

## **INTERVIEW WITH MAISHE MAPONYA**

15<sup>th</sup> April 2014 at 1pm

Wits University

Interviewer Vanessa Cooke

**VC: Maishe.**

MM: Hi.

**VC: Hi, how did you come to theatre?**

MM: Ah I guess I came into the theatre out of the love of seeing, or having seen, plays being done in the townships. I, at that point, was influenced by a play called GIVE US THIS DAY by a writer from the Eastern Cape, called Mzwandile Magcina, and that play made such an impact on, on me and in terms of where I was beginning to go in. I mean I was going to go into understanding the Black Consciousness philosophy and, and er... beginning to, you know, develop a level of, of, of awareness and er... A position, you know, in my life (coughs).

**VC: Was this after school?**

MM: This was after school. Er... at that time I was working for an insurance company called er Liberty Life. Er... I had been to a number of other plays by Gibson to see plays by Gibson Kente, by Sam Manqwane, who had done quite, lots of township plays. Also, you know, other plays by other writers, one called MB Selumi and, and Wake Nhlome's play. So I basically had seen those plays and when Mzwandile Magcina's play came on board in Soweto and I went to see it and I was one of the fewest people in the auditorium, er, er, I think there were not more than 20 of us at the DOCC (Donaldson Orlando Community Centre) in Orlando. I, after seeing that play you know, I got so energised and so inspired that I went back to, to get the workers to come to the play the following, the following evening and er at least there were a number of other people among those that came to the play. They had also recruited other people so the play was almost, you know. The, the, the hall was almost half full. And then it finally, I mean, when it came back after that short run, two day, three day run. When it came back it, it became a hit in the townships. A big, big hit. And, and all shows that they had, you know, all er... were packed until it got banned.

**VC: And what year was that, can you remember?**

MM: This was in 1975.

**VC: Okay.**

MM: Ja er... Think '74, '75 yes.

**VC: And then did you form your own group?**

MM: I then formed er... Bahumutsi Drama Group in 1975 and we did our first play, we in 1976 called er... THE CRY and when I did THE CRY we only had two performances at church again across the road here at the Methodist Church.

**VC: Okay.**

MM: Ja we had two evenings and it was at that point that I was informed but also realised the danger of getting involved in such a theatre. Remember I'd seen Mzwandile's GIVE US THIS DAY, but I, but I'd also seen Kente's HOW LONG.

**VC: I saw that in town here.**

MM: Ja. Ja, so, so, so those influences, I think I also saw SHANTY er which was done by Workshop '71, I think, somewhere around 1974 so then that period is, is a period that we would call the, the genesis, or the birth of Black Consciousness philosophy, you know, within communities in the townships and the theatre, and the establishment of, of other literary and drama groups and debates, you know, emanated from there. I also was a member of a group called Medupe which was formed somewhere around '74, '75, during that period and, er, and, and, and we had a lot of other writers, poets and things, Matsemela (Manaka) was one of them. Duma Ka Ndlovu and Mthobisi Motloatsi you know.

**VC: Oh you were part of that.**

MM: Of, of that and er...

**VC: Is that when you first met Matsemela?**

MM: No I'd known Matsemela, because we went... We grew up in the same township.

**VC: Okay.**

MM: So we grew up in the same township. We went to the same school, and so we basically knew each other. Except that ?? at that point then we started realising that we were all writers. Yes.

**VC: So then how did you come to the Market Theatre?**

MM: I came to the Market Theatre after I had learned, I mean, I had done my first play, which was done here and, and basically being warned that, you know...

**VC: Be careful.**

MM: You're running the risk of detention and arrest and other things. That this is just very, very didactic and remember I'd never had any formal training, any training in the theatre so I was just writing.

**VC: Whatever you wanted.**

MM: And created my own kind of way and dynamics about stage directions and things. I didn't know anything but I had a performance, and I picked up young people in the townships and we all performed and we were very happy. We had one or two other people that actually were scared. They came in and I know that, I then had known that Ramolao (Makhene) was in the theatre and Arthur Molepo and George Lamola were in the theatre. And er.., so I went to them and that's when I did the first play. I went to them also and I said – come in and see I've written a play and things, and Rams came.

**VC: Coz they were with Workshop 71?**

MM: They were at that stage ja, and they read the script and they ran away.

**VC: (laughs)**

MM: I think you can't speak to us.

**VC: Too radical.**

MM: Yes, yes and you know it wasn't seen as, as a drama probably, in their context, because I really didn't understand the dynamics of the theatre. First attempt and er...ja. It was not to be with them.

**VC: (laughs) The Market you came...**

MM: And then, in, after the two performances then we tried to, we had someone I worked with at Liberty Life who originated from Lesotho, who came to see the play, and said – this is a good play, I can make arrangements for you to go and perform in Botswana, ja, no in Lesotho.

**VC: So your first tour.**

MM: We were going to do the first tour then at that point. And er... he made these arrangements. He had a brother and it was almost in the week that we were to travel, actually even a day or two before we were to travel that we were being lured into a trap by the, what do you call it? The secret agency.

**VC: The Special Branch.**

MM: The Special Branch. We were ?? in a trap and er... I remember that on the morning of the departure, quite early, around 4 o'clock in the morning I heard someone throw stones on the roof at my place and they had come to warn me, to say that – do not go.

**VC: Just don't go.**

MM: And when the actors arrived there, they arrived and they were told that the tour has been cancelled and I didn't give them any other reason. I just told them that it is not happening. But also that the danger with that was – I did not have a passport and I think a few of them did not have passports and this person who was organizing had organized for us, you know.

**VC: Oh go under.**

MM: Under somewhere.

**VC: Psss, ja.**

MM: And it was highly risky. So we then didn't go, didn't do the trip. So even now I think, much much later did I tell what had happened.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: And I had a fight with that guy that was organizing there ?? so I, I regarded him as the informer.

**VC: He must have told somebody.**

MM: Ah yes absolutely and we had fights. And I was very brave and I challenged him, and I said – you are responsible for that, and you are going to get us into this trouble – things like that. So, and then I then sat and tried to write a second play. Remember I'm writing here without any kind of you know, teaching.

