zuma's medicine that Charley has insisted on her taking?

Nontobeko, the dead baby, needs her name to emphasise her reality in her mother's eyes. It is ironic that Nontobeko, the character in *Dark Voices Ring* who only exists in her mother's imagination, has a name while the others do not. Labourer's wife, Lucy, in *The Road*, needs her name to confirm the duplicity of her position as Farmer's mistress, while Young Man's sister, Ntati, in *The Hill*, needs her name to allow him to focus on his personal despair at his beloved sister's degradation as a shebeen owner.

It is significant that all the whites both on or off stage, with the exception of Banker, have names and are all Afrikaans. Without their names their nationalities would be ambiguous, so it becomes strikingly obvious that Mda means to emphasise their Afrikanerness. Banker may be any of the former European colonists (i.e. English, Dutch, French, Portuguese, German as well as Afrikaans) and so it is important that he should have no name, if his universality is to be maintained. But Frikkie du Toit and the Koornhofs (DE), *Baas* Jan van Wyk (DVR), Johannes Koekemoer and his wife Maria as well as his dastardly foreman Boetie van Rensburg (TR), are all unequivocally Afrikaans. The ruling National Party in South Africa - in power from 1948 to 1994 and the creator of the Apartheid system - was originally exclusively Afrikaner-supported and, latterly, largely so. Mda seems to be placing the responsibility for exploitation and oppression squarely in their hands.

It is interesting to note further significances in the Afrikaner names in *The Road*. Boetie van Rensburg is held in extreme contempt by Farmer, not alone for the seduction of his wife but for the fact that he had 'this imbecile habit of sitting with the Bantu labourers in their hovels, drinking their miasmatic beer, and sleeping with their women' (TR 129) - indeed 'a disgrace to the Afrikaner race' (129). The word, *boetie*, means 'little brother' and it is thus ironic to note where van Rensburg's allegiances lie; but it is even more ironic that Farmer is completely oblivious of any significance in this name; and the insult he hurls at Labourer before he realises his blackness - 'You *Kafferboetie* you!' (127), (a derogatory word meaning a black-sympathiser) - intensifies the dichotomy of Labourer's position and the ambiguity of the name.

Finally, during the historical re-enactment scene in the same play, Farmer sees fit to rename both himself and the Labourer. He rudely elects to call the Labourer Jim - a name associated in literature with slavery - because Labourer

must act as his slave bearer/guide. One of the reasons for the Great Trek in 1836, the opening up by whites of the hinterland of South Africa and the establishment of the two Afrikaner republics, was the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834. Farmer prefers to be called *bwana*, a Swahili word meaning master or sir, and consequently foreign to South Africa - thus boosting his status in his own eyes by its exoticism, but also serving to emphasise his foreignness and thus his alien position.

The named characters are referred to many times during the course of the plays, thus affirming the importance of the names.

Characters then, for Mda, are a means to an end - vehicles for his ideology. In every one of the plays under discussion can be detected strong political or social comment. As we have seen in Chapter 1 the theme of Apartheid can be traced through all of the plays, but this theme is aspected so that the characters are made to embody whatever facet of the regime is relevant to Mda's intention.

In *Dead End*, Charley and Frikkie are contrasted educationally (Charley has a Matric Certificate - Frikkie hasn't finished primary school) to highlight the iniquitous system of Job Reservation. In this case the bank is representative of the practice in public institutions of reserving certain jobs for whites regardless of qualifications or ability. *Dark Voices Ring* focuses on the precariousness of the lives of farm labourers and the system of convict labour and the old couple represent the helplessness of the disempowered in a situation which demands that they comply or get out. That they haven't the strength of character to take a moral stance does not condone their oppressors. *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* stresses the fallacy of freedom which is based on the capitalist system when

illustrated by Sergeant and Janabari¹, while Banker serves to underline the danger of neo-colonialism in the future. The three main protagonists in *The Hill* - Man, Young Man and Veteran - illustrate the myriad evils of migrant labour in South Africa, while Farmer and Labourer in *The Road* personify every aspect of the Apartheid system. The Lady and the Woman in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* explore the concept of gender, while the social comment on corruption and inefficiency in post-colonial Lesotho is an additional ingredient of their purpose in the play. All the characters in *Joys of War* further the cause of armed rebellion, most obviously the two soldiers, but most powerfully, Nana. A child, however reluctantly on the border between childhood and adulthood, joyfully embraces the role of the soldier in the end, thus confirming the play's intent.

An easy conclusion on Mda's characterisation would be that there is a lack of individuality or even humanness. One would be tempted to see the characters, because they are ideological vehicles, as lacking humanness because of their typographical nature, but this very notion is a contradiction because of what they represent. The problem is aesthetic rather than dramatic. In depicting the plight of a particular group of people in a particular society, Mda is, in fact, stressing their humanness because the problems they illustrate are human ones. All his political and social concerns have a direct bearing on what is fundamental to all humans, i.e. their quality of life. To be black in a white or formerly-white - controlled country must cause one, perforce, to focus on one's inferior position in that society and to become conscious of a selfhood as defined by nationalism, racism and, ultimately, a sense of blackness (as a positive affirmation). In addition, Mda presents his audience with plays that are peopled by engaging characters, however representative they are meant to be. While we must surely take Tseli's side in *Dead End* we do not altogether condemn Charley. His irrepressible wit touches us

¹Perhaps hinting at a favouring of ANC policy (class based) over that of Pan African Congress (race based in the concept of 'Africa for the Africans'). See Wilson and Thompson 468,469.

as much as Tseli's predicament. Although *Dark Voices Ring* is largely didactic, it ensures - through the Woman - that the audience cares about the outcome. Her acute sufferings at the loss of her beloved child balance the blind selfishness of the Old Man's former position as *induna*. Mda manipulates the audience's emotional response by simultaneously encouraging its concern and forcing it to judge.

Sergeant and Janabari are, perhaps, the most human (and consequently lovable) of all the characters concerned here. In *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* their good natured humour and care for each other cannot fail to stimulate the audience's sense of altruism. Their warmth of character, displayed mostly towards each other, but also in their courtesy towards, and Sergeant's excuses for, the other characters, is juxtaposed with the unremitting coldness they encounter. The other characters are deliberately two-dimensional (with perhaps the exception of Ofisiri), which also serves to highlight their humanity.

Straight didacticism in *The Hill* is softened largely by Young Man. His unfailing optimism in the face of constant evidence to the contrary emphasises the human predicament of both the present and the future. *The Road* might also remain within the realms of didacticism but for the link between the two men in the form of Lucy, the wife/mistress. Labourer's hatred for Farmer then becomes personal as well as ideological. Both judgment and emotion are called on and the audience's concern for the outcome is not merely academic.

In *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* both the Woman and the Lady strive for a certain dignity despite the abjectness of their positions. The Lady keeps up appearances literally, despite having nothing in the world but the R10 for a bag of rice. The Woman quietly and patiently assists the Lady in joining her in a growing sense of autonomy and they face the future together, no longer victims but

agents. This is, perhaps, the least engaging of the plays due to some rather heavy didacticism in parts, but it is relieved in most part by the humanity of the Lady.

In *Joys of War* the obvious judgment with regard to engagement would be on behalf of Mama and Nana. An old woman and a child would be the obvious focus for the audience's concern; but the two soldiers, while articulating the case for and the lot of an armed rebellion, are far more convincing as points of argument because of their all-too-human backgrounds. The audience does not question their right to arms - their humanity has already convinced.

Wilson and Thompson discuss nationalism in South Africa or, indeed, the lack of a sense of nationalism. They argue that, because of its multicultural and multilingual diaspora - whether it be white (not united in one group) or the multifarious black groups (divided linguistically and culturally) - there is a distinct lack of syncretism in the South African concept of nationalism:

Only Africans and Afrikaners are generally regarded as carriers of nationalism by students of South African society [English speaking South Africans have traditionally seen themselves as 'other' - not truly of Africa and certainly not claiming any kinship with Afrikaners]...The development of nationalism among Zulu or Xhosa, based on common language, culture and territory, would correspond to concepts of nationalism in Europe, or among the Afrikaner people. But from an African point of view, and indeed by common convention, outside Afrikaner nationalist circles, this consciousness, which the policy of Apartheid sought to foster, would be described as tribalism. The concept of nationalism is reserved for movements of national consciousness and organisation among all the African peoples of South Africa. Its basis is thus a perception of a common racial identity, a shared historical experience of subordination, and a common civic

status in South African society. There is neither a common traditional language nor common traditional culture, and the common territory is that established by the incorporation of the various African groups into the union of South Africa. (Wilson and Thompson 1975: 425).

Mda is therefore careful not to focus on a sense of nationalism. True, two of his plays are set in Lesotho and deal with problems particular to that country, but it is obvious that his concerns are with southern Africa as a whole throughout all his plays; he says as much in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* when Woman tells the Lady: 'One day it's going to dawn on you, and on the rest of the others who think like you, that this struggle is not just South African. It is Southern African' (GSD 26). Indeed, this attitude would be wholly in keeping with ANC policy (which is based on class), illustrated, as we have seen, in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* (socialism being favoured over capitalism). The alternative in South Africa today is the highly nationalistic Inkhatha Freedom Party, the feud between which and the ANC accounts for large numbers of deaths periodically.

Instead of focusing on nationalism or tribalism, Mda points up racism and investigates blackness (either negatively in the form of 'othering' or positively in the form of a sense of selfhood). While racism in itself may be viewed thematically, Mda has his characters embody and express a sense of what it means to be a black person. All of the plays, with the exception of *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*, are illustrative.

Frikkie, in *Dead End*, knows that he can count on a system based on racism when he is able to transfer the responsibility of Tseli's impending death to Charley. Charley explains to God:

And there is Frikkie, arms akimbo, with a big grin hollering to the police '*Vang 'om*. What are you waiting for? I will report you to the big *baas* at the station' (DE 20).

Frikkie expresses an almost axiomatic confidence through his physical attitude - his 'arms akimbo' and his 'big grin' express his sense of racial superiority knowing that the 'big *baas*' will experience no qualms when it comes to taking sides. White will side with white, regardless of the facts of the case, and Charley understands this. 'You see, he was in the right...He was white' (20), he says, not questioning the validity of the statement. He does not refute the concept in any way. To him, people are defined by colour and he seems to accept this as a fact - unpalatable but incontrovertible. God must have a colour too, and he pursues the point despite the denial.

The Woman and Old Man in *Dark Voices Ring* embody the subservient attitude of an oppressed people towards their oppressors. Unable to detect until the last that all their misfortune is as a direct result of the power wielded on racist terms, the Woman is only able to focus on the 'prestige' enjoyed by Nontobeko for having been '[t]he only child on the farm, from the beginning of time, to have been born in the *huis* of the master' (DVR 56). Racism, in this play, is taken an insidious step further when the Old Man, encouraged by van Wyk and the warder, who are drinking brandy on the *stoep* of the house, wields his whip all the more. '...when the prisoners winced with pain they went into a great frenzy and pride swelled in the chest of the Old Man. He had the prisoners in his hands - more power than he had ever had before - and he was enjoying it' (DVR 62). The Old Man has collaborated with the warders and has thus become one of them. His punishment in the form of his daughter's death, though harsh, is appropriate. His toadying has backfired. The civil servants, castigated by the Man later in the play, 'who carry out the repressive laws' (64) are adumbrations of the Old Man. He personifies what they are and what will happen to them.

The Road, because its main theme is Apartheid, is suffused with racism and the two characters are representative of the black and white races in South Africa. Although the entire play is allegorical the two characters are more subtly so. Farmer represents the extreme right-wing white Afrikaans National Government supporter. He is unequivocally racist. His speech, attitudes and demeanour all proclaim him so. His conversation is peppered with reference to colour. Initially he claims that he likes blacks, when challenged by Labourer - 'I have known some of the finest blacks in my life' (TR 125) - and admits to having a black mistress, but he is outraged when he 'discovers' that Labourer is actually black and that he has unwittingly shared the shade of the same tree with him. From this moment he unbridles all his racist animosity and is seen as an extreme example of a white supremacist. His distaste at Labourer's colour is all the more irrational and ludicrous in that he hasn't recognised it until this moment and it highlights the irrationality of his immediate assumption of an attitude of unquestioned superiority and arrogance. He immediately assumes the role of master and begins dictating the terms of that relationship.

Labourer, also representative, is more subtly drawn. His role is two-fold. Representative of the black race in general, he is, nevertheless, a 'foreign' black from Lesotho. Ostensibly not used to racist treatment, he has none of the imposed humility expected of the oppressed. He expresses the selfhood of a person devoid of a sense of race/colour and is understandably baffled by Farmer's change of attitude after the colour recognition scene. When he assumes the role of 'Jim', the slave/bearer, his attitude changes to one of obsequiousness and he gives an impression of the way Farmer believes blacks should behave. As a foreign black unused to racism he shows how blacks should behave, whereas as Jim he behaves as blacks are forced to do in a racist society. Therefore the characterisation in *The Road* is complex and made all the more so by its quasi-simplicity. Labourer

represents not only the black point of view of Apartheid, but the view of the outsider of any colour. Farmer, because he is almost a caricature in his extreme behaviour, satirises racialism.

