

# **An African Dream Play**

## ***Isivuno Sama Phupha***

**Reconstructing the spirit of *ubuntu* in the contemporary urban  
'village' through theatre**

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### COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## ABSTRACT

My project proceeds from the question: What might an African Dream Play be for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Or how might dreams be used to generate content and presentational form as well as to influence the way in which the audience experience or participate in the performance event?

My interest in the African Dream Play lies in a belief that it might provide a means of reconstructing the spirit of *ubuntu* through theatre. It seeks - both in process and presentation - to include in this reconstruction, that which is popularly known as moral regeneration - which I see rather as spiritual regeneration. My contention is that we, and particularly young people, are living in a social and spiritual crisis and the African Dream Play attempts a transformative intervention within the dynamic fabric of the contemporary urban 'village'-a space of many cultures, languages, ideologies and levels of economic status.

This explication sets my practical research and the production *Isivuno Sama Phupha* in particular, in a theoretical framework and performance historical context. It draws on the theories of Victor Turner, specifically his concepts 'liminality' and 'communitas' and his idea of the social drama. It then traces the evolution of my theatrical research: first through an interest in cultural and religious practices prevalent in the townships around Cape Town and how they might be used to generate material for the theatre and an aesthetics of presentation that could stimulate the communitas experience for both the performers and the audience; then, on to dreams and how they might provide the stimulus for my envisaged theatre by utilizing an experience of their essential liminality.

It places my work in the context of other practitioners, particularly August Strindberg and his early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dream Play and Brett Bailey's 'plays of miracles and wonder'; but also Ben Okri and his linking of dreams and storytelling in the African tradition.

It then goes on to outline the process followed in making my thesis production, *Isivuno Sama Phupha*, and then describes the presentation itself in terms of the four stages of Turner's social drama: breach, crisis, redress and reincorporation.

It concludes by arguing that through a return to ritual and an incorporation of practices already prevalent in our communities, and through an experience of liminality and *communitas* in which indeterminacy and determination, anti-structure and structure work in a dialectical relationship with each other, theatre might indeed generate the change required in the face of crisis.

## INTRODUCTION

At the centre of my research is the question: What might an African Dream Play be for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? Or how might dreams be used to generate content and presentational form as well as to influence the way in which the audience experience or participate in the performance event?

My interest in the African Dream Play lies in a belief that it might provide a means of reconstructing the spirit of *ubuntu* through theatre. It seeks - both in process and presentation - to include in this reconstruction, that which is popularly known as moral regeneration - which I see rather as spiritual regeneration. My contention is that we, and particularly young people, are living in a social and spiritual crisis and the African Dream Play attempts a transformative intervention within the dynamic fabric of the contemporary urban 'village'-a space of many cultures, languages, ideologies and levels of economic status.

To begin, I will briefly expand on the concepts *ubuntu*, urban 'village' and spiritual regeneration. I will then move on to contextualise the project in terms of my production work leading up to *Isivuno Sama Phupha* ; in terms of the work of other practitioners, particularly August Strindberg and Brett Bailey; and in terms of the theories of Victor Turner on 'liminality' and 'communitas' that underpin the study.

*Ubuntu* is an African ideology of living, in theory and practice, which affirms that a human is a human only through other humans; that every village and every human being depends on others for their survival. In this cultural setting, those who are structurally and/or materially more powerful and influential do not use their position to further themselves, while leaving others with no means of survival. The idea of

living together in the community in harmony is stimulated and supported by practical ways of living, based on the spirit of comradeship.

The ubuntu philosophy displays tolerance. It displays awareness of what is just and unjust; what is humane and inhumane; an awareness of the distinction between kindness and cruelty...ubuntu is the art of being human - a desirable state, which contributes positively towards sustaining the well being of a people, community or society.

(Bhengu 1996:141)

This idea of interdependence is consciously and sub-consciously manifested by people in response to one another and in relation to nature as a whole.

*Ubuntu* contradicts prevailing ideologies, which in practice encourage survival of some, through exploitation of others. *Ubuntu* was, and still is, advocated culturally in the storytelling tradition of *Iintsomi*. *Iintsomi* seek to secure and harness the interdependent lifestyle through the practice of (mostly) older people performing stories for (mostly) younger people. *Iintsomi* are essentially interactive communications, transferring skills, information and knowledge. Each performance has both mythical relevance and relevance to daily life; it is structured around a repeated core-image and it evolves as a powerful relationship between performer and audience, within a context set by the community of listeners - the audience - and with ongoing 'permission' to continue, from that audience.

However, modern urban society is a world of multiple and shifting cultures, beliefs and styles of living. Instead of *Iintsomi*, a communal practice, we engage individually with movies, newspapers, pamphlets, radios, Internet, billboards and books. Ours is a world of fast moving traffic slowed only by traffic lights, road circles and street humps. Everyone is racing to grab something. The language of capitalism is superseding the language of *ubuntu*:

We live in a world of Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonalds and Coca-cola, a world where globalisation, language-death, ethnic cleansing and culture have become part of our verbal repertoire.

(Kaschula 2001: xi)

When our grandparents and parents came to the cities, to seek survival in the new age of colonisation, they had to learn other languages and different ways of living. They brought only a few objects and materials with them to remember. They became a tribe of many cultures, trying hard to keep the past with them in the strange land that eventually became their secondary home. Believing that “Ubuntu is active and adaptable” (Bhengu, 1996:141) our elders tried to re-make the village they knew, not only through word of mouth, but through the repertoire of ritual practices - communal singing, clapping, dancing, praising and praying - involving the immediately affected and the community at large. These practices are dynamic and organic, altered and adapted to accommodate the changes in peoples’ lives and needs.

The idea of the 'village' is passed from generation to generation and it is now our cultural task to apply this to the contemporary urban context in which the cattle we once knew - or heard of - have turned into valued pieces of paper and the kraals have turned into ABSA and FNB. This is a new 'village' with robot humans whose fuel is money; a community of SMS and e-mails, TV and computer games to shape our behaviours, beliefs and focus. We can no longer control what knowledge is being fed to us, nor control the age at which children are exposed to it, and:

[i]t is precisely in a fractured, broken age that we need mystery and a reawoken sense of wonder. ... We need to be reminded of the primeval terror again. ... We need to go down to the bottom, to the depths of the heart, and start to live again as we have never lived before.

(Okri 1997: 39)

Symbols, inherited from the past, serve as markers of community collective memory in the 'village' and are always attached to ceremonial rituals. Through physical and emotional engagement in such rituals, grounds for the manifestation of spiritual ecstasy are formed, and the community is enabled to better understand its unique challenges.