**VC: Editing.**

MM: And things. So I then got into reading some stuff and, and remember that the motivation is, is the politics.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: Er. I then got into writing the second play which I started somewhere around '76, yes, remember now, the uprisings have started, so that influence of the uprisings and having seen the other plays er... I then got into, developed the piece and the and at that time the Market Theatre had this thing of doing try outs.

**VC: Oh yes.**

MM: So I started rehearsing with young people and things and some amazing ,coz I had e...r young people, the youngest one was about ten of nine in PEACE AND FORGIVE you know, and my, my kind of cloak in the piece was to use two tribes fighting each other so you'd have the Zulus then fighting with the Basotho and things. And basically the, for me, representing the racist white people and the black people.

**VC: Ja right.**

MM: That's how, that's how I looked at it er... and that the Zulus were in charge and the Basotho were the victims, the oppressed, and things like that. So the Basotho were fighting for their own liberty against the white people. So we then, I spoke to, I then spoke to I think, it was Mannie (Manim) at that time, and er... There was an agreement that we could do a try out. So we came in for a try out and ...

**VC: In the Main Theatre.**

MM: In the Main Theatre.

**VC: I remember Sam Williams...**

MM: Yeah.

**VC:... did one there as well.**

MM: Yes.

**VC: CHILDREN OF THE TWILIGHT.**

MM: Yes, yes exactly. And we finally ended up with a week at the Market. It was very kind of, I mean you'll see the reviews and things and that was how we came into the Market. And after the try out the Market Theatre said will you come in for a week and we came in and performed for a week.

**VC: In the Upstairs or...**

MM: In the Main Theatre.

**VC: The whole time, it was in the Main.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: Wow.**

MM: Very difficult.

**VC: Difficult.**

MM: In those days, also because, the language you know, the main part, the main part of the play was in, in Sotho and in Zulu, you know, and English, and remember, my, my training or that was there was no training and we, it was what I perceived and I thought was correct and I did exactly what was correct for me at that time.

**VC: Right.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: (clears throat) So then um..., that was 1978.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: According to the...**

MM: Ja.

**VC: The Book.**

MM: 1978 ja.

**VC: And then – THE SUN WILL RISE, was that your next...**

MM: Ja 1978. Ja it was a collective of young artworks, also coming from Madupe Writers Association which was then banned in 1977. With the 1977...

**VC: Okay, so they were banned.**

MM: Ja, Medupi Writers Association was banned in 1977 with the blanket bannings of 19 organizations. The World and Rand Daily Mails organizations then you know, Black People's Conventions, all of those banned when, when they were banned in 1977 in October, on the 19<sup>th</sup>. When that banning took place er... we then got together, er..., closer friends in Diepkloof and er..., you know, in the township, we then formed the Allah Poets.

**VC: Okay.**

MM: Er... with Ingwapoele Madigwane, Matsemela Manaka, Kule Khaba and a few other young people who had found us and we then started at that point. We were activists moving around all commemorative services and things like that. This is the time when, you know, the blanket banning came because they wanted to silence us, all voices that were associated with Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement. Remember that? As I was saying the end of the 70's was a very, very strong Black Consciousness period, in the time that started off in the late 60's obviously young ? and when the bannings took place and just to say that, on record that Steve died in September on the 12<sup>th</sup>, you know, that's when we knew that Steve was killed and probably died a few days before that, was killed and they then loaded him onto a land rover to Pretoria from Port Elizabeth on the 12<sup>th</sup> so...

**VC: October.**

MM: October then we had the blanket bannings so it was basically to say that, you will not know black people have no organizations at that point. Remember there was no ANC at this point. There was no PAC. PAC at this point was the Black Consciousness that basically for me, basically drove the revolution and creating this type about this liberation in this country.

**VC: And lots of artists were involved.**

MM: Ja, ja the Committee of 10 was banned at that time so ?? Poets picking up from Medupe Writers Association we were actually major activists that were running around all over the place being chased by the police and things like that and sis kind of guerrilla, black guerrilla tactics you know, kind of, hit and run and at some point we would have a few three poets and the rest would remain and we would say to them, you are so young to get involved in this and so don't go. It's very risky, we know that the security police guys will be waiting for us and things, so we would take the risks, you er...

**VC: Yes.**

MM: So we had those moments ja, and during that period then lots of other you know, activists were detained things like this. So a number of things were taking place during that period. So the other poets then in 1978 if I'm not mistaken, er..., we were formed around 1977 and went about doing things and we ended up in '78 at the, the Market and we did THE SUN WILL RISE.

**VC: It says '80 here though, but I'm not sure.**

MM: Oh it might have been 80's but they...

**VC: ??**

MM: But you'll pick up the reviews here, ja. Probably '79 probably that. And then came HUNGRY EARTH after that. So you want to, can I take a pause there then you want to ask questions.

**VC: Okay so THE SUN WILL RISE was it a play or poetry?**

MM: It was lovely writing it was poetry.

**VC: Mm.**

MM: As we would have performed in the township. So we just created some kind of er... movement but it was basically poetry. And we had ...

**VC: And did people come?**

MM: Ja, ja but not, we didn't have full houses because it was very scary.

**VC: At night especially.**

MM: Ja at night. It was very scary. And the, and we did perform and er... I, also the journalists that were covering the events were almost all white.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: At the Market Theatre.

**VC: Raeford (Daniel) and all those other people.**

MM:??

**VC: Coz Raeford was with the Rand Daily Mail.**

MM: Daily Mail. Garalt MacLiam I think, if I'm not mistaken and so for you it would be easier maybe once you get the time, you look at newspapers in that period and see...

**VC: See yeah.**

MM: Who covered...

**VC: Yeah.**

MM: That...

**VC: And you see not all of them did.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: Sure.**

MM: Ja ja.

**VC: And by this time you obviously knew Barney.**

MM: By this time I knew Barney. Yes. I knew Barney I think. Somewhere around when we did the PEACE AND FORGIVE piece. I think to some extent, you know, kind of had an inkling of who the main people were at the Market Theatre, if I'm not mistaken, ja.

**VC: And er... for instance THE SUN WILL RISE was that produced by the Market, or did you rent the space or...**

MM: No.

**VC: It was free.**

MM: It was free space, or produced by the Market.

**VC: Okay.**

MM: We didn't pay a cent. We didn't have any money.

