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Lisa Biggs

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Lisa Biggs

SERIOUS FUN AT SUN CITY: THEATRE FOR INCARCERATED WOMEN IN THE “NEW” SOUTH AFRICA

Women have been largely invisible in crime discourse in South Africa; they have never been conceived of as either the primary authors or objects of the law.¹ Yet according to the Republic of South Africa Department of Correctional Services (DCS), they are one of the fastest-growing segments of the prison population today.² In the eight years following democratic elections in 1994, DCS reports that the number of women behind bars grew by over 31 percent.³ From 2008 to 2012 alone, the women’s prison population rose by 10 percent while the number of men behind bars declined.⁴ These increases are not fully attributable to an escalation in women’s illicit behavior. Instead, shifts in policing and sentencing policies now mandate longer sentences for crimes for which women are most likely to be convicted—both aggressive and non-violent, often poverty-related, offenses such as theft (shoplifting, robbery, burglary, carjacking, fraud, embezzlement), narcotics (trafficking, sale, distribution), and sex work.⁵

In response to the increasing numbers of women behind bars, DCS—an agency once internationally condemned for human rights violations—has been tasked with instituting effective programs that will rehabilitate them and return them to civil society. As DCS has worked to transform its notorious prisons into centers of learning over the last twenty years, community-based organizations have been granted a limited ability to offer arts programs in prisons. Workshops in music, black South African dance, and theatre (acting, playwriting) often culminate in performances on the prison grounds for other prisoners, visiting DCS dignitaries, the media, and occasionally the general public. Warders (i.e., corrections officers, police, or guards) offer the performances as evidence that prisoners are being rehabilitated.

Lisa Biggs, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at Michigan State University, where she teaches performance studies and theatre in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities. Her most recent scholarship appears in Solo/Black/Woman: Scripts, Interviews, and Essays, edited by E. Patrick Johnson and Ramon H. Rivera-Servera. Previously a member of the Living Stage Theatre Company, she currently writes, produces, and performs with Drapetomaniac Productions (www.lisabiggs.org/drapetomaniacs/).

In the limited published scholarship about prison arts programs in South Africa, however, scholar-practitioners Alexandra Sutherland, Miranda Young-Jahangeer, and Kelly Gillespie challenge warders' appropriations of black and coloured⁶ South African performance forms to further the state's rehabilitative project.⁷ They question whether the arts programs benefit the prisoners or if warders value them for their ability to present "properly performative" (i.e., well-behaved and compliant) prisoners in entertaining displays that affirm and reaffirm the power, authority, and efficacy of the state.⁸ Compelling imprisoned men and women to perform in this manner does little to address the social, economic, and political structural problems that most prisoners identify as the greatest challenges they face and the real catalysts for their illegal activities. Instead of aiding the imprisoned, Gillespie warns, theatre and dance programs for incarcerated people in their current iteration may obfuscate the "serious politics" of race, class, and gender embedded in South African's criminal legal system and block the implementation of more effective interventions.⁹

Since 2008, I have engaged in a combined ethnographic and historical research project to investigate the impact of theatre and dance programs for incarcerated women in the United States and South Africa. This article draws on fieldwork conducted from 2009 to 2012 at the Johannesburg Female Correctional Centre (aka Sun City) with the Medea Project: Theatre for Incarcerated Women. It seeks to unpack how selected performers in their most recent production, *Serious Fun at Sun City*, used the opportunity to perform. Relying upon data gathered from participating in and observing the production as an assistant stage manager and occasional workshop facilitator, I argue that under the guise of a rehabilitative theatre program for women, the *Serious Fun* cast and crew found innovative ways to exploit the opportunity to perform for their own purposes. Personal testimonial monologues and choral songs that on the surface conformed to the warders' expectations surreptitiously staged a pointed critique of the interlocking systems of oppression that had landed the women behind bars. Instead of following the state's rehabilitative script, ensemble members used the production to criticize the structural inequalities that undergird the legal, economic, and political systems, ultimately issuing a pointed demand for radical societal change.¹⁰

GANGSTER

Since the rise of the penitentiary in Europe and the United States in the 1800s, prisons have been regarded as sites for spectacular performances of both criminality and state power. When Dutch and English settler colonists began to occupy southern Africa in the 17th and 18th centuries, they adapted the penal practices of their homelands to subjugate indigenous populations. Florence Bernault, Dirk van Zyl Smit, and Kelly Gillespie have documented how, over time, white political and economic elites used colonial judicial systems and the military to conquer southern Africans they regarded as biologically inferior, criminal, primitive savages and establish the independent Union of South Africa, the predecessor to the contemporary Republic.¹¹ More than stereotyping black, coloured and Asian men, women and children as lawbreakers, colonial judicial processes invalidated

their humanity, rights, bodies, languages, customs, and acts of resistance.¹² Under the pretext of preventing crime against whites, the aggressive system of social control called apartheid was instituted in 1948.¹³ For the greater part of the twentieth century, South Africa's criminal legal system was explicitly calibrated to contain the movement (physical mobility and political activism) of dispossessed blacks.¹⁴ The apartheid regime attempted to depoliticize all black organizing, criminalizing any actions that defied racial segregation, destroyed private or state property, or interrupted the flow of business. The apartheid state attributed such activities not to members of the organized resistance but to individuals it labeled as local hooligans or gangsters (*tsotsis*). It asserted that the *tsotsis* were not political activists but disruptive criminal opportunists masquerading as liberation fighters in order to get away with stealing, destruction of property, gun running, and murder. This rhetoric was countered by discourse from the Left that framed such activities as purposeful incursions to take down the corrupt apartheid state. Organizers of and participants in the Defiance Campaign against Unjust Laws and other liberation campaigns of the twentieth century, including members of the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), understood that the authorities had criminalized the actions people took to liberate themselves. They coined the term *tsotsi-comrade* (or *com-tsotsi*) to reveal and invert the state's logic and to identify a person who engaged in illicit activity to defend him- or herself and the community against apartheid rule because of a growing political awareness and the knowledge that other means of resistance were ineffective. Where the *tsotsis* were considered common criminals who pretended that their actions were political, the *com-tsotsis* engaged in criminal activities as a natural outgrowth of a critical analysis of the political landscape.¹⁵

In the mid-1990s, observers of the transition from white ethnic-nationalist apartheid rule to multiracial democratic elections predicted that the elected leaders of the transitional government would dismantle the existing judiciary, police, and penal systems because they had become notorious for indefinite detentions without charge, false prosecutions, and the torture, disappearance, and murder of detainees. During the period of transition, hope soared that women and blacks would be able to participate as full citizens at every level of society. Activists imagined that as blacks and women were elected to positions of government leadership, they would transform the judiciary, decriminalize black life, and allow indigenous African forms of justice to be (re)incorporated into the criminal legal system, diverting most people away from penal facilities into restorative social justice initiatives.¹⁶ In subsequent years, it has become clear, however, that the "new" neoliberal South Africa has instead continued to rely upon the old penal infrastructure as a critical node of governance.¹⁷

Before democratic elections were held in 1994, South Africa's criminal legal system did undergo significant (albeit limited) restructuring. Former president Frederik Willem de Klerk ended the use of police and detention facilities for exclusively political purposes and dismantled some of the most sadistic security units.¹⁸ And in 1998, when the Correctional Service Act formally reorganized the prison system, legislators adopted a "strong human rights/liberalizing discourse" that advanced a new approach to penal discipline "based on behaviour

modification rather than punishment.” The structure of the police became less militaristic, a change that was accompanied by pledges of greater transparency and accountability, new uniforms, and the change of the prison system’s name to the Department of Correctional Services.¹⁹ Most important, DCS adopted a new mission that no longer attributed illegal activity to the “born criminality” of blacks—that is, an inherited racial-biological, evolutionary defect that the Italian eugenicist and criminologist Cesar Lombroso had incorrectly identified in the late nineteenth century.²⁰

More recently, the pervasive sense of fear and instability in the country has been attributed to the emergence of a new class of organized, intelligent, and utterly immoral black gangsters. Kynoch writes it is popularly understood that these “politicized militant” men and women have opted “to live by the gun” because their “expectations were not met in the first years of democracy.”²¹ Representing criminal(ized) men and women in this way diminishes both the historical brutality of the apartheid system and the challenges facing contemporary South Africans.²² To survive, blacks have often been required to use violent force. Violence has been an effective tool to get and maintain honor and respect from white employers, from political leaders, and from other black community members. As the effects of decades of state repression continue to reverberate and inequalities persist, the cultural strategies necessary to protect black life have endured. Framing this new class of *tsotsis* as the greatest threat to the state and its citizenry has enabled contemporary South African leaders to disavow responsibility for implementing neoliberal economic policies that perpetuate the impoverishment of the majority. Gordon concludes that the recent adoption of get-tough measures—aggressive policing of targeted poor black communities, longer sentences, higher bail, and supermax cells—is evidence of political decisions to “prioritize” the demands of the global free market over the needs of ordinary South Africans.²³ The identification of a new class of *tsotsis* has allowed the state to recuperate the old penal system, despite its history of abuses, as the only institution that can reliably contain and control what it identified as the criminal element.

Within the contemporary neoliberal context, the rehabilitated prisoner, or “‘corrected’ subject,” writes Gillespie, is articulated through “the most heteronormative of Christian family values.”²⁴ Individual moral ineptitude is seen as the cause of crime, with roots traceable to the failure of the family—especially of mothers—to instill appropriate African Christian values.²⁵ More ethical behavior is considered the only proper cure. Thus, in recent years, DCS has initiated a “special focus” on the “upliftment of the female offender,” and worked to ensure that the “conditions and circumstances” of incarceration “respect . . . their human rights.”²⁶ DCS must now provide safe and secure confinement for women and all other prisoners that is infused with educational, vocational, recreational, and religious life-skills programs that will enable them to return to free society as moral citizens.²⁷ It is hoped that these measures will reestablish proper Christian patriarchal authority and inoculate the mothers of the nation and their children from future criminality.

