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**SUBALTERNITY AND THE NEGOTIATION OF A THEATRE IDENTITY:
PERFORMING THE POSTCOLONY IN ALTERNATIVE ZIMBABWEAN THEATRE**

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Subalternity and the Negotiation of a Theatre Identity: Performing the Postcolony in

Alternative Zimbabwean Theatre

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the field of theatre practice that I have chosen to call alternative Zimbabwean theatre through a detailed study of four plays and reference to several others all first performed and written between 1980 and 1996. The study interrogates the interweaving and juxtaposition of divergent performance forms and styles on stage created by the contact between western dramatic theatre, indigenous theatre and cultural performances. This contact results in the formation of a third space for theatre which is a creative area of ambivalence, sameness, difference, conflict, struggle, mocking and celebration. The study specifically scrutinises this intersecting area as it obtains in alternative theatre and examines the forces at work in producing the nature and identity of syncretic theatre. Between 1980 and 1996, the nature and identity of alternative theatre changed significantly. This thesis investigates these changes, movements, shifts, conflicts and appropriations and the context within which they took place.

My overarching argument is that the identity of alternative Zimbabwean theatre is traceable to its response to a specific version of colonial discourse which I call Rhodesian discourse and specific aesthetic approaches that African theatre makers in their quest for decolonisation of theatre consciously chose such as socialist realism, Afrocentrism and indigenous cultural texts. The study reaches back to the beginning of colonialism in 1890 to trace the resistance and affirmation of dramatic theatre in such cultural productions as tea parties, *beni*, *nyawo* dance, liberation war performances (*pungwes*) as well as theatrical texts.

Since Zimbabwean alternative theatrical texts do not slavishly adhere to the dictates of dramatic theatre, the work notes the inadequacy of conventional and monocultural dramaturgical analytical strategies and deeply entrenched understandings of the theory/practice nexus for analysing alternative theatre. In this regard the study analyses performances through the lens of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial criticism seeks to explain the interconnection of race, empire and dominated groups with cultural production. I deploy postcolonial theory to find out how Africans' interactions with western cultural forms

impacted on the identity of alternative Zimbabwean theatre. Methodologically, I apply a combination of contextual reconstruction of performances and socio-semiotics. In contextual reconstruction the performance text is placed in a position where it is the site of centrifugal movement toward other external texts. This pragmatic approach involves co-textual and contextual analyses. In the first instance a performance text is analysed to yield its internal regularities such as dance, mime, music and other materials of production. In the latter I establish a relationship between the internal regularities of the performance text and its external aspects. External texts include other performances of the same period, and the cultural text, that is, the context of performance such as the theatrical convention of the period, circumstances of enunciation and reception, aesthetic performance and non-aesthetic performance codes and how these influence and produce the moment of enunciation. The analysis of reconstructed performances is done according to a model that I have called cultural system model. In this model, the analysis is not exclusively on the end product; theatre identity and meaning is a product of a distillation of three processes – theatre production, theatre performance and theatre reception.

This study hopes to contribute to the advancement of knowledge of theatre and performance in Zimbabwe by studying theatre as a corporeal and spatial discourse that uses bodies moving in space as its primary mode of signification and taking an intertextual approach to analysis through the lens of postcolonial theory. This thesis concludes by accounting for the decline of socialist revolutionary theatre after 1996 and delineating the emerging identities of that theatre.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A Level	Advanced Level
AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2002)
ARTS	Association of Rhodesian Theatrical Societies (started off as Southern Rhodesia Drama Association in 1957)
BADG	Bulawayo Association of Drama Groups
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BSAC	British South Africa Company
CABS	Central Africa Building Society
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
CBT	Community Based Theatre
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FTLCA	Federal Theatre League of Central Africa (formed in 1958 and lapsed in 1963 at the end of the Federation to be renamed ARTS)
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LMS	London Missionary Society
LRF	Legal Resources Foundation
LOMA	Law and Order Maintenance Act
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MP	Member of Parliament
NACZ	National Arts Council of Zimbabwe
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NAF	National Arts Foundation (renamed National Arts Council of Zimbabwe in 1987)
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NMDDF	National Music, Dance and Drama Festival
NHSTF	National High Schools Theatre Festival
NRDA	Northern Rhodesia Dramatic Association (joined with SRDA in 1958 to form Federal Theatre League of Central Africa)

NTF	National Theatre Festival [was rebranded to Winter Festival (Winterfest) in the late 1980s]
NTO	National Theatre Organisation (ARTS rebranded itself NTO in 1977)
OAU	Organisation of African Unity (now AU-African Union)
O level	Ordinary Level
POSA	Public Order and Security Act (2002)
(PF) ZAPU	(Patriotic Front) Zimbabwe African People's Union
RADA	Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts
RF	Rhodesian Front
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SRDA	Southern Rhodesia Dramatic Association (formed 1957)
SRMS	Southern Rhodesia Missionary Society
TfD	Theatre for Development
TTL	Tribal Trust Land
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USA	United States of America
UZ	University of Zimbabwe
UZAMDRAMS	University of Zambia Dramatic Society
WB	World Bank
ZACT	Zimbabwe Association of Community-based Theatre
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU (PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZAP	Zimbabwe Arts Productions
ZBC TV	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Television
ZIBF	Zimbabwe International Book Fair
ZIMFEP	Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZPH	Zimbabwe Publishing House
ZWRCN	Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

African

There are a number of types of Africans. There are continental Africans – Arabs and Africans born and bred in Africa including adjacent islands whom Ali Mazrui calls ‘Africa’s children of the soil’ (cited in Shaka, 2004: 23). There are Africans who are phenotypically black – Sub-Saharan blacks whom Ali Mazrui calls ‘Africa’s children of the blood’ (ibid). There is a third category of Africans – European Africans, which constitutes whites born and living in Africa and some of them even claim Afrikaner (African) as their ethnic identity. In this research, I use the term African to refer to the second category of Africans – blacks, and I am in no way denying anyone the right to being an African. This is also the sense ‘African’ was used by Rhodesians to refer to blacks. Sometimes they used the colloquial term ‘Afs’ for the same purpose.

Dramatic text

The unperformed version of a text which is variously called dramatic text, play text, literary text, published text, written complex, written text, language text and *a priori* metatext. Not all texts that produce theatre can be called ‘drama’. ‘Drama’ is a western bourgeois concept to describe a specially written text that has a historical and generic form. This text is structured around the Aristotelian notions of drama characterised by *hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis* and catastrophe which ultimately produce catharsis in the audience (Boal 1979). This structure corresponds to the well-made-play structure characterised by exposition, rising action, climax and denouement which structure contains the linear plot/story/action. Richard Schechner (1988) draws four concentric circles to represent the differences between a dramatic text and theatrical-performance texts. Schechner calls the inner circle ‘drama’ which he argues is the domain of the playwright, the composer and scenarist. The dramatic text has a material existence as a written text, score, scenario, instruction, plan or map and can move from place to place independent of actors (1988: 72). This model by Schechner corresponds to another illustration by Temple Hauptfleisch who draws a quarter of a pie chart and divides it into five rows, the inner two representing ‘serious’ and ‘legitimate’ theatre¹ while the rest of the rows represent other forms of theatre which are not drama (as it is understood in the West) such as popular entertainment and indigenous performances (Hauptfleisch 1997: 30). Augusto Boal (1979) however argues that the Aristotelian structure varies in multitudinous ways and not all its elements may be found in any given dramatic play, but the effect of purging antisocial elements are nonetheless intrinsic to all dramatic texts. Boal asserts that the Aristotelian system appears disguised in television, movies, circus and even such plays originally designated as illegitimate theatre. Dramatic text is therefore broad enough to include the written text of Shakespeare, Greco-Roman classics,

¹ Legitimate/serious theatre was a category created by the British Licensing/Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737 which restricted spoken drama, usually Shakespeare, Greek and Roman classics to two patent theatres. Other performances called ‘illegitimate’ theatre such as comedy, interludes, pantomime, melodrama, opera, farce and other entertainments were to be performed in non patented theatres (Raithby 1811. Ed. 266-8)

naturalist/realist plays, comedy, musicals, opera, operetta and singspiel. The dramatic text is to be distinguished from a theatrical text (see definition) which doesn't necessarily follow the generic Aristotelian format.

Dramatic Theatre:

Dramatic theatre is the enunciation of the dramatic text usually by 'method' trained or influenced actors. In this case the theatre simply illustrates dramatic literature or in other words the theatre is a realisation of the dramatic text as it is defined in this study. Dramatic theatre relies mainly on mimesis through actors imitating human speech and natural movements and supported by a created space/set which imitates or suggests nature or created things. For this reason Jerzy Grotowski (1968) describes dramatic theatre as a synthesis of disparate creative disciplines such as dramatic literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting and acting. He calls it 'synthetic theatre' or 'Rich Theatre' (1968: 19) which he criticises in favour of his 'poor theatre'. Because it was a theatre and is still a theatre practised by the western bourgeois class, Fischer-Lichte calls it 'Bourgeois Illusionist Theatre' (1992: 193). It tries to create an illusion of reality. Peter Brook (1968) calls it 'Deadly Theatre', not because it is dead theatre, but because of its purgative qualities which take away the power from the audience to act (Brook 1968, Boal 1979). Augusto Boal calls it Aristotelian theatre for the reason that it recruits Aristotle's elements of drama for its realisation. Bertolt Brecht (1957: 37) gives it the same term as the one I use – 'dramatic theatre' – and gives it seventeen characteristics which he contrasts with his preferred 'Epic Theatre'. In this study I use western theatre, western bourgeois illusionistic theatre and dramatic theatre interchangeably for stylistic reasons in appropriate circumstances. Even though dramatic theatre has been challenged in the West by the avant-garde, modernist, postmodernist and post-dramatic theatre, it is still the dominant form (Sauter 2006: 68, Schechner 1988: 73, Balme 2008: 125). That is why I use the term western dramatic theatre without the risk of ambiguity.

Eurocentrism/Eurocentric

The term Eurocentrism is used in this study to refer to a form of dramatic and critical practice which privileges aesthetic values of the western bourgeoisie. Scholars of the Eurocentric practice universalise these dramaturgical canons and become unsympathetic to difference. This practice forces cultural heterogeneity into a single paradigmatic perspective which privileges serious/legitimate theatre as the standard theatre and Europe as the source of meaning. According to Chinweizu et al Eurocentrism assumes that 'an African work must conform to rules and criteria developed within the European tradition. If it does not, it is claimed to be problematic' (1980: 17). This critical practice is naturalised as common sense. If scholars were raised within its tradition, Eurocentrism becomes embedded in their everyday lives and forms unconscious choices they make about what to admire or disparage. Thus some African scholars are Eurocentric even if they don't originate from Europe. Likewise some European scholars (and the number is increasing everyday) are not Eurocentric even if they originate from Europe or the West. Eurocentrism is not a conscious political stance, but an implicit positioning. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam eloquently describe Eurocentrism:

Eurocentrism appropriates the cultural and material production of non-Europeans while denying both their achievement and its own appropriation, thus consolidating its sense of self and glorifying its own cultural anthropology. ... In sum, Eurocentrism sanitises western history while patronising and even demonising the non-West; it thinks of itself in terms of its noblest achievements – science, progress, humanism – but of the non-West in terms of its deficiencies, real or imagined (1994: 3).

Performance text:

A performance text is the performed version of a dramatic or theatrical text. A performance text is sometimes designated by the terms *mise-en-scene* (Pavis 2003). While Pavis (2003) attributes the performance text to the director, Fischer-Lichte (1992) argues that the *mise-en-scene*/performance text is produced by a collective – director, actors/performers, and stage and costume designers. For the reason that the performance text is constituted by numerous subjects whose individualities are not submerged by the collective to a point where they are indiscernible, the performance text achieves a condition that Fischer-Lichte calls 'polyphony', a term she borrows from music.

Partial Text:

Since a performance has several concrete forms of expression each of which has its own codes, De Marinis (1993: 78) argues that a performance text has an expressive heterogeneity i.e., a number of forms of expression/or diverse expressive media. Each of these diverse expressive media can be taken as a full-fledged text which is, however, found within one coherent performance text. De Marinis (1993) calls these segments of performance text 'partial texts' which he defines as 'the part(s) of the performance text distinguished by a single concrete form of expression, and hence composed of what Barthes calls 'typical signs' (1993: 79). The performance text can be taken to be one big text which De Marinis (1993: 79) calls a 'macro text' whose partial texts, using the opposite of macro texts, can be called 'micro texts'.

Rhodesian:

Everybody black or white who was a citizen of Rhodesia between 1890 and 1980 was called a Rhodesian. However, Rhodesian is used in this research in a way it is commonly used now in Zimbabwe as a descriptor of any white person who had a Rhodesian citizenship. Rhodesianness is not a singular category which accommodates only English white people. Rhodesian is broad enough to include Jewish, Afrikaner, Continental European immigrants and whites retreating from decolonisation elsewhere in Africa and Asia who came to reside in Rhodesia. Rhodesian is still used to describe a white person who lived in Rhodesia during the colonial period and still believes in a discourse that sustained Rhodesia (an unrepentant white person). The colloquialism 'Rhodie' is still used for the same purpose.

Rhodesian discourse:

I use this term in the same sense it was first used by Anthony Chennells to suggest a philosophy held among white Rhodesians which held Blacks as inferior and rationalised their subjugation. That philosophy was played in Rhodesian representations of Africans in cultural discourses covering a whole spectrum of intellectual activity – anthropology, government commissioned reports, drama and theatre, fine art, literature, cinema, biography, natural science and memoirs. It was also played physically by creating spaces for Africans – ‘reserves’ and ‘locations’ where their alternative discourses considered irrelevant and hostile were checked and closed. As spokespersons of the British Empire, Rhodesians used British metaphysical concepts, moral values and ethics to judge and represent Africans and their art as inferior. In the Rhodesians’ enactment of power, the production of knowledge is as important as power itself and the substructure of that knowledge or Rhodesian mind reproduced itself in the aforementioned cultural discourses. According to Antony Chennells (1996) Rhodesian discourse presupposes subject Whites and object Blacks and it insists that Englishness will eternally define Africanness as other.

Text:

The traditional definition of a text from its literary and linguistic origins has been limited to something written down – written language, literary work, written song, or in short a coherent set of writing that transmits a message. This notion of a text, however, is not valid for what is now considered to be a text (whether it is an aesthetic text or a non-aesthetic text). Fischer-Lichte (1992) relying on Coseriu and Lotman has delineated three characteristics of a text (explicitness, delimitation and structuredness) which allow the inclusion of oral narratives and visual images in the fold of the now broader ‘text’. Bouissac is cited by De Marinis (1993) as proposing a definition of text that is all encompassing:

Any permanent set of ordered elements (sentences, objects, or actions, or any combination of these) whose co-presence (or collocation) is considered by an encoder and/or a decoder as being related in some capacity to one another through the mediation of a logico-semantic system. (Cited in De Marinis 1993: 56)

Theatrical Text:

Although Erika Fischer-Lichte (1992) uses theatrical text to describe the event enacted by performers, Balme (2008) uses the same term to cover a vast array of performance-related texts that may not possess any of the characteristic features of the dramatic text as it is defined here. This becomes the textual basis of a performance. ‘A theatrical text encompasses any kind of textual blueprint that is intended for or attains performance’ (Balme 2008: 125). The theatrical text covers the outer two circles of Schechner’s model which he aptly names ‘theatre’ and ‘performance’ (1988: 71). These terms correspond to Hauptfleisch’s outer two pie chart rows which he also labels ‘popular entertainment’ and

'performance' (1997: 30). The theatrical text may sometimes not pre-exist a performance, but is a result of a performance. This is an area shunned by intellectuals of the dramatic theatre tradition and remains an area of anthropological and ethnological interest, yet it is precisely this area that is now changing the theatre paradigm in Africa and the West.²

West/western:

The term West/western mobilises a series of meanings that it has acquired over a period of time.³ In this study I am using West (noun)/western (adjective- not capitalised) more as a cultural construct than a geographical reality.⁴ This cultural construct includes Western Europe, North America and diasporic Europeans who refer to the West for cultural symbolism. Stuart Hall offers four benefits derived from using the idea of the West/western as a concept in analysis which I am adopting:

- It allows the analyst to characterise and classify societies into different categories in which case the term 'western' becomes a tool to think with and structure thoughts and knowledge.
- It is an image which condenses a number of different characteristics into one that can be used to analyse different cultures and peoples.
- It serves as a standard of comparison and helps to explain similarity and difference.
- It provides a criteria of evaluation against which other societies are theorised. It allows knowledge to be produced about any subject and the expression of certain attitudes towards that subject and therefore operates as an ideological tool (Hall 1992: 277).

In Africa, however, the term West/western is used according to how Africans experienced the West. In Zimbabwe, for example the West as a cultural construct was and is still experienced through Hollywood movies, western television dramas, colonial theatre as represented by various white theatres, the education curriculum, visiting European theatre adjudicators and theatre companies, the architecture of theatre performances. Most, if not all of these employ the Aristotelian notion of drama and acting. Although the West has experimented with various types of theatre since medieval rituals and passion plays up to contemporary post-modernist and postdramatic theatre utilising dance and non-proscenium arch stages, Zimbabweans use 'western' in a limited sense to mean Aristotelian theatre.

² Intellectuals who favour the dramatic theatre tradition are critical of the theatre-performance tradition. This is a power struggle between the dominant West and (to use Chenweizu's phrase) 'The Rest of Us' (Africa, Latin America and the Oriental world) (1978). I deal with this power struggle concerning the theatrical discourse in more detail in chapter 3. Who has the power to tell others what theatre ought to be?

³ The Roman Empire used the binary West/East to refer to Europe and the Oriental world respectively. The medieval Christian Church used the same binaries to define the Judeo-Christian West and the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist East. (see Shohat and Stam 1994: 13)

⁴ Although it is true that the West first emerged in Western Europe, not all of Europe is in the West. The boundaries of Europe to the East are not known and are still being negotiated each year when small East European countries apply to join the European Union. Latin America which is in the western hemisphere is not part of the West, while North America which is not in Europe is part of the West (see Stuart Hall 1992: 276-7).

PRESCRIPT

At the age of five, I found myself in the middle of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. Mozambique had just won its independence from Portugal and ZANLA guerrillas with rear bases in Mozambique reached our Mberengwa district. Between 1975 and 1979, although my parents did not approve and often punished me, I became a participant during all night vigils (*pungwes*) where guerrillas created performances with the masses comprising sketches, mock battles, memorised speeches, songs, dances, narratives, epics, legends, slogans and less frequently the spectacle of lynching perceived sell outs. Within village life, I participated in collective labour processes like *nhimbe* where villagers sang and danced together during and after threshing rapoko, millet and sorghum. Raised as a Christian, I could only watch, but not participate in communal rituals where performers in spectacular costume danced and sang to the glory of their deities. This kind of theatre and performance was at variance with the theatre that I was introduced to when I enrolled for grade one in 1978.

At Makuwerere Primary School, the curriculum was western in orientation. Drama was an extra-curricular activity assigned to the end of term school concert. Although all the teachers were African, the drama we performed ignored our liberation war and indigenous cultural performances to which we retreated after school. Our school performances affirmed the dramatic traditions of the West. This theatrical canon was carried over to high school. I wrote and excelled in my Cambridge 'O' and 'A' Level examinations in 1989 and 1991 respectively. Drama at high school was an appendage of English and the school expected us to stage at least one English play to aid our understanding of literature. Indeed, in 1988 our Form Three class (Grade 10) staged William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* using the proscenium arch stage in the school assembly hall. The other set play text was Bernard George Shaw's *Saint Joan* and Thomas Hardy's novel *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This dramatic and realist literary tradition continued up to 'A' Level with a host of English texts such as Shakespeare's *King Lear*, *Twelfth Night*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, *Dombey and Son*, Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. In retrospect, I realise that we deployed formalism to critique these works since we did not study the contexts of their production. We were more interested in themes, techniques, style, and the literary or dramatic effectiveness of stylistic devices. We didn't study theories of literature; formalism was the received commonsensical approach. This was the standard practice throughout Zimbabwe.

However, during the 1980s a new theatre movement at variance with our school dramatic and literary tradition was becoming more prominent. Chegato High School began to host outside theatre groups for single performances in the school assembly hall. Of note was Mberengwa Theatre Club⁵ which brought moving anti-apartheid plays utilising performance styles that I had witnessed during the liberation struggle. The theatre group used the proscenium arch stage and also planted performers amongst the audience who played their parts at appropriate times. While within the school system we were stuck with the dramatic traditions of Shakespeare, medieval and Victorian literature, theatre practice in the communities was growing at a tangent and at some points directly in opposition to our aesthetic practice at school.

My enrolment at the University of Zimbabwe in 1992 afforded me more opportunities of seeing how widespread alternative theatre had become. Alternative theatre, epitomised by the Mberengwa Theatre Club, was a nationwide phenomenon deliberately geared to counter the dominance of dramatic theatre. Alternative theatre had become the dominant performance style, but it was dominance without hegemony. It was neither taught at schools nor used as a benchmark at the National Theatre Festival. At the University of Zimbabwe this new theatre tradition was advanced by Robert McLaren. From the dramatic theatre of primary and high school we shifted, between 1992 and 1995, to the ritual theatre of Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers*, the agit-prop theatre of Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*, the socialist revolutionary theatre of UZ Theatre's *The Darkness of our Light* and Zambuko/Izibuko's *Simuka Zimbabwe*. Visiting theatre groups to the university used similar styles. My theoretical orientation drifted towards Pan-Africanism and Marxism as evidenced by my honours dissertation in 1995 which critiqued the Euro-American dramatic method of analysing theatre which I argued was monocultural and prejudiced African performances.

The events of the 1990s shook the foundations of my aesthetic beliefs. The Soviet Union collapsed, including the Warsaw Pact, which had successfully divided the world into binaries of the East and West. In Africa, Namibia gained her independence followed in 1994 by South Africa. Zimbabwe shifted from socialism to pursue neoliberal policies. Theatre groups doing anti-apartheid plays lost the source of their legitimacy. The agit-prop techniques lost their

⁵ By the mid nineties this group received musical instruments from a donor and transformed itself into a band. By the time I started this research I could not locate a single member of the original theatre group. Their repertoire of plays risks being lost permanently.

vibrancy soon after the independence euphoria. In 1995 when I left the University of Zimbabwe, audiences were dwindling from a capacity crowd of about 300 in the mid 1980s to an average of 50 people.

During colonial times, the third world deployed Marxist-Leninism, Pan-Africanism, liberation theory – in short third world theory – to contest western imperialism. Today we find that colonialism has retreated and the binaries of liberal West and communist East are fast disappearing. The global revolution that was to see the working classes of the first and third worlds taking over is now less likely after the collapse of communism in the East. Yet in place of the old bi-polar world, there is now a uni-polar system that seeks to dominate the world militarily (NATO), economically (IMF, G7, WTO and WB), politically (the five veto-wielding members of the UN Security Council) and culturally (CNN, BBC, Hollywood, etc). The binarisms that used to sustain the old militant past have become obsolete. It is in this context that my theoretical position has shifted towards postcolonialism which is capable of addressing complex multi-layered identities found in postcolonial cultures. Binary oppositions that are affirmed in both formalism and liberation theories can no longer explain adequately hybrid cultures and identities found in new terminologies such as creolisation, third space, new ethnicities, syncretism, heterogeneity, carnivalesque, ruination, border culture and transversality.

When I returned to Zimbabwe in 2002 after two years of MA studies at the University of Cape Town, I discovered that revolutionary socialist theatre that had sustained us during the 1990s had given way to a new form of theatre. This presaged a new structure of feeling that pervaded the young theatre makers of that time. At the University of Cape Town, I developed what I called syncretic theatre through the writing and performance of *Trauma Centre*. I was dissatisfied with revolutionary aesthetics and the notion of the well-made play which I argued promoted only one way of seeing reality. I wanted a type of theatre that was post-nativist, scriptible, syncretic, post-realist and post-linear. My re-entry into Zimbabwe convinced me that what I thought was a new technique that I had adapted from Dambudzo Marechera was in fact the standard practice within an emerging trend of alternative theatre. My hypothesis was corroborated with evidence from actual practice. I immediately thought that these changes needed to be recorded and explained and this study came into being.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

This study sets out to analyse how subaltern Zimbabwean Africans negotiated structures of domination to create theatre that liberated the subaltern and implicitly subaltern theatre from western cultural domination. Antonio Gramsci (1971) became the first intellectual to use the term subaltern outside military terminology to refer to a cultural-political category of Southern Italy peasants and workers. At the time of writing his notebook he was in prison and therefore did not want to alarm prison censors by using Marxist terms like 'peasants' and the 'proletariat' (Beverley 1999: 2). The term 'subaltern' was appropriated by a collective of South Asian historians aptly named the Subaltern Studies Group interested in exploring the role of non-elite subjects in the making of South Asian history (Guha 1997). Although Marxist theoreticians had long started to valorise the role of the working class, the Subaltern Studies Group believed that Marxists were Eurocentric and the group sought to provide a new perspective on social and cultural analysis which privileged the colonised rather than the dominant viewpoint of western grand narratives. This research explores the different ways Zimbabwean alternative theatre appropriated and/or resisted colonial constructions between 1980 and 1996. The cultural resistance to (neo) colonial presence took different forms from one period to another. In each period, theatre makers were influenced by a common social and political background which impelled the adoption of a system of techniques, conventions and forms which they consciously or unconsciously accepted as a law to govern them. The present study interrogates these theatrical developments in order to discover, account for and explain the different identities alternative theatre assumed in its interface with colonial discourse.

This study aims to:

- Interrogate the cultural consequences of the contact between western dramatic theatre and African theatre and performance in Zimbabwe from 1980 to 1996 as expressed in Zimbabwean alternative theatre.
- Record and reflect on the history and development of Zimbabwean theatre from the perspective of the subaltern.
- Investigate and identify endogenous and exogenous forces motivating theatre making and influencing the identity of theatre and how alternative Zimbabwean theatre and performance responded to those various forces.
- Propose a theory and methodology with which to analyse syncretic texts that are

assumed to be unable to lend themselves to fair analysis through purely Euro-American analytical strategies.

Even if colonialism is a thing of the past postcolonial criticism is an academic practice of intervening culturally in the production of knowledge from the perspective of the subaltern more so in the contemporary world in which imperialism, globalisation and neo-colonialism are producing new patterns of domination which redeploy and reinforce older colonial practices. Gayatri Spivak (1998) understands the subaltern as everyone who has limited or no access to cultural imperialism and she often uses the term to refer to South Asian women. I am using the term subalternity to refer to a condition of subordinated particularity which is expressed in a variety of ways such as race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, age, class or any condition which creates a space for difference and resistance. Subaltern theory (postcolonialism) is therefore a theory of change where 'the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the subaltern' (Spivak 1998: 271). Subalternity is not a position of mourning lack of power and demonising those who have it; it is a space of claiming a positive subject position for the subaltern even through deploying the dominant's means. In this study, resistance does not necessarily mean the negation of theatre of western dramatic theatre. Domination and subordination are intricately intertwined and break the fixity of any lines dividing them. The categories that I create in this study such as western dramatic theatre/African theatre, mainstream theatre/alternative theatre, dominant/subordinate and so on are concepts to think with and I deconstruct them once they have served their purposes.

Research Question

This study sets out to answer the following research question and sub-questions. How does the theatrical frame, performance text (song, dance, mime, and the spoken word) and language reflect, mediate and challenge the relations of domination and subordination between western culture and indigenous African culture at the level of theatre production, theatre performance and theatre consumption? Since there are essentialist claims about the identity of alternative Zimbabwean theatre, is the identity of alternative Zimbabwean theatre fixed and unchanging? Which cultural context and contextual theatricality was and is at work in defining the nature and style of alternative Zimbabwean theatre? How can a work that combines europhone and indigenous forms be analysed in recognition of the fact that only one culture-specific interpretative strategy might mask various possibilities of meaning?

Statement of the Problem

A significant number of studies on Zimbabwean theatre have been done by theatre historians (Taylor 1968, Cary 1975, Byam 1999) literary critics (Kahari 1975, Zinyemba 1986, Ngara 1986, Plastow 1996) and adult educators (Kidd 1983). As can be expected, these studies have lacked aesthetic considerations and interpretative strategies that reflect the poly-medial⁶ nature of theatre. I am not suggesting that theatre cannot benefit from academic sister departments. What this study intends to do, which only Rohmer (1999) has done, is to study theatre as a corporeal and spatial discourse that uses bodies moving in space as its primary mode of signification. Debates about identity must not only emanate from linguistic codes as literary critics have tended to do, but also the irreducible specificity of the actual body that plays a given role in a given socio-political context. In its focus on alternative theatre, this study addresses a significant gap within the field of postcolonial studies which has tended to analyze novels and poems without extending the terrain to theatre as it is realized on stage.

In addition, none of the critical works employed postcolonialism as a theoretical tool to systematically study Zimbabwean theatre. While some important reflective and analytical works have been done in the field of postcolonial theatre studies (Balme 1999, Gilbert 1999), none of it has been on Zimbabwean theatre. This study is, at the moment, pioneering in employing and formulating a coherent postcolonial theory to account for the phenomenon of theatrical syncretism in alternative Zimbabwean theatre and performance. Perhaps more importantly, this study throws out a challenge to mainstream postcolonial theory's biases, specifically its emphasis on linguistic forms of cultural production. The nature of theatre productions that are going to be studied will question the adequacy of current postcolonial theoretical concepts which have been deployed in literary studies. It can be argued that this research has the potential to extend the conceptual frameworks of postcolonial theory by pointing ways in which key debates in the field are given impetus by shifting from texts consumed in written form to those physically embodied in the presence of a live audience.

The other problematic is that theatre consultants such as Stephen Chifunyise, Robert Kavanagh, Ngugi wa Mirii and Kimani Gecau hired by the Zimbabwean government

⁶ Polymediality which is also called multimediality is a condition of theatre where the theatrical text is communicated by means of more than one medium such as dance, song, mime, masks etc (Fischer-Lichte 1992). De Marinis (1993) uses the term 'multidimensional' for the same purpose.

responded to colonial notions of theatre by developing a theatre technique that essentializes Zimbabwean theatre identity. The dominant discourse held western bourgeois illusionistic theatre as a yard stick to which all theatre activities in colonial Rhodesia had to aspire in order to be recognised as theatre. At Independence in 1980, the hired cultural nationalists responded to this discourse by creating and advocating for a counter-discourse which supported a type of theatre that gravitates more towards Afrocentricity with a socialist and revolutionary thrust. This Afrocentric theatre tries to reverse the identity of a theatre that was operational in the then Rhodesia for close to a century. In a manual, *Making People's Theatre* (1997) that explains the mechanics of what Kavanagh calls 'people's theatre', Kavanagh blames colonialism for importing what he calls 'a very lifeless, conservative, unoriginal, static and old-fashioned theatre tradition' which he calls 'dead theatre' (1997: 5) and recommends that it be discarded in Zimbabwe to the extent that it cannot be used productively. Ngugi wa Mirii is more specific about the identity of this new theatre:

For our theatre to develop a truly Zimbabwean character and form it must involve the use of dance, mime, song, drama and gestures which are so powerful that colonialism failed to destroy them. Any theatre that ignores these characteristics is abstract and irrelevant to the aspirations of the Zimbabwean masses in their struggle to build socialism in Zimbabwe. This is the only genuine direction for a true Zimbabwean theatre (1988: 40).

The pretension of this theoretical standpoint is that colonialism, at least in the field of culture, has ended with the attainment of Independence and thus it is possible to discard it and forge ahead with a theatre that brings a renewal and revitalisation of traditional performance. This seems to me like a reverse discourse which tries to close out a Rhodesian discourse in a manner reminiscent of the colonial period. It creates two spaces; an authorised majority space and a discredited minority white space which must be completely closed out. It is ahistorical in the sense that it ignores the glaring neo-colonial presence in its space. If Zimbabwe is still economically dependent on Europe what can stop European cultural products from entering the creative space of alternative theatre? Culture cannot be sequestered from its political and economic moorings. It is reasonable to assume that when western illusionistic theatre and alternative theatre share the same geo-political space, cross fertilisation can take place either way. The theatre cultural nationalists were advocating for seems to have a fixed identity – song, dance, mime and speech. This theatre seems to be insulated from history in its dynamic sense. The scholars who advocate for it are reluctant to concede dynamism to Zimbabwean theatre. I am convinced that western illusionistic theatre interacted with alternative theatre and created a syncretic form falling within what Bhabha

aptly named the 'third space' (1990). This third space cannot be essentialised in the sense that it is a centre of dynamism that is always fluctuating and changing from time to time. This research demonstrates that dynamism.

Rationale

Theatre and performance research in Zimbabwe lags behind theatrical output. By the end of 1996 there were between 250 and 300 theatre groups in Zimbabwe (Mahoso et al 1993, MS-Zimbabwe 1995) as compared to the thirty-eight theatre companies officially recorded during the colonial period (Jackson 1974). Semi-professional theatre companies like Reps, Amakhosi, Rooftop Promotions, and Zimbabwe Arts Productions produce an average of seven plays per annum. The amateur theatre groups, which are by far the majority, produce an average of at least two plays per annum. Theatre companies in Zimbabwe produce a cumulative average of about 650 plays per annum. Therefore in the first sixteen years after independence, there were an estimated 10,000 plays produced by various theatre companies. Everyday, somewhere in the countryside, in the city, in the farming area, at mission stations, in the village, a theatre group or a clan collective is performing to an audience. Most of these plays and performances are either lost, published, recorded on video cassettes or reside in the memory of audiences and body-texts of performers who participated in their performance. Yet most of these performances pass without researchers noticing, documenting or analysing them for posterity. Stephen Chifunyise notices the same problem and asserts that 'research in theatre is still in its infancy in Zimbabwe' (1997: 369). While acknowledging the effort of Ranga Zinyemba (1986), Jane Plastow (1996), Dale Byam (1999) and Martin Rohmer (1999), research still lags behind theatrical output. I have chosen to write the history of Zimbabwean theatre through the analysis of four plays; UZ Drama's *Mavambo* (1985/97), Gonzo Musengezi's *The Honourable MP* (1983/4), George Mujajati's *The Wretched Ones* (1988/9) and *The Rain of my Blood* (1989/91) and two case studies – the theatre of Dambudzo Marechera and Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* (1986/90).

The generation of knowledge in Zimbabwean theatre studies is 'segregated'. In other words, knowledge is not disinterested, but serves the ends of certain societal groupings. Of the 300 theatre companies in Zimbabwe by 1996, 20 per cent of them were affiliated to the white dominated National Theatre Organisation (NTO) while the remaining 80 percent were affiliated to the black dominated Zimbabwe Association of Community-based Theatre (ZACT). Knowledge production in Zimbabwe, and this seems to be the case in most post-colonies, has tended to approach community theatre as Theatre for Development

(TfD)/applied theatre even where this is not always the case at all. The term 'applied theatre' in Zimbabwe and the Third World is deployed with a certain negative nuance which suggests that it is not standard. Gay Morris (2010) notices the same trend with respect to South African township theatre. Where scholars like Wrolson (2009), Zenenga (2005) and Chinyowa (2005) have researched community theatre, they have approached it as applied theatre. The label 'applied theatre' is not used as a descriptor of white produced theatre even where the cast and theme are typically African such as the Reps production of *African Macbeth* (1961), *Svikiro* (1978), *Mhondoro* (1993) *Vuka Vuka* (1996). The question is can theatre be recognised as 'legitimate theatre' only when it is produced by a western run theatre company? Thus questions of who has the power to recognise and who doesn't have it come into play. Bourgeois academic knowledge which has dominated Zimbabwean theatre studies is a practice that produces subalternity (the condition of lacking power). It is incapable of existence without declaring other knowledges invalid or at least knowledge of less value. Thus the bulk of research currently available on Zimbabwean community theatre is complicit in the 'othering' of a new type of theatre that emerged after independence in Zimbabwe.⁷ This bourgeois knowledge while acknowledging the existence of African theatre does so only as a 'special' kind of theatre with a subordinated particularity.

