

ReTAGS

ikrele leChiza...the sermon is part of a 6-year research project called Re-Imagining Tragedy in Africa and the Global South (ReTAGS). The ReTAGS project's principal investigator is Mark Fleishman and Mandla Mbothwe is a co-investigator. *ikrele leChiza...the sermon* has had three iterations thus far: an initial recorded version, Sonic Passages; a Live/Digital Mutation and now this 2022 live production. *Antigone (not quite/ quiet)*, created in 2019 and directed by Mark Fleishman, was the first of the ReTAGS productions and was performed at the Baxter Theatre Centre.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

FOR MAGNET THEATRE

Trustees: Mark Fleishman, Jennie Reznek, Mandla Mbothwe, Neo Muyanga and Joonji Mdyogolo

Artistic Directors: Jennie Reznek, Mark Fleishman, Mandla Mbothwe

Administrator: Jenny Hewlett

Production Manager: Themba Stewart

Training Manager: Zamah Nkonyeni

Culture Gangs Facilitators: Yonela Sithela, Asemkela Ketelo

Technical Assistant: Mluleki Titi

Interns: Abigail Mei, Thobeka Terra Nzimande

FOR ReTAGS

Principal Investigator: Mark Fleishman

Co-investigator: Mandla Mbothwe

Administrator and Research Assistant: Raezeen Wentworth

Digital Archivist: Jayne Batzofen



FULLTIME TRAINING AND JOB CREATION PROGRAMME

The Fulltime Training and Job Creation Programme, established in 2008, provides a bridge for talented youth from marginalised communities to tertiary education and employment in the creative industry. The programme gives 20 youth in each 2-year cycle the necessary skills to be absorbed into tertiary education, ensure that they are employable, and/or able to create their own income-generating projects. To date we have facilitated access for 36 first generation full time university students, 23 have graduated, 7 with post graduate qualifications and 8 are still studying. On average over the past 4 years 93% of graduates are either studying full time, working in the creative economy or are self-employed.

Ikrele leChiza... the sermon

Directed by Mandla Mbothwe

Written and Created by the Company

CREATIVE TEAM

Director: Mandla Mbothwe

Musical Director: Babalwa Makwetu

Choreographer: Mzokuthula Gasu

Movement Direction: Jennie Reznek

Set and Costume Design: Linda Mandela-Sejosingoe

Production Manager/ Lighting Design: Themba Stewart

Stage Manager/Technician: Mluleki Titi

Poster Design/ Photography: Rob Keith

CAST:

Luphawo: Thando Doni

Mesuli (Luphawo's sister): Indalo Stofile

Luphawo and Mesuli's mother: Babalwa Makwetu

Their father: Lulamile Bongo Nikani

Nkenqe (trickster story-teller) : Emmanuel Ntsamba

Nongoma (guardian of the ancestral realm): Nomakrestu Xakatugaga

Sandisemvumo: (Nongoma's partner/ also a guardian of the ancestral realm):

Nceba Gongxeka

The Village: Bongani Dyalivana, Bulelwa Mbalo, Buhle Stefane, Gabriel Buis,

Khaya Magansela, Kuhle Myathaza, Lindokuhle Melaphi, Mhlahi Bele, Moluphi

Lepeli, Nosiphiwo Ndabeni, Olwethu Qavile, Siphenathi Siqwayi, Siphon Kalako,

Thabo Mkenene, Wendy Mrali.

DIRECTORS NOTE

The *Reimagining Tragedy from Africa and the Global South* (ReTAGS) project comes at a time for me in which I feel the desire to retrace, remap and connect my past works, works that excavated buried stories, both in terms of theme and aesthetics. These are productions such as *lingcwaba le ndoda lise cankwe ndlela*, *Inxeba Lopmhilisi*, *Isivuno Samaphupha*, *G7:Okwe-Bokhwe*. I am especially interested in the possibility of connecting these stories, locating them in one world of story while finding what could be an African tragedy with roots in a pre-colonial era.