During the past twenty years of both heightened hope and heightened insecurity, however, the department has been constrained in its ability to act, due to

rising rates of imprisonment, crumbling infrastructure, serious overcrowding, and inadequate funding for staff training, programs, and supplies.²⁸ Because women make up only a small portion of the total prison population, they are often overlooked when already scarce resources are allocated. Unpaid Christian missionaries and other volunteers such as theatre program facilitators are tasked with completing the penal system's mission. Sutherland and Young-Jahangeer report that the theatre and customary dance programs they facilitate have been valued by DCS warders not for teaching art history or technique but for providing prisoners with opportunities for "recreation."²⁹ Sutherland says that her work has been at times so misconstrued that some warders have praised it only for providing gratifying entertainment for visiting dignitaries on special occasions, often at the last minute.³⁰ Gillespie finds that warders offer such presentations as proof that they are themselves performing up to standard, doing their jobs of rehabilitating the prisoners by making them sing or dance on command. She warns that the pageantry of these staged events dangerously masks the role of the past and present state in the criminalization and incarceration of the poor black majority, whose living conditions have not changed substantially since the end of political apartheid. The country's brutal history of colonial and state violence is obfuscated when prison theatre and dance shows arrange the imprisoned in celebratory "diorama[s] of a new, carceral order;" such images not only misrepresent the past but disavow the "perduring hold" of white supremacist neoliberalism "over the real conditions of the country's prisons."³¹ Furthermore, by uncritically performing what I call the state's rehabilitative script, the arts programs misrepresent the role of black performance practices in the struggle to end apartheid and forge a more democratic and inclusive nation. To paraphrase James Thompson, prison arts programs in South Africa, as in other parts of the world, risk becoming only a slightly "less explicit" aspect of the prison's regular punitive function when they operate in this way.³² If DCS, and by extension the state, responds to the deep impoverishment and exploitation of the African majority not with comprehensive structural change but with programs that train the criminalized black poor (*tsotsi*) to act in the most superficial manner like "properly performative" moral citizens, prison arts programs offer no opportunity for individual or systemic transformation. Instead, they help ensure that deep gender and racial disparities persist.³³

When I began researching the work of the Medea Project: Theatre for Incarcerated Women in South Africa, I wondered if this program too subscribed to this reduced role for the arts behind bars. In 2006, after nearly two decades of working in women's correctional facilities in the United States, performing artists Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor were invited by Roshnie Moonsammy, producer of the Johannesburg-based Urban Voices Festival, to join with other equally talented and dedicated South African artists to develop a theatre piece at Sun City. The collaboration was the first time African American and black South African artists codirected an arts program at a women's facility. Jones, an accomplished actress and director, had been devising original theatre for incarcerated women since the late 1980s through the Medea Project, an initiative produced by Cultural Odyssey, the San Francisco-based nonprofit arts organization she and Ackamoor co-own and administrate.

Though the Medea Project is often overlooked in histories of prison theatre programs, in U.S.-based feminist, community-based arts settings, it is the standard against which other programs for imprisoned women are measured.³⁴ Emerging from a broad continuum of black women's activism, including social justice organizing against police brutality and sexual violence, Medea Project productions are known for doing more than merely replaying the rehab script that involves remorseful accounts of imprisoned women's crimes and staged confessions.³⁵ Nina Billone finds that by using song, dance, monologue, and scene work embedded in a distinct black feminist performance praxis, the Medea Project restages the multiple and interlocking social, economic, political, and judicial processes that put women behind bars and render them civilly and socially dead.³⁶ The Latin root of the word incarcerate (*carcer*) "denote[s] not only those acts of 'enclosure'" as in a jail cell, "but also the process of 'cancellation'" of subjectivity, autonomy, citizenship and dignity that is experienced by people who are relegated to the lowest rungs of white supremacist capitalist patriarchies.³⁷ Under the pretext of a rehabilitative arts program, the Medea Project in the United States has been able to put the real lives, creative stories, and independent thoughts of incarcerated, overwhelmingly black women at the center of criminal legal justice discourse. I wondered if Medea would have the same effect in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

From 2009 to 2012, I made three ethnographic fieldwork trips to South Africa, during which I observed and participated in all facets of the rehearsal and production process for mounting *Serious Fun in Sun City* four times in three locations.³⁸ *Serious Fun at Sun City* was an evening-length, episodic, personal narrative-driven theatre and dance work that featured a dynamic cast of some thirty incarcerated women.³⁹ My fieldwork was informed by the everyday tasks of production assistance that I was asked to do to support the production while documenting the process. I lived with the directors in a small bed-and-breakfast in the (somewhat) racially mixed Johannesburg suburb of Melville and drove with them to and from the prison for intensive four- to fourteen-hour rehearsals five or six days a week for two to four weeks at a time. I took handwritten notes about staging, transcribed scenes and monologues to build the script, learned songs and dances, participated in and occasionally led warm-up and closing acting exercises, and, to the extent that DCS allowed me, documented rehearsals and performances on video and through photographs.⁴⁰ In 2010, at the State Theatre in Pretoria, an expansive complex that is historically renowned in that predominantly Afrikaner city for producing Eurocentric works, I also served as an assistant stage manager and as a liaison between the directors, the South African stagehands, the warders, and the incarcerated women performers. My fieldwork was supplemented by opportunities to speak extensively with the directors about their work. I also engaged in archival research and spoke with former members of the cast who had been released. Based on these experiences, I argue that the imprisoned women at Sun City appropriated the production of *Serious Fun* to articulate alternative histories of and visions for the nation's future based upon their lived

experiences as women. Through the production, the women were able to enter the public sphere to expose the interlocking processes of cancellation they endured and that contributed to their criminal(ized) activities. *Serious Fun* put these processes on public view, making them available for collective analysis and for activism, not only by spectators but by the women themselves.

THE PROCESS

Jones and Ackamoor were excited to partner with Urban Voices Festival producer Roshnie Moonsammy and choreographers Sonia Radebe and Joy Sidibe of the pioneering South African modern dance company Moving into Dance Mophatong. With the DCS and some thirty women confined to Sun City, their goal was to develop a new performance piece the Sun City women were willing and able to present. In an interview with the Johannesburg *City Press*, Jones explained her vision for the project:

I just want them [the imprisoned women] to embrace the idea that they have a right to life. Women's lives always belong to other people. The perception of women in jail is that they broke all the rules and did all the wrong things. Nobody likes bad girls. But we should know the variables that make bad girls. We are not born bitches; a lot of stuff happens to us.⁴¹

For Jones, there is always a sense that women belong to other people—children, parents, spouses, employers, and the nation.⁴² They are repeatedly blamed for South Africa's failings, for black South African women are expected to embody and uphold the nation through their reproductive and domestic labor while avoiding the appearance of “independent subjectivity.”⁴³ While popular African Christian explanations argue that a lack of morality is the impetus for crime, positivist theories that were forged under colonization and apartheid still linger, even though they have been discredited. These theories argue that women are inherently bad by virtue of their biology, that they inherit a degenerate (bitch) nature. Like the mythical Eve of the Garden of Eden, they are believed to be plagued by poor decision making and “cheeky” attitudes that “force” men to correct them through everyday acts of repression, including rape and other forms of sexual and gendered violence.⁴⁴

The *Serious Fun* production staff met the “bad” women of Sun City during an intensive two-month rehearsal process in October and November of 2008. Jones, Ackamoor, Radebe, and Sidibe worked closely with them to craft responses to a series of prompts Jones provided into a cohesive script.⁴⁵ To get to the “bad girls,” the *Serious Fun at Sun City* production team had to wind through the sprawling Sun City prison campus. The women's facility was one of several reddish-brown, brick buildings set in the red dust of Soweto behind a tall wire fence. After one enters its cramped visitor receiving room, a metal gate swings open onto a cement ramp that spirals around the heart of the prison. Segregated cellblocks fan out like the spokes of a wheel in a classic panopticon design. The team wound its way through the building to reach the rehearsal/performance

space, a small outdoor courtyard at the center of the prison. Down one hallway a young black or coloured woman might be standing over an unsteady toddler learning to walk in the Children and Mother's Unit, while in another corridor black and coloured women in white aprons, gumboots, and hairnets might be unloading heavy wooden crates of food into a whitewashed kitchen.⁴⁶ Sometimes we heard Christian gospel songs sung in complex harmonies as we threaded our way through, carrying scripts, boom boxes, pencils, and paper—the materials for a theatre project for incarcerated women in the works.

Like the zoos introduced in the 1800 and 1900s to exhibit the exotic and strange, the Sun City penitentiary was built to make hypervisible the bodies of the prisoners it contained; though originally these were men, nowadays the prison holds women.⁴⁷ However, a narrow side door that led to a cement-paved, open-air courtyard on one side of the panopticon made a shift possible for the cast members—a move, even a momentary escape, from the position of the observed into that of an observer. The production team met the cast before this locked metal door flecked with white paint that opened into the courtyard. We waited there for a warder to let us out. When its bars swung open, we were released into the sunlight. A thin line of blue sky stretched overhead. High red brick walls dotted with hundreds of barred windows blocked out almost every other sign of life except the occasional mangy pigeon perched in the gutter above. As rehearsals began, however, I noticed that behind the barred windows rimmed with jagged, broken glass other imprisoned women's faces peered at us from the adjacent cellblocks all day, every day (see Fig. 1). This attentive, nearly invisible audience watched and listened as the ensemble (re)worked the prison's technologies of cancellation and immobilization for their own purposes. In Jones's words, rehearsal provided a space for the cast to examine their lives and "slide into their own mythologies."⁴⁸

Participation in *Serious Fun* was voluntary, but cast members had to have been sentenced to at least five years in this medium-security facility and had to be in good standing, with no infractions on their record.⁴⁹ Direction was conducted in English, with translation provided as needed into isiZulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and other local languages. Writing prompts and intense in-rehearsal group discussions about how the women got to Sun City, their visions of themselves, and their dreams, needs, and desires formed the basis of the script. The result was an episodic, two-hour production built upon a spine of women's monologues and augmented by ensemble-driven narrative song, customary dances, and scene work that balanced predictable preventive messages (say NO to drugs) with cautionary tales about the real dangers women face in the struggle to survive.

