

**PERSPECTIVES OF TRAGEDY IN BLACK SOUTH
AFRICAN DRAMA: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED
PLAYS BY ZAKES MDA, MBONGENI NGEMA AND
MAISHE MAPONYA**

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If after every tempest come such calms, may the winds blow till they have
wakened death,
And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas, Olympus- high.
Othello (William Shakespeare).

DEDICATION

To my late mother Nosicelo Pheto

How I wish you were still here in body and soul to share the joys of motherhood; and to enjoy the fruits of your son's toil.

ABSTRACT

Key words

Tragedy, Aristotelian tragedy, Shakespearean tragedy, South African drama, Mda, Maponya, Ngema.

This dissertation focuses on the nature and manifestation of tragedy within African experience in selected plays written by black South African playwrights. The plays under discussion are We Shall Sing for the Fatherland (1973) by Zakes Mda, The Hungry Earth (1978) by Maishe Maponya, and Sarafina (1985) by Mbongeni Ngema.

The many conflicting statements regarding the “death” and existence of tragedy in contemporary drama lead one to ask the following two fundamental questions: Can there be tragedy in contemporary South African drama and what structural devices are there to account for the manifestation of this elusive phenomenon?

This dissertation works towards defining the concept of an African vision of tragedy by examining the nature and form in which tragedy manifests itself in South African drama. Secondly, it considers the extent to which this phenomenon is similar or different from conventional elements and structural forms of Western tragic drama.

This dissertation argues that there exists a distinct and viable vision of tragedy in black South African drama which can be called African. It contends that dramatic texts do not all have the same degree of profundity of tragic vision because their subject matter, techniques and depth of artistic exploration differ, and vary according to their cultural roots. The basis on which old forms of tragedy are used to interpret the version of contemporary tragedy is therefore called into question, and as a result, the analysis of structural forms

and thematic preoccupations of contemporary tragedy needs a set of criteria different from that of Euro-American drama.

The portrayal of a tragic hero as a common man whose tragic stature is measured in terms of his ability to feel, to be aware of forces closing down on him in The Hungry Earth, the manifestation of tragedy as generated not only by individual volition, but by an economic structure established by those in power in We Shall Sing for the Fatherland, and, finally, the mingling of tragicomic elements of entertainment and communication to accommodate both tragedy and comic elements without destroying the integrity of either in Sarafina, indicate a definite development and imitation of tragedy from emphasis on form to meaning. By asking a question like: "What constitutes tragedy in black South African drama, and how are such processes represented and modelled in the selected plays?" this dissertation enters into a dialogue of global and local perspectives of tragedy in order to contribute to our understanding of an African, and specifically South African, concept of tragedy firmly rooted in its socio-cultural context.

OPSOMMING

Sleutel terme

Tragedie, Aristotelie tragedie, Shakespeare tragedie, Suid Afrikaanse drama, Mda, Maponya, Ngema.

Hierdie studie fokus op die aard en manifestasie van tragedie in die Afrika-belwenis van uitgesoekte dramatekste deur swart Suid-Afrikaanse dramaturge. Die dramas wat bespreek word is We Shall Sing in the Fatherland (1973) deur Zakes Mda, The Hungry Earth (1987) deur Maishe Maponya en Sarafina (1985) deur Mbongeni Ngema.

Die baie weersprekende stellings oor die "dood" en "lewe" van tragedie in hedendaagse dramas noop ons om die volgende twee belangrike vrae te vra: Kan daar tragedie wees in hedendaagse Suid- Afrikaanse dramas? en, watter strukturele middele is beskikbaar om die manifestasie van so 'n ontwykende verskynsel te verantwoord?

In die studie word daar gepoog om die konsep van 'n Afrika-siening van tragedie te definieer deur die bestudering van die aard en vorm waarin tragedie gemanifesteer word in Suid-Afrikaanse dramas. In die tweede instansie bestudeer die studie ook die mate waartoe die verskynsel ooreenkom of verskil van die konvensionele elemente en strukturele vorme van Westerse tragiese dramas./tragedies.

Hierdie studie argumenteer dat daar 'n definitiewe en aanvaarbare visie is van tragedie in die swart Afrikaanse drama wat as Afrika-drama ervaar kan word. Die studie gee toe dat dramatekste nie almal dieselfde graad van diepte van tragiese visie het nie aangesien hul inhoud, tegnieke en die diepte van artistieke ondersoek verskil en ook wissel volgens hul kulturele begroning. Die manier waarop ouer vorme van tragedie gebruik word om nuwere

weergawes van hedendaagse tragedie te interpreteer word dus bevestigend en gevolglik is 'n stel kriteria nodig vir die analise van strukturele vorme en tematiese belange van hedendaagse tragedie wat verskil; van Euro-Amerikaanse drama.

'n Definitiewe ontwikkeling en nabootsing van tragedie, waar die klem verskuif word van vorm na betekenis in die uitbeelding van die tragiese held word bepaal op grond van

- ❖ die siening van die tragiese held as gewone mens wie se tragiese natuur gemeet word aan sy vermoë om te voel en om bewus te wees van die magte wat om hom inwerk in The Hungry Earth,
- ❖ die verwesenliking van die tragedie wat nie net deur individuele wilsuiting teweeggebring is nie maar deur 'n ekonomiese struktuur wat gegenerer word deur die maghebbers in We Shall Sing for the Fatherland, en ten laaste,
- ❖ die vermenging van tragi-komiese elemente van vermaak en kommunikasie om beide tragedie en kommunikasie binne die tragedie te akkommodeer sonder om die integriteit van die twee te vertroebel soos in Sarafina.

Die nabootsing van vorm en tema sedert Aristoteles tot Shakespeare dra by tot die problematiese om 'n tragedie tot 'n vasgestelde era, vorm en betekenis te beperk. Deur vrae te stel soos: Wat behels tragedie in Afrika drama? en Hoe word sulke prosesse verteenwoordig en gemoduleer in gekose dramas? tree hierdie studie in dialoog met globale en plaaslike perspektiewe van tragedie ten einde 'n bydrae te lewer tot 'n beter begrip van 'n Afrika, en spesifiek Suid-Afrikaanse konsep van tragedie soos gewortel in die sosio-kulturele konteks daarvan.

FOCUS AREA

SPACE AND IDENTITY

This study falls within the ambit of Potchefstroom University's Research Focus Area: Languages and Literature in the South African Context. Essentially, it explores the concept of African tragedy as reflected in contemporary black South African texts, a problem which to date has not been tackled in any meaningful way. The study might well be incorporated into the Space and Identity Project, in that it participates in the dialogue between local and global texts, so as to enhance our understanding of the figurations and discursive limits of tragic identity and narrative in the contemporary South African context. Secondly, it is likely that the study will be incorporated into the research scheme within the Project, "Constructing a Cultural and Literary Identity: The Case of South Africa". In its using the keys of Western tragic drama to unlock the door(s) of African tragedy – which may well open on to quite unexpected terrain – it enters the dialogue of global and local in order to contribute to our understanding of an African, and specifically South African, concept of tragedy. It asks a central question within the Project: "How do stories and modelling that people use compare across space and time?", in this case, South African and Greek/Renaissance tragedy. It posits, moreover, that disrupted space, specifically the socio-political context, functions in black South African drama in much the same way as did cosmic whim and disturbance in Western tragedy, and hence locality is as essential to the nature and function of our contemporary drama as are the Aristotelian unities of time and space.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations of the titles of the plays have been used:

THE: The Hungry Earth

WSF: We Shall Sing for the Fatherland

SFN: Sarafina

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Tragedy is then not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions. It is not the case of interpreting this series by reference to a permanent and unchanging human nature. Rather, the varieties of tragic experience are to be interpreted by reference to the changing conventions and institutions. The universalist character of most tragic theory is then at the opposite pole from our necessary interest (Williams, 1966a:46).

Elder Olson, in the book entitled Tragedy and the Theory of Drama asked the following questions: "Do we have tragedy in modern times? If so, what sort is it?" (1961:237). These questions focus our attention on the questions asked by many critics and writers, for example George Steiner and Raymond Williams, whether or not contemporary drama is capable of producing tragedy, as well as on the nature of tragedy. Taking these questions as its starting point, this study focuses on the nature and form of tragedy as it manifests itself in South African drama.

The relationship tragedy bears to contemporary drama in general remains an elusive and problematic phenomenon. In his essay, "The Modern Temper and Tragic Drama", Krutch makes the following remark: "We read tragedies now-a-days, but we do not write them" (quoted in Bredvold, 1963:338). Two observations from Krutch are deduced: first, Krutch simply attributes the lack of tragedies in modern drama to the reason that "we do not write them", secondly, Krutch seems to suggest that our inability to write tragedies leaves us with no option other than to read old tragedies (especially the great tragedies from the Greek and Shakespearean literary eras). It would seem from these views that tragedy is non-existent in contemporary drama, but contrasting opinions prove otherwise.

Long before the decline of serious drama and theatre during the years of protest and revolutions in Africa, the relationship tragedy bears to South African drama had been a complex phenomenon. The complexity arises from the fact that tragedy in South African drama, contrary to Western drama, is not a widespread or a developed form. One of the main reasons why this is so can be ascribed to the fact that tragedy as a dramatic art in South African remains blurred and overshadowed by many years of a particular awareness as portrayed in Greek and Shakespearean tragedies, and it is for this reason that some critics argue that contemporary drama is incapable of tragedy. Finnegan further adds that dramatic performances in African drama “never seem to involve tragedy in the normal sense, for the events and characters are depicted as comedy, and treated more or less realistically, even cynically” (1970:516).

Given these observations, the main questions that this study will focus on, are: what is it that makes contemporary black South African drama incapable of tragedy if the preoccupations of its playwrights have for many years been tragic? Can it be generalised that South African drama is incapable of tragedy on the basis that it manifests itself in structural forms different from the elements of conventional tragedy?

In looking at African drama in general, it must be understood that African plays, like their Greek counterparts, were primarily written for performance in ritual and religious ceremonies rather than for purposes of literary studies. As a result, these plays use a collage of forms as diverse as “dialogue and mime, song and tableau, sounds and dance” (Peterson, 1990:237). A relevant play to mention here is Mbongeni Ngema’s play Sarafina!. In this play, form, content and theme are interwoven and portrayed through various devices and techniques almost to the exclusion of the tragic seriousness characteristic of conventional tragedy.

Furthermore, unlike Western drama, African drama has not been forced into a physical shape of form and content. Banham (1976:1) sees it as “functional,”

“free and flexible.” For example, the classical plot pattern of introduction, middle and end is not observed in Maishe Maponya’s The Hungry Earth. Instead, the play seems to be a fragmentation of five different scenes, with each designed to present a landscape of industrial exploitation and human oppression. Each scene depicts aspects of the lives of migrant labourers, poor working conditions in the mining industry, with the emphasis on meaning rather than form.

To determine more closely the nature, form and manifestation of tragedy in selected works written by black South African playwrights, this study will attempt to illustrate that the decline of tragic tension, particularly in South African drama, can be attributed to the evolution and use of a variety of devices and techniques suitable to a particular era. The underlying premise is that the decline of the tragic tension which is characterised by the heroes of high moral and material standing, the use of ordinary man¹ as a tragic hero, the use of tragi-comic devices and techniques, the disappearance of verse, as well as the absence of heightened diction, is a technique in contemporary drama and not an indication of “death” as argued by some of the critics. It follows from these observations that the generic structural forms of tragedy have evolved throughout history, and that this evolution has signalled a significant change in the structure, form and content of contemporary tragedy.

My argument will confine itself to the analysis of black South African plays for the simple reason that an African or South African notion of tragedy remains directly related to the roots of African culture, and as Banham argues “not bound by the preoccupations and preconditions that have done so much to limit contemporary European drama” (1976:3). I shall provide a theoretical framework on the nature and form of tragedy. Much of my theoretical framework takes its cue from Raymond Williams’s assertion that “new kinds of relations and new kinds of law, to connect with and interpret our actual suffering, are the terms of contemporary tragedy” (1966a:5), and that the “universalist character of tragic theory is then at the opposite pole from our

necessary interest” (1966a:46). Williams’s work is relevant to this study, for it demonstrates the need to interpret the tragic experiences by reference to the changing conventions in relation to a particular era and context.

The argument will develop as follows: in the second chapter, I shall attempt an overview of various working definitions of tragedy as defined by Aristotle (cited in Lucas, 1965:25); Williams (1966a & 1996b); Sewall (1980), Orr (1981) and Sofola (1986). I shall argue that tragedy has changed and developed since the days of Aristotle, and that its mutations contribute to the difficulty of confining tragedy to a fixed meaning and structural form.

The third chapter discusses the play The Hungry Earth (1978) by Maishe Maponya and also attempts to contextualize the definition of a tragic hero within Greek, Shakespearean and modern tragedy. It is argued that a tragic hero in contemporary drama is not only a man of high moral and material standing, but that he can also be a common man whose tragic stature is measured in terms of his ability to feel, to be aware of forces closing down on him.

Chapter four analyses what constitutes a tragic theme by examining the following questions with regard to Zakes Mda’s We Shall Sing for the Fatherland (1973): What is our attitude towards the hero’s suffering, his problems and frustrations, his line of action, and how do we react to his realisation that he is about to die? It is argued that tragedy in this play is generated not only by individual volition, but also by an economic structure established by those in power.

Chapter five explores the performance styles and diction in Mbongeni Ngema’s Sarafina! (1985). The emphasis is on how Ngema brings together diverse elements of entertainment and communication, including dance, music, song and praise poems with the effect that the tragic sting embedded

¹ The word “man” in this dissertation is not gender-specific as it refers to a human being irrespective of gender.

in the suffering, torture and execution of the youth is subsumed by the comical presentation of these events through entertainment devices.

The final chapter, chapter six, will conclude the argument by pointing out that South African drama is capable of producing tragedy in forms which to a greater or lesser extent resonate with conventional forms. All three plays embody tragic aspects, but each play also emphasises a particular aspect over and above the others.

In the studies completed on tragedy in contemporary drama, the focus has been directed mainly at whether or not tragedy as a dramatic art is possible in contemporary drama. In order to determine the sense in which tragedy in black South African drama could be studied, it would be useful to give a concise survey of critical judgements on the debate surrounding the possibility or the death of tragedy in contemporary drama. The findings of such a survey shed light on the content, form and manifestation of tragedy, and the reasons why tragedy seems an illusive and complex phenomenon in contemporary drama. However, as it is not the aim of this study to enter into complex debates surrounding the existence of the "death" of tragedy, therefore only relevant issues are discussed and the study is limited to a survey of tragedy in contemporary dramatic works only. The survey is followed by a discussion of theoretical underpinnings of the African version of tragedy using the works of G. Steiner (1961), R. Williams (1966a & 1966b), K. Agovi (1985), and Z. Sofola (1986).

George Steiner emerges as one of the leading proponents of the 'death' of tragedy in contemporary drama. In his seminal book, The Death of Tragedy, Steiner totally rejects the possibility of tragedy in contemporary drama and states that "tragedy is indeed dead" (1961:351). Amongst other reasons given for the death of tragedy is the decline of an organic worldview, as well as its "attendant context of mythological, symbolic and ritual reference" (Steiner, 1961:296). For example, tragedy in modern times does not only extol heroism and heroic achievement of a man of high moral and social standing as

depicted in Shakespearean tragedy, but also concerns itself with people of ordinary stature. Furthermore, tragedy in contemporary drama does not have its belief firmly rooted in the life of objective reality which has confined tragedy to a systematic form and course of action.

According to J. L. Styan (1962:176), the basis of Steiner's argument is firmly rooted in a long tradition of European civilisation which confines the elements by which we define tragedy to static and received rules. This view rejects any notion of tragedy that deviates from conventional elements of tragedy such as verse in preference to prose, heightened diction, kings and princes as heroes, plot leading to disaster, and an action in which a spectator is edified by fear and pity. For Steiner, therefore, anything that deviates from the confines of Aristotelian conception of tragedy threatens the very existence of tragedy.

Raymond Williams presents an equally strong and contrasting view of tragedy in contemporary drama to that of Steiner. While it is evident that Steiner rejects tragedy and does not seem to make sufficient allowance for the effects of social changes, Williams argues that contemporary drama produces tragedy in technically different forms from that of conventional tragedy. In his book Modern Tragedy, Williams states: "Yet tragedy, because of its central importance, commonly attracts the fundamental beliefs and tensions of a period, and tragic theory is interesting mainly in this sense that though the shape of a particular culture is often deeply realised ... tragedy is not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions" (1966a:45-46). Important to note here is that Williams rejects the "universalist character of most tragic theory" and emphasises the influence of culture on tragedy and tragic theory. He argues that the received ideas of tragedy no longer describe our experience for such ideas of tragedy in their ordinary form exclude the tragic experience which is social. The link between tragedy and culture surfaces, and man is seen to be the embodiment of his society in which tragedy is seen as a "response to social disorder" (Williams, 1966b:63). If we accept that tragedy in modern times is a response to social disorder, then, Williams argues, the response will not always be direct and the

disorder will appear in many forms, making it difficult to articulate tragedy to a "single and permanent kind of fact."

Sewall (1980:83) supports Williams and states that the tragic "spirit never dies, but it goes underground to find sporadic expressions in lesser forms, or on the periphery of the form currently in fashion". Williams anticipates Sewall's point and observes that to say that contemporary drama is incapable of tragedy is to "ignore the genuine achievement in tragic literature in a form other than that of the classical tragedy poets," and then in so doing is to "admit a strange and particular bankruptcy, which no rhetoric of tragedy can finally hide". The underlying premise here is that tragedy is never static and inflexible, but that it is susceptible to change brought about by the transformations of literary art in relation to reality and representations relevant to changes in a particular era. As a result, new elements have been introduced into the traditional idea of tragedy, and these elements have effected a shift of emphasis from structure to meaning, and from "tragedy in its formal aspect to the essence of tragedy" (Draper, 1980:202).

After a brief discussion of the contrasting views on whether or not contemporary drama is capable of serious tragedy, the central question remains: How far has African tragic drama succeeded in moulding its form and content to suit the Greek and Shakespearean temperament, and can we arrive at a conception of an African vision of tragedy?

The period of transition after the nineteenth century signalled a significant change in the structure, form and thematics of twentieth century drama. The various movements in the theatre culminated in a revival of dramatic forms and theories of what constitutes tragedy in modern drama. With these changes having occurred, the question remains: what tendencies are now to be noticed in the structure and form of modern African tragic plays?

An important article regarding the viability of a special African variety of tragedy is Conradie's "Debates Surrounding an Approach to African Tragedy"

(1996:25-64). Conradie states that “critics differ about the best approach to tragedy in Africa”, and he distinguishes between the two main groups of critics of African tragedy. The first group comprises what he calls the “metaphorical” critics like Sofola and Soyinka. These critics emphasise the role of the hero and advocate a concept of tragedy which fits in with the African worldview. In her article “The Concept of Tragedy in African Experience” (1986:58-76), Zulu Sofola firmly believes that there could be a concept of tragedy which could be called “African”, and argues that Euro-American critics have turned Africans away from their own metaphorical speculations.

Furthermore, Sofola sees cosmology as a key to understanding the vision of African tragedy. She states that tragedy as a moral action occurs in a world with clear definitions of the essence of life, man’s place in it, the moral codes that should guide the members of the communities, and man’s general relationship to his creator (1986:60). Sofola (1986:60) calls this cosmology a “world whose ethics derive from the moral consciousness of the group.” Tragedy, therefore, is defined not only as any human suffering, but also as “that which arises in the process of executing a well-intentioned moral action” (Sofola, 1986:64) as it shall be illustrated in WSF and SFN. The emphasis is on volitional involvement where the character believes in the morality and desirability of his objective. In African cosmology, man is seen as a being-in-relation, and any action which jeopardises the common good for personal and selfish reasons is objected to.

On the other hand, Joyifo, one of the Marxist critics in the second group identified by Conradie believes in a kind of tragedy in which the conflict is not waged between individuals but among social classes. Maishe Maponya’s THE is a relevant example of this class struggle. Emphasis here is on the idea that tragedy does not only concentrate on the emotions and struggles of one character, but that it should also depict the class struggle (Conradie, 1996:26).

The distinguishing of indigenous and foreign elements of tragedy in African drama is often very difficult to achieve. There exists strong evidence that tragedy in African theatre borrowed ideas and forms from Greece and Europe, and as a result, critics have always found it necessary to read into African tragedies interpretations of foreign inspiration and foreign technical expertise. However, this does not mean that there is no new corpus of texts that are wholly African in motivation and vision. It is for this reason, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, that I shall rely heavily on conventional elements of tragedy as perceived during the Greek and Renaissance periods to unlock the doors of contemporary tragedy.

Another distinguishing and unique aspect of research on black South African drama that relates to tragedy contends that studies of tragedy in South African drama are likely to fail if they do not take into consideration the fact that there is a cultural component to the perception of tragedy in African theatre. This view shared by both modern Western and African critics and writers is predominantly elaborated upon in Kofi Agovi's article "Is There An African Vision of Tragedy in Contemporary African Theatre?" (1985:55-74). It seems that there is a certain willingness in African culture to view culture as a matrix of man and society within a larger context of the observable universe.

CHAPTER II

WESTERN AND AFRICAN VISION OF TRAGEDY: WORKING DEFINITIONS

This chapter first provides a brief discussion of the concepts and terms relevant to tragedy. Secondly, it will provide a general overview of tragedy in context, i.e. the vision of tragedy and its historical development during the three periods, namely, Greek, Renaissance and Modern period. Finally, an attempt will be made to give a theoretical account of tragedy in order to arrive at a definition of tragedy in contemporary drama.