**VC: Oh ja.**

MM: Ja we didn't pay a cent. Er... and er... the photographer Raeford...

**VC: Ruphin. (Coudyzer)**

MM: Ruphin ja. I know he passed away, did he?

**VC: No, no I hope not.**

MM: Ruphin did, did the photography for the Market.

**VC: Ja ja. Now HUNGRY EARTH. HUNGRY EARTH was the one that caught a lot of attention.**

MM: Ja interestingly in '78 at that time, I also was, was basically engaged in community work. We had a, we had a kind of a, a community group in, in Diepkloof with two white guys, one a doctor and

yes they were married and, and, and we met quite often, you know, and a number of other things that communities would do, visited old people, and things like that. And but I also had another one, er... group, that I belonged to, that was basically again, another community group you know, consisting of a number of people in the townships, you know.

**VC: Bahumutsi was no longer.**

MM: No Bahumutsi ..

**VC: Still existing.**

MM: Bahumutsi continued to exist up to late 90's

.

**VC: Oh okay.**

MM : Early up to the late '90's.

**VC: Okay.**

MM: Ja, and, and at the time we worked with a social worker, if I'm not mistaken, lady called Lindi Myeza and she worked with us, and I, I know that at that time, because we were more inclined towards community service and things, and er... or that's the time that I knew er... this woman whose...

(interruption)

**VC: Okay sorry.**

MM: we went to a number of other people who were harassed by the police at that time, examining them, the Beyers [Naude] I mean, you know, met him even before he became the Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches and things like that. And er, Lilian Ngoyi, at that time, very much neglected, I must say, neglected and sickly at home and we visited her a number of times, took groceries to her home, nobody cared about her.

**VC: Nobody cared.**

MM: Ja, ja. And we were just a community group, not political, but we went to those people and saw them with Beyers, I remember quite well, and sitting, I think it was at his place or something, and he had just had an operation, quite ill, and he said to us, " This is just an illness and I mean an individual is what is important is humanity. Where you come from it's like that, so don't get too bothered about me dying, and things like that."

**VC: Okay.**

MM: That was the man. So we were involved in that. So I then, that group in Diepkloof organized a trip to go to a, a few field trips. To go to a pilgrimage in Tonize in France, south of France. I remember this Reverend. It was a wonderful space, ja.

**VC: How do you spell that name?**

MM: Tonize.

**VC: OK.**

MM: Um... and, and during that period, knowing that I was going to go on this trip, now my interest was in the theatre, and, and, and Liz and ? they called Liz and Michael, this Liz was the doctor, medical practitioner the wife of the priest, the Reverend Michael, um... then thought that, while



we're outside, there could be some assistance. I would love to introduce to the theatre for my, and do some bit of study or observe and – observe was the word we used, and then fortunately got the British Council to sponsor my trip to go to the UK.

**VC: Wow.**

MM: To observe the theatre and look at and er... I went to Stratford Upon Avon, and a number of other places. I attended workshops and things like that. Went to Edinburgh, and in Edinburgh I then saw a piece that really influenced me to writing HUNGRY EARTH – and that was THE MEASURES TAKEN BY METAL PLANT. Here's some, here's some name I didn't know, but something attracted me to that piece, to go and see and, and er... and I, you know at that point then, they booked me to see Bertolt Brecht that's the play. And I was so moved, you know, and politically moved by watching the MEASURES TAKEN with the propagandists who are on a mission you know to liberate people and the mistakes they made and things like that, and how the leadership gets arrested and things like that, how they keep going back to the control, you know, commander to report the death of one of them because they were careless and things like that, and the mission not being completed and things like that, so I definitely I mean that inspired me so much. And because there were also three, how many, I think there were about three of five players – four, there were four actors, four characters and that gave me the inspiration to write.

**VC: And for fewer people.**

MM: Ja, I started then with the HUNGRY EARTH and er... originally with the HUNGRY EARTH I had five people. So I used, kind of, same kind of approach. Very much agitprop, very, very agitprop and with my, you know, kind of consciousness and things, got into it, looked into the various, you know, ?? The story not just one story, there's more than one storyline ? you know storylines, and the actors basically being the ..

**VC: Playing more than one character.**

MM: Various characters throughout

.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: Changing from scene to scene and even within scenes changing characters and things like that. I then was the writer, I then was the actor. I was the manager.

**VC: Director.**

MM: Director you know, and everything in all that, so that's how we got into it and then we did a few performances in the townships. ?? With PEACE AND FORGIVE I'd forgotten we did a number of other performances also in the townships.

**VC: It wasn't only at the Market, no.**

MM: It wasn't only at the Market, so we went to the townships. I remember at one point in Soweto, in Dobsonville we were performing - the Security Branch – the police came – the army came actually.

**VC: (laughs)**

MM: And we were on the stage and when the army came and we were got a message, very quickly that er.. the army's inside the theatre, inside the hall and so we had to try and find ways of, you know er...

**VC: Coz this is in Dobsonville, in that big hall.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: Ja and we had to, tried then to you know, er... find ways of concealing, hiding, hiding the message and things, in the performance so we did a lot of dances and...

**VC: (laughs)**

MM: ...and things like that so until they got, got bored and left.

**VC: (laughs)**

MM: And then we continued to do with the play. Because I was backstage I was able to (whispers) - guy, go in, dance and you go in and sing, dancing and do this and that, and that was what was happening. We managed to do the shows.

**VC: Now HUNGRY EARTH had attracted ...**

MM: Attention because ...

**VC: Attention, ja.**

MM: E...r first I think we started off in the township. At the time then when we were doing these performances we used to then have, like Matsemela, come in to look at the plays and make comments, and things like that. So we, that's how we collaborated in a way, and, and got much closer to each other and, and then we ended up with that piece. I also remember that I was writing poetry and things like that, so there's a lot of poetry in HUNGRY EARTH, I kind of used. Obviously I was largely being influenced by Berthold Brecht THE MEASURES. When we had the five actors I then on my trip, you know, er overseas I'd met someone called Thomas Zuppelmeyr, the man I'm working with now.

**VC: You're still in contact. Wow.**

MM: Ja and then er, I think it, no, he says he saw, met me first here at the Market Theatre when I was doing HUNGRY EARTH.