The African Dream Play attempts to create a ritual space by means of which the performers and the participant audience experience the spirit of *ubuntu* - the 'village spirit'. The young performers participating in the experience are inspired to recreate the essence of 'village' in which each feels safe, respected, at home beyond his or her yard, loved and knowing that whatever s/he does affects the people around him or her. This 'village spirit' is forged by means of incorporating popular practices that dominate in the community in question. Practices such as cultural ceremonies and religious activities are investigated, challenged and recreated in pursuit of spiritual regeneration.

An African's expression of ancestral prayer  
is celebrated not kneeling on a velvet cushion  
in a stone building with stained glass window on a  
Sunday  
but with sacred rituals and a dance  
performed each night thanking the gods  
for a life lived to the fullest  
in spite of wide spread spiritual genocide.

(Motsei 2004:17)

For the purpose of this study, it is imperative for me to be specific about who I am - a black, middle-class male, whose history and reality are contradictory. I have been raised in western religion and African cultural traditions; in western education and African cultural teachings; in times of apartheid and post-apartheid; in singularity and plurality; in the African philosophy of *ubuntu* and the western practice of

capitalism; in English and in isiXhosa, and in the previously (and mostly still) racially and economically segregated townships and suburbs of South Africa.

Only four years ago I started looking at this complexity of my life along with others who have similar experiences of multiple realities. I was unable to explain or describe this dilemma; my situation felt more than just about issues of the reality that surrounded me. I could not even use my limited creative skills to define the situation. Dealing with the burning issues of the time in theatre, in both style and theme, felt superficial or even fake. Our theatre seemed to ignore the 'grey' state, the state of in-between. The complexity of my life seemed to me to be more faithfully reflected in my dreams, in structure and in substance. Trying to reconcile my dilemma I noted:

Now I am here but still there  
Looking at the back for backup  
At times my back is dragging me back  
I am ailing, I feel woozy I want to vomit  
I shift and shift  
From moment to moment  
From self to self  
I thought I flee the 'we'  
I thought I escape the 'us'  
I thought I still have I.

(Mbothwe 2006a)

## CONTEXTUALISATION

### ***Liminality***

This term liminality is taken from the Latin word *limen* meaning threshold. Turner borrowed the term from Arnold Van Gennep's work on rites of passage. He distinguished between the pre-liminal, the liminal and the post-liminal as follows:

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(1) *separation* or the pre-liminal ... when a person or group becomes detached from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or from an earlier set of social conditions; (2) *margin* or the liminal, when the state of the ritual subject is ambiguous; he is no longer in the old state and has not yet reached the new one; and (3) *aggregation* or the post-liminal, when the ritual subject enters a new stable state with its own rights and obligations.

(Turner cited in Deflem.1991:7-8)

My particular interest is in the middle stage, the margin or liminal. I understand liminality as the state of moving from one state of being to another. A person in a liminal state is in a process of becoming but is not yet; for s/he is not in a present fixed point and nor is s/he in a future fixed point. S/he is in a passage in-between. The concept is found in all rites of passage, described by Van Gennep as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age” (Van Gennep 1909 cited in Turner 1967: 94).

Liminality is a state of mobility; a not-yet-defined space of time, place and character status; a place of ambiguity and multiple possibilities; a time between reality and imagination. In Turner’s words it is a subjunctive space of “as if” or “if it were so” rather than an indicative space of “as is” or “it is so” (Turner 1980: 24). Liminality through its transformative dimensions is the essential state of traditional rituals and gives rise to communication between the living and their ancestors. It is also present in many contemporary forms of theatre that find inspiration in ritual. Turner recognises this when he write that “both rituals and theatre crucially involve liminal events and processes and have an important aspect of social metacommentary” (1990: 8). Brett Bailey expatiates through his theatre performances and actors:

They shatter the boundaries between waking reality and inspired vision, between reason and unreason, allowing our imaginations to dance to subliminal rhythms, to embrace paradoxes and to confront symbols, giving us the creative strength to pass through the razor-

wire-topped walls and recreate our selves.

(Bailey 2003: 9)

During the course of my studies I have come to realise that this state of liminality is one we all have within our reach, yet we don't often recognize it; it is the state of our dreams or the phase between our sleeping and waking.

Growing up in a black township it was inevitable that I would experience liminal states of being - either as the subject of ritual or as an actively participating witness. The liminal ceremonies of spiritual realisation and interconnectedness of the community at large are - together with dreams - the constructs of my African Dream Play. They are against logical structure, full of symbols, carriers of ambiguity, moving in and out of time; uncontrollable, mysterious, and wondrous.

In essence, I perceive liminality to be a dream-like qualitative state of being that can evoke a wide range of thoughts, feelings and possibilities, including spiritual ecstasy and transformation. Furthermore, in my understanding, liminality is the basis of what Turner calls 'communitas'.

### ***Communitas***

Turner defines communitas as "a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions" (cited in Deflem 1991:14). He uses the term to refer to a sense of comradeship or oneness between subjects involved in the liminal phase of a ritual event, all of whom experience a sense of equality without distinguishing characteristics. He goes on to say that "Communitas can generally be defined in opposition to structure: Communitas appears where structure does not."

(ibid) Turner uses terms such as 'threshold', 'liminality', 'marginality', 'inferiority', 'equality', 'neither here nor there' to describe communitas (Turner

1969: 94-97; 125-130). He goes on to argue that *communitas* (the undifferentiated community of equals) and *structure* (the differentiated and often hierarchical system of social positions) form two societal modalities that exist in a cyclical and dialectical relationship (1969: 131-140).

[M]en (sic) are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*.

(Turner 1969: 13)

My intention at the beginning of this study was to explore religion and rituals in 'communitas theatre' - which I understood to be a theatre that seeks to speak to the hearts and spirit of people; a theatre in which the line of demarcation between audience and performers is blurred; in which the spiritual world and the world of reality coexist. Over a period of time I had created theatre based around important societal issues. In all these productions there existed elements of two worlds, the 'real' and the 'spiritual', mixed-up and coexisting - in the space "betwixt and between all fixed categories" as Turner would put it (1969: 232). Motivated by this realisation, I set out to investigate my envisaged theatre by looking for the content, and a form of presentation, that engendered the *communitas* experience between performers and audience. My intention was to utilise the liminal experiences found in religious and ritual practices of the communities I grew up in to achieve the *communitas* theatre I was seeking.

Rituals can be what we physically do; drumming, dancing, singing, clapping, wearing masks, painting faces, cutting faces or little fingers, wearing certain clothes, lighting a candle and passing it, washing each other's hands or feet, cutting each other to make blood contact, slaughtering, making fires and so forth. Ritualistic practices can also evoke different emotions in different people of different cultures.

Through rituals, iconographic manipulations, symbolic gestures and popular elements, participants experience a *communitas* state which aims to touch the hearts of the participants and move them to find ways of reconstructing the spirit of *ubuntu*, using what they know best.