In indicating the dimensions of tragedy in tragic drama, I shall be mindful of Unamuno's warning that:

tragedy is not a matter, ultimately, to be systematised ... it is the sense of an ancient evil, of the mystery of human suffering, of the gulf between aspirations and achievement. It colours the artist's tragic vision of life and gives his works peculiar shade and tone. It speaks, not the language of systematic thought, but through symbolic action, symbol and figure, diction and image, sound and rhythm. Such a recognition should precede any attempt to talk 'systematically' about tragedy, while not denying the value of the attempt itself (cited in Sewall, 1963:119-120).

Tragedy in contemporary drama does not follow a systematic and prescriptive form. It combines language, diction, song and imagery and symbolism in a manner different from that of Aristotle and Shakespeare. In short, contemporary tragedy is descriptive rather than prescriptive and form seems to be secondary to content and function.

Tragedy does not occur in a vacuum. In order to deal with the various visions of tragedy in drama, it is necessary to define the "world" or "cosmos" within

which tragedy occurs. In the essay titled "The Tragic Forum", Richard B. Sewall emphasises the relationship tragedy bears to the world, man and to society. He states that "tragedy makes distinguishable and characteristic affirmations as well as denials about the cosmos and man's relation to it; the nature of the individual and his relation to himself; and the individual society" (1963:121). Tragedy, therefore, concerns itself with the existence of man in a society within a broader world.

Tragedy, as a result, relates to the world in which man functions because "man's actions have meaning or significance only in terms of reference according to which he acts or feels" (Bopape, 1994:42). Simpson seems to have a point when she asserts that

one can define (man) in terms of his physical or spiritual nature, look at him in relation to his own identity, his family, his society, his laws, his beliefs, his religion, his country, or his customs. And he can be identified in negative, positive, or neutral terms. But if, for example, we say he is a good man, then we are comparing him against a standard of reference from which we regard him, or in terms of the standard of some other world (quoted in Bopape, 1994:42).

The relationship between man, world and tragedy is further given emphasis by Sofola when she states that

Man, as a sentient and moral being, is puzzled by the mysterious and inexplicable realities of life. But due to his restlessness and insistence on knowing the final truth and ultimate realities, he thrusts himself into a probing action whose repercussions find him at variance with his initial purpose. He is consequently caught in a web which seems to be of his own making, while at the same time, the making of a mind outside his own control and comprehension. He eventually finds himself at the mercy of a world which inspired him to quest, but which repudiates him so severely for the same. Man thus finds himself propelled and constrained to assert himself for his own will to exist, even at the expense of the wellbeing and the very life of man (Sofola, 1986:59-60).

A point to emphasise from the above-mentioned quotations by Simpson and Sofola is the realisation that tragedy occurs in the world in which man lives and functions. Therefore, any study about tragedy is never complete if it does not make certain affirmations or denial about the (1) the cosmos and man's relation to it; (2) the nature of the individual and his relation to himself; and (3) the individual society. These three aspects will be illustrated in the discussion of the nature and the manifestation of tragedy in THE, WSF, and SFN.

The term "world" is difficult to define. The difficulty, among others, arises from the fact that various cultural developments have taken place and still continue to occur in societies. Any definition of the "world" therefore depends on a culture and world-view of a particular society. For the purpose of this study, the "world" is vaguely defined as an ordered system of different societies based on certain norms and values. As a matter of fact, norms and values are never static because of changes in societies, and these changes result in the term "world" acquiring new meanings. This implies that the nature of tragedy varies according to different world-views in a particular society within a particular world.

The "world" is divided into societies, and societies are governed by laws, whether scientific, divine or natural. These laws are thought to have an effect on the source as well as the cause of tragedy resulting in a conflict between man and his god (Greek tragedy); between man and another man (Shakespearean tragedy); and between man and society (contemporary tragedy). Simpson describes the conflict as follows:

the society in which the real nature of the (laws) is misunderstood or misinterpreted, in which the (laws) are rejected or violated, or are inadequate for the needs of some or all its members, could precipitate tragedy within itself or within the lives of some of its members (cited in Bopape, 1994:42).

The point worth noting in the description is that man exists and functions within a world, and as man struggles to achieve his objectives he violates the laws of his world and, as a result, tragedy occurs. In Western drama such a tragedy often resulted in death whereas in African drama, tragedy is characterised by constant pain and by the suffering of an individual or of the whole society. The point I am making here is that the "world" and its governing laws have an influence on the nature and form of tragedy. It is evident from the above discussion that tragedy affirms a world or cosmos of which man is a meaningful part.

In the following section the influence of different world-views on the perception of tragedy is discussed. A brief background on Greek, Elizabethan and Modern cosmology will set my discussion into perspective.

In his article "Third-World Drama: Soyinka and Tragedy", Andrew Gurr gives a brief summary of the Greek cosmology. Gurr (1980:14) states that Greek tragedy rested or was moulded on a world-view that was essentially static. While he says that the pace of social change in Greek society was going at a snail's pace to the extent that it was almost considered imperceptible, he cautions, however, that this does not mean that individuals were not made to change, but that what was evident is that the whole structure of society remained static. Taking this information into consideration, one realises the reason why Greek tragedy is described as "descriptive rather than dialectical" (Gurr, 1980:14). In a society where there is little or basically no social activity man's existence calls for "explanations rather than revolutionary change" (Gurr, 1980:14).

In the article "Is There An African Vision of Tragedy in Contemporary African Theatre?", Kofi Agovi sees the relation between the gods and man as a necessary part of existence. According to Agovi, Greek cosmology viewed existence as a "complex union of gods and human beings" (1985:57). Orr describes the Greek mode of tragedy as "basically divine" (1981:xii). Man, it seems, was allowed little control over his destiny and the gods or

supernatural forces were the controlling agents of human life. Greek tragedy, according to Agovi, existed to “explain the ways of the gods to man as well as to describe the powers operative in a static, unchanging world” (1985:57).

Similar to the African belief Greek tragedy centres on fate, destiny and human weakness. A common belief was held that man’s destiny was predetermined and that man had no control over it. In order to avoid tragedy, man should obey rather than challenge his destiny, and any attempt to go against his destiny was serious enough to trigger suffering and ultimately death. Divine laws were not to be transgressed and any effort to appease the god was key to the avoidance of tragedy. Sofola supports this view and suggests that “it is the duty of the individual to seek to abide by the content of his destiny rather than to fight it. The tragic figure in African experience is not compelled to fight against his destiny because it is assumed that if he was given an opportunity to participate in the making of it, he naturally would have chosen a good one” (1986:64).

The transition from the Greek to the Renaissance² era of tragic drama is marked by significant differences between the two world-views. Although similar in many ways, the emphasis in Renaissance drama was transferred from the divine to the human. There was a strong urge towards questioning and trying to find answers to the mysteries of the world. Tragedy grappled with the existential question: “What is man?” or “What does it mean to be?” By asking these questions, man was seen as a questioner in the midst of his suffering as he struggles to assert his existence.

Orr describes Renaissance tragedy as “predominantly noble” (1981:xii). Man was seen as basically “good” and “noble”, and by revolting against his traditional order, man isolates himself from his privileged role. Similar to African drama, man’s death impacted on the whole society, and as Agovi states:

if man suffers, his society is bound to suffer. If man is unstable, his society is bound to be unstable. For man is a microcosm of his world and society: he is an embodiment of his community, an entity whose welfare is inseparable from that of the total community (1985:72).

There exist similarities between the Greek and Renaissance tragic drama. A common denominator between the two tragic periods in drama is the cultural component which extols heroism and heroic achievement. For both Aristotle and Shakespeare, tragic heroes had to be characters of high moral and social standing. It was argued that only men of heroic stature carried the potential for a truly tragic tension in drama, and therefore, tragic heroes were kings, princes and people of noble status. This view seems contradictory to the basic norms and values of contemporary society. Modern Western society believes in the equality of all human beings irrespective of race, class or religion. It extols the better organisation of man rather than emphasising the nature of man. Amongst other things, it seeks to improve the human conditions of man or society since man is not seen as a separate entity from his society. Therefore, heroes in the modern world could be people of ordinary status who are pursuing a noble or a moral course.

For the purpose of brevity and fear of repeating the same information over again, differences with regard to form, structure and subject matter between Aristotelian and Shakespearean tragedy will be discussed in conjunction with the nature and form of the vision of African tragedy.

An important key to understanding the vision of African tragedy is offered by Zulu Sofola's article "The Concept of Tragedy in African Experience" (1986:59-76). Sofola emphasises cosmology as key to understanding the vision of African tragedy. Sofola (1986:60) states that tragedy as a moral action occurs in a world with clear definitions of the essence of life, man's place in it, the moral codes that guide the members of communities, and man's general relationship to his creator. Sofola calls this cosmology a "world

² Greek and Renaissance tragic drama will be discussed using Aristotelian and

whose ethics derive from the moral consciousness of the group” (1986:60). Tragedy, therefore, is defined not only as any suffering, but also as “that which arises in the process of executing a well intentioned moral action” (Sofola, 1986:64). The emphasis here is on volitional involvement where the character believes in the morality and desirability of his objective.

African cosmology emphasises a close relation between man and community or society. Man is seen as being-in-relation and any action which jeopardises the common good for personal and selfish reasons is objected to. African cosmology maintains that the behaviour of every member of the community is of concern to all, and in this communalistic set-up, disloyalty is held to endanger the fabric of both society and the spirit of the departed³. In other words, the will of the group must override the interests of the individual because the individual is not greater than his community- a point explored in some detail in Sarafina! and We Shall Sing for the Fatherland.

Another distinguishing and unique aspect of research on African tragedy requires discussion. One may say that studies of tragedy in South Africa are likely to fail if they do not take into consideration the fact that there is a cultural component to the perception of tragedy, especially in African theatre. This view shared by Western and African critics alike, is predominantly elaborated upon in Kofi Agovi’s article “Is There An African Vision of Tragedy in Contemporary African Theatre?” (1985:55-74). Agovi relates tragedy to man’s cultural life. There is no doubt that culture gives tragedy “a sense of place and values through its reflection of real life concerns” in life (Agovi, 1985:73).

He relates tragedy to man’s cultural life and asserts that:

a universal tragic vision cannot exist in a vacuum; nor
is it an intellectual abstraction unrelated to the reality

Shakespearean concepts of tragedy consecutively.

³ “Departed means “deceased”. In African cosmology, there exists a belief that the deceased (ancestors) play a role in shaping up the destiny of the living people. The link between man and the gods as in Greek drama, is considered to be extremely important.

of man's cultural life. Tragedy must always define those who espouse its vision. It must reflect their real life concerns and involvement; it must embody their fundamental assumptions about life and existence, including their attempts to preserve the integrity of their culture. In other words, a tragic vision that has no sense of place and values, or has not been stamped with the authority of a particular culture, cannot realise the universality that is part and parcel of its range of vision. It is in this sense that the tragic vision that emerges from contemporary theatre may be described as African (Agovi, 1985:73).

Ohaeto supports Agovi and argues that the tragic form of drama takes "material from the culture of a people" (1982:8). Culture here is seen as a matrix of man and society seen within a larger context to the observable universe. For example, culture in African context is conditioned by "a deep seated respect for life, its continuity and survival" (Agovi, 1985:57). For reasons already discussed, the cultural component of tragedy in African cosmology varies according to changes in world-views and in individual communities. This means that tragedy in a particular community may differ from another community according to the norms and values in that community. Since the individual's nature is unstable, and the fact that tragedy depicts the individual's struggle, tragedy will manifest itself in different forms.

The sense in which tragedy in South African drama is studied is uniquely different. According to Ohaeto (1982:11), South African drama concerns itself with themes and subject matter of apartheid. The selected plays under discussion explore the problem of freedom and equality. The themes of suffering, pain and death coat the dialogues, actions and characterisations. In THE by Maishe Maponya, technique seems not to be the most essential factor because the dehumanising factors are terrible. Loots says that THE deals with "issues around labour and apartheid" and in the play Maponya seems to "focus less on creating character and linear plot, focusing rather on using theatre and the process of performance as a vehicle for transporting a political message" (1997:146).

Similarly, in WSF Mda's portrays his characters as types rather than as fully developed persons. Duggan says that the main reason Mda is shying away from portraying his characters as individuals is because "the individual is not his subject: his subject is people in groups or society" (1997:28). I agree with Duggan that by employing this style, Mda has "succeeded in avoiding the inwardness in his characters for fear of clouding the main purpose of analysing society" (Duggan, 1997:28). Ohaeto claims that drama from South Africa deals extensively with "the tragic theme of dehumanising apartheid" (1982:11) and as a result, form is secondary to function.

This section of chapter two consists of a synthesis of a number of more critical opinions on the definition of tragedy in the modern European and African context. Sofola's paper referred to earlier, "The Concept of Tragedy in African Experience" and K. S. Misra's ideas expounded in his book entitled Modern Tragedies and Aristotle's Theory (1981) will be used as a theoretical basis for the African and modern European vision of tragedy consecutively. Of specific interest here is Sofola's discussion of the three concepts of tragedy and the vision of tragedy within an African experience. Aristotle's theory of tragedy is especially useful to serve as a basis from which to interpret contemporary African tragedy. One should be aware that a generic model of tragedy as defined by Aristotle and advocated by George Steiner is not always valid in contemporary drama, as this dissertation hopes to show.

It seems as if the definition of tragedy in dramatic circles is tied up with definitions of different situations which are subject to change. In his book, A Handbook to Literature, Hugh Holman cautions that

Tragedy defies specific definitions, each age producing works that speak in the conventions and beliefs of that age, the enduring sense that human beings have of the tragic nature of their existence (1980:447).

This quotation alludes to the observation that the definition of tragedy is a matter of traces rather than a clearly defined, single and precise definition.

The nature, form and subject matter of tragedy, therefore, are never fixed, permanent or unchanging. What seems crucial in answering the question, "What is tragedy?" is the ability of individuals to call upon their intuition when conceptualising tragedy. R. P. Draper states that "it is impossible to define the term satisfactorily" (1980:11), and Sewall adds that the "vision of tragedy is hardly reducible to easy formulas" (1980:x).

But why is it that tragedy is a difficult phenomenon to define?

Sewall says that tragedy has much to do with mood, feelings and tone, and he describes it as "a sense of life, not a doctrine" (1980:ix). Important to note here is that tragedy assumes various dimensions which cannot be systematised - a fact which will be thoroughly dealt with in the coming three chapters. Furthermore, Sewall states that a reader of tragedy should emerge with a clear notion of what tragedy is and what it is not. This, then, turns our focus to what can be called "subjective interpretation" which appears to be shaped by a culture component⁴ of a particular historical period. Therefore, the term "tragedy" today, particularly in a democratic age, could mean something different from what it meant a century ago. For example, the tragic experience, the stature of the tragic hero, the language or diction, as well as the notion of "catharsis" have assumed new forms in modern drama. Tragic heroes are no longer kings but ordinary men, suffering does not necessarily end up in death, and the plot does not follow a linear sequence as Western tragic drama demands. This line of argument is given more weight by Sewall's remarks that "in his heart of hearts, every reader reserves the right to call this or that work a tragedy, or not a tragedy, just as he feels in his heart of hearts that he alone has felt the anguish of the marrow ... the fever of the bone" (1980:ix).

Furthermore, two contradicting views add to the difficulty of defining tragedy in contemporary drama. The difficulty is attributed to the observation that

⁴ Culture and a detailed analysis, as well as a description of the mythologies of African religion and literature are discussed in Edmonson Asgill's "African Adaptations to Greek tragedies" (Journal of the English Department, 1980:67-92. Freetown: Sierra Leone).

elements of tragedy in modern drama have undergone changes in form and structure, and that these changes fall short of capturing the tragic tension observable in Greek and Shakespearean tragedy. The first view, espoused by Steiner in The Death of Tragedy, totally rejects the existence of tragedy in contemporary drama. It contends that any drama which deviates from the confines of Aristotle's conception of tragedy does not meet the requirements of a truly tragic work. The second view, advocated by Williams in Modern Tragedy, states that contemporary drama is capable of producing tragedy in structural forms slightly similar to tragic tension and different from plot and character of the conventions of old tragedy. Supporters of this view believe that it is possible to create tragic drama which would not be hopelessly overshadowed by the achievements of Western drama.

But what exactly is this phenomenon called tragedy and what are its distinct characteristics?

According to Misra, Aristotle defines tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished, with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of an action not narrative; through pity and fear effecting proper purgation of these emotions" (1981:1).

The definition⁵ says that tragedy should imitate "an action that is serious" (Misra, 1981:1). The emphasis here is on "serious" and on "action". Ohaeto describes "action" as an imitation "not of men but of action and life" (1982:4). Tragedy here is seen as an imitation of action by men, i.e. the things that men do and the end towards which their action moves. The word "serious" according to Butcher (quoted in Misra, 1981:2) contains ideas conveyed by the words "grave" and "great". These words give tragedy the seriousness and tragic tension which differentiates it from comedy.

⁵ Aristotle's definition of tragedy has been subjected to various interpretations. I prefer to use the above-mentioned definition from Butcher's translation of the Poetics in his Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (Dover publications, Inc, 1951) Poetics V 1-2.

The tragic tension embedded in the "serious action" is difficult to pin down in modern drama. While Aristotle (Greek tragedy) views tragedy and comedy as separate and different entities, modern drama recognises that the two concepts are interrelated. This means that a purely "comic" or purely "tragic" work incorporates in it some elements which could sadden and which could also make us laugh. However, the fact that tragedy fuses comic and tragic elements does not mean that tragedy in contemporary drama is impossible, rather it aims to depict the reality of everyday life where the boundary between tragedy and comedy is a fine line or remains blurred.

Aristotle regards "language" as an important feature in tragic drama. He argues that tragic drama uses special or appropriate style and diction which is different from ordinary speech. Similarly, Shakespeare stresses the importance of using creative or heightened diction, and maintains that an effective use of words, structure and rhythm which suits the heroic stature of tragic heroes is necessary. The use of heightened diction in contemporary drama seems problematic. Modern drama tackles moral issues of ordinary people, and the language it employs does not demand a sophisticated use of language. Instead of a bombastic style, it uses simple language as long as it is "appropriate to the tragic character" (Olson, 1961:258).

Misra states that "unlike epic, it (tragedy) has to be acted and not narrated" (1981:2). Aristotle sees tragedy as a dramatic form rather than a species of narrative poetry. In modern drama, the distinction between "dramatic" and "narrative" drama seems non-existent. For example, verse seems to have disappeared and to have given way to prose which in other instances proves not to be a greatly varied prose. As a result, prose has become more and more like ordinary speech.

The "purgation" of emotions or "catharsis" is an essential part of tragedy as Aristotle suggests. The concept "catharsis" is a complex phenomenon to define. It is vaguely described as a purging or cleansing of emotions of pity and fear. These emotions could be experienced by an individual character or

the audience. It seems that in modern drama the purging or cleansing emotions and the feeling of pity and fear apply both to the playwright and the audience and very seldom to the individual character. The important question to ask here is: "Does the playwright want the audience to change?" What is evident here is that the function of tragedy might change as the intention changes.

Apart from Aristotle's characteristics of tragedy discussed above, Aristotle mentions six parts⁶ which determine the quality of tragedy, namely, Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle and Song. A discussion of these elements will be done in chapters 3, 4, and 5. The focus now shifts to the definition of the African vision of tragedy.

The perception of tragedy has changed significantly during the course of history. Modern or contemporary drama seems to have extended or refined its conception of what tragedy is and what it entails. Sofola broadly defines tragedy as follows:

a purposive volitional involvement in a serious action which is moral, noble and desirable, but whose consequences are painful, even fatal. It is an experience where man is thrown into critical dilemmas which are difficult or impossible to escape (1986:59).

I have stated in the previous section on African cosmology that African communities are communally evolved and that the individual is regarded as an important part of its structure. Furthermore, I have indicated that the preservation of a sense of stability, cohesion and continuity of African society cannot be over-emphasised. The thread holding these qualities together is consensus, the main function of which is to guarantee collective interest and collective will. When an individual engages in "a purposive volitional action" (Sofola, 1986:59) against his destiny or moral fibre of his society, consensus

⁶ Detailed analysis of Aristotle's six parts of tragedy is found in K. S. Misra, Modern Tragedies and Aristotle's Theory (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1981). Also see chapters 5, 6 and 7 in F. L. Lucas, Tragedy (New York: Collier Books, 1965).

is destroyed and such an individual is seen to be working independently against the will of his society. Tragedy, as Ohaeto observed, “emerges when the individual refuses to accept the dictates of his society” (1982:9). Although man is thought to have little control over his destiny, he is free to choose whether to fulfil or to fight his destiny. If he chooses to act irresponsibly by abandoning the collective will of his society, man ends his life disastrously.

Sofola (1986:64-67) discusses the three concepts of tragedy within the context of African experience. The first states that suffering or tragic experience results from man introducing new items into his destiny. The tragic figure in African experience should rather seek to understand the content of his destiny in order to bring it into fruition than to fight his destiny. No matter how hard an individual pursues his noble and worthwhile goal, the individual ends up frustrated and sometimes dead. This vision of tragedy, however, was more relevant in pre-colonial Africa than in contemporary Africa.

The second concept states that tragedy occurs as a result of the individual’s assertion of will at the expense of the common good. The individual here may well be pursuing a noble and morally desirable course, but if it is at the expense of the group, tragedy ensues. Although an individual in this case may be forced by forces within himself or beyond his control, there is generally no sympathy for such an individual in the communalistic African society. Contemporary drama is exemplary of this vision of tragedy.

The third and significant concept of tragedy is that in which one deliberately chooses to suffer for the common good. Sofola describes it as “altruistic redemptive suffering” (1986). The focus here is on the individual who serves as an antidote to the disorganisation and moral disorder in his society. This individual is seen as a martyr because he is prepared to offer his life in order to redeem the whole society. This vision of tragedy leaves no room for self-assertion of the tragic character. For example, since man is seen as essentially a social being, the individual is never greater than his community, and any personal aspiration for self-assertion leads to a disastrous end.