To my knowledge, it seems as though there is no work that has taken the dimension of analysing the identity of a signifying system in Zimbabwe. Most studies in film, literature and television have looked at the issue of how these signifying systems construct the identity of their characters. Chikonzo (2007) has for instance looked at colonial Zimbabwean film and its construction of African cultural identities. Mashiri (1998) has looked at the representation of blacks and the city in Zimbabwean television drama. Musariri (2007) has looked at how a television historical fictional drama, *Tiriparwendu*, constructs pre-colonial African identities. At the moment this study is pioneering in that it is looking at the identity of theatre itself and not how theatre constructs identities.

Area of Study: Alternative Theatre in Zimbabwe

This study focuses on a strand of theatre that I have called alternative theatre. In order to fully understand the practice of alternative theatre, I rely on Raymond Williams's categories

⁷ I am not suggesting that research in applied theatre should be abandoned or that it is less valuable, but I am pointing out the preponderance by western researchers to label anything produced by black artists or community theatre groups as applied theatre. Applied theatre is useful and has a right to exist as long as it isn't used as a method of re-inscribing segregation in cultural production.

of residual, dominant and emergent cultural forms (1977: 123). Williams argues that at every stage of the social process there is always the residual, dominant and emergent cultures. When transposed to theatre, these categories can be used to describe the development of Zimbabwean theatre between the period 1980 and 1996. The residual theatre is the imported western dramatic theatre brought by Zimbabwean white settlers from 1890. All western plays performed by the thirty-eight white theatre companies existing at independence belong to this tradition. However, as a theatre practice, the residual theatre was not limited to white theatre companies, but was also practised by blacks who entered the annual African theatre festival run under the auspices of the Native Affairs department (Jackson 1974). A number of Zimbabwean authored plays belong to this category such as Tsitsi Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps* (1987), Julius Chingono's *Ruvimbo* (1980), Dorras and Walker's *The Big Wide World* (1987) and *She Can't Even Cook* (1987), Stephen Mhlabi's *Ibuzwa Kwabaphambili* (1981), Charles Mungoshi's *Inongova Njake Njake* (1980), Daniel Pearce's *Generation Gap* (1983), Ben Sibenke's *My Uncle Grey Bonzo* (1982), Themba Ndhlovu's *Umkhunjulwa Ufelokwakhe* (1983) among others. Like most African authored plays during colonial rule, these plays mimic the western dramatic theatre tradition, although they have minute spaces of resistance. Although I have labelled western dramatic theatre as 'residual', the NTO which supported this kind of theatre continued its institutional dominance until about 1991 when alternative theatre became effectively the dominant theatre.

However, to attain a position of 'residual' does not mean that the western dramatic theatre is archaic and fossilised. According to Williams, although the residual was formed in the past it is still active in the cultural process as an effective element of the present. The residual affects the dominant⁸ in two ways. Firstly, certain values and standards from the residual culture are used to evaluate the dominant as asserted by Raymond Williams:

Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation (1977: 122).

⁸ The dominant aspects of a historical period are the systems of thought and practice that dictate, or try to dictate, what can be thought and what can be done – that is the assertion of dominant values, morality, and meanings (see Auslander 2008: 162).

In Zimbabwe during this period, the white dominated National Theatre Organisation (NTO) continued to run the CABS Play of the Year competition, theatre workshops and the National Theatre Festival which utilised western canons. Most plays were written, evaluated and performed on the basis of the residual values. Secondly, the residual affects the dominant through the dominant's appropriation of elements of the residual into its theatre practice. This study demonstrates the extent to which such borrowing altered the identity of the dominant theatre.

Two categories of theatre groups resisted the western dramatic theatre tradition by utilizing African performance modes while at the same time appropriating some aspects of western dramatic theatre. These two groups – the dominant theatre and the emergent theatre – are what I have called alternative theatre. The dominant theatre was practised by what Samuel Ravengai (2006) calls the 'second generation' of theatre makers.⁹ Ravengai argues that this generation of theatre makers was born between 1940 and 1959 and as such they were part and parcel of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle either as guerrillas, liberation movements' collaborators or cultural activists. Ravengai adds that, for these theatre makers, colonial violence was not only physical but cultural as well. They were preoccupied with healing the damaged African culture by relying on African performance modes. Their repertoire of plays revolted against colonisation (even after independence) both politically and aesthetically by denouncing western dramatic theatre staging techniques while purposefully employing traditional African theatre modes. This is the area that I have chosen to examine. There are many plays in this category, but I have chosen to analyse the following: UZ Drama's *Mavambo*, Musengezi's *The Honourable MP*, Mujajati's *The Wretched Ones* and *The Rain of my Blood*. I will also refer to other plays in the dominant category that were written between 1980 and 1996: Moyo's *Chenga Ose* (1983), Tsodzo's *Shanduko* (1983), Chikanza's *Vakasiwa Pachena* (1982) and Ndhlovu's *The Return* (1990).

The emergent theatre is a new phase of the dominant which strives to be an alternative to the dominant by being oppositional to it. Williams uses the term 'emergent' to refer to 'new

⁹ The second generation is preceded by the first generation of theatre makers whom I argue were born between the early 20th century and 1939. They became active in the 1960s, a period which coincided with the rise of nationalism. Their theatre such as Osias Mkosana's *USikhwili* (1957), *Ngiyalunga* (1957) and a number of traditional performances played at beer gardens, Stanley and Macdonald halls in Bulawayo rejuvenated traditional culture. This was also the cultural thrust of the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress, the only black political party that existed at that time (Ravengai 2006: 74-5).

meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships [that] are continually being created' (1977: 123). The emergent theatre can be understood in relation to the dominant. The emergent theatre reaches back to the meanings, values and techniques that were created in the past which the 'dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognise' (1977: 124). The emergent theatre then combines those values and meanings with new methods that it has created. In Zimbabwe, this emergent theatre is practised by what Ravengai (2006) has called the third generation of theatre makers whom he argues were born after 1960. If born and raised in the city, this generation has become 'de-tribalised' owing to the absence of unifying and controlling forces of indigenous native society such as kingship and chieftainship. The third generation of theatre makers accepts they are a product of both nationalism and colonialism and as such colonial and nationalist forms of theatre are available to it for creativity. However, this generation does not believe in artistic rules set by western dramatic theatre or the dominant socialist realists. This generation works without rules in order to create rules for what they have created. The major practitioners of emergent theatre between 1980 and 1996 were Cont Mhlanga (*Workshop Negative* (1990)), Dambudzo Marechera (*Mindblast* (1984)) and Andrew Whaley (*The Rise and Shine of Comrade Fiasco* (1991)). I will analyse *Workshop Negative* (1990) and *Mindblast* (1984) in chapter 9.

Alternative theatre is a heterogeneous grouping (and this seems to be the tendency in all countries where this term is used) which covers a wide range of theatrical activities and projects that represent a wide range of different theatrical agendas, theories, ideologies and social aspirations. These groupings include Community Based Theatre (CBT), socialist/revolutionary theatre, workers' theatre, protest theatre, women's theatre, people's theatre, popular theatre and majority theatre. As can be read from the labels of these types of theatre, alternative theatre displays leftist political tendencies and is often a means of expression of its creators' social and political commitment. Alternative theatre is thus named because it offers an alternative to mainstream theatre, its aesthetics, working methods and techniques. The general perception of alternative theatre makers is that the political, economic and cultural realities captured by mainstream theatre do not reflect the realities of Africans (as they are defined in this thesis). Alternative theatre is broad enough to include white theatre practitioners who have worked in Zimbabwe to provide such alternatives. Even if alternative theatre is that heterogeneous, more often than not its techniques are similar – they are taught from the community collaboratively for the reason that most artists

have no prior training or the skills required are not taught at tertiary institutions or practised in mainstream theatre.

In Zimbabwe, alternative theatre is characterised by five elements. These elements, however, should not be taken as inflexible since they may also be found in some mainstream theatre companies. I am just using the term as a concept to work with for analysis. First, although alternative theatre groups often make profit from their productions, the main reason for creating theatre is not commercial success, but they are driven to communicate explicit political, social and economic issues affecting their communities or the African working and peasant classes. They are advocacy groups for the newly liberated Africans. Secondly, alternative theatre groups use alternative theatre spaces since they don't own theatres. The colonial state did not invest in theatre and the new Zimbabwean government did not prioritise infrastructure development in the arts. The available theatre houses were built during colonial times by private societies for their private theatre companies still operating after independence. Alternative spaces include church halls, community centres (not well equipped for theatre), school assembly halls, classrooms, street pavements, workplaces, open spaces, public parks, beer halls and sometimes prisons. Since entry requirements for the NTO winter festival are too high and based on dramatic theatre traditions, alternative theatre companies usually participate in alternative festivals such as the ZACT run National Music, Dance and Drama Festival (NMDDF). Thirdly, with a few possible exceptions, most alternative theatre groups were affiliated to the government aligned ZACT as opposed to the NTO.¹⁰ Both ZACT and NTO are now defunct and alternative theatre groups are now affiliated to the new Zimbabwe Theatre Association (ZiTA).¹¹ Fourthly, most alternative theatre groups operate with smaller budgets than the richer white mainstream theatre companies usually sponsored by societies such as the Reps Society. Finally, because they mostly tackle typically African issues, they are ideologically driven by socialism and nationalism, although this is certainly not the case with alternative theatre in the emergent theatre grouping.

¹⁰ About thirty-four theatre companies belonging to the Bulawayo Association of Drama Groups (BADG), although practising alternative theatre, were affiliated to the NTO.

¹¹ ZiTA was formed in 2008 and its first chairperson is Josh Nyapimbi who is deputised by Jason Mphepo. Committee members are: Samuel Ravengai, Walter Muparutsa, Chiedza Makowe, Mandla Ncube, Obrien Mudyiwenyama, Eresina Hwede and Friday Mbirimi. Its secretariat is housed at Global Arts in Harare. On March 26, 2011 ZiTA held its inaugural National Theatre Awards at Jameson Hotel in Harare and gave awards in sixteen categories (Shumba 2011, Zikandaba 2009).

This study is limited to the period 1980 and 1996, but draws its context from the colonial period between 1890 and 1979. The period of buoyancy (1980-1996) is not an arbitrary demarcation of time. It is a period dominated by virtually similar macroeconomic fundamentals; albeit there is a slight change between the years 1990-1996, which Daniel Makina (2010) has called the economic liberalisation period. In the same article Makina called the 1980-1990 era the post-independence period of controls owing to the maintenance of control measures inherited from the Rhodesian regime. However, what characterises the whole sixteen year period is the positive growth of the economy, with an average of 4.3 per cent per annum (Makina 2010: 105) during the first decade and declining to an average of 0.8 per cent per annum (Makina 2010, Muzondidya 2009) between 1991 and 1996. In the educational sector during the same period, the number of primary and secondary schools rose by a remarkable 80 per cent (Muzondidya 2009). Even though this sector experienced growth, the curriculum remained largely Eurocentric with both Ordinary and Advanced level examinations set, moderated and marked in the United Kingdom by Cambridge University staff or their nominees. Thus Zimbabwe, as exemplified by plays produced during this period, did not develop its own variety of English as a way of challenging the dominance of Britain.

The growth experienced during this period had its own paradoxes. Hidden underneath this economic buoyancy were acute inequalities between the historically dominant white community and blacks. Thus most alternative plays during this period explore the theme of social and economic injustice: Mujajati's *The Wretched Ones* (1988/9), *The Rain of my Blood* (1991), UZ Drama's *Mavambo* [First Steps] (1985/97), Musengezi's *The Honourable MP* (1983/4) and Moyo's *Chenga Ose* [Do not Discriminate] (1983). The economic gains were unevenly distributed. A small number of Africans comprising rich peasants, farmers, educated professionals and business people, most of whom were already well off from privileges they enjoyed during the colonial era, benefitted from the new government policies of indigenisation or Africanisation. This group of black and white professionals, white industrialists and farmers continued to own the bulk of the resources and, according to Muzondidya, they controlled 'two-thirds of gross national income in the 1980s' (2009: 170). Towards the end of the period in 1993 black participation in all sectors of the economy stood at 2 per cent (Muzondidya 2009: 171). In essence, 3 per cent of the total population of about 10 million people controlled 67 per cent of the gross national income. The above plays capture this inequality through the depiction of the 'have-not' characters such as peasants,

farm labourers, paupers, domestic servants and children. All of them without exception wear heavily patched tattered and torn clothes. All of them try to fight their white and black bosses to end the injustice.

Even though this study is limited to the period 1980-1996, the nature of postcolonial theory requires that the study reaches into the colonial past to find answers to questions raised in the present. The 'post' in the term 'postcolonialism' does not mean after colonialism. Precisely because of the importance of colonisation in postcolonial criticism this study goes back to 1890 when the Pioneer Corps arrived in Zimbabwe. In two chapters the study presents a contextual background that helps to explain the choices made by alternative theatre makers during the period 1980 to 1996.

The Language of Description and Research Methodology

In this section I survey some aspects of postcolonial theory which I have found illuminating for this study. My overarching theoretical framework is postcolonialism which is concerned with the interconnection of issues of race, nation, empire, migration and ethnicity with cultural production – and in my case with theatre production. In the case of post-colonies such as Zimbabwe, the interaction of race, empire and ethnicity is not a disinterested interaction; the historically dominant metropolis (Britain) and diasporic Europeans interact with Africans in a manner that replicates the old hegemonies, but in a subtler way than before to reflect the changed political circumstances. Postcolonial theory is therefore a set of reading practices concerned with cultural forms (such as theatre) which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination between and within nations, races and/or ethnicities.

Due to the heterogeneity of the field of postcolonialism, the meaning of the term depends on who is using it. It is prudent against this background, to define the theoretical position or framework under which the term is deployed. Postcolonialism is deployed here in the same sense it is used by Bill Ashcroft et al (1995) to designate the totality of theatrical practices in their rich diversity which characterize the society of the postcolonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day. The position of this study is that colonialism does not discontinue at the attainment of political independence, but continues to be active in many ways in what can be called neo-colonialism. Postcolonial theatre is understood to be a result of this interaction between the old imperial culture, neo-imperial culture, African

performance traditions and contemporary African popular culture. Postcolonial theatre is therefore used as a descriptor for the dramaturgical products which have emerged in response to European and American (neo) imperialism. Anne McClintock (2000) takes postcolonialism to mean a series of stages in history from colonial to postcolonial. The 'post' in the term, she argues, presupposes a suspension of history where what has preceded contemporary history has gone and is now not in the making. She believes that to be beyond colonialism as suggested by the term 'postcolonialism' ruptures both the continuities and discontinuities of the power of imperial culture. The term is, however, not used in that sense in this present study.

Postcolonialism resonates with postmodernism and scholars have argued that African theatre makers and critics, in their attempt to resist European cultural domination have emulated interpretative strategies from Europe. It is indeed true that there is an overlap between the two theories as both of them fight grand narratives established by the European bourgeoisie. However, in this study, postcolonialism is designated as a more specific and historically located set of cultural strategies. However, I do not rule out that contemporary Zimbabwean performances borrow from European postmodernist performances.¹² Much as other forms of European culture can be appropriated by Zimbabweans, the internationalization of the market and the commoditisation of artworks allows the possibility of borrowing postmodernism, although I doubt if the artists themselves are, in the slightest, aware that they are postmodernist. It is possible that both postcolonialism and postmodernism can inhabit the same text. Where it is evident, such work is herein referred to as postcolonial theatre and the postcolonial theory will be used to interpret and define such a theatrical text.

Since relations of domination and subordination cannot be solely found in theatre practice, postcolonialism relies on other disciplines such as sociology, history, anthropology and literary texts. It thus borrows the concept of 'intertextuality' from post-structuralism. In this study I read one theatrical text against Zimbabwean history, political economy and other theatrical texts of the same period in order to illuminate shared textual and ideological resonances. All texts and ideas are part and parcel of a fabric of historical, social, ideological

¹² The juxtaposition of postcolonialism with postmodernism needs some explanation. It is indeed true that the postcolonial movement began right at the moment of colonisation with such figures as Du Bois. However, it was not until 1989 that postcolonial theory existed as a theory. Postmodernism predates postcolonialism since it emerged in the early to mid 20th century.

and textual relations. I will adopt the postcolonial (also postmodern and poststructuralist) intertextuality¹³ method of reading where one text is read against another or others in order to illuminate shared textual and ideological resonances as well as points of similarities and differences. According to Taylor and Winqvist (2001) a playtext or a performance is part and parcel of a fabric of historical, social and ideological contexts. It cannot be regarded as an autonomous and self-contained text existing separately from its author and cultural forces. The method of reading intertextually shifts from the self-contained text to a text with multiple points of connection to other texts such as history, politics, sociology, anthropology and other art forms. This is an important feature of postcolonial theory which helps 'to undermine the traditional conceptions of disciplinary boundaries' (Moore Gilbert 1997: 8). Drama and theatre performance are studied together with other disciplines 'rather than in isolation from the multiple material and intellectual contexts which determine [their] production and reception' (Bart-Moore, 1997: 8).

As one of the more recent theories, postcolonial theory, especially as it is applied by Edward Said (1978) borrows from cultural theory (particularly Foucault and Gramsci) and Marxism. From Foucault (1976, 1980), postcolonial theory borrows the concept of 'discourse' to explicate the notion of colonial discourse which the metropolis uses to explain and legitimize its rule which I deal with in chapter 3. From Gramsci (1971) postcolonial theory borrows the notion of 'rule' and 'hegemony', the latter being a term that Ranajit Guha (1997) takes forward by arguing that post-colonies politically dominate their subjects but lack hegemony (soft persuasive power) which continue to be exercised by the metropolis and diasporic Europeans. In Zimbabwe even after flag independence the western theatrical canon and education system still continue to affect the culture of the post-colony.

From Marxism, Afrocentricity, and Nietzschean Existentialism (humanism) postcolonialism borrows the concept of African agency, subjectivity and intentionality (Auslander 2008, Asante 2007). Agency is a descriptor of the state or capability of an individual or collective to determine their own actions. The term is used to describe the state of being present, active, or self-actualised in the performance of political, ideological, philosophical selfhood or

¹³ The term was first coined by Julia Kristeva, but is mostly associated with Kristeva's teacher Roland Barthes. It is very close to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism. In its structuralist sense, it meant the text being in dialogue with other texts to generate meaning without the aid of the author. In its postcolonial and poststructuralist sense, it includes the author as part of the meaning making process. (See Auslander, 2008: pp.45-50).

community, despite any system which infringes upon or precludes this ability. The term denotes the freedom to choose voluntarily and deliberately. While postcolonialism, as applied by Edward Said, puts emphasis on colonial discourse and how it shapes perceptions of the Other, Spivak (1998) focuses on various manifestations of counter-discourse – discourses produced by the ‘Other’ to counter colonial discourse. Spivak adds the notion of ‘enabling violence’ or ‘enabling violation’ to postcolonial theory by which she means the new cultural productions that emerge out of the colonizer-colonized matrix which are catalyzed by colonialism despite its destructive impact in other spheres.

Homi Bhabha (1990) takes the enabling violence motif further by problematizing the binary opposition of colonizer and colonized in Paulo Freire (1972) and Frantz Fanon (1963). Bhabha argues that the line dividing the colonizer and the colonized is blurred. The relationship between the two is more complex and nuanced in the sense that the binary oppositions do not exist in stable and unitary terms and are not in all cases involved in perpetual enmity and disintegrative conflict. They interact in interesting ways producing new cultural identities that celebrate and mock old relationships. This is achieved through what Bhabha calls ‘mimicry’. Mimicry does not produce the original, but something else. This process of translation produces a destabilising lack in the original and therefore mocks it in celebration. This results in slippage in colonial discourse thereby siphoning its authority and power.

Postcolonial theory is also defined by the notion of hybridity/syncretism (Balme 1999, Hauptfleisch 1997, Bhabha 1990 – or what Sarah Nuttal (2009) calls ‘entanglement’. The interaction of Zimbabwe and the metropolis produces a ‘Third Space’ (Bhabha 1990) which disrupts seamless narratives of oppressor/oppressed, colonized/colonizer, dominant/subaltern and First World/Third World.

Methodology

I used the sampling method to reach to the four theatrical texts under examination in this study. In humanities it is acceptable to analyse the identity of the theatre of a period by judging the whole from a small part. This study measured a sample in order to draw an inference about the whole theatre movement between 1980 and 1996. The politics of choosing may be invoked to question the validity of the results. Out of the 10,000 theatre productions enacted during the period, how did I come up with the six productions for analysis? For a research that goes back to 1980 it may be hopeless to write a history of

theatre based on non-existent primary material. I therefore chose plays that were both performed and published in Zimbabwe. To this end fifty plays were published in Zimbabwe between 1980 and 1996 (see appendix A). I read most of them and grouped sixteen of them as belonging to the residual western tradition. I narrowed my focus to the dominant and emergent theatre traditions. Thirteen plays could be classified as belonging to the emergent tradition and eleven of them were authored by one playwright – Dambudzo Marechera. I then chose to designate Marechera as a case study in chapter 9 owing to the quality and quantity of his theatrical output. From the remaining two emergent playwrights, I chose Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* as a case study in the same chapter. I classified 21 plays as belonging to the dominant theatre tradition. I excluded from analysis all plays written in African languages except only as contextual reference to support historical facts. The reason for this was to try and avoid the cumbersome process of translation of speeches in a study with a strict word limit. The other reason was that most plays written in African languages were severely doctored by editors at publishing houses and the Literature Bureau, which remained operational till the early 1990s. The editors deplored language mixing and maintained artificial language purity regardless of how language was used by Africans in everyday conversations. These plays, in their written form, therefore, did not reflect the glaring postcolonial condition of theatre that I knew existed in theatrical texts with less editorial interventions. I was then left with six plays written mainly in English or a combination of English and African languages. I then used the criteria of availability of evidence and archives of performance to cut down the number to four plays.¹⁴

Anne D'Alleva (2005) brings an interesting connection between theory and methodology which I will use to frame this chapter. She argues:

The line between theory and methodology is often fuzzy, and they're usually spoken of together – “theory and methodology” – so that they seem to come as a unit ... Theory is what helps us frame our inquiries and set an agenda for work on particular topics, objects or archives. Methodology, strictly speaking, is the set of procedures or ways of working that characterise an academic discipline (2005: 13).

¹⁴ Although most of the published plays were performed by various community theatre groups and schools, I did not have adequate archival information to conduct meaningful analysis of those plays as performance. When the Zimbabwean government adopted ESAP in 1990, it affected most sectors of the economy including the publishing industry. Although alternative theatre groups continued to write and produce theatre (Rohmer 1999) there is no play that was published between 1992 and 1996. That is why the last play treated in detail was published in 1991. The claims I make in this study were valid up to 1996 and I have the benefit of experiential knowledge to say so. I enrolled at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare in 1992 and finished my studies in 1995 during which time I watched alternative theatre of the dominant type at various theatre spaces.

The major theoretical framework that I am using to frame my inquiry as stated is postcolonialism. Postcolonial criticism is a body of principles, a procedure; an ideal set of facts offered to explain the interconnection of race, empire and dominated groups with cultural production. In our case, I am trying to employ the postcolonial frame to find out how Africans and Africanists¹⁵ interactions with Britain and White Zimbabweans have influenced the identity of alternative Zimbabwean theatre. Bart-Moore (1997) explaining postcolonialism sees it in the same light as ‘more or less distinct set of reading practices’, which he argues is, ‘preoccupied principally with the analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination...between (and often within) nations, races or cultures’ (1997: 12).

Since I am connecting theory to methodology it is important that I explicate the set of procedures or ways of working that I will employ in order to achieve the objectives of the chapter. I rely on Du Gay et al’s (1997) circuit of culture model (figure 1.1) as a set of procedures that I would use to analyse texts.

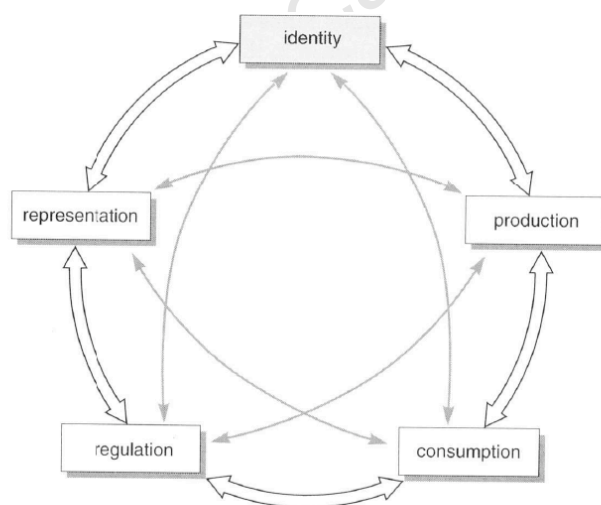


Figure 1. 1 Circuit of Culture Model

While I adopt the concept, I do so with substantial revisions. The metaphor of a circuit, although sufficiently explaining the multiplicity of starting points, seems inadequate in explaining the dynamics within cultural processes that are linked together. A circuit allows a

¹⁵ The term Africanist is used here as a descriptor of any white person or anyone not originally from Africa who is a specialist in the study of African cultural production or African affairs and an advocate of Africanism (the devotion or allegiance to the traditions, interests of Africans including the decolonisation of states and cultural productions). This explains the inclusion of works by Robert McLaren and Andrew Whaley in the coterie of alternative theatre.

current to pass through it without causing any physical or noticeable change to the medium. As Hauptfleisch (1997) has observed theatre is 'a system of processes' that cannot be fully explained by the metaphor of a cultural circuit and I am, therefore, offering a 'cultural system model' (Figure 1.2) as an alternative or modification of Du Gay *et al*'s 'circuit of culture model'.

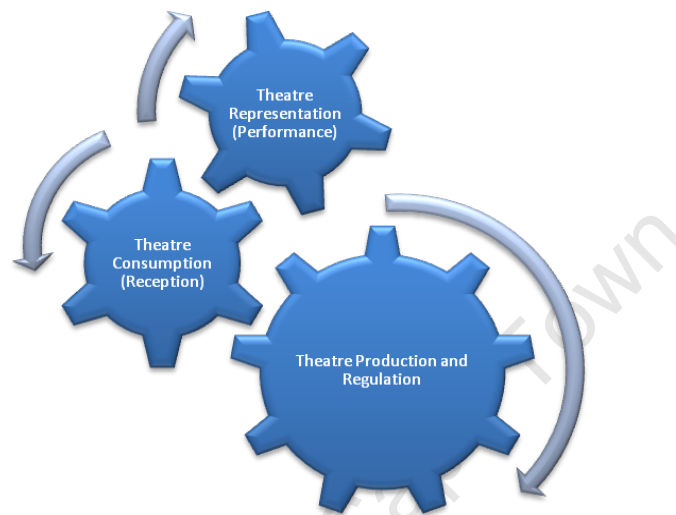


Figure 1. 2 Cultural System Model showing the symbiotic relationship between production, performance and reception

The 'cultural system model' seems apt to me as it suggests that the components move in sympathy as one of the processes starts moving. As this is a gear system, it doesn't matter where the motion begins; if one component is moved, everything else that is connected to it moves as well. Du Gay *et al*'s original 'circuit of culture model' has five processes that are connected together, which they argue, any analysis of a text or artefact must pass if it is to be adequately studied. While this seems applicable to a material cultural product such as a walkman or a guitar, not all processes may be useful to explain ephemeral cultural products such as theatre which ceases to exist once the moment of enunciation is over. I contend that meaning and identity are determined by a combination of all other processes. Theatre identity is a product of a distillation of all other four processes. I have reduced the processes to three [Theatre Production, Theatre Representation (performance) and Theatre Consumption (reception)]. In the case of theatre and perhaps other cultural products, regulation takes place at all levels of the process. When a cultural product such as theatre has passed through each of the stages at which meaning and identity is added and altered, it eventually embodies a certain identity that can be seen and explained as represented in the theatre identity model below.

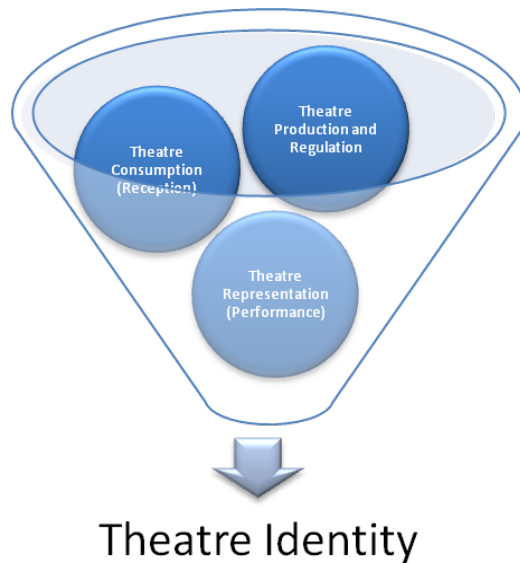


Figure 1. 3 Theatre Identity Model showing the distillation of production, performance and reception to form theatre identity

In social terms identity refers to a social category or a set of persons marked by certain features (James Feron 1999). The social category establishes rules written or unwritten which qualify or disqualify membership. However, identity is not only social, but a marker of objects whether natural or synthetic. Thus the American Heritage Dictionary defines identity as ‘the collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing is definitely recognisable or known’ (2000: on line). Transposing this definition into theatre, the term theatre identity is used in this study to refer to a collective of performances that share certain characteristics by which they are recognisable as alternative Zimbabwean theatre of the period 1980-1996.

A playtext on its own cannot be the prime determinant of theatre identity. This study breaks that tradition by analysing the whole chain of production in terms of the cultural system model based on the connection of a number of distinct processes. Instead of finding theatre identity in one of the elements, this study argues that it is a combination of processes that meaning can be investigated. In other words, how are theatre identities added and altered at the level of production – writing, publication and producing? How are theatre identities constructed and altered during the process of representation/performance – acting/performing, directing and designing? How are theatre identities constructed and altered at the level of consumption/reception – when the audience (critics, journalists etc) watches live theatre? A number of factors including, but not limited to theories, tradition, culture, politics and ideologies have the propensity to influence decisions that cultural

producers take at all the levels of the process. The performance text will be studied in tandem with other disciplines. The analytical procedure (methodology) does not contradict the theoretical framework which is also multi-disciplinary.

The semiotic approach is unavoidable when analysing performed theatre. Before the use of semiotics in performance analysis by the Prague School in 1931, drama and theatre were analysed from a literary perspective and as Elam puts it 'drama had become...an annexe of the property of literary critics' (1980: 5). From 1931 to the present moment the new approaches to performance analysis opened by the Prague School have attained a rigour and depth that have helped to establish theatre as an autonomous discipline. Having said that, I am not applying a full-blown semiotic approach to texts in the manner old semioticians have done in the past. Patrice Pavis (2003) has called the old approach 'classical semiotics' which he says has a number of problems. The first one is that it reduces signs to the smallest units and tends to end there without helping us to understand performance. The second one is that classical semioticians are bent on creating categories or systems of signs to constitute and apply to any performance and these categories are mostly based on western realist text-based performances which may not necessarily apply to non-literary text-based performances and non-western performances such as intercultural and syncretic plays of Africa, Asia and the Fourth World (Native Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders). The disadvantage of creating what Pavis calls a hit-list of categories of signs is that they serve to delimit and fix performance and 'they force us to think in ready-made, outdated categories that any avant-garde, or indeed any *mise-en-scene*, systematically calls into question' (2003: 15). From this point of view, I am deviating from classical semiology to utilise what Pavis has called 'socio-semiotics' which has resonances with both my theoretical framework and analytical procedure. Like postcolonial criticism and the culture process model, socio-semiotics is attentive to the context of production, performance and reception.

Dramatic Literary Text or Performance Text?

This study will proceed by way of reconstructing previous performances. This is important to this study in the sense that I analyse mainly four plays *The Honourable MP*, *The Wretched Ones*, *The Rain of my Blood* and *Mavambo* which were first performed and then published as dramatic texts. The actual performances have disappeared and only left a few traces in the form of drawings, prompt books, pictures and plays themselves that attempt to transcribe previous performances. I propose that both the dramatic text and the performance text are vital to the analyst.

There are difficulties that will be encountered in the sense that the productions cannot be restored in their entirety including the audience's aesthetic experience; when a performance has ended neither its aesthetic experience nor its living materiality can be accessed fully by the analyst. The written text, where it exists (as is the case in this research) is the only component of the performance that is available and enduring. All other elements of performance dissolve with the end of each performance since performed theatre is ephemeral and non-duplicable or non-persistent. The other components of performance, according to De Marinis (1993: 16) 'can be retrieved only partially, in varying degrees, according to the quality of traces left behind by the performance'. In terms of this research can the chosen texts be relied on as theatrical texts that transcode written language into another medium – the performance text? In other words, does the dramatic text contain its own staging, that is the performance that it will become and can the performance analyst recover the performance solely on the basis of a dramatic text? There have been varying and conflicting positions with regards to this question and I intend to take a panoramic view of those debates and suggest a way forward.

Throughout the 1960s through to the 1980s, scholars believed that a theatrical performance was an interpretant of a dramatic text. According to Fischer-Lichte (1992: 193-4), both Diderot and Lessing agree that the dramatic text's linguistic signs can be translated into theatrical signs without altering the meaning and intention of the dramatic text. De Marinis (1993: 18-68) cites Pagnini, Jansen, Knowzan and Gulli Pugliatti as endorsing the same claim that performance totally represents the dramatic texts. If this position is to be accepted, then it follows that the theatrical signs found in live theatre function as faithful carriers of the dramatic text's meanings without any chance of altering those meanings. As the dramatic text is transcoded to the performance level, all the cited scholars seem to suggest that the meanings do not generally change, although the performances acquire new signifiers. A dramatic text, according to this school of thought, is defined in terms of its ability to be transcribed from linguistic codes to another medium which is not the textual code. A dramatic text is simply elevated to the status of a performance text with no change of meaning. Regrettably, however, this approach has invariably favoured the promotion of the dramatic text as the all encompassing component that, in the absence of other ephemeral components, is totally representative of the performance text and the aesthetic experience.

Although De Marinis (1993), Fischer-Lichte (1992) and Pavis (2003) differ considerably with proponents of the written text, they seem to agree that under certain conditions, a performance may indeed be taken as an interpretant of a written text. While the idea of equivalence between the source text and the final performance text is inconceivable to Pavis, he suggests that when the director has chosen the diachronic method of transformation the magnitude of equivalence increases. Diachronic transformation resonates with what Fischer-Lichte (1992: 197) calls 'linear transformation' which is a method of creating *mise-en-scène* which follows the proposal offered by the dramatic text. While this is theoretically possible, Fischer-Lichte argues that linear transformation cannot be applied exclusively on its own to a dramatic text, but can be linked with other methods such as 'structural' and 'global transformation' (which I will discuss below) or what Pavis (2003) for the same term calls 'synchronic' transformation. As a dominant mode of transformation, Fischer-Lichte argues, linear transformation can determine the shape of the *mise-en-scène* and increase equivalence between the source text and final performance text.