In balance with these broader focuses, Mda then zones in on the notion of black selfhood and explores and develops this area of the human psyche. Chinua Achebe maintains that:

[w]ithout subscribing to the view that Africa gained nothing at all in her long encounter with Europe, one can still say, in all fairness, that she suffered many terrible and lasting misfortunes. In terms of human dignity and human relations the encounter was almost a complete disaster for the black races. It has warped the mental attitudes of both black and white. In giving expression to the plight of their people, black writers have shown again and again how strongly this traumatic experience can possess the sensibility (Achebe 1966: 135).

And Mda's characters, black and white, all display themselves as products of this disaster. Fanon goes on to define these mental stances and, as far as the colonising whites are concerned, has discerned an overall patronising attitude: 'A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronising, cozening' (Fanon 1968: 31). He goes on to quote O.Mannoni:²

What the colonial in common with Prospero lacks is awareness of the world of Others, a world in which Others have to be respected. This is the world from which the colonial has fled because he cannot accept men as they are. Rejection of that world is combined with an urge to

² O. Mannoni (1964). *Prospero And Caliban: The Psychology Of Colonization*. New York: Praeger.

dominate, an urge which is infantile in origin and which social adaptation has failed to discipline (108).

Frikkie du Toit, Jan van Wyk, Johannes Koekemoer, even the Koornhofs, all display the need to dominate. None of them is able to live in harmony with their black colleagues; instead, all of them observe a distance and maintain a sense of Otherness. Banker is an especially good example of what Fanon is describing. Ten years after independence he is as patronising as it is possible to be. His false *bonhomie* is given the lie when he makes it very plain who is in charge. Businessman will only gain his position because Banker has had to threaten his customers and the Banker pooh-poohs Businessman's concerns about trouble from white quarters: 'If you do your job well how can they cause trouble for you? The only thing you have to do is to listen to our advice' (WSF). The message is clear: according to Banker, Businessman cannot act on his own initiative - indeed, can he act at all? And Businessman accepts it.

But most people would agree that a sense of the Other is necessary in order to define oneself. What one is not, helps to affirm what one is. Bhabha, in analysing Fanon's concept of black identity, argues that there are 'three conditions that underlie an understanding of the process of identification in the analytic of desire' (Bhabha 1994: 117). These may be summarised as, firstly, 'to exist is to be called into being in relation to an Otherness'; secondly, 'a "space of splitting" i.e. a desire to have the advantages of Others but at the same time maintain one's own position; and thirdly, identification and transformation by the assumption of an image' (117). But he goes on to refute Fanon's assumptions based on the above, and asserts that '[t]he Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity - cultural or psychic - that introduces the system of differentiation' (118).

In 1978 Said developed this concept in terms of the colonial *milieu*, when he explained:

...this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs' as a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word 'arbitrary' here because imaginative geography of the 'our land - barbarian land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and mentality are designated as different from 'ours' (54).

This type of mental distancing is clearly seen in the attitudes of the whites in Mda's plays. In *Dead End*, having replaced Tseli's African name with a more acceptable 'white' one, the Koornhofs are constantly 'othering' her: 'What's wrong with you Bantu girls...You are dirty...And cut those damn long black nails' (DE 7). Even Mr Koornhof's sexual innuendo is done at a condescending distance: 'Anna, you are quite [e.a.] a nice kaffir maid' (7).

The Old Man in *Dark Voices Ring* is called 'my faithful *induna*' (DVR 55) by van Wyk - rather like a pet dog that is owned by a more evolved being. The imaginary phone call by the Man underlines this dominance which insists that any events in the Others' lives must be of lesser importance than anything in the lives of their 'superiors':

Man: (*dials on an imaginary phone*) Hello. I am Kaptein's wife. [She is alone and in labour.] Yes, *baasie*, the wife of the faithful *induna*. May I make an appointment with him for five o'clock? Tomorrow afternoon, yes...Well, *baasie*, I would like to discuss with him family affairs...Pains in my stomach. (56)

Banker in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* epitomises all that colonialism and, more insidiously, post colonialism is, in everything he utters in his short scene, perhaps culminating in the damning statement: 'I met your Ministers about this. [Note it is 'your' Ministers and not 'our', considering that they are living in the same country.] They too are quite clear about this. They know that without us they wouldn't be where they are now' (WSF). The pronouns say it all. And, of course, everything that Farmer, in *The Road*, does and says is a re-iteration and confirmation of Said's assertions.

The natural result of this sort of Othering is the development of a national or racial sense of inferiority. According to Fanon: '[i]n South Africa there are two million whites against almost thirteen million native people [in 1967], and it has never occurred to a single black to consider himself superior to any member of the white minority' (Fanon 1968: 93) - perhaps an over simplification and not altogether true, especially in the 60s, but the point is made. Manganyi investigates this aspect of colonialism from a psychiatric perspective, concluding that: '[t]he fixity of the representation of the Other (blackness) which race science places before our eyes pronounces the genetic inferiority of blacks particularly with regard to intelligence' (Manganyi 1985: 156).

Though all the characters adopt an inferior attitude in their dealings with whites, it is perhaps the Lady who symbolises this state of being. Thankfully the practice is now going out of fashion, but the Lady has ruined her skin with skin lightening creams:

Lady:.... You remember the skin lightening creams we used, eh?

Woman: Very well. *Ambi Extra, Artra...*

Lady: *Super Rose* and all the rest. When we were girls we used them, 'cause we wanted to be white. We bloody hated ourselves, so we used

them. They've got something called hydroquinone in them, but we didn't know it then. All we wanted was to have white skins.

Hydroquinone, sister woman, it destroys the skin (GSD 8).

This symbolises perhaps the most profound effect of racial oppression - an attempt to change the unchangeable. As Fanon expresses it:

I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonised native, robs me of all worth, all individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring myself as quickly as possible into step with the white world... Then I will simply try to make myself white: that is, I will compel the white man to acknowledge that I am human. (Fanon 1968: 98).

It is not sufficient either, to 'return, after the catastrophe of colonialism, to an unsullied indigenous cultural tradition, as in various forms of cultural nationalism' (Williams and Chrisman 1993: 14). As the Woman in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* says:

It is now time for us to change things. To liberate not only ourselves, but the men themselves, for we are all in bondage! Yes, the men in this free and independent country are in bondage, mostly to their attitudes. That is why you see them sitting back and swimming in the glories of the past (GSD 27).

Chinweizu and his fellow writers understand fully the need that this sort of historic romanticism fills but they repudiate it too:

It was an understandably extreme reaction, offering blanket praise in retort to Europe's blanket condemnation of Africa. But that mythical portrait of traditional Africa can prove to be a new prison. In the task of decolonisation we cannot afford an uncritical glorification of the



past. We may brandish our memories of empires of ages ago as shields against Western disparagement but we also know that before colonialism came there was slavery. Who hunted the slaves? And who sold them for guns, trinkets and gin? And the African attitudes and roles which made that slave trade possible, are they not part of that nostalgic past? Are those attitudes not still with us, poisoning our present? How much of this illusion of purity and sanctity can survive the events of the past decade? After all, 'When a nigger kicks a nigger/Where is the negritude?' (Madubuike). Even though other parts of the blame lie elsewhere, we cannot deny our own share of the responsibility. (Chinweizu et al 1983: 257/8).

Mda sees the need for blacks to seize agency and develop a positive sense of blackness. In *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses*, as has already been seen, the two women have personified the endemic sense of black inferiority by their attempts at whitening their skin. Typically, as women, they also display the prevalence of defining themselves through men. The Lady makes her living by whoring, after a failed marriage, while the Woman has been a housemaid for a man, and then a mistress. In both cases their salvation has been seen in terms of a man. Marriage, at best, or some sexual relationship with a man is their insurance for the future - and they don't question this. Even the office girls, we are told, have to 'lay some dirty old man to get a promotion' (GSD 19). However, Mda takes this feminist issue and extends it in a racial sense. Both women have batted on a man (the same one, coincidentally) but, in their case, he is white - and not only white but European. As a European, his allegiance is not with Africa, and, when times get tough, he has a natural leaning towards Europe - an escape from Lesotho for the two women - or from Africa, when viewed in broader focus. They are not alone. The Lady tells us of the many of her profession who have succeeded in securing just this kind of insurance:

There are many of us who are married all over Europe...The women now lead respectable lives as housewives. Others have forged careers for themselves. Only a few days ago I met one of my old colleagues. She is visiting home, you know, from Switzerland where she has a successful marriage and a successful career as a singer. She sings gospel music all over the place. Sometimes she gets invited to sing in anti-apartheid rallies all over Europe. You can't get more respectable than that. (21).

Note the marriage is equated with the career as successful - there is no reference to emotional fulfillment. This is business and success can only be achieved through a foreign man.

However, by the end of the play, the two women have rationalised their attitudes and consequently their position. They take agency. The Woman, it transpires, has already done this through her trade union involvement but the Lady eventually shows that she, too, has become empowered through the help of the Woman. She says, 'When the revolution comes I want to carry a gun. I don't sit in the sidelines and darn socks for soldiers' (33). The Woman replies:

You don't wait for a revolution. You make it happen.

Lady (*carried away*): No, I don't sit on the sidelines and sing songs and ululate with *melilietsane* to make the blood of men boil so that they may bravely march into battle. I carry the gun. I march into battle.

Woman: There is hope for all of us yet (33,34).

They have renounced their dependence on men and, by inference, European men; they are going to control and direct their own lives in their own country - in Lesotho. Positive, affirmative action.

A sense of agency then, according to Mda, whether it be as a woman or as a black person, is essential if one is to retain any sense of hope for the future.

Mda's attitude to Negritude, however, seems to be ambivalent. Senghor, who claims, along with Aimé Césaire, the honour of launching the concept of Negritude, is quoted by J.M. Ita as saying:

To launch an effective revolution, our revolution, we had to discard our borrowed garments - those of assimilation - and affirm an existence, that is to say, our Negritude. However, Negritude, even defined as the 'cultural values of Black Africa' could offer us but a beginning of the solution to our problem, not the solution itself (Ita 1968: 118).

Others, like Mphahlele, would disagree, seeing Negritude as confirming or even categorising an affirmation or intensification of Otherness. He goes on to argue that, because of the magnitude of the continent of Africa and because of the multiplicity of her peoples, there cannot be a single definable concept. Initially, when the idea of Negritude was first mooted, '...this idea of an African personality took on a palpable shape: something that could express the longings and ambitions, aches and torments, the anger and hunger of our people and shout them out to the outside world' (Mphahlele 1962, 19). But on analysing the concept he finds that, as far as cultural activities are concerned - the arts in particular for example -

...the only culture worth exhibiting [by the proponents of Negritude] was traditional or indigenous. And so they concentrated on countries where interaction of streams of consciousness between black and white has not taken place to any significant or obvious degree, or doesn't so much as touch the cultural subsoil (27).

This is all very well but in countries such as South Africa, which is largely detribalised, the concept of Negritude is very different. Western influences can no longer be divorced from indigenous culture; instead an art has emerged which can

now be described as proletarian and, as such, is positive and affirmative, claiming kinship with the rest of the world. As far as the arts are concerned '[o]ur choral and jazz music, literature, dancing in South Africa have taken on a distinctive content and form which clearly indicate a merging of cultures. And we are not ashamed of it' (28).

This seems to be Mda's attitude. While lamenting the sense of inferiority ingrained in most blacks due to the ravages of colonisation, he does not seem to be embracing an attitude of black for black's sake - rather an empowering of the person, whatever the colour, gender or politics. As Fanon says: 'To us, the man who adores the Negro is as "sick" as the man who abominates him' (Fanon 1968: 8). Chinweizu and his colleagues would seem to confirm this notion. While agreeing only partly with Mphahlele they also, like Mda, denigrate a vague and romanticised harking back to the past, but applaud and embrace those aspects of Negritude which raise an African nationalist consciousness and the recapturing and development of African literary traditions within the modern African literary canon.

For too long has the African voice been either silent or ignored. As Said says: 'The challenge to Orientalism and the colonial era of which it was so organically a part was a challenge to the muteness imposed upon the Orient as object...The Orient was...not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent Other' (Said 1985: 93). Mda's characters are not mute and, by their universality, discourage muteness in anyone with any sense of identification with them.

Many writers have emphasised the importance of group identification in the African psyche and writers as diverse as Charles A. Larson and Senghor attest to the difference between the African and the Western concept of the world in other ways. Senghor asserts that 'the African...conceives the world, beyond the diversity of its forms, as a fundamentally mobile, yet unique reality that seeks

synthesis' (Senghor 1993: 30). He goes on to explain that matter for the African '...is only a system of signs which translates the single reality of the universe being, which is spirit, which is life force' (30). And again: 'As far as African ontology is concerned, too, there is no such thing as dead matter: every being, everything - be it only a grain of sand - radiates a life force, a sort of wave particle; and sages, priests, kings, doctors and artists all use it to help bring the universe to its fulfillment' (31).

Larson, twenty years earlier, developed this concept in the difference between African and Western ideas on death, for instance. In Western culture, once a person dies he is virtually forgotten; but for the African 'the dead are not dead but alive in the trees, the water, the fire...In Africa the dead cannot be forgotten: they control the destinies of those who are still alive' (Larson 1973: 469). As far as nature is concerned: 'The African does not think that nature is something he is separate from: for the African there is no ontological gap. He is every bit as much a part of the natural world as his environment is part of him' (469).