Turner defines ritual as a “stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests” (Cited in Deflem 1991: 5). He points to the centrality of symbols in ritual practice. As Deflem puts it, paraphrasing Turner, “[r]ituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols ... dealing with the crucial values of the community” (Deflem 1991: 5).

In my analysis of the Easter Project (MA medium project: 2006) I asserted, in explaining the use of popular cultural symbols, that the calabash is said to represent the feeding of the stomach and spirit. It is a reconnection with and reminder of the ‘village spirit’ of *ubuntu*. Where it is present there will always be singing, dancing, clapping and praising of the ancestors. This promotes a sense of communality as the experiences of people are joined together. It represents sharing, education, love and comfort.

Symbols such as the calabash serve as a stimulus for achieving a sense of *communitas* as they carry rooted meaning for particular groups of people; they are springboards for emotions as they tap into memories, dreams and nightmares. Turner describes symbols as the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behaviour ... a ‘storage unit’ filled with a vast amount of information (Cited in Deflem 1991: 5). Symbols include colours, symbolic gestures, sentimental items, iconographic objects, popular objects, and/or typical items of clothing that resemble a particular type of person or group. When symbols become

part of rituals they often suggest a movement from one state of being to another, or one life stage to another- an imagined or actual transformation. As Turner puts it, using symbols in ritual means to “anticipate, even generate, change” (1980: 163). The manipulation of symbols “works,” because they are not just reflections of cognitive classifications, but also “a set of evocative devices for rousing, channelling, and domesticating powerful emotions” (Turner 1969a:42-43. Cited in Deflem. 1991:11). When the actors of a ritual are deeply familiar with the symbols of the ritual, their emotional involvement and engagement with the performance of these symbols is so evident and palpable that those witnessing the ritual are drawn in in a desire to share the experience beyond the literal or cognitive comprehension of the language and symbols used in the performance. This is clear when the community of performers and witnesses is homogeneous. The question becomes more complex where the community is heterogeneous and some of the participants (particularly in this case some of the witnesses or audience) are not from the same cultural and linguistic community that the performers come from. However, with this work I am operating with a belief that the intensity of performer engagement in the ritual, and with the symbols of the ritual, has the capacity to break through the rational, through the cognitive and into the phenomenological space of experience, establishing a sense of *communitas* between all involved.

The realisation of a sense of *communitas* through theatre becomes the beginning of the 'village spirit' experience. The inclusive process of creation and its mass-participation performance is the definer of *communitas* theatre, as opposed to most westernized highly structured theatre practices, which leave little or no space for outside participation in the performance. Furthermore the attention of the performers is focused away from self and onto the community created as part of the event. This

resonates with a growing sense of dissatisfaction, in western actor-training, with a self-oriented approach. For example Benjamin Lloyd (2006) argues that: “The narcissistic actor needs to have his attention directed away from self and onto a higher purpose - a purpose whose primary goal is serving others” (72).

In the African Dream Play the *communitas* begins to manifest itself through the spirit of acting together and also through the emotional stories -mostly similar - that bond the participants. The songs sung are also familiar to everyone as they are taken from everyday contexts. In most religious and cultural practice, group work or a chorus is used and encouraged. Doing something together in unison is not a strange exercise to these practiced gatherings; singing, dancing, praying, praising, and crying together are common practice and embed the African concept of *ubuntu*. Valdez and Baraka say that:

[C]hants, music, gestures, physical action, and comic business all serve to convey and compel both cultural affirmation and social action.

and, in expatiation:

The transformative power of theatre performance can transform a seemingly simple act into a powerful moment of theatrical as well as social and cultural significance...this performance is to constantly remind the audience of their conditions and the reality of their living it is there to take the complicated appearing issue and break it down for them so they can see it in detail and take the simple one and complicate it so they look at it again with new investigated meaning.

(Valdez and Baraka 1997: 73)

A similar experience of spiritual ecstasy and exaltation can be encountered in the (mostly black) township churches. When the preacher preaches, he jumps up and down, moves to and fro, and everyone joins the choir in singing, clapping, blowing pipes (extracted from washing machines), in the hitting of *Izimayimesi* (two pieces of metal that look like parts of a school bell and produce high notes), in the beating

of *amagubu* (homemade drums), *oompampam* (hand size pillows that are slid on to one hand and beaten with the other hand), and shouting amen, hallelujah, *igama lenkosi malibongwe* (praise the name of the Lord).

It is my hope that the experience of liminality in a theatre based on ritual and the engendering of a sense of *communitas* might become the kind of socio-cultural action suggested by Turner, in which: “New meanings and symbols may be introduced or new ways of portraying or embellishing old models for living, and so of renewing interest in them” may be found (my sense of regenerating the spirit of ubuntu); and which might “contain the potentiality for cultural innovation and for effecting structural transformations” (Turner 1980: 165).

### **Strindberg**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Swedish playwright and theatre director August Strindberg wrote *A Dream Play*. This play marked a change of style in his theatre.

Walter Johnson defines this change of style as: “The substance was a combination of dream state inner perceptions and outer reality as perceived by the limited senses and the form was what some scholars have labelled Expressionistic but that he called dream-play” (1976: 156). In other words, with *A Dream Play*, Strindberg moved from realism to a more expressionistic style of writing. Strindberg accounts for this change in style through reference to his personal life. In attempting to understand the disappointments of his life and his personal suffering, he became increasingly interested in both Christianity and Buddhism. Both these influences are evident in his later writings and particularly in *A Dream Play*, in which he explores the misery of characters caught up in the class struggle and in unequal gender relationships, the pain of betrayal in love relationships and the general lack of happiness found in

human existence. His interest in spiritual matters could not be expressed on stage through the medium of realism, the drawing room 'slice of life'.

Strindberg began to explore the role of the unconscious in drama. He realized that his past work dealt with life and its issues on a surface level, that theatre was trapped in realism and that ironically, this was not a true reflection of human existence. He started considering his life more deeply, going beyond reality and the senses. *A Dream Play* looked at metaphysical issues and adopted a style that suggested a liminal world between dream and reality.

In *A Dream Play* Strindberg worked towards a more symbolic style, heightened by the expression of intolerable feeling. He used character and symbols which were not only connected to reality but also to religion and spirituality. This was according to scholars and theatre critics (Johnson 1976; Morgan 1985; Meyer 1982) a breakthrough and *The Dream Play* became the most popular play of his career. 'Disequilibrium', 'disunity', 'surrealist symbolisms' are Strindberg's words to describe not only the play's structure but life in general. In the 'The song of the winds' in *A Dream Play* he emphasises this notion of the realisation of life's complexities by saying:

The earth is not clean. Life is not good.  
Men are not evil. Nor are they good  
They live as they can, a day at a time. The sons  
Of dust in dust must wander. Born of dust  
To dust they return.