When *Serious Fun at Sun City* premiered in November 2008 in the courtyard of the women's prison to an audience of more than three hundred imprisoned women as well as DCS officials, warders, and the press, both the participants and the audience responded enthusiastically (see Fig. 2). DCS warders praised the production for allowing the cast to demonstrate that they were being "rehabilitated" and for providing the women with an opportunity for "emotional release" and a chance to "showcase their talents."⁵⁰ In an interview with the *City Press* in 2009, Samantha Ramsewaki, the communications manager for Sun City, explained that DCS saw the show as a success because it "helped to teach restorative



Figure 1.
In the Sun City courtyard, Idris Ackamoor and Rhodessa Jones (both standing to the left) rehearse a woman's monologue. Hidden behind the barred windows, other prisoners observe rehearsal. *Photo:* Lisa Biggs. Reproduced with the permission of Cultural Odyssey.



Figure 2.

Joyce strides into place during a 2009 performance of *Serious Fun* in the prison courtyard. *Photo:* Royal Takalane Mudau. Reproduced with the permission of Cultural Odyssey.

justice, the importance of forgiveness, and has helped them [the prisoners] to address the emotional baggage they brought with them to prison and to make peace with it.”⁵¹ Local papers published laudatory feature articles that emphasized that the women were not the “monsters” the reporters expected to meet.⁵² The articles often followed a narrative of redemptive suffering, emphasizing that the women had found their time in prison to be productive—an opportunity to examine and better themselves and now seek forgiveness (i.e., mercy, understanding, or pardon) from the community. At a time when Johannesburg had an international reputation for crime and corruption, this coverage offered rare, positive proof that DCS, and by extension the entire government, was working.⁵³

South Africa’s prison system is not unique in its appropriation of arts programs for rehabilitative purposes. Ashley Lucas finds that in most carceral facilities, the arts, like the prisoners, are stripped of their histories and complexities.⁵⁴ She writes that rehabilitation today is narrowly construed as little more than a state-regulated, three-step process through which prisoners learn to demonstrate the ability to self-reflect, confess past wrongdoing, and express remorse. Day in and day out, the “corrected” (compliant) incarcerated subject is not nurtured or

truly cared for but trained to confess and seek forgiveness. Every portrait, poem, song, dance, or scene produced by an imprisoned person is assumed to fulfill the rehabilitative script; it is presumed to be a form of confession that is presented to allow scrutiny of the “deviant soul.” It is never perceived as the expression of an acquired skill or the demonstration of a person’s independent “intellectual” initiative, imagination, thought or desire.⁵⁵ Mastery of the script of rehabilitated prisoner behavior is essential both for survival behind bars and for securing future freedom. Imprisoned men and women learn to perform it because if they do not, they risk additional punishment until they comply or are rendered obsolete, insane, or dead.

Because the show made the authorities look good, when the unprecedented opportunity arose in August 2010 to tour the work to the South African State Theatre in Pretoria as part of the National Women’s Day Celebration, they allowed it. For the cast and crew, the State Theatre performance promised a chance to do much more than fulfill the state’s rehabilitative script, which was never their sole intention. The State Theatre offered an opportunity to communicate their core message to a broader audience.

YOU STRIKE THE WOMAN, YOU STRIKE THE ROCK

The State Theatre in Pretoria is a six-theatre multiplex. Construction of the facility began in the late 1960s to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the apartheid republic.⁵⁶ Located in the middle of a bustling downtown business district, the three-story cement and mortar complex, “forbidding and once-forbidden” to blacks, takes up a full city block.⁵⁷ The six performance spaces plus bars and restaurants under its roof are surrounded by an expansive outdoor plaza filled with palm trees, gurgling water fountains, abstract sculptures, and dining tables topped by red and white canopies. The Drama Theatre where *Serious Fun* played accommodates an audience of more than six hundred in deep, red-upholstered, cinema-style seats and boasts a wide proscenium stage trimmed with a black marley dance floor, dark heavy curtains, sky-high riggings, and a flawless white projection screen (scrim) forty feet upstage. It could not have been further from Sun City’s meager accommodations. Of course, the cast did not get to experience this poshness. DCS transferred them in small, discretely marked, secure vans from Sun City to the local women’s jail in Pretoria for the duration of the show, which played from 5 to 17 August 2010. They rode in DCS vans across town and entered the theatre via the loading dock. Warders in light brown uniforms stood guard as they strode to the stage to work. Several days of rehearsal provided an opportunity to restage the work for this much larger venue. This heightened the production’s underlying messages calling for an end to social, economic, and political repression and domestic violence against women (see Fig. 3).

On a cool August evening in 2010 that was set aside to commemorate the Women’s Anti-Pass Law March in Pretoria in 1956—the first large-scale interracial political action by South African women against apartheid—the Sun City women took their places on and around a half-dozen elementary school desks



Figure 3.

Rehearsing a lift at the South African State Theatre in Pretoria. *Photo:* Royal Takalane Mudau. Reproduced with the permission of Cultural Odyssey.

and chairs placed in a half-circle at center stage to, in Jones's words, "tell the truth." Across the expansive black proscenium stage, they faced a full house of hundreds of schoolchildren; family members, curiosity seekers, arts patrons, legislators, and visiting dignitaries. The multiracial, multiethnic cast wearing facsimiles of customary clothing (Zulu, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, Pedi, etc.), interspersed with a few bright orange prison travel jumpsuits, seemed to paint an idyllic picture that exemplified the Rainbow Nation and established them in a shared elementary school classroom setting.⁵⁸ It quickly became clear that the students were not there simply to learn. They were there to teach.

Once in place, the performers introduced themselves, shouting out their first names in a quick roll call. Then Xoliswa, a petite, 30-something woman standing atop one of the desks at center right, ignited the performance. Stepping into the role of Teacher, she called out to the ensemble, "Attention!" They responded: "Mamela!" (Listen!). As Xoliswa exchanged calls and responses with the ensemble she interwove gumboot dance choreography to punctuate her words, alternatively placing one hand then the other behind her ears as she rocked left or right. The ensemble responded by repeating Xoliswa's gestures. With each repetition, the momentum and excitement of the dance built. Soon Xoliswa replaced the arm gesture with dynamic footwork. Crossing one leg slightly behind her, she slapped the inside of her ankle as she called out "Attention!" The ensemble responded with "Mamela!" and echoed her choreography. Words and footwork repeated and built until the ensemble came to the phrase, "*Mame mame mame mame mamela!*" which they accented on each syllable with quick slaps to the inner ankles, alternating right and left. The combination of sound and movement repeated across so many bodies reinforced the imperative to pay attention, calling the cast to work well together and inviting audience members to engage, listen, and learn.⁵⁹

In keeping with the form of popular prison theatre programs in South Africa, an *imbongi* (praise singer or poet) stepped forward from the ensemble with a short invocation, which was followed by several *ingoma* (black customary) dances in rapid succession. The Zulu-inspired *indlamu*-style *ingoma* that initiated the series built from a preparatory, very contained rhythmic walking pattern that moved back and forth in a straight line toward the audience.⁶⁰ After several passes forward and back, the three dancers stretched their left legs back to catch the pickup of the beat.⁶¹ A rapid series of straight-legged frontal kicks using only the left leg, then alternating left and right, exploded from the hip and rose toward the sky. Each kick struck the ground like a bolt of lightning with the downbeat of the music, embodying, according to Meintjes, the Zulu concept of *isigqi* (artistic power) (see Fig. 4).⁶² Again and again, the *Serious Fun* dancers lifted their legs skyward, each time with greater height, speed, and force. Then, just as the Zulus appeared to tire, they suddenly turned their backs on the audience with a dismissive wave of an arm and were replaced in rapid succession by Xhosa, Pedi, and Tsonga dancers who showcased their own customary ethnic dances. The sequence ended with a rump-shaking solo by Joyce, a boisterous Venda woman who served as the de facto captain of the ensemble. With each dance, the choreography positioned the women as the driving forces and central protagonists of the work.

Gillespie warns that South African prisoner presentations of customary song and dance often evoke a fictitious, idealized past devoid of the black liberation struggle. In the contemporary context, they seem to imply that a sinful lack of knowledge of one's social place and pride in the country's history leads to illegal activity, a move that masks the role of the penal system as a central repressive apparatus of the state that subjugates Africans. By placing the women as the central protagonists and forces behind these performances, *Serious Fun* opens up the possibility of an alternative reading of the effect of the customary dances performed by prisoners. Lisa M. Anderson states that one of the hallmarks of black feminist performance is the positioning of black women and their lives, experiences,



Figure 4.