In his plays it would seem that Mda displays these ontological concepts, not because they are an intrinsic part of him (which they may well be and therefore he is unable to act differently) but apparently deliberately as part of his individual creative process. 'The conceptualisation of "race", ethnicity and ethnic identity is a major concern both within and alongside post-colonial theory,' according to Williams and Chrisman (1993: 17), but they also decry the fact that ethnicity should be associated exclusively with people of colour. Black South Africans are what they are now, not what they were, and their attitude to what they are now will determine what they might be in the future. In South African terms, however, it seems that the emergence of a positive black sense of self, a sense of black

identification and subjectification is essential before there can emerge an all-South African psyche and, consequently, a real all-South African selfhood.

CHAPTER 4

Language as power

...thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish...

The Tempest I ii

I still hear voices that were swallowed by the
gurgling of foreign seas.

‘The Silent Listener’ - Chidi waPhaleng

Chinua Achebe investigates the difficulty of defining what makes a work of literature essentially African:

Was it literature produced *in* Africa or *about* Africa? Could African literature be on any subject, or must it have an African theme? Should it embrace the whole continent or south of the Sahara, or just *Black* Africa? And then the question of language. Should it be in indigenous African languages or should it include Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans etc. etc. (Achebe 1993: 428).

This reasoning throws up many interesting dilemmas. As Achebe cites: Conrad, a Pole, writing in English may produce African literature whereas Peter Abrahams, a black South African, may not if he writes on his experiences in the West Indies. I would put it, however, that it is language with all its idiosyncrasies, nuances and colour which gives literature and, more obviously, orature their ethnicity. I would concur with Ngugi (1993) that language is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture, but I would add that the language itself and *the way it is used* defines the user more potently than any other criteria for judgment and that the use of English so widely all over the world, both as first and second language, is a useful example for this concept. As Shaw tells us in the preface to *Pygmalion*: 'It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him'.¹

Lewis Nkosi found, in 1979, that black South Africans seemed unaffected by modern influences and issued a harsh indictment in his article 'Fiction by Black South Africans'; but this was the year which saw the productions of Mda's *Dead End*, *Dark Voices Ring* and *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*, followed in 1980

¹G.B.Shaw. *Pygmalion*. London: Constable and Co., 1926.

by *The Hill* (the last two plays award winners), so it would seem that black South African drama (or that by Mda at least) is certainly not to be judged pejoratively. Nkosi castigates the fiction writers for being seemingly unaware that Dostoevsky, Kafka or Joyce had ever lived, but if European influence is indeed a yardstick for standards, Mda is exonerated. He has certainly been inspired, if not influenced, by one European at least, in the form of Brecht. Surely, however, the focus should be on what the writer has contributed to the literature rather than vice versa. Has the writer enriched the medium he has used and, particularly, has he enriched the language? Any South African writer (of any colour, writing in any genre) worth his salt should be able to do just this in two ways. He should be able to contribute something worthwhile to literature which has universal value, but he should also be able to contribute from a linguistic point of view which is rooted in ethnicity but which enriches, syncretically, the common language. Nkosi is right in saying that black South African writers should say 'something positive about black experience in South Africa instead of writing as though everything the blacks did in the country was a reaction to white oppression' (Nkosi 1979: 223), but themes are only one part of their contribution to literature.

Senghor claims that, for the black African, 'art is not a separate activity, in itself or for itself: it is a social activity, a technique of living' (Senghor 1993: 33). If this is true, how much more so is drama to the black African? Drama, in any culture, is, perforce, a social activity, demanding, as it does, a performer and an audience and expressing itself, as it does, both audibly and visibly. Drama then, should be closer to life for the African, closer than poetry and fiction according to Ngugi (1986: 54) (African praise poetry must be excepted, as it is essentially a performance). Therefore we come back again and again to language, and - as far as drama is concerned - either written when it is text based, or oral when it is performance based. And again we come back to the question: is there a common African psyche or identity and, therefore, is it possible or necessary to be

linguistically united? If language is the vehicle of culture and, partly, the medium of dramatic expression, does African drama *per se* demand a common language?

Of course this, in Africa, is impossible. Not alone are there hundreds of indigenous African languages but the experience of colonialism in almost every African country has imposed one or more foreign language and this has, in itself, become a problem for African writers. The question arises constantly: what language does the African writer choose as his medium? The advocates on either side of the debate are equally vociferous. Amongst others, Senghor, Mphahlele, Egejuru, Ngugi, Achebe, Fanon, Ashcroft, Kunene, Memmi and Soyinka have all had their say and all come to similar conclusions on the problems presented. They do not agree on the solution.

There is no such thing as a common language in Africa. The closest one comes to such an entity is kiSwahili (advocated by Soyinka as a suitable *lingua franca*) but that language is not spoken south of the equator. Therefore, the African writer must choose either to write in his own language (as Ngugi has latterly chosen to do, i.e. in his native Gikuyu) or choose - usually - the language of the oppressor, i.e. the former coloniser. This latter is invariably a language from another continent - usually English, French, Portuguese or Afrikaans. Afrikaans, while definitively an African language in that it developed in Africa and is spoken nowhere else, is still the language of the erstwhile oppressors. But then Afrikaans is the home language of a sizable number of blacks in South Africa today.

If the African writer chooses to write in his mother tongue his audience is, of necessity, circumscribed. South Africa, for example, now has eleven official languages since 1994 - and not all South African languages have been catered for.²

² For South Africa's linguistic and literacy complications see Appendix C

There is nothing much wrong in having a limited audience and one accepts of course that financial reward is not the main aim of the serious writer. But the serious writer has something important to say, obviously, and would surely wish to reach as many ears as possible. He has no wish, like Gray, to 'waste [his] sweetness on the desert air' (156) and Gray had the advantage of English. The African writer, if his message is to reach 'the universe' which would also include his oppressor, is forced therefore to make a linguistic choice.

Both Egejuru (1978) and Ngugi (1993) place this state of affairs squarely in the hands of government policy with regard to education. In order to control a people to exploit the wealth of that country, it is imperative that the colonised people be subjugated. Domination, in order to be complete, does not aim solely at the control of wealth but is also 'the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceive[d] themselves and their relationship to the world' (Ngugi 1993: 442). Ngugi goes on to argue that the domination of a people's language is crucial to the domination of this mental universe of the colonised (442). By imposing a foreign language on children in education a government ensures that those children, when they grow up, become unused to expressing themselves in their own language and are always at a disadvantage, learning, for them, having always been 'a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience' (442). Colonised writers, therefore, are conditioned, through education, to write in a foreign language.

Fanon argues that the colonised, in adopting his coloniser's culture and consequently, language, becomes 'elevated above his jungle status' (Fanon 1967: 18) and the more he thus renounces his blackness, the 'whiter' he becomes - the greater his mastery of the language, the more he measures up to whiteness. Daniel Kunene states that in the case of South African blacks, writers have no option but

to use the white languages if they want to address their oppressors, as few South African whites speak any black language, but he warns:

The claim that a book written in English is addressed to blacks makes no sense unless one specifies that it is for those blacks who have acquired enough English to be able to read and understand it. Then we would understand that it is not intended for the masses, counted in millions, who do not have that skill (Kunene 1986: 505).

Many critics see the use of, say, English in African countries paradoxically as a unifying force. Africa, as a continent, is linguistically incredibly complex - Nigeria, for example, has more than 150 languages. Consequently, not only does the use of English give Africans direct access to the rest of the world, but it enables peoples within the country to communicate with one another. It is also felt that technology and abstractions are more easily expressed through English, although some critics feel that these are limitations of the writer rather than of the language. Conversely, the dearth of textbooks in the vernacular is seen as the cause of lower standards of education if Africans are forced to be educated in their own languages.

Although intruders in the colonised countries, the colonisers made little or no effort to learn, let alone adopt, the indigenous languages. Hoffer sees this as stemming from feelings of superiority. Conversely, feelings of inferiority encourage people to overvalue the new and, as has been said before, proficiency in the oppressor's tongue and assimilation into his culture places the seal of approval on one's sense of self worth. Mphahlele, internationally known for his advocacy of a sense of self worth amongst black people, rejects the concept of Negritude as affirming a difference between black and white. Yet even he, in attempting to establish the world class quality of certain black writers, finds it necessary to use

Keats, Byron, Shelley (Mphahlele 1962: 183) and Goldsmith (189) as the yardsticks for excellence. As W.H.New says:

Whether the impulse is to attach oneself to Great Traditions or to sever oneself from them, there is general agreement in all these stances about one thing: language affirms a set of social patterns and reflects a particular cultural taste (New 1978: 362).

Mda, a Mosotho, has chosen English as his medium. Why? I would suggest that the reasons might be both practical and political. Although English is a medium only partly shared with his audience, Mda has indicated that he wishes to rally men to a cause (Mda 1983: 14) and, given the linguistic complexities of South Africa (see Appendix C), English would seem to be the language most likely to reach most South Africans. Although only fifth in line as the most widely-spoken home language, English is, nevertheless, the language of the commercial world (of necessity for international trade), in recent times of the government and, where it is most relevant to ordinary people's lives, in the entertainment world. Imported television, film and popular music are largely through the medium of English despite the rich and varied local linguistic contributions. While Zulu is the language of the largest number of people (9.1 million out of a total population of about 40 million), it is only widely understood in kwaZulu/Natal and Eastern Transvaal. Although English is also one of the languages of the erstwhile oppressors, there has been a determined rejection of Afrikaans as the language of the architects of Apartheid - the former National Government. This is ironic as Afrikaans is spoken by a larger number of blacks as a home language than is English. Finally, the Soweto riots of 1976 were partly a protest by school children rejecting Afrikaans as a medium of education, in favour of English.

The ethics of choice of a foreign language are only the beginning of the problems for the African dramatist. Questions arise continually as to how the

audience will accept the illusion of people speaking one language which purports to be another. If the writer sees fit to break into the vernacular for, say, a song, is it pushing the bounds of credibility too far that the characters who seem unable to understand another language are quite happy to move between two languages which both represent the same one?

And then again, if the writer chooses English, who exactly is he writing for? If he has chosen English in order to reach a wider audience, he automatically eliminates a large section (numbering millions) of the black community who are poorly educated, if at all, and who are either unable to understand English at all or else not able to read it. Ngugi asserts that it is impossible for a writer to be either radical or to reach the intended target of his radicality, unless he uses the vernacular. He goes on to say: 'In writing one should hear all the whispering, and the shouting and the crying and the loving and the hating of the many voices in the past and those voices will never speak to a writer in a foreign language' (Ngugi 1981: 60). Then again Kunene cites the problem of a poet who wrote only in her own language, Sesotho. Not only was N.M. Khaketla completely ignored by 'the numerous white self-styled experts on African literature' (Kunene 1992: 508) but was not even taken as a source of inspiration by her compatriots - she did not have the affirmation of accessibility to white culture.

W.D.Ashcroft is completely negative about the matter:

The problem for literature is threefold: how can anything be said by a person writing in a language not his own without it in fact being dictated to him by the 'obligatory terms' of that language? How can any valid *interpretation* of such writing be made by a person of another culture? How can any just and reasonable *evaluation* be made of the quality of that writing? (Ashcroft 1989: 4).

But this is, perhaps, taking things to extremes. Writers all over the world have been and are writing in a variety of languages not their own and being assessed in a variety of languages. No lesser figures than Conrad and Beckett spring to mind. Whether they write in the vernacular and then translate, think in the vernacular and translate while writing, or whether the second language just comes naturally, is immaterial. That writers use English as a medium for expression, even if it is not their own language, is a positive thing and that they enrich the language by doing so is unquestionable. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin dub the brands of English developed and spoken in the colonies and former colonies as *english*. They say:

We need to distinguish what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinct varieties throughout the world. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989: 8).

Both Achebe (1964) and Chinweizu et al (1983) argue the case for no excuses for African english. Writers should always remember that, whatever the purpose of their writing (whether for political, social, literary or reasons of entertainment), their prime concern is to write well. It is not enough to offer a brand of English simply because it is 'other'. Idiosyncratic versions of the language are only acceptable if they enrich the existing language and are not merely excuses for bad English.

Ashcroft has suggested five criteria for assessing writing in english. He lists: a) form; b) ethnology; c) ethno-rhythmic prose - presentation of speech patterns of the indigenous language in English; d) dialect - which may vary in definition from area to area, e.g. in some areas the dialect may be very close to the mother tongue, whereas in others the variations are greater, resulting in creole or pidgin forms of the language; e) the use of ethnic words - in any language there are

certain words that are untranslatable but may be crucial to the writer's expression (Ashcroft 1989).

Ethnic words evoke not just place but, according to W.H.New, 'a cultural attitude' (New 1978: 365) and consequently '...writers who are striving to evoke the voices of their society will make creative use of the words in that society, whether or not they are all common parlance, all from the same rootstock, or all spoken by the same group' (364).