De Marinis (1993) shares this position of the equivalence of the source text and the performance text (only under certain conditions). According to De Marinis, there are two ways in which equivalence can be achieved between a written text and its performance text. The first one is a condition suggested by Gulli Pugliatti (1976) who is cited by De Marinis (1993) as saying that the dramatic text is not a source text of performance, but is an intermediary record of a performance that already exists within a specific community's cultural text or 'general text'. In this sense, the dramatic text is not seen as the point of departure for the creation of the performance text, but it is taken as the '*a priori* metatext' (De Marinis 1993: 22) located halfway between the 'cultural text' of a community and the real *mise-en-scène*. The cultural text of a given community exists in unwritten form and incorporates diverse elements such as the circumstances surrounding theatrical realities – ideology, theatrical convention of the time, public taste, the very idea of theatre within that community, previous theatrical performances, aesthetic and non-aesthetic codes, among other things. For the reason that the cultural text exists before the writing of a play, it influences the choices and constraints of the playwright who in this case creates within the framework dictated by the cultural text. Following this line of thinking, the dramatic text is a '*virtual mise-en-scène*', a virtual/potential/ideal performance' (De Marinis 1993: 21-2) from which legitimate analysis of a performance may be carried out. In the absence of a performance, the dramatic text (since it contains stage directions and dialogue) 'when properly analysed it can best reveal to us (or "describe metalinguistically") the staged

performance(s) that it envisions or prescribes' (De Marinis 1993: 22). The dramatic text comes after the dictates of a cultural text that already exists beforehand within the cultural milieu before it is immortalised by a competent playwright. It is in this sense that the dramatic text is considered both an *a priori* metatext (beforehand) as well as the *a posteriori* metatext (afterward) with respect to its staging. This signals some equivalence between the dramatic text and performance text. However, having conceded this fact, De Marinis (1993) warns that this virtual performance can never contain the real concrete performance of a dramatic text.

De Marinis (1993) proposes the second condition (somewhat related to the virtual-real staging hypothesis above) under which a dramatic text can be depended on as a record of performance; he calls it the 'residue text'. Residue texts:

...constitute at least in part a *posteriori* metatexts, since they aim at verbally transcribing (especially, though not exclusively, through stage directions) a previous performance, an actual staging that has already taken place, thus distinguishing themselves from the usual transcription of a future performance. (De Marinis 1993: 23)

De Marinis (1993) depending on the research carried out by Viola Papetti gives us examples of three versions of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* written in 1623, 1670 and 1674. The three versions, De Marinis argues, were published after the respective productions as evidenced by extensive use of illustrations, drawings and other types of documentation on the theatrical sites of London during the seventeenth century. De Marinis also cites Guarino as arguing that Pierre Corneille's *Andromeda* (1650) is a residue text owing to the quantity and quality of its stage directions (very uncharacteristic of the playwright) which have been taken to constitute an account of a real production. The outlines or plot drafts (*scenari*) of the *commedia dell'Arte* are examples of the residue text. As opposed to dramatic texts that propose a *mise-en-scène* for the future, a residue text is a dramatic text that records a specific previous production and the playwright attempts to freeze the theatrical event through verbal transcription. As I argued at the beginning, the plays under study here *The Honourable MP*, *The Wretched Ones*, *Mavambo* and *The Rain of Blood* are examples of residue texts. There is a higher degree of equivalence between the dramatic text and the performance text.

Beyond the 'virtual *mise-en-scène* – real staging', 'residue text' and 'linear/diachronic transformation' hypotheses, scholars dispute the fact that a dramatic text contains its own

staging, that is, the performance it will become. As such performance analysts may not fully recover the performance solely on the basis of a dramatic text. Scholars like Pavis (2003), De Marinis (1993) and Fischer-Lichte (1992) belong to the coterie that believes that once a dramatic text has been transcoded from literary signs to visual and acoustic signs, the process is irreversible thereby making the performance text far different from the dramatic text. The irreversibility of theatrical transcoding results from the non-notational language in which the stage directions are recorded in the dramatic text (De Marinis 1993: 28). De Marinis depends on Goodman (1968) who asserts that in order for a language to be considered as a notational system it must possess five requirements: 'absence of ambiguity; syntactical disjointedness and differentiation; and semantic disjointedness and differentiation' (De Marinis 1993: 28). The dialogue of a play text, according to this definition of a notational system, would be considered a notational language, although this is possible only theoretically since the dialogue cannot record the grain, tessitura (range) and accent of the voice as well as gestures and other paralinguistic and non-verbal aspects of *mise-en-scène*. While the issue of fidelity cannot be achieved hundred per cent there is a high degree of equivalence between the written word and the spoken dialogue. Stage directions and descriptions/transcriptions of scenes and scenery meet none of the semantic requirements of notationality. After evaluating Stephan Brecht and Ivanov's systems of notation for theatre, De Marinis (1993: 68-74) concludes that the results, while constituting a tremendous leap forward, were far from successful and even goes on to say that actual transcriptions of entire performances are unheard of.

The other reason proffered to discredit the notion of equivalence between the source text and the performance text is the altering power of the creative collective – directors, actors and designers. Fischer-Lichte (1992) argues that every actor is unique in terms of physique and the cultural imprint on his/her body-mind. By this she means that actors are not made of the same material since their bodies are structured by nature and the symbolic order of a particular culture where they were raised. The valid acting code of that particular culture will also affect the way the dramatic text is going to be performed. For this reason, actors, directors and designers may not be taken as neutral subjects who can convey meaning proposed by the dramatic text without altering it. If this is to be accepted, it follows that an actor with a different physique, cultural imprint and acting code will play the same character from the same dramatic text differently.

Fischer-Lichte (1992: 198-9) deploys the term structural transformation to refer to the mode of creating *mise-en-scène* which initially depends on the reading and analysis of the dramatic text. Each actor uses the dramatic text to establish his/her motivations and through-line-of-action. The conception of space for individual scenes and for the whole play is derived from the dramatic text. However, when it comes to the actual enunciation of the play, choices are made on the basis of the body-text that each performer has through natural and cultural means and from the valid acting code. The choices that are being made may not necessarily correspond to the subtexts of the dramatic text. When designers use certain colours, costumes and lighting (no doubt not explicitly mentioned in the dramatic text) and directors come up with certain choreographic arrangements of performers, this underlying structure created by theatrical signs (and not literary codes) is then used to create and introduce changes. These changes are not derived from the dramatic text itself, but they result from conditions outside the dramatic text. They come from accidental discoveries on set and the cultural text which has a bearing on the staging of dramatic texts. When structural transformation has taken place, the performance text cannot be wholly reversed to create a dramatic text that looks the same as the one that inspired the performance. The two texts are not equal or equivalent.

Finally 'global transformation' (Fischer-Lichte 1992: 197) or 'synchronic' transformation (Pavis 2003: 203) is the most aberrant mode of all transformations which when used virtually destroys any link between the source text(s) and the resultant performance text. In this mode of transformation directors continue to rely on text(s) for creating *mise-en-scène*, however, the source text is not used in its entirety nor is its meaning assumed to be a given. Fischer-Lichte (1992: 200) argues that 'parts of the dialogue or even substructures are changed, shifted round or even omitted completely, not to mention the addition of new substructures'. In order to reinforce the meaning that would have been chosen by the creative collective (and not necessarily the meaning proposed by the dramatic text) actors and directors can uproot other text materials from different dramatic texts or other found texts. The intention, according to Fischer-Lichte (1992: 200), is to 'generate a meaning that does not arise from a concrete dramatic text, but stems from some other textual complex or context of life'. Pavis (2003: 205) having observed this mode of transformation argues that '*mise-en-scène* is an artistic practice that is strictly unforeseeable from the perspective of the text'. The text is chosen from different sources and is prepared independent of music, scenography and performance. The end of the theatre making process produces the final

mix with the dramatic text(s) as only one of a number of partial texts and according to Pavis (2003: 205) not enjoying 'an anterior or exclusive status'. As opposed to other modes of transformation the dramatic text can no longer centralise or organise other partial texts. A new text emerges at the end of the process which depends on absorbing other texts into its fold. For this reason the *mise-en-scène* has 'the sovereign power to decide on its aesthetic choices' (Pavis 2003: 205) and the resultant performance text lacks any causal relationship with the source text(s).

What then must analysis be attentive to- dramatic text or *mise-en-scène*? Considering the foregoing arguments, it is not fair to advocate for a blanket ban on analysis of dramatic texts nor is it enough to rely solely on the *mise-en-scène* as a full record of performance. The dramatic text may still be an important source of information especially where the creative collective relied on diachronic/linear and structural modes of transformation, although the dramatic text will be useless as a record of performance in the event of global/synchronic transformation. There should be no rule as to what analysis must be focused on. Each case must be dealt with on its merits using some of the following questions as guide: what method of transformation did the creative collective use? Did the dramatic text come as a result of a working process – is it a record of a performance? If the dramatic text was already written at the beginning of the working process, did the playwright revise it to add any new proposals that emerged through the efforts of the creative collective? If the answer is in the affirmative, the dramatic text can be acceptable, but only as part of the evidence of performance. As I have indicated above the *mise-en-scène* is non-persistent and unlike a novel or painting which are always present and lend themselves to repeated analysis, this persistence is entirely lacking in the *mise-en-scène*. The *mise-en-scène* can only be partially present through live performance (which dissolves thereafter), video recording and transcription. The last two methods can only produce part of the *mise-en-scène*, but cannot contextually reproduce the performance-in-situation. Live performance will only survive through transcription, which I have argued is not yet developed enough to cover all aspects of performance. A *mise-en-scène* is therefore unrepeatable and/or partially duplicable and cannot be reliable on its own as a record of performance. It appears that the *mise-en-scène* is always partially present (either in a dramatic text or in a retrieval system such as video or transcription) or absent. How then can it be restored for analysis? I go back to the position that I have postulated above that both the dramatic text and the partial *mise-en-scène* are important in contextual restoration. I take recourse to the pragmatic approach which

involves the two processes of co-textual and contextual analysis where the dramatic text, partial *mise-en-scene* and other external texts together help in creating the context within which the theatre event took place.

Structure of Study

Chapter 2: The Current State of Research on Zimbabwean Theatre and Performance

This chapter reviews books, journal articles, book chapters and theses that have been written on Zimbabwean theatre. It does so by dividing the scholarship in the area into three themes: (i) the shifting paradigm in theatre historiography and analysis (ii), indigenous and Africanist theories of theatre and performance, and (iii) critical trends in post-independence book chapters, journal articles and theses.

Chapter 3: Rhodesian Discourse, Power and the Field of Cultural Production

This chapter discusses the construction and dissemination of Rhodesian discourse during and after colonialism. It does so through recruiting cultural theory as adumbrated by Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams and Michel Foucault. This is a more general background study which contextualises the resistance that follows in the rest of the chapters.

Chapter 4: African Resistance to Rhodesian discourse in the Colony

Since postcolonial theory deals with how the present interacts with the colonial past, this chapter looks at that colonial past and how African dramatists, theatremakers and performers negotiated the strictures established by colonial authorities to create their own version of theatre. The chapter highlights the expression of African agency in a cultural and political environment that demanded compliance with colonial structures.

Chapter 5: Theatrical Conventions and Themes in Zimbabwean Performance

This chapter discusses the background to the period 1980-1996 by delineating the two theatrical conventions – the dramatic theatre convention enforced by the NTO and the African theatre convention enforced by ZIMFEP/ZACT. It then summarises the themes of seven selected plays as they respond to Rhodesian discourse still felt after independence in 1980.

Chapter 6: Zimbabwean Revisions of the Western Dramaturgical Frame and Psychological

Acting

Borrowing terminology from Erving Goffmann this chapter analyses Zimbabwean alternative theatre by looking at how theatre makers 'keyed' indigenous texts into the western dramaturgical frame resulting in the alteration of both the western frame and indigenous texts in a new creative space.

Chapter 7: Sites of Struggle: The Body and Song in Performance

The chapter looks at the actual execution of performances and demonstrates how western discourses on acting are problematised through song, dance and mime. The performance texts are constituted by both western and African staging techniques.

Chapter 8: The Politics of Language on the Zimbabwean Postcolonial Stage

This chapter notes that all the four plays under study employ mainly English as a medium of expression. However, this chapter views language as a site of struggle between purists and liberationists. Zimbabwean theatre makers deconstruct the English language by de-anglicising it through a number of linguistic strategies.

Chapter 9: The Dynamics of Reception of the Dramatic (Theatrical) text and Performance

While all the chapters so far have been discussing theatre from a production point of view, this chapter looks at the reception of theatre and theatrical texts between 1980 and 1996. Since plays that toed government line were well received, I chose to select two plays Dambudzo Marechera's *Mindblast* (1984) and Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* (1990) that contradicted official policy on theatre making. The chapter looks at how structures consolidated by the new government but inherited from the old one restricted the tastes of postcolonial audiences.

Chapter 10: Observations and Concluding Reflections

The chapter summarises the major points and comments on their implications for the future of Zimbabwean theatre.

CHAPTER 2: THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH ON ZIMBABWEAN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

Introduction

This literature review is divided into three themes: (i) 'The shifting paradigm in theatre historiography and analysis' (ii) 'indigenous and Africanist theories of theatre and performance', and (iii) 'critical trends in post-independence book chapters, journal articles and theses'. Under the first theme, I review all the nine books on Zimbabwean theatre that were written between 1968 and 1999. I critique the various approaches that the authors have deployed in writing Zimbabwean theatre history and theatre studies. Their approaches range from colonialist criticism, formalism, socio-historical criticism, sociology of theatre, Marxism and post-structuralism. While I acknowledge the strengths of the books, I also identify loopholes in critical approaches the authors have used and argue that Zimbabwe needs a comprehensive new theatre historiography which is written from the subaltern's perspective utilizing new paradigms that can best articulate theatre historiography in a post-colonial and post-cold war world.

Under the second theme, I discuss the theories of performance that were propounded by Stephen Chifunyise, Ngugi wa Mirii, Robert Mshengu Kavanagh and to some extent Kimani Gecau- theatre consultants that were hired by the new Zimbabwean government to develop and teach socialist theatre. My intention is to evaluate the extent to which these theories of performance impacted on the identity of alternative theatre of the period 1980-1996. The review of performance theories is both a contextual background and a launching pad for the analysis of plays in this study.

Finally, under the third theme I discuss book chapters, journal articles and theses on Zimbabwean theatre that were written after 1980. I delineate the various strands of theatre criticism to highlight areas of research that have been covered and areas that need further research. I argue that post-independence theatre criticism is characterised by four strands – residual colonialist criticism, historical revisionist criticism, feminist criticism and applied theatre criticism.

The Shifting Paradigm in Zimbabwean Theatre and Performance Historiography and Analysis

To date, nine books have been written on Zimbabwean theatre or some aspects of it. Four of them were written before independence: Charles Taylor (1968), George Maxwell Jackson (1974), George Kahari (1975) and Robert Cary (1975) while the last five books: Ranga Zinyemba (1986), Jane Plastow (1996), Robert Kavanagh (1997), Dale Byam (1999) and Martin Rohmer (1999) were written after independence. To my knowledge, two journal articles on Zimbabwean theatre were written before independence by Daniel Pearce (1977) and Christopher Wortham (1969). It is my intention in this subsection to identify and comment on the methods of theatre historiography and performance analysis employed by theatre historians and analysts. I argue that there is a shift from western bourgeois criticism characterised by colonialist criticism¹⁶ and formalism to several new paradigms which see theatre as a system of interrelating processes that eventually lead to a theatre event. I propose that Zimbabwe, and perhaps Africa at large, needs a comprehensive new theatre historiography which problematises colonialist and/or Eurocentric theories or some other segregationist paradigm, discourse or ideology.

Before independence in 1980, and for a short while after, Zimbabwean theatre historiography and theatre analysis was bourgeois in its orientation, that is, it has clearly drawn from Rhodesian discourse and in the case of theatre criticism – from western formalism.¹⁷ This is not the case though with some missionary authored articles like Daniel Pearce (1977). The first three theatre history books attest to this claim of Eurocentric ideological bias. Taylor's *A History of Rhodesian Entertainment* (1968) completely closes out any African performances. Taylor recounts Regimental Sergeant-Major Fleming King's knock about farce of 27 September 1890 as the very first entertainment ever to take place in

¹⁶ Chinua Achebe (1995: 57-61) uses colonialist criticism to refer to a critical fashion by Euro-Americans and their African protégés where western illusionistic theatre is used as the standard of evaluating African theatre. Chidi Amuta (1989: 18) argues that colonialist criticism is racially inflected and displays supremacist arrogance. Colonialist criticism views African theatre from an evolutionary perspective where it is developing towards a state of perfection- western dramatic theatre. It is hostile to African theatre that displays a definite commitment to challenging western imperialism.

¹⁷ I am using the term formalism to mean a method of analysis where meaning is derived from the text itself and not extra-textual material. The primary goal of analysis is to comment on the organic unity of a text- how its various parts contribute to the overall effect or meaning. The text is broken down into themes, characters, figures of speech (allegory, analogy, irony, sarcasm, satire, metaphor, metonymy, personification, simile, symbolism synecdoche etc), plot, setting etc and how these combine to create meaning. It is called New Criticism in USA and also resonates with French Structuralism (Fish and Perkins 2006)

Rhodesia. He goes on to follow theatrical developments between 1890 and 1930 in all the major towns – Bulawayo, Gwelo (Gweru), Umtali (Mutare) and Que Que (Kwekwe). Taylor attaches an appendix of 871 plays that were performed throughout the country including dates on which they were performed, casts and producers of those shows; and not a single African performance is included.

Robert Cary's *The Story of Reps* (1975), focuses on a single theatre company, the Salisbury Repertory Players (Reps) covering the period 1931 to 1975 and lists plays, casts and producers of various productions. By 1975, Cary had four novels to his name which Chennells (1996) labels as purveyors of Rhodesian discourse. This discourse is quite apparent in *The Story of Reps* (1975). Like Taylor (1968), Cary follows traditional western historiography where history is made by great personalities who intervene in human affairs to change the course of history. Cary follows the life of Lady Rodwell, the wife of the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, in the early chapters of the book and then follows the unfolding of events through such personalities as John Orton, Ken Towsey, George Barnes, Adrian Stanley etc leading to the construction of Reps theatre in Avondale. The publication reflects the beliefs and tastes of its intended diasporic European readership. The work does not mention the black experience in theatre and performance. As encouraged by the pervading Rhodesian discourse, black discourse was closed out both literally and metaphorically.

A much broader but equally Eurocentric book by George Maxwell Jackson *The Land is Bright* (1974) covers not only theatre but all the arts in colonial Rhodesia. It was initially written as a commissioned special report to the National Arts Foundation to evaluate the state of the arts in Rhodesia with some proposals for their development. Its contribution on the state of diasporic European arts such as ballet, music, literature, poetry, fine art, drama and arts festivals is invaluable. It devotes three chapters to theatre and festivals and reveals information that is valuable to any theatre historian – the theatres and concert halls that were built, drama, music and dance societies that were formed, institutional support, drama festivals and the role of municipalities in supporting the arts. Commissioned by a national board (National Arts Foundation) one would have thought that the book would be 'national' in nature. However, like the other theatre history books above its selective amnesia is glaring. It only records the activities of thirty-eight white theatre companies affiliated to the all white (ARTS) Association of Rhodesian Theatrical Societies which renamed itself National

Theatre Organisation in 1977. Jackson (1974) mentions in passing that there was an African Arts Festival held in Salisbury (Harare) during the months of October and November each year which entered plays published by the Rhodesian Literature Bureau. An average of twenty all black theatre groups entered the festival. The festival was run under the auspices of the African Affairs Department of the municipality of Salisbury (Harare) instead of the National Arts Foundation. However, for Jackson, this is where the story ends. The black theatre companies are not named nor are the plays that they performed whereas all thirty-eight white theatre companies are listed at the end as an appendix. Whereas we may intelligently guess which plays were performed (since the number of locally published plays was small by 1974) we may never know which theatre companies participated in the African festival. This is an important area of research.

A journal article written in 1969, *The State of Theatre in Rhodesia* by Christopher Wortham, whilst exclusively focusing on theatre, takes the same stance. It follows theatre productions in all the major cities of colonial Rhodesia and argues that diasporic Europeans were not interested in modernist plays. Even though the title is national in nature, there is no mention of theatre productions by Africans. Almost as an after-thought in the last paragraph of the article, Wortham (1969: 52) argues from an evolutionist perspective shared by Ruth Finnegan (1970) and Phyllis Hartnoll (1969) that African peoples of Rhodesia had their drama in embryonic form which would evolve into world dramatic literature over time. We now know through the efforts of Schechner (1994), Shepherd and Wallis (2004) Turner (1988) that the evolution theory in artistic development cannot stand up to serious scrutiny. Ritual and theatre lie on the same continuum and are not necessarily opposites.

White liberals, especially of the missionary type, did not share the ideology of their Eurocentric counterparts and often recorded African performances where they could find them. Father Daniel Pearce (1977) epitomises this group. Pearce documents plays that were staged at St Augustine's High School, an all-black school, where he was both a teacher and a missionary. Pearce remembers an all-African cast in a production of *Hamlet* in 1958 and another one which staged African *Macbeth* in 1961 under the direction of Adrian Stanley. Pearce's own play *A Credit to the Family* (1973) opened the University of Rhodesia Dramatic Society to black actors in 1973. In 1964, according to Pearce, a Whitby Sister produced John Kirkup's *True Ministry of the Passion* with St Augustine's students. Pearce himself directed *Charley's Aunt* in which Charles Mungoshi who was to become Zimbabwe's foremost writer

took part. Pearce concentrated on set plays for the Cambridge 'A' Level examinations and produced *The Rainmaker*, *The Browning Version* and *The Crucible*. He argues that the dramatic face in an African school must emphasise African values and settings while at the same time include material from other cultures. To this end he wrote and produced *Generation Gap* (1976/83). Pearce also recorded his involvement with about forty African drama students whom he coached at the annual Ecumenical Arts Workshop lasting over a week, usually at Waddilove Institute.

What is clear from the above publications is that with the exception of one article, they are all informed by Rhodesian discourse. If a theatre piece is not European, it is not theatre and therefore cannot be recorded in a history of theatre book. Even if the work is European in form and content, but is not produced by diasporic European cultural producers the work is equally disqualified from documentation as history. Thus the African experience is effectively written off in these publications. None of the above publications analyses any plays or performances at all. There is a tendency to list performances and follow the achievements of selected producers and/or directors by writing their biographies. I am not suggesting that this is insignificant – lists of performances and biographies of producers are extremely important, but as Hauptfleisch observes:

But one has to look at the processes involved- processes embedded in a larger, open-ended system of interacting sub-systems. And basic concepts of theatre need to be opened up, to incorporate far more than the old, conventional ideas about what constitutes theatre and drama, and what is involved in making it happen. (1997: 3)

It is in this sense that my research seeks to re-write theatre history by unthinking Eurocentrism and exploring other ways of thinking and interpreting evidence.

From 1975, there was a dramatic shift in theoretical paradigm and perspective from colonialist criticism practised by Taylor (1968), Jackson (1974), Wortham (1969) and Cary (1975) to socio-historical theory.¹⁸ George Kahari's *The Imaginative Writings of Paul Chidyausiku* (1975) is an embodiment of this analytical practice. The book, in the main, analyses Paul Chidyausiku's novels and his only play *Ndakambokuyambira* (1968), the first written Shona drama. Kahari extends the frontiers of formalist criticism by incorporating cultural history, sociology as well as the author's autobiographical details (1975: 6-7). While the analysis retains a formalist rigour by revealing the setting, plot, form, theme, structure,

¹⁸ For more information on the socio-historical theory see Fish and Perkins (2006).

language and how content determines the form of Chidyausiku's works, Kahari goes beyond formalism which views an artefact as self-contained and does not require the analyst to bring detailed contextual knowledge from outside the text. Kahari does so by employing the socio-historical theory to analyse texts. Kahari demonstrates that meaning does not exclusively reside in the artefacts, but also in their contexts. Thus in chapter 1 Kahari dwells on the interplay between oracy and literacy in Chidyausiku's works and in chapter 2 demonstrates how Chidyausiku's works are influenced by his life as a product of both traditional upbringing and western education.

Kahari uses his formalist knowledge to identify the form and style of Chidyausiku's works, but these recurrent motifs do not have all the answers to questions of meaning. Kahari uses elements of style such as theme, structure, plot and language as the initial means to gather further information from Shona culture and Chidyausiku's biography and then uses this information to unravel the meaning and significance of Chidyausiku's works. In other words, Kahari uses Chidyausiku's novels and play as objects and/or means of accessing broader contextual social trends that define Shona culture in the 1970s. At its worst, the socio-historical method of analysis becomes an exercise of linking Chidyausiku's works mechanically with orality, western influences and biography as well as explaining such influences. Indeed chapter 3 which incorporates the play *Ndakambokuyambira* does just that by discussing how works are composed, fashioned and what influences their form, style and function. However, how the relationships are played in real life and in the works is left to conjecture. Even though *Ndakambokumbira* was performed at the University of Rhodesia where George Kahari was lecturer, he does not analyse it as performance. He applies a literary paradigm, which however, is important as a departure from formalism. In this research I propose to shift the analytical paradigm to postcolonial theory which I hope will help to fill the gaps created by Eurocentric theories and discourses.

During the seventies, the liberation war intensified in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and it was ideologically and logistically backed by the communist eastern bloc. The practice of theatre, especially in freedom camps outside Zimbabwe and in liberated and semi-liberated zones in Zimbabwe, became radical by employing traditional performance practices during all-night vigils (*pungwes*). This radical theatre practice coincided with a world-wide revolution in the field of theatre research which expanded the traditional western notions of drama to theatre studies, cultural performance and performance studies. Notably influential,

especially in Zimbabwe, was the so-called 'radical paradigm' (Steadman 1985: 80-4) epitomised by the first book length analysis utilising a Marxist approach, *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa* which was presented as a PhD thesis in 1980, and was published in 1985 just a year after its author Robert Kavanagh was appointed as lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe. This radical paradigm did not effectively erase conventional western approaches to theatre criticism as evidenced by the publication of Ranga Zinyemba (1986) who plunged back into western formalistic criticism. I will return to the radical paradigm shortly after reviewing Zinyemba's book.

Zinyemba's publication is the first major book length work to come out of post independence Zimbabwe and the first to critique Zimbabwean produced plays from 1958 to 1984. He analyses fourteen plays spanning this period and this is no mean achievement.¹⁹ While he counters the racial and ethnic exclusivity of the foregoing works and argues for an African ethnic imperative from which contemporary Zimbabwean drama should grow, he is less successful in unthinking Eurocentrism. Zinyemba applies the bourgeois aesthetic of formalism to all the playtexts he examines. Zinyemba focuses on the formal elements of a play such as plot, theme and style and their complex interplay to generate meaning. The analysis is carried out without including the experiences of the playwright and the historical, cultural and political context and what they bring to bear on the playtext. The exclusion of historical, cultural and biographical material to the interpretation of a play is a condition that Fish and Perkins call 'autotelic' which they use to describe 'an autonomous work whose meaning is not dependent upon something external to itself, nor intending to assess a contextual reality beyond itself' (2006: 2). Zinyemba looks at all fourteen plays commenting on plot, structure, character and theme. Zinyemba's idea of the above concepts is derived from the Aristotelian concept of drama. It is not surprising that for a book that talks about Zimbabwean drama, the character, thematic and structural benchmarks are found in Shakespeare and other European plays from which he frequently draws examples and parallels. Even in chapter 1 where he tries to prove the existence of drama in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, he does so on the basis of western notions of drama. Like Wole Soyinka (1976), Zinyemba tries to demonstrate African equivalents of European drama in pre-colonial performances instead of perhaps arguing for a different conception of theatre in the African

¹⁹ Zinyemba, however, does not analyse white authored plays produced during the same period. The reason could be that the incumbent government withdrew all Rhodesian novels and plays from the public domain, therefore making it difficult to access them. I have personally not watched or read a single Rhodesian play, although Jane Plastow (1996) was successful in having access to some of them.

world of ritual and entertainment. Thus while the intentions are laudable, Zinyemba gets clogged in Eurocentrism. My point of departure is that this bourgeois aesthetic be challenged and reconfigured as its assumptions of drama and theatre prejudice Zimbabwean theatre productions that tend to employ in part non-western modes of performance.

Zinyemba discusses the fourteen plays according to the western categories of drama – liturgical/mystery plays, comedy, tragedy and political satire- and criticises those plays that do not fit neatly into those categories. Zinyemba's artistic sensitivity allows him to notice that most of the plays he has analysed are 'at worst melodramatic and artificial, and at best farcical, puny and domestic' (1986: 15); however he is prevented by formalist perspective from finding the answers outside the playtexts. He criticises the playwrights for lack of creativity, but as Chinyowa (2007a) demonstrates, it was censorship exercised by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau which prevented them from exploring more public themes and experimenting with different genres.

Returning to the radical paradigm of the 1980s, a new South African journal, *Critical Arts*, started in 1981 and identified its position as Marxist applying mainly Althusserian strategies. Although *Critical Arts* was not readily available in Zimbabwe owing to the international cultural boycott, Marxism had announced its emergence in cultural analysis in Southern Africa. Fay Chung and Emmanuel Ngara authored *Socialism, Education and Development: A Challenge to Zimbabwe* (1985) explaining how Marxism could be employed not only in theatre but throughout the education system of the country. Emmanuel Ngara (1986) was the first critic to deploy Marxist perspectives to analyse Zimbabwean theatre in a conference paper which was preceded by a book length study *Art and Ideology in The African Novel* (1985) and followed by another one *Ideology and Form in African Poetry* (1990). Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind* (1981) became available in Zimbabwe in 1987 through the Zimbabwe Publishing House (ZPH), a government publishing company. Marxist critical practice continued into the mid 1990s even after the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1990.

These works made an important contribution to the project of revising colonialist, formalist and liberal humanist critical practices which had dominated drama and theatre studies. For the first time, the Marxist critical practice criticised the West for being capitalist and indirectly or directly responsible for Africa's problems. Contextual material such as the class

character of the playwright, critic and the characters became available as sources of meaning of the playtext. The Marxist critics provide a rigorous assessment of the conjunction of class, race and activism as they play out in various plays.

On the other hand, Marxist analysis became a form of censorship which prescribed what writers could do and couldn't do. Playwrights could not afford to criticise society as they chose to, but according to particular ways dictated by the radical paradigm. The playwright, who must be socialist realist as opposed to critical realist (Udenta 1993, Onoge 1985), must not merely testify to the crisis of the society but must offer a precise class diagnosis of that society, where capitalism represented by the white settler community is the source of all problems. In this way, Marxism looked outside the society depicted in the play for the causes of problems and lacked self-introspection and reflexivity. These societal problems were not going to be solved by putting good people in positions of power and removing the bad ones; this in Marxist terms was just reformist moral effluvia. The real solution was in the liquidation of the capitalist state and the establishment of a socialist one where workers and peasants play a pivotal role in the revolution. The writer was supposed to be on the side of the people as asserted by wa Thiong'o:

What he (writer) can choose is one or the other side in the battlefield: the side of the people, or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics.
(Cited in Udenta 1993: iv)

When the peasant and proletarian classes undertake a revolution, they should be portrayed as heroes and imbued with a sense of hope and/or optimism.

Marxist critics were unsympathetic to any work that did not follow this schema. Thus we find Ngara (1986: 134) lashing out at Tsodzo and Musengezi's plays as 'not particularly inspiring as works of art' since the latter projects a corrupt politician in *The Honourable MP* (1983/4) who has betrayed socialism and the people who voted him into power. Similarly, Tsodzo's *Shanduko* (1983) presents a corrupt bureaucrat Tafi, a portrayal that Ngara perceives as not capturing the mood of the new period in Zimbabwe. Ngara contradicts himself when he shortly gives examples of corrupt politicians in real life. The same tone is noticeable in Kavanagh's analysis of four plays (*Shanti*, *Too Late*, *King Kong* and *No Good Friday*) where he painstakingly demonstrates how each of the plays should have been written for it to successfully explore the notion of revolutionary socialism.

After the demise of the radical paradigm in Zimbabwe, critical space in theatre and performance was immediately occupied by foreign scholars. This trend was due, among other things, to the paucity of locally trained theatre analysts in Zimbabwe.²⁰ During this period three books on Zimbabwean theatre and performance were published – Jane Plastow’s *African Theatre and Politics* (1996), Dale Byam’s *Community in Motion* (1999) and Martin Rohmer’s *Theatre and Performance in Zimbabwe* (1999) which I now review for their theoretical approach and the gaps they open for my study. Plastow’s work is a comparative study of Ethiopian, Tanzanian and Zimbabwean theatre and thus takes a similar regional dimension as Byam’s book which backgrounds Zimbabwean theatre analysis by exploring similar experiences in Botswana, Zambia, Nigeria and Kenya. The central focus of Plastow’s book is the seminal relationship between theatre, society and politics. She sees the development of theatre and drama against the background of centuries of cultural evolution and interaction, from pre-colonial times, through phases of African and European imperialism, to the liberation struggles and the present post-independence experience. Plastow castigates other foreign academics for studying African texts in isolation from the cultures in question and sets, as one of her objectives, to study both texts and the cultural contexts. In this, she succeeds and her work has to be credited for introducing the sociology of theatre to theatre analysis in Zimbabwe. Plastow chronicles productions of theatre in Zimbabwe from pre-colonial times to about 1992 when her study ends. This is an enormous task which while rich in history runs the risk of giving skeletal analysis of plays. Her analysis is not focused on a few selected plays (like Rohmer 1999 and Kavanagh 1985) for purposes of achieving depth, but on every play she could lay her hands on. The result is that she gives an excellent historical account, sometimes substantiated with dates of performances and theatre companies that performed such plays, while at the same time paying lip service to the analysis of plays themselves as dramatic texts or as performances. Her objective of setting out to research the process of western cultural invasion and to explore the way in which links between indigenous performance forms and western drama subsequently developed only succeeds on a thematic level but fails in the area of performance. This is on account of the massive number of plays she has chosen to look at which does not allow her to go beyond the dramatic text despite her declared intention to avoid ‘the overwhelmingly

²⁰ The University of Zimbabwe Theatre Arts department was opened in 1992 and became a standalone fully fledged unit in 1993 comprising three foreign lecturers: Robert McLaren, Peggy Harper, Fani Kayode Omoregie and later in the process Owen Seda, a Zimbabwean scholar. I was in the pioneering class of 1992 and am the first in that class to study Zimbabwean theatre at doctoral level.

literature-based' (1996: 1) approach. The focused analysis of a few selected plays is an area my study hopes to explore, an approach previously adopted by Martin Rohmer with commendable success.

However, the sociology of theatre approach which Plastow uses, while a welcome departure from colonialist criticism and formalism, limits the various ways meaning(s) can be derived from Zimbabwean performances. Both Plastow and Byam are implicated. They both apply the sociological approach that can be described by Vambe's phrase- 'the dominant thesis paradigm' (2005: 89). In this approach the context of theatre production is imbued with extraordinary powers that deny theatre makers the ability or agency to resist the absolute power of structure. After enumerating pre-colonial forms of theatre in Zimbabwe, Plastow demonstrates that they were, during colonialism, suppressed and structured by both the state and the church. Relying on the Marxist writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Plastow portrays western imperialism as a cultural bomb whose effect was to annihilate African languages, cultural environment, heritage, unity, capacities and potentialities. She argues in absolute terms:

There is little information available on just how the settlers effected an obliteration of traditional cultures so complete that many local instruments became obsolete, rituals were often abandoned, and Ndebele cultural practices in particular were all forgotten (1996: 73).

This suggests a dominant thesis paradigm which negates the resistance of the colonised, an approach that is similar to Veit-Wild (1993) and Chiwome (2002) for which they are criticised by Vambe (2005). When writing about Zimbabwean theatre between 1965 and 1980, Plastow observes that most of the published plays imitated the western theatrical canon. Thus western culture is portrayed as the chief maker and shaper of African theatre. This is only partly true since there were spaces of resistance within those texts which I will demonstrate in the ensuing chapters. A black discourse was only closed from the sight of urban whites, but continued in overt or covert forms in black reserves and townships. The dominant thesis paradigm also permeates literary studies.²¹ This is a gap my study intends to fill.