The ideas discussed thus far clearly suggest that the vision of tragedy in the African context is based on the existence of the individual in a society, and his meaningful participation in shaping his destiny. The definition of African tragedy, therefore, depends on society's rich tradition and culture which ultimately impacts on the diversity of devices and techniques of contemporary tragic drama. Having discussed the vision of Greek and African tragedy, and having outlined the mutations of tragedy, the following chapters will present a critical analysis of South African tragic plays in the context of contemporary drama.

CHAPTER III

THE HUNGRY EARTH: THE TRAGIC HERO

This chapter discusses the nature and manifestation of tragedy in The Hungry Earth. The emphasis is on defining a tragic hero and how his stature affects the tragic intensity of contemporary tragic drama. In order to make sense of the stature of a tragic hero in THE it is necessary to give an overview of the tragic world in which Maponya wrote and produced the bulk of his tragic works.

The “world” forms an important feature of tragic art. Bopape shares this view when he states that “in order to understand the concept of tragedy more clearly, it [tragedy] must always be related to the world in which man functions” (1994:42). The implication of this statement is that the world is an essential feature of man’s being, and therefore, the two cannot be separated from each other.

The tragic world of pre-colonial African drama differs significantly from that of contemporary African drama. In traditional drama, African theatre was developed around issues of tradition, religion and cultural myths. For example, it was part of the religious belief of the African in traditional societies that man comes into the world to fulfil the chain of certain actions or obligations approved by his god. If for any other reasons man fails to act in a pre-ordained way as dictated by his gods, his life and the life of the entire society are rendered unstable. David Lloyd states that “traditional tragedy seems to favour the view that the cosmos has intrinsic order and meaning, even if it is indifferent and hostile to human endeavour” (1995:33). Consequently, the nature of the world impacts on man’s behaviour and actions.

The “world” in THE presents us with a different context from that of traditional societies. The world in which Maponya wrote and produced the bulk of his

drama was haunted by political upheavals and instability. Maponya's writing career gained momentum in the early 1970s and stretched until the late 1980's just before the dawn of the new political dispensation in South Africa. Since the birth of apartheid in the early 1950s until its eradication in 1990, South Africa experienced widespread political boycotts and anti-apartheid demonstrations aimed at defying the policies of the apartheid government. Black people, young and old together with a minority of their white sympathisers, took to the streets of South Africa to demand an end to racial discrimination and a better life for all irrespective of the colour of their skin. State and social institutions such as the courts of law, businesses, schools and churches, were not spared from the political turmoil that was the order of the day then. Discriminatory laws such as the Publications Act⁶, the Internal Security Act and the Group Areas Act were enforced and their impact on black and white society alike was strongly objected to.

But what does this political scenario have to do with the "world" in which THE was written and produced? Firstly, it provides us with a "context of a number of anti-apartheid plays" (Steadman, 1991:77) of which THE is one. Secondly, this "context" sheds light onto the nature and the driving force behind the phenomenon of tragedy in South African theatre. In my view, tragedy has to relate to community, and if such a view holds true, then the question, "What is the perceived role of tragedy or tragic theatre in community?" becomes crucial to understanding both the nature as well as the role of tragedy in a given society in a particular era.

In an essay entitled "Theatre Beyond Apartheid" (1991), Ian Steadman offers background into the role of theatre as well as the nature of tragedy in South African theatre. Steadman sees South African theatre as essentially a reaction to apartheid. In a sense Steadman suggests that apartheid provided a context for a number of plays of which THE is one. This gave birth to what

⁶ For a detailed summary of the Publications Act (42) of 1974, as well as the reasons behind its inception, see Martin Orkin, Drama and the South African State. (Manchester: Manchester UP, and Johannesburg: Witwatersrand UP, 1991), especially the introduction.

was later on known as “resistance”, “black”, or “protest” theatre. Steadman makes the following remarks about “protest” theatre:

In recent years, the practitioners and commentators of South African theatre have developed a theory of resistance culture. The assumption behind this culture is that, by adopting the convention of voicing protest and resistance in plush theatres, concrete political change can be achieved. Such an assumption is based on the notion that South African dramatic art, by showing men and women as victims of apartheid politics, has exhausted the potentialities of theatre as a public art form; however, the true potentialities of theatre as a public form lie in its power to reveal men and women making choices in circumstances which define meaning for them (1991:79).

As thousands of ordinary people openly took their defiance campaign against the apartheid regime to the streets, other protesters like Maponya resorted to the stage to register their protest. Artists like Maponya were later on regarded as the voice or mouthpiece of the oppressed masses and their theatre was popularly known as protest theatre. Ian Steadman rightly describes Maponya as “one of the prominent anti-apartheid voices” (Maponya, 1995: xiii). In the article titled “Re-remembering Protest Theatre in South Africa”, Liane Loots gives a brief description of protest theatre:

Protest theatre defined itself, in the South African context, on its articulation of opposition to state legislated racism in the form of an apartheid government. Much protest theatre of this period took the political line showing how much a system like apartheid victimised the black man living and working in South Africa (1997:143).

It is evident from this quotation that protest theatre was used as a tool in South Africa during the apartheid era. Its function included among others, the ability to drive social and political change. Playwrights wrote plays which did

not only serve to entertain people, but produced plays which became “avenues for educating people and raising solidarity amongst communities” (Loots, 1997: 142). The primary aim was to work against mainstream ideologies of the apartheid state by challenging its racist policies. At the time Maponya was writing THE, a major political movement called the Black Consciousness Movement was in full swing. This movement directly or indirectly influenced black dramatists as far as the subject matter is concerned. Its main objective was to mobilise the oppressed black population to take pride in themselves and fight for their rightful place.

In the article entitled “Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance” (1987), Kelwyn Sole points out that the Black Consciousness Movement, to a large extent, developed from the black thinkers who equated oppression with being black. They questioned and doubted the ability of whites to share in their struggle for liberation while they were part and parcel of the same oppressive structure. This thinking gave rise to what was popularly known as Black Consciousness Theatre which in essence is synonymous with “resistance” or “protest theatre”.

Black dramatists used this theatre as a platform not only to attack apartheid policies, but also to educate and foster unity among the oppressed. Mokgethi Motlhabi (1984:111) sees this kind of theatre as a form of re-awakening or a renaissance which sensitises black people to their values as human beings, as well as their dignity as God’s children.

Through it black people were to affirm a recognition of the fact that their condition was not intended by God, but was a deliberate creation of man. This offers a tragedy of some sort and this point will be thoroughly dealt with in the discussion of the tragic flaw later on in this chapter.

A number of various plays such as Woza Albert, as well as The Hungry Earth were instrumental in imparting knowledge to the oppressed, and this enabled them to stand up and fight for their rights. On Saturdays people would gather

in large numbers in community halls and school halls to watch the performances of these plays. Later on the state imposed a ban on all the performances because it considered them “political” and anti-government. Some of the performances were enacted, integrated, and mixed with songs and rendered in community meetings. In this way theatre became an informal way of disseminating political awareness despite frequent censoring by the apartheid state. THE was also subjected to restrictions under the Publications Act. Shortly after its conception in 1978 the original script was sent for legal advice via Bishop Desmond Tutu, and the reply from attorney Tucker was as follows:

I am of the view that the play would constitute a contravention of the laws relating to racial incitement and the Publications Act and, in addition, the presentation would result in severe harassment of both the author and the performers (Maponya, 1995: vii).

Evidently, Maponya felt the pressure of intimidation and was forced to revise the original script and adapt it to a more acceptable form to please the authorities. Therefore, one could also argue that Maponya’s world at the time of writing THE played a significant role in giving him a voice to speak against the evils of racial oligarchy perpetuated by the apartheid regime. Born to a painter in 1951, Maponya tasted the wrath of apartheid at the tender age of eleven when his family was forcibly removed from Alexandra Township and resettled in Diepkloof. The Group Areas Act which gave rise to homelands was in full effect, and generated the influx control and pass laws which restricted people from working, moving and living wherever they wanted. It is this background of Maponya’s world that informs tragedy in THE.

3.1 The Tragic Form

Maishe Maponya has firmly established himself as one of the leading voices of twentieth century tragic drama in South African theatre. His leadership

within theatre does not only arise from his creating works aimed at attacking the brutality of the apartheid regime, but most importantly, his works gave a voice to the voiceless, and in so doing, enabled them to sing or speak out against the injustices of the apartheid state then. During the prime reign of apartheid in South Africa, Maponya's theatre developed a defiant voice which carried a powerful tone of protest and resistance which could be heard both locally and internationally.

The message embedded in this "voice" was loud and clear in calling for the eradication of apartheid by creating a consciousness which the oppressed people embarked upon in an effort to rediscover themselves and restore human dignity. Maponya's theatre essentially served two purposes: firstly, to mirror the tragic suffering of black people, and secondly, to educate them to take a stand in order to reclaim their human dignity. It is this loss of human dignity that reduced the stature of a tragic hero from that of kings to the stature of ordinary men.

Maishe Maponya wrote a total number of nine plays during the period 1976 until 1987. In all the nine plays, tragedy of a different form from that of Aristotle exists. For example, THE highlights the questions a tragic play asks about life rather than confines itself to any particular theatrical form. Critics and sceptics of the existence of tragedy in contemporary drama are likely to dispel the view that THE is a tragic play. Such critics may be quick to point out that THE lacks the required tragic tension, and that a specific structure and form characteristic of Greek and Shakespearean tragic drama is non-existent, and as a result the play is far from being a tragic drama.

The arguments for the existence and non-existence of tragedy in THE are both valid, but neither of the two is completely true enough to replace the other. What seems important is the realisation that, despite differences in structure and tragic intensity in conventional and modern drama, tragedy of a sort is possible, and THE is one example of a modern version of tragedy. It comes as no surprise to see that in all the nine plays, Maponya considers

structure and form secondary to the “uncompromising dramatisations of the evils of racial oligarchy” (Steadman in Maponya, 1995:xiii). For Maponya, the need for the oppressed people to rediscover themselves and create their own consciousness is of primary importance, irrespective of the form in which such an awareness is presented. This view validates the view that THE is not a tragedy strictly moulded after the Greek model which is essentially Aristotelian in character. Such a view, however, does not nullify the existence of tragedy in THE.

In his final assessment of Aristotle’s theory of tragedy, Misra shares a possible reason for the structural and thematic differences between conventional and modern tragic drama:

Literature is the image of life and life means dynamism. Hence it would be dogmatic to claim that a literary principle derived from the literature of an age with its peculiar outlook of life, culture, religion and moral values would be literally applicable to the literature produced in later ages in different or altered social contexts (1981:87).

We must not lose sight of the fact that “Greek tragedy and even Shakespearean tragedy rested on a world-view that was essentially static” (Gibbs, 1980:14). Therefore, Aristotle’s insistence on a particular structural form of a tragic work is understandable; however, such a prescriptive form does not suit the modern structure of contemporary tragic drama. In contrast, modern tragedy struggles to keep up with the rapid pace of ever-changing life and demands of modern life. Therefore, to speak of a particular structural form common to all tragic works in modern drama is an impossibility. Evidently, each tragic play would assume a structure or form suitable to the events and situations it aims to depict in a given society. THE in this regard is far from representing something vague and misty. It heightens the awareness of what life during the apartheid era entailed if you were classified as the “other” by those who were of a different colour from yours. The focus, therefore, switches from what Aristotle sees as a well structured tragic play to the dramatisation of human actions and their effects on the whole society.

Maishe Maponya's THE is a play in six scenes. The play is fairly short and the events of the play are few and simple, but densely loaded with tragic situations throughout the entire play. The play essentially deals with the effects of apartheid on individual migrants who because of poverty and unemployment, have left their homes and loved ones in rural areas in order to work in the sugar plantations, and later on in the mines in urban South Africa. Matlhoko [Sufferings] tells of the immigrants' exodus from the rural Lesotho to the city of gold:

Matlhoko [Sufferings]:

Yes, my wish was misplaced for I was one of the Basotho who were driven by hunger and drought from the confines of their rugged mountains. In those days it seemed as though the god of the white man from over the sea had stamped his feet in anger upon this land for the first time since its creation. Obviously many of us were coming to the mine for the first time. The talk in the cramped compartments was of all the hunger that had fallen in Lesotho (THE 12).

It is not very long before the migrants learn that the "hunger" and "drought" they had experienced in the "rugged mountains" of rural Lesotho assumes another shape in South Africa. The comfort of their homes, despite living in poverty, becomes preferable to the exploitation and racial discrimination they are confronted with in the sugar plantations, as well as in the mines. Life in the sugar plantations becomes extremely difficult and unbearable as they live under adverse socio-economic conditions.

Agovi states that the perception of tragedy in African cosmology is conditioned by "a deep seated respect for life, its continuity and survival" (1985:59). Any effort or action which threatens this cultural philosophy of respect for life is likely to trigger tragic situations in the society in which its people are denied the right to value and respect life. In THE, both adults and children are dehumanised and treated like animals. The investigator who

visited the sugar plantations owned by Illovo in Doringkop, sheds light into the squalid conditions under which child-workers live:

Visitor:

Ah! So many stables. This man must be very rich to afford so many horses. Let me peep and see how many horses he has in each. No! This cannot be true. I see people inside. Or maybe they did not look after the cattle well and that's why we locked them inside (THE 9).

With the emphasis of the notion of tragedy in African theatre being on respect for life and human dignity, a violation of the code of respect for life is conceived in tragic proportions. These tragic proportions seek to stress the importance and respect of all humanity irrespective of race and religion. The investigator learns with shock that children are denied a chance to go to school because of working in the sugar plantations. Everyday, they walk six miles to and from their work destination. Children are not only deprived of education, but they are overworked. They work for six days and rest only on Sunday, and are denied a break to go to lunch. The situation is made worse due to a small salary they are earning, which does not exceed fifty cents, with married men earning two rands after working nine hours, and their women one rand and ten cents a day.

The attempt to see THE in strict Aristotelian terms could be misleading and problematic in many ways. Aristotle sees plot as a unified whole with a beginning, a middle and an end, which follows a linear pattern of arrangements of events. Emphasis here is that a well constructed plot should not begin and end haphazardly. Contrary to this view of plot, the events of plot in THE do not conform to the conventional plot sequence in which events are presented in a linear fashion. The events are not presented in the sequence of their happening; instead the play is a collage of overlapping scenes which at first reading seem unrelated, and which only make sense when fused together in a coherent whole. A reader reading THE gets the impression that the plot lacks coherence as events jump from one to another.

In a manner almost reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's theatrical device of fusing form and content to achieve a didactic effect, Maponya uses his characters to present theatrical and political events in a series of loosely connected scenes.

Maponya states that the structure of THE is composed of "a series of episodes" (1995:xv). Each scene is an episode on its own and carries a specific message which links up to the ultimate theme of the whole play. The first scene opens with Usiviko [Shield] experiencing a nightmare. Unable to sleep, Usiviko [Shield] twists and turns and the contents of his nightmare are revealed and what has happened before to trigger the nightmare is revealed in bits and pieces in the middle of each scene. The action of the plot moves to and fro with an indication that the tragic life and suffering which characters are presently experiencing, began long ago during the time of their forefathers. As the action jumps from one scene to another, we learn that the natives were dispossessed of their land and enslaved in the very same land. Although all the scenes form a series, a linear plot is not obvious, and calls for the audience or reader to piece together the events into a coherent whole.

But what about the magnitude of the plot in THE? Aristotle demands a certain length of the plot of tragedy. He argues that in a very short play the development of action is not possible. The length of the plot has a certain implication for the degree of tragic tension. For example, the depiction of the working of the mind is not possible in a short plot, and in THE this is further complicated by the many plots observable in each scene. The implication is that the play does not succeed in detailing the motives behind the action and the working of the character's mind. The prolonged action of the conscious and the unconscious working of character's minds observable in Othello, Macbeth and Hamlet is absent in THE. Furthermore, a step-by-step build-up to the way characters react to a given tragic situation is also non-existent. The action rather presents us with an active resistance to apartheid because it is all because of apartheid that characters are actively seen as protesting sufferers.

Although it appears that the plot in THE lacks magnitude, and that the action is presented as flashes in the imagination of the reader or audience, the unity of action is nevertheless artistically preserved. The action, short and fragmented as it is, is pruned of all that is unnecessary. Even the arrest of workers by the police for the possession of dagga is never elaborated in detail. Similarly, events of life in the compounds, characters' movements, suffering and death are skilfully and logically harmonised into an organic unity.

Furthermore, the deficiency of the strict Aristotelian interpretation of tragedy in THE shows itself in any hunt for the tragic flaw. The hunt for the tragic flaw is the hunt for the place where blame should be laid for the migrants' suffering and, ultimately, their death. This hunt is based on the belief that individual fate must have definable individual causes. Sofola (1986:64) attributes the source of tragedy to man or society introducing new items into his or its destiny. Sethotho [Imbecile] shares the same view when he remarks: "The older men put blame on the younger generation that had put their faith in the mystical gods of Europe, foolishly forgetting the old and safe ways of the nations' ancestors" (THE 12). This statement clearly suggests that "mystical gods of Europe" (THE 12) and the characters' failure to uphold the "old and safe ways of the nation's ancestors" are to blame for the source of tragedy.

As in Greek tragedy, traditional African drama valued the relationship between gods or ancestors and man. Schipper gives us perspective into the importance of ancestors in African society:

Ancestors are worshipped as me-gods and those who were tribal chiefs still have great powers after death. They were consulted when important decisions are to be made, in judgements or at traditional ceremonies. It is necessary to respect them or they could punish the living by causing illness or accidents. They could cause rain to stop and pasture to dry out, harvests to fail or women to become barren (1982:21).

Ancestors formed an integral and important part of traditional African society. It was believed that as chiefs, they had great wisdom to guide their nation through difficult times. Their advice and powers were sought after by consulting traditional doctors or simply through the passing of culture from one generation to the other. It was believed that they had immense powers to punish those who disregard them. The fact that ancestors could cause rain to stop and harvest to fail, confirms Matlhoko's [Suffering's] statement that because they have disobeyed their ancestors, hunger and drought has driven them away from the rural places to search for greener pastures in the city. Prior to the fatal death of migrants in the mines, Beshwana [Loincloth] states that "the gods are angry" (THE 12) and Sethotho [Imbecile] states "you deserted your culture" (THE 12). Maponya seems to suggest that tragedy in THE sprouts from the weakness of individuals who have forsaken their "culture" and who have ignored guidance from their "ancestors" in favour of the "mystical gods of Europe".

A dignified society based on values such as love and understanding is crucial in the African version of tragedy. When the white men first came to the shores of Africa, they were kindly received, fed and sheltered by the natives. The white man's ideas and teachings that "love your neighbour" (THE 5-6) were embraced with two hands as the natives displayed their "natural love" (THE 6). Problems started when the white man went back to Europe stuffed with gold and diamonds leaving his army behind "to take care of the unruly elements that may provoke a revolution" (THE 6). What Aristotle calls "pride" is replaced by a weakness of characters to forsake their culture and ancestors. Characters in the play do not necessarily suffer because of their "pride"; instead, they are confronted with a brutal system of apartheid which aims to bring an end to their existence. As a result, the source of tragedy comes from an external source which allows them little room for individual choice.

Diction or language is another important feature in tragic drama. Aristotle maintains that the language of tragedy should be clear but elevated. In THE

Maponya uses simple and direct language, but which is also rich in poetry. The beauty of dramatic language in the play lies in the immediacy of its effect upon the audience which the following song artistically illustrates:

Wake up Mother Africa
Wake up
Time has run out
And all opportunity is wasted
Wake up Mother Africa
Wake up
Before the white man rapes you
Wake up Mother Africa (THE 11).

The prose of THE is harmoniously blended with the recurrent theme of death and survival. The following passage illustrates the skilful fusion of “dramatic” and “narrative” speech with the theme:

Oh, how cruel this earth is. Our men will never stop dying to feed this hungry earth. Today I have no place to stay. Today I am a widow. Today my children are fatherless yet I do not know. How many more have vanished like that without the knowledge of immediate relatives? My husband has died digging endlessly for gold which would help to prop up the apartheid system. My man is dead! My man is dead! My man is eaten by the hungry earth! He is dead! (THE 23).

There is music in this passage. The music of repetition in “My man is dead! My man is eaten by the hungry earth! He is dead!” works upon our senses and compels us to view the disaster that has fallen on the woman with deep sympathy and vision. Proper tragic atmosphere is produced by the harmony of language which is blended with the theme. In a situation where characters are constantly subjected to harassment and suffering, elevated and literary scholastic language takes a back seat. The natural speech is blended with the jargon which is spoken in the mines and shebeens. This jargon, called “*fanagalo*”, is a mixture of indigenous and Western languages, such as Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans and English. Characters here are migrants of ordinary stature and this ordinariness is reflected in their speech.

In the article entitled "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" (1991), Njabulo Ndebele discusses and validates the importance of the ordinary in South African literature. In this article, Ndebele argues that literature in South Africa should directly concern itself with the way people live. Such literature should seek to go beyond the representation of the spectacle in which the representation of the exterior has the upper hand above that of the interior action. Emphasis here seems to be on literature trying to reflect the rationality in the ordinary by paying attention to necessary details and methods which will result in the significant growth of consciousness. THE exemplifies a sense of the ordinary that is the very antithesis of a mere representation of the spectacle.