In the plays under discussion we find that Zakes Mda presents us with his own version of english, perhaps not unconsciously (he has been professor of English at two universities) but deliberately in his use of ethnic words, ethno rhythmic prose and through his use of irony, all of which suffuse all the plays. It must be remembered though, that the linguistic situation that all the characters in his plays find themselves in is essentially artificial. None of the characters in any of the plays, with the possible exception of Banker, would speak English as a home language and therefore none of the dialogue would normally be carried out in English. The interchange between Banker and Businessman might be in any language although more than likely it would be in English. Farmer and Labourer in *The Road* would speak to each other in English, Afrikaans or Sesotho depending on their linguistic abilities, although it is unlikely that Farmer would choose Sesotho when he doesn't recognise Labourer's blackness at the start of the play. Either way, at least one character would be using a second language. Therefore it can be safely assumed that the language as presented in the plays is not a faithful rendering of the kind of language naturally used by the characters but rather, a literary compound using elements of real speech but formed by literary intentions and purposes. As Etherton has explained: 'Drama unmakes the reality of [language], in a language beyond verbal language, in order to get at a different

reality, a greater consciousness of the illusiveness of semantics and ideology which constitute reality' (Etherton 1989: 237).

In his discussion on language as culture, Ngugi provides a threefold interpretation. He sees culture as a product and reflection of human beings' attempt to communicate with one another. Our whole concept, consequently, of ourselves and our world is based on the image-forming nature of language. Language determines our capacity to confront the world creatively and it does this as a mediator. Culture is therefore transmitted, not through the universal nature of language but through the particular (Ngugi 1993). It is this particularity in the nature of the language of African literature that gives it what Tejani calls 'virile form and substance' (Tejani 1979: 40).

That there is not a great deal of evidence of ethno-rhythmicality in Mda's prose does not preclude it from Tejani's description, in view of the fact that, however slight, there is still some detectable. Because it is so elusive in the plays (hardly at all in the earlier plays and most evident in *Joys of War* - the latest under discussion) one does question whether Mda has slipped up in his command of English or whether the 'slips' are deliberate. When one remembers his academic standing one is inclined to hesitate, but the frequency and place of appearance in the sequences seem to me to suggest that they are deliberate.

In the entire play, *Dead End*, there is only one line with a local idiomatic expression in it, when Charley says: 'That Koornhof was having eyes on you too' (DE 7). This is the only line in the play that has an African ring to it. The fact that one of the themes is Apartheid, the play is about a black couple and there are references to Dr Zuma etc., are extraneous to the play's Africanness - it does not have even one African word in it. In *Dark Voices Ring*, there is not one example of ethno-rhythmic prose although there is frequent use of indigenous vocabulary.

The woman refers at one stage to the Old Man's 'age-mates' (DVR 58), a phrase which serves not only to distance him in age, but time as well - he seems of a different era to the Man but this cannot, in truth, be described as ethno-rhythmic. In *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* Sergeant accuses Janabari: 'You must be having some money in yourself', to which Janabari replies: 'I do not have anything in myself' (WSF 28) but that is the only deviant example in that play. *The Hill*, in its entirety, though it makes use of the longest list of indigenous vocabulary, can boast of not a single idiosyncratically formed sentence. *The Road* manages to muster up one example when Farmer exclaims: 'Are they now mine' (TR 127) but this misplacing of the word 'now' is typically Afrikaans - Labourer has a perfect command of Received English. The two women in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* have as much ease with the English language as Labourer, although they resort to Sesotho fairly frequently whereas Labourer never does.

In each of the above cases, the variant is wholly appropriate to the character who utters it. The flavour of his speech is rooted in that line. In the same way, Sergeant's and Janabari's repartee embodies the comradely banter that they indulge in, while Charley's accusation has a streetwise urban knowingness about it. But more importantly, there is an Africanness (part of Afrikanerness as well of course) in each, which roots the plays in that land and makes them African by nature rather than just plays about Africa.

However, when we come to *Joys Of War* we find that Mda has filled this play, comparatively speaking, with ethnic use of language while he omits indigenous words entirely. Never content to continue, in his plays, with the same formula, Mda experiments in this play with the establishment of Africanness and, because this is so blatantly deliberate here, it would seem that what has happened in the preceding plays has been deliberate also.

In *Joys Of War* we find that Mama and Nana, but for one aberration by Soldier Two, are the transgressors. Firstly, their speech is more idiomatic than that of the soldiers who only seem to stray into the regions of militant rhetoric. Nana, commenting on her father, says: ‘...you want me to talk nice-nice about him’ (JW 89) and again: ‘You know Mama, I still don’t really really believe that they have him’ (110). Both ‘nice-nice’ and ‘really really’, though childish in their lack of semantic sophistication (and Nana is desperately trying to remain childish), have the smack of a translation that is not quite possible. They sound like an attempt to approximate some other more precise meaning. Mama, naturally more linguistically experienced, seems able to translate an idiomatic expression with confidence when she says: ‘Come child, it is time for our feet to talk with the road again’ (92) - idioms aside, metaphorically the concept works admirably. Indeed, no less a person than Mda’s editor, Dr Helen Moffett of Oxford University Press, has affirmed that his idiosyncratic expression is deliberate. Although less evident in his plays than in his novels, it is reasonable to assume that what she says of his novels is true of his plays:

Mda resisted any editorial intervention that risked flattening a highly individual African voice. We agreed that it was vital to retain [e.a.] his practice of transliteration. Many of the apparently awkward expressions...are direct ‘translations’ of vernacular idioms and instantly recognisable as such by most African readers (Moffett 1996: 11).

This view is endorsed by one of his African readers in a letter to Johannesburg’s *The Sunday Independent*: ‘[Mda’s] English is consciously informed by African idiom. In most cases it is a direct transliteration from African languages to English’.

Mama and Nana both have trouble with prepositions - a pitfall for most non-native speakers of English. Mama tells Nana: ‘And take out your finger from your nostril’ (88) - the correct preposition but in the wrong place - while Nana

uses the wrong preposition when she says: 'Then again they saw him at the bus stop with a luggage...running away on us' (102). Of course people run away *from* and not *on*, but Nana has also made another mistake, this time functional. One cannot say 'a luggage' even though the noun and article agree as to number. According to usage, one must omit the article or use some other adjective such as 'some'. But Nana's grammar, as we know, is not perfect and therefore it is appropriate for her to say: 'You know Mama, I can't hate you no way' (9). This expression serves not only to consolidate her childishness but to emphasise her un-Englishness.

Finally, both Mama and Nana together with Soldier Two, err with regard to ellipsis. All of them seem at various times unaware of the need for auxiliary verbs. Soldier Two: 'You jumping to your own conclusions' (95); Mama: 'Then you going to do it again?' (107); Mama: 'What I mean is, we making your doll again' (107). Once again, this affirms for the audience that these people are not only not English but unsophisticated (Soldier Two less so). The inference is that, had they been speaking their own language, their grammar might not have been so perfect either. It is safe to assume that, given the characters and settings of all the plays under discussion, none of the characters would normally speak to one another in English. English, in these plays, represents another language - in most cases Sesotho.

Peculiarity of expression appertaining to a particular character usually serves as part of the characterisation construct. It may serve as a comment on the character's education, social position, degree of sophistication or idiosyncracies of personality. On the other hand, as in Mda's plays, familiar idiomatic and dialectal expressions, because they are used generally in the plays by all of the characters, become part of the general social comment.

While ethno-rhythmic prose obviously gives ethnic flavour to a piece of writing, over-use of it merely serves to annoy. Even in *Joys Of War*, Mda seems mindful of how far to go and no further but he is far more liberal in his use of indigenous words. The latter play is the only one of the seven that makes no use at all of non English words. All the others, to greater and lesser degrees, use Sesotho and Afrikaans with a sprinkling of Latin when Mda is dealing with religious issues. It is obvious why Afrikaans is used. In the plays that feature whites, they are always Afrikaners - consequently Frikkie du Toit and the Koornhofs in *Dead End*, Jan van Wyk in *Dark Voices Ring* (Boetie van Rensburg has no speech reported) and Johannes Koekemoer in *The Road* emphasise their Afrikanerness by the insertion of Afrikaans words.

Mrs Koornhof's admonition, in *Dead End*: '*Kyk hoe vuil is jou overall*' (DE 7) [Look how dirty your overall is], rather than emphasising Mrs Koornhof's standards of hygiene, highlights Tseli's humiliation. Not only is she a servant with few rights, but she is dirty - or at least dirtier than her employer will accept, even with the provision of an overall; and this humiliation has the added disadvantage of being carried out in a foreign language. Mr Koornhof's lascivious comment: 'Anna, you are quite a nice *kaffir* maid' (7), hardly atones for it. Not only is his sexual harassment condescending - 'quite nice' damns with faint praise - but she is a 'kaffir', one of the most objectionable terms he could possibly use. But the Koornhofs feel free to speak like this to Tseli as they assume a superiority which she does not challenge. Similarly, Frikkie, after the debacle in the street, knows full well that the black policemen and black onlookers will understand clearly his shout: '*Vang 'om*' (20) [Catch 'im]'. Not only do they know what it means but they need no explanation as to whom it is directed at. The white man calls the shots and will never be considered to be the perpetrator of the crime, at least not openly. His warning: 'What are you waiting for? I will report you to the big *baas* at the station' (20) is hardly necessary.

The Afrikanerness of Jan van Wyk in *Dark Voices Ring* is far more subtle. Van Wyk and his workers use Afrikaans words which establish his superior position in that everyone must obviously defer to him by using his language, but he and they also use Sotho words in their mutual dealings. However, it is the particular words they use and their context which reinforce his superiority rather than suggest that he attempts to meet them on an equal footing. Van Wyk refers to the Old Man as ‘my faithful *induna*’ (DVR 55) [headman or supervisor] and the other workers respond to him with obvious false obsequiousness with ‘*Yebo nkosi...ewe nkosi...morena*’ (55) [Oh yes chief...yes chief...king]. Again, the falseness of their tone is evident when they call van Wyk ‘*baasie*’ (56). Although it means ‘boss’, the diminutive version transforms it into a term of affection. Used within the highly ironic context of a wife in the middle of her first labour making an appointment to see her husband the following day, because his employer cannot give him time off, rather belies the connotations of the word. It is definitely not expressing affection, but van Wyk might be tempted to believe that it is.

Later on, in the scene where the white prison warders have joined van Wyk on the verandah of his *huis*, there is a mixture of both languages (note the white farmer’s house, referred to several times, is always a *huis*, suggesting something far removed from the hut that the old couple live in). The prisoners are referred to as ‘*blou-baadjies*’ (16) [blue-jackets], thus negating their individuality and humanness. However, we know that one of them, Janfek, is the cheekiest (62), attesting to his individuality and that the other characters give them names asserts this humanness. One of the warders acknowledges this even while he urges them on to work harder: ‘Janfek *kom ma-a-an!* Silas, Duiker *tshona!*’ (61). The first expression being Afrikaans and the second Sotho, mean more or less the same – come on! get on with it! A warder later on tells the Old Man: ‘*Wena betha lo mabantinti nduna*’ (61) [You punish the prisoners] as he hands him a whip. It

would seem that there are times when the white oppressors need to resort to the other language in order to ensure that the message gets home.

The prisoners themselves understand this. When Janfek decides to 'steal a few minutes from the day's working time' (62) he uses his own language: '*Hau, hau! Asichamanga namhlanje!*' (62) [We did not pass urine today]. When the warder dismisses him with a curt '*Voetsek*' (62) [an innocuous meaningless word but used in a derogatory tone and only usually used to chase dogs away] he tries again: '*Haakona...Nditshiswa ngumchamo*' (62) [Oh no...I am popping (to urinate)]. Both races understand the power and efficacy of language.

In *The Road*, Afrikaans is the only indigenous language used, despite the Labourer being from Lesotho. Johannes Koekemoer, by his use of Afrikaans, emphasises his feelings of supremacy by the imposition of his language. Initially, the simple word '*Ja*' (TR 123), a universally used word in South Africa, places the play merely in South Africa, but Farmer goes on to exclaim exasperatedly: '*Ag nee ma-an*' (124) [Oh no man - the last word drawn out] and then his Afrikanerness is firmly rooted, this being a common colloquial expression. When he speaks of his own community he resorts to definitive cultural words. The *kerk* (127) [church] together with its *dominee* (127) [priest], by his definition, are untranslatable and consequently hold him in obeisance (albeit hypocritically). Similarly, in his conversation with his wife, he calls her (again hypocritically) '*my skat*' (151) [my treasure] - a term of endearment that rings all too hollow in the light of his previous and subsequent revelations about his sex-life. It is altogether appropriate that she finds it hard to believe that he can disco-dance when she has never known him to dance a '*tiekiedraai*' (151) [a whirling movement in Afrikaner folk dancing]. His duplicitous nature of claiming loyalty to the conservatism of his people while indulging in *laissez-faire* activities is re-affirmed in such language. His actions belie his words.

Although the play is heavily loaded against him in every way, Johannes Koekemoer seals his own judgment in the eyes of the audience in his description of his mistress. The fact that she is his regular mistress suggests that there is some degree of emotional intimacy between them but, to him, she is completely objectified - and in a sordid, obnoxious way. All he can rise to in a description of her is: 'Tall, dark, big boobs, *lekker poes*' (154) [sweet cunt].

Mda makes use of Latin in two of the plays, but solely to effect his criticism of organised religion. *Dead End* sees Charley and the Voice (God) discussing Charley's early involvement with the church. The Voice wonders where it was that Charley went wrong, since he had been an altar boy. Charley describes himself as '...innocent. Ignorant. Trusting in human beings' (DE 11). Certainly he had been innocent, unable to see through the insensitive treatment of the little children by Father Joseph, but his faulty use of Latin suggests subtly that either he hadn't been altogether clear about what he had been saying as an altar boy and, indeed, what it had meant, or his training has not had a lasting effect on his memory:

Charley: ...*Dominus vobiscum* [The Lord be with you].