²¹ A cursory study of criticism reveals this dilemma in Shona literary criticism. Emmanuel Chiwome (2002, 2007) has carried extensive studies of Shona Literature from 1956 to 2000 using the dominant thesis paradigm. He discusses the influence of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau (the gatekeeper of Rhodesian discourse), politics, western education and missionaries on Shona writing. Even though he suggests that African cultural nationalists wanted to 'preserve their heritage' through recourse to writing, that quest, in the ultimate form of each Shona novel written, was defeated by missionaries

Byam (1999) appropriates the same dominant thesis paradigm approach in chapter 1 and then follows the growth of Theatre for Development in Botswana, Zambia and Nigeria in chapter 2. Chapter 3 and the penultimate chapter then focus on Zimbabwean community theatre. This book does not have any clearly defined aims and objectives against which its successes or failures can be evaluated. It seems to focus on Theatre for Development (TfD), but when it shifts to Zimbabwe its focus turns to community based theatre (CBT). It is not quite clear whether Byam is using the two descriptive epithets- CBT and TfD synonymously. Even though Byam offers a comprehensive history of ZACT, she does not, in the fashion of Plastow and Rohmer, analyse any plays or performances of ZACT affiliated theatre groups. The book chronicles the birth of ZACT and follows its development up to the mid 1990s in largely 'untheorised' and uncritical way. Byam follows ZIMFEP as ZACT's antecedent, the birth of ZACT, its philosophy, policy-making, organisational structure, its training ethos, funding and its conscientisation programmes. Even if the book is on community theatre, Byam writes off the NTO as a colonial left-over even though nearly fifty of the community based theatre groups were affiliated to the NTO and received funding and training from it. The book is therefore unrepresentative of the whole community theatre movement in Zimbabwe despite its implied national approach. Of the three books written after the radical paradigm era, Byam's contribution is the most problematic and least theorised. Its greatest achievement, however, is the documentation of the African experience in theatre and performance which previous colonial studies virtually ignored.

Martin Rohmer wrote his book after having read Plastow's book in manuscript form (1999: 6) and he therefore departs from its sociology of theatre approach to a post-structuralist one. This is the first book ever to successfully analyse Zimbabwean theatre and performance using post-structuralism. Post-structuralism, despite the misnomer of the term 'post' utilises structuralist semiotic approaches. In explaining how meaning is articulated the structuralist describes and evaluates the sign system used and reflected in the theatre piece. However, this semiotic approach of a classical nature is like formalism and sociology of theatre, positivist in the sense that it segments performance into its constituent parts and tries to

who superimposed their moral evangelising mission. He rightly points out that modern Shona literature is a site of struggle, but a struggle where Shona sensibilities are defeated and give way to the whims of missionaries and colonialists. After everything is considered, he concludes that this process 'led to a narrow focus on domestic conflict. The literature is thus characterised by silences even in the postcolonial period' (2007: 159).

find meanings within the performance text itself and tends to end there without making us understand theatre. Rohmer avoids this pitfall by relying on the findings of Guido Hib (1993) who argues that it is possible to operate with structuralist arguments but without identifying with the consequences of that school. Hib (1993: 155) proffers three elements that he suggests should be appropriated for purposes of performance analysis, which Rohmer deploys in his study- *historizitat* (historical awareness), *flexibilitat* (flexibility) and *explizitat* (explicitness). In this regard Rohmer proceeds to analyse five performances in their proper cultural, political and historical contexts. While using structuralist tools (semiotics) to break down performance for analysis, he goes beyond the texts themselves to unravel how cultural and political history influences the course of the theatrical event. The breaking down of performance into its constituent parts is what Hib calls explicitness while flexibility is achieved when an analyst realises that each performance text has its own centre of gravity and its own individual micro context. This micro context shouldn't be overshadowed by the macro context.

While analysing the five performances, Rohmer also seeks to establish the hierarchy of semiotic signs in each performance. He borrows the term 'dominant sign' from Erika Fischer-Lichte (1988) to designate a theatrical sign that is superior to all others with regards to its density, frequency and characteristic use especially at important moments in the play. Having looked at all the five plays *Animal Farm* (1993), *Dabulap* (1992), *Township Poverty* (1993), *Zvakamuwanawo* (1993) and *Mhondoro* (1993), Rohmer concludes song, dance and mime are dominant theatrical signs in Zimbabwean theatre and performance.

Rohmer dwells on the cultural historiography of song and dance in Zimbabwe and then proceeds to document the institutional history of theatre organisations as well as their ideological underpinnings and how those in turn reflected on theatre performance itself. Rohmer does not project the performers as objects lacking agency; he writes the analysis from their perspective, but managing to establish commendable scholarly distance, an issue he claims is lacking in Kavanagh (1988), Chifunyise (1988) and wa Mirii (1988) for which he castigates them. However, this feigned neutrality is the major challenge of the book in the sense that he relatively (compared to Plastow 1996 and Byam 1999) underplays the unequal power relations between the residual bourgeoisie theatre and alternative theatre and how these power relations play themselves in theatre production. This is the tendency with post-structuralist theories that are deployed in countries with a (neo)colonial background. It is in

this sense that I propose the application of postcolonial theory which I view as more historically located and appropriate in analysing alternative Zimbabwean theatre.

Indigenous and Africanist Theories of Theatre and Performance: Stephen

Chifunyise, Ngugi wa Mirii and Robert Mshengu Kavanagh

Stephen Chifunyise's academic papers (1994, 1997) do not articulate in any meaningful way his vision of a new Zimbabwean theatre. It is, however, in his speeches (as director of arts and crafts and later as permanent secretary in Zimbabwe's ministry of education, sport and culture), newspaper articles and training manuals, that he clearly adumbrates the characteristics of what he calls the new 'national theatre' (1988: 40). Whereas during the colonial era theatre was clearly divided into binary oppositions – black theatre and white theatre (although there were a few exceptions) Chifunyise advocates for a non-racial culture in which 'the themes of our national theatre should be non-racial' (1988: 40). Black theatre artists could work on their own or with what Ndema Ngwenya calls 'progressive whites' (1988: 13) or inversely whites could work on their own or with black artists to create a new national theatre. According to Chifunyise (1986, 1988) in this new national theatre, the old colonial labels of black/white theatre and English/vernacular theatre are ridiculous and irrelevant. For this reason Chifunyise deplors the practice of high art which accentuates racial divisions by creating theatre for an elite audience (mostly whites) dealing in imported themes. Chifunyise argues that this western theatre practice consolidates cultural imperialism (1986, 1988) and government would intervene by withdrawing financial support.²²

Whereas Chifunyise pushes for an integrative approach where all ethnicities and races work together to create a national theatre, Ngugi wa Mirii prefers isolationism where the working class and peasants who, because of their historical circumstances, are in the main black, work towards fighting the unfair labour practices of the middle and upper classes. For this reason the 250 theatre companies that were either members or associates of Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatre (ZACT) were not allowed to join the National Theatre Organisation (NTO) which wa Mirii viewed as representing 'cultural imperialism' (Byam 1999: 125). On the other hand whites could join ZACT on ZACT's terms, a move which wa

²² This political comment was not carried out entirely during the period as by 1986 of the \$60 000 made available to support the arts through the National Arts Foundation (changed to National Arts Council in 1987 through an act of parliament) a meagre \$ 5 000 went to black arts organisations that emerged after independence (Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988: 14).

Mirii thought was impossible as doing so would be tantamount to committing what he called 'class suicide' (Byam 1999: 125).

As a result of this isolationist stance, wa Mirii developed a linguistic purism in his theatre philosophy characterised by the exclusive use of either Shona or Ndebele (Byam 1999: 117, wa Mirii 1988). Depending on Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1981) wa Mirii argues that language is a carrier of culture and therefore African languages will best carry the weight and depth of African people's experiences. Wa Mirii's very first project in September 1982 after migrating to Zimbabwe was a staging of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo' *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* in Shona at Penga Penga Growth Point and subsequently throughout the country. In all of Ngugi wa Mirii's subsequent theatre workshops, he underscored the need to write and perform in African languages (Chronicle Reporter 1986: 7).

Chifunyise and Kavanagh share an opposition to art for art's sake and are believers in the functionality of theatre. Unlike theatre which celebrates the perfection of the form of the playwright's craft and which deals with individuality and privatist themes such as Dambudzo Marechera (1984), Chifunyise and Kavanagh lobby for a theatre that is politically engaged and is preoccupied with social and national problems with a Marxist-Leninist ideological inclination. They call this theatre 'revolutionary theatre' (Chifunyise and Kavanagh (1988: 2) that is based on 'a philosophy that is rooted strongly in socialism- a philosophy which dictates that theatre should be a tool for political and ideological development' (Chifunyise 1986: 15).

This ideological inclination is shared by other theatre consultants, Ngugi wa Mirii, and Kimani Gecau.²³ In a joint paper 'Processes for Creating Community Theatre' (1983) wa Mirii and Gecau are unambiguous about their ideological perspective; they call for a theatre that is on the side of the working class and peasants. In that theatre, the director is not a hero; neither should the creative process include a single main character that defeats the antagonist while other supporting characters watch the hero helplessly. Wa Mirii (1988: 40) argues that 'the people's theatre must project the peasants and workers as the true creators of history and

²³ Although Kimani Gecau initially came from Kenya as a theatre consultant working under the auspices of Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP) he got a job as lecturer in the English Department of the University of Zimbabwe and withdrew all his services from theatre. He therefore did not write and practice theatre as much as the other three consultants.

wealth'. He goes further to posit the view that 'people's theatre should portray the peasants and workers with human dignity, courage, determination and ability to deal with social reality as opposed to the way they are presented as fools, drunks, irresponsible, violent, lazy and unproductive' (ibid). Chifunyise and Kavanagh (1988: 1-2) and Kavanagh (1985: xiii-xv) express a similar view of theatre which is attributable to Marxism, a theory all the four theatre consultants unequivocally draw from.

The agency that Chifunyise, Kavanagh, wa Mirii and Gecau suggest should be given to peasant and proletarian characters is derived from Karl Marx's 'historical materialism' (1859: 328-9). Thus in the plays influenced by the four theatre consultants, it is the peasants and the workers who are the true creators of history through challenging their exploiters after first realising that the status quo is unsustainable.

In terms of performance, Chifunyise proposes a post-independence non-Eurocentric aesthetic which utilises indigenous partial texts as its backbone. This is an aesthetic which Ezekiel Mphahlele (1974: 47-53) called the 'ethnic imperative'. In literary production the ethnic imperative is known variously as 'Africaneity' (Gugelburger 1985), 'Afrocentric liberationist' (Chinweizu *et al* 1980), 'Negritudism' (Cesaire 1939) while in theatre it has been referred to as Ogunist-traditionalist or 'ritual theatre' (Soyinka 1976) and in the Caribbean islands as 'theatre of exuberance' or 'theatre of assimilation' (Balme 1999). As can be seen from these different descriptors of the 'ethnic imperative' there is no agreement on what constitutes this aesthetic practice. Two categories which are porous and fluctuating can be created to explain the practice of these groupings.

The first group can be labelled Afrocentrists or as they are pejoratively described by Soyinka 'neo-Tarzanists' denoting those who uphold African pre-colonial cultural purity. These are represented by the troika of Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1980), who like the revolutionary realist-Negritudist Aime Cesaire (1939) are preoccupied with the sovereignty, harmony and glory of pre-colonial African theatre practices and aim to engage (neo)colonialism by denying its cultural dominance. If there is to be syncretism with colonial cultural practices, 'such synthesis must be within the parameters of the African tradition rather than outside it' (Chinweizu *et al* 1980: 239). In other words, colonial theatre practices will be inscribed within the African theatre matrix for purposes of modernising and revitalising tradition. The overarching desire of this group is not integration into the fold of

world theatre, but the formation of an autonomous entity that is separate from all other theatre practices.

Gugelberger calls the second group 'Ogunist critics' or 'pseudo-traditionalists' (1985: 12) represented by Wole Soyinka and Dambudzo Marechera. Like the Afrocentrists, they rely on tradition for their performative idiom but write and create theatre in the tradition of European modernism. Instead of being politically engaged and dwelling on nationalist public themes like the first group, the pseudo-traditionalist are individualists who write on private and obscure themes and that is why Chinweizu et al hit back by labelling them 'Euro-modernists bent on the cultivation of obscurantism' (1980: 208-9). Admittedly, these two categories are merely theoretical and most theatre groups who use the 'ethnic imperative' approach (and they are many) are situated between these two extremes.

Chifunyise's theatre philosophy is located between these two aesthetic camps. He maintains that the performative idiom of national theatre must be based on 'the people's visual and performing arts which should become the major feature of their theatre' (Chifunyise 1986: 15). In other words, the cumulative use of indigenous partial texts should result in them becoming dominant in the theatre. Chifunyise is aware of the importance of western theatrical heritage and advocates for its use in unison with indigenous partial texts especially where theatre making is structured around the concept of drama as it is defined in this thesis.

In this regard, Chifunyise proposes two ways of creating theatre. The first proposal is centred on the concept of dramatic theatre. Here, the theatre maker takes recourse to writing drama following Aristotelian principles but incorporates song and dance at strategic points as summarised in Chifunyise's training manual.

- In every break in the play
- At change of scenes/acts
- To create an atmosphere/location/cultural environment or indicate progression of time
- To bring life into the play
- To explain or expand the theme of the play/remind the audience of the message/hidden theme
- To involve or awaken the audience
- To begin or end the play/rejuvenate it/help to create impact (Chifunyise 1986: 35)

In this approach, the matrix of performance is western and indigenous partial texts are inscribed within that matrix, and they alter the western dramaturgical frame while indigenous partial texts are themselves equally altered.

Chifunyise's second proposal can aptly be described as 'de-dramatisation' of theatre in the sense that he attempts to move away from the primacy of the written text (which implies death of the playwright and the ascendancy of the director in the creative process) to a type of theatre that utilises the body as the nucleus of performance or as he puts it as 'the most critical tool in creating theatre' (Chifunyise 1997: viii). Chifunyise describes this theatre as 'dance-drama' although the term itself is a misnomer in the sense that in actual performance of this theatre, drama is almost dead. Dialogue is minimal and where it is used it is not intended to be constructed around the Aristotelian notion of plot. Instead the theatre maker creates a performance through dance, song, music, mime, chants, ululation, recitals and movement (Chifunyise 1986: 36). According to Chifunyise, traditional songs, dances and ceremonies, rallies, recitals and festivals could be brought to the stage as they are and then rearranged for coherence and order. This seems to resonate with the Caribbean theatre of exuberance or theatre of assimilation proposed by Errol Hill (Balme 1999: 44). Since Chifunyise believes in the functionality of theatre and its ideological impact, he proposes that the songs and dances chosen by the theatre maker should depict the interests of peasants and workers. Alternatively, Chifunyise (1986: 36-7) proposes that the songs and dances could be used out of their original contexts by changing the words and inscribing new ones to an existing melody. The traditional dances could be re-choreographed to suit the new needs of the director.

Like Chifunyise, wa Mirii who had developed a similar type of theatre at Kamiriithu in Kenya together with Kimani Gecau and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, pitches a type of theatre that deploys dance, song, mime and gesture as according to him this represents the 'only genuine direction for a true Zimbabwean theatre' (1988: 40). This ethnic imperative is a position shared by Gecau (wa Mirii and Gecau 1983: 1-5) and Kavanagh (1997: 74-103). Kavanagh (1997) devotes a whole chapter 'A More Expressive Theatre' to explain how song, dance, mime and poetry can be incorporated in a typical people's theatre.

None of Chifunyise's plays that were written and published in Zimbabwe demonstrates this theory exhaustively. It is in the plays of his colleagues and friends (wa Mirii, Kavanagh and

Mujajati) that such a theory of performance is demonstrated. I asked Chifunyise if he preached what he could not practise and he indicated that his plays *The Retired Ones* (1979) and *Mr Polera* (1978) (unpublished) which he wrote while still exiled in Zambia typified his performance theory. These plays were brought to Zimbabwe by Kanyama Theatre, a Zambian theatre company that Chifunyise worked with while in exile that ZACT hired in 1985 for a two month period to teach Zimbabwean artists by example. He further maintained that since 1971 when he started writing for the University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UZAMDRAMAS) and Matero Boys Secondary School in 1973, he featured music and dance as the vehicle of dramatic structure in most of his plays. These include *Mwazona* (n.d), *Who Will Dance* (n.d), *Story of Mankind* (n.d), *The Slave Caravan* (n.d) and *Kachipapal* (n.d) up to 1981. In Zimbabwe during the period 1980-1996 Chifunyise told me that he wrote plays that were performed by Glen Norah Women's Theatre, Rooftop Promotions, People's Theatre Company, Mount Pleasant High School, Alternative Savannah Theatre and Zvido Theatre Company, that includes *Temporary Shelter* (n.d), *Farai* (n.d) and *My Piece of Land* (n.d). All of them featured song and dance²⁴ (Chifunyise 2011).

Whereas in colonial Rhodesia the arts were compartmentalised by using different venues for each so that orchestra and opera used concert halls such as Courtauld Hall, choral societies performed at the Civic Theatre in Harare that was not a theatre space, while drama was performed in properly designed theatres such as Reps theatre, Chifunyise advocates for a national theatre that would utilise most of the creative arts. To this day he encourages theatre groups to work with dance, choral song groups as well as church choirs, military and police bands to create some kind of total theatre. However, Chifunyise argues that the dominant sign system should be chosen by the director and not imposed by his theatre convention:

It is good, for example, to determine whether you will heavily be using dance drama and therefore develop excellence in dance, song, choreography, etc. If you want to specialise in dialogue drama it is up to you to then develop theatre skills related to dialogue drama, e.g. movement, mime, etc. (1986: 37)

From the above evidence Chifunyise is proposing a performance theory that seeks to 'de-dramatise' theatre by recourse to non-plot based performance modes such as dance, song, chants and other indigenous partial texts. This theory seeks to secularise performance by

²⁴ I triangulated these claims and found out that Byam (1999) and Munyaradzi Chatikobo (1994), indeed, recorded these performances as having taken place and performed with much song and dance.

taking ceremonies, festivals, rituals and supplications from their religious contexts into theatre for their spectacle and aesthetic quality. Chifunyise seeks to revolutionise 'acting' (as it is known in western psychological realism) and transform it into performance where a multi-dimensional character is not the goal, but a body performing in real time is preferred. By bringing in music, dance and song, Chifunyise seeks to 'ceremonialise' theatre. These partial texts are taken from their religious contexts and put to use in the secular performance where they are valorised for their aesthetic quality. Here the body is the central theatrical sign of performance. Theatre no longer imitates action, it is the action itself. Theatre becomes a public action or an event rather than a mimesis of the fictive world as is the case with Aristotelian theatre.

It was these ideas and theories of performance propagated by Chifunyise, Kavanagh, wa Mirii and Gecau which were the driving force that gave shape and direction to much of the Zimbabwean theatrical output during the period 1980-1996. As I will discuss at length in chapter 5, the National Theatre Organisation that was predominantly white in its early days controlled 20 per cent of the community theatre movement (about fifty black theatre companies) and also offered training to them based on mostly Eurocentric approaches. This research therefore seeks to evaluate the impact of such contending theories of performance on theatrical output of the period. Other studies (Byam 1999, Rohmer 1999, and Plastow 1996) are interested in the historiography of ZACT and NTO. This study seeks to fill the gap by analysing how that contextual theatricality has impacted on the identity of the resultant theatre of the 1980 to 1996 period.

Critical Trends in Post-independence Book Chapters, Journal Articles and Theses

Post-independence theatre in Zimbabwe can be described by looking at the nature of theatre practice. Stephen Chifunyise (1994) looks at trends in Zimbabwean theatre since 1980 and notices two trends. The first strand is that of white European theatre that recruited a number of black theatre clubs in order to continue to get funding from the new government, while at the same time refusing to change its Eurocentric orientation. The second strand is comprised of black and multi-racial theatre groups which Chifunyise argues derived its style from indigenous performance and the theatre of the liberation struggle. Chifunyise then groups forty plays according to their thematic preoccupations: plays dealing with gender issues and plays expressing workers and peasants' aspirations. Preben Kaarsholm (1994) creates the same categories but adds a third one – plays dealing with

development, which is essentially Theatre for Development (TfD). Post-independence theatre criticism has also followed the way theatre was practised. Thus we see the residual colonialist criticism supporting the values of white European theatre, though less frequently, through journal and newspaper articles (Tony Weare 1982). There is also a revisionist strand of criticism which counters colonialist criticism (Kaarsholm 1994, 1999; Chifunyise 1997, Chinyowa 2001, wa Mirii 1999). A third strand of theatre criticism with a strong feminist orientation developed due to the importance of gender in the last thirty years (Globerman 1994, Chitauro *et al* 1994, Seda 2001, Chivandikwa 2009, Zenenga 2004). Finally, there is a functionalist form of criticism which looks at community theatre performances as Theatre for Development and this group is led by Chinyowa (2005, 2007b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b), Zenenga (2005), Kavanagh (1994) among others. I now review these forms of criticism.

Just as Rhodesian discourse continued after independence, colonialist theatre criticism persisted in Zimbabwe. In a clear case of selective amnesia even in a new political context that required a new sensitivity, Tony Weare (1982) begins his documentation of Zimbabwean theatre from 1 July 1890 when the Pioneer Corps left South Africa for Zimbabwe, but does not include any African theatre. Weare gives a detailed account of the development of theatre, music and dance societies in each of the new towns and cities. He argues that 'theatre is not traditional to the African way of life' (1982: 67) although he appears to remember a nameless African musical written and performed by Africans, but directed by Adrian Stanley at Reps Theatre.²⁵ Although Weare had a son working with an all-African cast since 1974 in Sundown Theatre Company together with John Haigh, this piece of history is not important to colonialist criticism. This residual colonialist criticism was prevalent in newspaper columns controlled by white theatre critics (Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988, Granger 1986). Sheila Cameron (2008: 172-204) has written a whole chapter on the issue of 'discourse in theatre' in Zimbabwe which looks at white theatre critics and their utterances in newspapers as well as a counter-discourse by black critics responding to the white utterances.

²⁵ I think Weare is referring to Arthur Chipunza's *Svikiro* (1978/82) [My Spirit Sings] since Adrian Stanley did not direct any other known African authored play. The other play that Adrian Stanley directed which featured an African cast was *African Macbeth* in 1961, but it was simply translated from Shakespeare and not written by an African playwright (see Holland 1982).

The historical revisionist school emerged to counter Eurocentrism and omissions of colonialist theatre criticism. However, within this revisionist school, there are special interest groups interested in Shona drama, Ndebele drama and Greek drama. The leading figure in this revisionist school is Stephen Chifunyise. In a chapter that appeared in the *World Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Theatre* (1997: 355-70), Chifunyise's history of theatre, unlike other accounts of Zimbabwean theatre, begins from the birth of the Zimbabwean nation in the 5th century AD. Chifunyise demonstrates the existence of theatre and performance in pre-colonial times by discussing indigenous texts such as *mahumbwe* [child games], storytelling, praise poetry and dance dramas. Where colonialist criticism is silent about African theatre, Chifunyise recounts the works of College Drama Association which produced second generation playwrights like Ben Sibenke and Thompson Tsodzo. Chifunyise discusses the cultural activities of African drama associations from all provinces in colonial Zimbabwe and their participation in the annual Neshamwari Festival from the 1960s. His account also comments on the works of six post-independence African and multi-racial theatre companies: The People's Theatre Company, Amakhosi, Zambuko/Izibuko, Young Warriors Theatre Company, Glen Norah Women's Theatre, Rooftop Promotions and Savannah Arts.

Preben Kaarsholm (1994) is interested in the theatre of the liberation struggle and how it developed into post-independence theatre. Where colonialist criticism is silent about African resistance through theatre, Kaarsholm takes a panoramic view of liberation camp theatre and reveals the tensions between 'traditionalists' and 'modernists' and how this tension was to replicate itself in the post-independence era. Kaarsholm then moves to the post-independence period and comments on the emergent theatre of Dambudzo Marechera and Andrew Whaley. He then follows Robert McLaren's plays which were to enchant researchers during the first sixteen years after independence. In his book chapter on culture and politics in Bulawayo, Kaarsholm (1999) follows the development of African townships in Bulawayo from 1893 including African performances. Touching on an area of performance history not covered anywhere in Zimbabwean theatre studies, Kaarsholm argues that culture during colonial times became a site of struggle as African cultural associations such as Bulawayo Football Association and African Welfare Society refused to be controlled by the Bulawayo Municipality. The municipality responded by forming its own parallel African performances such as Bantu Brass Band, African Choral Society and African Eisteddfod Association which organised annual cultural festivals. The African Eisteddfod sponsored ethnic dancing, jiving

and ballroom dancing. These were performed in beer gardens, although from 1937 the activities moved to Stanley Hall and in 1957 to Macdonald Hall. Kaarsholm (1999) recounts that, amongst the Bulawayo youths, there was a structure of feeling to re-traditionalise culture. This began in 1964 when the annual Youth Week was launched. Youth clubs produced drama, re-enactment of African weddings, dances of warriors and coronations. According to Kaarsholm one of the youths at the time was Rev Osias Mkosana who in 1957 produced two highly successful plays *uSikhwili* [The Grudge] and *Ngiyalunga* [I am Doing Well] and set up an African Drama Society in the townships. Thus revisionists record and analyse African performances ignored by colonialist criticism and in this case Kaarsholm focuses on Ndebele theatre.

Kennedy Chinyowa, imbued with a strong African languages and literature background, also revises colonial theatre history from a Shona-centric perspective. Employing the cultural relativism theory, Chinyowa (2001) challenges Eurocentric accusations that there was no drama in Africa before African-European contact. He argues for African conceptions of drama by analysing two Shona ritual performances – *mukwerera* [rain making ceremony] and *kurova guva* [bringing home ceremony]. He argues that efficacy and dramatic entertainment are intertwined in Shona ritual drama. Chinyowa (2004) in his book chapter 'Shona storytelling and the contemporary performing arts in Zimbabwe' discusses dramatic elements in storytelling. The revisionist school tends to be a little forceful and combative to correct the inconsistencies, inaccuracies and omissions inherent in colonialist criticism.

The last interest group among the revisionists is a white aligned group currently represented by Jessie Maritz (2002). With the demise of colonialism, Rhodesian discourse which created cohesion amongst whites was challenged by a new nationalist discourse. Various alliances among the white population started to distinguish themselves according to their ethnic origins. Greek theatre once considered part of Rhodesian theatre demanded its own space in academic writing. Maritz (2002) is unsatisfied by books that don't make any reference to Greek performances performed in Africa. This is a source of annoyance for her and she writes 'Greek drama in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe' (2002) in response to theatre history that omits Greek performances in Africa. Maritz's article documents Greek performances in colonial Zimbabwe from 1927 up to 1999. In 1999 ZAP produced Athol Fugard's *The Island*, based on a Greek tragedy, *Antigone*.

Within the revisionist school, there is a coterie of critics that problematises and revises the western dramatic theatre technique by proposing an alternative one (wa Mirii 1988, 1999, Kavanagh 1997, McLaren 1992, 1993, 2000). Wa Mirii (1999) argues that Zimbabwean theatre must articulate the nationalist narrative of indigenising the economy as he sees this economic liberation as being capable of liberating theatre. Thus wa Mirii subscribes to Marxist theory which pontificates that the economic base determines its superstructure. The superstructure includes artistic, moral, scientific and other cultural productions. When the economic base is transformed as argued by wa Mirii theatre would inevitably articulate the values of African people. If the economic base is not transformed, wa Mirii argues that Zimbabwean theatre would be forever measured by western standards.

In the various articles on Zimbabwean theatre Robert McLaren criticises dramatic theatre techniques and demonstrates how to circumvent the problem through documenting the working process of all his plays. McLaren (1992) documents the achievements of his three plays in fighting apartheid and demonstrating a 'Zimbabweanised' theatre technique. McLaren's article on political theatre is a record of the working process in creating *Katshaa* (1985/6), *Samora Continua* (1987/9) and *Mandela: the Spirit of no Surrender* (1990). The article is rich in historical material and Africanist approaches to making theatre. In 'Developing drama at UZ' (1993) McLaren focuses on the working process of creating *Mavambo* (1984/5), a play he adapted from Wilson Katiyo's *A son of the Soil* (1976) with UZ students. Like the above article, it demonstrates his theatrical syncretism technique.

In his book chapter on art and actuality (McLaren 2000) chooses three productions that he workshopped with UZ students: *Chokwadi Ndechipi/Iqisiniso Yiliphi* [Which is the Truth], *Ndiwo Upenyu/Yiyo Impilo* [Is this Life] and *Imi Munozviona Sei* [What do you Think of it]. McLaren demonstrates the same rigour in documenting the process of production which is vital for a theatre analyst. Throughout the chapter McLaren's major preoccupation is to illuminate an important characteristic of alternative theatre, that is, the constant irruption of the real into the fictional world of theatre. McLaren backgrounds his discussion by referring to the performance of *Katshaa* (1985/6) and *Samora Continua* (1987/9) where audience members who had attended *pungwes* during the liberation war joined in the songs and dances accompanying the respective shows. In all three articles, McLaren exclusively refers to his own plays and underlines the importance of creating theatre that is based on experiences and performance forms of Zimbabweans and utilizing all the languages spoken

by Zimbabweans. In fact McLaren's *Making People's Theatre* (1997) codifies his theatre technique and I will refer to it from time to time throughout this study. Robert McLaren's plays at the UZ and at his theatre company Zambuko/Izibuko have received more scholarly attention than others as evidenced by the number of articles on his repertoire; Kavanagh (1993, 1997), McLaren (1992, 1993, 2000), Kaarsholm (1994), Chifunyise (1994), David Kerr (1996) and Peter Ukpokodu (1995). In this study, I have therefore chosen to analyse only one play *Mavambo* (1985/97) from McLaren's repertoire and shift to other plays that have not received a fair share of criticism.

The third strand of post-independence theatre criticism is feminist criticism motivated by plays and performances that tackle the issue of gender. UNESCO had declared 1975-1985 as a 'Decade of Women' which was followed in 1995 by the Beijing Fourth World Conference on women which gave an agenda to the world to integrate and mainstream gender issues in national policies.²⁶ Criticism of plays also took a gender dimension. Evie Globerman (1994) looks at Elimnyama's *Impilo-le* (1986) [Oh, this Life] which presents Senzeni's infatuation with a married man, Max, who impregnates her. Globerman examines the reaction of female audiences to Senzeni's ordeal when she is ditched by Max. Globerman notices that the female members of the audience applauded Senzeni when she threatened to take Max to court. They admired Senzeni's courage which in the 1980s was unusual among women. Thus the audience is empowered to deal with similar cases when men refuse to take responsibility for their actions. Owen Seda (2001) takes the same stance by looking at ten performances by a range of theatre companies. Seda's observation is that plays workshopped or written by male dominated theatre groups tended to portray women characters negatively while those created and performed by exclusively female theatre companies deconstruct the female stereotype to reclaim her dignity. Zenenga (2004) takes a slightly different dimension by examining how men in Musengezi's *The Honourable MP* (1984) and Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps* (1987) perform their manhood. Zenenga perceives that Dangarembga and Musengezi's perspectives on manhood are gendered, thus

²⁶ The Zimbabwean Government responded to this call by enacting a series of Acts of parliament to remove barriers to the advancement of women: Equal Pay Regulations (1980), Customary Law and Primary Courts Act (1981), Legal Age of Majority Act (1982), Labour Relations Act (1984) Matrimonial Causes Act (1985), Public Services Pensions (1985), Taxation Regulations (1988) Deceased Person's Family Maintenance (Amendment) Act (1987), Deeds Registry Amendment Act (1991), Marriage Inheritance Act (1993), Constitutional Amendment Act (1996) and Administration of Estates Amendment Act (1997) (Tichagwa 1998: 37-8).

confirming Seda's paradigm. The women who dare challenge patriarchal domination are often silenced, become neurotic, exiled, tamed and re-domesticated.

Nehemiah Chivandikwa (2009) and Moreblessings Chitauro *et al* (1994) examine a different dimension of gender studies. Chivandikwa analyses two productions from the perspective of their reception in various performance contexts ranging from an all-female audience, working class audience and a white audience. He observes that the play *Zvatapera Todini* (n.d) [What Shall we Do] was created by an all-female theatre group – Monte Casio High School, yet it constructed stereotypical images of women. The other play *Africano-Americano* (n.d) was created and directed by a male director yet it projected a positive image of women. This observation challenges a claim made by Seda (2001) and Zenenga (2004) that playwriting is gendered. Chivandikwa argues that female audiences at Monte Casino High School did not identify with the suffering of women characters, but admired the commercial sex worker who seemed to overpower men. He calls this contradiction subversive spectatorship. Chitauro *et al* (1994) move from fictional narratives and examine the lives of three female artists. Chitauro *et al* argue that the urban cultural and social spaces are historically dominated by men. Chitauro *et al* link the exclusion of women from those spaces to both African patriarchalism and colonial Victorian culture and argue that men constantly contest women's negotiation and reclamation of social space.

To my knowledge, four PhDs (not yet published) have been written on Zimbabwean theatre since 2005. Three of them are on Theatre for Development (TfD): Praise Zenenga (2005), Kennedy Chinyowa (2005) and Joy Wrolson (2009) while the fourth one by Sheila Cameron (2008) concentrates on cultural policy but using theatre as an object of study. Chinyowa and Zenenga cover the same period 1980 to 2003 but use different case studies. They both delve into the past to explore manifestations of 'play' in masquerades, song, dance, ritual ceremony, narrative performance, children's games and the *pungwe* (night vigil) from which they argue contemporary Zimbabwean theatre draws its style. They both refer in different ways to Mda, Mlamba, wa Thiong'o, Artaud, Brecht, Boal and Freire as providing the theoretical basis of Zimbabwean TfD. There is thus a convergence of tacit indigenous texts, theories propounded by African and western TfD practitioners and the western dramatic tradition to produce a Zimbabwean version of TfD. Zenenga and Chinyowa notice the same characteristics of Zimbabwean TfD such as folk media, popular participation, integrated development and interculturalism. The study of community theatre as Theatre for

Development is by far the most explored area in Zimbabwean theatre criticism as evidenced by a number of masters and bachelors degree dissertations at Zimbabwean and South African universities.²⁷

Wrolson (2009) focuses on a different time span between 2004 and 2008. Thus the research starts seven years into the Zimbabwean crisis and ends before the crisis has ended. Wrolson notices that TfD in Zimbabwe developed a particular style to respond to the crisis of the period which she calls 'panic theatre' (also called 'hit and run theatre' in Zenenga 2011) relying on the terminology of Allen (2006) on Zimbabwean 'panic poetry'. Because surveillance had such an intrusive impact on theatre, panic theatre developed a new idiom to evade detection by security agents. Wrolson singles out these techniques as satire, haunting or ghosting, hidden transcripts and megaphone sayings typical of *nhimbe* [collective labour] songs. She analyses three productions to substantiate her claims: Mukwindidza's *You have no Right to Remain Silent* (2005), Mwedzi Entertainment Productions' *Conquered Plans* (2005) and Muzondo's *All Systems out of Order* (2004/5). Like Zenenga (2005) and Chinyowa (2005), Wrolson (2009) attributes the present identity of panic theatre to past performances such as the *pungwe, bira* (supplication to ancestors) and *nhimbe*. Wrolson's major argument is that panic theatre reinvents memory through 'haunting' or 'ghosting' (Carlson 2003) - that is the ability of theatre makers and audiences to redeploy past memories in their performance and reception.