Where before in South Africa reality was a symbol of spectacular moral wrong, it seems to be a direct object of change. Maponya's THE illustrates this sense of the ordinary that appears to be frustrating and even exasperating to the reader. The migrants go to work in the mines and their journey to the mines is a spectacle of suffering. Their life in the mines is characterised by terrible working conditions, but despite this treatment, they emerge from the entire experience feeling triumphant. Matlhoko [Sufferings] seems to have absorbed and accepted the humiliation and exploitation they have experienced in the mines when he states: "I read a true statement in the Bible last week: it says that we shall live by the sweat of our brows" (THE 22). It seems that even under the most oppressive of conditions, people are always trying to live a normal social life. Important to note here is that although there is an obvious political spectacle, the problems under discussion are of ordinary nature involving ordinary people. Therefore, a reader schooled in the tradition of spectacle may well dismiss the story as political and miss the content of the people's struggle. Following this line of argument, it is clear that Maponya's THE does not only aspire to the representation of the ordinary but also that the play depicts rationality characteristic of the ordinary.

Critics of contemporary tragic drama have never ceased to criticise the inadequacy of contemporary speech to create the required tension. Although such a criticism is valid in certain contexts, the use of ordinary speech in THE is justifiable. Very few migrants from a disadvantaged economic and educational background can match the complexity and highly sophisticated speech of Shakespearean tragic drama. Special poetic and heightened diction or speech does not appeal to modern drama. The speech used by migrants reflects language spoken by ordinary men and women whose emphasis is on carrying the message of their suffering across rather than concentrating on highly sophisticated style to make their views known. While the tragic tension in Western drama is conveyed through characters' speech, tragic tension in THE is conveyed through songs. Very often these songs reflect the people's pain, happiness or frustrations. In the song "Wake up Mother Africa" (THE 3) Maponya warns of the "rape" that is about to take place if people do not "wake up". Other songs like "stand up all ye brave of Africa" (THE 7) warn and comfort at the same time.

The success of a tragedy depends upon its being able to produce the proper effect of "catharsis" through pity and fear. Aristotle sees pity and fear as the two major emotions aroused by tragedy. Two forms of cathartic experience have dominated the understanding of catharsis for a long time. The one mode of catharsis is that of the character in the play who receives insight into the tragedy of his world, and King Lear is one example of this form of tragedy.

The other form of catharsis concerns itself with the audience experiencing catharsis, and this form is difficult to pin down because the audience reaction to a tragedy varies not only from audience to audience but from person to person watching a performance. The two forms are intertwined and the latter proves to be the most difficult to pin down. In the essay "The Scheme of Tragedy" (1969a), Dorothea Krook states that what matters in tragedy is not that the tragic hero shall receive the knowledge issuing from the suffering, but that we the audience shall receive it. Furthermore, she states that if this view

holds enough water, it follows that self knowledge illuminates both the self of the tragic hero and that of the audience (Barnet, 1972:260).

In the article entitled "Catharsis: From Aristotle to Mafika Gwala" (1985), Colin Gardner discusses another dimension or a view of seeing or interpreting catharsis. Whereas the eighteenth century literary theorists tended to talk about the literary text itself and its effect upon the reader or audience, the Romantics focused on the psychology of the writer. As a result, the focus of catharsis of this nature shifts from audience or the reader and the character experiencing catharsis to the playwright experiencing catharsis. If Gardner's view that "for authors or playwrights of tragedy the process of writing is cathartic" (1985:31) is correct, then Maponya's THE is a striking example of such a catharsis. Judging from the political background in which the play was written and produced, Maponya clearly wrote the play partly to exorcise the suffering of his own people of which he is also a victim.

The following extract seems to me to offer a clear instance of catharsis. As the other actors chant softly, Beshwana speaks:

Stand up all ye brave Afrika
Stand up and get to battle,
Where our brothers die in numbers
Afrika you are bewitched
But our black blood will flow
To water the tree of our freedom (THE 7).

These words are spoken as the battle between the black warriors and soldiers from the West is dramatised. The extract both expresses feelings of sadness as a result of people being killed, and highlights hope that victory after death is possible. Both implications are to be found in the word "blood" which also carries a biblical connotation as a symbol of cleansing of evil so that life is given victory over death. The image of "blood", in a sense, suggests lives being lost expressed by the "black blood will flow". Ironically, this is contrasted by the statement: "To water the tree of our freedom". The

words “battle”, “die”, and “bewitched”, appear to offer a dark, gloomy sketch of a death-ridden “Afrika” which seems to offer no or little hope for survival.

However, these emotions are resolved and transformed into hope for victory in the sudden contrast: “But our black blood will flow to water the tree of freedom”. Therefore, catharsis in this extract is experienced both by the reader or audience as well as by the playwright. For example, the emotions aroused by the last two statements of the extract are given shape by our understanding and acceptance that through death, victory is certain. Similarly, the mere writing of this play could be seen as a cathartic exercise for Maponya. As the audience or the reader and the playwright experience pity and fear for the lives of actors, their emotions are also cleansed and lightened through the understanding that freedom, once gained after sacrifice, is here to stay.

In THE, it seems that this purging of emotions is experienced to a greater degree by audiences rather than by characters. Audiences see the characters’ struggle with the dehumanising force of apartheid and how this force inflicts immeasurable miseries upon them. The suffering arouses feelings of pity and we as audience, or readers, also experience fear when we feel that if we were also confronted with the same situation, we would have felt the same way as each of the character feels. At the end of the play, the audience does not feel purged since characters experience death, and nothing suggests that their death is justified. Characters are resigned to their fate in the epilogue song which carries a sense of helplessness:

Where have all our men gone
They have all gone down into the mines
They will never return again
They have been swallowed up by this hungry earth (THE 24).

3.2 The Tragic Hero

Arthur Miller (cited in Barnet, 1972:255) states that the common man is the subject of tragedy in contemporary drama in the same way as kings were in Greek drama. In tragic drama, characters are used to convey the playwright's message to the audience or reader. These characters can only succeed in exposing the "tragic" message if they have the necessary stature and character of tragic significance. In this section, attention will be paid to the significance of the tragic hero in conveying a "tragic" message. I shall investigate more specifically the nature and stature of the tragic hero in THE.

The nature and stature of a tragic hero have changed significantly over the years. Plato recommends that the subject matter of tragedies should be constructed around great men. By "great men" he meant people of nobility such as kings and queens.

On the other hand, Aristotle recommends a particular type of person as an ideal hero for tragedy. First of all, he should not be a perfectly good or virtuous man, brought down to adversity from prosperity, because the sight of such a man will produce neither pity nor fear. Secondly, he should not be a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity, because it is foreign to the spirit of tragedy, and can arouse neither pity nor fear but moral indignation. Thirdly, the change of fortune should not be the downfall of the utter villain, since this may gratify our sense of justice without stirring up the true tragic sentiments (Misra, 1981:11).

It can be inferred therefore, that Aristotle demands that for a tragic hero to be a significant character, he should neither be more virtuous than the average human being, nor be too similar. Such a hero must not fall somewhere between good and bad, but between good and average for him to be able to arouse our pity. Although he should be near enough to us to elicit our fellow-feeling, he should not be too near to forfeit his stature of importance.

Greek and Shakespearean tragedies are good examples that portray tragic heroes of high stature. In Oedipus Rex by Sophocles, the tragic hero is a

king whose tragic flaw sprouts from his unfortunate ignorance. Similarly, in Shakespeare's Macbeth, Macbeth is an honourable man with two titles whose ambition to become king brings him down. Contrary to the Greek and Shakespearean view which confines tragic heroes to noble persons of higher positions in society such as kings and queens, modern tragic drama advocates heroes of ordinary or common stature. However, critics and supporters (such as Steiner) of tragic heroes as men of higher type are quick to point out that characters in contemporary drama fall short of required tragic proportions. These critics and supporters argue that the tragic stature goes hand-in-hand with rank. What they fail to understand is that the concept of democracy in which all men are regarded and treated as equal is more popular than rank. The status of the hero does not depend on his nobility alone. What is important is his "courage and uniqueness of his strength in challenging fundamental human dilemmas" (Bopape, 1994:44).

As already pointed out in the previous chapters, critics such as George Steiner (1961) have often held the view that the lack of tragedy in the modern age is due to a paucity of heroes among modern man. What seems most disturbing to them is that the small or reduced stature of modern man makes it difficult for him to produce the tragic intensity of high mimetic tragedy which is Aristotelian in character. According to Miller, such a view "holds man below tragedy or tragedy above us" (Barnet, 1972: 255). The implication of this statement is that the tragic mode is archaic since it seems to fit people of high stature such as the kingly, who no longer hold sway in the modern world.

A seminal essay regarding the nature and stature of the tragic hero in modern drama is Arthur Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man" (1972). In this essay, Miller offers a direct challenge to Steiner's assertion that the decline in tragic stature of the hero in modern drama negates the existence of tragic heroes. The underlying premise in this essay is that the common man "is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were". He rejects the idea that the exaltation of tragic action is a property of the highbred character only, and argues that the need to secure one's personal dignity is strong

enough to evoke tragic feelings. Tragedy, therefore, is said to be “the consequence of man’s total compulsion to evaluate himself justly” (Barnet, 1972:255). Similarly, characters in THE are ordinary migrants who are trying to get their rightful positions in the working community. Divided “against themselves” and their “wishes displaced” as Matlhoko [Sufferings] says, they are determined fight with their lives in order to bring their suffering to an end.

Consequently, Miller disagrees that rank plays a significant role in modern day tragic drama. For Miller, what seems to be of utmost importance is “whether the hero has the capacity to choose, and whether his choice is between two alternatives of sufficient seriousness” (Miller, quoted in Draper, 1980:19). Although characters in THE have the capacity to choose whether to “rise up” and fight against the oppressive system or alternatively to succumb to pressure from intimidation and live as slaves forever, the question of choices is not an option but a necessity. They can either choose to “stand up and get to battle” or remain “bewitched” and be “swallowed up by the hungry earth”. Both choices yield a disastrous end, because even if they choose not to resist and fight, the equally dangerous working conditions in the mines are likely to lead to their death. No safety precautions and measures are available to safeguard the migrants from death. Caught between two choices of sufficient seriousness, it seems that whatever choice they make their fate already leads to death.

There is no doubt that characters in THE are forever tragic victims. In the absence of individual choice, or rather since individual choice is of no importance to their survival, they can only wish, and throughout the play their wishes are never realised. Nevertheless, the courage and strength to challenge oppression remain intact and are evident in Matlhoko’s [Sufferings] remarks: “Our brave stormed the bullets to protect the motherland from the cruel *umlungu*. One-two-ten hundreds of our brave never flinched, yet they know they were heading for death” (THE 7). In a soliloquy at the beginning of scene three, Matlhoko [Sufferings] remarks: “Unfortunately blacks can never be spectators of white reaction, but victims” (THE 12). The characters’

individual will is stronger and alive as they vow “not to be intimidated” but to “put up the fight”. The fine line that distinguishes a tragic hero from a tragic victim in THE is blurred but evident. Heroes in modern tragedy are as much victims as their Greek or Shakespearean counterparts, but in this play not of a flaw, but victims of history.

According to Sewall, tragic man is “a man at his most prideful and independent, man glorying in his humanity” (1963:123). It seems that Maponya’s tragic heroes are free from this pride. If there is any pride in them, such a pride carries positive attributes. For example, their pride stems from their determination to challenge actively the injustices of apartheid in an attempt to stop the wars, slavery, detentions and killing of innocent people. Such a pride does not emanate from selfish reasons, but from a collective effort to restore human dignity. If such pride fails and leads to suffering and eventually to death, the whole society suffers and not the individual. It is a redemptive pride and its heroes are pitied and respected at the same time.

The notion of collective responsibility is important in African tragedy. Sarah Ruden in the article titled “Thoughts on Mda, Ndebele and Black South African Writing at the Millennium” remarks as follows:

Black South African literature, like the literature of sub-saharan African in general, is founded on group experience. The African ideal of social life, now frequently voiced by Mandela’s government is that a person is a person because of other people (Ruden, 1998:156).

The importance of “group experience” to the organisation of African society cannot be overemphasised. A literature of collective rather than individual experience grows directly from African values. The suffering Maponya dramatises in THE is not of an individual but of a whole nation. Similarly, tragic heroes in the play are a group of people, rather than a single person. The men who died in the mines, the women who were shot at the frontline

burning passbooks, and the children in the sugar plantations are a group of tragic heroes.

It follows from this argument that tragic figures here do not rest on personal achievement for the characters live, suffer and fight together as a group. The suffering of individuals reflects the suffering of the whole society, and if victory comes, it comes to the "family of Africa" and not to individuals. There is as much emphasis on collectivism as there is on collective will. Interesting to note is that the plural form pronoun "We" is mentioned fifteen times in the opening prologue. Such a repetition emphasises a strong sense of collective reaction of people united as a single force or entity. Maponya seems to suggest that any effort to end suffering and poverty is likely to yield positive results if it is done collectively.

Furthermore, the notion of collectivism is further taken up in the arrangement of society in South Africa. In a close-knit African society where the idea of family is based on collective responsibility in maintaining a sound family life, the absence of either member of the family could lead to tragic situations. The absence of fathers and sons in THE is a costly exercise for both wives and the society. Men flock to urban areas in search for work while young children work in the sugar plantations. Left to themselves, lonely, unemployed and hungry, women are faced with the burden of raising up the young ones without any input from fathers. The family circle is disturbed and the situation culminates in marital breakdowns or depression as the family unit is no longer a reality. A woman called Chirango tells how her family was destroyed and how she turned to prostitution:

Woman:

My name is Chirango. This is my only home. I came here some five years after my husband had written to me to come and join him in this city of gold. To my dismay, I was not permitted to stay with him. I could not go back to Rhodesia because I had no money. He took me into his room at night. Later when a wall was erected around the compound it became risky to sneak in. Once I was arrested and fined R90 or 90

days. He did not have the money and I went to jail. When I came back I was told that his contract had expired and since then I have never seen or heard of him. Today I manage to live and feed my two fatherless children out of the beers and *indambola* (liquor) I sell. And when the beers don't sell I become every man's woman. What else can I do? I can't get permit to work here (THE 22-23).

The sense of tragedy in THE comes from the apartheid experience of social disintegration. People are more and more alienated from their societies and families by the discriminatory laws imposed upon them by the apartheid regime. Young children lack role models to look up to because their fathers work far away in the urban areas. Marriages are strained as women are not allowed to live with their husbands.

Workers were not permanently employed and once their contracts expired, they were evicted from the residence and had to find alternative accommodation. Chirango lost track of her husband after his contract had expired, and she was forced to sell liquor and her body to provide for her two children. This, according to Maponya, is a recipe of some sort, especially when a dignified society whose values are founded on unity, love and peace is dismantled. Since death has ceased to be the overriding factor in African tragedy, emphasis is now on suffering and the results thereof are serious enough to be called tragic.

Tragic heroes have always been plagued by the ambiguity of their own nature as well as that of the world they live in. Tragic heroes in THE are plunged into a situation in which their image of self becomes blurred. Usiviko [Shield] laments the loss of his identity: "This *umlungu* was far different from them all in a way. This one has divided me against myself. He has tinted my colour. I can no longer distinguish between right and wrong" (THE 5). The fact that Matlhoko [Sufferings] experiences an identity crisis is tragic enough, and in a state of frustration he even questions the existence of God as their human stature is reduced to nothingness. The fact that they are marginalised adds to the emptiness of their lives.

A number of observations about the nature and stature of a tragic hero can be deduced from the discussion thus far. Firstly, tragic heroes are not men of nobility but ordinary men and this is articulated by the language they speak. They are driven by an impulse or a drive to find political and moral fulfilment. Tragedy is triggered here by both external and personal factors. For example, the young generation suffers because it is said that they have rejected or forsaken their traditions and culture in favour of European culture. By disregarding advice from their ancestors, the social organisation of their ordered traditional society is threatened and punishment falls upon them. On the other hand external forces such as the oppressive apartheid system leave them with little choice but to live their lives in misery. The social equilibrium is destroyed and as the audience or readers, we cannot ignore the tragic sting emanating from this suffering. We are forced to feel for or pity the victims since they are like us.

In my view, Maponya's THE could be regarded as tragic drama in which the suffering of ordinary people is dramatised. Arguably, the play can also be seen as a movement away from the genre of historical or conventional tragedy. At the level of dramatic form, the play seeks to illustrate the tragic tension through intensive compression of the plot which appears fragmented and incoherent at first reading. Thematically, the compression of plot is complemented by a search to express the heroic stature of the oppressed migrants, mothers and sons by portraying these heroic figures as its victims.

Toward the end of the play, the dramatic development moves the heroes, "the brave of Africa" (THE 7), and their audience towards a mutual recognition of their total helplessness where at the end the heroes "have all been swallowed by the hungry earth". The action of the play in that sense seems to move not with the migrants but against them. As they are portrayed as victims of brutal oppression from birth to death the aptitude for heroic action in the conventional sense of tragedy is denied them from the very outset. As a result, the heroic victims in THE are less privileged and more oppressed than

in conventional tragedy, thus making it impossible to detect the point at which oppression ends and heroism begins.

CHAPTER IV

WE SHALL SING FOR THE FATHERLAND: THE TRAGIC ACTION

Zakes Mda's WSF is a play in three scenes. Its plot is simple and short. As the play opens we learn that the two war veterans, Sergeant Major and Janabari are destitute and live in the municipal park. The veterans, who are now roaming the park as hoboes, have fought bravely to liberate their country from colonial domination ten years ago. Neglected and marginalized by the very same government they have fought tooth and nail to put into power, the hoboes have no jobs and nowhere to stay. These veterans, Janabari in particular, feel that they have been betrayed by independence. He complains that the post-colonial government which has currently been in power for the past ten years has betrayed ordinary people who took up arms against the colonial government. Now that the country's sovereignty has been achieved, those who risked little during the years of resistance have inherited all with the help of capitalism. Contrary to the veterans' poor socio-economic conditions, Ofisiri, Mafutha, and the Banker live luxuriously and enjoy lots of opportunities which the veterans are being denied. Despite these privileges, Ofisiri misuses his powers as a municipality officer and takes bribes in order to allow the veterans to continue living in the park. Similarly, Mafutha and the Banker are both successful businessmen entangled in a web of corruption. These two men are determined to do everything in their power to make more money for themselves, even if this is being done at the expense of other people.

In this chapter I shall examine what constitutes a tragic theme in Zakes Mda's WSF. The following questions will be discussed as guidelines to understanding the complex nature of a tragic theme in WSF: What is our attitude towards the veteran's suffering, their problems, frustrations, their line of action, and how do we react to the realization that they are about to die?

The veterans find themselves in a difficult situation where they have little control over their destiny because of an exploitative economic system, and as a result, the source of their tragic suffering as emanating from their own doing is difficult to pin down. Therefore, I shall argue that tragedy in WSF is generated not only by individual will, but also by an economic structure generated by those in power. The underlying premise here is that tragedy emanates from a complex fusion of the ruling class's capitalistic government and individual greed aimed at enriching a small group of people to the disadvantage of the whole society.

Zakes Mda has emerged as one of the best African playwrights of contemporary drama. Although many of his plays were written and produced over the past three decades, these plays are unique in that they critique in advance of their time social, economic and political problems of contemporary life, particularly in post-independence Africa. Born in Sterkspruit in 1948, Mda started his career while he was a student at Peka High School in what was then known as the independent kingdom of Lesotho. Mda began writing for stage and collaborated with a musician by the name of M.M. Moerane to produce a number of musical plays such as A Hectic Weekend (1967). Since then Mda has received a number of awards, his first major breakthrough came when he received the South African Playwright's Merit Award in 1978 for the production of WSF.

The play is fairly short with a simple plot and reveals a structural compactness and great economy which suggests artistic maturity. The plot in WSF conforms to Aristotle's conventional plot sequence in which events are presented in a linear fashion. In the introductory stage, the plot introduces us to the war veterans and how they have come to live in the park. The action builds up towards a crisis where the veterans are told to vacate the park because they are not a good spectacle for overseas visitors. The climax is reached when the veterans defy the order and sleep in the freezing night only to wake up "dead" the next morning. Towards the denouement, the veterans

are portrayed as living people again and they continue their struggle for human equality.

Various reasons can be given to account for the veterans' reappearance. For example, one may argue that their reappearance symbolizes victory of life over death. Whilst they were still alive, the veterans were unhappy as a result of their being marginalized and dehumanized. Their "second life" is different in that they are not lonely anymore as they joke and laugh about their mean burial, as well as boast about their invisible status. Sergeant rejoices at the realization that his leg has been restored and that their relationship seems far more sustained than that of the others (Mafutha, Businessman, and the Banker). Ironically, Mafutha died shortly after he had been elected to one of the top posts, and as a result, was unable to enjoy the fruits of his chairmanship. It seems evident that the reason for the veterans' reappearance suggests that Janabari and Sergeant have finally overcome their suffering, and this in turn, could be seen as Mda's way of acknowledging the importance of the human nexus if tragedy is to be avoided.

4.1 The Source of the Tragic Action

In order to understand the complex nature of a tragic theme in WSF, it is necessary to probe into the "world" in which Mda lived and produced his drama. Tragedy and society cannot be separated, especially in the South African context where the tragic sting has been felt in almost all walks of life. In the book titled Achilles's Choice, David Lenson adds weight to this view and states that "a sensible approach to tragedy must take stock of the community in which the tragic action is placed" (1975:160). As a result, a probe into the community in which tragedy occurs will provide us with a context in which the vision of tragedy as portrayed by Mda in WSF can be understood.

WSF “offers both a persuasive study of neo-colonialism in independent Africa and speculation on the nature of man’s being” (Mda, 1990: XII). The period of transition from colonial rule to independence or self-governance signalled significant changes in the socio-economic structure of post-colonial Africa. These changes formed part and parcel of the subjects and thematic preoccupations of the spectacle in the dramatic and theatrical world of the communities then. In most countries throughout Africa, political and economic emancipation was key and crucial to the upliftment of the previously disadvantaged and impoverished communities. Any government that came into power found itself in a difficult position of improving the lives of its people to ensure their constant support.