**VC: Is he German or ...**

MM: German ja, I met, we had a discussion with each other in 1981 that's when I... and that's the time when Doctor Webster was killed.

**VC: David.**

MM: David Webster and er... he had come to South Africa for the funeral of David Webster and he was ?? and he came. That's where we met. Um I then, ja, we did that. There were five actors in the play originally and er... and then we came to Wits. When we came to Wits we performed at the - it's not the Nunnery.

**VC: The Box?**

MM: It's the Box. We went to the Box.

**VC: At the Student Union?**

MM: Ja.

**VC: Upstairs.**

MM: We performed there. Then I had comments from other people, normally I'd learnt to take comments from people and er and one of the comments was that the problem with the play was that I was acting and directing in it. I couldn't, I couldn't you know, be objective to a large extent so I ??

**VC: Coz you were right in it.**

MM: That's when I spoke to Ian Steadman.

**VC: Okay.**

MM: He was the, I think he was then the Head.

**VC: He was probably the Head of the Department.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: That time.**

MM: Ja. And er... he had come in to see it and we established some linkages and he was very interested in what I was doing. He actually even came to the townships to see the plays and think like that, and I think part of his doctoral thesis was based on my work and Matsemela.

**VC: OK. Yes I think you're right. Ja.**

MM: Na (clears his throat). I then approached him and said you know I think you should, if you can, take over as the director and we were talking with Thomas Zuppelmeyr, this guy that I'd met and er... it was difficult. We had five actors and we had to raise our own money to travel and er... so we didn't have money so we then find ways of actually raising the money inside, not as donations from overseas

.

**VC: Thomas.**

MM: Thomas ja. Not as donations but as a loan, we got a loan.

**VC: Loan.**

MM: We, we and we were able to buy tickets and er... (coughs)

**VC: So first you went overseas before performing at the Market?**

MM: I went overseas before performing at the Market, because that's when I got this inspiration about the HUNGRY EARTH and things.

**VC: No but I mean when you were at the Box.**

MM: No, we, no we. No. no let's see when we went. No we went to the Box.

**VC: Then the Main.**

MM: Box first, went to the Market then to the Box because I remember the Box was the last place.

**VC: You must have been at the Market.**

MM: Ja we had been already to the Market. So we lowered the number from five to three. Because we could only afford you know, a loan was for three actors.

**VC: God, a loan.**

MM: We paid for our own travel and accommodation and, so, and I do not earn anything, I got the same salary you know and it was very simple how we worked it out was that at each venue we went into community venues and we would say, you know, all we need is a hundred pounds whatever, you know from a venue er if, if we could raise, if people could come and we would raise a hundred pounds we'd be happy – so we'd be able to say 100, 100, 100 and we had six or seven performances a week, so we'd basically have about seven hundred pounds a week as a salary and the rest would go into admin and other things and travel and...

**VC: And paying for the loan I'm sure.**

MM: ...and paying for the loan. So that's what we did, that's how we did it. Even, even a few years later when I did UMONGIKAZI we did it the same way.

**VC: And um... I'm confused, coz was HUNGRY EARTH, wasn't banned then.**

MM: HUNGRY EARTH wasn't banned, but HUNGRY EARTH was so sensitive. You'll see here (refers to books) when you look at material you'll find a, a letter er... because I then got the same kind of warning to say that this is very dangerous. You either take it to the Publications Control Board or you close the...

**VC: You must take it**

MM: Ja and...

**VC: Voluntarily**

MM: Yes to be able to get an idea as to whether it is fine for me to do it or not.

**VC: Thank you.**

MM: So I then stopped for a while. We then went to the SACC (South African Council of Churches) now you're going to get amused. Coz then I went to, at that time the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches was Tutu. Desmond.

**VC: Alright.**

MM: And er, um and we, and Tutu, Tutu sent this to the SACc lawyers' advocate Raymond Tucker.

**VC: Ah.**

MM: And he read the script and then sent this message (shows letter).

**VC: So he said it was, it would be banned.**

MM: It would be yes.

**VC: Puts us at risk.**

MM: Basically ja so...

**VC: Hmm.**

MM: So he gave us that and that's when we then decided to try and say, one of the things we need to do is to also take it outside. Look at the year, it's 1979.

**VC: 1979. So this HUNGRY EARTH must have been when you came back.**

MM: I came back in '78 remember.

**VC: So you didn't go to the Market before you went overseas by this report.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: According to this.**

MM: I got this information and basically for me it was saying 'go to hell'.

**VC: Don't perform.**

MM: Ja, ja. I, I, I'm going to perform and, and my friend was, and that's when I had – something or be damned. Something, something or be damned. Publish or be damned, something like that.

**VC: (laughs) Yes.**

MM: You know so that's, that's...

**VC: So you didn't listen to Raymond.**

MM: Oh no, I didn't. I decided, you know, this is now the, the early 80's and I then decided I'm, I'm doing it. Then I got rid of two guys and then we ended up with three guys and then we perform. We went overseas and we did. So we got more publicity outside and it was very easy for me to come back and ja we went to various other places ja.

**VC: Ja and then you must have come to the Market in 1981.**

MM: I came to the Market in 1981.

**VC: Oh '81.**

MM: '81. Remember that I...

**VC: Yes yes**

MM: In 1987/88 (SIC) that's when I started the, writing scenes for HUNGRY EARTH.

**VC: Ja ??**

MM And then I developed it in 1979. That's when I did that. At that point it still, still working on the play, rehearsing and writing the script and then checking up after whether I could get somebody for, you know the SACC. I, I didn't have money so we sent it to the SACC. They would be able to find lawyers, the SACC. They were representing quite a number of other detainees and things like that.

**VC: And Raymond had represented already things that were banned.**

MM: Yes.

**VC: At the Market.**

MM: Exactly.

**VC: So then when you, when you did it at the Market.**

MM: That was in 1981. Ja and that's after, then at that point '81 and then we came to Wits, you'll see, probably at Wits, there's one or two other reviews. That's when, after, after Ian came in and that's when we were rehearsing with actors.

**VC: And then you performed in 1981.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: Was it banned then?**

MM: No, it wasn't banned.

