

## **Modeling the Present Economic and Social Alienation of Working Class in South Africa in the Musical Production 'from Marikana to Mahagonny' at Durban University of Technology (DUT)**

**Authors :** Pamela Tancsik

**Abstract :** The stage production in 2018, titled 'From Marikana to Mahagonny', began with a prologue in the form of the award-winning documentary 'Miners Shot Down' by Rehad Desai, followed by Brecht/Weill's song play or scenic cantata 'Mahagonny', premièred in Baden-Baden 1927. The central directorial concept of the DUT musical production 'From Marikana to Mahagonny' was to show a connection between the socio-political alienation of mineworkers in present-day South Africa and Brecht's alienation effect in his scenic cantata 'Mahagonny'. Marikana is a mining town about 50 km west of South Africa's capital Pretoria. Mahagonny is a fantasy name for a utopian mining town in the United States. The characters, setting, and lyrics refer to America with songs like 'Benares' and 'Moon of Alabama' and the use of typical American inventions such as dollars, saloons, and the telephone. The six singing characters in 'Mahagonny' all have typical American names: Charlie, Billy, Bobby, Jimmy, and the two girls they meet later are called Jessie and Bessie. The four men set off to seek Mahagonny. For them, it is the ultimate dream destination promising the fulfilment of all their desires, such as girls, alcohol, and dollars - in short, materialistic goals. Instead of finding a paradise, they experience how money and the practice of exploitive capitalism, and the lack of any moral and humanity is destroying their lives. In the end, Mahagonny gets demolished by a hurricane, an event which happened in 1926 in the United States. 'God' in person arrives disillusioned and bitter, complaining about violent and immoral mankind. In the end, he sends them all to hell. Charlie, Billy, Bobby, and Jimmy reply that this punishment does not mean anything to them because they have already been in hell for a long time - hell on earth is a reality, so the threat of hell after life is meaningless. Human life was also taken during the stand-off between striking mineworkers and the South African police on 16 August 2012. Miners from the Lonmin Platinum Mine went on an illegal strike, equipped with bush knives and spears. They were striking because their living conditions had never improved; they still lived in muddy shacks with no running water and electricity. Wages were as low as R4,000 (South African Rands), equivalent to just over 200 Euro per month. By August 2012, the negotiations between Lonmin management and the mineworkers' unions, asking for a minimum wage of R12,500 per month, had failed. Police were sent in by the Government, and when the miners did not withdraw, the police shot at them. 34 were killed, some by bullets in their backs while running away and trying to hide behind rocks. In the musical play 'From Marikana to Mahagonny' audiences in South Africa are confronted with a documentary about Marikana, followed by Brecht/Weill's scenic cantata, highlighting the tragic parallels between the Mahagonny story and characters from 1927 America and the Lonmin workers today in South Africa, showing that in 95 years, capitalism has not changed.

**Keywords :** alienation, brecht/Weill, mahagonny, marikana/South Africa, musical theatre

**Conference Title :** ICMTTP 2023 : International Conference on Musical Theatre and Performance

**Conference Location :** Stockholm, Sweden

**Conference Dates :** July 06-07, 2023