The reasons for this difficulty are diverse and vary from country to country. In post-independence Africa, particularly, many countries or governments fell into the trap of an aggressive capitalist system of economy in which the economic system was wholly influenced and controlled by external economic forces and the International Monetary Fund. The consequences were sometimes so disastrous that the majority of people were subjected to widespread poverty and suffering.

Consequently, it becomes clear why the emergence of colonized nations or countries from colonial rule and domination in Africa was characterized by political turmoil and social disorder. Merle Lipton summarizes the source of disorder and tragic situations as follows:

This political turmoil in Africa has moreover been accompanied by immense economic and cultural changes, such as industrialization and the introduction of Western science. The enormity and rapidity of this transformation; the fragility of the institutions and boundaries established by the relatively short-lived colonial powers; and the subsequent power vacuum and lack of trained people left by their abrupt departure – these structural factors are the sources of the disorder and upheaval, not the personal capacities or inclinations of Africans (1986:385).

Similarly, in Mda's world as depicted in WSF, this transition ushered in a social and economic crisis of immense proportions resulting from the tension between the Western understanding of capitalism and African nationalism. It seems that the question here was whether to put in place an economic system that was fundamentally Western or African in nature. The period before independence was characterized by an economic system that thrived under private ownership of the means of production. Western colonial powers were in favour of capitalism and saw it as a means of optimizing individual ability as far as the economic upliftment of their communities was concerned.

Emphasizing the importance of a capitalist economic system, Businessman states: "Africanization 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 and their friends" (WSF 34). In the eyes of colonial governments, the success of capitalism far outweighed its failures for a number of reasons. Firstly, the system seems to encourage diversity as far as individual expertise and innovation are concerned, as well as encourage competition. Secondly, since capitalism encourages private rather than state ownership of production and distribution, state interference and monopoly were thought to be kept under control by the system. Perhaps a point worth noting here is that another reason why Western colonial powers embraced capitalism is because Western governments support a society based on individual will and responsibility with the understanding that this will then lead to more effective development in society.

On the other hand, African cosmology is different in that it seems to favour group will based on collective responsibility. This collective approach to day-to-day running of affairs is founded on the philosophy that emphasizes the importance of a group over that of an individual. As a result, the success of the nation is societally driven and measured in terms of the success of the whole society. Such an approach closely resembles African nationalism

which in turn is not too different from African socialism because both emphasize development in society based on collective responsibility and consensus. Consequently, African nationalism in this context upholds the belief that the wealth of a nation belongs to all its citizens, and that equal distribution of that wealth should be decided by the entire nation. Emphasis here is on collective ownership rather than on private ownership and distribution. It must be mentioned here that African nationalism did not aim to discourage individual innovation and ability as other critics suggest. Rather, the philosophy encourages diversity within a group with the ultimate aim of reaching a consensus as a group. In African cosmology, honesty, commitment and consensus are key to an ideal world-view and the absence of these values could result in a tragic situation as it will be illustrated in this chapter.

But what does this socio-economic scenario have to do with the nature and source of a tragic theme in WSF? The scenario provides us with an economic context within which Mda's vision of tragedy can be analysed. In the previous chapter tragedy was analysed mainly from a socio-political context, whereas tragedy in WSF is examined primarily from a socio-economic context.

In my view modern tragedy relates to everyday problems in society, and these problems are taken up and dramatized by playwrights with the intention of changing society. The functional role of theatre, therefore, becomes important as it affects form, content and function of given piece of drama. The theatre of Zakes Mda is categorized as community theatre, Theatre for Development or theatre for education. Yvette Hutchinson describes community theatre as "a means of democratizing a way to explore and solve problems" (1996:42). The question which arises from this quotation is "Why the need to democratize theatre?" In the book When People Play People Mda provides an answer to this question. He explains that the rise of African Theatre for Development or "community theatre" came as a "response to the failure of multi-media communication channels to deliver development

messages” (Kerr, 1995:160). Mda states that communication channels which were in place then “serve[d] the needs of a few urban inhabitants while neglecting those of the vast majority of the population living in rural areas” (1990:1). In this way, problems experienced by the majority of ordinary people were not taken care of.

The socio-economic standard in rural areas was low and development favoured urban people. By taking theatre to the people, in a language and through dramatic conventions familiar to them, community theatre moved closer to educating people about issues of immediate concern. Seen as a vehicle to bridge the communication gap, this type of theatre essentially served to “educate” and to “develop” ordinary people. It seems that in writing WSF Mda wanted to challenge and educate the audience or reader to revisit the validity of the norms and values of their communities in order to bring about change and development. If this function is fulfilled, then it is true that Mda’s theatre “uses theatrical practices to promote progressive education” (Steadman, 1992:40).

Furthermore, Mda’s satirical tone is echoed in Janabari’s words: “The Priests have already decided that he was healthy enough to go to heaven ” (WSF 47). In this quotation, Mda foregrounds the foolishness of the Priest and questions the importance of the grand funeral given to Mafutha. As a businessman, his burial was a spectacle of decorations and singing accompanied by a sermon in which the Priest has already decided that Mafutha’s wealthy status has secured him a place in heaven. It seems that Mda is mocking at the view that money is power and that with it everything is possible. By foregrounding the subtle tension between the government and its people, Mda transcends political boundaries and draws our attention to the selfish reasons behind the source of tragedy as a result of the economic hypocrisy of the time.

4.2 The Tragic Action

The central question to be answered in this chapter is “What constitutes tragedy in WSF?”. In trying to answer this question, I shall approach the question from an economic as well as an individualistic point of view. The point to make here is that although individual greed is seen as a catalyst towards tragedy, a capitalist government is seen as the root cause of the nation’s suffering and poverty in WSF. Therefore, tragedy in WSF is closely associated with a capitalistic economic system which seems to empower the elite to the disadvantage of ordinary people.

In dealing with the source of tragedy in WSF, the discussion takes its cue from Janabari’s words in which capitalism is explicitly seen as a means of contributing to the disempowerment of ordinary members of society:

This is what I have been saying all along, Serge. And you thought I was being rebellious. All along, Serge, I have been trying to show you that we are not getting our share of whatever there is to be shared. This is what the learned ones call capitalism, Serge. It has no place for usonly 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. What we need is another war of freedom, Serge – a war which will put this land back into the hands of the people (WSF 44).

In this extract, Janabari suggests that capitalism encourages exploitation of ordinary people by the elite, which thus precipitates tragic suffering. The major reason for this exploitation can be deduced from Merle Lipton’s definition of capitalism. Lipton defines capitalism as “a social system in which there is a substantial degree of private, as distinct from state or communal ownership of the means of production (mines, farms, factories, banks), and in which the owners of those assets hire employees for a wage for private gain” (1986:2). This economic system carries some potential drawbacks in that it is often manipulated by the powerful minorities for selfish reasons.

It is clear that capitalism favours private rather than state or communal ownership of the means of production. Contrary to this view, Mda seems to favour an economic system which advocates for a collective and communalistic approach to life, be it in areas pertaining to religion, politics or economy. It must be mentioned here that the argument against capitalism does not suggest in any way that a capitalistic government is evil, and that it does not have a place in post-colonial Africa. Mda, however, seems to suggest that the system exploits and alienates ordinary people like Sergeant and Janabari and denies them a “share of whatever there is to be shared” (WSF 44). As a result, the veterans become an image of an alienated group in a capitalistic society. They are alienated from becoming full citizens by economically exploitative state policies. The concern here is about the failure of an economic system to accommodate ordinary people.

Consequently, the notion of consensus is of extreme importance in the organisation of African society. Agovi sees consensus as “the key to society’s integrity and the preservation of its sense of stability, cohesion and continuity” (1985:68). In WSF the veterans’ integrity as citizens and freedom fighters is undermined by the government’s failure to protect, care for and value its own people as an important part of the liberated society:

Janabari:

Do you mean cabinet is at last interested in us?

Ofisiri:

Cabinet is interested in you in so far as it wants your type cleared off the streets. (Brandishing the letter) Our country is chairing the International conference of Environment. Delegates from all over the world will be flocking all over the city. Tours will be conducted for them throughout our beautiful city, and as I told you before you’re not anyone’s idea of a tourist attraction (WSF 37).

This extract foregrounds two characteristics prevalent in post-colonial literature. The statement “you’re not anyone’s idea of a tourist attraction” and Ofisiri’s words “our beautiful city” illustrate the conflict between the post-

colonial notions of "Us" versus "Them". This conflict, which can also be seen as a conflict of the "other" foregrounds the irony of the situation in which the veterans are not seen as part and parcel of the "beautiful city" because they are the type to be "cleared off". Before independence, there was a perception that all the oppressed people were one black nation fighting one common enemy and the notion of the "other" was restricted to the enemy. Status and class during the times of struggle in the bush were irrelevant because what mattered most was unity and teamwork to defeat the enemy. Things took a dramatic change immediately after independence; teamwork and unity that had helped the oppressed people to overthrow the colonial power gave way to individual greed. People who were friends in war became enemies in business, and society moved slowly into the system which defined human worth according to the wealth and education a person has accumulated. Janabari and Sergeant became the "other" because they shared a different vision of what independence meant to the people in their communities. Once respected and seen as heroes during the wars of freedom before independence, the veterans are homeless and neglected. Ironically, during the struggle and wars of freedom Sergeant and Janabari had the bush as their refuge or shelter. Under the new government, they wander around without a proper shelter, and finally decide to take shelter in the park because "it is the only place where two self-respecting army veterans can spend their lives in peace and in quietude" (WSF 37). The veterans' identity has changed from being freedom fighters to unemployed hoboes. Thus, the search for identity and shelter impacts on their integrity in society with the end result that the absence of stability, cohesion and continuity leads to tragic situations.

By excluding and marginalizing the will of ordinary people, the government seems to have decided that there is no longer any need for consensus in its governance, and by so doing, it destroys the covenant of trust and commitment that binds interpersonal relations in African cosmology. From the above-mentioned discussion, it is clear that the vision of tragedy in WSF is one of a society that loses its will to survival or life because it also loses its will for consensus.

Cohesion and stability become illusory in a society crippled by white-collar crime. Ofisiri is a civil servant and earns a salary from the municipality. Despite this he betrays his trust as a law-abiding officer and accepts bribes from the veterans who are roaming the streets as “economic parasites, hoboes and petty thieves” (Mda, 1990:xiv). Instead of abiding by the work ethics that emphasise accountability, Ofisiri chooses to abuse his powers for his selfish financial gain.

Furthermore, it seems that Mda’s vision of tragedy advocates stability and continuity in society. But in a society where the gap between the haves and the have-nots is extremely wide, stability cannot be easily achieved. Mr Mafutha is a millionaire while the veterans are mere hoboes; he lives in a suburb while they have taken shelter in the park. This discrepancy is a recipe and foundation for possible conflict in societies. There is no doubt that if the poor are denied opportunities within legal means to share in the wealth of their country, it is likely that the poor will always resort to unlawful means to survive. As a result, stability, cohesion and continuity become impossible in a society divided along class and status.

According to Sofola (1986:65) tragic experience may ensue as a result of the individual’s assertion of will at the expense of the common good. Evidently, Mr Mafutha and the Businessman are determined to do everything in their power to climb up the economic ladder. The Banker explains his threat towards his clients: “I made them come to their senses at last. I don’t have to tell you all this, but it had come to a stage where I had to threaten not to give them any more loans and overdrafts. That brought them to their senses” (WSF 34).

The consequences of Mr. Mafutha being chairman of the Stock Exchange are indeed what constitutes tragedy in WSF. Lacking the skills and necessary expertise for sound economic leadership, Mr. Mafutha risks exploitation by opportunists like the Businessman, and the economy of the whole country will

take a chaotic plunge which will become a recipe for “another war of freedom – a war which will put this land back into the hands of people” (WSF:44). All these will help fossilise the stereotype that “Africanization seems to be failing when it comes to commerce and industry” (WSF 34). It appears from the discussion mentioned thus far that Mda shares the view of Agovi that “A society that allows the self-interest and personal considerations of its ambitious elements (however large or few) to undermine its collective will and interest only invites death to its doorstep” (1985:68).

Another source of tragedy in WSF is attributed to the “inequalities of a class-divided society” (Mda, 1990:xiii). In her book entitled Consensus and Conflict in African Societies (1977), Margaret Peil sees class as contributing to conflict in African societies. Peil defines class as “the institutionalised inequality of wealth or power in a certain society so that certain groups of people actively pursue their own interest at the expense of other groups with whom they are in conflict over societal resources” (1977:82). The Businessman, Banker and Ofisiri are the embodiment of privileged class and status in WSF. Mr Mafutha and the Banker are bound together by a common love for money and a desire to become successful.

Although Peil links class to race in her discussion of conflict and consensus in African societies, Mafutha and the Businessman are bound together by a common love for money rather than by their race. Mda’s vision of the source of tragedy transcends politics of race and colour. For example, Janabari tells Sergeant: “Serge I have been telling 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 44). In the same breath in which white-on-black prejudice and discrimination were criticised by many black playwrights, Mda criticises black-on-black discrimination as well. Clearly, Mda is aware of the fact that exploitation and prejudice are not only practised on people of a different colour. Janabari and Sergeant are discriminated against by people of their own race and nationality. Janabari explains this when he tells Sergeant that

their fight was to root out corruption irrespective of who perpetrated it. Since the new government is in the hands of their fellow blacks, these people are also subjects of attack and their being black does not make them immune to criticism. Mda seems to suggest that individual greed is colour blind and that it is in human weakness of enriching oneself at the expense of a group that tragedy exists.

However, their desire for success is carried out in a selfish manner that aims to benefit a few individuals at the expense of the whole society. Mr Mafutha and the Businessman are determined to do everything in their power to climb up the economic ladder. The Banker manipulates the Businessman into believing that he is qualified enough to become the chairman of the Stock Exchange. Furthermore, the Banker is duped into believing that his chairmanship as a black person is a positive move to “teach our incompetent socialist neighbours the art of running the economy of a state without making a mess of it all” (WSF 35).

The vision of “altruistic redemptive suffering” (Sofola, 1986:66) in which an individual deliberately chooses to suffer for the common good is also key to understanding tragedy in WSF. This view of tragedy is exemplified in the veterans’ unselfish concern for the welfare of others. For example, they are constantly subjected to threats of being removed from the park, subjected to suffering and indignation but refuse to “desert in the face of the mounting pressure” (WSF 43). Instead they remain loyal to their fatherland until the fateful day of their death. They are proud of being the “architects” (WSF 41) of a new government in which young men and women are holding positions which used to be held only by their colonial power. By refusing to bow to pressure, they have dissociated themselves from being part and parcel of corruption and disorder. Thus, they serve as an antidote to the disorganisation, socio-economic and moral decline which has held their country hostage.

Furthermore, Agovi gives prominence to “a deep seated respect for life, its continuity and survival” (1985:59). This respect for life in African cosmology does not end during death and is advocated for even after death. A common belief in African philosophy is that human beings pass from the world of mortals to another phase of life in the “world” of ancestors. This thinking is exemplified in Scene Three in which Mda gives us a glimpse of life after death in which the immortals can see and comment on the world and actions of the mortals without being seen. Sergeant says that “Mortals can’t see us now that we are dead. We can even move among them and inspect if they are doing a proper job digging our graves” (WSF 46). By using this dramatic device, Mda seems to suggest that nothing is hidden from the eyes of the creator, and that whatever evil is done during one’s lifetime, there comes a time when individuals will have to take responsibility for their actions.

The dead, therefore, are regarded as living people in another world, and so their wishes are to be respected even long after they have died. Even when dead, the veterans inspect the proceedings of their and Mafutha’s funeral. Contrary to their wishes being fulfilled while they were alive, Sergeant complains that he didn’t have his crutches when he needed them in life. Wrapped in sacks and refused a proper burial befitting the heroes of war, as well as being unsanctified by the grace of either church or state, the spirits of the veterans cannot find rest and wander aimlessly unacknowledged as in life. Ofisiri disregards the respect due to the dead and calls them “vagrants and vagabonds”; “ragged bundle of lice”; “fools”; “carcasses” (WSF 42) while they were alive, and “bastards” and “goddamned tramps” (WSF 45) while dead, and it is this disregard and disrespect for the ancestors that is thought to precipitate tragedy.

It seems that all the above-discussed elements about what constitutes tragedy in WSF seem to grapple with the question of existence: “What does it mean to be?” In asking this question, the veterans seem to question the validity of human existence in the midst of being snubbed and dehumanised by their own people. WSF, therefore, concerns itself with the alienation and

marginalization of people in their societies. The play dramatises the miseries and injustices of human existence in order to effect change in society. It is said that this change was geared to facilitating “progress” during the twentieth century, the century described by Spencer as the century of “faith in human progress” (Gurr, 1980:140). Therefore, it appears that failure to reconcile human dignity with human progress leads to tragic situations.

4.3 Audience Reaction and “Catharsis”

The question of how the audience reacts to the spectacle of a tragic action is difficult to pin down to one specific reaction. Therefore, the discussion of catharsis and audience reaction will be carried out in very general terms of how different audiences are likely to react rather than how they should react. This discussion is important because it reflects on the complexity of the issue as to whether contemporary drama can be classified as tragic or not.

Banning describes theatre performances as “collective, public, social forms of action” (1990:13). Banning regards audience consent and active participation in the construction of the dramatically real world as being very important. For Banning, theatre is a cultural activity in which the “immediate effects of ideological shifts can be publicly demonstrated to both performers and their audience as they occur” (1990:12). Similarly, Mda’s theatre adapts itself to the immediate needs and concerns of his society in order to achieve its didactic objective. Seen in this light, theatre becomes an “activity by its community, occurring within its communities, for that community” (Banning, 1990:13). It could be argued that the process of writing WSF is in itself cathartic. Judging from the socio-economic crisis foregrounded in the play, it appears that Mda wrote the play not only to educate people but perhaps as a way of reacting to the problems in his society.

Aristotle sees pity and fear as the two major emotions aroused by tragedy. The suffering experienced by the veterans is fully capable of exciting our pity

because their tragic suffering is unmerited. This pity readily blends with fear born out of the conviction that any human being in the position of the veterans would have suffered the same tragic fate. We pity them for their suffering because they suffer for no fault of their own. But we also appreciate their courage and determination to confront their suffering head-on while undergoing physical and mental strains.

As audience or readers we are tossed up and down between a feeling of depression and envy. Having been exposed to a spectacle of suffering and hardship, we are likely to feel depressed. But Mda skilfully downplays this feeling by fusing tragic and comic situations into a whole that does not allow the audience to be too depressed about the veterans' suffering and death. Above all, in a manner almost reminiscent of Shakespeare's use of his fools, Mda satirically mocks the evils of society by giving the veterans who are now hoboes, wit and insight into the problems of post-colonial societies. Instead of lashing out at Ofisiri for calling them names and taking bribes, Sergeant gives Ofisiri a false compliment under the pretext that "a word or two to raise the morale of our overworked police force is a great contribution to the fatherland" (WSF 31). Therefore, we admire them for their wit and loyalty and pity them for their unmerited suffering. Even the sad ending of the play when Sergeant asks: "What about us, Janabari. Where are we going?" and the angry tone in "How the hell do I know. Let's go" (WSF 47) is not sad enough to override the general feeling of hope and a better life for the veterans.

A number of Aristotelian elements of tragedy are not readily obvious in contemporary tragic drama. One such element is Aristotle's conception of tragic heroes which confines tragic heroes to men of noble and high social status. Contemporary tragic drama portrays ordinary men and women in a constant struggle to overcome their miseries and human injustices regardless of their class or status. Unlike Western drama in which the stature of the tragic hero was associated with the nobility and high social status in society, modern drama advocates a heroic stature associated with the nature and seriousness of the problem with which the hero grapples. It does not matter

whether man is a king, migrant, slave, or in the case of the veterans hoboos, man is believed to acquire great stature when he battles a problem of serious and universal nature. The veterans are in a constant struggle against the problems of universal concern such as betrayal, prejudice, poverty, and dehumanisation. Important to note here is that man in modern tragic drama does not have to be noble or have status from the outset, but in trying to address these universal issues, he gradually acquires great status, and as a result becomes larger than life.

Consequently, heroes in WSF are tragic victims rather than tragic heroes. They are protagonists of a stature and understanding of ordinary men. The ordinary man's world is social, and Mda's heroes are concerned with social issues and problems. Their concern with universal problems and their exceptional power to confront suffering and to refuse to submit to the forces working against them, makes them larger than life. Similarly, Sergeant and Janabari are larger than life because despite their immense suffering, they illustrate spiritual strength and extraordinary capacity to withstand pressure from forces against them. Throughout the play they remain undeterred and committed to a truly liberated fatherland in which there are equal opportunities and distribution of wealth. Since their commitment to human caring and respect for human dignity is shared by humanity at large, they are able to elicit sympathy from us as audience, readers or fellow human beings.

Diction or language is another important feature in tragic drama. I have already pointed out that characters in WSF are portrayed as types rather than developed persons. WSF is written in simple and direct language, and a mixture of vocabulary derived from a number of sociolectal groups. There are words from a Nguni language, for example, "Mashangana" (WSF: 29), which is slang for "Tsonga people", and from *tsotsitaal* spoken by gangsters, for example, "Mataliana" or "Italians" (WSF: 29). All these elements are not authentic features of various sociolects, because they only exemplify a register which is theatrical rather than accurately sociolectal. The importance of using these words from different nationalities varies according

to the context in which these words are used. For example, the words “Mashangana” and “Mataliana” as used in SFN refer to stereotypes associated with these groups. The Tsonga people were believed to survive on a certain special diet which appeared mean to people of other races. The reference to them here suggests stereotypes of them eating the same diet. The reference to Italians is associated with expensive fashion, especially clothes. Gangsters used to show off their American and European clothes, and this gave them certain status higher than that of ordinary members of the community. In using these words it is taken for granted that the audience is familiar with the context in which these words are used.