Sheila Cameron covers the period 1984 and 1997 which is almost the same period as this research, but uses case studies from the city of Bulawayo where she worked as a teacher. Cameron explores the endogenous and exogenous influences on cultural practices in Bulawayo during the transition from socialism to global capitalism which began in 1990 through the adoption of IMF neoliberal policies. She discusses the policies promulgated by UNESCO, IMF, WB, NGOs, OAU and EU adopted by the new Zimbabwean government. She also looks at endogenous policies crafted through Acts of parliament and cabinet. She argues that this 'documented policy' does not erase oral ones but works in tandem with them. She singles out two forms of oral policy – 'tacit policy' governed by local practices and common

²⁷ These include among others Makumbirofa (2011), Makumbirofa (2010), Kandenga (2004), Kuruwa (2004), Muwonwa (2004), Nhambure (2003). The area of TfD is Chinyowa's research area and he has published several articles (Chinyowa 2010a, 2010b, 2009a, 2009b, 2007). Owen Seda (2008) has also contributed in the area of TfD.

sense of living together and 'proto-policy' that is not written down but has important structural and functional elements such as forward planning, anticipation of problems. She then looks at how these policies impacted on cultural production in Bulawayo by means of hermeneutic analysis.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have chosen to look at various texts from three vantage points. I have chosen to review literature by the theory method. Under the first theme I organised the theoretical positions of various scholars on both sides of the binaries and then followed with my own position that forms the frame of reference for this study. In discussing the second theme I employed the same school of thought method, but organised the theoretical schools in chronological order right from bourgeois colonialist criticism right up to the post-structuralist criticism of Rohmer (1999). In this approach I demonstrated how theatre historiography has developed and changed until the present. In the last section I categorised theatre research in Zimbabwe according to theoretical orientations of the researchers. The chapter as a whole has demonstrated that there is no study that has exclusively investigated how the conflicting indigenous and/or Africanist theories and the saliently Eurocentric theories of the white dominated NTO have impacted on the identity of alternative Zimbabwean theatre of the period 1980-1996. It is also clear that most studies Taylor (1968), Wortham (1968), Jackson (1974) Cary (1975) and Byam (1999) have not analysed plays and/or performances at all and where that has been the case such as Kahari (1975), Zinyemba (1986) and Plastow (1996) the analysis has been less focused and has taken a literary approach. With the exception of Rohmer (1999) drama has been viewed or critiqued as an appendage of literature or as sociological evidence. This study seeks to expand the previous approaches by analysing plays as performances and employing a postcolonial framework, which at the moment seems to be a new endeavour within Zimbabwean theatre and performance studies.

CHAPTER 3: RHODESIAN DISCOURSE, POWER AND THE FIELD OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to foreshadow contextual forces that were/are at work to which past and present alternative Zimbabwean theatre responds. Alternative Zimbabwean theatre emerged as a form of contestation against a specific version of colonial discourse which I refer to as Rhodesian discourse. Since alternative theatre established its identity in discursive negotiation and contestation with Rhodesian discourse, it is imperative that we first highlight the characteristic features of this discourse to set the parameter for understanding the discursive manoeuvres undertaken in subaltern theatre. To conceptualise Rhodesian discourse I rely on Raymond Williams' dominant thesis paradigm, Michel Foucault's notion of discourse, Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation of symbolic power in the field of cultural production. These theorists offer interesting perspectives on how the dominant interacts with the dominated in the field of cultural production.

With these theoretical formulations on power and domination in the foreground I ask what is/was Rhodesian discourse and how did it (or did it not) affect the field of cultural production? While the notion of whiteness and Rhodesian discourse has mostly been viewed as stable and coherent, I argue that there were fissures and gaps inherent in the assumed cohesion of whiteness in Rhodesia. During colonial times, Rhodesian discourse shaped cultural production amongst both white and black artists in Zimbabwe. At independence, Rhodesian discourse was sidelined from the public sphere to give way to the dominant patriotic and socialist discourse. However, the former reconstituted itself in other forms such as neo-colonialism, the colonial mentality and within Eurocentric theatre institutions such as the National Theatre Organisation (NTO). Ranka Primorac (2010) has noticed that from 1997, white Zimbabweans writing from exile have revisited, revised and redeployed Rhodesian discourse as a tool to critique post independence politics.

Discourse and Power

Following the ground breaking work of the French philosopher, Foucault (1976, 1980), a discourse is a group of statements such as debate, discussion, conversations, speeches, arguments and performances which provide a language for talking about the world. A discourse becomes an institutionalised way of thinking that defines what can be written, performed or said about a specific topic and in that way limits other ways in which the topic can be constructed. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through both language and discursive practice – the practice of producing meaning. Stuart Hall (1992: 290-3) argues that all social practices entail meaning and have a discursive aspect. For that reason discourse enters into and influences social practices. Hall goes on to argue that a discourse just like ideology produces knowledge that serves the interests of a dominant social group or class. A discourse is an invented truth produced through a selective rule-governed system. The production of discourse is controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to clearly defined procedures. Foucault adumbrates:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth, the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true ...; it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses. (1980: 131)

Rhodesian discourse was a collection of 'truths' manufactured by European scholars (such as Hegel, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, De Gobineau, Linnaeus, Blumenbach and others) who formulated cultural frames that were applied by various European empires. Their ideas are often grouped together in postcolonial criticism as colonial discourse, a framework used to represent Africans as pathological or the inferior Other. Rhodesians being the subjects of Rhodesian discourse drew on philosophical and (pseudo)-scientific works of these scholars in their dealings with Africans. The whole vision of colonialism in Rhodesia was summed up by Cecil John Rhodes, the proprietor of the Chartered Company (British South Africa Company) that ran the country until 1922, who declared '[e]qual rights for all civilised men' (Mamdani, 1996: 17). The 'uncivilised' African would be subjected to a process of tutelage in order to enjoy the privileges of citizenship. It covered a whole spectrum of intellectual activity including the field of cultural production (theatre, drama, film, music, dance and fine art). The struggle in the Rhodesian cultural field over the imposition of legitimate public imagery is inseparable from the struggle between white Rhodesians and African cultural producers to

impose principles or definitions of human accomplishment. Bourdieu offers an explanation that is applicable to the Rhodesian field of cultural production:

...the field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definitions of the writer (*artist*) and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer (*artist*)... In short the fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of power to say with authority who are authorised to call themselves writers; ... it is the monopoly of the power to consecrate producers or products. (1993: 42, emphasis is mine)

This struggle to impose the dominant discourse is explicable in terms of what Foucault calls 'power' which resonates with Gramsci's (1971) 'rule'.²⁸ In order for the colonised to be effectively dominated, the coloniser must produce a 'discourse' that aspires to what Gramsci calls 'hegemony'. Rule constitutes the coercive apparatus of the state established according to law in order to exclude, blockade and repress those groups who do not agree to be dominated by the coloniser. Even where there is no evidence of non-compliance, Gramsci (1971) argues that this apparatus is proactively put in place in anticipation of moments of crisis. However, power would be a fragile phenomenon if it worked on the level of force, or to put it in Foucauldian terms, 'exercising itself only in a negative way' (1980: 59). Hegemony which operates as the persuasive front of power supplements it. Gramsci defines hegemony as 'the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general directions imposed on social life by the dominant group' (1971: 12). In Rhodesia this consent follows 'naturally' due to the perceived accumulated prestige of white cultural producers. They have managed to persuade Africans to see whites and their culture as the 'right' race and culture. Anna Weinrich (1973) depends on Banton to postulate that race relations in any given society are determined by circumstances at the first extended contact between different races. She asserts that at the point of contact the economically and politically more powerful race will tend to influence the weaker group. The weaker group will grudgingly 'allow' itself to be structured to the expectations of the dominant group by accepting many changes in its social organisation. The 'weaker' group will be forced to take subordinate positions and the weakest amongst the dominated will believe that they are truly inferior. Since the Rhodesians took over the power to consecrate writers, actors, producers and to

²⁸ The term power has various dimensions. When used to mean the exercise of force or control over individuals or particular social groups by dominant groups (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008) it tallies with rule. However, when legislative power is exercised to limit the behaviour of individuals it is executed without coercion and in some instances with 'justifiable force' exercised within the limits of legality. The other dimension of power has little to do with coercion. Foucault defines power as imbedded in knowledge. Discourses of knowledge are in fact an expression and embodiment of power.

define the very idea of theatre, those that excelled in the anglicised and Europeanised version of theatre enjoyed what Bourdieu calls symbolic and cultural capital. This is the prestige, consecration and honour as well as cultural knowledge and competences that the theatre practitioner gets. In the cultural field, the colonised African gives the white coloniser that respect and prestige and thus consents to give up her art for the one that brings about symbolic and cultural capital.

Power produces knowledge – the ‘right’ knowledge. In order to get that spontaneous consent Rhodesians had to produce knowledge that justified the domination of Africans. Foucault puts it succinctly:

...in a society such as ours...there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operate through and on the basis of this association. (1980: 93)

It seems to me that power cannot exist without knowledge which justifies it. Power, therefore, orders the production of discourses of truth, which it forces cultural producers to speak and write about. Power continually renews, recreates and modifies itself until it is capable of institutionalising and professionalising every field including rewarding producers who further its pursuits. In a way, power produces knowledge to serve it. Power and knowledge support and imply one another.

Theoretical Moorings and Structures of Rhodesian Discourse

It would be useful to contextualise Rhodesian discourse by looking at systems of knowledge that supplied it with substance at that time. Rhodesian discourse drew on a synthesis of race science, culturalism and biological conceptions of sex and hygiene. In pre-colonial Zimbabwe differences which existed between people were not biologically defined. However, with Charles Darwin’s contribution to the field of science through the publication of *On the Origins of Species* (1859) science took on the task of defining and ordering the world. Darwin problematised biblical time when he introduced the theory that species evolved from one form to another until the finest and purest form had emerged through a process of natural selection. He postulated humans had evolved from apes. Scientists such as De Gobineau (1855) developed an interest to discover intellectual and physical differences between human species and apes. They postulated that a missing link between apes and humans was

the Negroids – sub-Saharan Africans. These were placed right at the bottom of the hierarchy with the Caucasoid race (Europeans) at the top and other races – Mongoloids, American Indians and Malayans being placed somewhere in the middle. Zimitri Erasmus links the evolution theory to the field of culture:

Transposed on to socio-cultural aspects of human life, ideas of natural evolution shaped conceptions of human development as progressing in evolutionary fashion from primitive to civilised and so helped explain human differences... (2008: 168)

If the shape, colour and culture of a group were closer to European conceptions of development and civilisation, the better that group was appreciated by Europeans. Zimbabwean cultural productions were not anywhere closer to the English standards of performance and they were either to be closed out as a hostile discourse or Rhodesians would teach Africans how to perform according to ‘civilised’ standards. Robert Kavanagh concurs:

It is important to realise this because theatre as it was established by the settlers and colonial administrators during the colonial period tended to take one form- naturalistic performances on raised stages in rectangular halls. As the colonial education system taught the colonised that African indigenous forms of theatre were not theatre, people came to see the form of the theatre established by the colonial master as the one and only form. (1997: 36-7)

Colonial theatre, indeed, played a part in the discourse of ‘civilised standards’. Taylor (1968) writing a history of Rhodesian entertainment up to 1930 dismisses African performances as ‘infrequent amusement’. Riding on the wave of Darwinian terms, he argued that the first white settlers came from environments which had all the ‘sophistication of the nineteenth century, environments which for their relaxation, required entertainment of the standard civilised type’ (1968: 13).

The direct involvement of the highest imperial office (the Governor) in Rhodesia gave legitimacy to the type of theatre the colony had to practise. The dominant elite class established the standards of theatre through the involvement of Lady Rodwell, the wife of the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, Sir Cecil Rodwell. Salisbury (Harare) in the 1930s was a class conscious society.²⁹ According to Robert Cary (1975), the elite lived north of an

²⁹ The class nature of white Rhodesia began to change after the Second World War. European continentals, Afrikaners from South Africa, Jews and whites retreating from decolonisation in Asia and elsewhere in Africa started pouring into Rhodesia and eventually outnumbered Britons by a third (see Alexander 2004). Class distinctions disappeared as being white was enough to have access to government and private capital.

imaginary line estimated to be passing through Baines Avenue or Montagu gardens stretching infinitely east and west. Godwin and Hancock (1993) have extended the line to the railway line coming from Chegutu and passing through south of the central business district on its way to Mutare. South of the line lived lower class white settlers 'such as shop assistants, junior clerks, office workers – whose lack of adequate birth and income ruled them out as "people one ought to know"' (Cary 1975: 12). Lady Rodwell had originally come to South Africa as a member of a touring company playing *Miss Hook of Holland* before marrying Governor Sir Cecil Rodwell. Lady Rodwell was particularly fond of morning tea parties (something that was to be appropriated by blacks in the townships later) and Bridge, like all other spouses of the elite. She didn't give up on theatre and in January 1930, according to Robert Cary (1975), she produced *Alice in Wonderland* and four of the Rodwells appeared in the cast. She preferred musicals to dialogue theatre. When a society to form one of the first European theatre companies (Salisbury Repertory Players) was formed Sir Cecil and Lady Rodwell agreed to become patrons. A theatre aesthetic, with the blessings of the imperial office was established in Rhodesia. Studies carried out by Wortham (1969), Plastow (1996) and Godwin and Hancock (1993) have found out that the aesthetic has not significantly shifted from the pioneering days. The involvement of the imperial office throughout the history of colonisation in Rhodesia was a constant reminder of the official theatre standards to be bequeathed to later generations and Africans. For example, the opening of the new theatre space located at Second Street extension (Sam Nujoma Street) for Salisbury Repertory Players in 1960 was attended by Lady and Lord Dalhousie, who was the Governor-General during the Federation years.³⁰

Rhodesian discourse also drew from the belief that all cultures are not equal (culturalist theories). Some cultures are inferior to others. In South Africa this underpinned the ideology of apartheid or separate development. This is sometimes referred to as social Darwinism as an indication of its debt to evolution theories. After the holocaust which ended in 1945, and which many believe was driven by a combination of race science and culturalism, challenges to race took centre stage. Zimitri Erasmus argues that 'mainstream scientific conceptions of race were turned upside down: race was demoted from being a biological fact or truth to a meaningless falsity' (2008: 171). Britain, the colonial master, pushed for reforms in Rhodesia

³⁰ Between 1953 and 1963 Malawi (Nyasaland), Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) and Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) became one country called Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland or Central African Federation (CAF) under the premiership of Godfrey Huggins.

and hoped that the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland which began in 1953 would introduce those reforms towards partnership with black people. However, contrary to the process of decolonisation taking place in Asia and most of Africa, after the collapse of the Federation in 1963, Rhodesian whites refused to budge. A radical white supremacist party, the Rhodesia Front, came to power in 1964 and immediately demanded independence from Britain. When Britain refused, Ian Douglas Smith declared UDI in 1965 and continued with race and culturalist theories which the whole world had rubbished, at least theoretically. If racism as a science cannot be irreproachably used then culturalism which emphasises difference can be used to achieve the same racist objectives. Difference can be nurtured but separated in 'reserves' (Tribal Trust Lands), 'locations' (townships) and 'compounds'. Race was sanitised and relegated to the unconscious using culturalism which prescribed whites as having the most advanced culture. Culturalism allowed for 'racism without races' (Alexander 2004: 198). Culturalism created spaces for each cultural and/or ethnic group. White Rhodesians created a white world which could not be inhabited by blacks. Rhodesian discourse as the dominant discourse was open to everybody who wanted to be like whites, although carefully controlled in many ways. Black discourse was closed to every white person apart from missionaries and Native Commissioners who stayed in TTLs. Their job description involved knowing what was happening in TTLs in order to repress cultural practices which threatened Judeo-Christian values.

As the dominant cultural and racial group the whites categorised and named places and ethnic groups. To name is to perform power properly delegated and to be recognised as such by those who are being named. They named ethnic groups and places (Ranger 1985) because they had symbolic capital based on the recognition that they received from groups which had surrendered their powers to name themselves. Naming, far from being a neutral process, is a performance of power, of knowing something or someone in particular ways '...the act of naming something becomes part of the process of its constitution, and an active site of social contestation' (Shepherd and Robins 2008: 1). Apart from naming, anthropologists also looked for what they called 'inborn tribal characteristics' which could place particular ethnic groups above or below others following the Darwinian principles of hierarchy. Native Commissioners could also 'invent' tradition and history of particular ethnic groups as did the Native Commissioner Stuart of Malema district, who, according to Ranger (1985), invited Ndebele chiefs and taught them how to be Ndebele based on the

characteristics of the Zulu as contained in the Natal Code of 1891.³¹ Jobs were granted by employers based on the Rhodesian invention of ethnic superiority or lack thereof of cultural groups. Terence Ranger provides more evidence:

But historical studies of Bulawayo show nevertheless that some ethnic categorisation took place there. Stephen Thornton has described how 'Tonga' or 'Zambezi boys' were held to have a 'natural affinity' to night-soil work and were therefore employed in the most demeaning tasks. Certain Shona speakers, particularly the so-called 'Manyika', were held to have a 'natural affinity' for domestic service and were sought after as cooks and waiters. (1985a:10-11).

Ethnic consciousness defined inter-ethnic relations. There in the juridically enforced spaces (the reserves), African lives could be monitored by missionaries and Native Commissioners.

Apart from race science and culturalism, Rhodesian discourse also relied on 'panics' – the fear of Black peril, disease and rebellion. These panics were powerful psychological systems to construct a white identity which depended on demeaning and segregating black people on the basis of unsubstantiated fears of disease, rebellion and rape. In talking about the construction of white identity in Rhodesia, Alexander (2004) explains the link between identity and moral panics:

Identity then, as a function of culture, had to be consciously and fastidiously constructed through the creation and propagation of a series of myths which ensured insularity. Antjie Krog defines myths as 'unit(s) of imagination which make it possible for a human being to accommodate two worlds' (...) If such myths are sustained long enough to become entrenched in the social reality of a populace, they take on a power such that a whole host of images, consequences and reasoning can be summed up in a single word. In settler Rhodesia, the two most effective myths were the constant threat of rebellion and the fear of 'black peril'. Rebellion was a threat to life and 'black peril' a threat to racial purity in the form of rape, by black men. (2004: 197)

These real or perceived threats to the internal cohesion of white communities caused panics. It was mostly white men who spoke vehemently about black peril and the panics were problems that emerged out of a means of constructing a white identity. The fears were manipulated for political mileage and for enforcing solidarity (Alexander 2004, McCulloch 2000). As identity needs to be constantly reasserted, the panics – rebellion, disease, and black peril – were constantly repeated sometimes one after another and at other times all of

³¹ Early anthropologists ranked the Zulu highest in evolutionary hierarchy among Southern and Central Africans probably because of their fierce military machinery during the time of Tshaka. Invented characteristics included being militaristic, authoritarian, disciplined, keeping commoners, youth and women in their place (see Ranger 1985a).

them simultaneously.³² The panics were chosen and blown out of proportion and they took the form of much publicised trials, public rallies, petitions, media reports, letters to the press and deputations to the resident commissioner.

What can be observed from this evidence is that dominance was established by hiding behind disease, sex, hygiene and culturalism. The white subject was incorruptible, superior and dominant while the black subject was always defined, seen and portrayed as inferior and degenerate needing to be led and dominated. In cultural production, black discourse was either practised under supervision by colonial authorities or banned in urban locations and mining compounds. In the rural areas black discourse was practised, but closed out as an irrelevant or hostile discourse. Apart from missionaries and Native Commissioners, this discourse was unavailable to any other white persons.

The depiction of black people in white cultural productions followed the same trend. Anthony Chennells (1996) enumerates a number of myths and negative portrayals of black characters in the white authored Rhodesian novels:

³² In 1900, for example a global outbreak of bubonic plague reached Salisbury from Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. In 1902 rabies broke out in Matabeleland and followed by typhoid fever in 1904. Syphilis also continued to be used to spread the panics till about 1929 when cures (salvarsan and penicillin) were discovered. In 1918 soldiers returning from the First World War brought back with them Spanish influenza which 'within two weeks...spread throughout the territory' (McCulloch 2000:58). What is interesting is that for all these diseases, the white community blamed blacks for their spread. Rhodesians used bubonic plague to justify the first separation of blacks from whites by building the first black location (Harari now Mbare). Spanish influenza led to the banning of black people from travelling by train which later led to segregated travelling. The Public Health Act of 1924 authorised personnel to regulate the movement of black people, like the pass laws, and to quarantine and forcibly water bath and disinfect blacks entering the cities. Edwardian Britain, Jock McCulloch argues, commonly believed that Syphilis could be passed from wet towels and lavatory seats, among other things. To solve this problem required separation and controlling of blacks. The fear of sex from black men – (black peril) was given impetus by pseudo-scientific theories prevalent in Victorian ethnography of the 1800s crafted by such authors as De Gobineau who wrote *The Inequality of Human Races*, Sigmund Freud who wrote *Three Essays on Sexuality* and Laubscher who wrote *Sex, Custom and Psychology*. All of them agreed that blacks suffered from a hyper sexuality caused by, among other things, lack of shame, having strength of sensations as compensation for lack of intelligence and absence of latency period in Africans which rendered them unable to control their desires (McCulloch 2000). Whether the issue was fear of disease or fear of black men, the components of fear were similar. The white body was at risk and the cause was the vice of black bodies because a racial boundary had been crossed. If the white family was at risk, then the solution was to draw 'a cordon *sanitaire* between the white and black communities...' (McCulloch 2000: 83).

White Rhodesia because it is progressive refuses closure and at the end of a characteristic novel whites are looking forward to a future in a highly developed country, black Rhodesia because it is primitive is closed and the narratives write of blacks as denizens of stasis. If novelists choose to show progressive blacks, they are shown not as entering into white space but into limbo of false appearances, immorality, debauchery and brutality. (1996:104)

Kelvin Chikonzo (2007) and David Kerr (1998) have written on the construction of African identities in white Rhodesian films and their findings confirm the dominant – dominated paradigm. Between 1890 and 1930 Rhodesians produced 871 plays all over the country (Taylor 1968). Between 1931 and 1975 another 267 was produced by the Salisbury Repertory Players (Cary 1975) and the national figure is even more, but tentatively records are not available to state the figure with certainty. All of the plays were imports from Britain, Europe and North America. In the few Rhodesian authored plays, a black character created through the agency of a white playwright was always presented as a buffoon with no will of his own. Jane Plastow (1996) has carried out a study of Zimbabwean theatre including white authored Rhodesian plays. From the thirteen white authored plays officially recorded, Jane Plastow observes that all of them deal with the themes of white heroism, fear of black uprising and hatred and mockery of white outsiders. Where black characters show agency by fighting white people such as in Wilfred Bussy's *Rung Up*, they are presented as 'barbarians' with 'no motive for [their] attack' (Plastow 1996: 78). Having looked at all thirteen plays, Plastow comes to the conclusion that

The mass of blacks are portrayed as little more than child-like savages – a white man's burden, easily manipulated against their own interests ... The philosophy behind these plays is one of racist paternalism with a strong underlying streak of sentimentality. The heroes are tough, no nonsense whites who labour in the untamed bush to develop Rhodesia. Their virtues are the pioneering ones of hard work; bluff loyalty non-intellectual dedication to carving a nation out of virgin black minds and dusty bush. The attitude of blacks is appallingly unconsidered ... these plays are frightening because they so clearly demonstrate the prevailing white Rhodesian view, both of themselves and of the black majority (1996: 79-80).

Where Africans produced their own plays and performed them in the various towns and cities in which they lived, the white press turned its back (Robert Cary 1975: 20).

Stephen Chifunyise (1997b) concurs with Cary about the silence of colonial press on African theatre activities even where they imitated Western theatre. He attributes this to what he calls racist policies of the government which continued to repress traditional arts and culture. The press sometimes reported on black cultural productions, but it did not forget to cut them down to size. In 1904 a *Herald* editor was invited to cover a tea meeting for

Africans of the town and surrounding districts by the organiser Tom Loiswayo. The editor did not take kindly to the decorum and discourse³³ that was produced during this cultural event and he warned his readers:

The black must remain the servant of the white and if such gatherings as these are permitted, the Tom Loiswayos and the rest of his race will ere long refuse to submit to the white, the dire consequences of which cannot be foreshadowed (Cited in McCulloch 2000: 58).

The dominant discourse preferred to see Africans as having no capacity for organisation. The discourse assumes that African discourse is incapable of dynamism to produce new cultural products that respond to the immediate environment. Where there was evidence of order and complexity in African cultural productions, Rhodesian discourse was quick to attribute such complexity to foreign influence (O'Callaghan 1977, Chennells 1996). The monotheistic nature of Shona religion and the architectural complexity of Great Zimbabwe ruins were attributed to foreign models, as was the rise of nationalism in the 1960s. Rhodesian discourse assumes that since the African mind is uncreative whatever it has created is or can be a result of foreign influence. In an early Rhodesian novel *Rhodesian Philosophy or The Dam Farm* (1910) by Jill Getrude, one of the main characters describes the qualities most valued in an African servant which confirms the theory of progression from primitivism to civilisation.

A very stupid boy will often end by making a good servant, because, his head being entirely empty of ideas, becomes imbued with those you put into it, and he will therefore, with parrot-like rigidity, perform regularly whatever you have taught him. (1910: 177)

The controlled and guided development motif of an African by an outsider is a myth that was constantly repeated in the media and Rhodesian novels in order to reinforce the 'role model' position of white Rhodesians. Julie Frederikse (1982) quotes Franklin addressing Rhodesians from the Central African Broadcasting Station in Lusaka in 1949:

...whether you like it or not, the African mind is awakening, is thirsty for knowledge. Let us give it the right kind of knowledge; if we don't, it will pick up the wrong one. You know the old saying about idle hands and mischief. Well, the same applies to idle minds, and there are always people, even as far afield as Moscow, looking for idle minds in Africa. (1982: 96)

This patronising attitude was constantly expressed in the various media available to Rhodesians.

³³ The organiser had used salutation terms like 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen' while referring to black guests. Before 1953 the terms were reserved for whites while blacks were called 'boys' and 'girls' or African Male (AM) or African Female (AF). These appellations were dropped by Garfield Todd.

Apart from the negative portrayal of African images in Rhodesian cultural productions, Rhodesian discourse also defined the very idea of theatre – what was to be considered theatre and what was not. It would be interesting to take a snapshot of the colonial idea of theatre and the constructions of black cultural productions. Colonial ideas of theatre may look absurd now taking into consideration the avant-garde, modernist and postmodernist trends that have spread across Europe and the rest of the world, most of which have relied more or less on the formerly subjugated knowledge for their style (e.g. Brecht, Brook and Artaud). In general, the judgements associated with African theatre are based on logico-theatrical viewpoints; theatre must exhibit a definite minimal structure – exposition, rising action, complication, climax and resolution. It must also have linguistic content, specialised scenery and plot (Finnegan 1970). In short, it must be a well-made-play. This is to say that the elements intrinsic to the Euro-American model and which constitute what is called drama are interpreted as precisely those attributes which African theatre lacks in order to achieve the same artistic success as the West. This is both a Hegelian and evolutionary notion of theatre.

Finnegan dismissed the existence of theatre in Africa in the pre-colonial epoch. She saw oral African performances as 'quasi-dramatic phenomena' (1970: 500). She said so because the various elements which tend to come together, in the European sense, and were normally regarded as drama were 'missing' or seldom occur in a single performance in African performance forms. Finnegan (1970: 501) listed these elements of drama as, the idea of enactment; representation through characters who imitate persons and events, linguistic content, plot, the represented interaction of several characters and specialised scenery. Thus she came to the conclusion that:

With a few possible exceptions, there is no tradition in Africa of artistic performances which include all the elements which might be demanded in a strict definition of drama – or at least with the emphases to which we are accustomed. (1970: 516)

The other deficiency in the African theatre according to Warren (1975) was the lack of enactment of reality. Most African performances he argued were reality itself and not an imitation of reality. He argued that '... a literal chronicling of daily routine scarcely qualifies as drama. Neither does a ritual ceremony which merely makes a request to the gods and spirits' (1975: 21). Likewise Hartnoll (1960: 18) also said of African theatre 'the event is firmly rooted in reality: and according to Aristotle a play is an imitation of an action, and not

the action itself'. The fact of alterity and even 'difference' as espoused by culturalism was not taken into consideration as this did not fit the evolutionary framework which was the hallmark of colonial discourse.

African dances were perhaps the most expressive of all performing arts. However, colonial discourse was quick to confer on such pieces a stamp of obscurity. Michael Etherton (1982), for example, argued that the same performance forms were dense, coded and impenetrable. Though his contribution to African performance analysis is priceless, the meanings of African performances escaped him and he charged:

It is very difficult for someone outside the specific culture to know what he or she is looking at and listening to during a particular performance: the very style of performance is a shorthand of actual meaning which has been established jointly by artists (composers and performers) and their audience over a period of time. (1982: 36)

The bottom line here is that a work of art must be universal. Michael Etherton (1982) agreed with Michael Kirby (1974) who saw theatre as an art form that tended to be international, and then advocated for the same standard to be applied all over the world.

Like painting, sculpture and music theatre as an art form tends to be international. The same standards apply all over the world. We have a single global audience with common taste and common ideas about performance ... forms and techniques of the Living Theatre and the Open Theatre were taken up by groups all over the world, developing an international style that is hardly distinguishable from country to country. Contemporary art is not regional or nationalistic. (1974: 3)

In many ways, these notions of theatre look absurd now where discourses of 'cultural diversity' and 'intercultural dialogue' permeate our daily language and have been challenged by a number of scholars (Hauptfleisch 1997, Ravengai 1995, Fischer-Lichte 1992 and Counsell and Wolf 2001).

For a discourse to achieve its goal the positions of 'dominant' and 'dominated' have got to be maintained both in lived experiences and public imagery especially as it is expressed through artistic productions. Censorship and publishing were some of the instruments of domination used by Rhodesians to make sure that African written drama did not upset the status quo. In this regard, book publishers, the Rhodesia Literature Bureau and the National Board of Censors cooperated. Between 1966 and 1969, the National Board of Censors, using some provisions of the Obscene Publications Act (1911), Cinematograph Ordinance (1912)

and Entertainments Control and Censorship Act (1932)³⁴ had recommended the banning of 708 cultural productions comprising films, books, magazines and periodicals. Curiously enough, only a single collection of plays by black American playwrights Langston Hughes, LeRoi Jones and Lorraine Hansberry entitled *Three Negro Plays* (1969) was on the list of banned books on the 1972 catalogue. There was a chance that it could end up being performed by black people or even read and serve as an example of writing. Rhodesian discourse peddled the myth that Rhodesia had the best race relations in the world and that black Rhodesians were the happiest in the world.³⁵ Such politically charged plays could upset that myth of racial harmony. O'Callaghan provides clues to the importance of information to bolster Rhodesian discourse:

The system of minority government in Rhodesia makes it inevitable that information is vital to assure the minority's continued self-conviction of the validity and strength of its policies; and, even more so, to reduce the possibility of the majority becoming convinced of the invalidity and vulnerability of minority rule. This entails considerable governmental control, exercised positively and negatively. (1977: 275)

The Rhodesia Literature Bureau played a pivotal role in controlling the flow of information through creative writing. Even though after 1965, the Rhodesian discourse emphasised virulent forms of Anglophobia, this ended on a political level. Rhodesians even those without English birth, performed English, lived a 'Rhodesian way of life' and referred to England for public cultural values. Culturally, the Rhodesia Literature Bureau depended on European mentors who were occasionally invited to run workshops for aspiring African writers on the art of writing plays, poetry and novels. These courses were run 'following conventional British models of writing from 19th century Europe' (Viet-Wild and Chennells 1999: 9). Most plays written between 1968 and 1979 in Zimbabwe ape the Euro-American Aristotelian structure, although I will argue that playwrights inserted oral incendiary devices in order to upset the stability of the Euro-American structure. While the Bureau did a good job in developing reading habits and writing skills, these skills were, however, taught within the discourse of compliance which according to Veit-Wild 'obstructed the emergence of uninhibited and authentic literary expression' (1993: 23).

³⁴ All these three acts and their diverse strands were combined to form the Censorship and Entertainments Control Act of 1967

³⁵ The Pearce Commission of 1972 was actually set up to find out the truth of this claim and the result was a survey which revealed an overwhelming 'no' to the claim.

In many ways, the publishers cooperated with the Rhodesia Literature Bureau by publishing only those artistic works which the latter recommended. O'Callaghan (1977) notes that the bulk of Rhodesian publishing was done by government departments, local authorities and semi-governmental bodies. Commercial publishing, O'Callaghan continues, was relatively small and mostly made up of Rhodesian subsidiaries of British firms – Longman Rhodesia, Oliver and Boyd, E and S Livingstone and J and A Churchill. These cooperated with the Rhodesian government and did not have an independent editorial policy. Even if some publishers claimed to have autonomy, published books would be subjected to censorship. The field of cultural production is subsumed in the bigger field of politics and power. There were also small local firms like Galaxie Press, Books of Rhodesia Publishing Company and M.O Collins Ltd. What is known about white Rhodesian theatre was published by these local firms. Censorship and publishing cooperated in controlling the writing, distribution and publicity of African creative works.

Indeed there were independent, mostly church operated publishing houses like the Dutch Reformed Morgenster Press and the Catholic controlled Mambo Press. Mambo Press published books and magazines such as *Moto* that were critical of the government, but it had also to operate profitably by producing books that were going to be allowed in the public school system. For this reason 'if a manuscript was submitted directly it would always be referred to the Bureau for approval because in the end the Bureau promoted and marketed published works'³⁶ (Chiwome 2002: 37). The important thing here is to illuminate the production of Rhodesian discourse and the ways through which it attempted to contain and curtail other competing discourses in lived experience and the artistic portrayal of such lived experiences. Its aim was to project a superior white race and a degenerate black race.

Colonial discourse constructs the notion of whiteness as a stable and coherent category. Whiteness is also transparent and cannot be an issue for discussion in an African play unless

³⁶ Of the twenty-nine novels and stories published in Shona and Ndebele, twenty-seven were sponsored by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau. All four novels in English were sponsored by the Bureau. Of the twelve books on the Shona language, customs and literature, five were sponsored by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau and two were textbooks. Of the sixteen handbooks on family, health and recreation, eleven were sponsored by Rhodesia Literature Bureau and two were textbooks. The nine books on animal husbandry for Africans were sponsored by the Bureau. All the others in Shona and Ndebele were religious. (O'Callaghan 1977:271)

it is done through the agency of a white writer or producer. This is how the Rhodesian discourse chose to construct the authority of whiteness. Chiwome (2002) has carried out an extensive study on censorship and the following are some of the things not allowed to be said about white people in a work of art. It was unacceptable to project the image of a white person beating a black person, although in reality this happened or being mocked or criticised by Africans, though Africans did it in their own space. Chiwome goes on to say that a white persona could not be presented in an African work hanging or implying that he hangs black people. It is the law of the land that executes convicts and not white people. The white character could not be presented negatively. Descriptive epithets that were ambiguous for example *mhuru yomuchena* [offspring of a white person], *vasina mabvi* [those without knees] – as a pejorative reference to tight fitting Victorian military gab which made white males appear as if they had no knees, could not be used by playwrights. In short a white person could not be written in fiction through the agency of the black writer.

In terms of content the plays had to deal with social issues that glorified rural life and projected the city as a white person's world which corrupts African values. Many creative works revealed Africans running away from rural areas to the city and finding it difficult and then ending up going back home. This suited the national programme of 'provincialisation' of Rhodesia which was probably inspired by the Bantustan system in Apartheid South Africa. Writers could not venture into political themes and this was entrenched in their psyche that even today some artists feel that their work has been degraded if it is read as political. Themes that were acceptable were those that ventured into cultural and cosmological issues like spiritism, witchcraft and magic, traditional healers, love, traditional court proceedings and other social issues. For close to a century of colonisation, the Rhodesia Literature Bureau allowed only nine plays to be published, eight of which were in Shona and only one in Ndebele. Of this total none of these plays took on the Rhodesian government thematically and all of them deal with some of the issues that I have mentioned above. Foucault talking about the field of cultural production says:

I would say that we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we must speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth. (1980: 93)

It seems to me most branches of the Rhodesian superstructure spoke and produced the 'truth' that the state required in order to project a superior image of the dominant white. In the case of Rhodesia the structure of the field of cultural production and legal systems

combined to govern both access to expression and the form of expression. Bourdieu (1993) uses the term 'structural censorship' to refer to how the structure of the field of cultural production rewards excellence and has the sole responsibility to define what is excellent. Structural censorship is exercised by consecrators (publishers, academics, critics) who decide which goods should get which price. Prices of different kinds of expression are then imposed on all producers of symbolic goods. However, to get the highest cultural and symbolic capital for the African playwright is to accept to take up Euro-American models of drama. Bourdieu (1993) writes:

Censorship is never quite perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorised to say: in this case he does not even have to be his own censor because he is, in a way, censored once and for all, through the forms of perception and expression that he has internalised and which impose their form on all his expressions. (1993:138)

The censorship laws in Rhodesia came in to deal with mostly imported creative works and locally produced texts which internal and institutionalised censorship had not effectively dealt with.