**VC: No but after the Market.**

MM: No the HUNGRY EARTH was never banned.

**VC: Never banned Okay.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: Okay okay. Then we move on to UMONGIKAZI.**

MM: Ja before, before UMONGIKAZI comes in GANGSTERS AND DIRTY WORK. I think 1983.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: '82, '83 ja, you'll pick that UMONGIKAZI, '84 but I had GANGSTERS AND DIRTY WORK somewhere around '83.

**VC: Okay it's just ja.**

MM: You will check up. There's quite a lot about GANGSTERS.

**VC: But I think GANSTERS might have come back again.**

MM: Ja, GANGSTERS came twice.

**VC: Ja ja. This is the other one.**

MM: Ja my first production was with John Maytham. Now this is strange.

**VC: Ja ja.**

MM: This is when I got hold of John Maytham and I was interested in joining them with their work with Neil McCarthy.

**VC: Yes.**

MM: Ja and er... when they did MADNESS something MADNESS and SCAVENGERS DREAM.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: NATIONAL MADNESS was James Wylie.**

MM: James Wylie and them. I saw those guys, you know I loved them absolutely.

**VC: The army and a ...**

MM :Yes I loved you know, the conscription, you know. Anti-conscription and I saw that and I loved, I loved them and er... and then I was beginning to write, after I'd seen them, I started writing GANGSTERS AND DIRTY WORK at the same time.

**VC: Right.**

MM: Er er. No GANGSTERS was also strange (pause) It says 1984.

**VC: Ja it says UMONGIKAZI was 83/84 and then DIRTY WORK/GANGSTERS 84/85.**

MM: UMONGIKAZI must have been 84 and GANGSTERS AND DIRTY WORK 83/84. Ja. You'll see there are original pictures here. Ja. Um...

**VC: So shall we talk about um....**

MM: And then 84 that's when Charles Comyn came in.

**VC: To GANGSTERS?**

MM: GANGSTERS.

**VC: Yes.**

MM: And '85 that's when Marcel (van Heerden) came in, so you'll... definitely Maytham was the original with Sol Rachilo.

**VC: I saw John Maytham's name on the...**

MM: Ja John Maytham and Sol Rachilo.

**VC: Okay.**

MM: In the original cast and then I had Charles Comyn in, in '84 and Marcel, Marcel coming in in '85.

**VC: And then he went overseas with you.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: Ja I remember that, I remember that.**

MM: So you'll pick that up.

**VC: Ja um...**

MM: And then and then in between that's why I'm saying 84. That's when I did UMONGIKAZI and that's when I picked up Gcina Mhlophe.

**VC: Right.**

MM: She wasn't even an actress when we did that. She had lots of...

**VC: She must have been in the hostel then.**

MM: Ja she was staying in the hostel. She was not in the drama. She was a poet that I'd known from from African Writers Association, so she was a very vibrant er... poetry writer, very energetic and things, and I took her from there and put her in the play. That's when she was introduced into the stage and she developed from there on.

**VC: So you introduced her.**

MM: I ??

**VC: To Barney.**

MM: Yes exactly ja. And did INJEMNYAMA and...

**VC: Yes.**

MM: You were in INJEMNYAMA?

**VC: No I wasn't. That was Marie Human.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: I was in BORN IN THE RSA.**

MM: BORN IN THE RSA yes.

**VC: Ja and now you're, just to talk a little bit, I know you've spoken in the book about Barney.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: But your relationship with Barney was quite interesting. (they laugh) Wasn't it?**

MM: Um... I'm not quite sure in what way (they laugh) um.

**VC: Maybe I'm being polite.**

MM: No, no in those days. Remember that, you must always remember that, it's the early 80's, it's the early 90's the late 80's.

**VC: Many detentions. Many.**

MM: During that period, er... I'm espousing the Black Consciousness philosophy and things like that, so we had, we had these problems with working with white people and things like that.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: ...and that I'm not quite sure if you're interested in things, say, related to that and I had that quite a lot we and, and, and, er... and Barney was just fantastic, I mean as a director, as you know, as a critic, as a, just amazing, you know. He would sit and look, and very quiet in a very quiet manner, look at work and, and make comments on the work and when you look at it, when you go back to it and look at his comments you then realise that, ah this man really knows his story and he... I watched him, I sat through a, a rehearsal, I mean for me it was also learning in those days when they were doing WOZA ALBERT and things like that.



**VC: Ja.**

MM: With Mannie also sitting. So we had all those debates but also I had serious, serious debates with Malcolm Purkey. He would talk about Barney Simon, you should include Malcolm Purkey.

**VC: In the same breath. No.**

MM: Well I was seeing them as these white people who were in charge of, and in control of these black people who had been...

**VC: Ja.**

MM: With them and things like that, etc, etc we can go back to your question, maybe I can then be able to comment on what, what you were alluding to, so that I'll be able to expand on it.

**VC: Um....**

MM: And provide as much as I can.

**VC: No I think it was your, your comment about "White Consciousness".**

MM: Ja ja it...

**VC: I found very interesting (pause) because Barney was always moving...**

MM: Ja.

**VC: Side to side, so I think your comment was very relevant at that time, in terms of Barney and I'm not sure whether he totally understood what you were saying, or not.**

MM: I think he did. The same comment I, I at that time with Athol [Fugard].

**VC: Yes.**

MM: The same, the same kind of, you know, and I was saying I was coming from a point that said that I need to tell my own story, and for me, for us to have this kind of a revolution you know, liberation or a change in South Africa. Because I can't tell these stories to white people, I'm going to have to tell the story to my people and if, if Barney wants, if, if Athol believed that we need to have change. I would like for Barney and, and Athol to do to white people and make them change their minds and things, so that the white people, more white people would be conscientised about change and things and more black people would conscientise them, then we would have change, coz I'm ?? I can't tell, go to white people.

**VC: And why, why, ja.**

MM: It would be very difficult because we were not – remember in those days we were also not much earlier, were not allowed to go into white theatres. Market Theatre was the most open one – and then there was another one in, on in of er a theatre that I saw JESUS something, something JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR something like that. There was a theatre open in town here er...

**VC: Ah I've gone blank now.**

MM: If you go to, we are in, this is Bree. If you went towards Rissik Street on the left there was a theatre.