It appears that the style in WSF conforms to Aristotle’s requirement for a realistic, simple and dignified style. Mda uses everyday dialogue without rendering it mean and dull. The dialogue seems dramatically effective in that it helps the action to move properly as well as enabling it to carry the emotional weight without exaggerating. However, the dignity of style is not obvious for it is through a closer attention to the dialogue that the style reveals a charged effect of the weight behind the common words. For example, Janabari’s statement: “You know, Serge, they stole money from my corpse” (WSF 46) and Sergeant’s casual tone in “We respect the law as well as any man” (WSF 38) foreground more than what merely meets the eye. These statements by Sergeant and Janabari comment on the moral and ethical issues of the day.

The whole of WSF, as it shall be illustrated in the paragraph below, is written in a style which is clear, emotional and lofty:

Sergeant: Will you ever stop complaining, Janabari. Where else would you get a park like this – and all to yourself, Janabari? Yours for all the world to see. Where else in the world, Janabari? look at the flowers. The scent...the breeze – and you complain of a roof. Mh...I sense it now. Some air of rebelliousness in you. Janabari!

Janabari: Serge!

Sergeant: Come here. Stand here before me. Attention, man. Janabari do you remember the oath?

Janabari: Yes, Serge!

Sergeant: To fight and to die for the fatherland.

Janabari: Yes, Serge. We fought for the fatherland but we did not die.

Sergeant: You don't all die in a war, man. Others died, man. Your own comrades-in-arms dying before you, next to you... dying all over the place. Dying in order that we should live, Janabari. 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 (WSF 32).

Aristotle maintains that clarity without meanness is the first requisite of style. WSF exemplifies this style because it uses current and simple words as used in everyday life. However, this does not mean that the diction or speech is mean or lacks the dignity. For example, the word "fatherland" carries a significant connotation to the veterans, both before and after independence. The word "fatherland" brings back a picture of an ideal world or "Utopia" in which the veterans live happily in peace and are recognised as important citizens. Sergeant urges Janabari not to complain about not having a roof or shelter, and encourages him to take comfort in nature (the flowers, scent and the breeze). Loftiness in style here is achieved by using metaphors capable of conveying deeper feelings. The metaphors of "death" and "life" foreground the intensity of emotions aroused by the memory of people dying, as well as struggling to survive the enemy. The veteran's description of an ideal fatherland in which all people have a fair share in the distribution of wealth, the veterans' expression of the desire for a life of happiness in which they have shelter and equal opportunities, as well as their desire to be recognised as humans rather than being looked down upon, are some of the instances when the style becomes lofty. Therefore, a certain loftiness in style in WSF comes from the emotions expressed even though the words can be commonplace.

Tragedy in WSF does not depend on death alone but it depicts characters in constant suffering. The suffering emanates from the characters being marginalized by their government rather than by the shame of the offence as in Greek tragic drama. The knowledge emanating from suffering does not necessarily take the form of self-knowledge. As Krook (1969b:13) rightly points out, "what matters in tragedy is not that the tragic hero shall receive knowledge issuing from the tragic suffering, but that we the readers or audience shall receive it".

Tragedy in WSF is not a spectacle of bloodshed as in Oedipus and Macbeth; rather it is a depiction of constant suffering of ordinary people at the hands of other people and of an abusive government. Although death is naturally a recurrent feature in tragedy, its sting or intensity in WSF is downplayed by the veterans' will-power to confront the forces against them. It is definitely not the pain from the veterans' death that arouses feelings of bitterness and anger in WSF, but rather the spectacle of the veterans' homelessness and the fact that they are doomed to sleep in the cold of the park, to die there. Similarly, the symbolic movement in which the veterans try to sing their song for the fatherland but the words do not come out, is a symbol strong and tragic, perhaps more than that of their actual death. This accords with Ofisiri's statement about "loss and failure of human sensibility which is authentically tragic" (Orr,1981:xii). It seems from this statement that the spectacle of human alienation and suffering is more tragic than death itself.

WSF conforms to Aristotle's view that the subject matter of tragedy should be serious and universal. Mda does not give the play a fixed setting, and this, together with his concern with problems pertaining to politics and economy through the exploration of themes of commitment and betrayal, suggest the universality of the play. Mda's preoccupation with the dynamism of people's socio-economic struggle in post-independent societies is a situation evident throughout the whole world. Recent socio-political instability in Africa (Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo), in Europe (Yugoslavia)

and South America (Argentina) are few examples of the universal problems and challenges that have been troubling humanity for years. The problems expressed in WSF, especially issues concerning poverty, prejudice and dehumanisation are universal and admit of no easy solutions. The play begins with the contemporary problem of conflict between the veterans in the lowest stratum of society and the rich, privileged, ruling class. Besides representing the conflict between the poor and the rich, the play depicts the spiritual struggle of the veterans to get over the suffering which is lurking during and after life when their suffering appears a never ending action.

The argument presented thus far clearly indicates that the nature of the tragic theme in WSF is a complex phenomenon. The tragic theme depends on the problems of society, and that these problems differ and vary according to people's experiences and perceptions of what tragedy is. Betrayal, neglect, prejudice, and economic exploitation are some of the many issues associated with the source of tragedy in the play. Consensus and understanding between people and between communities are the key to a successful society because any attempt by the individual to impose his will over that of the majority is likely to lead to tragic situations. Our reaction as audience or readers to this suffering varies from individual to individual. For example, in situations where the suffering of the people is unmerited, we are likely to sympathise with, as well as to pity them. Lastly, the characters in this play seem to suffer not because of their pride, but rather from an economic system which benefits the few at the expense of the majority, and this action is serious enough to trigger tragic action.

CHAPTER V

SARAFINA!: PERFORMANCE STYLES AND COMMUNICATION

The play relates to the 1976 Soweto uprisings in which thousands of Black students took to the streets to protest against “Bantu” education. This system of education legislated Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction in black schools. Subjects such as Zulu, History, and Mathematics were to be studied through the medium of Afrikaans. As Thamsanqa states: “Actually, we just don’t want to learn Afrikaans” (SFN 62). Almost all the black schools in South Africa identified Afrikaans as a vehicle of oppression and an attempt by the apartheid government to destroy their identity. The students of Morris Isaacson High School of Education in Soweto teamed up together to defy the education authorities. Everything, from the school syllabus to extramural activities, was dictated by the Education authorities despite heavy protest from the students. The student leaders such as Tsietsi Mashinini and Khotso Nkhatho were among the brave students who openly defied the imposition of Afrikaans as a compulsory subject as well as the medium of instruction for black students. Protest marches and school boycotts were the order of the day and ultimately school was disrupted. To suppress this volatile situation, the government sent police and heavily armed soldiers to schools. Schools were basically under siege and fully occupied by the police and the army under the pretext that they were there to maintain law and order. Students found themselves in direct confrontation with the police and many of them were detained while others went to exile.

This chapter discusses the nature and manifestation of tragedy by looking at how Mbongeni Ngema uses various elements of entertainment and communication as a vehicle to foreground the tragic message in Sarafina!. The aim is to argue that although the use of dramatic devices such as dance, song, music, and praise poems seems to reduce the tragic sting or seriousness of the play, the physical and spiritual suffering transmitted

through these dramatic devices is serious enough to classify SFN as a contemporary tragic play. Since the play was originally written for stage, both theatrical and literary aspects of the play will be taken into consideration.

Ngema's SFN navigates between protest and Popular theatre. In the article entitled "Popular Theatre and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa", David Kerr discusses various ways in which popular theatre in Southern Africa (especially in South Africa) relates to the struggle of national liberation. According to Kerr (1995:196), the roots of this type of theatre lie in the anti-colonial struggle for independence. In this sense, theatre in South Africa has at some stage been used as a platform from which the battle for freedom and political liberation was waged. In this theatre a number of performance forms such as song, dance, music, and praise poems are employed not only as a spectacle of entertainment, but as mechanisms through which the message of oppression is foregrounded.

The concept "world" is a crucial concept in any interpretation of tragedy, and the world in which SFN was written and produced is summed up in the following passage:

Colgate:

In our times we don't have to fight to see the army, tanks, casspirs, thunder chariots or hippos, all of these army machines; we live with them right here in our school. The soldiers have become the inspectors who patrol our classrooms. They even study the syllabus. Sometimes they even forget their walkie-talkies in their classrooms. Teargas has become our perfume. What was most exciting about our school was the unity, the characters (SFN 59).

In this quotation Colgate gives a glimpse of the situation in their school. The period leading to the 1976 Soweto student uprising was characterized by violence and disruption of education in the black townships. In fact, the schools were gradually turned into battlefields between the students and the police. In an attempt to contain the violence that had already gone beyond

control, the government deployed hundreds of soldiers and the police to “normalize” the situation. Colgate satirically refers to the army as school “inspectors” inspecting the daily running of the school. The fact that the army studied the syllabus explains another form of suppressing the students because anything that they deemed to be “political” and subversive to the state, was immediately scrapped from the syllabus. Students were not allowed to assemble in a group, and if they did they were dispersed with teargas. This situation was so common that the students painfully learned to live with it. This chaotic situation later on spilled over to the whole townships with the results that the black schools and black residential areas were also engulfed in full-scale violence. It is against this historical and political background that tragedy in SFN should be understood.

In an attempt to highlight their plight and quest for a free and fair education, students embarked on boycotts and protest marches. At the forefront of these protest marches and campaigns against apartheid policies were organizations such as the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the South African Student Organization (SASO). It does not come as a surprise that the BMC teamed up with the students to oppose Afrikaans. In his book entitled Black Resistance to Apartheid, Mokgethi Motlhabi writes:

The Black Consciousness Movement rejected integration, especially if this was understood to mean assimilation of Black people into an already existing white society with pre-established values and norms. The idea that a settler minority should impose an entire system of values on an indigenous people was frowned upon (1984:113).

The majority of the black people during the apartheid era in South Africa found themselves alienated from their country. The Black Consciousness Movement stepped in to unite the black people to speak with one voice against white domination. This movement through protest theatre set out to encourage black people to rediscover their cultural heritage and roots. It was believed that this rediscovery of African culture and values would assist in creating an African identity which would restore pride in being African at a

time when Africans were treated like animals. In SFN for example, charismatic black heroes such as Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, and Sobukwe are praised for their struggle to resist white domination.

Seen in this light, it was evident that by accepting Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction in black schools, students would be seen as being assimilated into the culture of the whites. Language is an integral part of one's culture and identity, and any attempt to compromise it was strongly objected to because it literally meant destroying one's identity. As a result, such a move was seen by Black Consciousness activists as another form of oppressing the students. South Africa then was divided along race and colour, and evidently, the legislation of Afrikaans was perceived as an insult by the minority power upon the oppressed majority who were denied equal rights and justice in their ancestral land.

Steve Biko, one of the founder members of Black Consciousness Movement comments about the integration of blacks into white societal structures:

If on the other hand, [wrote Biko], by integration you mean there shall be free participation by all members of a society, catering for the full expression of the self in a freely changing society, as determined by the will of the people, then I am with you. For one cannot escape the fact that the culture shared by the majority group in any given society must ultimately determine the broad direction taken by the joint culture of that society. This need not cramp the style of those who feel differently but on the whole, a country in Africa, in which the majority of people are African, must inevitably exhibit African values and be truly African in style (Motlhabi, 1984:114).

In essence, black students did not abhor Afrikaans as a language. In fact, since blacks were employees and whites employers, besides English, Afrikaans was the main language through which communication was possible. The understanding here is that students were against the use of Afrikaans at the expense of their native languages. For example, Siboniso

says: "We don't want to do Zulu in Afrikaans" (SFN 61). There was a perception amongst Africans that the pre-established values and the norms of the Whites or Europeans would eradicate those of indigenous Africans. The feeling was that since the majority population in Africa is African, any form of integration should "exhibit African values and be truly African in style" (Motlhabi, 1984:114).

This line of thinking was furthered by the movement called Black Consciousness (BC). SASO defines Black Consciousness as "an attitude of mind – a way of life" (Motlhabi, 1984:112). In a nutshell, BC advocated for the re-evaluation of human worth in which the black person should fight against or reject all value systems that sought to make him a foreigner in the land of his birth. According to Motlhabi, the Black person should foster group cohesion with his fellow blacks in order to build his own value systems, rather than be defined by others (Motlhabi: 1984:112). Kelwyn Sole sees this initiative of defining oneself as a concern for "blacks to rediscover their cultural heritage and roots" (Sole, 1987:48).

Mubi asks: "Eyi, man what is this army doing in Soweto?" (SFN 91) and students replied: "Ya! Mabashaywe!" (SFN 91), which literally means "let us confront them!" Violence broke out between students and the police, and culminated in more dead bodies of students being buried. Parents seemed to have taken a back seat as students braved teargas, rubber bullets, birdshots, and live bullets from the brutal police force and the army. Colgate, a former student of Morris Isaacson High School, was among the police most wanted by the students because of his political activities. In the passage below, he gives us the picture of the "world" in prison and states:

It was like that in our school. Oneness: 'imbumba'. Those days went down bitter and sore in the presence of the army and the police not only in our schoolyard, but right inside our classrooms. Those were the days of anger, the days of panic and fear, the days when our brothers and sisters disappeared into the police cells. Others came back and others never came

back. We were told others hung themselves in the police cells in detention, others fell in the showers and died. And again we were told others tried to escape by jumping from the tenth floor interrogation room at John Vorster Square Maximum security Prison. Their bones were found scattered (SFN 112).

The students were angry with the army and the police, and many were imprisoned. Some panicked and went into hiding or exile for fear of being arrested or killed. The homes, streets, churches, schools, and the graveyard were the sites of political unrest and killing. It was as if Heywood is observing these events of the students' helplessness as the police torture, imprison, and kill them without them having any means to defend themselves:

The universe is itself wrong and the situation is fraught with eternal consequences for humanity. If the universe is already paralysed and humanity is adrift on a raft, then there is hardly any need for meaningful action; characters engage in some insane conversation, for the end cannot be improved on the beginning as everything will soon be consumed in universal chaos (Heywood, 1971:95-96).

In this quotation, Heywood (1971) sheds light on the theme of universal chaos as a result of human conflict. In essence, Heywood (1971) suggests that chaos is intrinsic in the universe, and because human beings are born, they live and interact in a troubled and torn world, they are subjects of this chaos. Similarly, characters in SFN are born in a society engulfed in racial and political war, and in their interactions and struggle for restoring their human dignity, conflicts and chaos ensue which ultimately leads to suffering or even to death. It is this picture of conflict, violence against individual will that Ngema depicts in SFN.

These events of political turmoil and widespread violence lead us to the discussion of what constitutes a tragic action in SFN. Ohaeto, in the article entitled "The Nature of Tragedy in Modern African Drama" remarks as follows about the source of tragedy in South African drama:

Tragedy in South African drama is different since it concerns itself with the themes and subject matter of Apartheid....the South African problem is related to freedom and equality. Drama from South Africa as in their prose and poetry deals extensively with the tragic theme of dehumanizing apartheid. The themes of suffering, pain and death coat the dialogues, actions, and characterization (1982:11).

It seems as if apartheid is seen as the root cause of tragedy in South African drama. In SFN apartheid triggers immense suffering, pain and death. Tragedy demands suffering and the theme of suffering in SFN manifests itself in physical and spiritual ways. Children suffer severe physical pain at the hands of the police force. They are beaten up, tortured and electrocuted, and even hanged. Some of the prisoners suffer emotional distress and pain as they are held in isolation cells and are denied visitors. Furthermore, the Internal Security Act allowed the police to arrest and imprison people for an indefinite period without being formally charged. Even after they have been released from prison, Section 2 of The Indemnity Act denies the prisoners the right to sue or to ask for compensation because: "no civil or criminal proceedings shall be brought in a court of law against: (A) the State, (B) the State President, (C) any member of the Cabinet of the Republic, (D) or any member of the force..." (SFN 110). As a result, the agents of the state enjoyed full protection of the law and even when they transgressed the law they could not be held accountable for their actions.

The theme of death as exemplified by the statement "their bones were found scattered" (SFN 112), and the images of students "falling in the shower", "jumping from the tenth floor", and "hanging themselves" (SFN 112), reinforce the theme of death which directly threatens the respect and continuation of life that Kofi Agovi holds key if one is to avoid tragedy in African cosmology.

There is no doubt that since creation, man has always experienced a tragedy of some sort whether as an individual or collectively as a group. Each time

after experiencing a tragic experience, man emerges physically or emotionally tortured, but most importantly, despite the suffering and pain, he has gained a deeper insight into the content and source of his tragic experience. Obiechina supports this statement when he says: "out of every serious crisis in the life of people there comes a deepening of insight into the true nature of man and of human society" (cited in Ohaeto, 1982:12). Sarafina, a young female student finds it difficult to understand why students can be imprisoned and harassed for rejecting a foreign language, in this case Afrikaans. As a young militant student, she chooses to fight this form of oppression by agreeing to stage a school play about Nelson Mandela. She is aware that by staging the play she will be targeted by the police who would do anything to suppress any attempt by the students to attack the apartheid state, and despite this threat she plays the character of Mandela in the school play. Consequently, she is arrested, badly tortured, and released. In prison she gets a better understanding of the problems facing them as students, and is influenced by the non-violent philosophy of her hero Nelson Mandela. In the monologue at the end of the play, Sarafina supports the non-violent approach to fighting against their oppression and suggests the possible solution to their conflict:

We are here all of us not to seek revenge or to destroy but to build the future. Where all of us, black and white can come together and forget the past and work to liberate our land. We should remember that it is only when South Africa is free that all of Africa can be free (SFN 122).

Despite Sarafina having been twice detained and tortured by the white policemen, she comes out of prison a stronger person than ever. Her view that whites are enemies, and her militant chants that whites should be driven back to the sea or be killed, have now changed to a need for cooperation between the two. Sarafina's sudden change of attitude towards whites can be traced down to philosophy advocated by Nelson Mandela that South Africa belongs to all who live in it irrespective of colour or race. This view seems to suggest that genuine peace is possible through negotiations rather than

through the barrel of a gun. It is believed that through understanding, black and white people can live together in peace and harmony. Unlike other extremist views that Africa belongs to the black people and Europe to the white people, co-existence and co-operation between these two groups were encouraged, and this enabled Sarafina to gain insight into the value of human dignity and existence. She realizes that for peace to be sustained blacks and whites should work together to liberate South Africa from the shackles of hatred and racial prejudice. In post-apartheid and democratic South Africa, the spirit of reconciliation, despite their having been at each other's throat in the past, seems to suggest that a positive lesson has been learnt from the Anglo-Boer War, The Battle of Isandlwana, the liberation struggle, as well as from the black-on-black violence. The preservation of human life and dignity has to be restored if tragedy is to be avoided.

Ngema briefly sheds light on the unfortunate scene of black-on-black violence and suggests that it is a recipe for tragedy in the world of SFN. Before addressing the meeting Sarafina warns the police informers:

Those of you who might be working or who might have some private friendship with the government can just get out of this meeting or otherwise...(SFN 93).

The police and informers were equally hated in the black townships during the war of liberation. So hated were the police informers that those accused of being "sellouts" or spying for the government were punished by pouring petrol on them and setting them alight. Alternatively, a tyre would be put around the neck of the accused and set alight while the mob danced and chanted slogans until the body was burnt to ashes. This form of punishment was called "necklacing" and was perpetrated against fellow blacks since they were the ones hired and paid by the state to infiltrate the people on the opposite side. This black-on-black violence took many forms, and among others, there were cases in which a black policeman would not hesitate to torture or shoot his own child during interrogation. In similar fashion, a child would not blink at the thought of burning his own father, uncle or cousin alive. The situation is

clearly exemplified in the play Bopha by Percy Mtwa. In Bopha a policeman is compelled to arrest and imprison his own son for defying apartheid policies in school. The abyss that divides them is so deep that it no longer matters that they are father and son. This situation is serious enough to precipitate tragedy.

Furthermore, Ngema dramatizes another form of black-on-black violence by referring to the conflict between Buthelezi, Mangope and Mandela. Buthelezi and Mangope were homeland leaders of areas known as “Bantustans”, and enjoyed certain privileges during the apartheid era. They were seen as collaborators with the apartheid government and were hated for that. The conflict became worse between the supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party and African National Congress. Many people died, especially in the hostels where the two parties were always bickering and fighting each other. Some went into exile but many people lost their lives during this war. As a result of this fighting, many people were displaced from their homes and wandered around in search for safety. Once again, Kofi Agovi’s social bond based on unity, respect and continuation of life in African communities was completely destroyed.

The theme of displacement features prominently in South African tragedy. The song “Sechaba” (SFN 108) informs us of how different people have left or forsaken their homes in search for a better life. The song talks about the great influx of people from the rural areas to the urban areas in search of loved ones, employment and security. Young boys and girls as well as men and women were forced to abandon their homes as a result of socio-political instability. According to Williams, the “impossibility of finding a home in the world, the condemnation to a guilty wandering, the dissolution of self and others in a desire that is beyond all relationships” are important themes responsible for the source of tragedy (1966b: 94-95).

The imposed system of education upon black students is one reason for the source of tragedy in black communities. In subjects such as History, students

were confronted with a foreign syllabus where they were taught about Jan Van Riebeeck. They were denied the opportunity to learn about their own leaders such as Cetshwayo and Chaka, and even prominent contemporary leaders like Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela were not to be heard of in the school. Sarafina questions the validity of doing a syllabus totally foreign to their socio-historical context: "But Mistress, why do we have to learn about beautiful cities in England which have nothing to do with us?" (SFN 69). Even the mere mentioning of Libya as one of the oil-producing countries was a costly exercise which ultimately left Mubi dead from a police gunshot.