Voice: *Et cum spiritu tuo* [And with your spirit].

Charley: *Dominus secula - a - aa* [Should read: *Dominus secula seculorum* - meaning Lord forever and ever].

Voice: A - a - men.

Charley: *Orimus*. [Should read: *Oremus* - Let us pray] (11).

In *The Hill* Mda has the Nun open the play in prayer. She is reciting over and over again in a monotone: '*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*' (TH 71). Whenever she appears in the play, she ignores Man and Young Man, despite their often desperate entreaties, while continuing to pray in this monotone. Mda

makes it very clear in the play that the church has been next-to-useless in the lives of migrant workers due to its irrelevancy when approaching their problems, or simply by going ahead with its own concerns, oblivious to the needs of its adherents. The fact that the Nun avows over and over: 'My fault, my fault, my grievous fault' is ambiguous, and places the blame for the situation squarely where Mda sees it - in the lap of the irrelevant and self-seeking institution; but the church's emphasis on guilt and unworthiness may also be seen as a force depriving people of autonomy. If they are consistently encouraged to see themselves as guilty and unworthy, why would they deign to blame anyone else or seize agency in their own lives?

When Sotho words and phrases are used in the play we find that they serve a variety of purposes. Their main function seems to affirm the Africanness of the plays. In many cases the meanings can be guessed through context, while in others the meaning follows directly. However, some need translation in order to discover their purpose. In *Dark Voices Ring*, random words such as *abakhozi* [parents], *ukhazi* [cousins] and the slang word *kwela-kwelas* [prison vans] are self-evident when in context. Elsewhere we see the Man and Woman discussing their very different dreams - his for a future of equality for everyone, hers a psycho-erotic working out of her trauma. So paranoid is she about being ogled by her male neighbours, they even appear lasciviously in her dreams:

Man: My dreams are dreams of freedom, ma; and you feature in them because I want you to be free.

Woman: I am always afraid when I feature in your dreams.

Man: Every black man features in my dreams.

Woman: *Uyayibona lonto?* [Do you see that?] Just what I have been saying. Not only do you shamelessly display me in your dreams, but the neighbours have to be there too (DVR 57).

Her exclamation, while not a repetition, serves to emphasise her paranoia. In the same way, Man emphasises his intention by repetition, when he announces to Old Man: '*Ndiyahamba mna*. [I am leaving.] I am leaving you two to see for yourselves' (60).

Finally, towards the end of the play, when Woman is working through her trauma by re-living it, she comes to the end of her story: the prisoners, after a confrontation with the Old Man, the *induna*, burst into a 'song of death' as the Woman calls it:

Senzenina

Senzenina maAfrica

What have we Africans done

Besibetha nje

Besibetha nje maAfrica

They assault us Africans

Besibulala nje

Besibulala nje maAfrica

They kill us Africans

Senzenina maAfrica (63)

after which the Old Man is attacked and his hut is burned with the sleeping Nontobeko inside. Woman and Man sing the song together and retell the story of the tragedy alternately, culminating in her frantic screams: 'My baby! Leave me alone! I must save Nontobeko! *Ncedani bo!*' [Hey please!] (63). The meaning of the last phrase is immaterial, the tone is enough.

There are very few Sotho words in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*. Words such as '*mashangana polony*' (WSF 28) [a type of salami sausage made with a variety of meats], '*lishabo*' (32) [cold meats] and '*sqa*' (30) [beer] are simply everyday expressions, almost untranslatable as they refer to consumables particular to the area. The only other words used are greetings such as '*Hela nate*' (43) [Hey, sir], '*Bo-nate*' (43) [Sirs] and '*Khotso*' (45) [peace]. Ofisiri, on

finding that the two hoboes have not left the park despite his dire warnings, greets them with expletives: '*Lisetane ting!* [You devils] Vagrants and vagabonds!' (42).

The Hill, set in Lesotho, is peppered with Sotho words. The characters use them to greet one another, comment on their daily lives and to hurl insults. Words such as '*hei banna*' (TH 105) [hey gentlemen], '*hle 'manyee*' (106) [please lady], '*me*' (107) [literally, mother, but a term of respect for a woman older than oneself] are simple enough, especially the delighted cries of children at their father's return: '*Ntate o fihlile, ntate o fihlile*' (87) [father has come]. The characters comment on consumables such as '*papa ka metsi*' (74) [porridge with water] and, more insidiously, '*dagga*' (100) [cannabis]. They also mention the place to obtain similar substances - '*shebeen*' (79) [an Irish word which has become part of South African vocabulary, meaning either simply an illegal liquor store, or one which also sells its own homemade brew], or places where people live - Young Man is the son of 1st Woman's sister '*...koama haena ha Ramabanta*' (105) [at home in Ramabanta] while the three women are '*matekatse a Maseru*' (103) [prostitutes from Maseru].

But this is tame stuff and merely lends African flavour to a play already suffused in Africanness, not as much in its setting as in its themes. It is only when the characters are at loggerheads and start hurling insults at one another that the Sotho vocabulary comes into its own. Man has been accusing Young Man of lies and builds up to a splendid climax with: 'I mean to expose your lies to the world. Liar! Liar! *U leshamo!* [You liar] You want to win on lies' (73). Veteran expresses his disgust at the degradation experienced by migrant workers in the mines in a word claimed and used by all language groups in South Africa and which is consequently untranslatable - '*Sis!*' (96). Perhaps the most potent insult is uttered, not by the prostitutes, but about them. On Veteran's entrance he announces that he has been robbed by '*bo-'m' abo sebono*' (86) [mother's

arseholes]. The vehemence of this expression can only be appreciated when the veneration of the old in African culture is taken into account and when it is remembered that the term of respect for any woman older than oneself in most African languages is 'mother'. This expletive is all the more forceful as it follows immediately Veteran's rendition, on his entrance, of a Sotho praise song to young men going to initiation school in the month of May (86).

Racism of an unexpected kind is expressed by the prostitutes in their summing up of the merits of the men. It would seem that it is an inferior thing, in the eyes of the prostitutes, to be Italian. In an effort to flatter the home-coming immigrants, the prostitutes call them '*Makhooa*' (102) [whites] but when they discover that the men are penniless, they say: 'Let us not waste our time listening to these *Mataliana*' (102) [Italians]; and again: '*Ke Kataliana u ntse u ba bona*' (110) [You can see he is a poor Italian]; and again: '*Re bua le Makhooa feela, eseng Mataliana*' (110) [We speak to whites, not Italians]. It would seem from the context that Italian immigrants are poorer than most and, in the eyes of the prostitutes, are less white as a result. Whites, being better-off financially in southern Africa, are preferred by the prostitutes, for obvious reasons. When 1st Woman expresses concern for her nephew, Young Man, 2nd Woman answers her:

What do you care? *Ke Letaliana joala ka a mang. E tla ba Lekhooa ha a khutla Khauteng*. [He is an Italian like the others. He will be a white man when he comes back from Johannesburg.] Let him struggle like the rest. We'll see him when he comes back from the land of gold (106).

Sotho words are also used to express irony. In the scene where the men act out the process of bribery needed to secure the precious contract for work on the mines from the NRC, the word *morena* is frequently used. In presenting his '*pampiri tse u pakang*' (93) [identification papers] to the recruitment officer, Man

addresses him constantly as *morena* [king] and he continues to do so almost every time he speaks even though, in return, he is addressed as '*uena koata*' (94) [you illiterate] several times. Eventually, when it is spelled out to him that a bribe is necessary, Man says very obsequiously: 'Thank you, *Morena*. God bless you, *my swart baasie*' (94) [Afrikaans: My black boss]; to which Veteran, in the role of recruiting officer replies: '*Chaisa koata*' (94) [Disappear, you illiterate]. The subservience on the part of the applicant is necessary because it is expected, but the frequency of its use suggests irony on the part of its user. The charade is understood by both sides. A little later when it is Young Man's turn to 'apply' for the contract, he is informed:

Veteran: You look rather soft. I am not sure if you will pass the medical. *Ke bona e-ka sekala se tla u lia, uena koata*. [I think that alcoholic drink will delay your progress, you illiterate]. Have you worked in the mines before?

Young Man: No, *morena*.

Veteran: It is going to be difficult to find you work. The mines need experienced people nowadays. Is your passport all right?

Young Man: Yes, *morena*. The extra green page is there.

Veteran: Good, *koata*. You are not as stupid as you look. On closer look I can see that you will pass the medical with flying colours. The power of the green page in the passport can do wonders, *koata* (94/5).

Finally, the contrast in emotion on the same sentiment is well expressed by the prostitutes through Sesotho. When 1st Woman tells about her husband having died underground, she says: '*O ne a oeloe ke tafole*' (106) [He didn't make it]. This contrasts graphically with the vicious reply to Veteran's struggle with his conscience:

1st Woman: His sins are eating him!

Other Women: *Ha li mo je!* [Let them finish him off!] (103).

And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses is the final play to use indigenous language although not nearly as frequently as does *The Hill*. Apart from *liketa* (12) [a game] and *melilietsane* (33) [praises] - both of which are particular to Sotho culture and untranslatable - the expression of obsequiousness and insults are the main reason for the use of Sesotho in this play, in a similar way to *The Hill*. Once again the Italians come in for criticism. Although the lover in this play is actually Italian by birth, when the two women discuss his tendency to philander the Lady says: 'These *Mataliana* are all like that, it seems' (GSD 24), with which Woman agrees. The Italian in question has married one of them and persuaded the other to run away with him - 'I cannot live without you, *ausi*' (24) [sister] - but his reputation hangs on more than just two transgressions.

The two women seem to find Sotho customs of salutation useful when taken to extremes. Certainly their plight is desperate - waiting for days in a queue to buy cut price food-aid rice - but the note of desperation becomes ironic by the end of the play. They begin by calling the office workers on their way to and from meals and home, *marena-a-rona* (6) [our kings] and *bo-ntate le bo-'me'* (6) [our mothers and fathers]. Later on this develops more vehemently to *nkosi yamakosi!* (11) [king of kings] and *melimo ea lefats'e!* (11) [kings of the earth]. At the end of the play the two women act out the bureaucracy that they will encounter when they finally reach the top of the queue for the rice; and this decides them to abandon their mission altogether and take agency in their lives. The off hand and rude manner of the civil servant dealing with Woman is accentuated and underlined by Woman's constant use of the respectful *'me'* (35). Without its subtle insertion, the encounter would sound merely businesslike.

Even Jesus finds the use of Sesotho effective. The reformed prostitute gives us an account of his words:

Jesus spoke to me. He said: 'My daughter, I gave you your body, and it is the temple of the Lord. *Hobaneng joale ha u ntse u fana ka eona hohle moo?*' (22).

The English is a typical religious cliché but Sesotho gets to the crux of the message - why are you having indiscriminate sex - spreading it everywhere?

The mix of Sotho and Latin words strategically with English, apart from aiding meaning, serves to remind the reader of these nations' origins and development i.e. through colonialism to post-colonialism. Similarly, in a minor but forceful way, Mda reminds us subtly of this aspect of African history with place names that are colonial throwbacks. *Dead End* and *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* each have a Victoria Hospital, while in *The Hill* the hospital is named after Queen Elizabeth II. In *The Road* and *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* it is the respective hotels that owe their names to Victoria. The cinema, in *The Road*, is called the Kingsway, while there is a distinctive British ring to the fictitious 'the Right Honourable the Keeper of the Stores' (GSD 36). Appropriately Mr Mafutha, in *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland*, lives at the corner of Freedom Road and Constitution Street - a good post-colonial address!

Describing Mda's achievement as a writer, Hauptfleisch observes that 'his artistic control of his media enables him to turn what could simply have been mere rhetoric into persuasive theatre which serves his cause remarkably well' (Hauptfleisch 1992: 412). That Mda uses rhetoric in many of his plays is self-evident, but whether it deserves the adjective 'mere' or whether this aspect of his language becomes persuasive theatre needs to be examined. *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* exhibits the most successful examples of militarist and socialist jargon, perhaps because the jargon is not simply moralistic in intention, but also serves a satirical function as well as being an adjunct to characterisation. Throughout the play, Sergeant (in particular) and Janabari make frequent use of

language such as: 'plan of action' (WSF 27), 'operational area' (28), 'manoeuvres' (29), 'art of survival' (29), 'attention' (30), '[g]ross insubordination' (30) as well as '[a] soldier does not cringe in adverse weather. Come storm or hail he marches on' (41) - even the ludicrous '[y]our sentence is: death before a firing squad' (30). The function of such rhetoric is twofold in this play. It is a necessary part of the soldier's lot and therefore valid. Militaristic jargon enables a soldier to carry out duties and perform deeds that he might not otherwise find himself able to because the agency, and therefore responsibility, has been taken out of his hands. He obeys orders: the language precludes the need for questioning. Akin to marching, it numbs the mind and, as Hoffer quotes from Hermann Rauschnung: 'Marching diverts men's thoughts. Marching kills thought. Marching makes an end of individuality' (Hoffer 1952: 141). Sergeant and Janabari are able to continue in their abject life cheerfully, as long as they do not question it and as long as they see it only as a furtherance in their fight for freedom. The continued use of militaristic jargon enables them to survive in peace time. This notion then, furthers Mda's satiric contention that, in fact, the ordinary person's survival is just as precarious in peace time if not more so. Sergeant reminds Janabari: 'When we were in the bush, it was me who taught you the art of survival under hostile conditions. After the Wars of Freedom it was me who taught you the art of survival among the civilians' (WSF 29).