Jabu, Nonhlanhla, and Lindiwe demonstrate their *isigqi* (artistic power) in a customary Zulu dance at the South African State Theatre in Pretoria. *Photo:* Royal Takalane Mudau. Reproduced with the permission of Cultural Odyssey.

knowledge, and stories at the center of the narrative. Feminist artistic works explore the world from their perspectives, often operationalizing the intersecting optics of race, sexuality, gender, and class that shape black women's lives. Feminist plays, choreopoems, songs, dances, performance art pieces, storytelling, and other interdisciplinary works strive to advance the causes of black women and of others who face oppression. They do so by establishing a distinct and identifiable "Black women's" style of art, distinguished not only by the centrality of black female protagonists but also by the use of language (relying upon black vernacular), perspective, tone, musically, and choreography that en flesh and articulate the experiences and perspectives of black women in their time. With these strategies, black feminist performances intervene in privileged discourses that undervalue black women's lives, intellectual contributions, and labors.⁶³

Serious Fun met the penal system's expectation that the women rehabilitate through customary dance by appearing to train them to express racial and heteronormative gender identities in these socially acceptable ways. Opening dances represented cast members as upright, moral women and mothers of the nation through the choreographic (re)connection to their "roots." Because women are the symbolic conservators of ancient South African customs, their ability to perform

customary song and dance is understood to preserve black South African culture.⁶⁴ Embracing this potent symbol of women as the mothers of the nation enabled the cast of *Serious Fun* to enter the public sphere as their foremothers did in the 1956 Pretoria march, which the show was meant to commemorate. Once onstage, however, they worked to assert *isigqi* (artistic power) and political power. The theatrical frame, imbued as it is with a sense of playfulness, alleviated anxiety that the women would challenge directly the fixity of gender roles; but as the piece unfolded it became clear that they have repeatedly had to defy expectations about appropriate female behavior in order to provide for themselves and their families, at great cost to themselves and to others. The play was an opportunity to complicate the dominant narrative about life in South Africa for men, women, and children through personal narratives authored by those women who have had to be “bad” to survive and have paid the price for doing so.

After the opening montage of praise poems and dances, Jones called from the edge of the stage, “Who has homework?,” appearing briefly in her role as narrator and director.⁶⁵ Ellen,⁶⁶ a 30-something round, dark-skinned woman with immaculate hair and nails from working in the Sun City beauty salon stepped forward in the role of “Ms. Ellen,” a special guest lecturer before the class. She began her monologue by asking the schoolgirls if they knew where drugs came from. They confidently shouted the names of countries and neighborhoods where illegal narcotics could be procured—“Brazil,” “Colombia,” “Afghanistan,” “Pakistan,” “Hillbrow”—then transitioned into a stage picture that embodied the effects of various drugs (see Fig. 5). Ellen began her lesson with a perfunctory “Just Say No to Drugs” message, then transitioned into a more personal story. As she spoke, the cast formed a moving stage picture of airport security, with two lines of passengers waiting to go through. At the head of each line, women playing security officers armed with imaginary scanner wands patted down the other members of the cast, detecting illegal drugs or other infractions (passport problems, wrong ticketing, etc.) with each one. Each woman was stopped, handcuffed, and then confined in a single, large, imaginary holding cell onstage until every traveler was in custody.⁶⁷ Against this backdrop, Ellen related her personal story of how she got to Sun City. In a high-pitched voice she addressed the audience:

Good morning, class! I am Ms. Ellen, mother of three beautiful daughters aged 11, 10, and 6. I’m in prison for drug trafficking and serving a 10-year sentence. I was arrested with 1.5 kg of cocaine on 21 January 2005. It felt like the end of the world. Let me tell you how it all fell apart. I fell in love with a Nigerian man, or so I thought. We had a child together. She was a beautiful bouncing baby girl. Wow, the guy was over the moon, it was his first baby. Little did I know that he’d drop this bomb on me—damn—the guy just up and left, never to return again. At this point the landlord came knocking on my door 24/7 demanding the rent. My kids and I started living like thieves. Life as we knew it was over. I had to sneak in every day while the landlord was out to get clean clothes. No money for rent, no money for food, no money for school fees. A friend of mine, or so I thought, who knew of my predicament, introduced me to this game. She took my passport and started making bookings. I



Figure 5.

Ellen describes the perils of drug trafficking as the cast restages her arrest at O. R. Tambo International Airport. *Photo:* Royal Takalane Mudau. Reproduced with the permission of Cultural Odyssey.

was also taken for a shopping trip and my hair was done, my nails and eye-lashes and the works—very glamorous, or so I thought. I was about to fly all the way from S[outh] A[frica] to Sao Paulo, Brazil [and back]. I was promised 20,000 rand, which I never received a penny of. I was arrested at Oliver Tambo International Airport [in Johannesburg]. Even the person I thought was my friend after my arrest immediately switched off her phone and I never heard from her again.⁶⁸

The confession is a formative structure of contemporary Western society and a defining ritual of rehabilitation. With her concise narrative, Ellen appeared to fulfill the state's demand that prisoners confess. Foucault theorized that the confession is understood to produce or yield "intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it," for the speech act "exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him and promises him salvation."⁶⁹ The role of the witness is critical to the process. Foucault wrote, "One does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply their interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile."⁷⁰ In the case of confessions before police or other state agents, the act is more than a chance for the speaker to demonstrate the ability to self-reflect and describe

their own past actions. Confessions gained through interrogations, coercion, and torture are notoriously false, but in many punishment rituals what is actually said means little.⁷¹ Of greater importance is the fact that the prisoner speaks, that he or she acknowledges the state's appellation and, following Franz Fanon, recognizes him or herself as the one interpellated—"Look, a Negro! ... a nigger!"⁷² In the DCS context, "Look, a *tsotsi* bitch!" The act of the confession (re)constitutes the authority of the state to administer laws and punishment rituals that affect the status of the imprisoned individual, who is put through the ritual repeatedly and forced to answer time and again.⁷³ In extreme confessional rites such as those associated with public executions, the prisoner is expected to respond to the executioner's hail and seek absolution or forgiveness from the assembled crowd with his or her final dying words.⁷⁴ But observers have long recognized that public confessions offer prisoners an opportunity to divert from the script and appeal to sympathetic onlookers for help instead of for forgiveness or absolution.

Ellen, like so many prisoners before her, appeared on the penal stage to demonstrate that she was rehabilitating and could self-reflect, confess wrongdoing, and express remorse. As she recounted her crime, however, she evoked not the image of a dangerous *tsotsi* but the image of a single mother who had selectively engaged in international drug trafficking to provide the basics for herself and her children—rent, clothes, food, school fees—when her partner abandoned her. Ellen acknowledged her role in her crime, but she was clearly the least knowledgeable person involved; she was a low-level mule who was set up to carry goods when convenient, easily disposed of when no longer needed. The monologue ends with a bewildered Ellen revealing she never even got paid for her troubles and that the others abandoned her and allowed her to take the fall. Standing backstage every night I wondered, Where were the real drug traffickers? What drove them to traffic drugs internationally, and why was Ellen the only one behind bars? A monologue that was intended to demonstrate rehabilitation instead opened up questions about the legitimacy and efficacy of the police, the judiciary, and penal systems.

With her subtle deviation from the rehab script, Ellen's monologue located *Serious Fun* within a continuum of black political activism that critiques repressive governments and cultural practices and calls for and enacts radical social change. When they were banned from giving testimony in judicial settings by white supremacists who argued that they were incapable of telling the truth, black South Africans developed a practice of personal narrative, a testimonial performance that recounted their real-life experiences, informed listeners about the urgency of their political situation, and urged collective action. Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and other political prisoners used their public trials on charges of treason, incitement, and terrorism to challenge the legitimacy of the apartheid government. They converted the state's mandate that they testify in court into opportunities to indict it for human rights violations. Other artists and activists used song, dance, and dramatic texts to tell the truth about apartheid repression, subvert government discourse, and express their desire that an alternative, more inclusive nation-state would emerge.⁷⁵ Black rhetorical and performative practices of truth telling were so integral to the liberation struggle and the constitution of the emerging

postapartheid nation that the transitional government employed personal narrative performances of testimony to stage a symbolic reconciliation between the state and injured community members. The transitional state hoped that, within the quasi-judicial settings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings of 1996–8, the ritual of truth telling would bring forth a new and more democratic nation. Because the prison was the “center of apartheid’s vortex” of oppression, it was essential for the TRC to open the judiciary and penal systems, the closed doors of police stations and prison lockups, for collective examination.⁷⁶ TRC representatives conducted more than twenty-one thousand interviews with those whom TRC commissioner Bishop Desmond Tutu referred to as “the little people”—those whom the public record and history books typically ignored but who bore the brunt of apartheid and provided the critical labor of the liberation struggle from 1960 to 1994.⁷⁷ Witnesses came forward to relate their own experiences and give statements about family members who had been brutalized and executed by security forces. Some government officials agreed to recount what they had done or seen done by others, even going so far as to demonstrate the techniques used to disappear, torture, maim, or murder detainees.⁷⁸ The individual stories connected disparate people’s seemingly isolated experiences to a larger collective narrative and reconstructed the history of the nation with a “complexity, multiple layers of experience, and emotional density” that had previously been prohibited.⁷⁹ Oral histories and embodied reenactments unveiled how state power was performed in South Africa through controlling and canceling black people.⁸⁰ Testifying publicly before the TRC and the nation restored the subjectivity, citizenry, and humanity of black South Africans by conveying to others the authority and dignity of individual speakers and symbolically articulating the experiences of a multitude of other people who had been similarly repressed.⁸¹

Despite the vast scope of the hearings, feminist critics complained that the commission was unable to create a substantial space in which women might come forward to recount their gendered experiences. Most women gave statements from the standpoint of wives and mothers who had witnessed or been impacted by the brutality that male family members had suffered.⁸² Testimony that fell outside this narrow purview was relegated to a special commission seated in Johannesburg that met for only two days in late July 1997. During those hearings, women told harrowing stories about personally encountering police and prison warders who used rape and other forms of sexual violence to control, inflict pain and suffering, and humiliate. Oboe writes that speakers connected the brutality of the apartheid and colonial systems to present-day violence women endured in their homes, workplaces, and other community institutions and gathering places. Women from the suburbs and townships, from rural farms to urban business districts, declared that there was no space that apartheid’s racist, sexist, and economic brutality did not reach.⁸³ Women of all races, the witnesses insisted, had been canceled out as citizen-subjects, brutalized by apartheid-era officials and institutions, and exploited by male friends and family members much closer to home. Women were profoundly degraded under apartheid—reduced to “mere objects of exchange in the territory of the masculine”—and continue to be severely degraded in the

post(anti)apartheid era.⁸⁴ Their testimony issued a collective warning that more had to be done to recover the negated status of women and restore them to a dignified humanity. Yet women continue to be largely excluded from the political imaginary of South Africa except as symbolic “mothers of the nation,” a position that threatens to cancel their past contributions and compromise their possibilities for the future.