5.1 Language in SFN

Critics who dispute the existence of tragedy in contemporary drama may argue that Ngema's use of language in SFN is inappropriate to tragedy. Such critics insist on elevated language as the appropriate register for the tragic genre. However, Conradie in the article entitled "The Gods Are Not To Blame" gives us another perspective into the way diction is used in contemporary drama when he states that: "with the exception of those who wish to revive poetic drama, most modern dramatists do not aim at elevated language but attempt to create the same effect by means of ordinary language" (1994:31). Conradie's observation that contemporary drama uses ordinary language to create the same effect as that of poetic drama is perfectly exemplified in the way language is used in SFN. The play, therefore, should not be judged according to strict Aristotelian principles of tragedy.

The whole of SFN is written in a style which is clear but lofty. Loftiness in style, according to Aristotle, may be achieved by using unusual words which are high sounding, complex and capable of conveying deeper feelings. The following passage exemplifies how clear and simple language can use metaphors and imagery to arouse intense emotions:

Silence:

My father was stopped at the roadblock in the middle of the night. He was coming from the movies. They asked him where he stole his car from. He showed them the papers, but they were drunk. They beat him and made him go down on his knees and bark like a dog, (*He barks four times like a dog*). And then they unleashed real police *dogs*. The dogs dragged him all over the place for two hours. He came home without his pants. What happens to you when you see your father coming home without pants, but blood running down his legs? What happens to you? (SFN 93).

The style in which language is used in the above-mentioned paragraph is simple, clear, and commonplace, but also far from being mean. In this passage, Silence, one of the students against the use of Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction in their school, describes the painful experience of his father at the hands of the police. His father, returning from the movie was stopped at the roadblock and accused of having stolen his own car. Despite his efforts to produce papers showing that he is the rightful owner of the car, the policemen who were under the influence of liquor beat him up. Through the use imagery, Ngema vividly creates a picture of police brutality in which the man was made to “go down and bark four times like a dog”. The image of the dogs dragging the innocent man all over the place for two hours, and the shameful spectacle of the man coming home without his pants, but blood running down his leg, illustrates a certain loftiness in style. This loftiness in style comes from the intensity of emotions as well as the seriousness with which the man’s torture is expressed. Even though the words might be commonplace, the emotions aroused by the images of “dogs” biting the man, and the “blood” running down his leg, give the language the required dignity for a tragic drama. Therefore, by lapsing into the binality of using elevated and ordinary language, the play has on the whole succeeded in combining simplicity and evocative language to achieve the desired tragic effect.

It seems that SFN gains much of its compelling vitality from the innovative ways in which it uses the language. The play uses a variety of languages, the songs, as well as the dialogues in the play, are illustrative of the general style in which language is used. The language in SFN alternates between English, Setswana, and Nguni languages such as Zulu and Xhosa. Similarly, the song “Sechaba” incorporates words from Sotho, Setswana and Zulu. It could also be argued that by mixing various languages, Ngema not only foregrounds a multilingual conversational convention that was then reflective of multilingualism in South Africa, but that he uses this device as an indicator of “realism” which is presented through dialogue and songs within the play.

Furthermore, Ngema uses language to suit a specific type of character and stereotypes. For example, Colgate is an intriguing and delightful character, and his speech is laced with humour and comic elements. On the other hand, Stimela is the embodiment of the pseudo-American character and his language is that of streetwise talk. In a subtle way, the use of language in SFN gives us glimpses of the stereotypes, humour, morality and behaviour of people in societies during the 1970s. Sometimes Ngema uses repetition to enforce or emphasize a point:

This whole place is filthy! It smells. It smells of the burning bodies of the government's informers. It stinks of the government's lies. It stinks of their jails, it stinks of the state of emergency. It stinks of the madness. It stinks of the army. This wholeplace is a mess! (SFN 94).

We should not lose sight of the fact that Ngema's theatre was used as a vehicle to educate, politicise or conscientise people about the challenges facing their communities. By frequently repeating words, phrases and expressions, the reader or audience is forced into paying attention to what is being repeated. The words “smells” and “stinks” are repeated twice and five times respectively, emphasizing or suggesting that society has deteriorated into a state of chaos and anarchy. The statement “it stinks of the army” suggests that the army's presence is not welcomed in the areas where the

state of emergency is imposed. The repetition of the same words and phrases may seem monotonous and boring, especially to the audience or reader who is not familiar with the context in which these repetitions are used. For Ngema's target audience or reader, the repetition serves to emphasize a certain point or ideology. The repetition of the political chant "*Amandla, Awethu*" [Power belongs to the people] and "*Mayibuye! Africa*" [Come back Africa] (SFN 88) underlines that power and land belong to the people. Although the chants consist of one or two words, they carry in them a forceful and strong message that has the strength to incite people. Both these chants or political slogans are articulated with clenched fists and muscles flexed up, which illustrate the determination in people to put up a brave fight and resist the hegemony.

It must be remembered that using clear and simple language in communication is an age-old tradition in which the spoken word is far more important than the printed word. Consequently, SFN was originally written for the stage before it was printed as a literary text, and as a result, by using clear and simple language Ngema was concerned about putting the message across. His audience consisted of ordinary people who were often semi-literate, and therefore, one can understand why Ngema opted to use a simple style rather than a sophisticated one.

I have already pointed out in the previous chapters that some of the elements of tragic drama have undergone modifications according to their political and social context but they are still applicable to modern drama. It is generally accepted that serious literature is an imaginative re-creation of life. In SFN Ngema has taken material from everyday life about the suffering and dehumanisation of people and dramatised it. The difference is that the material presented is not arranged in a plot sequence governed by Aristotle's conception of plot. The plot structure appears "chaotic" and fragmented, and this could be attributed to the fact that at the time the play was written, Ngema was concerned with dramatising the brutality of apartheid rather than with structural form, and thus the events are presented as historical facts in

an unsystematic way. Consequently, this becomes problematic for the reader or audience because in order to comprehend the play, one has to pull the threads together by oneself especially if such an audience does not know what has gone before to trigger the tragic action. In this way, Ngema forces his audience into a process of becoming active participants in comprehending the play.

Furthermore, students in SFN are tragic heroes and victims at the same time. They do not necessarily have noble and high social status, but they gradually acquire heroic status as they grapple with issues of morality and universal concerns, and in this way they become larger than life. We tend to sympathise with them because they are human like us and their struggle is about issues that matter most to us. Through empathy we forget our petty concerns and imaginatively experience a life which is higher in which we identify with their suffering.

In his discussion of tragedy, Aristotle states that “hamartia” and “hubris” are the two elements which contribute to the tragic hero’s suffering and downfall. Aristotle defines “hamartia” as a moral flaw or a central weakness within a hero. Furthermore, he defines “hubris” as the hero’s pride. The understanding here is that because of pride, a tragic hero engages in an action which leads to his suffering and later on to his death. Contrary to this view, the source of suffering and death of children in SFN does not emanate from the children’s pride or moral weakness, or even from an error of judgement.

In SFN, the element of “hamartia” is difficult to pin down because the students are constantly immersed in unmerited suffering. The students’ “hamartia” may be said to be their determination to stand firm in their fight for justice. If this argument holds water, then tragedy is not strictly due to their weakness or moral flaw since their action is perceived as a right step to take. In this way “hamartia” is general and collective rather than individual and particular. It is for this reason that “catharsis” in SFN does not only excite emotions of anger, frustration and suffering, but also expresses optimism exemplified in

Sarafina's monologue at the end of the play. For example, we feel relieved to learn that the conflict between blacks and whites has taken a dramatic shift from an act of revenge and confrontation to a situation where the two groups can come together and forget the past and work to liberate their country (SFN 122).

The way funerals are conducted and the way death is perceived in SFN, shed light on the nature of the tragic vision in African cosmology. Funerals are respected and are characterized by a special atmosphere depending on the nature of death and the person involved. The preparation to bury the deceased is marked by mixed emotions of sadness, happiness and relief during the period of mourning. If the deceased dies young and unexpectedly, the mood becomes serious and painful because it is thought that if she/he had lived longer, he/she would have helped his/her family and community in many ways. If the deceased dies old from a long and life-threatening illness, the mood is of relief and acceptance that he or she has gone to rest. In SFN, the children die young while resisting and fighting for what is communally seen as a just cause towards liberation. Similarly, men and women die before reaching old age, and as Ngema portrays in SFN, funerals are a spectacle of dancing, ululating, singing, rejoicing and crying in which mixed emotions of anger, sadness, happiness and relief are foregrounded. The tragic sting as a result of death, therefore, is painful but it also soothes the mourners when they come to the realisation that not even death can deter them from continuing the fight for justice.

Death is a recurrent theme in SFN and its image is exemplified through the whole play. The images of "scattered bones", and of "students jumping from the tenth floor", as well as "students hanging themselves" (SFN 112) are tragic enough to regard death seriously. Even if the seriousness of death in SFN is downplayed because although death threatens the continuity of life, it does not signify the end of life itself. Ngema seems to suggest that life does not end with death, and as a result, might share the Christian belief that death

is a gateway to another life. Sarafina gives us the picture of life after detention, torture and death:

There will be millions of people, millions, from all over the world in a big open field in Soweto. The whole place will be vibrating. Women will be ululating. Dust will be rising to the skies. The air will be filled with the sounds of laughter. People will be rubbing shoulders with one voice, one thought, one colour (SFN 122).

In the passage above, Sarafina explains what South Africa will look like after the release of political leaders and the introduction of democracy. She is referring to the new country liberated by the death of the martyrs, and the spirits of these martyrs will now be celebrating “what they believed and lived for and died for...” (SFN 123) which is “The Day of Liberation” (SFN 123). This life after liberation will be characterized the spirit of brotherhood in which all people work together to make South Africa a better place to live in.

The circle of people dying is tragic but also necessary because “life is informed by death” (Williams, 1966b:56). The act of singing and dancing at the sight of tragedy as a result of suffering and death is clearly explained by Sewall in the following observation:

When man graduated from the condition of pain and fear to the condition of suffering – which is the condition of pain and fear contemplated and spiritualized – the response was verbalized in some kind of art form, a dirge or lament. Even in the most sophisticated forms, literary tragedy, the element of gesture, and action is strong (1980:6).

The transition from tragic heroes to tragic victims is clearly observable in SFN. The students and adults are heroes in their own capacities and rights. Modern drama has bridged the wide gap between heroes as kings, queens and heroes and ordinary people such as slaves and migrants. Man is given noble status by the fact that he is created in the image of God, and if the saying that the kingdom of God is in man holds water, then man is perceived

as having the characteristics of a noble man or king. As a result, the death of an ordinary man without rank is not less tragic than that of a man of high status and nobility. In contemporary drama, the death of everyone, irrespective of social status is considered serious enough to be called tragic. Therefore, the Greek and Shakespearean tragic hero as a person of rank and nobility does not apply in SFN. Such a view alienates ordinary man from becoming a tragic hero. Furthermore, there is no single observable tragic flaw which leads heroes to the violation of the moral law as Aristotle and Shakespeare demand. Heroes are born and live their lives as tragic victims of a society that is in constant suffering. The children move us to pity since they are portrayed as not completely evil but as victims whose misfortunes are immense and tragic.

5.2 Performance Theory: South African Theatre

Mbongeni Ngema's SFN is an example of contemporary tragic drama that is totally different from the Greek and Shakespearean vision of tragedy in its dramatic techniques and structural form. The plot does not follow the linear sequence of Aristotle's beginning, middle and end because the emphasis is on presenting the message in whatever form the playwright finds convenient to use. The play is a collage of praise poems and dialogues rendered through songs and monologues. Ngema fuses song, speech and dance to communicate and this reflects and illustrates the African tradition of non-separation of art from everyday life and experience. A normal day in an African community is a spectacle of performance in an informal way. For example, women doing their household chores and men working underground in the mines often sing songs about their work environment. Sometimes during leisure times different actions would be mimed and talked about amongst workers. As a result, the spectacle of communicating a message through dance and song is an old tradition that is not only confined to theatre but that is also integrated into peoples' way of living.

A discussion of dramatic techniques in contemporary drama would not be complete if it did not take into consideration how different performance forms of South African theatre have evolved throughout the history of theatre, not only in South Africa but in Africa as a whole. In the article entitled "Post-Colonial Criticism, Performance Theory and The Evolving Forms of South Africans Theatre" (1992), and in the book Theatre and Society in South Africa (1997), Temple Hauptfleisch gives a detailed analysis of very broad categories of performance forms. Hauptfleisch distinguishes between eight categories of performance forms and emphasizes that these performance forms do not exist separately, but are integrated into a "hybrid" form of a complex structural form. Three categories, namely, category one, three and eight are pertinent to our discussion.

The first category of Hauptfleisch's performance forms is essentially indigenous, traditional and communal in nature. This category represents "the kind of performance traditionally associated with Africa: ritual dances and songs as well as ritual festivals" (Hauptfleisch, 1997:50). The content of this performance is based on the information found in drawings and on the descriptions left by travellers and missionaries. The mimetic element is one of the important features common to all the old performance forms. The mimetic element could be of an imitation of a dance or of any action which is being performed (Hauptfleisch, 1992:68). In SFN, Ngema exemplifies the use of the body as a mimetic element in the action in which the students are throwing stones in slow motion (SFN 91). The action of throwing stones is not verbally communicated but rather acted out. Therefore, body movements play an important role in imitating and communicating messages in African drama.

The second distinctive feature of this performance form is the "strong interrelation between performance and music" (Hauptfleisch, 1997:57). Unlike the other two plays, THE and WSF, SFN is a play in which performance and music are closely interrelated. In fact, the entire play is a spectacle of music and dance. Mbongeni Ngema states that "I had always

wanted to create a musical that would celebrate “*mbaqanga*” music but had no vehicle to do so....I took the children, surrounded them with “*mbaqanga*” music and let them tell their story” (Ngema, 1995:vii-viii). Mbaqanga music is dance music which was popularised in the late 1970s in black South African townships. This music uses song and dance to explore and communicate a variety of socio-political concerns in societies. In the play, a total of twenty three songs are rendered and the rendition is sometimes accompanied by dancing and rendition of poems in between the melody. Hauptfleisch (1992:68) sees the element of telling and of addressing an audience directly, interspersed with mimetic enactment of significant episodes from the narrative as a central facet of this category of performance. The narrative in dramatic monologues in SFN carries a “tour de force” enriched with loaded action and atmosphere from the vivid spectacle of miming characters, dancing and drumming.

The performance forms or styles in SFN have been largely influenced by cultural dance forms. Ngema, being a Zulu himself, born and raised in rural Zululand, was deeply influenced by the Zulu tradition and way of singing and dancing. The tradition of singing and dancing is a feature incorporated and common in all forms of religion, politics and festivals, as Munro observes:

The strongly traditional [Black] organizations, such as Inkatha, to a large extent rooted their cultural work both in tradition and in religion. The worship services of many of the Zionist and Ethiopian religious sects are powerfully theatrical in their structure and style. The services contain many instances of stylized (or ritualized) movement, dress, song and speech. These stylizations are seemingly very expressive of devotion and also what appears to be “natural” abilities of performance. Nevertheless, this theological wellspring (particularly in Natal and for those that came from Natal) influences much of the work of the new theatre practitioners (1997:15-16).

This extract clearly explains the performance forms in category two of Hauptfleisch's performance theory. Performance forms in this category originated from the "impact the cultures of the new settlers had on the socio-political, economic, demographic and other structures of the region" (Hauptfleisch, 1997:52). The changes, as a result of this impact, influenced the dance styles and the way funerals and church services are conducted in African communities. In many African Christian churches such as the Zion Christian Church, for example, dancing and singing form an integral part of the worship service. Every Easter there are huge annual gatherings where people congregate to sing, dance and pray. Worship services are a hybrid spectacle of prayer accompanied by dance and singing which are fundamental to the ritual in which communal elements of performance are rooted. Another point worth mentioning here is that the church has always had a strong influence in South African political thinking. Different churches, whether they were for apartheid or against it, have used the church to further their political aspirations. It is not surprising that the preacher in SFN identifies with the mourners and openly attacks the police for killing the students. In this sense, the preacher assumes a leading role in the liberation struggle. It follows from the argument presented thus far that the process of hybridization and the mingling of Western and indigenous performance forms ultimately create a unique style of performance.

Performance forms have always been part and parcel of political gatherings. At the beginning or at the end of a meeting, participants would normally sing a national anthem or a traditional song as a symbol of unity or togetherness in whatever participants endeavour to do. In townships specifically, it was common practice to hear praise poets render their poems accompanied by background singing and shouting of political slogans. Ari Sitas sheds light into the theatrical spectacle of activities that characterized trade union meetings:

A typical meeting would involve the chairperson leading crowds into prayers, militant and defiant songs, call and response chants and depending

on the individual's symbolic capital, through poetic reveries. In total control he/she would rhythmically indicate that the 'defiant' mode was over and workers would settle down for the discussions and resolutions. At crucial moments again in the midst of speaking, the chairperson would energise proceedings with more chants, slogans and songs. Finally, beyond the relationship between call and response between the foreground and the crowd, a choir might add some religious or traditional harmonies, or a dancing group would emerge and entertain the participants. The process of participation reconfirmed most of the time the dominance of Zulu (in Natal) – based performance languages (in Orkin, 1991:15).

This extract illustrates a typical trade union meeting as a spectacle of performance in which performance forms such as song, dance, and poetic reveries are used. In this extract, Sitas foregrounds the relationship between popular and working class culture by illustrating how the proceedings in the meeting were integrated with theatrical conventions. For example, in the above passage, the languages used in the participation process are English and Zulu since the workers were predominantly Zulu speaking. Category seven of Hauptfleisch's performance theory exemplifies this hybrid between "indigenous" and alternative "Western" forms. Theatre-making in this category found its material from the political turmoil of the apartheid era. Trade unions were seen as a powerful tool to resist exploitation and discrimination of labour by the employers. As a result, politics and labour issues were fused together with performance forms in a way that resembled a theatrical performance on stage. Very often the purpose for using these forms was to mobilise the workers through forms that were familiar to them and in many cases the whole spectacle was subversive; a subversive tool aimed at attacking the employers. This subversion was exemplified through the singing of "militant and defiant songs" as well as through "poetic reveries" directed against the employers.

Furthermore, the performance of poetry was and remains a significant feature at such meetings. Orkin describes the poetic rendition as follows:

A worker able to master the craft of the *isibongo* [praise song] and who stands in front of a gathering pouring out aggregative and additive metaphors in the requisite fury will get a response and will elicit participation in pre-coded ways: after the initial roar of approval, the end of every stanza would bring forth the stock of responses of encouragement and appreciation. The better able poet will elicit more than stock responses and send the crowd into a fury of exclamations and phrases, impromptu power-dances and ululations. Such a process of interacting makes the praise poem a fertile symbolic resource for the affirmation of identities and comradeships...but the praise poem is only one 'poetic' strategy: propaganda poems in English punctuated with chants, *toyi-toyi* sequences with quasi-poetic call and response vocalisings, struggle songs all serve to create solidarities and to strike defiant chords (1991:15-16).

This passage fits the mould of Hauptfeisch's eighth category in which "all varied strands of convention, tradition, and experimentation are fused together in a hybrid form of performance" (1992:77). Performance in this category uses formal and thematic elements, indigenous and imported forms including performance poetry and storytelling. The praise poet and his rendition of a praise song are important features here. The success of the praise poet here lies in the way in which he presents his poem which is a complex matrix of figures of speech. The intention is to arouse certain feelings among the audience depending on the purpose of the gathering. Singing, praise poetry, and "*toyi-toyi*" dance are aesthetic forms of resistance whose aim is to strike defiance chords. In this way, the narrative, mimetic, musical, and dance go side by side with the socio-political message which the poet wishes to convey.

Depending on the context within which a song is used, songs perform a variety of functions. In the book entitled Oral Literature in Africa (1970), Ruth Finnegan distinguishes between various songs and how these songs function in different contexts. Different types of songs such as political songs, songs

of praises, songs of hatred, songs of violence, and religious songs are among the frequently-used songs in communities. Finnegan states that in other instances, songs can be used to “report or comment on current affairs, for political pressure, for propaganda, and to reflect the mode of public opinion” (1970:272).

The two extracts quoted above give us a comprehensive view of how songs, dance and praise poems were used in political and trade union gatherings in South Africa. Common to these two extracts is the observation that songs were frequently used as a vehicle to defy, criticise or conscientise people to the problems and concerns of the day. The use of songs is an important and a distinctive feature of performance in African theatre. Finnegan acknowledges that “a society cannot be fully understood without its songs” (1970:519). Songs carry and transport messages embedded in them. It is in these messages that one comes to learn about the happiness, problems and frustrations that people are faced with in their daily lives and communities.

The song “*Afunani Amaphoyisa e Soweto*” (SFN 89) reflects on the mode of public opinion of the residents of Soweto during the 1970’s. The song questions the presence of the police in schools and in Soweto as a whole. Colgate explains the presence of the police in Soweto schools and states: “In our times we don’t have to fight to see the army, tanks, casspirs, thunder chariots or hippos, all of these army machines, we live with them right here in our school. The soldiers have become the inspectors who patrol in our classrooms. They even study the syllabus” (SFN 59). The government then argues that the army is stationed in Soweto to maintain law and order. Contrary to this claim, students’ complaints that the army is called in to arrest, detain and kill all those who defy the apartheid government and its oppressive policies.