**VC: Oh the Intimate.**

MM: Was it the Intimate?

**VC: Was it the YMCA building?**

MM: No not at the YMCA.

**VC: Then there was the Academy.**

MM: If you go down, down Bree Street and you went and you got into Joubert – before you get into Joubert Street. Somewhere at the corner, maybe er, er, Harrison Street, if you come down, I suspect that that's where it was down Harrison and one of those smaller streets, Plein or something like that. There was a theatre there and I saw a few times JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR.

**VC: I can't remember what it's called. I'll ask.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: I'll ask.**

MM: And, and my idea at that point was that if white people went to, if we were to work on change, I would like, because I can't you know, can't just change black people's minds because of we must change white people's minds. If you were to talk to white people, even in this change and things, you know and black people – then we would really have real change. But if we were to change white people, black people's minds, and that's what I was doing and nothing was changing and because the white people...

**VC: Were shall??**

MM: Was not being addressed properly and I suspect that I have that in my, in my dissertation, my masters dissertation from Leeds and things like that, and remember it was the period also of the, of the Cultural Boycott and thinks like that. Ha so, so sorry I interrupted...

**VC: No that's fine, that's fine. Market Theatre for you in those days, did it have a function for you?**

MM: It had a, a vital function in that it opened spaces that were not open. It, it provided a platform that would normally not be available, and that one even got the reviews that I'm talking about and things like that, was because of the Market Theatre. I mean in the townships people don't come to the – the journalists were not coming to the township shows. Very few were really you know, not even few, I mean they were not trained in the theatre – ah, and so their reviews would be biased, would be you kind of ??

**VC: Not serious these reviews.**

MM: Ja, ja you know it would be because they liked it and the one person they liked quite a lot was Gibson coz he, he paid them. He also bribed them I can say that ja.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: He bought people like Elliot Makhaya who would go and not like a play this week, two weeks later he goes he loved the play so much.

**VC: (laughs)**

MM: ...that you know, it would get two bits there and photos ?? and when we put up plays these guys would not understand, you know er, experimental theatre and things like that, I mean I remember taking UMONGIKAZI into one township in in the Vaal and we were attacked by er... members of the audience because we, we played various characters and things like that.

**VC: There were not enough people in ...**

MM: And there weren't there were only four of us at that point when we went to the Vaal it was Thoko Ntshinga myself and two other guys and er at the end of the ...

**VC: ...you were chased.**

MM: And people chased us and when we come to see Gibson Kente we would watch until 11o'clock so you've just played and er you've given us one hour or 90 minutes and you tell us that the play is over.

**VC: (laughs)**

MM: You're not going anywhere and they took out lights and things, our board and things.

**VC: You cheated them.**

MM: That night there were running battles in the streets because they didn't want us to go anywhere. They wanted their money they – I don't know whether they took the money and things like that and er we had to run away. We were running, literally running – and throwing stones and protecting the women that we were with, you know, and in the middle of the night in a township, in Sebokeng, I think, if I'm not mistaken, so...

**VC: I saw Gibson Kente at the Jewish Guild there.**

MM: Mm.

**VC: I was one of the few times he came to to ...**

MM: Oh ja, Okay...

**VC: He wasn't often in town.**

MM: He wasn't, and also the interesting thing about Gibson, I know we're not talking about, it's not about Gibson, is that he also, he was a very strange animal in that even in the after years. He didn't want anybody to do anyone of his plays.

**VC: No.**

MM: You wouldn't do any one of his plays, er..., whether you seek permission or something he doesn't because he says "If you like my play and you want it to be performed, you've got money, give me money, I'll do the play.

**VC: Ja.**

MM: You know, I remember Jerry Mofokeng at some point, many years later, wanting to do one of Gibson's plays and he said "No you can't you can't".

**VC: I'll do it.**

MM: I'll do it. If you're interested in my play, let me direct it.

**VC: So he was like an old fashioned...**

MM: Ja absolutely and he then had problems with Sam Mangwane and you know, Sam Mangwane was doing, was doing an equivalent you know. Gibson was a little more popular but he, Sam Mangwane had done you know, he did a play that was running almost 30 years, 20 years, in the townships called UNFAITHFUL WOMAN.

**VC: Yes.**

MM: And that play ran and ran he would rewrite.

**VC: But aren't they still doing it?**

MM: No.

**VC: Not that one but there's one called THE UNFAITHFUL WOMAN.**

MM: Oh I saw yes um no you know it's...

**VC: Not his.**

MM: Ja I'll remember the name. Ja.

**VC: I'm sure it's a homage.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: To that play.**

MM: Ja.

**VC: And Maishe – in terms of theatre now do you still see it in the same way or do you ...**

MM: Now er...

**VC: Does it have a function?**

MM: It has a huge function. It has a huge function, a huge function that I think the practitioners are caught up in, kind of, a strange time warp, or something, that I don't um – I can't describe. There er... we and I must admit not say we, because I'm not part of that. You know for me, I still feel that the theatre has a major major role to play, to be able to deal with the consciousness of the people – what, what it all meant, because remember that, you know, my theatre is going to be all about social change, political change and thinks like that, that's what – I can't write about love and other things, you know. And I look at the scenario today and I'm saying to myself – what did 1994 bring to us, people who really were in the struggle and who made this contribution and the vibrancy of that theatre, you know. And I see the vibrancy of the theatre still very much needed in this country but because our, our, our theatre activists our actors have really not been conscientised and educated enough to begin to deal with the realities I mean we kowtow to political whims and individuals and things like that. And we, we've stopped being critical, you know, and we sing praises. I've stopped. I go to a point where I said "I will no longer be a proper poet, you know. I cannot be a prose poet and for me, that's what gave me strength. That's what gave Matsemela strength and a number of other people in the Allah poets, we did not take political membership, a very strong Black Consciousness

but I never went to Azapo and, or to take part and I would not. And I tell them, they know that I don't do that. Because I want to be saying to them that I don't like the way your party is, is behaving or is doing things. I don't ...