(Meyer 1982: 235)

In his realization and acceptance that life is neither straight forward nor clear-cut, he challenged the notion of a play that follows the logic of 'cause and effect' in structure and in substance. He believed that such a play could never be a completely true reflection of life. In doing so he challenged realism as a genre.

## **Bailey**

As a developing theatre-maker I have been fortunate to experience the work of the director Brett Bailey and his Third World Bunfight company. I have seen the plays *Ipi Zombie*, *Imumbo Jumbo* and *The Prophet*. I have read his book *Plays of Miracles and Wonder* (2003). When considering his work in the context of Turner's notions of liminality, communitas and ritual in theatre, I recognise many similarities with my notion of an African Dream Play. In describing his intention Bailey writes:

The three plays published in this book are a trilogy of struggles - dramatic battles to restore health and harmony to communities invaded, assaulted, diseased - played out in the sickened country to summon a healing.

(2003:9)

He continues:

One of the main sources of my inspiration since 1996 has come from Sangomas - diviners or traditional healers.

(2003:19)

Despite being white and middle-class Bailey's plays are heavily concerned with Xhosa culture. The plays mentioned above deal with Xhosa stories of the past, myths and beliefs of the amaXhosa. Bailey draws his material and aesthetics to a large extent from traditional healing ceremonies- *lintlobe*. The performances I witnessed were in English with little of isiXhosa, yet were performed in Gugulethu and Nyanga, in which the dominant language is isiXhosa.

The songs were isiXhosa songs we grew up singing as township youth and in the play they are mixed with spoken English. Bailey uses traditional white make-up, which covers the whole body and directly reflects cultural practices such as *abakhwetha* in initiation schools or that worn by the *Sangoma's* initiates. The make-

up thus suggests a state of liminality, a place of not here nor there, a time between now and tomorrow.

As an African child I grew up respecting these cultural practices and their attendant liminal state, knowing they involved not only individuals but contained the secrets of the community. These practices are attended by the chosen ones alone, mostly those who have been, and those who are about to become initiates. It is only at the beginning and ending, when the chosen ones arrive and leave, that others get to be part of the rituals. This stimulates a sense of wonder and devoutness.

As powerful as Bailey's theatre is, it cannot but be a view from the outside in; a playing with elements of culture that have been appropriated. My African Dream Play is created from the inside out. It is intrinsically a part of the community and the culture; not standing in relation to it. I have chosen this form of practice and this language not because it serves a function but because not to is a kind of cultural dismemberment that most theatre-makers like me experience constantly in our working lives.

### ***Arriving at Dreams***

My five years of work with the community drama groups of young people from Khayelitsha<sup>1</sup> has led me to realize how much and how fast the spirit of *ubuntu* and respect for adults is disappearing. The work I have engaged in in preparation for my thesis production has involved a slow, at times almost blind, attempt to reconstruct the fading spirit of *ubuntu* through theatre. It began with religion and ritual and ideas

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<sup>1</sup> The Community Groups Intervention (CGI) is a project of The Magnet Theatre Educational Trust of which I am a trustee. I have been primarily responsible for the project that mentors a number of community drama groups established in the Khayelitsha community. The project has been running since 2002 and the number of groups fluctuates between 5 and 8 at any given time.

of *communitas* and liminality and then stumbled upon the potential power of dreams in a contemporary African theatrical context.

The world-renowned Nigerian writer, Ben Okri, makes vivid connections between dreams and story telling. In his writings he asserts the fact that storytellers are the dreamers of the community, the directors of the future, for they “find life in myth, and myth in life” (1997b:126).

Dreams function out of real time. They are beyond the spoken word that is so often the major element in theatre – they operate through and are constructed by images, signs, symbols, metaphors, deconstructed words and sentences/phrases. They include magical elements such as the possibility of defying gravity through flying. They open up a multitude of possibilities for interpretation depending on one’s individual or communal reality. One is free to respond to the ambiguity of dreams according to one’s own cultural interpretation.

Close to this form of communication are the mythical stories such as *Iintsomi*, the parables and poems. Ben Okri draws strong parallels between storytelling and dreams, not:

... just any story, but only ...those great ones, rich and rare, that elude, that tantalize, that have the effect of poignant melodies lodged deep in barely reachable places of the spirit.

(1997: 123)

These stories always bring the darkness closer so as to see the light clearly. Okri notes that “The parables of Jesus are more powerful and persuasive than his miracles” (1997: 109).

In my minor project *Ubuntu*, I incorporated popular symbols of African rituals and of Christianity in dealing with the issue of HIV and AIDS. Characters have no names; the story is performed in no particular place. Women desperately swing

pieces of cloth, which earlier in the play represent individual houses; their acting together suggests the need for unity, for action from the community. *Iintsomi*, told within the play, are a means of communicating the message. A character who dies, not only of an AIDS-related disease but also through being outcast and stigmatized by the community, is raised up from the dead by communal action involving gestures and singing. This communal action symbolizes the power of unity in a fractured community with a multiplicity of practices. Other symbols explored are safety pins that connect things and the washing of hands that is connected to cleansing. The play follows the structure of the gospels, from the last supper to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, suggesting implications for what this story means in the face of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The play's weakness in retrospect is that the form is rooted in dialogical realism that waters down the deeper meaning of life's complexities. In following the logical laws of language, it cannot express the complex reality which exists in dreams and spirituality, and which needs to be expressed through a different aesthetics and content.

The minor project was followed by the *Easter Project* (my medium project), in which I explored the notion of *communitas* theatre, still working with the themes of HIV and AIDS. Here my inquiry was to explore how popular symbols, rituals and practices can enhance communication and recreate the spirit of *ubuntu* in an urban contemporary 'village'. In my first reflective seminar on this project, I stated that people and societies develop culture, rituals and traditional practices to satisfy their need for interdependence. In many societies, particularly in Africa, this sense of interdependence includes departed members of the community. Use of symbols connects us to those around us and to practices of the past, helping us to remember, so as to be able to move forward. Continuing ritual practices lead to education and

healing, which bring about wellbeing and ethical understanding and hopefully, change. According to Turner, people or societies in a liminal phase are “a kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change” (1982:45). Symbols are so rooted in the beliefs and culture of a people that they inevitably evoke emotional responses, often releasing emotional experience in a language different from, and more powerful than, the spoken language.