Even the socialistic admonition in the end by Janabari is acceptable because the play has illustrated most effectively that capitalism has failed the ordinary man and, perhaps, socialism might serve him better. This never deviates into an harangue because the two characters invite sympathy and the jargon they use is intrinsic to their characters. This type of language works less well in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses*. The trade union rhetoric that the Woman has gleaned from her involvement with the Domestic Workers Union is less sympathetic. It emerges rather unexpectedly from page 28 (well on in the play)

and has not been developed as part of her character. When it appears it seems almost gratuitous and is only saved from being an harangue in that it becomes a vehicle for the Woman to take agency in her life and so encourage the Lady, ultimately, to do the same. There seems to be insufficient motivation in the Woman's character early in the play for this facet to seem natural to her.

Unlike the militaristic jargon in the earlier play, we find that both *The Road* and *Joys of War* make use of militant rhetoric in subtly different ways. The use of language in *Joys of War* is much more straightforward and therefore easier to assess. The whole play is about armed rebellion. It makes no apology for the fact but, instead, iterates the premise that strategic and controlled armed rebellion is the only answer in the southern African political *milieu*. The language the characters use can therefore not really be termed militant rhetoric. It is not rhetoric. The language is an intrinsic part of the theme. What Mda uses in addition though, are semiotics to support this theme. Not only do we see the mourners clapping and stamping as they burst into a 'freedom song' (JW 99), but the flowers they throw at Soldier One serve as a base for his metaphor :

Somebody wrote something like 'from bullets flowers shall bloom'.

Yeah, I think it went like that. 'From bullets...' that's how it went. I can't say I remember who said it. But it looks like all that is left for us to say is 'From flowers bullets shall bloom'. From these plastic flowers bullets shall... (100).

It is quite valid also for him to describe a funeral thus: 'They did not seem to mourn for the dead. They raised their clenched fists and sang songs of freedom' (98).

In *The Road* the use of militant rhetoric is far more complex. Early in the play the polemical interchange between Farmer and Labourer seems outrageous, not to say blasphemous:

Labourer:....Jesus says love your enemy.

Farmer: I say love your enemy, but shoot him all the same.

Labourer: I say shoot your enemy, then love him when he has been vanquished.

Farmer (with relief): At least we agree on one thing: shoot! (TR 127).

But throughout the play, the concept of Apartheid is investigated allegorically and we find that it progresses inexorably and ineluctably despite all reasonable resistance. The audience, by the end of the play, have been prepared for Labourer's killing of Farmer, through the militant rhetoric. The words in Labourer's mouth sound artificial:

'Woe unto the hapless who fall, for they shall be trampled, and it takes a great deal of strength and courage to stand up again and continue the combat, which must and shall continue' (126);

'The final combat when those who have been licking the dust are on their feet, and those who have been trampling are down...' (127);

'Yes, I want to use violence! Lots and lots of it! I want us to bathe in it! I want to cleanse our souls in it!' (136);

but their very artificiality is important. They sound as if he is quoting another, perhaps higher, authority. If he is not quoting, he sounds like a blood-thirsty propagandist, but if he is quoting it seems that he is expounding ideals and perhaps theoretic goals which are far more acceptable in a civilised community than actually bathing in violence. The gunshot in the end does not entirely preclude this interpretation. Of course, it is implied that Labourer shoots Farmer, but it is not explicit. The stage directions read: *They grapple for a moment, each trying to get hold of the gun, Labourer finally succeeds in getting it. They grapple still.*

Gunshot simultaneously with sudden black (156). The fact that the blackout masks who actually gets killed changes the end into a warning of what *might* happen rather than what *will* happen. As recent South African history has proved, Mda was right. International prophets of doom have always forecast a bloodbath when South Africa moves to democracy, but the first democratic elections in 1994 proved otherwise.

* * * * *

The final feature of Mda's use of language is not so much an attestation of his Africanness as an attestation of his individuality, i.e. irony - little used in the earlier plays, it has been developed so that by *Joys of War*, it has become a Mdaian feature. It is a moot point whether irony is exclusively a discussion on language since irony usually, and in Mda's case, can be detected in both language and situation - but these aspects are so bound up in each other that it is virtually impossible to separate them. But, as much as Mda's use of english establishes him as an African writer, so does the use of irony establish his writing as Mdaian. Therefore a discussion of irony is important at this point.

Although Tseli's prophetic words in *Dead End*: 'You have served time for rape. One of these days you will serve time for murder if you go on at this rate' (DE 14) and Charley's comment on screaming being a 'sign of life' (12) are ironic, it is Charley's relationship with God that is interesting and amusing, although not fully developed. God is fully aware that Charley doesn't 'care about [him] in any case' (10, 21) and yet they spend three scenes in conversation, the tone of which suggests a relaxed mutual understanding, even to the extent of God accepting a (lit) cigarette from him (11). Perhaps Charley's inaccurate Latin suggests that he had an imperfect understanding of religion as a child, a mere mouthing of gibberish, whereas now his relationship with God is real - ironic in that as an altar boy he

would, outwardly, have appeared to be in communion with God, whereas as a pimp and accused murderer and rapist he is seen by the audience to be on good terms with God.

Dark Voices Ring is almost devoid of irony; the only evidence is in the notion that the old couple place so much importance in the position and status of the *induna* when, in reality, they are scorned and despised by the rest of the farming community. Described ironically by the Man as a 'sacred duty' (DVR 55) and a 'kingdom' (59), it is made clear throughout the play that Nontobeko was doomed rather than blessed because of her father's profession.

It is, however, from *We Shall Sing For The Fatherland* onwards that Mda gets into his ironic stride, and in this play we find irony aimed at the notions of principles and freedom, on the one hand, and as satirical comment on the social situation in which the country finds itself, on the other. In the first instance, irony revolves around the central question in the play, expressed by Sergeant: '...haven't we achieved what we were fighting for?' (WSF 32). Either they haven't achieved what they were fighting for or they are deluding themselves. Sergeant seems to be the one deluding himself. He describes their park bench as his 'own house' (28) and is prepared to carry out a quasi-military campaign from a city park, which turns out to be a desperate scavenge on the hobo's part simply to keep themselves alive. As the play progresses he manages to transfer his misplaced pride onto Janabari so that, after they have been ignored, abused and exploited by all comers - what Sergeant eventually describes as 'shitted upon' (43) - they express their pride in 'all the beauty [they] have created' (41). This despite the ironic admission earlier by Sergeant that the loss of his leg - 'a whole leg' (32) - is all he has to show for risking his life. And, of course, as far as the country as a whole is concerned, the so-called Wars of Freedom are an ironic fallacy. The financial power is still in the hands of white bankers and foreign investors and the black

figureheads enjoy their positions at the whim of their (usually white) controllers and at the expense of the proletariat. 'Where else would you get a park like this - and all to yourself, Janabari?' (32) asks Sergeant, but they are litter in the self same park and must be tidied up and cleaned out before the ironically titled International Environment Conference is hosted in the city.

Apart from the lack of recognition of their contribution as soldiers, Janabari and Sergeant are not even treated as worthwhile human beings. The irony in the contrast between their lot and that of Mr Mafutha is subtle. Someone whose name means Mr Fat, and who eventually dies from an 'upper class ailment' (36) like 'gastric ulcers or some new-fangled disease' (36), high blood pressure having lost status and no longer the 'privilege solely of the higher class. It gets everybody these days. Peasants and all' (36), is a long distance from others who, if they do not constantly scrounge for a living, will be 'giving [their] stomachs a holiday' (27). The ultimate irony lies in their unceremonious paupers' funeral, while Mr Mafutha is buried with 'all the trimmings' - '[t]he priests [having] already decided that he was wealthy enough to go to heaven' (47).

Mr Mafutha is not the only transgressor as far as the hoboes' treatment by society is concerned, although, whereas the Banker manages a 'condescending smile' (35) for them, Businessman (Mr Mafutha) reacts with 'offended pomposity' (35) when it is through their efforts that he enjoys his position. Further, they are no more than a bad smell to the beautiful young woman although Sergeant comments proudly: 'Why, we never seemed to see girls like her a few years back - before the great Wars of Freedom' (41).

It is no wonder then, that when they come to sing for the fatherland they are mute. Both as climax of the play and embodied in the title, the concept is heavy with irony. Hauptfleisch sees the title as both ironic and prophetic, as well

as having a poetic ring to it. Set presumably in South Africa [ambiguous - see Chapter 1], where the Afrikaner emphasis on the '*vaderland*' and on '*vaderlandsliefde*' [love of fatherland] 'has been so powerful a unifying force, the use of the word *fatherland* gains a number of ironic echoes. They are disillusioned, yet proud, lauding their new, albeit imperfect, fatherland - for it is, at least, theirs' (Hauptfleisch 1992: 413).

But is it theirs? They have served their purpose and are expendable. They did not fight to perpetuate a system which exploits, abuses and denies them their basic rights. They are unable to sing, no matter how much they would like to, because their fatherland has rejected them. All they can do therefore, is die.

In *The Hill* Mda makes frequent use of irony as a means of expressing the inversion found in Maseru society and its values, the church and the mines. The dichotomous nature of Maseru society is well illustrated by the ironic conversation between the Young Man and his prospective employer. The doctor feels most generous in offering the men 'five rands each per month' (TH 75) for gardening work with a promise of a one rand increment plus gifts of clothing from his own wardrobe at Christmas, but sees no anomaly between this and his own salary of 'one thou five hundred per month' (TH 76). When the men are reduced to stealing from his dustbin, he - a doctor - suggests that they might be spreading their germs there. It is well for him, living in Maseru West, 'the safest place in the world when there is a tax and radio licence raid. The cops never go there because that's where all the fat ones live' (84). The police choose to raid, instead, Thibella and Motimposo townships and others 'where the poor ones live' (84). The message is clear: society protects the better off and hounds the weakest, the only recourse under pressure is to seek refuge in Maseru West.

With a society such as this it is no wonder that its values have become subverted. Young Man has very quickly learned to value a car above cattle (a strange notion in a person from a farming background) because 'it gives [him] the assurance that [he is] important in the eyes of [his] fellow men' (80). The hard earned money squandered on the car and record player, instead of on his family's needs, is worth it in his eyes - apart from this, its back seat provides a comfortable alternative to the *dongas* when he wishes to have sex with his girlfriend, Palesa. Naive and gullible, he cannot see through his popularity with the prostitutes. '[S]urrounded by beautiful women, like the man in the deodorant advertisement' (109), he prefers to believe it is because '[t]hey know a good thing when they see it' (109) rather than the more accurate assessment that they see him as a good investment. 'First go to the land of gold,' 2nd Woman tells him. 'When you come back, you'll have enough money to buy any woman you like. You'll have the privilege of being robbed at will' (108). He does not learn from the mistake of Veteran who 'picked [one of the prostitutes] from amongst the others because [he] thought [she] had an honest look' (102) - a contradiction in terms and thus pure irony.

The church comes in for a great deal of criticism in this play and much of it is through irony. The remoteness and the irrelevance of the church to the lives of the migrants is illustrated by the Nun's total lack of concern with the men despite their desperate pleas for blessing, so that they must console themselves that she has blessed them 'by remote control' (78). The hypocrisy of a church that hardly impinges on the lives of its adherents is reinforced when it is discovered that the only morality it concerns itself with is sexual, and then only as long as it doesn't involve the church's agents. The church is prepared to be an instrument in the immoral exploitation of the men by the mines but is vociferous in its denunciation of 'Sodomy! Buggery of the first order!...Fornication! Prostitution!' (101); and when the pastor is implicated in the woman's confession he informs her that God is

not interested in her confessions. When she says: 'Don't worry, my holy pastor. I am not going to confess about you', he replies instantly: 'Confess, my child. God is listening' (101). But then, the Bantu God is different. He is a pitch black man, smoking a pipe and drinking beer. The white man's God is far superior. He is beautifully dressed, fatherly and - above all - white.

The central irony in life in the mines is the fact that all of the men are trying desperately to reach this land of gold and yet they are all fully aware, by the end of the play, of the corruption, exploitation and humiliation they can expect there. Starting with 'a comfortable night in the bug-ridden hostel of the NRC' (74), they are aware of all the indignities and hardships they must endure; although, like Veteran, they may only end up with a plastic identification bracelet to show for their trouble, they aim for the gold mines at any price - anything else is 'less prestigious' (83).

As in *The Hill*, the main thrust of *The Road*, i.e. Apartheid, is the central irony. The fact that Farmer is unable to see that Labourer is black, and rails against him for not informing him of the fact, serves to underline the irony of colour prejudice. Skin colour is, literally, superficial and, if it weren't for the fact of being visual, would be hard to recognise. Mda drives this central irony home when he has Farmer recognise, visually, that Labourer is from Lesotho. 'How can you tell just by looking at me?' asks Labourer and Farmer replies mysteriously: 'We can always tell, you know. We have ways and means' (TR 149). The ability to tell a Mosotho from a Xhosa, a Japanese from a Chinese or even a mainland Chinese from a Taiwanese is ludicrous and the irony of the claim underlines its fallaciousness. But it is important to Farmer, representing the National Party in South Africa, if he is to survive internationally. He must ignore the hypocrisy of such a situation if he is to trade.