**VC: No.**

MM: ...want to, to say to the party. I don't think you have the capacity to run this country. I can say that because I don't know the people that are working within your party. I wouldn't know you and so and so, and I don't think you have the capacity to – but I know you and I know you, you've run this country for the past 20 years. I have not seen any difference from what the Apartheid regime did, except that Apartheid was, you know, at that point, you know, kind of legal, or legalised and things like that. But where my people are, and the benefits for my people etc. why would we still be having all these service delivery protests, why would we have a leader who is very, very arrogant and basically like pisses on our notions of democracy and liberation. He does that, you know, undermines our intelligence and thinks we are buffoons and we have all these buffoons sitting in parliament, backing every single thing that he does because they are looking for their own benefit and for me that's the role of the theatre, that theatre must be able to begin to go into.

**VC: So are you writing a new play?**

MM: Well I'm writing – not a new play. I've been writing poems, lots of poetry and that's what I did with the the, the, piece that I do, SONG FOR BIKO.

**VC: Mm.**

MM: And I was very brave, I mean, the mid nineties you know I'm with Matsemela, slightly earlier than the 90's, I can't remember. And we did, when I did SONG FOR BIKO it was basically to begin to say, you know er..., "We shall see the colour of the sky when the clouds clear." You know at that point we'd begun to say – well you've gotten to the point we shall see the colour of you know, the sky when the clouds clear. Are we seeing, are we seeing it clearly? Is it clear already or not? You know so we're dealing with all those things and you know my poetry says it all. I'll continue to write like that. I don't beg anybody. I'm not buying anybody's favour. I don't like this regime, it's a regime I can call it. People may be happy with it, happy with certain things. I don't like it. And I'll say it. So that's where I stand for, you know, pieces that deal with society in certain instances er... I think the poetry to a large extent says it all but you know also the ?? some pieces that I did, I did in 2010 a piece called ?? but it starts off with some elements of poetry, things like that. To deal, and also I did a piece about a few years back with it's a co-collaboration of you know and I pick up on, for me the poetry is what begins to make the statements. We will have an Arab Spring here in this country, I suspect.

**VC: What did we use to call it – the second wave?**

MM: The yes, yes. We will have it. These guys can be so arrogant to think that we are buffoons, I think they take us for buffoons.

**VC: Well they definitely don't take anything seriously.**

MM: Ja and then you have actors that go about celebrating a, a, a birthday of a man who is really being so arrogant. I saw Sello Maake Ka Ngube at, at a birthday bash of Jacob Zuma. I mean I'm not saying, ja he was there in Durban, in the weekend newspapers – and you see these actors now are

moving about and musicians moving about and, and being at these things that the parties are doing and then they go and sing, and they dance and things like that, and I'm saying "They have not dealt with the issue that we don't have an artist's union that is strong. In this country still that represents theatre. I mean we fought, Vanessa."

**VC: We did – oh come on Maishe we tried.**

MM: And we tried to try to say to them this is what you need to be able to do. Be able to even create spaces for yourselves for the future. Look at where we are not, you know. And they don't buy it. They don't want it er and yet you can have them go about, go and support a party when they're not even supporting their own actors equity that we wanted to form.

**VC: No they don't want that.**

MM: Exactly.

**VC: Just a last thought. The Market Theatre now. Is it hopeful or ...**

MM: Now that's a strange scenario. I'm, and I will say it er, the Market Theatre now is not giving me any hope. Now it's a very strange one, because I may be subjective, so I'm saying that very clearly, but I've seen it er... before I became subjective, I've seen and, and I've, I've also looked at the Soweto Theatre. There are no innovatively, creative ingenious leaderships within these institutions. And so for me the Market Theatre has really missed it. Um... I had the opportunity, personally unfortunately. That's why I'm saying perhaps I am subjective. I had the opportunity to be able to go on to the helm of the Market Theatre a few years back and I missed it, and I know I just goofed in my time because there were two last people that were left. I was one. There was myself and some other woman. I don't know if it's the same one was is in charge there. And I goofed because ...

**VC: You can't remember?**

MM: I was dissuaded, my mind, I just got so confused. I went into, when I you know I'd gone through the interviews and things, and I was, there were only two people remaining. On the morning of the interview, and this is sad and I've never told anybody not even my family. On the morning of the interview I received a call from the person who's going to, who is doing the interviews for the company, who's 'Pinpoint', and he says to me, and he tells me that – you're coming to this interview er... I'm going to ask you questions. And these questions are, are about your vision for the Market Theatre.

**VC: Why?**

MM: If you took over, if you took over. This is, I've never said it, now I went into that interview. I totally ...

**VC: Mmm.**

MM: It was like my mind was, I don't know, what I was thinking. That I actually decided not to answer his question. This is, this is very strange. So I did not answer his questions and I answered that he said I must not, even if I don't answer those questions I would still make it. If I answered his questions but I don't answer these other questions.

**VC: My God.**

MM: Er I would still I would make it. All you do is that you must answer these questions and er and the other questions. And I've never said it I was, I've been very sad about it and it's been hurting me that. How could I have been so stupid? Because then I, I got entangled you know in trying to show that I er, that this was not a scheme. So I tried to evade the question in a way, with the hope that I would go back to the question and answer it properly.

**VC: Oh.**

MM: So I went all over the place, until he said that, you know, I'm finished. And when he said I'm finished I ...

**VC: You were finished in another way.**

MM: And ja. I was finished in another way because I had not answered the question and then I started dealing with the questions that he said don't deal with. You know? He said you can answer these questions.

**VC: But that's not important.**

MM: But they're not that important and I dealt with the questions I got emotional in that because I was then frustrated just now dealing with issues that either, the Board was asking me about – director, if, if how do you see the Market, now and they were saying, you know, there was one play that was very popular was this play, about nakedness – [Paul] Grootboom's play}.

**VC: RELATIVITY.**

MM: Ya that and that became very popular and they were saying, these guys, it's a popular play, it brings seats on the bum.

**VC: Did they like it?**

MM: Ja they, they said it puts bums on the seats and if they, if they. People like it, would you do a play like that and I said "no" and, but if I don't do it, but I'm not the artistic director. I'm the CEO of the company. If I feel...

**VC: You weren't doing it, you weren't going to be Artistic Director.**

MM: No I was going to be the CEO.

**VC: I see.**

MM: And I was saying then that the Artistic Director. They say, well Malcolm Purkey was the Artistic Director at that point.