During rehearsals, using techniques honed during over twenty years of composing theatre for incarcerated women, primarily with African American casts, Jones encouraged the *Serious Fun* women to reexamine their lives and the lives of their mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers from their own black feminist theoretical perspectives. Jones insisted that the women identify the narratives that have defined them from the outside, and that they turn the most limiting myths on their heads. The shift from margin to center helped them identify factors other than a lack of morality as motivators for their wrongdoing and incarceration. Activating this alternative, repressed, and fugitive repertoire of women’s knowledge and understanding enabled the production to do more than repeat the state’s rehab script. Two core members of the ensemble—Wendy and Joyce—who built the show in 2008 and continued with the production through 2012, told me that *Serious Fun* was the only time they were “treated like human beings.” From this deep place of connection to both their own worth and life struggles and the struggles of other imprisoned women, cast members were able to smuggle, within the framework of prisoners’ confessions, pointed critiques that revealed both their own mistakes and the interlocking social, political, and economic processes of cancellation that contributed to their incarceration. In many cases, the result was personal narratives that uncovered the persistent fallacies of the criminal legal system and the patriarchal beliefs and practices that undergird it. Subtle shifts in words, tone, intention, and emphasis encouraged the women not to confess but to *testify*, in the black vernacular sense, on their own behalf.

Geneva Smitherman has identified black *testifyin* as a practice of telling a truth “all blacks have shared” through a spontaneous oral elocution, often but not exclusively in a religious setting.⁸⁵ Though she initially called testifyin an African American rhetorical practice, Smitherman located similar oppositional practices throughout the African diaspora, and she theorizes that the practice originated on the continent and spread during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Faced with similar repressive white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal regimes bent on breaking black bodies and spirits, Africans throughout the diaspora developed similar subversive tactics to express their dissent and activate an alternative practice of justice that situated them and their needs in the halls of power and at the center of discourse. While testifyin alone may not elicit immediate systemic change, it provides a means of disrupting practices of domination, displaying injustices, and communicating dissent. Emerging from this complex genealogy of antiracist, anti-patriarchal, judicial activism by “bad” black women, *Serious Fun* became a vehicle through which the Sun City women might disrupt entrenched criminal legal discourse and practices and exercise their rights and abilities as independent human beings and subjects to issue a call for radical social change.



Figure 6.

Alouise recounts how divine intervention saved her from an abusive partner. *Photo:*

Royal Takalane Mudau. Reproduced with the permission of Cultural Odyssey.

Fifteen years after the last TRC hearings, Alouise, a light-skinned, frail-looking coloured woman in her forties with long braided hair, stepped out of the ensemble and moved purposefully to the microphone at the State Theatre moments after Ellen turned away. Alouise, like Ellen, had at one time worked as a drug smuggler but had been sentenced for murder. When she joined the ensemble in 2010, she was about halfway through her fifteen-year sentence and had never shared with anyone at the facility the details of what happened the night her partner died. One rehearsal Jones asked people to write in response to the prompt “Love Don’t Love Nobody” to begin to get at how family dynamics, gendered obligations, and love relationships can entrap women. Alouise responded with the following monologue, which became one of the centerpieces of *Serious Fun* at the State Theatre. When she performed it, Jones and Ackamoor placed her alone before a microphone located downstage left in a low spotlight (see Fig. 6). The cast scattered around the stage initially in a series of tableaux to enact aspects of her

story—a group of children playing ring-around-the-rosy, adults engaged in a violent argument, a few women huddled over an imaginary open fire. Despite the separation, dressed now in identical, bright orange, prison travel uniforms, they read as one person, stood as one body, told one story. Alouise said:

Love don't love nobody! I'm Alouise, a mother of three. When poverty stepped in, love stepped out. Fifteen years of marriage down the drain. I was living in a scrapyard with my kids for 8 months. Then I met this guy, offering me place to stay and a plate of food. We fell in love. He told me how much he loves me but little did I know what was in it for me. I had to hold on 'coz there was nowhere to go. I then became his personal slave and then the abuse started, all kinds of abuse including rape. My kids had to witness all these things. They too were abused in a way, still I had to hold on 'coz I loved him. I got to a point where I couldn't take it anymore. My body was tired of all the stabbing, the beatings, the hurt, the pain I had to go through. Let's not forget the rape. I was confused. I then went to the pillow where he kept his gun. I took it and threw the gun at him. It went off. A day later he died in hospital. And that, ladies and gentlemen, that's the reason I'm in prison. Love don't love nobody.⁸⁶

Alouise's testimony, which establishes her as a mother and a respectable married woman, reflects upon how impoverishment and abandonment by her husband forced her onto the streets and into the crime that landed her at Sun City. Homeless with three small children to care for, living in a society that did not have a deep network of institutional supports, Alouise had few options other than to accept the "plate of food" and "place to stay" offered by an unnamed stranger. She acknowledged that she stayed with him even after he became violent but framed this decision as the result of her realization that there was "nowhere to go." In this post(anti)apartheid, neoliberal state that champions self-reliant economic citizens, Alouise's choices and ability to act independently were circumscribed, rendering her in effect a prisoner in a violent home. Within these narrowly defined parameters she eventually found the strength to act. Her description of grabbing the gun and throwing it at her former partner satisfied the penal system's expectation that she would disclose her crime, but her personal narrative stopped short of admitting that she killed him.⁸⁷ Though the gun "went off," Alouise did not confess to pulling the trigger. Instead, his death was framed as the result of unseen and unknown forces or actors—perhaps even divine intervention—beyond her power and control.⁸⁸ Alouise's word choices elided the issue of taking the blame for the man's death, and from her telling, it is arguable whether any crime occurred. While on the surface her monologue took the form of a prisoner's confessional speech act, the content and the tone of her words made her actions appear wholly justified. By testifyin not to her own wrongdoing but to the man's brutality and the power of unknown, unseen, perhaps divine forces to intervene, Alouise subverted the state's mandate that she confess to prove she had been rehabilitated. Instead, within the framework of the confession, Alouise (re)

established her personal dignity before hundreds of spectators in the audience—as well as the dignity of her young children, who had witnessed the man’s brutality and came to the show to hear her tell this story for the first time.

LOVELY, OR THE RETURN OF THE CONDEMNED

Lovely, a thirty-something coloured woman with a soft, round face, also smuggled drugs internationally. She joined the show for the 2009 production, and after completing her sentence, she was released. She was allowed to return and present a new monologue at the State Theatre in 2012 that reflected on her time behind bars and, most important, on the experience of being released and returned to her old neighborhood, Hillbrow, an infamous area known for high population density, a large immigrant population, and crime. Rhodessa Jones, Idris Ackamoor, and I would pick Lovely up in the car at a taxi station or other meeting point, and on the way to or from rehearsals, Jones and Ackamoor would discuss and practice what she would say. As Ackamoor drove, Jones and Lovely would debate the content of her monologue while I took notes. In performance, Lovely improvised upon the outline they crafted and interjected new thoughts or commentaries as she felt was appropriate. In Pretoria, her monologue issued forth the most pointed critique the ensemble offered about the position of women in South African society and the responsibility of the community to them (see Fig. 7). She greeted the audience with this:

Angicholwa ngiphumile [I do not believe I have come out]. Am I out? Am I really out? ... When I got out, the Members [corrections officers] when they saw me on the streets were the only ones who treated me in a respectful way. They’re glad for me. Other people in the community, they called me Nelson Mandela. At first, I was proud, then I got angry. Nelson Mandela went to jail for you and for me, not for drug trafficking. Now you’re using that freedom of speech he fought for to abuse. To have my child come to me and ask me, “Mommy, are you a bandit?” I’m not a bandit. My name is Lovely, and it is my duty to tell my child what has happened.

Lovely’s narrative questioned the presumptions of those who mocked her. By subtly deploying the well-known black rhetorical practice of *signifyin*,⁸⁹ Lovely was able to denounce her tormentors and reveal their lack of knowledge about Nelson Mandela. Smitherman defines *signifyin* as a way to insult or shame another person using a clever, often humorous, turn of phrase. Though the practice is usually associated, like *testifyin*, with African American vernacular speech, Lovely’s neighbors’ mocking hails echo the practice. With their humorous criticisms they “make a point” about Lovely’s personal shortcomings by highlighting how far removed from dedication to the struggle and personal sacrifice symbolized by Mandela her own activities had been.⁸⁹ The State Theatre performance was an opportunity for Lovely publicly to answer back. She replied to their criticism with a complex argument about women’s rights, roles, responsibilities, and duties in the new South Africa that shifted the dialogue from the realm of the confessional into



Figure 7.