Deconstructing White Cohesion

Postcolonial studies have revisited the notion of whiteness to investigate all the ways in which whiteness was constructed and the ways in which it is negotiated and altered. Scholars (Huddart 2006, Bhabha, 1983) have problematised whiteness by arguing that contrary to its preferred coherence and stability, whiteness is opaque and agonistic. It is contestatory and contested. White Rhodesians were not a homogenous group who took a common position on all matters relating to race relations. After the Second World War, some white Rhodesians wanted reforms which favoured partnership with blacks. In 1949 just three years after race science was declared invalid progressive Rhodesians elected Garfield Todd to parliament. In 1953 he became the Prime Minister of Rhodesia and immediately began reforms based on Christian values (he was Vice President of the World Convention of Churches of Christ). He campaigned for the increment of African voters and for legalisation of sexual relations between white men and black women. Even if he had the backing of his electorate, he was forced out by members of his cabinet who thought he was too radical in reforming.

Rhodesians were divided by political persuasions. Political schisms destabilised a supposedly homogenous white Rhodesia. There were liberals who defied white minority rule in the 1970s and were labelled a 'portion of the communist force, wittingly or unwittingly'

(O’Callaghan 1977: 262) by the then minister of Internal Affairs, W. J Harper. They stood up to Ian Douglas Smith in the face of ostracism. Within the Rhodesian Front, the ruling party at that time, there were also white supremacists who outnumbered liberals. Liberals preferred partnership with blacks. After even Ian Smith agreed to a ‘window dressing’ internal settlement in 1976 which was to see Abel Muzorewa’s party (UANC) and other Africans³⁷ joining government, the right wing supremacists broke away from the Rhodesian Front in 1977 to form Rhodesian Action Party (RAP) and started lobbying and campaigning for racial segregation, unsuccessfully this time around.

There were also ethnic divisions within the Rhodesian white community. The 1969 census revealed that there was Anglo-Celtic hegemony in Rhodesia which seemed to exclude Afrikaners, Jews, Greeks and other European continentals. The English – Afrikaner hostility had historical origins in the Anglo-Boer war in South Africa, the Jameson raid and the suspicious loyalties of Afrikaners during the First World War. The Afrikaners were also seen as attempting to preserve their language and religion in an English colony. Although these groups remained collectively conscious of their separation from the Anglo-Celtic alliance, they were further separated amongst themselves by religion. The Greeks were mostly adherents of the Greek Orthodox Church, while Afrikaners mostly went to the Dutch Reformed Church and the Jews followed a Hebrew religion. Godwin and Hancock (1993) have problematised this issue by arguing that Rhodesians practised a Sunday Christianity and lived other days in the most carnal of ways. If this notion is correct, this religious separation was probably felt on Sundays only and after that there could have been a tendency to cling to one another in the face of a common enemy – communism. Within the Anglo-Celtic alliance, there were further divisions. Descendants of the Pioneer Column felt that they were more Rhodesian than new immigrants from Great Britain and the crumbling British Empire whom they often accused of disturbing the ‘Rhodesian way of life’ (Cary 1975, Godwin and Hancock 1993).

There were also economic conflicts between European workers and European employers (O’Callaghan 1977, Godwin and Hancock 1993). European workers campaigned for higher wages and also to be protected from African competition. A white led railway strike in 1969 is an example of the worst conflict within the white polity. The Rhodesian government

³⁷ Jeremiah Chirau, Byron Hove, James Chikerema, Ndabaningi Sithole and others

worked hard to minimise and at times eliminate such conflicts by passing laws such as the 1934, 1959 and 1971 (as amended) Industrial Conciliation Act which protected the economic interests of white workers by providing for a wage structure which compared favourably with western salaries. However, the war and the discourse that it produced played a significant role in eroding the differences inherent in white Rhodesia. Godwin and Hancock (1993: 11) have argued that Rhodesians' 'language, rituals, and symbols are fertile sources for their culture'. That language is what Alexander (2004) has called 'myths' which if sustained long enough become entrenched in social reality. The word 'terrorism' in Rhodesia had the power to unite almost every white person across ethnic and racial lines because, according to Godwin and Hancock, 'most Rhodesians believed that 'terrorists' were communist, malcontents, and murdering thugs – the Godless embodiment of evil – who made cowardly attacks on defenceless tribesmen and farmers' families, ran away from security forces' (1993: 11). The other issue that brought cohesion among the whites was the unilateral declaration of independence in 1965 by Ian Smith. This came with isolationist, anti-internationalism and anti-liberalism policies of Ian Smith which naturally placed South Africa as the only partner he could rely on. The Anglo-Celtic and Afrikaner hostility disappeared for the sake of this alliance. In private, however, each family retreated to its own ethnic practices and language, but projected an English façade in public. In a way, Rhodesian discourse should not be seen as an all-embracing philosophy that every white person believed in. However, believing is one thing and being a conduit of power is another. As Michel Foucault (1980) reminds us, power is exercised through a net-like organisation where everybody in its space, regardless of their belief, circulates between its threads and exercises this power. Social bodies are the vehicles and elements of power and elements of its articulation. As long as members of society work in the mechanisms of power, they are implicated in the result that power produces. Commenting on the mechanisms of power such as the law, publishers and institutions such as the Rhodesia Literature Bureau and how they produce the preferred discourse, Michel Foucault asserts that:

It is quite possible that the major mechanisms of power have been accompanied by ideological productions ... It is the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge ... All this means that power, when it is exercised through these subtle mechanisms, cannot but evolve, organise and put into circulation a knowledge, or rather apparatuses of knowledge, which are not ideological constructs. (1980:102)

The main thrust of this thesis is to investigate the different ways alternative theatre in Zimbabwe responded and continues to respond to Rhodesian discourse.

The Future of Rhodesian Discourse

There are conflicting observations about the persistence of Rhodesian discourse after independence in Zimbabwe. Chennells thinks that 'with Mugabe's victory at the polls both discourse and the Rhodesia which had produced it were simultaneously swept away' (1996: 129). Whilst Alexander (2004) partially concurs that the Rhodesian system of political, economic and social segregation did not survive the war of Independence she, however, observes that the Rhodesian 'ideological underpinnings have remained and are resurfacing with renewed strength' (2004: 207).

Ranka Primorac (2010: 202-27) argues that Rhodesian discourse at independence was sidelined even if it continued in spaces controlled by unrepentant whites and gave way to the dominant nationalism and patriotic narratives, but has since been redeployed to respond to the Zimbabwean crisis. The sidelining of Rhodesian discourse created space for white liberals to openly criticise it as in Angus Shaw's *Kandaya* (1993), Tim McLoughlin's *Karima* (1985) and Nancy Patridge's *To Breathe and Wait* (1986). Rhodesian discourse continued, albeit not in the mainstream media, for example in Peter Armstrong's novels such as *Hawks of Peace* (1979), *Cataclysm* (1980) *The Pegasus Man* (1983) and *Tobacco Spiced with Ginger* (1987). However, since the fast track land redistribution programme began in 2000 with its attendant violence and nationalist cultural repertoires, Primorac argues that white Zimbabweans writing from exile have revisited and revived Rhodesian discourse. Their texts oppose the violent social practices of the Mugabe administration but go beyond that to suggest the old infantilism, laziness and weakness of Africans. Primorac examines among other texts Peter Godwin's *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun* (2006) and Alexandra Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat* (2004). These texts Primorac argues modify and reproduce Rhodesian discourse, using it as a tool of political critique. The texts replicate what Primorac calls a 'deep and colonially rooted ambivalence towards notions of Africa, home and belonging' (2010: 202).

Rhodesian discourse took different forms after independence in 1980. Foucault (1980) argues that power does not weaken and vanish. It can retreat, but it has the propensity to re-organise its forces and reinvent itself in another form, but pursuing the same objectives such as neo-colonialism. How has alternative theatre in Zimbabwe responded to the structures of domination and with what consequences? Contrary to Chennells' (1996) position that Rhodesian discourse was swept away with Mugabe's victory, the facts indicate

that cultural productions of the post-Independence era have continued to be shaped by the same discourse in its more recent forms. It would be important to look at the new political field, which as I have argued above subsumes and controls the field of cultural production. When Ian Smith's internal settlement failed, he agreed to the 1979 Lancaster House talks which produced the Lancaster House Constitution, which is being used to the present day in Zimbabwe. This constitution in its original form had a number of articles which guaranteed the continued dominance of Rhodesians. It imposed on the new regime the burden of inheriting all white Rhodesians including mercenaries who didn't have proper papers, by giving them Zimbabwean citizenship and above all providing for dual citizenship. White Rhodesians were offered an automatic twenty seats in parliament without going to the polls. There was to be no compulsory acquisition of land from white landowners for ten years. This guaranteed the whites economic security and power. The Lancaster House Constitution accepted by the Patriotic Front entrenched the old status quo and prevented any wholesale attempt at change for ten years.³⁸ Brian Kagoro (2004) relying on Mandaza and Sylvester comes to the conclusion that:

As a result, the first decade of Zimbabwe was characterised by compromise, and has been described as 'a post-white settler situation in which the former white settlers [found] themselves with such political and economic guarantees as would be the envy of any former colonisers in the decolonisation process'. Government action was limited to 'pragmatism' and 'transformation' came to mean 'balance'. (2004: 239)

Transposed into the field of culture, this meant that Zimbabwean whites (as they were called from 1980) continued their cultural and economic dominance albeit they had lost a significant chunk of the original political power. This lost power was reinvested in international funding organisations (IMF and World Bank) where the former colonisers wielded immense voting powers and control.

The Bourdieusian cultural model (1993) better explains the cultural dynamics of this period. When there is change in any of the available positions in the political and cultural fields it affects other positions. With the coming to political power of a black government, the laws that prevented equal competition between blacks and whites were removed, somewhat shaking some of the privileges that whites had previously enjoyed. An alternative discourse could no longer be prevented. This time it had the blessings of the new government which

³⁸ This privilege of white people continued well into the late 1990s well after the lapse of the ten year grace period. Robert Mugabe was knighted in 1994 by the British with the Order of the Knight of Bath. He got several honorary degrees, some of which have now been withdrawn, from American and British Universities (Michigan, Massachusetts and Edinburgh) as a sign of approval of his leadership.

also reconfigured available institutions to support its preferred discourse – socialist realism. A number of alternative plays were performed and published while at the same time white theatre companies continued to produce and practice the same type of theatre they had been producing since 1890. What kind of theatre was produced out of playing this polarised relationship? This is the main thrust of this research.

Since the white-black relationship has been characterised largely by inequalities, the whites have continued to play a dominant role. Even after the right to twenty parliament seats was taken away and the economic base of white farmers was shaken through land invasions from 2000, the current stock of white Zimbabweans enjoy a privileged status historically acquired as explained by Alexander:

The historical and cultural heritage that white participants ascribed to themselves has allowed them to redefine their role in the nation. Ideologically, they shifted the logic that necessitates their presence from one of outright domination to one of themselves as a role model to guide and shape the future of the country. It is no less an ideology of dominance, just one that is easier to reconcile with the social world that they now inhabit. (2004:203)

In the field of culture the same dominance permeates almost all practices. English is still the official language in Zimbabwe which is used in schools, parliamentary debates and to conduct business. Even if in public politicians denounce whites, they tend to measure success by adopting a utopian white culture. Their children mostly attend historically white schools and white commonwealth universities. Zimbabwean whites realise their dominant position and easily withdraw themselves if they are dominated in the field of culture as Robert McLaren observes:

But in terms of blacks and whites working together, looking at Zimbabwe, it is interesting to note that there is very little inter-racial cooperation here. Generally speaking, whites are very uncomfortable when participating in anything in which they are not numerically superior or predominant, and culturally dominant. So they don't mind doing a play which is their play, based in their culture, and bringing in a few black actors, etc. But ask them to actually participate in something which is rooted perhaps in a black view of history or in black life! Very difficult. They won't! Even ask them to participate in a situation where they are three whites and fifteen blacks! – That is this country (Interview with Solberg 1999: 106).

This evidence helps to establish the fact that alternative theatre has continued to negotiate for an identity in a field where the dominance of white theatre has sparked contestations.

The other dimension of dominance is what Kwame Nkrumah (1965) has called neo-colonialism. Nkrumah developed the term originally within a Marxist theoretical framework, to mean tactics and attempts by the USA and other former colonial masters 'to accomplish objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism'. It is a broad term covering politics, economy, information and culture. From a cultural perspective Nkrumah's term may be taken to mean the tactics employed by wealthy nations to control values and perceptions of former colonies through cultural means that include, but are not limited to the media, language, education, art and culture. However, there are other approaches to understanding the concept of neo-colonialism. Postcolonial critics, within the ambit of cultural theory, view the same phenomenon as either forced acculturation or voluntary appropriation of a culture considered superior by individuals who exercise that option out of their own volition. Depending on the relations between the dominant culture and the receiving culture, this process of appropriation can be seen to be either a threat to the national identity of a receiving people or as a form of vitalisation and enrichment of that culture. The artists who receive and appropriate such values do so almost unconsciously and thus the epithet 'soft power' is used to describe the new force of neo-colonialism. This is the passive dimension of neo-colonialism. The passive dimension implicates the dominated people because they are complicit to the denudation of their culture. This is ordinarily termed 'colonial mentality'. Paulo Freire (1972) has theorised on the same concept or condition of the oppressed which he has termed 'duality'. It is a positivist approach to social analysis where social structure, and in our case the culture of the coloniser, exerts so much pressure on the oppressed that the oppressed loses identity and internalises the image of the oppressor. The oppressed cannot think beyond the cultural structure established by the coloniser. The oppressed is helplessly caught in the confines of structure:

The very structure of their (oppressed) thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men, but to them, to be 'men' is to be an oppressor. This is their model of humanity. This phenomenon derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopts an attitude of 'adherence' to the oppressor. (1972:22)

A condition of duality develops when the colonised superimposes the coloniser on him/herself in a relationship characterised by what Paulo Freire calls 'prescription'. The culture of the coloniser prescribes and imposes its choices upon the colonised whose consciousness is transformed to conform to that of the person prescribing it. The oppressed 'are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalised' (Freire 1972: 24). There is a degree of tension embedded in the

oppressed; a tension that arises from the conflict of being oneself and playing another person. Freire's positivist analysis is also problematic in the sense that it takes away the agency from the dominated by making them passive. Some may agree to be shaped by structure while others may reject the limits imposed by structure depending on their subjectivity. Whereas some scholars (even Freire himself) call for the ejection of the image of the oppressor who has inhibited authentic creativity in the mind of the oppressed, others (Balme 1999, Hauptfleisch 1997) see it as enriching the culture of the former colonised.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described and explained the propagation of Rhodesian discourse in cultural productions and lived experience. I have discussed Rhodesian discourse by reference to theories that shaped it in the 20th century, such as culturalism, social Darwinism and panics based on pseudo-science. I argued that Rhodesian discourse is a discourse of the past as well as the present. Inasmuch as it limited or provoked alternative theatre during colonial times, its legacy and now its reconstitution in post-independence Zimbabwe has continued to influence the nature, form and content of alternative Zimbabwean theatre. Indeed, the interplay of Rhodesian discourse and post-independence nationalist discourse gave alternative Zimbabwean theatre its identity between 1980 and 1996. The subsequent chapters demonstrate how the legacy of colonialism and the emergence of counter-discourses impacted on the identity of alternative Zimbabwean theatre. The next chapter looks at how alternative theatre responded to Rhodesian discourse during colonial times.

CHAPTER 4: AFRICAN RESISTANCE TO RHODESIAN DISCOURSE IN THE COLONY

Introduction

This chapter deals with African responses to Rhodesian discourse in the field of theatre and performance. I analyse four African cultural performances; *nyawo*, tea party, *beni* and *pungwe* as well as eight dramatic texts written between 1968 and 1978. Previous works in the field of cultural production have projected a notion of the absolute power of colonialism (of which Rhodesian discourse is its soft power) where it has taken away the subjectivity in Africans to resist it. I deploy resistance theories proposed by Sally Moore (1978) and Homi Bhabha (1994) to analyse dramatic texts and performances in order to suggest that colonialism was not absolute.

Colonialism is the forcible invasion, occupation and administration of non-western cultures and nations by European and North American forces (Edgar and Sedgwick 2008: 50). Colonialism in Rhodesia intended to extend British rule and influence with the goal of transforming Rhodesia to become like the metropolitan state in manifesting the nature and will of the English in lifestyle, actions, activities and culture.³⁹ Colonialism, in part, operated through what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic power'.⁴⁰ In Bourdieu's terms symbolic power is a 'structuring structure' a 'structured structure' and an 'instrument of domination' (1991: 165), but the result in the Rhodesian cultural field was far from being absolute and 'structured'. As evidenced by the nature of these African performances, domination does not necessarily result in absolute 'structuring'. Rhodesian discourse was both collaborated with and resisted by African cultural producers. I look at this element of collaboration and

³⁹ Although direct rule, in which Africans are subjected to a single legal order defined by European law and native institutions are not recognised, was the official administration policy in the 19th century, it was abandoned for Lugard's policy of Indirect rule by the 1920s which rested on three pillars: a native court, a native administration, and a native treasury. Colonialism's capacity for absolutism was checked (Mamdani, Mahmood, 1996). The absolutism of bourgeois culture had previously been tested in Europe where the ascendancy to power of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe facilitated the assimilation of its culture and taste by virtually all of western civil society.

⁴⁰ Bourdieu defines symbolic power as that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or that they themselves are subject to it. It is exercised through what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic systems' such as art, religion, language, myths and ideology (1991: 164-70). This dimension of symbolic power resonates with Foucault's use of the term power.

resistance through Ranajit Guha's (1997) frame of the articulation of power where domination implies subordination. In the case of colonial administrations, coercion seems to outweigh persuasion in the articulation of domination thereby denying absolute assimilation of colonial culture by Africans as was the case of civil society in Western Europe. I argue that the degree of collaboration with Rhodesian discourse was dependent on geographical proximity to the city, which in form and function epitomised western culture. Urban African performances and drama recruited western cultural matrixes such as the military band and tea party, which they infused with their own traditions, while the rural performances either refused to cooperate with Rhodesian discourse or appropriated elements of western performance into the African matrix such as the *pungwe*.

The cultural landscape in Zimbabwe has been, for a very long time, largely segregated. Forms of knowledge production and criticism have followed a similar trend. The reality of colonialism is that, though it preferred segregation and difference, it depended on Africans inasmuch as Africans depended on colonialists. The search for wealth by whites meant that black labour had to be used in industries, farms, mines and homes and so there was contact between these two races. The relationship was one of a horse and rider, where the white person always occupied the saddle. This contact came with loss of dignity, place, rights and culture. Despite all this loss, something new came into being. The new phenomenon became a way of survival in an otherwise hostile world. Nuttal (2009) calls this phenomenon a creolite hypothesis. This contact is not just a physical contact; it is a contact of cultures which allows cultural transmission, less in the direction of the coloniser and more in the direction of the colonised. Whereas both resistance and subjection are part of the equation of the creolite hypothesis, criticism in Zimbabwe has tended to demonise the coloniser, for the right reasons, but sometimes for controversial ones. That criticism mourns the loss of African culture during colonialism to a point where critics have failed to see spaces of resistance where they are apparent, especially in pre-independence plays and performances. I am proposing a theory which looks at sites and spaces in alternative theatre where identities, histories, techniques and modes of performance, which in theory were once thought of as separate, come together in a variety of unexpected ways. This seems to me to be the reality of European and African contact and the relationship that ensued thereafter. Nuttal describes this condition as a state of entanglement:

Entanglement is a condition of being twisted together, or intertwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or a set of social relationship that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but

which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication (2009: 1).

This condition of entanglement reproduces itself in alternative dramatic texts. Frustratingly, much of available cultural theory does not recognise the existence of this condition of entanglement in Zimbabwe. Where it is acknowledged as in George Kahari (1975), Kennedy Chinyowa (2007) and Owen Seda (2004) it is depoliticised and the playwrights are blamed for allowing themselves to be 'structured' by Rhodesian discourse. They are taken as incapable of resisting colonial discourse, yet hybridity is a political project and not just a literary and/or performance device.

The Bourdieusian diagram representing the field of cultural production and the field of power can be reinterpreted and modified to dramatise the power relations between the Rhodesian field of power and the artistic field with its sub-fields of white theatre and African theatre. It will explain how African cultural producers resisted and complied with colonial authorities by demonstrating centres of sameness, difference and resistance.

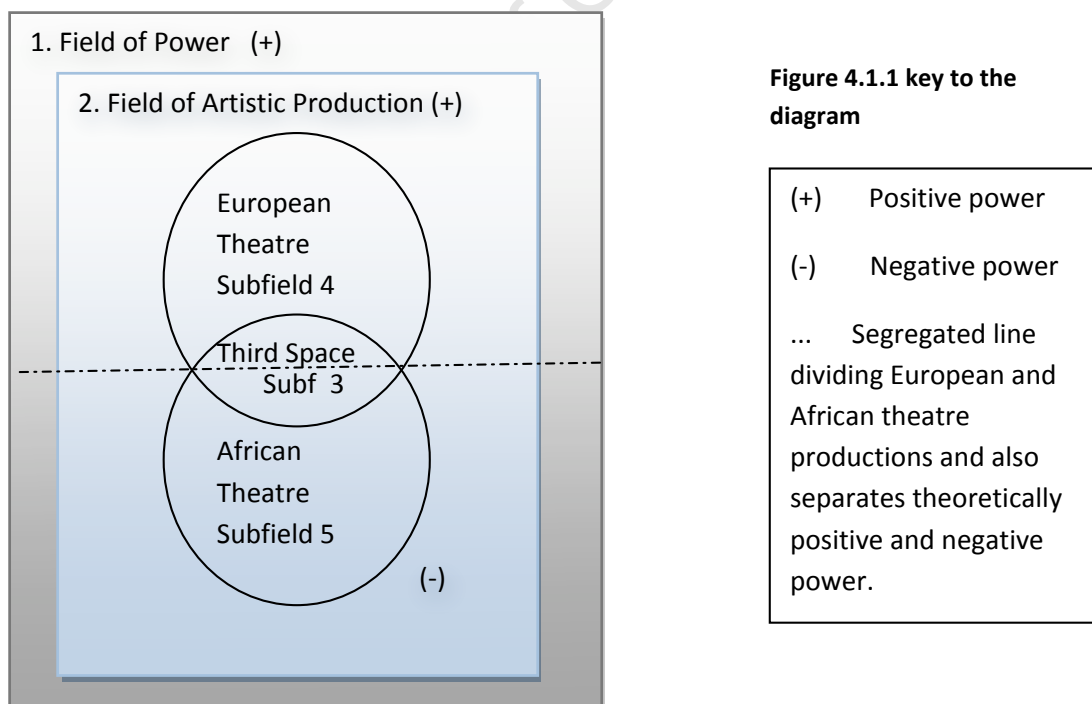


Figure 4. 1 showing the influence of the fields of power and artistic production on Zimbabwean theatre

The field of power (1) generates the laws for social engineering as well as the ideology and discourse to justify its power. However, the field of power is weak on its own. It must depend on cultural structures for its coherence and justification. Something needs to supply an explanation for colonialism and this is the field of artistic production (2) which subsumes a variety of subfields within it. For our purposes, I have singled out two subfields (4) and (5) representing European and African theatre respectively. The imaginary broken line represents a racially segregated artistic field and also divides all fields into two polarities: the positive (+) and powerful pole which is occupied by whites and the negative (-) less powerful pole which is occupied mostly by black cultural producers. The artistic field is a site of struggle since agents who occupy available positions 3, 4 and 5 are in perennial competition for two things – public imagery,⁴¹ which must be allowed to float in the minds of people, and symbolic and cultural capital. This is an unfair competition, particularly during the colonial period because agents occupying positions 3 and 5 (blacks) lack adequate power to decide on spaces where they can show their images as well as power to consecrate their artists. The power to give these resources lies outside the field of African theatre. Power lies with academics, publishers, critics and production houses who all serve the interests of the colonial administration. As the black artist moves from the bottom of position 5 to position 3, the more cultural capital s/he gets. Because of the subjectivity and agency of the black playwright, there is a limit to which the artistic and political field can exert force on his/her creativity. The intersecting area represents the point of contact, sameness, and at the same time difference. This is the point of entanglement where hybrid texts are formed.

Even if blacks occupying positions 3 and 5 are subjected to the same pressures, they resist them in different ways. Agents occupying position 5 have largely refused to succumb to the external structures and continue to produce traditional theatre. This is where *zvinyawo* discussed below is found. This explains the phenomenon of the co-habitation of both modernity and tradition in the same geopolitical space. These agents have customs and laws of their own that preserve them even against the harshest external conditions. Bourdieu (1991) while explaining price formation and the anticipation of profits in linguistic exchanges emphasises spaces of resistance that are equally applicable to African theatre.

It is true that the unification of the market is never so complete as to prevent dominated individuals from finding, in the space provided by private

⁴¹ Public imagery is used here to mean images produced to catch a wide audience with a variety of functions including selling a doctrine, a way of life, religious beliefs or in short, values of an elite class. The images may range from fictional characters, theatre and the electronic media.

life, among friends, markets where laws of price formation which apply to more formal markets are suspended. In these private exchanges between homogenous partners, the 'illegitimate' linguistic [*theatre*] products are judged according to criteria which, since they are adjusted to their principles of production, free them from the necessarily comparative logic of distribution and of value. (1991:71, emphasis mine)

Transposed to theatre, this suggests that in spaces that are not entirely controlled by colonial agents, blacks had the liberty to perform their own theatre, but without accruing symbolic and cultural capital. This is a form of resistance to the dominant discourse. The phenomenon of agency and subjectivity has led to the production of highly differentiated alternative theatre even among cultural producers of a similar socio-historical background. This gives credence to my claim that the individual artist is not a passive agent at the mercy of structure, but s/he has a degree of reflexivity to make personal choices.

Sally Moore (1978) provides anthropological theories of resistance that are useful to explain the production and maintenance of black performances in the early days of the colonial city. She argues that the process of regularisation of society through ideologies, social systems, laws, rules and force or the threat of it do not always produce what she calls 'situational adjustment'. This is as a result of continuous struggle between pressure to establish or maintain order or regularity and the attendant counter-activities and complexity that make life unsuited to absolute ordering. Imposed rules, customs and frameworks that operate in a community, she argues, work in areas of 'indeterminacy', 'ambiguity', 'uncertainty' and 'manipulability'. Social relationships and processes are in their nature mutable and to impose laws is an attempt to fix their mutability. She argues that order never fully takes place. The other reason Moore proffers for the failure of laws and rules to fully fix social life is the semi-autonomous nature of the social field. It has its own rule-making capacities even if it is subsumed in a larger social matrix which can invade it. Moore's position aptly explains the existence of African performances in the then Salisbury and other mining towns even though both missionaries and colonialists had banned some of them. Bans and prohibitions did not always result in compliance, as can be seen in the following examples. On 18 August 1899 the British South Africa Company passed the Witchcraft Suppression Act which defined witchcraft as 'the throwing of bones, the use of charms and any other means or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery' (Statute Law of Zimbabwe, 1899: 295). This ordinance was used to ban *mhande*, a Shona traditional dance (Plastow, 1996). *Nyawo* was banned in the mid 1920s (Parry, 1999). The courtship dance (*mbende*), danced by the Zezuru (a subgroup of the Shona), was banned in 1910, but continued under an undercover name

jerusarema (Asante, 2000: 44). Missionaries had the power to ban a dance which they thought was not consistent with Christian values and this was the fate of *mbende*. The same missionary, however, reinstated the dance after a plea by the local chief in Mrewa⁴² (ibid).

Guha (1997) concurs with Moore and goes further to give his own reason for the failure of the colonial administration to achieve absolute assimilation of colonial subjects. He argues that colonialism relied on autocracy (instead of democracy), coercion and force in order to subjugate its subjects. In this kind of domination coercion far outweighed persuasion for there could be no colonialism without force. Guha calls this condition 'non hegemonic' and argues that domination cannot be absolute where force is applied more than persuasion. He proffers the argument that in this particular case the articulation of domination is followed by subordination which is characterised by both collaboration and resistance. This is true when applied to the Rhodesian field of cultural production as evidenced by performances that reflect this condition of collaboration and resistance. Early African migrant workers did not become bewildered and passive aliens in a white world. Neither did they jettison their cultural practices upon entering a predominantly white city.

Oral Performance as Resistance

The period 1890 – 1954 is characterised by absence of written creative works by Africans. However, this is not to suggest that there were no African performances during the period 1890 – 1957, nor that the history of performance began with the arrival of Europeans. Since I am interested in how African theatre and performance responded to given socio-political conditions and experiences, it follows that I draw examples from the historical trajectory influenced by colonialism. What is striking about this period is that there is general absence of Shona and Ndebele people from the repertory of urban performances, which is where real contact⁴³ was more pronounced. The urban space, therefore, presents a fertile case study of African cultural responses to colonial discourse. Paradoxically, a large proportion of

⁴² According to one version of recorded evidence, the chief went to the missionary and told him that he had dreamt the baby Jesus being born in Jerusalem (sic) and had seen a vision where all chiefs were coming to Jerusalem with presents singing and dancing *mbende* (which from then became *jerusarema*). The missionary was impressed and allowed the dance to be performed to commemorate the birth of Jesus.

⁴³ Urban Africans were more exposed to Western values as they interacted with whites at workplaces and even lived with them (in the case of domestic servants). The urban space was under direct rule while the rural space was under indirect rule. The rural people were relatively less exposed to Western influence. The difference though was a matter of degree.

urban African population was drawn from outside Rhodesia. Most of the immigrants came from Malawi, Zambia, the DRC and Mozambique. While for towns located in drought prone areas like Bulawayo, the population of local Ndebele people was relatively higher, Salisbury (Harare) was marked by a relative scarcity of Shona people.⁴⁴ The significance of this is that the cultural life of the early urban dwellers was dominated by northern ethnic groups. The lingua franca of most of the mining towns, settlements and cities was Chinyanja – the urban language of northern ethnic groups. It follows that performances, music and other forms of recreational culture had a northern flavour. According to Yoshikuni (1999) this trend began to change after 1950 when large numbers of Shona migrants settled in the towns – especially Salisbury. Before 1950, according to Yoshikuni, the Shonas in Salisbury were less than 40% of the African population, however, he demonstrates that '[t]he proportion of Southern Rhodesian Africans rose from 41% in 1951 to 72% in 1962 and 83% in 1969' (Yoshikuni, 1999: 120). It is thus not surprising that from 1968, we see an exponential growth of drama written in African languages as well as oral performances from the increasing numbers of urban Africans in Rhodesian.

How then did oral performances collaborate and resist colonial discourse? Going back to the figure 4.1 above, I would argue that there were oral performances that appropriated western styles but mocked Rhodesian discourse from within by refusing to be wholly western. These include tea parties and *Beni* performances. The other category of dances such as *Nyawo* refused entry into the arena offered by colonial styles. When *Nyawo* performances were banned they went underground and continued to perform once at the start of each new moon out in the secluded darker areas of the city. The banning, according to Parry (1999), took place in 1920. What is known, however, is that it was brought by immigrants from Malawi who came to Southern Rhodesia looking for work at the beginning of colonisation in the 1890s and throughout the early 20th century. The other variation of *nyawo* came from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) with Zambian job seekers. According to Sambo (2002), Zambian immigrants brought what he calls the 'social *nyawo* performance' while Malawian immigrants brought what he calls the 'mysterious type'. The mysterious *nyawo* is a ritualistic performance played once a month. Although it is entertaining, its main purpose is efficacy achieved by initiating neophytes, giving supplication to the spirits of the dead and maintaining cosmic order. For this reason, it is a religious institution only

⁴⁴ The reasons for this anomaly are varied and have been dealt with at length by other studies (Yoshikuni 1999).

welcoming those who are born into it: the Chewa. The social *nyawo* is non-ritualistic. It can be performed at social gatherings, dance festivals and galas for entertainment.

In the early 1900s *nyawo* performance refused to conform to colonial demands. These early *nyawo* performances were embellished with body paintings, masks made of animal skins and feathers as a way of constructing characters. They put on masks of animals such as cows (*chimombemombe*) zebras and ostriches. With time, an element of collaboration with colonial discourse crept into the *nyawo* performance, as evidenced by how the costumes changed from skins and feathers to cotton and synthetic fabric. Some characters were constructed from colonial and Catholic religious figures that were popular during the early days of colonialism to both emulate and mock them. Sambo (2002) has included a list of characters that *nyawo* dancers played. Colonial figures that were satirised included the Native District Commissioner, who was authorised to interact with Africans in Tribal Trust Lands, as well as popular white characters in western films and novels, like James Bond. The dancer playing James Bond was adorned in a suit and put on a white mask to suggest a white person. The masked dancer playing the Native District Commissioner would be clothed in the appropriate uniform complete with helmet and baton stick. Catholic figures that were satirised included Maria (the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus) who was dressed in white apparel decorated with all kinds of ornaments and a white faced mask to suggest her white race. The Pope (Papa) was also played by the *nyawo* dancers costumed in appropriate robes and papal emblems. Biblical characters like Simon were created with white or yellow paint on the face with a brunette wig to suggest a white person.

For Catholic characters to emerge within such an intensely 'heathen' practice was an affront to Catholicism and Christianity. *Nyawo* dancers took turns to dance randomly and spontaneously according to the tempo and rhythm of the drum. To present a white persona (religious or political) amongst other mystical beings dancing in the most grotesque patterns to an African drum was standing Rhodesian discourse on its head and exploding the 'preferred' and politically correct transparent image of whiteness. European bodies that came to Rhodesia carried with them a lot of cultural baggage. They were cultural bodies that were supposed to radiate manners, values and comportment of what Shilling (1997) has called 'civilised' bodies. Throughout the medieval times and the court societies the European body became subject to expanding taboos transforming it into a site for an expression of behavioural codes (Shilling, 1997: 63-103). The Victorian and Edwardian body that came to

Rhodesia embodied those values. To enact this 'civilised body', giving up its taboos and adopting the Bakhtian grotesque body in an intensely African ethnic dance, was an insult to Victorian values. It was both tragic, shattering the preferred image, and comic, as it brought relief to Africans who played and/ or watched Europeans being satirised. It was affirming the European image through emulation and at the same time mocking it by caricaturing it. A white person in Rhodesia could not be created in a work of art through the agency of a black person. Who says a black man cannot play white? Look at what I can do to this white figure once I have become him. It seems like a form of Brechtian *gestus* where the actor while playing the character is offering a commentary on the character he is performing.

There were other oral forms that also mimicked western cultural productions. Records of earliest urban African performances in Rhodesia (McCulloch, 2000; Makwenda, 2005; Parry, 1999) indicate tea parties and *beni* dances as performances that celebrated and mocked Rhodesian discourse through mimicry. The tea party as a cultural production was appropriated from the white Rhodesian elite. According to Cary (1975), Lady Rodwell, wife of the Governor of Southern Rhodesia in the early 1930s was particularly fond of tea parties, and wives of white Rhodesian elites normally held tea parties in the morning where they congregated at the house of one of their colleagues to drink tea and dance to music from the gramophone (Cary 1975).

The tea party was an ambivalent performance which both affirmed colonial culture and challenged it. In its various manifestations in most early Rhodesian urban and peri-urban centres the tea party was not a homogenous phenomenon. Black communities, inspired by the class structures of early white Rhodesian society separated themselves socially on the basis of their own class positions which were reflected in these tea parties. There were two classes of tea parties – the African elite⁴⁵ tea party and the African lower class tea party which also mutated into two types.