Taking this into account I set out to incorporate the above mentioned elements in creating a mass-participation, mass-performance, mass-cleansing ritual involving a lantern parade through the street of Khayelitsha, passing re-imagined stations of the Cross, and a ritual performance on a site in the township. It was then evident to me that I was looking for a theatre that speaks to the hearts and spirits of its performers *and* audience; a theatre that functions between spaces and times; between spoken language and body language; and between the conscious and subconscious. I was in search of liminal space for *communitas* theatre, where spoken language is minimised and replaced by songs, dance, images and symbols that express the complexity of feelings and emotions more accurately.

The medium project was followed by the solo piece *Insomnia*, in which I considered all aspects of my life - not life in general, but rather my personal experiences and dilemmas; the varied influences, including religion and traditional cultural beliefs, as well as the fears, anxieties and desires not always acknowledged by my conscious mind, pre-occupied as it is by what it sees, hears, touches and smells - by that which many theatre practitioners call 'realism'.

I was interested in exploring both the content and form of dream-states in order to explore what Strindberg called a theatre where “we can never be sure of what is real

and what is imagined” (Meyer, 1982:170). The task involved examining my life and presenting it through the metaphor of insomnia - a state of desiring to sleep and being scared to do so. Insomnia is a state in which you are caught between sleep and waking, when the rest of the world around you is asleep but you are awake - or at least you think you are awake. In this state you start having a conversation with yourself about yourself and about the rest of the world. This is the time of self-analysis where you engage with what you have just dreamt, trying to understand it in terms of your conscious thinking. Truth is frightening, hence we are so afraid of nightmares - stimulated by the silence of the night when our subconscious takes over and we are no longer in control of our thoughts and bodies.

Whatever the case, the spirit is intangible and detachable from the body; during the night, when one sleeps, it wanders about moving freely to faraway places or back and forth in time and its night expeditions are experienced as dreams.

(Jedrej and Shaw 1992:41)

Through the solo piece I was drawn even more strongly to looking at dreams and how they operate. I became interested in how the dream-state might be used in theatre to generate the liminal space that allows for the reflection of the multiple realities of the self. In *Insomnia*, the main character desperately wants to sleep as the following morning he is going to his brother's funeral. He goes back in time to when his brother was still alive, and we see him visiting his cousin. Through physicalisation and changed vocality he becomes his brother, who then dreams of strange voices and sounds. Through the use of voice-over, we hear verses from the bible that suggest his father's teachings prevail or have come to haunt him and challenge his present beliefs. He experiences his past in questioning his present state. Poetically, Strindberg expresses a similar state: “*The Damascus* trilogy is an attempt to let the theatre-goers or the reader witness a sensitive human being's attempt to

penetrate below the surface, to plumb the depths of the self, the ego, the persona, and to find reconciliation” (Johnson 1976:157).

My experience with *Insomnia* brought me to question how I could find expression for an African Dream Play. This piece drew my attention closer to the importance of dreams in theatre and society. I began to ask questions focusing mostly on dreams in an African theatrical context.

In *Diamond out of Rubbish*, my dramatic-poetic-musical production which was performed at the Artscape Theatre in Cape Town in 2006, the character of a young girl has a recurring dream of people chasing her. In her dream she awakes and is surrounded by smoke and fire. We get to know about this dream through her telling the old man from next door. The girl represents the younger generation and the old man represents the wisdom of the older generation. His unfortunate state of unemployment is a blessing to this girl because he is always available to listen to her while the rest of her family is at work. During her telling of the dream she says “*tato-mkhulu* it came back again”, implying both that this is a recurring dream and that he is a father-figure. The importance of communication between generations is emphasised. The girl mentions that when she wakes up she keeps on telling the dream to herself, trying to figure out what it might mean, but fails to understand. This suggests the importance of sharing our experience with those who have wisdom. The young girl has initiated a communication, proactively trying to understand and find meaning for herself and her world. She explores issues and prevailing circumstances, as well as her desires for the future, during the conversation about her dream with the old man.

The dream is so real to her when she says “*ndiphuphe ndiphaphama*” (I dreamt of waking up). Here again we see the power of dreams as they seem to her to coexist

with the waking reality - the sleeping and waking time become mixed up. Being chased by dogs and people, hearing screams and shouts, seeing smoke and fire, and being accused of causing the fire are all terrible experiences, both in sleep and reality.

I looked at my chasers, they grew bigger and bigger. I was hopeless. I didn't know what to do, I just stood there with tears rolling down, I was so scared, my knees were giving up on me, I just stood there then something from inside me, a little voice said something in strange words that I could not make sense of.

(Mbothwe 2006c)

One does not need to have had the experience of growing up in a black township to understand the nightmarish nature of her dream. It is also here that we realize that dreams can become the source of our actions in waking time but also that our lives, our waking time, can become the source of our dreams. "Telling it to myself it felt that I was still sleeping" (Mbothwe 2006c). The girl establishes a dialogue within herself and a dialogue with the old man about her dream.

Such theatre attempts to provide an opportunity for young people to re-examine their circumstances from a different perspective, to see their situation as the springboard to 'fly'. "The happiness of Africa is in its nostalgia for the future, and its dreams of a golden age" (Okri 1997: 177). After communicating her dream with the old man the young girl comes to a realization and exclaims:

This one [dream] I will swallow  
It will assemble with my heart  
It will invade my veins  
It will mentor my memory  
It will move my muscles.

(Mbothwe 2006c)

In her waking she uses poetic language to express her realization and takes a decision about her attitude towards her life's conditions. Through her dream and the sharing she sees possibilities, her spirit of moving on is stimulated, and she decides to act accordingly in her reality. Ben Okri articulates this deliberation when he says:

“When we have made an experience or a chaos into a story we have transformed it, made sense of it, transmuted experience, domesticated the chaos” (Okri, 1997: 113).

In my next production, *Kuthethi' thongo* (Artscape 2007), I wanted to investigate dreams as a source of communication between the living and the spiritual world. This production looked at dreams not only as the source of expression that comes from one's desires and anxieties - as is often the case in popular western analysis. Rather, the exploration concerned those dreams that are a communication from the ancestors, thus emphasizing the African understanding of dreams. Traditionally, dreams played a decisive role in teaching the young and the rest of the community. Dreams were respected as they were considered to be a direct message from the otherworld, not only for the dreamer, but for the family or the community as a whole. Communications from dreams were interpreted on 'waking' by adults, mostly grandparents. In traditional African culture our respect for our parents - every mother and father figure - went beyond their physical presence. They taught us to respect something bigger than ourselves, something so much more powerful than we are; something/someone beyond our parents, beyond laws and regulations, beyond the constitution and the police, beyond what we see, hear, touch and taste. Our parents taught us in the spirit of *ubuntu* and through the art of storytelling, singing, poetry and cultural rituals, that this power was always with us to protect and guide us, and to punish us when we went astray. Turner asserts something similar when he writes:

Judicial processes stress reason and evidence, religious processes emphasize ethical problems, hidden malice operating through witch

craft, or ancestral wrath against breaches or taboo or the impiety of the living towards the dead.