Lovely confronts her Hillbrow neighbors and the nation for dismissing women's real political and economic needs. *Photo: Royal Takalane Mudau.*

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the political and challenged the depoliticization of “common” women’s criminal acts in contemporary criminal legal discourse. Lovely argued that by running their mouths against her, especially to her child, the neighbors proved they were less knowledgeable than she was, and as far if not further removed from the values that animated the fight for black liberation. Her claim to have a “duty” to tell her daughter what she had done activated an alternative repertoire of understanding about the responsibilities of mothering today and in the historic struggle. These obligations exceeded the narrow parameters of parenting, citizenship, and productivity the residents of Hillbrow—and, by implication, the rest of

society—articulated. It was this wider “duty” to tell her child herself what had happened that brought Lovely to the stage. There, she did not seek forgiveness but called out those faraway Hillbrow neighbors and anyone else who shared their opinions.

Like Ellen and Alouise, Lovely deviated from the anticipated confessional script, in this case by omitting the details of her crime and upbraiding society. Focusing more on the inappropriate actions of others and less on her own wrongdoing, she positioned herself—and, by extension, others in the ensemble—as women engaged in a much larger struggle for respect, dignity, and a better quality of life. Lovely’s testimony interrupted and dispelled the clear-cut boundary between so-called common (immoral) criminals and political prisoners whose (moral) actions an unjust state criminalized.⁹⁰ Her insistence that she had a “duty” to introduce herself to her child activated an alternative framework of motherhood, responsibility, community, and belonging that is often absent in popular criminal legal discourse and public policy. Her words reminded listeners that much work remains to be done and that the “bad girls” onstage were not the only ones with who had work to do.

THE CALL TO ACTION

To reinforce the connections between contemporary incarcerated women and the legacy of struggle without engaging in the kind of obvious political work that might raise the ire of prison officials, between the monologues the women’s voices rose in songs that signified both a deep religious conviction and the struggle. They enveloped Ellen’s monologue within these lyrics:

Igama lamakhosikazi malibongwe (Let thanks/praise be given to women.)

Igama lamakhosikazi malibongwe

Malibongwe malibongwe malibongwe malibongwe (They must be thanked/praised.)⁹¹

“Malibongwe” is both a religious hymn and a historic struggle song. It was sung to commemorate the interracial women’s march in Pretoria in 1956 against the restrictive Pass Laws, which was a hallmark of women’s antiapartheid activism.⁹² The song bears witness to women’s activism and reminds listeners of their past contributions to the sacred fight for freedom. Like the songs U.S. civil rights activists sang as they entered hostile territories or were thrown into southern jails, today “Malibongwe” reminds singers and listeners of a time when the community was united against the regime. Bernice Johnson Reagon states that American civil rights songs were sung to establish and maintain the community of activists. As marchers moved to reoccupy hostile territories, the songs announced their arrival and sonically prepared the way for black bodies to enter and reclaim the ground for more inclusive ways of being in the world to be enacted.⁹³ Shirli Gilbert, Liz Gunner, and Grant Olwage, among others, have documented the efficacy of black popular song and dance forms in galvanizing antiapartheid protestors.⁹⁴ To sing “Malibongwe” at the State Theatre was to activate a deep and broad repertoire of black performance practices. Pairing it with Ellen’s monologue located

the imprisoned women's testimonies within a specific trajectory of women's liberation activism. It framed their current incarceration as more than individual failings, as the result instead of both historic and ongoing inequality and injustice, and it asserted that their actions were the latest front in an ongoing struggle for black women's equality. As the cast raised their voices, they further activated a repertoire of black vernacular performance practices, including black township theatre, in which audience members are expected to participate actively as cocreators of the event. Hundreds of audience members joined spontaneously in singing "Malibongwe," as they did for other works such as the hymn "Moments of Trouble, Sing a Song" before Alouise's piece; Tracy Chapman's contemporary song "At This Point in My Life" before Lovely's monologue; and the iconic anti-apartheid song "Safa Saphel Isizwe" (Our Nation Is Dying) after Lovely spoke, each time adding new sonic layers. In doing so, the audience dissolved the perceived distance between themselves and the incarcerated, establishing, if only for a moment, an instance of *communitas*. Their actions, I believe, were grounded in shared knowledge of what it takes to resist the "regulative power" of the state and to rise up as an empowered black community resonant with a sense of optimism for the future.⁹⁵ The imprisoned are not supposed to act freely, and free people are not supposed to help them, but they do. The *Serious Fun* women used their prison drama to smuggle out of their closed world their bodies and their life stories, emboldened by black feminist theory and buoyed by hope and a deep desire for a new society to emerge. Further, by singing "Malibongwe" and other "new" South African struggle songs, the ensemble accessed a reservoir of shared knowledge embedded in themselves and the audience and revealed a collective dream for the future of greater inclusivity and women's equality. With themselves firmly at the center of the action, they pointed the way forward (Fig. 8).

NOTES IN CONCLUSION

It is presumed that, since multiracial elections began in South African twenty years ago, there is no longer any need for criminally defiant activity such as that demonstrated by Mandela and other explicitly political prisoners. Yet the stories Ellen, Alouise, Lovely, and other women in *Serious Fun* shared indicate that women continue to struggle to live in the public and private spheres as full human beings who are respected, seen, heard, and understood. As former Constitutional Court Justice Albie Sachs has noted, patriarchy has long been the "one of the few profoundly non-racial institutions in South Africa," one that "brutalizes men and neutralizes women across the colour line."⁹⁶ Black men continue to be overrepresented in legal discourse as both the perpetrators and victims of illegal activity, be it state, corporate, or street crime. This narrow focus on black male perpetrators and victims has foreclosed opportunities to examine more closely the full spectrum of harm done. During the transition to black liberation in the 1990s, women's organizations had to demand a seat at the negotiating table. Ultimately, they were successful in instituting one of the most gender-aware constitutions on the planet; but there is a difference between constitutional change and the reallocation of material resources required to bring about deep structural



Figure 8.

The *Serious Fun* cast and a DCS warder (bottom center) celebrate after the State Theatre show. *Photo:* Royal Takalane Mudau. Reproduced with the permission of Cultural Odyssey.

change. The fall of apartheid did not signal the end of the push for democracy, citizenship, equality, respect, and dignity.⁹⁷ In the post(anti)apartheid era, despite the ratification of one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, a masculinist bias continues to obfuscate both the contributions and the needs of South African women. Inadequate state responses to systemic problems, such as chronic unemployment and the poor enforcement of laws prohibiting violence and discrimination against, them have forced some women to take matters into their own hands.⁹⁸

The Sun City women's stories evidence the perils of relegating them to the status of rights-bearing individuals on paper only, and of dismissing the efficacy of alternative prison-based arts programs like the Medea Project. Women fight back, furtively, if necessary, or in the open. They procure the goods and services they

and their loved ones need to live with dignity, and they will go to prison for doing so. So defiant and determined were they, the *Serious Fun* women even refused to follow the state's narrow prescription for rehabilitation, and instead issued subtle but pointed demands for access to the full rights, privileges, opportunities, and resources of citizens in the "new" South Africa on their own terms. With song, dance, and personal testimonies that appeared to uphold the state's rehabilitative mandate anchoring the script, the cast was able to subvert the Department of Correctional Service's efforts to rehabilitate them into Gillespie's "properly performative" women. Like other black artist-activist-community members before them, they appropriated the opportunity to perform to express their collective discontent with the status quo and their desire for a different, more inclusive society to emerge.⁹⁹ Activating a repertoire of black performance practices, the women (re)inscribed the history of the country and enacted an alternative vision for the future. Due to penal prohibitions against explicit acts of defiance or criticisms of the state, they had to articulate their cause in recognizable "maternalistic" terminology, simultaneously smuggling in an assertion of their rights to equality and full participation on black "feminist terms."¹⁰⁰ Their stories, songs, and dances revealed popular fictions about women who break the law and complicated the familiar, moralizing, positivist, and patriarchal approaches to crime, safety, security, and justice that predominate. Told again and again before larger and larger audiences of listeners, their testimonies undermined the authority of other tellers of tales about women behind bars, and encouraged audiences to question the motivations and justifications of law enforcers and legislators tasked with providing security to the nation. By challenging, disrupting, and complicating DCS's rehabilitative script and the undergirding logic that sustained it, the *Serious Fun* cast demonstrated the need for alternative responses to crime in South Africa—with themselves, their lives, and their needs for once at the center of the struggle.

ENDNOTES

1. The lack of official judicial attention to black South African women is not an indication that women's behavior was unimportant or went completely unremarked. For a history of the treatment of women by the criminal legal and prison systems during the colonial era, see Florence Bernault, "The Politics of Enclosure in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa," in *A History of Prison and Confinement in Africa*, ed. Florence Bernault, trans. Janet Roitman (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 1–53, at 20–2. For a history of the criminalization of women in the twentieth century, including modifications to signature apartheid laws like the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, see Shireen Ally, *From Servants to Workers: South African Domestic Workers and the Democratic State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 34. Ally contends that before instituting these legislative controls, "the state enacted its efforts at control through third parties with whom they shared an interest," in particular churches and their armies of missionaries, who developed and ran Christian religious hostels and domestic service training schools to channel black South African women into household labor for whites (34). This forced-labor program exposed black women to greater scrutiny in white domestic spaces than perhaps on the streets or in other more public institutions that police regularly patrolled. For a more contemporary analysis of women's struggle to achieve citizenship rights through legal processes, see Catherine Albertyn, "Defending and Securing Rights through Law: Feminism, Law and the Courts in South Africa," *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 32.2 (2005): 217–37.