Ikrele leChiza follows the story of a sister and brother who are left alone, in that the sister always takes on the role of mother. It is also related to Homer's *Odyssey*, following the story of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. In the original text Telemachus remains with his mother, when his father goes off to war in Troy, but in this story, he remains with his sister.

Their house is under attack. For me, house and home are central to an African spirit of *ubuntu*, of a kind of socialism – whatever you interpret that to be – carried in the heart of *ubuntu*. Home in the play represents humanity and village spirit. But there are systems that attack that spirit, systems like capitalism, colonialism, apartheid that are still present with us today, and the violence of poverty that continues to plague black communities and families. I call these systems the 'suitors', after the *Odyssey*, where, in Odysseus's absence, the suitors lay siege to his home and family in an attempt to acquire his wealth and power. These suitors are *amagonqongqo*, *oohlolisakhe*, *oodyakalashi*, and all those evil animals we find in the oral traditional storytelling. They are *amazim*, less-than humans, who are no longer fit to stay in the village – cannibals, man-eating men, living in caves like vampires. These suitors are the capitalist systems which are attacking the fabric of *ubuntu*.

The house is constantly under attack. In my previous production, *lingcwaba le ndoda lise cankwe ndlela*, the father left as a migrant labourer to go work in the mines. In this production, the father, *Ngangezwe*, doesn't go to the mines but goes into exile and becomes stuck there. He has magical powers, to *udlala ngezulu*, and during the time of war, in a battlefield in Angola or Mozambique or Namibia or Tanzania, he became stuck *kwisivunguvane*. As *isivunguvane* started spitting out the enemy, *Ngangezwe* does not come out. As *isivunguvane* disappears, he disappears with it. That's part of the story, the father stuck there, in a storm, somewhere between worlds. This is also a dedication to all those people who went into exile and died far away from home, and were never properly buried. Their souls and spirits need to be restored and returned home.

At first, the son, *Luphawu*, goes to the neighbours, the families the chiefs, the legal system to complain about how the house is being attacked by the suitors. In this case the suitors are former comrades and uncles who are conspiring to marry off the daughter, *Mesuli*, the wiper of the tears, so they can gain the wealth for themselves. This is the same thing the system does to individuals and families in our communities. *Luphawu* doesn't get any answers, but he is plagued by dreams of his father stuck between worlds. In agony, he goes off to look for his father, to attempt to rethread the fabric of home.

There are rooms in the ancestral world, or villages or societies or caves, that specialise in the different aspects that allow our eco-system to function. There might be a village of militant people, another one of comforters, another of healers, and of herbs. When we call upon these people, we summon them to be part of our work. When we call and summon these different spirits, we are calling them from deep within their ancestral rooms to aid us in continuing their work.

The mother in the story has refused to die and to be buried. Now she is stuck at the entrance to the ancestral world, in the orientation room of the ancestral world. The mother refuses to go further because she is worried about what will happen to their home because *ibambeke ngeyesigcawu*. That is in fact what is happening to the pillar of our humanity today, it is held together by a single thread of a spider's web. *Ayisahexi, iyawa*, it is no longer trembling, but has collapsed completely. That's the wound we are talking about in an African society.

In its collaborative and African dream aesthetics the work poses the question of the possibility of attending to a wound that continues to be under attack. The initial impulse is to defend and fight – *Ikrele* emerges from this impulse. We are not saying let us attend to the wound as if the attack has stopped. The attack has not stopped. The wound is continuously being attacked by the suitors, the system. The poverty and violence in the community continues, the gender-based violence continues.

There is a line in the play: "*Ndicela nje umzuzu ndichophe ndibangula*". But you can't take a moment to greet if you are still running, you don't have that moment in war. The play asserts that we are stuck in this moment of continuous attack and defence and seeks to initiate a ritual to progress our humanity to more of a village spirit.

Mandla Mbothwe