(1990:8)

Communication between parents, grandparents and children was the most important part of a community's health, essential to the survival of the individual and community. While survival on a material level was part of everyday living, acknowledgement of the spiritual world was believed to make all that possible. "Zulus believe that without dreams, true and fully realised living is not possible. Dreams are our eyes in the world" (Jedrej and Shaw, 1992: 33). Traditional African religion considers little division between the worlds of the unborn, the living and the spirits of the dead - all of whom coexist and are believed to be in a state of equilibrium.

Sadly, this state of equilibrium has been shattered or at the very least is under intense pressure. The traditional structures no longer hold in the urban contemporary 'village'. As I stated early it is my contention that we, and particularly young people, are living in a social and spiritual crisis.

At the beginning of 2007, fifteen members from five drama groups in Khayelitsha undertook an informal survey to map popular activities among the youth of Khayelitsha. The central question was, 'where do we most find the youth of Khayelitsha?' 85 respondents answered - in the shebeens; 75 - in the schools; 50 - in churches; 80 - in gangs, and 30 - in creative groups. This is informal research but it does give an idea of what many of the youth of this community face. As clichéd as it might sound, crime, teenage pregnancy, gangsterism, drugs and alcohol came out on top of the list of problems. So many young people have given up their dreams because of these circumstances. In giving up they have become part of the problem, affecting not only their own lives, but also those of others.

And so, it is with the thought of theatre as potential healer that I set out to create the African Dream Play, to find expression of the 'village' spirit, the spirit of *ubuntu*, with the young people of a contemporary urban township.

## PROCESS

In our well-intentioned effort to explain acting by exchanging the mysterious and spiritual for the scientific and psychological, we are inadvertently playing into the wounded actor's hands. In losing spirituality from our acting classes, we have enabled such actors to develop, for we have replaced God (for lack of a better word) with self.  
(Lloyd Benjamin 2006:74)

For my thesis production I chose to work with a group of 11 participants from the Khayelitsha community groups mixed with a group of 4 second year University of Cape Town (UCT) Drama students. All were Xhosa speaking and all originated from townships around Cape Town. I began with a five-day workshop following *Kuthethi 'thongo* in which only the Khayelitsha group participated. I also worked with the UCT students in formal classes.

During the initial process with the community drama group members and during the classes with the UCT students, we were harvesting dreams to generate material for the productions. We were also starting - albeit unintentionally at first - to build a 'village spirit' among the cast members and with our family members, friends and neighbours as we gathered and discussed the dreams. A new and different kind of trust and communication was forged. A spirit of *ubuntu* was being discovered and revived.

I had not known what the results would be of the five-day workshop that followed *Kuthethi 'thongo*, but had trusted what dreams would offer in all aspects - in identifying the issues, in generating production material, in structure and aesthetics.

There were many questions. What are our dreams and what do they mean to us as black township youth? Do we ever think about them when creating our plays? What happens when we use them as our source of inspiration in making plays? How can we use them in both substance and aesthetic to tell our stories and to share them with others? How can they enhance communication among participants and audience members? Might they become a way of regenerating a spirit of *ubuntu* in the contemporary urban 'village'?

Participants had time to reflect on their own dreams - both day and night dreams. They also had to go to their parents, friends, siblings and neighbours to collect and discuss dreams and their meaning. They had to write poems and bring objects that represented the dreams. Individually, they presented their dreams using sounds and bodily expressions. Through the process of the dream construction a different theatrical language was realised, and we developed a 'dream dictionary' to foster a clear understanding of structure and dream aesthetics, particularly in performance without words. Presentations were recorded and played back to performers. Structure, image, rhythm, space, sound, mood and story were discussed in terms of their impact and the qualities of communication these elements initiate between the performer and audience.

From the workshops we moved on to formal rehearsals for *Isivuno Sama Phupha* in which the two groups were brought together for the first time; every session about dreams, in waking and in sleeping. We started with singing, dancing, clapping and beating of drums as the opening ritual - each one of us would be given a chance to lead these various warm-up sections of the opening ritual. The rehearsals were developing the language of expression of dreams physically and vocally. They were also a sharing of dreams and a performance for each other.

At the first rehearsal each one was given a book for recording and creative writing around dreams. I did workshops on creating and writing dreams as performance, giving topics and guidelines and leaving the rest up to them. Some exercises were based on free-writing prompts such as 'Last night in my dreams I saw.....last night in my dreams I heard.....last night in my dreams I smelled.....last night in my dreams I tasted.....' All work was done in isiXhosa, our common language of communication.

In the sharing of dreams we came to realize that some dreams are more frightening and unclear than others; some make no sense at all until they are shared; some are embarrassing, secret, inspiring and/or haunting. We did improvisations around the dreams, as individuals and in groups. We looked at the popular meaning of dreams from a cultural perspective. The 'lines' between the UCT students and community group members disappeared. Singing, drumming, whistling, sharing emotional songs, doing trust exercises, buying, preparing and eating lunch, crying and laughing together all served as gateways to the *communitas* experience of the 'village spirit'. Rehearsal rituals were forged. I wrote choruses based on their dreams and my dreams. We chose the songs, images, objects, sounds, colours and materials for the performance of the dreams we wanted to tell.

The heart of my production was inspired by dreams. I wanted a theatre that engages the liminal space for the realisation of the *communitas* state - in the performance and beyond; a theatre that incorporates the social dramas and popular practices of the *Khayelitsha* youth and creates a directly experienced theatrical ritual. I wanted a theatre that reflects its community's modes of practice, of traditional and urban beliefs; a theatre where the divisions between waking and sleeping, between 'real' and 'unreal', between here and there, between auditorium and stage, between waking and sleeping, between actor and the audience, between Christian and African

traditional practices disintegrate, and are replaced by an authentic healing experience. I used sounds, gestures, colours, smells, spaces, places, figures, animals, nature at large, objects, materials, phrases, idioms, fire, water, earth and air and all their meanings within their cultural and mundane contexts of people's common experiences. Deeply rooted in African influences and guided by the spirit of *ubuntu* this would be a powerful theatre that would suffocate inside theatre walls; a theatre that draws on but cannot be controlled by western conventions - one that follows the inspiration of dreams yet takes into full consideration the complexity of the contemporary black urban 'village'.