**VC: Mm.**

MM: And if Malcolm likes this play, and things like that, and you don't like it, what would you do? I said " Well I don't like it. I don't like it. I would get into a discussion with Malcom to say – because we need to give the Market an image and bring it to where it was. I mean the Market Theatre was so, so vital and very critical and it played such a role. And I will be able to bring the Market Theatre, to be able to regain that lost ground you know, all those years. To be able to do that. "And what would you do then, would you refuse for the play to be done?" I say "I would enter into a negotiation with, with the artistic director."

**VC: Artistic director.**

MM: Ja artistic director but also that maybe – and they say what happens if you don't agree? I say, well if I don't agree, I don't know. Maybe it would go onstage but I will also raise it with the board to say these are the dynamics that are being – they said – no the board has nothing to do with that. And I then got angry. I even forgot to go back to the questions that I was supposed to – until they said – well we've done that.

**VC: Why?**

MM: And then – “Have you got any questions?” because I was so frustrated by the fact that here we are sitting talking about the Market Theatre about RELATIVITY or it was one before that – CARDS.

**VC: CARDS.**

MM: Yes. It was CARDS and talking – I mean I didn't go to see CARDS. I mean I had an invitation I, I just felt I'd heard about it and I felt – I really don't want to do that.

**VC: Did you see ??**

MM: I, I just refused. I said No I'm not going to see it. RELATIVITY I saw it because it was then done by one of your - was it the lecturer that was fired now?

**VC: Wa Mamatu.**

MM: Wa Mamatu. I came and saw it. I said – well it's brave. He's very brave. I still don't think I like it.

**VC: Mm.**

MM: You know, but it's fine, you know and this is what these young people are doing. They had bums, and I say, I saw people who had never been to my plays but were going to see...

**VC: (laughs)**

MM: Watch cards and things like that.

**VC: Maybe for a different reason.**

MM: Ja and then I spoke to them, they said, “Well we're going because we've heard so much about it and we would like to see it.” And the actors were saying to, some of the actors, “Bra Maishe please come and watch us. We're playing. We'll give you tickets.” And I said, “well I'll come” and call and then it ended and I still feel that we've lost that ground and I don't think I see the Market really doing that. I don't see our theatre really getting to that point where it becomes a vibrant element of the theatre er... that we need to create. And I don't see, I don't know. I mean, I I would love to see these young people coming out, you know coming to the stage with those plays that are vibrant but also making an input in terms of, you know, helping them to make these plays to be, you know...

**VC: Relevant.**

MM: Ja relevant and things like that. But I would not achieve that because I probably don't see the right places. And I don't beg for favours. For me, I'm a strange animal.

**VC: We come from a different time I suppose.**



MM: Ja (laughs). And we had a commitment, I mean look at what we did with PAWE, the commitment that we had, the love, you know, for me, and then getting into that space to begin to say “This is where we’re moving.” And when we did the White Paper, when we were involved in the White Paper...

**VC: Ja Okay.**

MM: The Actag processes – the energy and the commitment to be able to make an impact that was so vital you know, for me, that is gone you talk to these artists here, I mean.

**VC: They’ve got a Guild or something. One part of them and the other part is still with Kid (Sithole) and...**

MM: Oh yes and, and Kid has been there ever since, I mean I went back into, into PAWE at that time 2003, 2005 I became the General Secretary and Kid was there, was the President. He is still the President today. I mean it’s like his name is Mabuto, it’s like Mabuto Sese Seko.

**VC: (laughs)**

MM: The man doesn’t want to, you know, let go. He still wants to be – and for them it’s a status. It’s like President with double heads, you know, and that’s, that’s what he is, er for me the revolution A luta Continua means A luta Continua it never stops any... No specific leadership because we are all scared to lead those things, I mean there won’t be a young person who’s very brave. Today there’s Julius [Malema], except that he had got a cockeyed head at some point, you know...

**VC: He needs a bit of guidance.**

MM: He, he’s the only person, he’s the only voice that can stand up to the ANC today and say anything you know. Nobody else says things, I don’t say things. I, you know. A lot of others won’t say anything. He’s the only one. I mean he’s just come up, well a party and he’s been very brave. Where he heads, where the ANC goes into areas. He puts up there, at their own campaign. He puts up his campaign there and he gets an audience. He gets the attention of the media and things like that, you know. But whether he is the right leader to lead this country, I’m not quite sure. We’re not building, we’re not grooming. The question was related to whether the Market Theatre – I don’t see it going there. And I mean, transformation, change you know, they still have the Civic Theatre, the theatre here Joburg Theatre, you know, still running the same way. What has changed?

**VC: Very little now.**

MM: Er... what has changed? And we have Xoliswa Ngema, I’m not saying she’s bad, she’s Okay, and things like that. And, and we say, you know the dream for a Soweto Theatre was part of my dream then.

**VC: Mm.**

MM: You know when we argued, you can look into my thesis. My, my dissertation, talking about the lack of theatre. We were the people that fought for the theatre. We know almost where we were going. Not that I would say that I need to lead it, but we almost had the wonderful...

**VC: But and...**

MM: Yes.

**VC: One was around when they decided...**

MM: Exactly when they decided. They decide to choose, you know, who goes in, and they were not invited to it – Kid Sithole is now on the Board. He was not being invited. I was the person that said You know, if you do this thing, I would like to bring – and they call meetings, they don't call you. I call them to these meetings and we sat in there and he didn't, he wouldn't help. He didn't know about the meeting. And? It's only because I call him. And I'm being asked from that office, from the City, you know "Who can be invited" and er... and my plan was the person who was putting up all these names. They didn't know who to invite.

**VC: But then it all changed, hey?**

MM: Yes and it all changed you know. And er... where are we? Sorry I am getting angry.

**VC: Maishe thank you very much. If I need something else I will ...**

MM: Ja. Okay.

**VC: And when Michelle comes we can start with that.**

MM: Look into your archives – and maybe you can put some of my, almost a package of my works and other things. Other people, you know, one of the writers, very wonderful poet. I think he's so far the best, you might not know him. He was with the Allah poets? I have some of his unpublished works er... hand written by him also. I've sat down to type it out and so something like that. There's quite a lot of material which I think, if you were to add.

**VC: Ja. Thank you.**

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