Furthermore, the song “Meeting Tonight” (SFN 92) is used to report about the meeting to be held at night to protest against the government’s introduction of the state of emergency. The state of emergency gives the police and army

the powers to arrest and detain suspects indefinitely without trial. The song goes on to protest against the presence of the police and calls on the students to fight. Similarly, the song "Mama" comments about the current affairs in which women are depressed because they cannot find jobs to provide for their loved ones. The song also encourages women not to lose hope that one day they will be able to provide for their families.

According to Hauptfleisch, performance forms in South African theatre have an "entertainment", "social", and "socio-critical element" (1997:51). The song "Sechaba" (SFN 108) is critical of the socio-economic conditions of the society in which the family unit has either been destroyed or its members displaced. The song foregrounds the tragedy of people who no longer have livestock to depend on for a living. Fathers have been arrested for failing to produce a passbook. Boys and girls are in exile while women and children are left to fend for themselves. Uncles live and sleep in shebeens while aunts have taken refuge as sex slaves in neighbouring countries.

Finally, the song "Bring Back Nelson Mandela" (SFN 20) can be seen as an example of a song which reflects public opinion among the oppressed black people about who their true leader is. Mandela is regarded by the oppressed as their true legitimate political leader. It is clear from the discussion above that Ngema uses songs in SFN to comment on people's political and socio-economic concerns or frustrations and so moulds public opinion.

It seems as if most of the songs in SFN function as a vehicle to foster unity and resistance among the oppressed against the apartheid government. This function is also similar to the function of theatre as expressed by Murro in his observation: "by introducing these songs ["Kilimanjaro" and "Africa is Burning in the Sun"] at the end, Ngema shows the resilience of the youth, and as such draws on the dynamic of the performance to mobilize feelings against the regime" (1997:302).

The practice of poetic composition and performance forms an integral part of theatre in Africa. This practice, which is closely related to the singing of songs, gave rise to the story tellers and praise poets (*imbongi*). In African culture, these story tellers and praise poets function as historians and performers. Finnegan sums up the profession of the "*imbongi*" as follows:

The '*imbongi*'s' profession was to record the praisenames, the victories, and the glorious qualities of the chief and his ancestors, and to recite these in lengthy, high-sounding verse on occasions which seem to call for public adulation of the ruler. The poet had two duties: to remember and to express the appropriate eulogies. Though these praises tended to have a set and recognized form, the poet's task did not consist of mere memorizing. The praises had no absolute verbal immutability, and emotional and dramatic force in actual recitation is expected of a successful '*imbongi*' (1970:84).

The role of a praise poet changed significantly during the apartheid era. The tradition of praise songs as employed in protest and popular theatre was aimed at tackling many issues related to problems about nutrition, poverty, education, and politics. The praise poet would sometimes speak in parables using metaphors and proverbs as a way of expressing sentiments which are aimed at attacking a certain ideology or institution. In this way he could adapt his speech to suit the theme of the occasion.

Category two of Hauptfleisch's theory of performance forms in theatre, in particular, seems the most relevant to SFN because it is a hybrid of Western and African performance forms. In this category the interchange between the "older" Western and the "new" African performance forms brought new changes in the style and function of the performance, and in some cases led to an entirely new form. A perfect example of how the process of hybridization has impacted on the form, content as well as the function of performance is clearly illustrated in the following sermon given by the Preacher:

Children of God. Bantwana ba ka Thixo. God has given and the police have taken. Children of God, what has happened to the children is not the unusual. For the nation is in the grave. The nation is blowing with the wind. Crossroads has been bulldozed and many have been left homeless in Cape Town. Voices that speak for us either have been sent to Robben Island or executed at Pretoria Central Prison. America and Britain have sold too many guns to the South African government to kill our children (SFN 87).

In this sermon, the preacher exemplifies the outcry of the mourners against the brutality and oppression of the state. The preacher attacks the police and condemns the killing of children, then strongly protests against the forced removals from Crossroads in Cape Town. The form and content as well as the function which are usually characteristic of traditional funerals have now assumed new shape and purpose. Mourning is not only characterized by mourners weeping, but is also a vivid spectacle of loud singing and dancing, and a coffin being carried shoulder high by the mourners. This is a sign of defiance, and in this way, the stature of the funeral service has been "elevated to a symbol of life under oppression" (Hauptfleisch, 1992:71).

It is evident then that an attempt to interpret dramatic conventions in modern drama according to strict Aristotelian principles of tragedy is problematic. Performance forms have changed since the time of Aristotle, and modern drama, particularly South African theatre, exemplifies this through a hybrid of Western and indigenous performance forms which combine together to produce a unique style. It seems from this observation that any performance style that will lead to the successful communication of the message is seen as appropriate to use.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have analysed various perspectives on the nature and manifestation of tragedy in selected black South African drama produced between 1973 and 1985, viz. We shall sing for the Fatherland (1973), The Hungry Earth (1978), and Sarafina! (1985).

This dissertation was prompted by my encountering many conflicting statements about the "death" and existence of tragedy in contemporary drama. In an attempt to find answers to the debate as to whether or not black South African drama is capable of producing tragedy, this dissertation has attempted to answer two critical questions: Can there be tragedy in contemporary South African drama, and if so, what structural and thematic devices are there to account for the nature and manifestation of such a tragedy?

To find satisfactory answers to these two questions, three aims were formulated: first, to attempt to define the phenomenon of "tragedy" within the Western and African worldview or context; secondly, to investigate how the dramatic techniques of the two world-views vary according to their socio-cultural roots; thirdly, to illustrate that the changes in form, content and function observable in modern tragic drama, do not imply that tragedy is non-existent. The underlying premise here is that there exists a type of tragic drama which can be called African or South African owing to the socio-cultural conventions of a particular social context.

In presenting the argument in this dissertation, I have attempted to separate two crude concepts of "form" (structure) and "content" (meaning). This separation, though, is sometimes misleading because the two concepts are closely interrelated in a manner in which form and content are fused together in a complex matrix. Analysis of the interrelationship between "form" and

“content”, or between the “rhetoric” and “aesthetic” of tragedy aims to shed light on the question: “If a playwright has a message, what is the best form in which to place the message to get optimum results from his target audience or reader?” or alternatively, “What role does the socio-historical and cultural context play in determining the structural form in which the message is presented?” Ultimately, this discussion boils down to the realization that tragedy is about something, i.e. about man and his struggle in a given world context. I therefore conclude that the relationship between man and the world in which tragedy occurs becomes crucial in understanding the vision of tragedy in any context.

In Chapter One I have indicated the dimensions of tragic drama and how these have evolved in different worldviews, namely, Greek and Elizabethan (Aristotle and Shakespeare), and African (Maponya, Ngema, and Mda). I have argued that each worldview impacts differently on the nature and manifestation of tragedy in contemporary drama. Consequently, the differences in each worldview help to shape or dictate the “form” (structure), content, and function of tragedy. Owing to these differences or changes, I have come to the conclusion that a single and permanent definition of tragedy as advocated by Aristotle and supported by Steiner is problematic and misleading. The problem lies in the observation that tragedy has evolved and changed, and as a result, the old forms of tragedy cannot be relied upon to determine whether or not tragic drama in contemporary drama is possible. Although some of the classical elements of tragic drama are still relevant and applicable, modern tragedy presents modifications of a different political and social context from that of the Greeks and Elizabethan.

Despite all these changes, I have pointed out that there is a common consensus between Western and African critics and writers that tragedy relates to the world in which it occurs. This view brings us to another important role player in tragedy, namely, man. Man has always been the subject of tragedy. Man lives in a society governed by laws (natural and supernatural) and sometimes finds himself in conflict with these laws. In an

effort to find solutions to his dilemmas he engages in wrongful action which results in a tragic action. My conclusion is that any study of tragedy should take into consideration the complex relationship between man and his "world" or society.

Fundamental differences between the Greek and African worldviews, to a certain extent, dictate the "form" and "content" of tragedy. The Greek worldview was essentially static in its observation that the world in which tragedy occurs has some intrinsic order or meaning. This view compelled man to seek to abide by the contents and dictates of his fate or destiny without questioning. Man was believed to invite punishment upon himself if he chose to question or reject the intrinsic order of his world, and as a result tragedy of immense proportion would occur. A more modern world-view seems to emphasize the need to "question" things and to "comprehend" the problems of contemporary society. The validity of the view that any authority (government or church) is chosen and legitimized by God, and therefore should not be questioned or rejected, is challenged in modern drama. The central question here is: "How should one comprehend the belief that the suffering, chaos and dehumanization characteristic of the modern world is a legitimized action, and, therefore, should not be challenged?" My conclusion here is that by dramatizing the spectacle of man's suffering at the hands of his fellow men, modern-world tragedians question the validity of a supreme authority, be it government (politics) or church (religion).

The line of argument in which the validity of the "omniscient" and the "omnipotent" type of authority is challenged and questioned is taken up in my discussion of the universal vision of tragedy as well as in the validity of conventional dramatic techniques to dictate the "form", content and function tragedy should assume in modern dramatic circles. Influenced by the thinking that studies of modern tragic drama have been obliterated or hampered by the confines of the more developed forms of tragic drama such as the Greek (Aristotelian) and Renaissance (Shakespearean), I have alluded to the potential danger which equally worries Sofola that "the overwhelming grip

which Euro-American theorists, critics and writers have on us seem to have turned us away from important concepts and metaphysical speculations which are common knowledge in our various communities" (1986:59). In an attempt to counter this view, I have set out to illustrate that there could be a concept of tragedy which could be termed African or South African. Having done this, I conclude that the vision, the structural forms, and thematic concerns cannot simply be dissolved into the melting pot of universalism. Analysis of tragedy in modern drama, therefore, should try and liberate itself from the clutches of the set of fixed conventional rules.

Based on the information above, I conclude that tragedy has evolved within the structure and content of the modern vision of tragedy. Furthermore, a single and permanent definition of tragedy is not possible because tragedy reflects different cultures and traditions of different worldviews. Amongst other forms, tragedy occurs, firstly, when a character introduces new items into his/her destiny; secondly, when an individual asserts his will at the expense of the common good; and thirdly, when an individual deliberately chooses to suffer for the common good. I have also cautioned that although these examples are prevalent in both Western and African tragic drama, the list is not exhaustive because different people in the same society perceive tragedy differently, and the examples mentioned here are only used as guidelines into my argument.

Five of Aristotle's six elements of drama, namely Plot, Character, Theme, Diction and Musicality have been used as keys to unlocking the argument that tragedy is not static. In examining these elements, I have tried not to get involved in the fruitless debate of "we had it before you" or "we also had it". My aim here has been to illustrate and discuss the various dimensions of modern tragedy using the conventional elements of tragedy as the basis for my argument. My observation here is that in the modern age, Aristotle's principles of the Poetics have a significant bearing on numerous plays written in entirely changed social contexts.

It has been illustrated that the Aristotelian concept of plot as complete and whole, with a clear beginning, a middle, and an end does not fit seamlessly in African drama. Unlike Greek tragic drama whose world-view was relatively stable because it was based on a worldview which was static in its observation that the universe has some intrinsic order, the modern world-view is essentially unstable, chaotic, and fragmentary. As a result, a chronological plot sequence is not always possible or is blurred. Maponya's THE exemplifies an "irregular" or "fragmentary" plot structure by presenting the plot not in a linear sequence, but rather, as a "palimpsest" or a collage of overlapping events. Similarly, Ngema's SFN captures the fragmentation of structure in which the plot pattern jumps from one event to another in loose but interrelated scenes. Interesting to note here is that this "chaotic" structure might affect the audience or reader's interpretation of the play, especially if such an audience or reader is not familiar with the history behind the play's action. My conclusion here is that the "irregular" plot structure observable in THE, SFN, and WSF can arguably be attributed to the perception of the modern worldview, and this has had a significant impact on the irregular "form" or structure in which the tragic action is presented.

My assessment of plot led me to look at the nature and character of the tragic hero. I have developed the argument that modern tragic drama does not only confine itself to heroes of high and noble social stature such as kings and queens. This view, supported by Arthur Miller and Njabulo Ndebele, led me to the observation that ordinary people (men, women, and children) are also subjects of modern tragedy. The migrants in THE, the veterans in WSF, and the youth in SFN, are heroes of ordinary stature. Their tragic status arises from the fact that they are constantly engaged in an unmerited struggle against forces in their society, and it is their pain as a result of the suffering that elicits feelings of sympathy from us. What seems to be common between the Greek and modern tragic heroes is that both heroes appear to be larger than life in their concern with universal problems. The migrants are against oppression and prejudice, the veterans abhor discrimination based upon race and class or status, and the youth fight tooth and nail against

inequality and the brutality of the apartheid government. It is evident that in all the three plays discussed, Ngema, Maponya and Mda present heroes of ordinary social stature who are concerned with universal values of love, respect and continuity of life. I conclude that it is the hero's preoccupation with universal issues of life that gives him the dignity appropriate for tragic drama, and it is this "dignity" that makes the hero larger than life.

The element of "hamartia", which is the hero's tragic flaw, often pride, or "hubris", is one element closely associated with the nature of the tragic hero. The view that pride brings about the hero's tragic fall or "weakness" is problematic in the modern experience of tragic drama. Unlike Shakespearean heroes who had "choice", modern heroes have little choice over their destiny. Heroes here are victims immersed in constant suffering, and often the "weakness" or "error of judgement" in these characters lies not within themselves, but outside them. Arguably, if there is any tragic flaw in these characters, then such a flaw could be attributed to the character's determination and will to take a stand and confront the evils against them. In all the three plays, characters are determined to suffer and even die for what they judge to be the fight for a just cause, which is the fight to restore human dignity. Surely, if the determination to resist oppression is perceived as a "moral weakness" on the side of the characters, then such "weakness" is not necessarily a wrong step if one considers that it is aimed at achieving peace, stability and human dignity. I have shown that the heroes' tragic flaw does not only emanate from their moral flaw as Shakespeare perceives it, but also sprouts from their rejection of an oppressive authority.

The complexities of an Aristotelian "perfect style" or Shakespearean "heightened diction" are observable in how language is used in modern tragic drama. Clarity and simplicity are characteristic features of style or diction in the three plays. Although the language in these plays is simple and clear, it falls short of being the elevated speech characteristic of high mimetic drama. This, however, does not impact negatively on the required tragic tension in the plays because clear and simple language is in line with the ordinary or

common stature of the modern tragic temper and hero. Therefore, the speech through which everything in modern drama is expressed is far from being mean. My argument here is that Mda, Maponya and Ngema's style is given dignity appropriate for tragedy by the seriousness in which the message embedded in the densely written words is expressed. The speeches in the texts are a mixture of the use of "common" words, words imported from other languages (Zulu, English, Sotho and Afrikaans), as well as metaphorical language. In THE, the metaphor of the hungry earth gives us an analogy of an image in which migrants are always killed working underground in the mines. Therefore, the seriousness with which metaphors and imagery are used to convey deeper feelings of pain, suffering and death, suggests that the diction or language used in modern drama is appropriate for tragedy.

Theatre in Africa, as explained by Temple Hauptfleisch's theory of performance forms, incorporates various performance forms and styles. Performance styles are a hybrid of various styles (Western and African), influenced by societal cultures and traditions. The use of songs, dance, puppets, music, praise-poets, are among the many forms that have been part and parcel of theatre in Africa throughout the years. The use and importance of songs in South African drama is particularly noticeable.

Like Greek drama, tragedy in modern drama falls into two alternating parts, namely, verse (dialogue) and song (rhythm and melody). Songs are employed to praise, ridicule and educate people depending on the philosophy behind the creation of the songs. The performances constructed under the influence of the Black Consciousness Movement and "protest" theatre were developed around the philosophy of non-racialism, democracy and socialism as demonstrated in THE, WSF and SFN. The message transported through these songs aimed at reinforcing feelings of participation and unity amongst the black oppressed and to encourage them to fight against prejudice and exploitation. Songs in THE and SFN lament the suffering and death of the migrants and students respectively. In short, songs are used as devices through which public statements about issues relating to politics, economy,

and society were made. In so doing, songs in modern theatre perform the same role as the Greek chorus because both are regarded as one of the characters in the presentation of the play. In this sense, songs do not only introduce beauty in the play, but they also contribute to the development of the plot.

My views on the nature of theatre in which THE, WSF, and SFN were incorporated showed that theatre in South African performs various functional roles. I have turned to Steadman (1990:222) to illustrate that Black theatre, protest, or resistance theatre has been used as a vehicle for “political liberation”. Loots (1997:143) sees this kind of theatre as a “tool” to oppose apartheid, and similarly, Motlhabi (1984:11) describes it as a form of “re-awakening or a renaissance”. Maponya’s THE uses strategies of protest theatre as a way of raising social awareness and demonstrating the need for a changed society. I conclude that the defiant mood observable in THE is characteristic of protest theatre during the apartheid era. Theatre for Development is exemplified through Mda’s WSF. This kind of theatre aimed at educating and developing people, especially in rural communities. Seen in this light, I have argued that Theatre for Development uses WSF as an example of communication in which theatre performs a didactic and developmental role. Finally, Ngema’s SFN navigates between protest and popular or committed theatre. This theatre uses themes from real life situations which are related to the struggle of national liberation and dramatized through music, dance and revolutionary songs.

The oral tradition has always been an important feature of theatre in Africa. The use of the praise poem (*isibongo*) rendered by a praise-poet (*imbongi*) exemplifies this aspect. The praise poet would render a speech in a poetic form. The message of the poem is important as it explains the poet’s intentions and concerns. I conclude that modern drama uses various elements of entertainment and communication, such as dance, song, praise-poem, and that these elements impact on the “new” form and content of modern drama, and this in turn contributes to the complex spectacle of

playmaking in South Africa. Despite the use of various dramatic techniques, the emphasis in South African drama is on the urgency of these forms to convey the tragic suffering rather than on the structural devices used.

The question of what characterises a tragic action points to the observation that tragedy should imitate a serious action. In THE, WSF, and SFN, the playwrights have selected materials from their socio-political context and recreated a serious action by and about man, as well as about the end toward which man's action moves. I conclude that the suffering, pain and death enacted by South African drama is an imitation of a serious action characteristic of tragic drama.

Theatre in South Africa treats apartheid and other related issues such as freedom and equality as tragic themes. Such treatment seems justified if one takes into consideration that a playwright during the apartheid era would find it difficult to write about something which was alien to the social formation of his community. As a result, if politics and other related issues were the problems during that era, it is obvious that drama would reflect such issues. During the period in which THE, WSF and SFN were written and produced, apartheid and its related evils were issues of major concern which led to widespread suffering, and it is for this reason that politics seems to be the overriding theme in South African drama. The problem is that as a writer, a spectator, and sometimes a direct victim under apartheid, a dramatist found that the circumstances at the time in South Africa unconsciously dictate the "form" and "content" of tragedy as he engaged in the process of producing drama (a work of art) based on his observation of objective or subjective "reality".

Lastly, the issues of freedom and equality (politics) constitute central concerns in South African societies during the apartheid era because they affect society's feelings of corporate identity, consensus and continuity of life. Alongside apartheid, capitalism as an economic system is seen as one of the sources of a tragic action. This economic system exploited by crooked

individuals resulted in societies being divided along class and racial lines. THE and WSF exemplify the exploitation of labour and the wide gap between the haves and the have-nots respectively. The government after independence, as illustrated in WSF, embraced economically exploitative state policies which alienated its people rather than developed them, and this proved to be the recipe for tragedy triggered by economic exploitation. Therefore, apartheid and capitalism were regarded as the essence of tragedy in the South African drama of this period.

In presenting the tragic action, the dramatist enters into a dialogue with the reader or audience in an effort to put across and to comprehend a specific message. The message is intended to facilitate or bring about change in the way characters and the audience behave, and this led me to the discussion of the principle of "catharsis". This principle contends that tragedy should arouse feeling of pity and fear. It is difficult to measure the extent to which we pity and sympathise with the tragic victim. The difficulty, among other reasons, is that our interpretation of what tragedy or tragic action is differs and varies from person to person. For example, in an event of suffering and death, people react differently to the same experience. While others may cry while mourning the death of a beloved person, others might feel relieved or even rejoice. The important aspect is that the suffering or death of some people, depending on their perceived roles in societies, does not necessarily lead to lament and anger. The observation here is that suffering or death leads to insight into the tragic action, and our emotions towards the tragic hero will differ according to how individuals react and comprehend the tragic action. In the case where we feel that the suffering and death is unmerited, we are likely to sympathise with, and pity the victims when we realise that we are likely to suffer the same problems as them. I conclude that catharsis is possible in modern drama and that it is a matter of general observations rather than specific conclusions.

The interpretation of an African/South African vision of tragedy formed the premise of my dissertation. It informed the plea for studies of tragedy to

transcend the “fossilisation” and dominance of Western culture in determining the boundaries or parameters within which tragedy in the modern era exists or manifests itself. The aim here was to make connections between tragedy and culture within a given world’s historical and socio-political context in which tragedy occurs.

It would certainly be beneficial for future studies of tragedy to attempt a comparative study of how dramatic tragic texts compare across space and time by looking at South African texts in comparison to texts from the so-called “Third-World” or rapidly developing countries – seeing that these countries often mirror problems of different and similar historical and socio-political concerns. Such a study might offer fertile ground for investigation and comparison of how tragic literature in these two “worlds” contributes to the understanding of tragedy held by different cultures.

In conclusion, it is evident that literature, particularly tragic drama, is a dynamic phenomenon which constantly reflects the changing spectacle of different world views under changing contexts of social, moral and artistic value. As a result, the method of examining modern tragic drama by using one definite standard laid down by Aristotle many centuries ago is misleading, and therefore cannot be relied upon to determine that modern drama is incapable of tragedy. Due to the cultural and socio-economic changes discussed in SFN, WSF, and THE it is evident that tragedy is shaped or moulded around a world view in a particular era.

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