The Christianised African elite tea parties were held 'under the auspices of a white controlled religious body (often the Wesleyan church)' (Parry, 1999: 58), however, those not

⁴⁵ African elite is used here to refer to Africans who were Western educated, wealthy and practised a combination of Western and Judeo-Christian values (even if in some cases they were not religious). Weinrich (1973) has suggested an annual salary of £250.00 as a marker of elite economic life. This class of Africans included priests, pastors, doctors, nurses, social workers, lecturers, teachers, headmasters, school inspectors, clerks, traders and artisans.

held under the auspices of a colonial organisation served alcohol to participants and audiences. They played European music and ate and drank European food (fat cookies, cakes, rice, salads, roasted/fried chicken and beef) and beverages, often European Liquor.⁴⁶ Makwenda (2005) recounts that African elites favoured Township jazz 'as this type of entertainment was associated with Western or "modern culture"' (2005: 28). Makwenda goes on to argue that during the 1940s elite tea parties often hired a one man band musician called a *Masiganda* (Shona) or *Omasiganda* (Ndebele) which is a corruption of the Afrikaans word *musikant* for musician. Popular musicians in the 1940s included Josaya Hadebe, George Sibanda, Sabelo Mathe, Jacob Mhungu and John White. Their music imitated western country following trend setters of the period like Jimmy Rogers, Louis Armstrong, Elvis Presley and others. Chimhete (2004) cites the musician (Friday Mbirimi) on the elite tastes of the 1940s and 1950s: 'it was the norm to go West ...local music was frowned upon, except for the manual worker' (2004: 39). When holding a tea party in a public hall like Mai Musodzi, which African elites called a concert, they played Western music from a gramophone and did ballroom dancing and a man usually paid a fee for dancing with a woman (Chimhete, 2004; Makwenda, 2005).

Lower class tea parties were patronised by lower-class Africans. They manifested in two slightly different ways. The first type was the house tea party which hired neighbouring houses near the tea party or adjacent compound⁴⁷ to act as retreat zones for men wanting to have sex with hired girls (Chimhete, 2004). The second type of lower class tea party was affectionately labelled a 'speed bar' because of its associations with running at great speed if police raided the party. This was operated in a bush on the outskirts of a black township. The dance arena was a temporary enclosure constructed in the bush. According to a 1949 government report, to take a hired girl for a dance in the dance arena cost 3s 4d per record

⁴⁶ Only Africans with university degrees could drink European liquor according to the 1957 amendment of the African Beer Act. All other Africans were not allowed to drink it, but they used this tea party opportunity to evade the law. Since the 1920s the law on liquor was honoured more in breach than in compliance.

⁴⁷ Compounds were tiny housing units in mining towns to house large numbers of African labourers. Phimister and Van Onselen graphically describe a typical compound. Large compounds were typically three-tiered: the inner or square compounds were used to house either short-term workers or recruited labourers. ...The huts of single workers surrounding the inner compound housed longer-term miners. ...Finally separated from both these tiers were the huts of married workers and their families – fully proletarianised workers, semi-skilled with above average wages – the group least likely to desert (1997:4)

(Chimhete, 2004). Both these types of tea parties served the traditional brewed beer mostly from a tea pot to disguise the contents (Makwenda, 2005).

Although the obvious influence and aspects of collaboration with colonial culture is clear, one may ask whether these tea party performances resisted the colonial culture in any way. I would argue that these parties were not slavish imitations of the white elite tea party, but had their own customs included. However, it is in the lower class tea parties that one sees resistance most clearly – the music played was African pop – usually rumba from the Belgian Congo, traditional *mbira* music and a ghettoised version of Western Jazz called *tsavatsava*. According to Claire Jones (1992), the jazzy sound intrinsic to *tsavatsava* was derived from the music of the rural social dances. Jones singles out August Musarurwa as a *tsavatsava* musician who entertained lower class Africans at their tea parties in the late 1940s eventually recording his *skokiaan* in 1951, which was later adapted by Louis Armstrong and became a hit in the USA in 1954. The dancers improvised contemporary movements to suit the rhythm of rumba and *tsavatsava* music.

As Bhabha puts it, mimicry is ‘an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners and ideas’ (Huddart, 2006: 57) and that it subverts in its slippage, in the way it differs from the source. This is a form of resistance to colonial discourse in a number of ways. While the production responds to colonial notions of respectability by copying Western values, it refused to be wholly assimilated, as seen by the exaggeration in the copying in the lower class African tea parties.

The second dimension of resistance lies in the ways in which the production refuses the fixedness of the African stereotype. Rhodesian discourse fixed the African in one place as a ‘savage’ and understood that ‘savage’ on the basis of prior knowledge. When the ‘savage’ refused this position of stasis by being able to do what the colonial master could do, Rhodesian discourse created new stereotypes in order to maintain the status quo. For example, the Rhodesian Ministry of Information put together a booklet entitled *The Man and His Ways* (as a guide to understanding Africans in Rhodesia) which was distributed to white school children, tourists and members of the police force and army. Through that booklet the African was understood not through lived experience, but through prior knowledge. University sociologist M.F.C Bourdillon complained about the African myths it contained:

... [it] allows the status quo to be maintained, with whites preserving their privilege. That's what's behind the development of this mythology: the instinctive realisation that if the mythology is exploded, the position is no longer justified. Therefore the mythology must be maintained at all costs (cited in Frederickse, 1982:16)

However, mimicry is a powerful challenge, as it breaks the stereotype causing anxiety in the coloniser. When the African refuses the fixed stereotype by being able to do what the European can do, then the coloniser is made anxious and must manufacture new stereotypes to, once again fix the new African or colonialism will collapse. This search for respectability and acceptance into the colonial ruling order by blacks in Rhodesia caused much anxiety among early colonialists as evidenced by the *Herald* editor in 1904 who after watching an African elite tea party wrote:

The black must remain the servant of the white and if such gatherings as these are permitted, the Tom Loiswayos and the rest of this race will ere long refuse to submit to the white, the dire consequences of which cannot be foreshadowed. (Parry, 1999: 58)

The Master of Ceremonies had addressed audiences as ladies and gentlemen thus promoting African 'girls' and 'boys' to the status of their European counterparts. The official titles for professional Africans were AM for African Male and AF for African Female. These appellations were dropped in 1953 when Garfield Todd ascended to power and replaced them with European titles Mr or Mrs or Miss.

To add to that, all European theatres did not admit African audiences or performers during this period (1890-1960).⁴⁸ The only social spaces available for Africans were council beer halls, opened only on weekends. Tea parties offered an alternative space for relaxation, performance and entertainment which did not respect colonial policy on African socialisation. Furthermore, if the colonial government did not want to acknowledge and respect African elites, elite tea parties, even if they were European in form and style became one of the many ways that African elites 'tried to shape their own sociability and determine how they spent leisure time' (Chimhete, 2004: 53). At some lower class tea parties, especially those that took place in the bush (speed bars), participants performed traditional dances and drank traditional brew. This could be taken to mean that even if Africans were

⁴⁸ City by-laws did not allow Europeans and Africans to use the same ablution facilities and in a sense the same theatres. This was successfully challenged in court by the Salisbury Repertory theatre and the by-law was set aside. Reps theatre through a secret ballot in 1960 voted 419 for and 196 against admission of black audiences (see Cary, 1975). Admission of blacks from 1960 onwards depended on individual theatre houses.

uprooted from their natal origins by relocating to the European city, they tried to recuperate their culture in an urban context using an art form appropriated from English culture.

Another important aspect of resistance, especially after the Second World War, was 'the winds of change' that swept across Africa as nationalism. As municipal beer halls were seen by Africans as an extension of white hegemony they, according to Chimhete (2004), started to boycott council beer halls and patronised tea parties and later shebeens.⁴⁹ This was a form of passive resistance to white domination. Related to this was the Africans' response to laws banning them from drinking what was classified as 'European beer' (wines, brandy, whisky, spirits, lagers and all clear beer) under the African Beer Act and the Liquor Act until 1957. Tea parties were an opportunity to usurp colonial authority by transgressing the law through drinking prohibited substances.⁵⁰

The *beni* dance is another example of oral performance that resisted Rhodesian discourse through mimicry. This dance still survives today in Zimbabwe, but it has its roots in German East Africa/Tanganyika (Tanzania). The version that was brought to Rhodesia is the *Beni Arinoti*, (from *Harinoti*, meaning the perspiring or unclean ones). *Beni Arinoti* was brought by ethnic groups from Malawi who took part in the King's African Rifles that fought the Germans. When this military unit was disbanded at the end of the First World War in 1918, as was traditional in the early 20th century, the demobilised soldiers together with other young Nyasas, thirsty for opportunities in the more prosperous south, moved to the present day Zimbabwe and carried with them this cultural form.

When *Beni Arinoti* moved to Southern Rhodesia in 1918, the 'quasi-military atmosphere of the compound endowed with its own emphasis on discipline, status, uniforms and barracks' (Phimister and Van Onselen, 1997: 8) provided a fertile hosting culture for its development. It moved down with the same European characteristics – military drills with dummy guns

⁴⁹ The term *Shebeen* originates from the Irish word *sibin* and was brought to Zimbabwe by British settlers as a descriptor of an illicit bar or club where alcoholic beverages were sold without a licence. Shebeens have become an integral part of southern African urban township culture, although in Zimbabwe they are still illegal.

⁵⁰ Tea parties started to decline from 1962 when the African Beer Act was amended and removed all restrictions on beer consumption, allowing Africans to buy any type of beer. There was no need to disguise the drinking of beer under a tea party, but the economic benefits could not be ignored. According to Makwenda (2005) the tea parties slowly transformed themselves into shebeens, but carrying with them the same class tags – elite shebeens and lower-class shebeens.

made from wood, dances which took the forms of a parade, procession or a march past and sometimes a platoon form. The songs were in Chewa or Nyanja. *Beni Arinoti* had a hierarchy of office bearers who wore uniforms and had titles of honour that replicated the British navy. The Port Herald Burial Society which hosted these dances, for example, had the following titles of office bearers: King, Governor, Prince, General, Commander, Doctor, Bishop, Lord and King's Servant (Parry, 1999; Phimister and Van Onselen, 1997; Ranger, 1975). Although they were honoured during the performance, these office bearers performed administrative roles for the welfare of members. Organisation of this nature was normally discouraged by the colonial authorities as it didn't fit the frames of the African stereotype. However, as in other similar cases where an African performance or organisation had been banned, Africans responded by emulating the establishment of philanthropic organisations like the Red Cross which Europeans had founded. Phimister and Van Onselen (1997: 7) recount that in 1918, seven percent of all black workers died during the Spanish influenza epidemic of that year. Rhodesians during the same period started a number of voluntary organisations to make a contribution to the war and this capacity for organisation struck Africans who used the crisis as a reason to form their own voluntary organisations such as the Loyal Mandabele (sic) Patriotic Society 1915, Nyasaland Boys Club 1917 and Port Herald Burial Society 1918. It would have seemed ridiculous to stop Africans organising the burial of their society members during such a critical moment.

A number of things in the *Beni Arinoti* acted as a challenge to both missionaries and colonialists. First, even if the missionaries could see that most of the *beni* elements were aping European models, they denied Africans the autonomy to choose what they wanted to use from European styles and what they did not want. Choosing from African performances and Arab dances as was evident in *beni* was taken as exercising too much freedom of choice. What Ranger (1975) has called the 'intensive Arabisation' of *beni* was interpreted as a way of trying to spread Islam in a British Christian colony. Just as in Tanganyika, *beni* in Rhodesia was met with bitter missionary hostility to the extent that the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference of 1930 recommended the banning of African dances in their areas of jurisdiction (McCulloch, 2000: 137). While they might have admired European styles, the secular innovations were unpalatable to their spiritual sensibilities. Both O'Callaghan (1977) and Jones (1992) agree that early missionaries in Rhodesia required African assimilation into European culture. Missionaries acknowledged nothing of value from African culture. Converted Africans had to drop their tunes and style of singing to assimilate the European

acapella style in four part harmony. All dances, including *beni*, which brought innovations from elsewhere were despised. However, according to Jones (1992) missionaries in Rhodesia 'repented' from this notion of assimilation in 1954 with a programme which required the incorporation of African instruments and melodies in worship. This has become an annual event run under the auspices of the Ecumenical Arts Association still run today. Missionaries in eastern Africa had long changed their attitudes from the 1920s and 1930s relating to African performing arts. According to Ranger (1975), missionaries supported traditional dances which they found to be consistent with morality.

Secondly, colonial industrialists and mine owners also felt challenged by *Beni Arinoti*. The capacity for organisation by Africans was interpreted as a recipe for industrial action, particularly in the congested compounds. In Tanganyika this capacity for organisation in the form of *beni* dance had produced strikes. A warning had been cabled to Southern Rhodesia that such organisations were 'eminently capable of misuse for propaganda purposes' (Phimister and Van Onselen, 1997: 9). The Compound Manager at Shamva confirmed fears from Tanganyika by viewing the Port Herald Burial Society formed in 1918 as 'liable to lead to a great deal of trouble' (ibid). In fact, in 1927 a strike broke out at Shamva mine. Although some scholars attempted to link the strike to the Port Herald Burial Society, Ranger, depending on studies by Clyde Mitchell, has concluded that the strike had no connections with *beni* (1975: 138). The Chief Native Commissioner wrote a circular instructing that the leadership of *beni* should be put under surveillance. The Chamber of Mines was perturbed by these reports of organised drill of *beni* performances, and they 'expressed the fear that the dance societies might become "the basis of labour movements"' (Ranger, 1975: 138). Those fears were not unfounded as it later proved that the first labour movement the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) was formed through the structures provided by African voluntary organisations (Parry, 1999).

Lastly, colonialists linked *beni* dances to the rise of nationalism. This fear was given impetus by a Belgian rightwing journalist – Daniel Thwaites, who in 1936 wrote that *beni* and its mutations constituted

a cancerous growth of racial hatred deliberately cultivated on modern lines by a mastermind well versed in native lore with a profound knowledge of how to make the complicated appeal to native psychology... (Ranger, 1975: 138)

The use of military titles was interpreted as a preparation to take over the colony. To use them, according to the journalist, was a way of understudying Europeans for the inevitable takeover. For this reason, *beni* was banned in the Belgian Congo in 1934 (now DRC), but there is no record of its banning in Rhodesia. It simply caused anxieties in the missionaries and colonial administrators. There is no systematic study at the moment that has documented the number of *beni* societies that existed between 1890 and 1950. What can be said with certainty, however, is that with the closure of mines in Zimbabwe and the invasion of farms by ZANU PF militias and war veterans as well as displacement of workers of mostly Malawian origin, cultural life revolving around *beni* dances has been emasculated. There are still *beni* societies that perform at social and political galas in Zimbabwe. While in eastern Africa the dance died a natural death in the 1960s, in Zimbabwe it still exists. Some of the movements like the 'borrowdale' dance popularised by the *sungura* artist Alick Macheso have been incorporated into *beni*. Probably what exists now is its mutation rather than *beni* as it was in its 1918 form. However, it played a particular role in black Zimbabwean (peri)-urban culture in the early twentieth century as a form of cultural resistance to European performance forms.

Theatre and Performance of the Liberation War

A bigger chunk of performances in this category is located in subfield 5, although a minute fraction of performances such as choirs and some songs derived from Christian churches are located in subfield 3 in figure 4.1. This is the space with the highest concentration of resistance to Rhodesian discourse. When the liberation war intensified from 1972 guerrillas resisted western performance forms by reverting back to traditional performances which they enacted in training camps to each other. They also performed at bases in operational war zones in Zimbabwe with the masses. The war introduced a new structure of feeling which resulted in politically engaged cultural performances. Alec Pongweni who left Zimbabwe for England in 1972 and returned home in January 1978 recalls the cultural transformation in Zimbabwe at the time of his return:

I came back home in January 1978 to be confronted with an earthshaking revival of ethnic music. Where local artists had made their names by emulating the Beatles, Elvis Presley, etc., I found Thomas Mapfumo, Oliver Mutukudzi and others holding sway and quite confidently and resignedly hugging the ground of African culture in their music. This amounted to a re-entry shock for me. (1982: xiii)

It could only have been the war which revolutionised the way art was made in Zimbabwe.

Political nationalism which had begun in the 1940s was accompanied by cultural nationalism. One manifestation of this cultural nationalism, which was also a form of resistance, was religious cooperation between both ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrillas and territorial spirit mediums (*mhondoro*). In Matabeleland, ZIPRA guerrillas especially visited the Dula/Red Axe shrine in Matopo Hills for guidance and spiritual blessings (Ranger and Ncube 1996: 35-57). Relying on Daneel's earlier studies, Ranger and Ncube confirm that ZANLA guerrillas sent emissaries to the Matonjeni/Wirirani/Zhilo shrines in the same hills to obtain mystical directives for the conduct of the war. In either case, there is no evidence of ritual performance. However, David Lan (1985) highlights that ZANLA guerrillas operating in north-east Zimbabwe took part in ritual performances (*mapira*) to win the protection of the ancestral spirits (*midzimu*). They observed ceremonial cleanliness laws issued by the spirit mediums and physically performed in trance rituals by singing and dancing to the ancestors. These ritual performances completely refused cooperation with Rhodesian discourse.

Liberation performances can be divided into two strands – camp and *pungwe* theatre. Camp theatre was performed by ZANLA and ZIPRA recruits in their respective training camps in Zambia, Angola, Tanzania and Mozambique. In fact, performance was part of the training of recruits. For ZANLA recruits, the day began at 4.30 am with exercises which were then followed by a sixteen mile run (Martin and Johnson 1981: 81). This sixteen mile run was accompanied by the *toyi-toyi*⁵¹ dance and chant (Maluleke 1993, Pfukwa 2008).

The *toyi-toyi* dance, being a military and war like performance has insurgent qualities. When performed by large numbers of people, it gives them confidence while at the same time intimidating the rival. In Ndebele, the act of defiance through *toyi-toyi* is called '*ukuzabalaza*' which means to stand firm; refuse to give way or to resist. In South Africa the act of defiance through *toyi-toyi* became known as '*umzabalazo*' (Twala and Koetaan 2006: 164). This act of

⁵¹ The exact origin of *toyi-toyi* is contested. The Shona, Zulu, Ndebele and Xhosa claim it as part of their culture (Twala and Koetaan 2006) since it has meaning in each of these languages. What is known, however, is that it was not part of public performance in South Africa before 1980 and only became visible in street protests after the apartheid South African Government declared the State of Emergency in 1985. In Zimbabwe, no recorded workers' union used the *toyi-toyi* dance in the numerous general strikes from 1948 to about 1965 (Raftopoulos and Phimister 1997) and it only became visible after contact with guerrillas coming from Mozambique from about 1972. While all theories of origins of the *toyi-toyi* dance have a right to exist, the most plausible theory is that it began as part of military drill in camps outside Zimbabwe and was brought by returning guerrillas to Zimbabwe. Since MK fought and trained together with ZIPRA they carried the dance with them to South Africa. It is now part of Southern African performance especially during civil unrest events. Even though ZANLA used the *toyi-toyi* dance during public performances in camps and bases, its war time leader Robert Mugabe banned it in 2004 (Blackstone 2008).

dancing on the same spot sometimes prancing forward and punching the air with the right fist in rhythm with the chant was a confidence booster. Mkhululi Dhlwayo, an ex-guerrilla fighter remembers the experience of *toyi-toying*:

Just to hear 30,000 guerrillas *toyi-toying* in the heat of emaGojini, knees beating their chests, arms high up in the air holding AK-47s, sweat streaming from their uniformed bodies was a moving experience. The whole mountain range seemed to sway to this rhythm. Even wild animals like hyenas, lions, tigers and elephants never strayed near the camps when soldiers roared their songs to the *toyi-toyi* dance. It instilled us with confidence (cited in Maluleke 1993: 33)

Pfukwa (2008: 30-59) collected and analysed some of the chants that accompanied the *toyi-toyi* dance and he argues that liberation songs became a site of struggle to challenge Rhodesian discourse.

Political education for recruits was not given in lecture form, but was performed. Each training camp, especially in Mozambique, had a cultural guerrilla unit which composed and/or sang renditions of previously composed songs. This cultural unit, according to Pongweni (1982: 1), underwent military training and conscientisation as part of their preparation for war. The ZANLA choir led by Dick Chingaira Makoni is known for having composed many liberation songs now published in Pongweni (1982). Other choirs in different training camps sang renditions of ZANLA choir songs and even composed their new songs (Pfukwa 2008). Political education was derived from 'national grievances' published in a booklet entitled *Mwenje 1* (n.d) [Light] developed by members of ZANU High Command (Martin and Johnson). As the speeches were given daily to recruits, political commissars who led the political education sessions had almost memorised the speeches which they delivered by rote or paraphrased. No speaker could start a speech or ask a question or start a song without chanting the standard slogan (see Appendix B).

The culture shock experienced by Pongweni underlines the dominant feeling in the late 1970s. The very idea of theatre as it was understood in the school system that most peasant children had attended was challenged through these camp performances. They opposed the dominant text-based theatre which was usually produced in generic consumer-oriented Aristotelian structure. The thrust of this camp theatre was to be reflexive and presentational as opposed to the colonial representational theatre that was officially admired. Camp theatre situated the audience (recruits) as participants rather than spectators. This type of performance was grounded on an anti-essentialist resistance to western illusionistic theatre.

The theatrical event is both immediate and performed by real people playing themselves as opposed to characters. This theatre is comparable (although no influence is insinuated at all) to the American and European Happenings of the 1960s where performances 'just happened' on the basis of chance (Wallis and Shepherd 2004: 87). Most of the camp theatre songs were composed by the ZANLA Choir and rehearsed beforehand. The speeches and slogans were also available in the memory of political commissars and were rehearsed everyday during training. Each training session was a rehearsal for forthcoming performances and this continued from 1972 up to 1979 when training of cadres stopped after the ceasefire was declared. However, how the different components of performance were put together in each day happened by mere chance depending on the inspiration and impulse in each participant. This use of the aleatory⁵² technique was to mock dominant bourgeois ideas of drama and beauty in the field of theatre. The values placed in individual creativity, structure and received aesthetics which characterised formal Eurocentric drama were mocked. The aleatory is both offensive and liberating from tradition and received formulae. It is in that sense of subverting received aesthetics that camp theatre could be taken as theatre of resistance. The resistance is located both in content and style. There is a convergence of popular revolution with art in revolt. In this theatre there is an underlying insistence to problematise the existence of art as a separate discipline/category. Performance was integrated into the totality of life as part of a revolution whereas received colonial theatre practice separated life from art.

Inside liberated and semi-liberated war zones, guerrillas and peasants held performances at what was called 'bases'.⁵³ This was done twice or thrice a week. A base was a militarily strategic position located under natural cover like a forest or between kopjes, hills or

⁵² An aleatory event is one that is governed by chance as was the case with composer John Cage (1912-92) in the early 1950s. He produced sounds on the piano by dealing cards on its strings. The Dadaist Tristan Tzara (1886-1963) used random selections from newspaper texts to create poems. In theatre, such activities acquired a name 'Happenings' in 1959 when Allan Kaprow produced *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (see Wallis and Shepherd 2004: 172-4).

⁵³ Unless otherwise stated, the information in this section is based on personal experiences during the war. I was born on the 15th of October 1970. At about the age of five, according to local custom, I became a herd boy (starting with herding goats and graduating to herding cattle) together with other lads of my age and hence became unwilling witnesses to the movement of troops in the bush and sometimes fighting. I attended the *pungwe* performances, ran for cover when fighting ensued, spent long hours in hiding away from home when pursued by Rhodesian forces. Being ten at the end of the war I was classified by the guerrillas as a *chigubhu* which in war parlance meant young and intelligence gatherer. Because we were assumed to be herd boys and too naive to know anything, we could pass through military positions, with our animals, without being harassed. For that reason guerrillas depended on our assumed 'naivety' to gather vital information for them.

mountains, but close to a cluster of villages. When guerrillas were deployed in Zimbabwe they moved in small units of between 9 to 12 soldiers led by a detachment commander. This detachment then moved between bases located within a radius of about 20 kilometres⁵⁴ mobilising the masses through *pungwe* performances and fighting when pursued by Rhodesian forces.

The base as a theatre space was not a constructed structure. It was what Marvin Carlson would call a 'ludic space' which he defines as 'a permanently or temporarily created space...space, a ground for the encounter of spectator and performer' (1989: 6). This definition includes flexible forms such as the *pungwe* theatre that did not rely on constructed structures. A base had a central performing area surrounded by the masses (participants) with visible aisles that led to strategic military positions dotted around the perimeter of the base called '*postos*' (Portuguese for set, place, location, stead, site or spot). Guerrillas maintained positions at *postos* throughout the *pungwe* but took turns to come and address as well as perform with the participants. At times a group of three or four guerrillas took to the podium to perform monkey crawling tactics in mock battles. The major role was played by the detachment political commissar who reproduced speeches of camp performances based on national grievances amidst song and dance. Performances included sketches, songs, dancing, memorised speeches, bursts of slogans, chants, poetry, narratives, verbal art, cumulative accounts, epics, tales, sayings and other suprasegmental features of speech, such as whistling, ululation, loud cries and growls, especially at climactic moments of performance.

The above art forms were performed through recourse to the eleatory technique. Amidst a speech, a guerrilla would move from a *posto*, salute the facilitator and whisper something in his ears. The new comer would introduce a new item by chanting a slogan, break into dance and then address the participants. If there was anybody who wanted clarification on any point they raised their hand, chanted a slogan and asked the question.

The structure of the *pungwe* was not predetermined. Only the beginning and the ending were planned. The *pungwe* usually began around 7pm and ended well past midnight with a

⁵⁴ Our Chitorimira base was surrounded by Mapeto on the south, Zvipungudzani on the east, Vuwaza on the south east, Matehwa on the west and Chivungwi bases on the north.

song (see appendix C). Between the opening and the ending, the performances happened by chance and could be interrupted by chants of slogans from parents arriving late from far villages. In order to be recognised as friends and not enemies they methodically chanted a slogan while about 700 metres away from the base '*Pamberi nehondo*' [Forward with the war] whereupon all participants at the base retorted '*pamberi*' [forward]. A guerrilla would advance to intercept them with a loud question and sometimes cocking his weapon 'who is that?' The arriving delegation would identify itself and equilibrium was achieved.

Alec Pongweni has collected a significant number of liberation songs under the title *Songs that Won the Liberation War* (1982) and has grouped them under themes according to the message they articulated.⁵⁵ What is significant about *pungwe* performances is that while they mocked the western bourgeois idea of theatre and denounced colonialism in the substance of utterances and performances this mocking was achieved (in some cases) through recourse to western performance forms. The idea of a choir such as the ZANLA Choir and the ZAPU affiliated choir- People's Revolutionary Choir was western in origin. Although there was a lot of music in African societies; none of it was presented in four part harmony led by a choir conductor. The choir has liturgical origins in western churches. It was popularised in colonial Zimbabwe by mission stations dotted around the country and also by the school extra-curricular activities. At each school there was a junior choir made up of students from grades 1 to 4 and a senior choir made of students from grades 5 to 7. These competed for trophies at zonal, district and provincial choir competitions conducted annually. This cultural practice resulted in a wave of choirs in villages that competed amongst themselves. When the war began in the 1960s choirs (*makwaya*) had become deeply entrenched in the local traditions and were appropriated by liberation movements to fight colonialism. The other significant aspect was that liberation movements appropriated a significant number of songs from Christian churches as observed by Pongweni:

Our cadres knew that the influence of the Christian missionaries among the masses was considerable and that they had to take it into account. They decided therefore, that in the war situation; since no other form of popular culture exerted a strong enough influence to reduce reliance on hymns, it was imperative to exploit this form, if only to mock it. (1982: viii)

⁵⁵ I have left out songs that were played by local bands which Pongweni (1982) includes in his book. Music played by bands was not performed at *pungwes*. An interesting study of *chimurenga* music played by local bands was carried out by Alice Dairai Kwaramba in *Popular Music and Society* (1997). See also Thomas Turino's *Nationalist, Cosmopolitanisms in Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (2000) for the same category of music.

The procedure involved taking a church tune and infusing it with new words that furthered the ideological goals of the liberation movements. I will deal with this ambivalence of *pungwe* performances in chapter 7 where I am analysing war songs as they are used in playtexts. What is important to point out at this stage is that *pungwe* and camp performances resisted Rhodesian discourse on the level of content, while manipulating some western forms in order to attack colonialism. However, *pungwe* performances were largely located in subfield number 4 in figure 4.1 and to a very large extent refused to cooperate with Rhodesian discourse while subfield number 5 which forms the next section to very large extent collaborated with Rhodesian discourse, but with minute spaces for resistance.

Mimicry and Incendiary Devices in Written Drama (1968-1978)

When the Shona language was 'invented'⁵⁶ in 1931 and the Rhodesia Literature Bureau was instituted in 1954 alternative theatre playwrights mimicked the western well-made-play. Even though critics have mourned the loss of African culture as a result of mimicking western writing styles, I demonstrate in this section that written drama is a site of struggle where African playwrights, even though they could not be blatantly political in thematic choice, resisted absolute control of their creativity by placing oral incendiary performative forms in their texts. All the eight plays that I am looking at: Chidyausiku's *Ndakambokuyambira*, (1968) Mugabe's *Rugare Tange Nhamo*, (1972) Hamutyinei's *Sungai Mbabvu* (1973), Lwanda's *Mudyazvavamwe*, (1976) Tsodzo's *Babamunini Francis* (1977), Dzoro's *Mukwasha Aba Nyama* (1978) and Mashiri's *Ushu Ndohwangu* (1978) were written under the auspices of the Rhodesia Literature Bureau. The criterion for evaluating scripts favoured the adoption of western forms as Chiwome (2002: 52) reveals: plot: 15, conflict: 15, suspense: 5, characterisation: 15, language: 5, continuity: 10, theme and title: 15, style: 5, appeal: 10 and ending: 5. If all categories relating to form are added together, they claim the lion's share of 60 percent of the total. As a result, all plays that ended up going to print have a realist Aristotelian three act structure. The form was written on stone and, therefore, could not be changed. The few differences that exist in the play texts arise from the leverage playwrights were given in the remaining 40 percent - covering language, style, characterisation, theme and title. This was where playwrights could put their unique signature to their works.

⁵⁶ Shona was created out of four related dialects, Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika and Kore Kore; and an orthography to standardise the language followed in 1931

Even within this 40 percent, some playwrights like Chidyausiku (1968) and Mugabe (1972) chose to be innovative by mimicking European styles. In *Ndakambokuyambira* Chidyausiku employs the play within a play technique which seems to ape William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where Hamlet uses the play within a play technique to incriminate Claudius for murdering his father. In Chidyausiku's play *Dzikamai* employs the same tactic to prove that women cannot be entrusted with deep secrets. Some of Mugabe's characters, especially Guchu and Deze, in *Rugare Tange Nhamo* appear close to Shakespearean court fools. Zinyemba (1986) has found them to be close to Autolycus in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Their uncouth behaviour and excesses make them misfits in a typical conservative 1960s Shona society depicted in the play. Zinyemba asserts that 'these types of characters strictly have no equivalent in Shona society' (1986: 44). Chidyausiku's *Ndakambokuyambira* is also written in verse which gives credence to my claim that both in terms of style and form, this play mimics Shakespeare.

However, while on the surface, the writing looks European, a closer look at the play texts reveals the refusal by African playwrights to be controlled by European structure. All of the eight plays borrow from the story-telling tradition. All of them, without exception, have didactic endings which can be attributed to the folklore tradition which both teaches and delights. All of them deal with domestic issues for which the story-telling tradition is known. Most critics attack these plays for this reason by arguing that folklore limits the playwrights' vision as they cannot engage with political issues of the day. But as Vambe has argued:

...writers are not mere slaves to tradition, waiting passively to be influenced by orality. They select some aspects of orality and fuse these with new ideas that confirm, modify or even reject the old elements of tradition in their bid to transform their works into something new. (2005:13)

The same could be said about western tradition. Playwrights choose what they want to use without losing their agency as some commentators have implied.

Some playwrights have borrowed directly from known folkloric stories while others have selected certain aspects of oral performance and the reason according to Chinyowa is that 'the folklore, as an oral narrative performance, offered greater theatrical possibilities for emulation than any other art form' (2007: 177). Chidyausiku's *Ndakambokuyambira*, which exposes the unreliability of women, is based on the folktale *Murume Nomukadzi Wake [The Man and his Wife]* which also deals with the same theme (Hodza 1983). Chidyausiku,

however, bends the story to suit his new poetic vision. Mugabe's *Rugare Tange Nhamo* and Hamutiyinei's *Saka Rega Aroore* base their main characters on a common character found in the folklore, *Murume Mvangamakomwe [The Covetous and Mischievous Husband]*. In Mugabe's play, the main character Chikweva dumps his wife just as Hamutiyinei's main character, Muzvondiwa, for a similar reason that they cannot bear them a son. Both characters can be linked to the folkloric character, Sungiraimatunzvi. About half of the plays include a traditional court scene to try offending members. The traditional court is a space for drama as witnesses, accusers and defendants use gesture and language endowed with witticisms to out-manoeuvre others. Protocol also demands that headmen present cases to the chief after dramatising clan praise poetry. *Ushe Ndohwangu*, *Ndakambokuyambira* and *Rugare Tange Nhamo* have this quality. Ruth Finnegan watched an African court session and recorded the following performance elements:

The art of oratory is in...Africa carried to a remarkable pitch...each official spokesman stands up in turn and pours forth a flood of speech, the readiness and exuberance of which strikes the stranger with amazement, and accompanies his words with gestures so various, graceful and appropriate that it is a pleasure to look at. (1970: 444)

What has been appropriated from both European and African forms is a book length discussion that cannot be dealt with exhaustively in a chapter that gives a historical overview. What is important to me is to reveal how what has been called mimicry is in fact exaggerated copying which upsets the stability of a typical realist play. What colonialism has provided, the African playwright has used it to resist and fight colonialism. Colonialism 'invented' a Shona language and the African playwright uses the same language to fight it as Chennells (1997) argues:

Within a colonial situation the act of black writing is always dialogic for it is a refusal to accept colonialism's assumption that blacks are silent unless they are heard through the agency of whites. The black-authored book is the site of an alternative and therefore subversive authority. (1997: 56)

Mashiri's *Ushe Ndohwangu* takes the evangelizing missionary flare in other plays head-on by enacting the disavowed rainmaking ceremony and even reconverting Chief Tigere to traditional religion. The playwright even authorises performers to enact the ceremony according to local variations of *mukwerera* in their area. This becomes a ritual performance within an otherwise Euro-American model of drama. This mimicry is exaggerated and, therefore, mocks the coherence and stability of a European form. While other plays resist Rhodesian discourse stylistically, Mashiri resists both stylistically and thematically. The play *Ushe Ndohwangu* can be read as an allegory of how colonialism affected African societies

and how the latter resisted and accommodated colonialism. Since whiteness cannot be written about through the agency of a black writer, like Solomon Mutsvairo's Pfumojena tribe in the novel *Feso* (1956), Pearson Mashiri creates the character Ishmael in *Ushe Ndohwangu* to epitomise colonial authority. There are a few pointers to this character as allegorical. Ishmael's mother is Chief Tigere's daughter. She worked for a missionary couple, whom we assume was white; went to Salisbury when the couple was transferred there, but she refused to leave the city when her masters were further transferred to some unknown destination. It was during this time that Ishmael was born from what seems to be an illegitimate relationship that his mother had with an unknown city man. The city which in its form and function is European has delivered Ishmael. As if naturalisation of the city is not enough to make him colonial, Ishmael goes overseas to gain the white man's knowledge. He is fathered intellectually and figuratively by colonialism and is its 'bastard' son in a manner reminiscent of the biblical Ishmael. When he comes back from overseas Ishmael literally runs his maternal grandfather's chiefdom as if he is its Native Commissioner. He is not only respected, but feared by everybody including Chief Tigere. Douglas, Ishmael's workmate, comments that '*Saka Ishmael achityiwa haikona?* [That's why people are afraid of Ishmael – isn't it?] (1978: 40). For everything that Chief Tigere intends to do, he consults his grandson Ishmael. This is unforgivable for a typical Shona chief to run his chiefdom on the advice of a 'bastard' nephew. We also learn that Chief Tigere has succumbed to colonialism by being converted to Christianity and by allowing colonial administrators to build roads through his chiefdom. His opponents, such as Nyanguru and Mutizwa, complain that these roads are now being used by the police to harass villagers for not paying tax. Chief Tigere is portrayed as an accommodationist and is contrasted with his nemesis, Nyanguru, who is a hard core traditionalist with a good support base from those who want to save the ancestral graves and worship their rain god.