On a personal note, as well, he finds that he must mix socially with blacks in the neighbouring African states in order to indulge his sexual needs as well as retain the purity of his Calvinist ethos at home. It is permissible to engage in pornographic and sexually deviant activities as long as it is elsewhere and not at home. After all, it would not do to 'defile the *volk*' especially since '[they] have always been a pure race with pure minds' (152). The enormity of the irony of these utterances is underlined several times during the play by Farmer himself. Ironically, he is his own worst judge. Having threatened Labourer with a gun himself, he is 'a bit shaken' when he asks: 'Do you mean you are going to use violence on me?' (137). Having admitted to killing several men as a soldier, he is insulted at the possibility of killing civilians, as he deems that murder. The irony of the fact that he has had control over Labourer, through the threat of a gun, is lost on him. If this is lost on him, then obviously he sees no irony when he says: 'I love animals. I used to be a hunter', or 'Guide me whilst I discover your continent' (143). He sees himself as 'kind hearted and not greedy' (139) and yet has no qualms at stealing Labourer's belongings and making him work for them.

This last, of course, is part of the metaphor for Apartheid. By stealing Labourer's belongings, he represents the white man stealing from the black man what was his by right. By keeping him in a state of subservience through force and by designating him his own separate area, he personifies Apartheid political policy, and through the play there are many political ironies. The notion that Labourer should learn to manage himself before he can be given his independence is highly ironic in view of the fact that he has managed himself well enough when he had his independence. In order to regain possession of his own belongings, he is told he must negotiate, but when he attempts to do so, Farmer tells him: 'I think you should know that there are some issues that are not negotiable. The ownership of that property is one such issue' (138). Farmer, for a moment, seems to be softening when he hands over the overalls with the words: 'You haven't yet

worked for those but I am giving them to you' (139), but this becomes ironic when one reflects that they had belonged to Labourer in the first place before being stolen from him.

Even the irony of history is graphically expressed as the two men walk around in circles as they become explorer and guide. The so-called technical advantages of colonialism in the form of binoculars and map are irrelevant when one is going nowhere to any advantage - to Labourer at least. The exploration of his land by foreigners is not progress for him - it can only lead to disaster.

The iniquity of Apartheid lends itself well to irony, and irony is a natural medium for criticism, but it is also used to good effect, though to a lesser extent, when describing corruption in a post-colonial state. The tyranny of bureaucracy in *And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses* highlights the helplessness of the little person in such a society. The initial wide divergence in the roles of office girls and prostitutes is quickly closed through the use of irony. The office girls in their beautiful Sunday dresses seem to be on a privileged plane as they chew their fat-cakes in between lunches and time off, but their exalted positions are questionable. These Sunday dresses are little different from the Lady's 'uniform' (GSD 29). They need to look their best because '[m]any of them have to sleep with someone to get their jobs' (19). The only power they have is in the unnecessary bureaucracy in the doling out of the food-aid rice. Indeed, as the Woman says: 'If it's food aid it must be given to the poor for free. And in many cases it helps to keep them where they are - poor' (14). Free food merely fills the belly, whereas real aid gives a people the means to help themselves as well as avoiding possible administrative corruption.

The use of irony in *Joys of War* is in itself ironic. One would expect the thrust to be centred on the theme of armed rebellion itself but, conversely, there is

more irony in an unexpected aspect of the play and that is the mismatch between what society expects and what it gets. To concentrate entirely on plugging the war line would reduce the play to mere propaganda but, by subtly emphasising this other facet of the play, it becomes wider in its scope and, consequently, more satisfying philosophically.

There are the obvious ironies when dealing directly with the war situation, perhaps encapsulated in the universal notion of fighting for peace. The contradiction in terms of the well worn phrase 'peace keeping force' comes immediately to mind and Mda is aware of this. When Soldier Two asks for a little peace, Soldier One quite rightly, but ironically, replies: 'Both of us holding AK 47s. We are on a military assignment, and you want some little peace' (JW 104). And again Soldier Two complains: 'Can't you people leave me alone? Can't you let me fight this war in peace?' (125).

But they are soldiers and their business is serious. Danger and death are always imminent and it is foolhardy to relax at any time, even to clean a gun. It is with good cause that Soldier Two demands: 'You just going to sit there and die with a clean gun?' (121). Death is seen as inevitable, part of the bid for freedom and Soldier One shows cool acceptance at the inevitability of possible civilian deaths in their act of sabotage. 'That's how things happen in war,' he says. 'It's not murder. But if you kill your own comrade-in-arms, well, it can't be anything but murder' (105). Either his sense of morality is undeveloped or his words are ironic. It is easy to be philosophic about the fate of the faceless multitude, but personal threat is another matter. It is part of his humanness - evident even after his cryptic comments on bullets and flowers blooming reciprocally. When he pauses to consider the point, he is puzzled and asks: 'Do bullets bloom?' (100). An unanswerable question.



Mda reserves the bulk of his irony in this play, however, for his subtle reflections on society's expectations. Although some of his observations are essentially militarist in nature, the irony occurs from a personal standpoint. Soldier One defines Soldier Two as an example of the best in soldiery. This is society's definition of a good soldier - volunteering for 'the most dangerous missions', 'the best example of the utmost dedication to the liberation struggle' (106) - which is ironic in the extreme when one considers the intensely personal and unsoldierly reasons for his soldierliness. At the end of the play, when Soldier One discovers the truth of Soldier Two's terrible secret and demands to know why he should take the word of a traitor, the latter replies that he has proved himself and atoned for what he has done - and, ironically, he is right. He has served the military cause over and over, atoning militarily for his previous transgression, but in human terms he knows he has not atoned and resorts ultimately to suicide - the only answer.

Although their punishment was harsh in the extreme, Soldier Two's former fiancée and her husband are, in personal terms, traitors too. For material comfort, the woman is prepared to throw over emotional loyalty and finds it in her heart to reduce their previous relationship to a future of listening to obituaries on the radio as entertainment. Apparently morally and emotionally shallow, she opts for the Mercedes, the taxis and the fish and chips shop.

The soldiers' encounters with the law are all suffused with irony. The plot to humiliate Soldier One by putting him with common criminals backfires when he gets on well with them and learns many valuable lessons from them. The forces of law fail utterly in their methods of (presumably) prevention of terrorism when their deterrent methods become a means of enticement. Soldier One makes the decision to join the armed rebellion whilst under interrogation. But the ultimate irony in this area occurs during Soldier Two's experience with the police. Although puzzled by the idea that a 'budding capitalist [would] want to support a communist-inspired

war' (137), Police Three knows full well that no one calls the police - the law enforcers - if they have broken the law. There must be another reason and, ironically, betrayal is a good enough one. It is this event that throws all of Soldier One's praise of Soldier Two, early in the play, into the realms of irony.

Mama and Nana don't escape irony either. Their phoenix-like existence as squatters, who have no need to 'set [them]selves on fire' because the system of Apartheid does it for them by burning down the squatter camps to be rebuilt from the ashes, becomes glorious in its relentlessness. Who will hold out the longest? Mda suggests the squatters with his slightly heavy handed translation of the phoenix's red and gold feathers into the gold, black and green colours of the ANC flag.

However it is in the area of Nana's pathetic clutching at her childhood that the irony has most effect. Throughout the play she leads a double existence - on the one hand, rejecting premature adulthood, and on the other insisting on mothering all the babies doomed to die over and over again. It is only at the end of the play that she is able to find her *milieu* and it is in the role of a soldier alongside her father. She has rejected childhood and embraced adulthood. 'Take my doll with you,' she tells Mama. 'I'll get it when I come back home' (144). Irony has had the last word.

Mda, then, through his use of language, would appear to be not the hapless victim of the ravages of colonisation, but the victor. He has recolonised English and made it his servant. Through its medium he has not only contributed powerfully to his nation's liberation but he has returned it a better tool than he found it. He proves Tejani's claim that he, along with other African writers, has added 'virile form and substance' to the language (Tejani 1979: 40).

CONCLUSION

...then to the elements
Be free, and fare thou well!

The Tempest Vi

Do not ask me, mother, where they went
Tracks on watery dew-bells
as puny feet brushed the morning grass
have evaporated in the heat of the sun's kindness
and the hunting bloody-snouted hounds
have lost the trail

'The Return Of The Amasi Bird' - Daniel P. Kunene

It is now some eight years since the first production of *Joys Of War*, the last of Mda's plays under discussion. Since that date neither Mda nor South Africa has remained static. 1990 saw the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, a date considered by many as the end of Apartheid, although that did not end officially until April 1994 when democratic elections were held for the first time in South Africa's history. The government, elected to shape the country for the ensuing five years, is known as the Government of National Unity (GNU), giving minority parties entrenched positions for a set period in the new government - a guarantee which is written into political structures at almost every level. Because unity is not voluntary, there are major advantages to this system, lying mostly in the fact that opposition parties have

...the bargaining power of being able to threaten a walk-out if they disagree with decisions; yet, they would also have to bear the political cost of being seen to damage the concept of national unity...[while] the ruling party has no choice but to work alongside its erstwhile enemies if the government is to survive (Harber and Ludman 1995: 212).

The seven parties that won seats in the GNU represent, not only the majority ANC Party, but the extreme right (Freedom Front), the extreme left (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania) and the extreme nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party. The prophets of doom and gloom had always forecast the proverbial 'bloodbath' for South Africa but, to the surprise of many, the transition to democracy went relatively smoothly.

Mda, also, has made a smooth transition from playwright to novelist but, given his proven versatility, this is hardly unexpected or surprising. As has been seen, he considers himself first and foremost a painter, but he has been successful as a teacher, a dramaturge and a musician, as well as in all the branches of literature. From the literary point of view, Mda has published a collection of

poetry, two novels, four collections of plays, a text book and numerous academic articles.

While his poetry has received mixed responses, not so his two novels. To these, reaction has been unequivocally positive. As the title suggests, *Ways Of Dying*, published by Oxford University Press in 1995, covers countless ways that people die, ranging from politically related deaths, through murder to accidents and natural causes. Ostensibly a romance between professional mourner, Toloki, and 'home girl', Noria, who is part mystic/part pragmatist, the story moves between the rural mountain villages of the South African hinterland and a contemporary South African city - apparently Durban, although it is never named. By means of this framework, Mda is able to comment on squatter camps, senseless violence, negative and positive aspects of ethnicity, the traditional roles of men and women and, more covertly, an unscrupulous 'tribal chief' and his nationalistic political party - a thinly veiled critique of Chief Mangosotho Buthelezi and the almost exclusively Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party. Thus, many themes raised in the plays are developed in this novel. The most interesting aspect of Mda's creative powers to emerge, however, is the depth of character he is able to evince in this book, thus thoroughly refuting Albert Gérard's contention about the nature of characterisation in African writing. Toloki and Noria are by no means mere types but unusual, well-developed characters, not typical of but rooted in their ethnicity.

She Plays With The Darkness, published by Vivlia Publishers also in 1995, is set in present day Lesotho and reflects both the social and political changes, traditional rituals and customs of that country, as well as telling the unusual story of an opportunist brother, Radisene, and his enigmatic sister, Dikosha. The story, like two of the plays under discussion, is a commentary on the post-colonial experience of Lesotho, but it delves deeply and in detail into recent Lesothan political history, ranging from the coup and state of emergency in 1970 to the coup

of 1994 and afterwards. This story is more concerned with human relationships than any of Mda's other literary works and, once again, depth of character is fully realised. Radisene, clearly an unreliable person, is an unscrupulous egotist but he maintains an interiority which is clearly realised and well-developed. Working as an insurance agent, of sorts, who exploits the victims of motor accidents, he still manages to be an engaging and interesting character, maintaining relationships at various levels, despite his reprehensible actions. Dikosha remains aloof throughout the novel. A kind of mystic, she refuses all attempts at closeness from mere humans, preferring to be in communion with her 'people of the cave' - the figures in pre-historic cave paintings with whom she communicates through the medium of dance. Despite the efforts of Radisene and her ex-football-star suitor, Sorry My Darlie, to evoke some emotional response in her, Dikosha maintains a solipsistic, though complete, existence. Although her reserve is impenetrable, she also has an interiority that is motivated and three-dimensional. Again, neither Radisene nor Dikosha are types.

The reviewers have been complimentary and Keorapetse Kgositsile, reviewing for *The Sunday Independent*, pronounced Mda's novelistic success as equal with that of his success as a playwright. Other reviewers have been as complimentary and it is therefore not surprising that he won the 1995 Sanlam Literary Award for the second novel. However, despite two more recent literary awards for *Ways of Dying*, namely the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in November 1996 and a special mention in the CNA Literary Awards in the same year, his books have failed to reach the best seller lists in South Africa. Mda attributes this to the fact that

[b]lack people don't read books, and I am not talking here about the poorest people such as squatters. I refer to the very black intelligentsia who last paged through a book when they were still at varsity - a prescribed book. This makes things particularly difficult for black

writers, who may well find themselves looking at the white community for a market for their work. (Maswanganyi 1996: 22).