2. In South Africa, the police, courts and prisons were established to protect the white ruling minority with little emphasis on conventional policing practices. The apartheid regime (1948–1994) deployed these institutions in horrific ways against the black majority and never defined its acts of brutality as illegal. Record keeping was inconsistent and many offenses went unreported, undocumented and/or undiscovered. To convert the police, courts and prisons into community-oriented institutions dedicated to protecting the full citizenry, as mandated under democratic rule, required radical restructuring. Some twenty years into the process, bureaucratic and administrative changes continue to impact reporting. In some years, the Department of Correctional Services provided little to no information about women behind bars in its annual reports. Yet these are the available official records. Rather than dismiss them out of hand, I site them hoping to encourage a discussion of the larger developments they may reveal. For an evaluation of the challenges facing law enforcement in South Africa in the early years of democratic rule, see *Policing the Transformation: Further Issues in South Africa's Crime Debate*. Eds. Mark Shaw, Lala Camerer, Duxita Mistry, Sarah Oppler, Lukas Muntingh. Institute for Security Studies. Monograph No. 12 (April 1997). For a comparative analysis of sentencing under apartheid and democratic rule, see Gail Super, "Punishment in the 'old' and 'new' South Africa: A Story of punitivist humanism," *Theoretical Criminology* 15.4 (2011): 427–443.

3. The Republic of South Africa Department of Correctional Services reports that in 1994 the daily average number of adult women behind bars was 2,867. This number represents women sentenced to incarceration and the unsentenced women who were being held in pre- or posttrial detention in DCS facilities; see Republic of South Africa, Department of Correctional Services (hereinafter RSA, DCS), *Annual Report: [In Review] 1997* (Pretoria: Department of Correctional Services, 1997), 9, table 3. In 2011–12, the average "female inmate population" was 3,765 for sentenced and unsentenced prisoners combined; see RSA, DCS, *Annual Report 2013–14* (Pretoria: Department of Correctional Services, 2014), 27. (These and other DCS annual reports are online at www.dcs.gov.za/Publications/AnnualReports.aspx, accessed 4 September 2015.)

4. On 1 October 2008, a few weeks before the Medea Project began at Sun City, DCS reported it confined a total of 3,426 sentenced and unsentenced women; RSA, DCS, *National Offender Population Profile in the Department of Correctional Services* (Pretoria: Department of Correctional Services, 30 June 2009), 13, table 8 (available online at www.dcs.gov.za/Publicans/Other%20Publications/National%20Offender%20Population%20Report%2030%20June%202009.pdf, accessed 4 September 2015). By the end of the reporting year 2011–12, there was a daily average of 3,765 sentenced and unsentenced women in DCS facilities; see RSA, DCS, *Annual Report 2013–14*, 27. The number of men prisoners reached 162,047 on 1 January 2008, then began a steady decline to 155,177 at the end of the 2011–12 reporting year; see RSA, DCS, *National Offender Population Profile*, 13, table 7; and RSA, DCS, *Annual Report 2013–14*, 27.

5. RSA, DCS, *Annual Report 2008–09*, 20–2.

6. Coloured people are a distinct linguistic and political group in South Africa. They include people of mixed African, Asian and European descent as well as the indigenous Khoisan community. For a history of coloured people in South Africa, see Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2005).

7. Alexandra Sutherland, "'Now We Are Real Women': Playing with Gender in a Male Prison Theatre Programme in South Africa," *RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 18.2 (2013): 120–32; Miranda Young-Jahangeer, "'Less Than a Dog': Interrogating Theatre for Debate in Westville Female Correctional Centre, Durban[,] South Africa," *RiDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 18.2 (2013): 200–3.

8. Kelly Gillespie, "Moralizing Security: 'Corrections' and the Post-Apartheid Prison," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2.1 (2008): 69–87.

9. *Ibid.*, 71.

10. In *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), Jon McKenzie traces the evolution of performance as a critical lens in the twentieth century, especially the underresearched connotations of "perform" that mandate what he calls "operational

efficiency" (14) as a precursor to participation in human society. Failure to perform carries with it the threat of being rendered obsolete or worse (12).

11. For a comparative history of the use of incarceration on the African continent, see Bernault, *History of Prison and Confinement in Africa*. For more detailed analysis of the use of imprisonment in South Africa, see Dirk van Zyl Smit, "Public Policy and the Punishment of Crime in a Divided Society: A Historical Perspective on the South African Penal System," *Crime and Social Justice* 21–2 (1984): 146–62; and Gillespie, "Moralizing Security."

12. Bernault, "Politics of Enclosure," 11–39.

13. Here I refer to black South Africans in the political sense, not the biological or ethnic cultural sense.

14. Kelly Gillespie, "Containing the 'Wandering Native': Racial Jurisdiction and the Liberal Politics of Prison Reform in 1940s South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37.3 (2011): 499–515, at 509.

15. Gail Super, "The Spectacle of Crime in the 'New' South Africa: A Historical Perspective (1976–2004)," *British Journal of Criminology* 50.2 (2010): 165–84, at 168–9.

16. Diana R. Gordon, "Side by Side: Neoliberalism and Crime Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Social Justice* 28.3 (2001): 57–67, at 58.

17. Paul Williams and Ian Taylor, "Neoliberalism and the Political Economy of the 'New' South Africa," *New Political Economy* 5.1 (2000): 21–40.

18. Gordon, 58–9.

19. Gail Super, "'Like Some Rough Beast Slouching towards Bethlehem to Be Born': A Historical Perspective on the Institution of the Prison in South Africa, 1976–2004," *British Journal of Criminology* 51.1 (2011): 201–21, at 210–11, quotes at 211.

20. Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, trans. and intro. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter ([*L'uomo delinquente*, 1876] Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), quote at 164.

21. Gary Kynoch, "Of Compounds and Cellblocks: The Foundations of Violence in Johannesburg, 1890s–1950s," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37.3 (2011): 463–77, at 463.

22. Kynoch, 477.

23. Gordon, 60.

24. Gillespie, "Moralizing Security," 79–83.

25. Ibid.

26. Super, "'Like Some Rough Beast,'" 211.

27. The Department of Correctional Services defines its mission thus: "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. We are turning our correctional centres into centres of learning. Offenders must read, study and work. We must impact the hearts and minds of offenders so that, upon release, they are in possession of, at least, a certificate in one hand and a skill in the other." RSA, DCS, *Annual Report 2012–13*, 13.

28. Super, "'Like Some Rough Beast,'" 211; RSA, DCS, *Annual Report 1997*, 4.

29. Sutherland, 122; Young-Jahangeer, "'Less Than a Dog'"; Miranda Young-Jahangeer, "Bringing in to Play: Investigating the Appropriation of Prison Theatre in Westville Female Prison, KwaZulu-Natal (2000–2004)," *South African Theatre Journal* 19.1 (2005): 143–56; and Miranda Young-Jahangeer, "LIVING with the Virus Inside: Women and HIV/AIDS in Prison," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equality* 26.2 (2012): 93–9.

30. Sutherland, 122.

31. Gillespie, "Moralizing Security," 70–1.

32. James Thompson, "From the Stocks to the Stage: Prison Theatre and the Theatre of Prison," in *Theatre in Prison: Theory and Practice*, ed. Michael Balfour (Bristol, UK, and Portland, OR: Intellect, 2004), 57–76, at 57.

33. Gillespie, "Moralizing Security," 70–1.

34. Standard histories of the prison arts movement after 1960 include Balfour, *Theatre in Prison*; James Thompson, *Prison Theatre: Perspectives and Practices* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1998); Lawrence Tocci, *The Proscenium Cage: Critical Case Studies in U.S. Prison Theatre*

Programs (Youngstown, OH: Cambria Press, 2007); and Jonathan Shailor, ed., *Performing New Lives: Prison Theatre* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2011). For histories of the Medea Project, see Rena Fraden, *Imagining Medea: Rhodessa Jones and Theater for Incarcerated Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Billone; and Sara Warner, "Restorative Justice: Theater as a Redressive Mechanism for Incarcerated Women," in *Razor Wire Women: Prisoners, Activists, Scholars, and Artists*, ed. Jodie Michelle Lawston and Ashley E. Lucas (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 229–46.

35. Rhodessa Jones points to the mid-1970s efforts to liberate Joan Little, an African American woman tried for killing the corrections officer who tried to rape her while she was confined to a small jail in North Carolina, as one catalyst for her own work (personal communication, June 2012).

36. Billone, 273–4.

37. Rebecca McLennan, "Citizens and Criminals: The Rise of the American Carceral State (1890–1935)," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1999, 9, quoted in *ibid.*, 262–3.

38. The three locations were as follows: at Sun City in the small courtyard where rehearsals took place (2009); in a large vaulted auditorium at Sun City for selected members of the general public (2010); and then at the South African State Theatre in Pretoria later that year. In 2012 the production was remounted in another courtyard of the women's prison where it had begun.

39. Several members of the original cast continued to participate throughout the length of this study, but others were released from the prison, and new ensemble members were recruited. Participation was predicated upon the approval of the warders.

40. When the production moved to the performance phase, I helped prepare the theatre spaces by doing everything from picking up litter in the women's small courtyard to clearing dressing rooms at the State Theatre and handling props, microphones, and furniture. To support the cast further, I placed personal phone calls to friends and family members, offering complimentary tickets to the show. During each performance, I served as a core member of the backstage crew; in fact, for the prison performances in 2009 and 2012, I was the *only* backstage crew.

41. Gail Smith, "Rogue Mothers and Deviant Daughters," *City Paper* (Johannesburg), 1 November 2009, 25. (Available online at www.news24.com/Archives/City-Press/Rogue-mothers-and-deviant-daughters-20150430, accessed 4 September 2015.)

42. Rhodessa Jones, personal communication, 12 May 2015.

43. Helen Moffett, "These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them: Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32.1 (2006): 129–44, quoting sociologist John Moland at 138. See also Gillespie, "Moralizing Security," 75.