## **PRESENTATION**

My intention for the thesis production was to develop an African Dream Play for the 21st Century; one that in substance, aesthetic and in modes of presentation and reception would function as a means of social 'redress'. This term is borrowed from Turner and his concept of the 'social drama' (1980; 1990). According to Turner, over time communities pass through cycles of change that reflect a 'dramatic' shape. These cycles have four stages:

[I]n the first stage, Breach, a person or subgroup breaks a rule deliberately or by inward compulsion, in a public setting. In the stage of Crisis, conflicts between individuals, sections, and factions follow the original breach, revealing hidden clashes of character, interest, and ambition. These mount towards a crisis of the group's unity and its very continuity unless rapidly sealed off by redressive public action .... Redressive action is often ritualized, and may be undertaken in the name of law or religion. ... [T]he fourth stage in my model may be either (a) the restoration of peace and "normality" among the participants, or (b) social recognition of irremediable or irreversible breach of schism.

(Turner 1990: 8-9)

According to Turner, if the usual legal or religious redress fails, the community reverts to the state of crisis. When the legal and religious systems lose their efficacy, the community remains constantly in crisis until new forms of redressive action are found. Redressive actions include a process of 'divination' into what caused the breach, inter-personal or social conflict, the "invisible action of spirits, deities, witches, and sorcerers" (1990: 11) and 'curative rituals' that involve spirit-possession and shamanic trance mediumship.

In most contemporary urban South African townships, the legal and religious systems have broken down. New forms of redressive action are required to restore 'peace and normality'.

The theatre I seek to create is both a breach of certain conventions in the theatre and a form of redressive social action. It aims to create a liminal state in which performers and audience participate in physicalising and visualizing dreams, a theatre where people are given a chance not to wait passively for change, but rather to be part of generating that change. By so doing a spirit of optimism and possibility is felt and experienced in a way that can be taken forward in the daily lives of *all* participants. This stimulated sense of purpose in turn creates space for progression.

In this final section of the explication of my thesis production, I will summarise the presentation of *Isivuno Sama Phupha* with reference to the four stages of the cycles of change that Turner describes.

In *Isivuno Sama Phupha*, a play in isiXhosa, participants created and experienced a theatre free from what is called 'realism' as a theatre style. *Isivuno Sama Phupha* is a theatre of dreams - in process and performance, in content and in form of presentation - an African Dream Play.

The first part of the production takes place within a conventional western theatre space. The purpose of this stage was to show the set rules of theatre as they have been imported to Africa from the west. My intention in part one was to stage a 'Breach' of these conventional rules.

The audience members who came to experience *Isivuno Sama Phupha* showed their tickets, got some assistance from the ushers and sat down passively. These regular theatre goers all knew the cues; knew when to shut up, switch from being active to being passive, when to stop moving and to sit tight without distracting other audience members or the actors on stage. They knew that their place was on those seats, nowhere else; knew that they would be told a story about the lives of other people that might be relevant to them or not at all. They were paying peeping toms. The character - referred to as the central character for the sake of clarity - was revealed asleep at a desk, dressed in modern clothing. He woke and engaged with the activities of studying with the frustrations and excitements of encountering and overcoming minor obstacles. All his actions had a cause-and-effect logic. He ignored the presence of the audience who remained firmly ensconced behind the fourth-wall. Everything at this stage made sense in terms of a realistic theatrical style. This stage of the production represents the ignorance and arrogance of theatre that is created in isolation from the African continent and its predominant beliefs and forms of communication, a theatre without spirit and heart. This is 'realism' and - using Lloyd's terms - it is the place of the 'wounded actor' obsessed with self. It is a one-dimensional mundane reflection of human life, without any of the traditional rituals that are responsible for a community's health. It is a theatre without dreams.

Suddenly, the central character's studying was rudely interrupted by the insistent knocking and entrance into the theatre space of three guides - dressed in African

style robes and with their faces, hair and exposed arms covered in mud. These figures were clearly not from the same world as the central character or from the same play for that matter. Their performance was ritualised, presentational beyond the realistic paradigm. Their presence in the 'realistic' theatre space was intended to constitute and enact a 'Breach'.

After the guides had pulled the central character off the stage, the audience heard the voice of a singer from a balcony above the stage and as the sound spread through the auditorium, other actors appeared from under the raked theatre seating singing a popular church song '*besuka bamlandela bayisha imizi yabo, bethwele umqamlezo*' (they have decided to follow him leaving their homes behind, carrying the cross).

The guides, having taken the central character away, reappeared and stood in different spots on the stage looking straight at the audience, as if saying, 'Why are you still sitting there?' Other actors physically encouraged the audience to come on stage. The audience's training - to be disciplined and passive - was challenged. Their comfort was disturbed; they didn't know what was happening or why. The audience was then divided into three different groups. In this process, some were separated from friends or partners - which disturbed or excited them even more. Each audience group was taken to one of the guides from whom they received instruction in a commanding voice. They were required to leave the theatre space and proceed on a journey; to follow the guide closely and to stay with the group; to answer '*Malekeleke*' to the guide's call of '*Mapiya*'

The first group was then taken outside through the backstage door while the rest remained in wonder, not knowing what would happen next. They heard cries from outside and this intensified their discomfort and their curiosity.

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The second part of the production corresponded to Turner's stage of 'Crisis' that follows the 'Breach'. It involved a slow journey under the colonnade surrounding the open-air quadrangle outside the theatre building itself – a journey through a passage or tunnel. The journey involved stops at a number of stations contained between two sets of doors, one on either side. At each station an installation had been created, repetitively performed for each successive group, depicting a series of images of crisis. These installations were intended to reflect the crisis of our communities – a magical mirror of real social crisis. The first group encountered a woman doing her washing, evidently in deep pain. She showed stains on the cloth to the group as she desperately tried, but constantly failed, to remove the stains from the cloth. Repetitively she thrust the cloth in and out of the water, even using her feet in her attempts to clean it. As they witnessed her attempts to render the cloth clean, the attention of the audience was consistently breached by the guide's requirement for them to respond '*Malekeleke*' to his call of '*Mapiya*'.

Behind the second door the audience experienced an girl in a school uniform, desperately writing on the wall and talking, saying repeatedly, 'He got arrested and came back; he raped, and killed and got arrested and came back; he killed children and cut off their private parts for magical potions, to make money; he got arrested and came back...' (My translation).

Behind the third door they encountered a woman, at first sitting on a chair trying to pull something invisible out of her open mouth. After a while she stood up and knocked insistently on the door behind her, desperately hoping for something to happen, for a desirable change in her life. By this stage some of the audience group had relaxed a bit and even anticipated the guide's call becoming comfortable with the style of performance.

Behind the fourth door, the audience discovered a passage leading off the main path, flanked on both sides by candles. At the end of the passage a group of men were man-handling the central character who had been removed from the stage during part one. They had removed his clothes and were covering his bare body in mud.

By this time, the audience were not only experiencing what they were seeing in front of their eyes, but were also hearing the sounds of what they had seen before and what they were about to see, now being performed for another group. Multiple senses were stimulated as these installations reached a point where everything was happening at the same time. All these experiences were visibly a community in crisis, in pain, in disharmony, in sickness.