Although he is now taking a break from playwriting (see Appendix A), Mda has not been idle in that sphere. Apart from two published works, *Banned* and *The Final Dance* (not under discussion in this thesis), written before *Joys Of War*, Mda has had six plays staged in South Africa since. They are: *You Fool How Can The Sky Fall?*, *The Nun's Romantic Story*, *The Dying Screams Of The Moon*, *Broken Dreams*, *Love Letters* and *Dankie Auntie*. All but the last one were premiered in a festival of Mda's plays in Johannesburg in 1995 - the first two receiving the most critical acclaim. *Dankie Auntie*, a mini musical about the lives of street children, was premiered at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 1989 and is further proof of his versatility.

Only *The Nun's Romantic Story* has, so far, been published. This tells of the trial of a young nun for the murder of a man who massacred her family - an event that she witnessed at the age of nine. Two lawyers attempt to get her reprieved on a plea of diminished responsibility but she is determined against a verdict of innocence. The story is told through a series of semi-independent scenes, flashing backwards and forwards in the narrative, rather like evidence being given at a trial. The trigger event, the massacre, took place during, and as a result of, the political unrest in 1970 Lesotho so that, while the play breaks new ground as far as subject matter is concerned, the Catholic church and politics still provide a background for Mda's themes. As far as stage technique is concerned, the play is reminiscent of *Joys Of War* in that it utilises three acting areas where scenes are performed, either independently of one another, or where characters may interact or even move between areas.

Further to his post as dramaturge at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg, Mda, as writer in residence, runs writers' workshops and is a leading participator in the theatre's annual Community Theatre Festival which has been running for six years. Billed as an important platform for the 'discovery and nurturing of new South African talent', it presents 'a lively non-stop programme of dance, drama, comedy, poetry and song that reflects the development of creativity in the communities' (*The Citizen*, 14 May, 1996, p22).

His academic publications are numerous but his work in development communication is arguably the most important. He has been, as he says himself, a researcher in the field of communication and a practitioner of theatre-for-development and he has presented this valuable knowledge in the form of the book *When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre*. His research for the work took him to many countries where he became aware of the importance of the role of the artist in development communication. Mda explains this as the use of various methods of communication to enable communities to increase participation, achieve self-reliance, promote equality and close gaps of communication between social groups. Decentralisation of communication technologies, for example, is essential, he feels, if rural communities are to develop alongside urban ones, and are to gain access, not only to the messages produced by others, but to the means of producing and distributing their own messages. His prime interest, naturally, has been in the use of theatre as a communicator for the purpose of development. Interest in this area, he has found, has not been confined to the Third World; but he has focused on rural communities because they form the vast majority of the Third World and are the most disadvantaged and oppressed. His contribution with this book is, in his words: '[towards] a mutual body of knowledge in the fields of development communication and theatre-for-development, the application of which will lead to a process of dialogue' (Mda 1993: ix). He remains very concerned at the lack of

dialogue between urban and rural areas and also 'between the centre and the periphery in both urban and rural areas' (ix).

Theatre in South Africa today is still a concern for Mda, although he is not writing for it at present. In an article in 1995, he said: 'In South Africa, a society which has been, for centuries, characterised by racial segregation, political oppression, and economic exploitation, culture has always played a role both to reinforce these conditions and to challenge them' (38). He goes on to describe the role of theatre under these circumstances, but decries the tendency of the media to describe all political theatre as protest theatre. He defines protest theatre as, specifically, depicting

'a situation of oppression, but [it] does not go beyond that. It addresses itself to the oppressor, with the view of appealing to his or her conscience...a theatre of complaint...of weeping...of self-pity, of moralising, of mourning, and of hopelessness' (40). [See Appendix A]

A more positive form of theatre, which motivates people to help themselves, rather than appealing to the better side of the oppressor, he terms theatre-for-resistance. Ironically, the more effective theatre-for-resistance became, the more it moved away from the ordinary people in the townships and into the city theatres where the audience consisted largely of white liberals and blacks affluent enough to be able to travel to expensive venues. This, in turn, influenced theatre practitioners who aspired to city venues, which would mean white recognition and approval of their plays, with the resultant reshaping of the texts and production techniques for the export market. Eventually, many writers began to write purely for export - the original purpose of resistance writing having been overlooked. Yet Mda is the first to admit that exported productions did serve the cause of the oppressed as 'they informed the people abroad about the conditions in South Africa, and rallied for their solidarity...There is no doubt that the arts, especially theatre, played a very big role in the changes that finally happened in this country' (41).

Mda sees theatre now, in South Africa, as having an important role in reconciliation - but with a rider. He says:

[f]or we who were the victims of this holocaust, it is important that we do not forget. We owe it to future generations that what happened to us must never happen again. It must never be repeated by those who oppressed us before, and we ourselves must never assume the role of the oppressor (43).

As a seemingly tireless interpreter of the uniqueness of his culture, Mda, through his writing, depicts not only that struggle for a definition of self which is a hall-mark of post-colonial literature but, more significantly, the struggle for a control of one's own destiny, which is a necessary sequel to this selfhood. Ideals, whether personal or communal, are meaningless unless there is a conviction that they are attainable, not through the agency of others as a gift but through self-determination and self-reliance. Mda, through his plays, shows that all can - and should be - agents of their own destinies and that, whatever the cause, his is a powerful rallying voice.

APPENDIX A

IN CORRESPONDENCE WITH ZAKES MDA

1. *Now that you have begun writing fiction, does this mean an end to play writing?*

I have taken, at least, a five year break from serious playwriting. Not because there is nothing to write about, but because I am now working at three novels. I am concentrating more at prose because it is a genre I have just discovered, and I seem to enjoy myself more writing novels. I am still highly involved in theatre though, as a dramaturge at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg.

2. *If there will be more plays forthcoming do you see yourself tackling vastly different themes under the New South Africa or will you be extending and modifying old ground?*

Of course I'll tackle different themes as I have always done. I get my material from society. The discourse out there in society is what informs my plays. Last year [1995] there was a festival of my plays here in Johannesburg. Eight plays of mine were performed. Five of them were world premieres: *The Nun's Romantic Story*, *You Fool How Can The Sky Fall*, *The Dying Screams of the Moon*, *Broken Dreams*, and *Love Letters*. All these plays deal with different themes. Two of them are not even set in South Africa. Two of them don't deal with politics at all.

3. *Do you see protest writing as a thing of the past in the New South Africa?*

Protest writing came to an end in South Africa in the early 1970s. For an elaboration on this see 'Politics And The Theatre: Current Trends In South Africa' (seminar paper given at Southern African Research Program, Yale University, 1992, and referred to in Mda 1995). [However, as recently as December 1996, Mda's plays have been called 'protest' plays (Maswanganyi 22) - the division of plays into specific groups such as protest theatre and theatre for resistance is not universal. Many critics see plays which question the status quo, whether they call for action or not, as 'protest plays'.]

4. *Do you agree with Janabari when he says: "...our wars were not merely to replace a white face with a black one, but to change a system which exploits us...[w]hat we need is another war of freedom, Serge - a war which will put this land back into the hands of the people"? Is this true in terms of the New South Africa? Bearing in mind black South Africa's past, do you think the land was ever in the hands of the people?*

Yes, I agree with Janabari on this. It is not yet true in terms of the New South Africa, but attempts are being made to redress this. In the past, before colonialism, the land was in the hands of the people. Of course the injustices that exist in all feudal societies existed in pre-colonial South Africa. Janabari is not saying that we should return to some pre-colonial mode of production. That is impossible and

undesirable. All he wants is a democratic order, and I think South Africa is trying to move towards that.

5. You make it clear in your plays that you see armed rebellion as the only recourse to freedom when dialogue has failed. What are your views on violence vis a vis the Inkatha/ANC debacle at present? Is it possible to condone violence at some levels but not at others i.e. should passivism be selective or blanket?

I am not a pacifist. I believe it is important to defend yourself when you are cornered. I do not turn the other cheek. For three hundred years the oppressed people of South Africa waged different types of struggle. They took up arms to defend their land when the British and the Boers encroached. They were defeated and colonised. Then for decades they waged peaceful protest against various laws that were meant to oppress and exploit them. They were met with great violence by the racist state. They had no recourse but to take up arms to defend themselves and to fight for liberation. Now they have liberated themselves through various forms of struggle, including armed struggle. South Africa now is a democratic country where everyone is allowed to express herself/himself. There is no longer any need to take up arms because there are many other channels that each and every other citizen can use to express dissent. When we advocated an armed struggle it was because there were no other channels. We have the ballot now, no need for the bullet. We have a bill of rights that protects the minorities. However if someone were to subvert the democratic order, perhaps with the intention to overthrow it, then it would be necessary to defend it through force of arms. This is the reality of life. What is happening in Natal between the followers of Inkatha and the ANC has historical origins - some of which predate both the ANC and Inkatha. The contemporary political organisations have merely manipulated what already existed. There is also the work of the Third Force there which is trying to subvert the new democratic order. It is a complicated situation, that needs to be thoroughly researched from the faction fights of the last century to what is happening today. Of course I condemn that violence in Kwazulu/Natal, not because I am a pacifist, but because those people have many other channels and forums to resolve their differences. We have a democratic order now, they have no business to be fighting. In any case their conflict is self-destructive. Peaceful solution is always the best in any situation. All normal human beings would rather live in peace.

6. What are your feelings with regard to the concept of negritude? Have you any comment to make on Mphahlele's views on the subject?

I agree with Mphahlele totally!

7. Why are your plays so emphatically Brechtian in style? Was this a deliberate decision on your part or did it happen by chance? Did you find Brecht or did Brecht find you, as it were?

I am not that familiar with Brecht's plays. Up to now I have only read two of his plays, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, which I adapted for six characters in 1987 - long after I had written the plays you say are Brechtian - and *The Good Woman of*

Setzuan which I only read last week since it is going to be performed at the Market Theatre where I am dramaturge. Of course I have read a lot about Brecht's Epic Theatre, Alienation Effect etc. All along I was under the impression that my practice of theatre was different from his.

APPENDIX B

ZAKES MDA'S PUBLICATIONS

PLAYS:

COLLECTIONS:

We Shall Sing For The Fatherland: And Other Plays. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980.

The Plays Of Zakes Mda. Introd. Andrew Horn. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990.

And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses: Four Works. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993.

Four Plays. Compiled and Introd. by Zakes Mda. Florida S.A.: Vivlia, 1996.
(Four Plays by various writers, including *The Nun's Romantic Story* by Mda.)

INDIVIDUAL PLAYS:

Dead End, Dark Voices Ring, We Shall Sing For The Fatherland, The Hill, The Road, And The Girls In Their Sunday Dresses, Joys of War, Banned, The Final Dance.

UNPUBLISHED PLAYS:

The Dying Screams Of The Moon, You Fool How Can The Sky Fall, Love Letters, Broken Dreams, Dankie Auntie.

NOVELS:

She Plays With The Darkness. Florida, SA: Vivlia, 1995.

Ways Of Dying. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1995.

POETRY:

Bits Of Debris: The Poetry Of Zakes Mda. Lesotho: Thapama Books, 1986.

DRAMA:

When People Play People: Development Communication Through Theatre. London: Zed Books, 1993.

APPENDIX C

STATISTICS

Population

South Africa's 40,346,000 people is spread unevenly over its nine provinces. Northern Cape is the largest province (about 30% of the country) and the most sparsely populated (2.1 people per square kilometre). Gauteng - which includes both the Johannesburg and Pretoria areas has the highest population density (364.9 per square kilometre) and the smallest surface area (1.54 per cent).

KwaZulu/Natal is by far the most populous province, accounting for 21.2% of the population with a very dense 92.8 people per square kilometre. The other provinces are as follows: Western Cape 10.61% land, 28.1 people per square kilometre; Eastern Cape 13.91% land, 38.3 people per square kilometre; Free State 10.61 land, 21.4 people per square kilometre; Eastern Transvaal 6.43% land, 37.1 people per square kilometre; Northern Transvaal 10.11% land, 40.7 people per square kilometre; North West 9.53% land, 28.8 people per square kilometre.

Language

In South Africa as a whole, more people - 9.1 million - speak Zulu as a home language than any other, followed by Xhosa (7.4 million) and Afrikaans (5.9 million), North Sotho (3.7 million), English (3.4 million) and Setswana (3.1 million). In the Western and Northern Cape, the most widely understood language is Afrikaans; in the Free State, Sesotho; in kwaZulu/Natal and Eastern Transvaal, Zulu. The pattern is not so clear cut in the other provinces - the most widely understood language by a small majority in Northern Transvaal is North Sotho, and in Gauteng, Zulu.

Literacy and Education

A literacy study, done in 1991, used the yardstick of people 13 years and older with at least a Standard Five (primary school final year) education. The findings were as follows: Western Cape - 71.9%; Gauteng - 69%; Northern Cape - 67.6%; Free State - 60%; Eastern Cape - 59%; kwaZulu/Natal - 58.7%; North West - 55.8%; Eastern Transvaal - 54.6%; Northern Transvaal - 52.7%. The total literacy rate for the country of South Africa is 61.4%.

The pattern of provincial inequality is repeated in education. The Western Cape and Gauteng are relatively well resourced and educated, along with the sparsely populated Northern Cape. KwaZulu/Natal, Eastern Cape, Northern Transvaal and North West have low levels of literacy, high pupil:teacher ratios, and large numbers of children not attending school at all.

Anton Harber and Barbara Ludman (Eds.). *A-Z of South African Politics: The Essential Handbook 1995*. UK: Penguin, 1995.

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