44. Moffett, 138.

45. The women were asked to respond in writing to prompts that asked them to consider "Me at My Best," "The Last Time I Saw Love," "One Thing You Should Know about Me," "What I Know Now," and "How Do I Honor Myself?" Other prompts provided opportunities to address specific family members, such as "A Letter to My Mother" or "To My Children." At no point did Jones encourage the women to seek forgiveness by Jones. In fact, discussions leading up to and in response to the letters to family members challenged the notion that all women are good mothers. Jones conducted frank discussions with the ensemble about how their mothers cared for them and voiced the sentiments of many one afternoon when she declared, "Some of our mothers, they were lousy and they left us." These frank discussions signaled that the women could express their dissent from the norm and challenge popular notions about women behind bars. I believe that within the prison system, however, prisoners make a calculated choice about what to say to whom. To remain in good standing and perform their rehabilitation, many chose to craft confessional-sounding, apologetic responses.

46. DCS annual reports do not identify prisoners using racial classifications. A few Afrikaner and Asian Indian women were sentenced to Sun City. Two—Wendy and Lustacia—played integral roles in the show from its inception in 2008. But they were in the minority.

47. Sun City does hold men who are detained for trial or are serving various sentences in other buildings on the grounds.

48. Personal communication, 13 May 2015.

49. The 40 percent of the population at Sun City awaiting trial were ineligible to participate; only women who had been convicted and were serving sentences could participate (Gail Smith, 25). Some prisoners were selected, encouraged, and/or coerced to participate based on the warders' sense that they had strong dance skills, but most volunteered.

50. These insights were gained through personal exchanges with DCS warders during rehearsals in 2009 on the prison grounds. Warders expressed these comments about the women's "talents" with great sincerity as a point of pride. Theatre for incarcerated people in South Africa, like other performance forms, is confronted by the pervasive myth that Africans are natural-born entertainers. Repeated emphasis on the importance of the performance as a "showcase" for the women's "talents" evidenced a lack of knowledge or awareness of the hard work and professional expertise it took to compose, stage, and present the piece.

51. Gail Smith, 25.

52. Ibid. See also David Smith, "Theatre of Burden," *Mail & Guardian*, 13 November 2009, <http://mg.co.za/article/2009-11-13-theatre-of-burden>, accessed 24 September 2015.

53. There is also the very real possibility that crimes against whites have increased as blacks dissatisfied with the pace of change and the lack of real redistribution of material resources have decided to seek reparations individually. The fear may also be the result of an ongoing sensationalization of blacks' crimes by media outlets that are still disproportionately controlled by the former colonists.

54. Ashley Lucas, "When I Run in My Bare Feet: Music, Writing and Theatre in a North Carolina Women's Prison," *American Music* 31.2 (2013): 134–62, at 135.

55. Lucas, 135–6.

56. Bhekizizwe Peterson, "Apartheid and the Political Imagination in Black South African Theatre," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16.2 (1990): 229–45, at 232.

57. David B. Coplan, *In Township Tonight!: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 375.

58. Less clear for audience members and the theatre crew were the orange coveralls. These were DCS uniforms assigned to incarcerated men or women when they were outside their cellblocks. A dignified elderly black theatre usher chastised me at one show for not using the appropriate doors to enter the house from backstage until I told him that they were locked, blocked, and guarded because the show consisted of real women prisoners, not actors playing a prison drama. The front row of the auditorium to the backstage loading dock was a temporary carceral space that warders from Sun City attentively guarded.

59. Rhodessa Jones, dir., "Serious Fun at Sun City," 2010, unpublished manuscript, 3.

60. According to Viet Erlmann, *ingoma* are choral song and dance performances that have histories that predate conquest and signify belonging to one of the many black ethnic communities. *Indlamu* are usually performed by men and pay homage to a proud and free Zulu heritage. See Viet Erlmann, "'Horses in the Race Course': The Domestication of Ingoma Dancing in South Africa, 1929–39," *Popular Music* 8.3 (1989): 259–73. For consideration of how Zulu customary dance has developed since the early 1800s, see Tara Firenzi, "The Changing Functions of Traditional Dance in Zulu Society, 1830–Present," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45.3 (2012): 403–25.

61. Louise Meintjes, "Shoot the Sergeant, Shatter the Mountain: The Production of Masculinity in Zulu Ngoma Song and Dance in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13.2 (2004): 173–201, at 174.

62. According to Meintjes, the concept of *isigqi* refers to the "magic moment" of synchronization when all the disparate elements of a performance suddenly coalesce into the groove. She continues, "A performance has *isigqi* when dancers, singers, drummer and clappers – leaders and team members – meld sound into a dense experience that is at once coherent and imminent: it is dense with internal tensions almost out of balance." She concludes the power lies in the tension between the known, the "danger," and "its potential." Meintjes, 175.

63. Lisa M. Anderson, *Black Feminism in Contemporary Drama* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 11–13, quote at 12.

64. Deborah James, "'Bagage'su' (Those of My Home): Women Migrants, Ethnicity and Performance in South Africa," *American Ethnologist* 26.1 (1999): 69–89, at 72.

65. On several occasions Jones broke the fourth wall to provide direction and encouragement to these novice performers. Her side coaching from the edge of the stage galvanized the performers and emphasized to audiences that this was a production created by incarcerated women. While the show was complete, the seemingly open structure in which the director might give direction from the front row revealed that the show was live, in the process of being created before witnesses in the moment. Her call in the opening moments for “homework” referenced both the classroom scene and the rehearsal process. Jones often referred to the writing and other assignments she gave the cast as “homework.” Her call for “homework” here has multiple layered meanings, some of which were not apparent to audiences.

66. Throughout this writing I refer to the incarcerated women of the cast by their first names in order to reduce their chances of encountering stigma due to their imprisonment. The South African Department of Correctional Services allowed their full names to be used in publications, but out of concern for their ongoing well-being I chose not to disclose them.

67. The holding cell was designated by an area of light.

68. Jones, 11. Twenty thousand rand would be approximately \$1,900. The average South African earns about \$50 a week.

69. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 62.

70. Ibid., 61–2.

71. For analysis of the practice and effects of torture, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and Alfred W. McCoy, *Torture and Impunity: The U.S. Doctrine of Coercive Interrogation* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

72. Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 111–14.

73. Scarry, 29.

74. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 66–67.

75. See Peterson; Coplan; and Loren Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants and Publics since 1910* (London: Routledge, 1999).

76. Catherine M. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2010), x.

77. Ibid., xii.

78. The South Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) aired live coverage of the early hearings and the testimony of prominent figures such as Winnie Mandela. Most South Africans learned about the commission's work through live radio broadcasts or by watching hourlong highlights broadcast on the SABC on Sunday nights from April 1996 to June 1998.

79. Cole, 164.

80. For additional analysis of the TRC, see Fiona C. Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); and Yvette Hutchinson, *South African Performance and Archives of Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

81. Cole, 164.

82. Analisa Oboe, “The TRC Women's Hearings as Performance and Protest in the New South Africa,” *Research in African Literatures* 38.3 (2007): 60–76, at 61.

83. Ibid., 64.

84. Rosemary Jolly, “Engendering Violence: An Analysis of the Dictates of Masculinity in TRC and Related Narratives,” paper presented at conference “The TRC: Commissioning the Past,” 11–14 June 1999, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; quoted in *ibid.*

85. Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 58.

86. Jones, 17–18.

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87. In rehearsal, Alouise was more forthcoming about the specific circumstances related to her decision to get the gun and pull the trigger. She chose to not detail them in her monologue, and I will only say, out of respect for her privacy, that she was once again engaged in a fight for her life.

88. Thanks to Austin Jackson for insights gained in conversation about this monologue.

89. Smitherman, 118–19.

90. In the 1990s, with the prospect of large numbers of people being released from the prisons, the nation became embroiled in a heightened debate about the distinctions between “true crime” and “crimes committed against the apartheid regime” that might be framed as political and therefore legitimate acts. See Super, “‘Like Some Rough Beast,’” 208–9.

91. Thanks to Mbongeni Mtshali for help with this translation.

92. Shireen Hassim, *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 26.

93. Bernice Johnson Reagon, “The Songs are Free,” *Bill Moyers: World of Ideas* video, prod., director, co-writer Gail Pellett, Public Affairs Television, Thirteen-WNET, 1991. <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11232007/watch3.html>. Accessed 26 September 2015.

94. See Shirli Gilbert, “Singing against Apartheid: ANC Cultural Groups and the International Anti-Apartheid Struggle,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33.2 (2007): 421–41; Liz Gunner, “Jacob Zuma, the Social Body and the Unruly Power of Song,” *African Affairs* 108.430 (2008): 27–48; and Grant Olwage, ed., *Composing Apartheid: Music for and Against Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008).

95. Fred Moten, “Black Optimism/Black Operation,” manuscript (Word file), Chicago, 19 October 2007, 4, 5–6, in author's possession. (Also available online at <http://drive.google.com/file/d/1JibplhWrGnE9V1tHjpae8U0FloGf9TQAJCoK0J5gi8SepzSS2ubLcAkc6txB/view>, accessed 4 September 2015.)

96. Albie Sachs quoted in Marcia Blumberg, “Re-Staging Resistance, Re-Viewing Women: 1990s Productions of Fugard's *Hello and Goodbye* and *Boesman and Lena*,” in *Staging Resistance: Essays on Political Theatre*, ed. Jeanne Colleran and Jenny S. Spencer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 123–45, at 131–2.

97. Cheryl McEwan, “Engendering Citizenship: Gendered Spaces of Democracy in South Africa,” *Political Geography* 19.5 (2000): 627–65, at 629.

98. Lisa Vetten and Kailash Bahana, “The Justice for Gender Campaign: Incarcerated Domestic Violence Survivors in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” in *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender and the Prison-Industrial Complex*, ed. Julia Sudbury (New York: London: Routledge, 2005), 255–69, at 256–9.

99. D. Soyini Madison, *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12.

100. Pamela E. Brooks, *Boycotts, Buses, and Passes: Black Women's Resistance in the U.S. South and South Africa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 210.