In the third part of the production, having passed through the installations of 'crisis', the audience emerged from the passage or tunnel into the open quadrangular space at the centre. In doing so they entered a sacred space, a space of praying and praising, lit by four fires in large metal drums. Each group was led to one of the fires and asked to tend the fire through the ritual. They were welcomed by the voice of a singer and were encouraged to sing along '*Nililela ntoni zinyanya zam, ndizenzile zonke izinto nililela ntoni zinyanya zam*' (my ancestors what are you crying for? I have done everything - what are you crying for?).

At this stage audience and performers were clapping, singing and dancing together. Stomping their feet in a ritualistic and repetitive rhythm. This was Turner's stage of 'Redress', an attempt to redress the crisis initiated by the breach. The stage of 'redress' is also a liminal stage achieved through communal ritual practice, it represents my idea of the 'village spirit' which in turn becomes an experience of *communitas* for those who are fully involved with the performance.

Then the guides entered the space, carrying the central character they had taken from the stage at the start. They put him in the sand in the centre and all eyes were on him while the singing, clapping and drumming continued. At this stage, everyone was part of the ceremony. This stimulated a sense of exaltation in everyone; whistles and ululations encompassed the stage as if reaching towards a climax. Then the reciting (my translation):

These are our dreams; these are our dreams and the dreams of those who are not here, those we don't know, and those of the past. At times we don't know what they mean, where they come from, where they are going. At times they scare us; at times they haunt us; at times they show us things we don't want to see. Sometimes they inspire us by shocking us. At times we don't want them but they are here to stay - and we need them so much.... We ask of them, we want them to teach us, to remind us, to connect us; we want them to tell us who we are, where we come from. We want them to show us the way, to give us *ubuntu*....

(Mbothwe: 2007)

Gradually, in images, chorus, gestures, drumming - in body and breath - the actors took the audience to various dream-states as constructed by individual dreamers. Everyone followed the ritualistic journey of the central character, who didn't know if he was dreaming or really experiencing what was going on as he was forced to do things, taken from one spot to another. This journey of the central character was modelled on the journey of the initiate through the liminal space of a rite of passage, excluded from the society for a time, and proceeding through various stages of transition.

Rites of passage, like social dramas, involve temporal processes and agonistic relations - novices or initiands are separated (sometimes real or symbolic force is used) from a previous social state or status, compelled to remain in seclusion during the liminal phase, submitted to ordeal by initiated seniors or elders, and reaggregated to quotidian society in symbolic ways that often show that preritual ties have been irremediably broken and new relationships rendered compulsory.

(Turner 1980: 158)

Finally, the central character was bound up like an ox for slaughter and seemed about to be stabbed in ritual sacrifice. However, the sound of sobbing in the background stopped the slaughter. The central character was then immersed in water and washed. The ropes were removed and *impepho* was lit. The entire community - performers and audience - was now singing, clapping and dancing around him. As he watched the entire community dancing, clapping, drumming, ululating, whistling, blowing whistles he felt empowered, encouraged and inspired to join the community. The singing grew to a climax as he slowly got out of the water and started clapping, dancing and singing with the community. This was the stage of *communitas*, a stage of comradeship, of possibilities, a magical stage of dreams in communal practice. This was the advocating of the spirit of *ubuntu*. The performance grew to a total communal celebration. People took turns to dance in the middle of the circle that had been formed.

Slowly the action died out. Some people talked to each other and others remained astounded and wondering. The African Dream Play had offered an alternative theatre aesthetic and experience and through the process, the possibility of regeneration through communal ritual participation.

The description above cannot encapsulate the experience of the performance. The performance is the thing itself and is far too complex to render in words. A description of what happened can never serve to capture the experience, the sense of *communitas* engendered, the possibility for change, for a different way of being that it generated. That resides only in the bodies and minds of those who participated in the event itself.

The purpose of including it here is to make the structure of the event – linked as it is to Turner’s social drama and its four stages – clear to the reader. The performance itself is, like all experiences of liminality, defined by indeterminacy not by determination; the mood is subjunctive not indicative. There are two things that need to be said about this indeterminacy and they are interconnected. First indeterminacy must always be understood in relation to structure and determination not in opposition to it – it is precisely in this relationship that things evolve. Second, indeterminacy is never about a simple lack or emptiness of determination or form, it is always about the potential for determination or form. As Turner puts it:

Indeterminacy should not be regarded as the absence of social being; it is not negation, emptiness, privation. Rather, it is potentiality, the possibility of becoming.

(1980: 158)

## **Conclusion**

In both theory and practice I have attempted to resurface the power of theatre and drama to address burning issues facing the community. I have indicated my interest in using religion, cultural rituals and symbols to communicate and bring about a state of *communitas* in the theatre event; a state that would allow for a spirit of optimism, of possibility, and of comradeship. I have advocated the power of dreams not only as a way of generating content but of suggesting an aesthetic beyond realism; closer to the storytelling practices of the past. I have located my work in the context of theatre practitioners such as August Strindberg and Brett Bailey and their attempts to move beyond realism and towards a more mythical, ritualistic and expressionistic theatre style. In my journey towards my envisaged theatre I have used Victor Turner’s concepts of liminality and *communitas* to inform both performance and its

reception, and followed the stages of his social drama, using them to structure the event that has become *Isivuno Sama Phupha – A Harvest of Dreams*.

From all of this I have come to a conclusion, that is also an affirmation: if theatre does not appeal to emotions, to the hearts of people; if it does not aspire to spiritual transformation; if it does not use the social and cultural modalities prevalent in the communities in which it is created and performed, and does not incorporate the belief systems of that community, it will always remain a marginal pursuit, a dry and superficial purveyor of information unheard by those who most need to hear. However, if we are truly concerned about the crisis facing our society and communities, and believe theatre has a part to play in redressing this crisis, it is to theatre such as my African Dream Play that we should turn.

The African Dream Play for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a theatre intimately connected to ritual; a theatre that acknowledges the “power of symbols in human communication”; a theatre that “uses the entire sensory repertoire to convey messages” (Turner 1982: 9). It is a theatre akin to the performance of *Iintsomi* in which the performer uses her exaggerated gestures, voice, sounds, different body parts, phrases, idiomatic expressions, images and imagination to conjure a world in which animals and humans coexist, in which the past and present are brought together, as we are with our ancestors. And the complexity of the audience relationship (clapping, singing, making sounds of appreciation and of terror, finishing and repeating phrases), and of the relationship between performance and the environment (stars, moon, night sounds, the light and sounds from the fire), all reflective of ritualistic communal action for change. My African Dream Play - the regeneration of the spirit of *ubuntu* in the contemporary urban ‘village’.

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