Ishmael would like to 'develop' his grandfather's chiefdom by building a dam to reverse the effects of a devastating drought currently being experienced in the area. His notion of development is oblivious of the value of tradition. Even though he implores Chief Tigere to hold a rainmaking ceremony, he seems to do this from a culturalist point of view which characterised the colonial provincialisation policy. The essence of ancestral graves that would be covered by the dam waters is not of value to him as it stands in the way of 'civilisation'. This is fiercely fought against by Nyanguru who wants to seize the opportunity to stage a *coup d'état* and dethrone Chief Tigere so that he can keep the graves safe and

worship his god with his 'undiluted' people. This will bring rain and render the dam project useless. In the end no one wins, but people survive in an environment that none of them ever willed. Chief Tigere loses his Christian righteousness under pressure from the clan and allows the holding of a rainmaking ceremony. Nyanguru loses his bid to become chief, but seems to have won the traditionalist battle. Tradition, however, loses as Ishmael goes ahead to build a dam which will drown all ancestral graves and the memory they carry. The play ends with something that underscores 'entanglement'. One of the dam builders, a townsman called Joseph, marries Tazvireva, a rural local girl. Tazvireva had been betrothed to Mutizwa, a friend of Nyanguru, the traditionalist. The city meets with the rural and it is as if the play is celebrating the marriage of tradition and modernity. All this is achieved through resisting and accommodating. It is a way of surviving in a most hostile world where choices are not made freely, but are negotiated. How then can the period 1968-1978 be read as a 'silent period'? Commentators above have projected a notion of absolute control of African creativity where African orality is a cultural site with values totally distorted by colonialism. I have analysed orality as a cultural space in which African identities are formed and negotiated. The frustration of colonial discourse is not accomplished by a negation of colonial values, but by their incorporation and pollution through recourse to oral performance techniques. For me, it is the centre of resisting Rhodesian discourse. It forms what Guillermo Gomez-Pena (2000: 439) has called a 'border culture' which resonates with the Nuttal's 'entanglement'.

The border culture dismantles the authority of Rhodesian discourse by placing incendiary devices in dramatic texts such as oral forms. These dramatic texts offer fields of counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse. Whereas Eurocentric critics see 'contamination' as an evil device to be removed from African dramatic texts, I see it as a dramatic strategy which is less a literary device and more a political project to challenge the stability and authority of Rhodesian discourse. It undermines the polarisation of Rhodesia into self and other as the contact between the differences has been made possible. Differences have been brought together into creative contact which is ambivalent. Diana Brydon (2000) does not view contamination in its negative sense, but proffers it as literary device for achieving political objectives. Contrary to some Zimbabwean critics' position that pre-Independence playwrights succumbed to the whims of external structure and were incapable of resisting it, new readings of the same texts have revealed that external structure was not absolute.

Conclusion

In staging the various performances, Africans both submitted to and resisted Rhodesian discourse resulting in hybrid ambivalent works that both mocked and celebrated colonialism. The notion of hybridity which characterises urban performances was a way of survival and negotiating new identities in an otherwise hostile world which attempted to suffocate some African traditional performances. The contact between Europeans and Africans was not only physical, but cultural and in the latter allowing cultural transmission, less in the direction of the coloniser and more in the direction of the colonised owing to unequal power relations. Cultural criticism in Zimbabwe has tended to apply the 'dominant hypothesis' which portrays the coloniser's power as absolute and having the propensity to dislocate and denature African culture. Critics have failed to notice spaces of resistance where they were apparent in African performances. This necessitates an academic endeavour to return to social and cultural history to investigate forms that emerged during colonial rule and this chapter has attempted to illuminate sites and spaces in urban and rural African performances where Rhodesian discourse was resisted and appropriated. I have tried to avoid the now tired debate about what constitutes theatre and what is not theatre. Our culture-specific values enter into our description of the social world, thereby ideologically affecting the statements that we make, regardless of how factual or sincere we are. The notion of theatre and how it is understood in different discourses has been dealt with at length in my earlier work (1995), as well as by Schechner (1994) and Hauptfleisch (1997), to name but a few scholars. I have noticed that resistance was more pronounced in camp and *pungwe* theatre since these operated relatively far from the glare of Rhodesian surveillance. I have also revisited eight plays written between 1968 and 1978 which previous studies labelled as conforming to the Rhodesian discourse. While indeed the plays have a three act structure and progress on the basis of psychological characters and naturalist dialogue reminiscent of western illusionistic plays, they deploy a number of indigenous texts which act as incendiary devices. These insurgent techniques frustrate a clean well-made play.

CHAPTER 5: THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS AND THEMES IN ZIMBABWEAN PERFORMANCE

Introduction

In this chapter I want to discuss the construction of theatre identities in alternative Zimbabwean theatre at the level of production. In the field of Zimbabwean alternative theatre, NTO and ZACT fought and competed with each other for occupying the dominant position. These two organisations competed to host theatre festivals, to train theatre artists, to express their views in the media and consecrate their agents. They competed on the right to define national theatre. It was a cultural struggle to assume the power and right to tell others what national theatre ought to be and to enforce national theatrical conventions. It invariably became a power struggle between two theatrical conventions – the NTO theatrical convention with a strong Eurocentric orientation and the ZACT theatrical convention with a strong Afrocentric orientation. Since both NTO and ZACT trained the same artists, I argue that theatre makers used their own agency to choose what they wanted from the workshop materials and created theatre that was an admixture of western and African performative modes. In terms of content the themes resisted Rhodesian discourse by challenging the exploitation of Africans by white capitalists and at the same time criticised the corruption of the new ruling elite and the black petit bourgeois class. This chapter is therefore a contextual analysis of the conditions of theatre production between 1980 and 1996 and should be read in conjunction with all other chapters that come after it.

The idea of ‘contextual analysis’ particularly in the semiotics of performance was promoted by De Marinis (1993: 4, 80-1). De Marinis uses the term to cover a wide range of theatrical processes including intertextuality, performance context such as conditions of production (training, rehearsals, scene planning etc) and ‘cultural context’ which he uses to cover theatrical texts such as mime, dance, song, choreography, dramaturgy and extra-theatrical texts such as architecture, theories, philosophies and episteme. He argues that the force of these elements can be brought to bear on the performance in question or on one or more of the performance’s partial texts thereby altering the nature of theatre. Wilmar Sauter refined the idea of contextual analysis by developing the ‘theatrical event model’ (2006: 19) comprising of cultural context, playing culture, theatrical playing and contextual theatricality. The rest of the model is irrelevant to my discussion, but I will appropriate the terms contextual theatricality and cultural context to theorise on how the context of production constructs the identity of alternative Zimbabwean theatre between 1980 and

1996. Sauter (2006) uses the term contextual theatricality to refer to all processes that go on to create a theatrical event but excluding the performance itself. The term covers a number of processes mentioned by De Marinis above and adds critics, directors and publicity which aspects I will discuss at length in chapter 9. Sauter (2006: 67-9) argues that the concept of theatre has been changing over time; and in each place and period there were people who enforced certain theatrical conventions which were used to define what was to be considered as theatre and non-theatre. He proposes that contextual theatricality is a descriptor of a range of theatrical activities that are regarded as theatre by a dominant group in a certain period and geopolitical space. How then was theatre understood by players in the field of theatre and how did that influence the identity of theatre in Zimbabwe?

In Zimbabwe between 1980 and 1996, there was no agreement on what national theatre should or ought to have been due to the cultural rivalry between NTO and ZACT. Both NTO and ZACT conducted national workshops to create national theatre yet their understanding and conception of national theatre was different as explained by Rohmer:

The NTO advocates for a National Theatre Company and a National Drama School. Here, the term 'national' may be defined in a western sense; i.e. as an institution which provides full time training courses for a small elite as well as regular performances in the company's own theatre house. ...ZACT voices the same demands: 'ZACT recognises that there is need to establish a national theatre company, national dance company and national orchestra' (ZACT 1993: 13)... National theatre in Zimbabwe is regarded as community-based theatre. ZACT, as the mother body of community theatre, therefore claims the right to be in charge of a future national performing arts centre. (1999: 116)

Consequently, there were two theatrical conventions that operated simultaneously. The field of theatre was further complicated by ZANU PF's adoption of socialism which it insisted should be infused in all cultural production initially through ZIMFEP and later through ZACT. Thus alternative Zimbabwean theatre was influenced by three theatrical conventions: (i) indigenous cultural text comprising a complex array of African performances from Shona, Ndebele and other minority ethnic groups, (ii) western dramatic theatre comprising mainly of an imperial version of Victorian theatrical tradition and (iii) socialist realism introduced in 1972 during the liberation war and grounded on Maoism, communalism and Marxist-Leninism.



Figure 5. 1 showing the various conventions and contextual pressures combining to form alternative Zimbabwean theatre.

These theatrical conventions were interpenetrated by cultural context which I will discuss together with the analysis of performances in the forthcoming chapters.

The Force and Effect of Theatrical Conventions on Alternative Theatre

A combination of various theatrical conventions shaped the nature of Zimbabwean alternative theatre. Socialism began in 1972 when the incursion of ZANLA guerrillas increased rapidly. The armed wing of ZANU went through socialist ideological training before deployment to fight in Zimbabwe. Every day during the nine months of military training, political education for ZANLA recruits began at 7.00am where instructors taught them the national grievances and the writings of Marx, Lenin and Mao Tse Tung as well as the nature of capitalism, communism and colonialism (David and Johnson 1981: 81). This political education was carried out amidst song, dancing, sloganeering and chanting. Chinese instructors at Itumbi training camp spent most of their time teaching Maoist socialism since they believed that it was the decisive factor for war (David and Johnson 1981). When ZANLA fighters were deployed in Zimbabwe their first priority was mobilising the people through political education⁵⁷ by holding *pungwes*. This became the basis for new theatre at independence. Socialism resonated with an already deeply entrenched tradition of African communalism which espoused similar values of collective creation of wealth, collective labour, equality of citizens and *unhu/ubuntu* [the quality of being human].

⁵⁷ According to David and Johnson (1981) fighters were under instruction to mobilise masses, study the characteristics of people they were operating in and to fight when pursued by Rhodesian forces; they were fighting to defend the process of mass mobilisation.

This socialism was codified into a theatrical convention by ZIMFEP at independence in 1980.⁵⁸ ZIMFEP continued both its academic and cultural programmes that it had been doing in refugee schools during the liberation war as ZANU department of education. Wa Mirii and Gecau, hired by the Zimbabwean government in 1982, took advantage of the new government's adoption of socialism and advanced socialist realism as a creative method for theatre makers whom they were training. They also took advantage of the already existing liberation songs and dances that were performed by both refugee and guerrillas during the war. This indigenous cultural text guided the cultural practices of over 70 percent of peasant refugees and guerrillas. After 1976, traditionalism⁵⁹ ruled the lives of guerrilla fighters. The minority communist and atheistic Vashandi movement⁶⁰ which had taken over ZANU was defeated in 1976 ushering a period of the reign of traditionalism supported by mostly peasant guerrillas. Each training and refugee camp had a separate encampment of spirit mediums who protected camps from attack by predicting air raids and they also blessed war materials as well as giving advice on deployment routes and areas to cache arms (Chung 2006, David and Johnson 1981). When Wa Mirii and Gecau joined ZIMFEP, they worked towards synchronising socialist realism with indigenous partial texts that were already embodied in the memory and bodies of ex-refugees, ex-combatants and the masses.

The cultural text leaves its imprint on the performer's body which comes to the acting practice. According to De Marinis (1993), the cultural text which he calls general text also comprises theatrical conventions and the valid acting code. The cultural text exists in the body-mind of performers before the existence of either a dramatic text or its performance

⁵⁸ ZIMFEP later transferred its intellectual resources to ZACT at its founding in 1987 under the leadership of Ngugi wa Mirii. ZIMFEP was formed by teachers, ex-combatants and ex-refugees who were inherited by the new government from all refugee schools in Mozambique such as Chimoio, Gondola, Pasi Chigare etc. Each refugee school had an average of 2000 students which sometimes included injured guerrillas. At independence, ZIMFEP bought nine farms and established nine schools to cater for ex-refugees and ex-combatants' needs. Fay Chung became the first chairperson of ZIMFEP with Taka Mudariki as its director. Ngugi wa Mirii and Kimani Gecau joined ZIMFEP in 1982 and took over its cultural division.

⁵⁹ I am using this term to mean a systematic emphasis or adherence to doctrines, beliefs, moral codes and practices of ancestors passed from generation to generation.

⁶⁰ Fay Chung (2006: 171-75) recalls that ZANU was taken over by the left wing between 1975 and 1976 who were very educated. This wing was called Vashandi (Workers Movement) and was led by Wilfred Mhanda and Sam Geza. They were orthodox Marxists and had no faith in peasant religion of ancestor worship and spiritism. They planned to establish an atheistic Marxist state at independence. They were rounded up by ZANLA commander Josiah Tongogara and imprisoned till the end of the war in Nampula, Mozambique. Thus ancestor worship characterised by singing, dancing and spirit possession was officially sanctioned in military and refugee camps.

text. The cultural text has a determining motivating function on the performance text and its conventions'. This can be represented diagrammatically as follows:

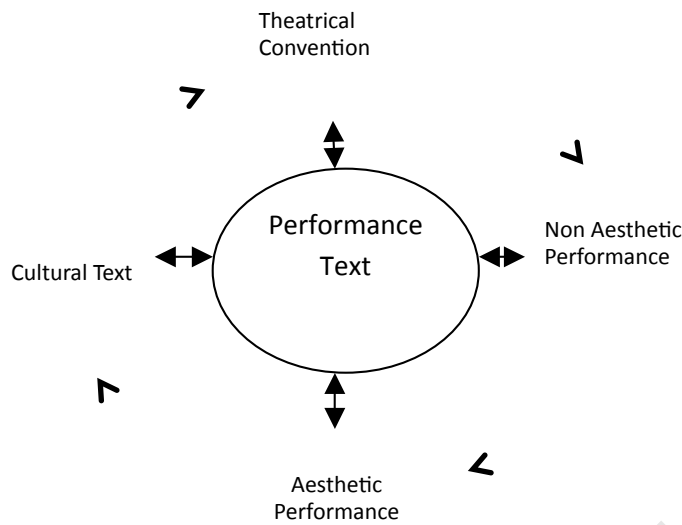


Figure 5. 2 Theatrical Interaction model showing the various performance related underscores that affect the nature of the performance text.

The issue of non-aesthetic performance is captured in Michael Gelfand's *The Genuine Shona* (1973) which discusses expressive behaviour of the Shona people. Erving Goffman (1976) uses the term 'social portraiture' to refer to expressive displays people make that are considered as appropriate behaviour in appropriate circumstances. These expressive behaviours are performed repeatedly until they have been ingrained in the body as ritualised behaviour. Michael Gelfand (1973) did a study of the Shona and recorded their ritualised behaviour during greetings, receiving goods, addressing seniors and equals, the manner of sitting down by different sexes, table manners, what is deemed to be good behaviour, relating with women, father-in-law and other relatives, signs of disrespect, ethics, morality, signs of humility, self discipline, courage and other displays of social portraiture. This is what I have called 'non-aesthetic performance' in the figure 5.2 in the sense that it is everyday behaviour that is part of human embodiment and cannot be taken as an artistic performance to an audience as is the case with 'aesthetic performances'. The two kinds of performances are, however, not mutually exclusive because aesthetic performances normally re-elaborate and reconfigure non-aesthetic performances. This is possible as art borrows from reality.

ZIMFEP's mandate was to craft a theatre convention that would privilege socialist realism and restore confidence and appreciation to the indigenous cultural text. ZIMFEP achieved this through a series of workshops which I now examine to describe and explain the theatrical convention of the period. The first project by wa Mirii and Gecau began in September 1982 at Chindunduma, a ZIMFEP school. There, they organised ex-refugees and ex-combatants to stage a Shona version of Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo's play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Kimathi, a Mau-Mau guerrilla in Kenya's war of liberation, was played by a real ex-guerrilla in Zimbabwe's war of liberation. Other characters were played by students who like their fictional mates had experienced the full brunt of colonial injustice and violence. They sang and danced liberation war tunes just as they did in military and refugee camps in Mozambique and Tanzania. Thus the new theatrical convention promoted the use of African languages and indigenous texts on stage.

Underpinning this decolonisation of Zimbabwean theatre was the paradigm of Pan-Africanism,⁶¹ which is a concept, a movement, a worldview as well as a philosophy illuminating much of African intellectual output. Pan-Africanism has hardliners (traditionalists) and moderates (syncretists). Cultural production in Africa has tended to take those forms as well. Hardliners like Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1982), Ngugi wa Mirii (1988), Chinweizu *et al* (1980) advocate for a total rejection of western canons in African cultural production, while moderates like Chidi Amuta (1989), Stephen Chifunyise (1986), Wole Soyinka (1976) and others advocate for the appropriation of vitalising contributions from western cultural production. Not all Zimbabwean theatre makers under discussion here formally belonged to the Pan-Africanist movement or even deployed the term as a descriptor of their works. Their works, however, reveal in part or in total the core values of Pan-Africanism as described by Watson and Thompson (2000). ZIMFEP's theatre workshops reveal the effect of this Afrocentric paradigm.

ZIMFEP used the strategy of teaching by example where a theatre company would be asked to perform a show. Just as the 'playing culture' (Sauter 2006) of a people is built by

⁶¹ Henry Sylvester William organized its first conference in July 1900. It was responding to the colonization of Africa which had officially begun 16 years before with the Berlin Conference. It was also against slavery, colonization, racism and neocolonialism. Its leaders wanted to restore a sense of pride in their African people's identity. This was to be achieved by re-writing history to give black people their rightful place in the past and the present. The 1945 Manchester conference convened by Du Bois was attended by 100 delegates including Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah later to become leaders of Kenya and Ghana respectively (see Watson and Dudley 2000).

observation and imitation, participants during a workshop would observe the show and then discuss, analyse and evaluate the performance at the end in order to make their choices. To this end, ZIMFEP formed and sponsored Zimbabwe Theatre Works which acted as a resource unit during training of other artists. This company was formed from ZIMFEP school leavers who used their war performances as the basis of a new theatre convention. Taako and Batsiranai theatre companies, although formed independently of ZIMFEP, were contracted as resource companies within the Harare chapter of ZACT.⁶² In 1985 ZIMFEP sponsored the visit of a Zambian theatre company, Kanyama, to conduct a series of training workshops by demonstration. According to Byam (1999: 118), Kanyama theatre spent two months in Zimbabwe performing in schools, community centres, the National Art Gallery and in open spaces. They performed Stephen Chifunyise's *The Retired Ones* (unpublished) and *Mr Polera* (unpublished) which he had written while exiled in Zambia. Kanyama demonstrated the viability of performing in African languages- Nyanja, Bemba and Tumbuka which they combined with English. Plurilingualism became a marker of the new Zimbabwean theatre. The plays also featured song and dance. The major goal of this sponsored cultural visit was to demonstrate to Zimbabwean theatre makers how other independent African countries like Zambia had developed their own theatre aesthetic which in a number of ways destabilised and deconstructed the colonial illusionistic theatre tradition. The decolonisation of theatre in Zimbabwe was not an isolated case, but had parallels in Southern Africa. The move towards an Afrocentric theatre was given impetus in the 1990s and early 2000s by Southern African Theatre Initiative (SATI), which, though based in Johannesburg, was active in most SADC countries, providing a regional exchange of ideas.

In more formal theatre workshops such as the one held at the Bulawayo Sun Hotel (19-20 July 1986) the training of artists⁶³ included a combination of lectures, performances, demonstrations and post-lecture and performance discussions. The content of the workshop was heavily weighed on the side of performances and post-performance discussions. Indeed, the aims of the workshop were not to teach skills as is the case with NTO workshops, but to boost confidence amongst artists on the rich performance traditions that they already had:

- To provide a platform for community theatre artists to meet and share their problems and experiences.

⁶² When ZIMFEP became ZACT, it had a chapter in each of the nine provinces of Zimbabwe.

⁶³ Over a hundred community-based theatre artists attended the workshop including five district cultural officers from Matabeleland South and North. The social background of participants ranged from individual artists and playwrights, teachers, young people, elderly literacy learners, industrial workers, unemployed youths, students and the disabled.

- To discuss ways and means of establishing a strong community-based theatre movement in Matabeleland and in Zimbabwe as a whole.
- To demonstrate theatre skills and discuss mobilisation, organisation and theatre group leadership techniques. (ZIMFEP 1986: 3)

The workshop was spread over two days and each day began with introductions and warm-up exercises derived from African traditions such as stories, songs, poems, chants, jokes and dances. Day two warm-up session was peculiar for its use of song and dance from the cultures of participating groups. Song and dance has become a permanent feature in warm-up sessions amongst alternative Zimbabwean theatre groups including the University of Zimbabwe. Song and dance also occupy a large portion of the content of alternative performances as the forthcoming chapters will demonstrate.

An important part of the training was the teaching of socialist realism. This was facilitated by Stephen Chifunyise, then a director in the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. Chifunyise stressed the importance of class analysis and the role of the theatre maker in that process. He suggested that a theatre group should have the class consciousness of its community and must use the material from the community as well as skills that the group already had from traditions passed down from generation to generation. Lectures were interspersed with performances and post-performance discussions. Mthwakazi Actors and Writers Association (MAWA) presented *Untitled* (1986) written by Ndema Ngwenya.⁶⁴ There was a post-performance discussion by participants guided by four questions of an ideological nature:

- Theatre for whom?
- How can we create theatre relevant to our situation?
- How can we adapt national art forms to modern life and social change?
- How can we develop our political consciousness to help us link artistic forms with appropriate content? (ZIMFEP 1986: 23)

Whilst *'untitled'* was warmly received, participants attacked it for public kissing which most participants at that time believed was western. The play also had scenes where actors talked to the audience and some participants operating from a western habitus questioned that idea. The facilitators took it as an opportunity to teach the notion of 'referring' to the audience or direct address of the audience which they said was African and should be part of the new theatre convention. This became an important performance technique in

⁶⁴ This was followed by *Musekiwa* (1986) presented by Tose Sonke theatre group. Kuwirirana theatre group's *Akusi Mulandu Wami* (1986) then followed and post performance discussions were held to critique these plays. The facilitators used the same list of questions to guide the post-performance discussion.

alternative Zimbabwean theatre. As regards the question of adapting national art forms to modern life, Chifunyise indicated in his opening address that the indigenous visual and performing arts should become the major feature of their theatre (ZIMFEP 1986: 15). The NTO preferred a theatre where indigenous texts, where they appeared, were to be contained in a western dramaturgical matrix.

The other key point of the theatre convention was the notion of socialist directing and workshop performances. Robert McLaren presented these concepts in a lecture and post-lecture discussion format.⁶⁵ He distinguished between dictatorial and democratic directing styles and did not hide his socialist ideological leaning by labelling dictatorial directing capitalist. He argued that dictatorial directing was individualistic and was produced by capitalist societies which in turn produced a capitalist boss mentality where all decisions emanated from the boss. He contrasted it with his preferred choice of democratic directing which he called socialist directing. In this style of directing all decisions are democratically agreed upon and the director endorses collectively produced choices. The second point he made was the democratisation of theatre making by conducting what he termed workshop performances. In the workshop performance, a theatre group invites an audience to give comments while the performance is still rough. The actors do not defend themselves but note all the comments and criticisms which they will discuss and adopt to improve the play before it is opened to a paying audience.

A lecture such as the one Robert McLaren presented did not end like a typical NTO lecture, but was followed by a plenary session to discuss the lecture. While NTO followed what Paulo Freire (1972) calls the banking concept of education ZIMFEP followed a participatory approach where every participant was involved in the creation and sharing of knowledge. This was liberating and empowering especially in 1986 when African confidence was recuperating from years of self-doubt. The plenary session endorsed the technique of directly addressing the audience. The plenary session also agreed that the community could be engaged in the theatre making process by even asking them to play roles. The facilitators referred to ZIMFEP's production of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* where nine villages collaborated in constructing an open air theatre at Penga Penga business centre

⁶⁵ Some of the points he raised in this lecture, for example the function of the play, creating for a specific audience and storyline, reiterated the same ideological position that Chifunyise had earlier made. McLaren covered a number of topics encompassing selection of material, building scenario, playmaking, research, casting, directing, rehearsals and workshop performance.

and some of them played parts in the play (Byam 1999). Ngugi wa Mirii referred to a similar experience in Kenya when the villagers of Limuru collaborated to produce *I Will Marry When I Want* at Kamiriithu theatre.

Another highlight of the workshop was the affirmation of the technique of centring the performance in the body. This discussion was facilitated by Chifunyise under the title 'Dance-Drama' discussed in chapter 2. Sticking to the participatory approach to learning, the six groups that had been formed were each asked to go and create a dance drama based on the teachings of the day. All the six groups presented their performances and a post-performance discussion was held to critique the improvisations. One of the issues raised was that while costumes and properties were important elements of theatre, they should not disadvantage theatre groups if they were not readily available. Performers could resort to focusing on the body as a site of performance. Indeed, in most alternative performances, mime, dance and movement occupy a significant part of the performance text.

From the above discussion, there was a fundamental realisation amongst facilitators that although Zimbabwe was politically independent, African agents were still culturally and mentally colonised. The workshop and several other workshops that followed intended to decolonise theatre by reorienting the participants. The facilitators proposed a radical shift in thinking as therapy to African disorientation and decentredness. The off-centredness of Africans, where they occupy peripheral positions in national narratives, is dealt with by centring them in their culture. This is what Molefi Asante calls an 'intellectual *djed*' (2007: 15) by which he means a strong place to stand. Asante argues that when Africans view themselves as centred and occupying a central position in their culture and history, they become participating agents instead of being on the margins of western discourses. Due to the emphasis of locating alternative theatre performances within Africans' own performance traditions, this new theatrical convention neatly fits within the Afrocentric paradigm. Asante uses this term to mean 'a consciousness, quality of thought, mode of analysis and actionable perspective where Africans seek, from agency, to assert subject place within the context of African history' (2007: 16) and one might add also within the context of African cultural production. The NTO, though interested in alternative Zimbabwean theatre, especially in the early 1990s, took a slightly different theoretical perspective which I now discuss below.

The dominating (at least until 1991) side of the field of Zimbabwean theatre was occupied by the NTO. Formed in 1958 as an exclusively white organisation, NTO carried the burden of a racist history. Although Rohmer argues that NTO as of 1993 was not a white organisation anymore and that ideological differences between ZACT and NTO had narrowed considerably, this is only true from a statistical point of view. There were more black theatre companies than white ones in NTO during the 1990s. With a few possible adjustments to the theatrical convention, the NTO remained largely Eurocentric.⁶⁶ My observation is that although in some places the NTO encouraged the inclusion of indigenous texts, they maintained a peripheral position within a largely western dramaturgical matrix. Although it is true that the new NTO chairperson, Susan Hains, tried from 1985 to transform the NTO into an inclusive organisation, she was outvoted twice in 1985 and 1992 (Rohmer 1999: 106) at the NTO general meeting. Thus as leader, she had to publicly defend decisions of her organisation especially the controversy surrounding the CABS Play of the Year Competition. Hains had some bit of leverage to transform the image of NTO within the community theatre movement, although her endeavour was tainted with Eurocentricity.

From 1993, the NTO conducted a series of workshops with community theatre groups and developed four modules: 'Working with a Group' (1993a), 'Some Thoughts on Playwriting' (1993b), 'Directing' (1993c) and 'Staging' (1993d). During the same year they opened the NTO School in Harare based at ILSA College. The first module stipulates general theatrical conventions that apply to theatre and are useful to all agents working in the Zimbabwean theatre field. The module does not prescribe any particular style of theatre as is the case with ZIMFEP/ZACT:

For its own internal fulfilment the group must perform plays which reflect its needs and purposes as well as its audience. This being true to the group's reason for existence will eventually give the group its own unique STYLE.
(NTO 1993: 2, original emphasis)

⁶⁶ Three strands within the NTO can be observed. The first one consisted of Eurocentric purists made up of thirteen exclusively white theatre companies. These performed exclusively western plays in their own private theatres and twice withdrew from the national festival when they felt dominated by black theatre companies (Rohmer 1999: 106, Chifunyise 1994: 59). The second strand was made up of a tiny coterie of multi-racial theatre companies that can be counted on the fingers of one palm. These wrote their own Zimbabwean plays such the *Rise and Shine of Comrade Fiasco* performed by Meridian Theatre or *Platform Five* performed by Zimbabwe Arts Productions. The plays tended to be modernist in nature. The last strand was the community theatre movement composed of thirty-eight theatre companies that were affiliated to the NTO. These received sponsorship and training from NTO. The theatre convention that I am analysing in this section is derived from workshop materials that the NTO offered to this coterie.

Style emerges from the cultural memes⁶⁷ of the theatre group. In other words it lies in the group's shared experience and the ways of expressing that experience. While this teaching is not dogmatic like the ZIMFEP/ZACT position, it seems as though the NTO would like to maintain the status quo between different racial groups instead of transforming it. Those who are African will express an African style, while those who are European will express a European style. The module does not explicitly encourage the style that comes about from living together and transforming one another even in theatrical expression.

However, when the modules shift to what De Marinis calls 'particular conventions'⁶⁸, their Eurocentrism is glaring. 'Some Thoughts on Playwriting' (1993b), for instance, begins with topics such as style of presentation, sources of stories, research, and transcription, but as it develops it favours a plot-based approach: '[g]roups, group leader/directors must be ruthless in paring away sub-themes, subplots and counter-plots that could submerge the main theme, story or plot-line' (NTO 1993b: 2). The teaching on story, subplots and plotline suggest a linear narrative that follows the Euro-American Freytag pyramid structure. The insistence on suspense and climax supports an Aristotelian structure. This is a style my MA practice in 2001 questioned and suggested a non-dogmatic approach that did not depend on plot (Ravengai 2002). The module underlines the dominance of dialogue as it advises that after improvisation the dialogue 'must eventually be scripted' (NTO 1993: 3) and be stuck to during performance. But we also know that very little progress has been made in developing a system of transcribing oral performances such as dances and physical games. After teaching what is fundamentally a Eurocentric play, Susan Hains, the NTO facilitator encourages participants to include music, dance and poetry as embellishments to the play.

As beginnings and endings or as an integral part of the play, music, dance and poetry are an inseparable part of Zimbabwean culture and should certainly be used. They enhance the production when well chosen and give the performance a uniquely Zimbabwean flavour. (NTO 1993b: 4)

The artistic role of indigenous texts is not explicated. Is it to enhance the theme, to tell the story through song and dance? The use of indigenous texts borders on 'theatrical exoticism'

⁶⁷ Cultural memes are units of cultural information that can be copied or imitated from individual to individual without too much alteration.

⁶⁸ De Marinis defines particular conventions as rules, styles that are proper to an artist. The term encompasses rules of a genre, a theatre school or movement, a historical period or rules specific to a culture in a geo-political space. When these rules are shared by the audience and theatre makers, they aid communication during performance. He contrasts particular conventions with general conventions and distinctive conventions (pertaining to rules established by a particular performance) (1993: 111).

which Christopher Balme explains as involving ‘the use of indigenous texts purely for their surface appeal, but with no regard to their original cultural semantics’ (1999: 5). This theatrical exoticism is at variance with ZIMFEP/ZACT’s approach where the emphasis is on the Afrocentric paradigm – indigenous texts are at the centre of performance and they constitute the dominant sign.

The NTO module on directing (1993c: 1-8) again takes Europe as the centre of knowledge while sidelining African styles of directing. While defining a director the module traces the development of the director in Europe and America from the era of magic to the era of naturalism in the 20th century. Hains justifies the importance of Euro-American history of directing by arguing that ‘the theatre of today draws on the traditions of the past and the importance of these foundations must not be underestimated or overlooked’ (NTO 1993c: 2). While much of the content it covers is essential for professionalising the rank of a director, ideologically the module is inherently Eurocentric. The reference to Euro-American directors while useful is done at the exclusion of African traditions of directing. Theatre in Zimbabwe since ancient times remained a collective enterprise where everybody in a given community was involved in the creation of culture. The entire history of African theatre directing, ranging from the *n’angas/sangomas* of pre-colonial times to contemporary democratic directing practices, is equally important, for this heritage has continued to influence trends in late 20th century alternative Zimbabwean theatre practice.

The last module on staging (NTO 1993d: 1-20) is by far the most successful and balanced of them all. It covers a variety of topics on types of stages, movement, sightlines, placement of furniture, scene changes and status shifts. In the module, the starting point is not Europe, but Zimbabwe. It recognises the constraints that Zimbabwean community theatre groups experience owing to the paucity of facilities. Recognising these constraints, it takes advantage of the cultural text or what Wilmar Sauter calls the ‘playing culture’⁶⁹ of black Zimbabweans which it taps from for the staging techniques:

In Zimbabwe, because we have few facilities and because the majority of our drama is by the people, for the people, we base our excellence in performance in the ACTORS THEMSELVES. This is very important, because it

⁶⁹ Sauter (2006) uses the term to refer to tacit knowledge that is learnt from one another by seeing and imitating and this is stored as body technique. This includes oral performances, games, ceremonies, pageants, parties or in short cultural performances. The body plays a performative role which due to repeated actions becomes encoded permanently in the body. Thus tacit knowledge has a strong physical component.

emphatically puts theatre where it should be. WITH THE PEOPLE AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF SOCIETY. (NTO 1993d: 1, original emphasis)

Thus the module echoes Chifunyise's theory of the body as a nucleus of performance. However, there seems to be dissonance between the playwriting and staging techniques. How can the African body utilise its stored technique (in the body) in an essentially Eurocentric play suggested by the NTO playwriting module? The playwriting module was less successful and had to be abandoned when the NTO opened its acting school (Poor School) which was later rebranded NTO School (Rohmer 1999). As can be deciphered from its old name, the acting technique dispensed with the props and extraneous materials of 'rich theatre' and centred the performance in the body.

When discussing types of staging, the module begins with open air stages of ancient Egypt and how drama developed up to the proscenium arch stage. While discussing the pros and cons of other types of staging, the module favours the arena and theatre in the round staging techniques which it links to the traditions of Africa.

In Africa, it's been used for centuries and is still one of the best staging styles for our theatre, being based, as most of our rituals are, on the circle... Fortunately, most halls in Zimbabwe are very flexible, given an open mind, enthusiasm and imagination. The permanent proscenium (if there is one) and the way the seating (sic) has been arranged can be daunting. YOU DONT HAVE TO USE THE STAGE IF YOU DONT WANT TO! (NTO 1993d: 1-2, original emphasis)

Hains, the facilitator, suggests that contemporary theatre is moving away from the closed stage (proscenium stage) towards a closer relationship between performers and the audience.

When this module is read together with the achievements of the NTO School which produced a dance-drama, *Three Faces of a Woman* (1993), at the Gallery Delta (Rohmer 1999), one is persuaded to exonerate the NTO from charges of Eurocentrism. However, the content of what was taught depended on personalities rather than institutional policy. It was Chris Hurst who taught acting at the NTO School and Hurst had a glowing history of working with community groups such as Amakhosi where he took part in workshoping *Workshop Negative* and played the part of Ray Graham. When Hurst left, the NTO School closed and was left to its preferred Eurocentric approach. The NTO chairperson Susan Hains taught voice and did not take part in any transgressive performance style.

The Subaltern Speaks: Themes in Zimbabwean Performance

Gayatri Spivak (1988) observes that colonial discourse establishes the West as the Subject while the rest of the world is the Other. In the constitution of the Other, the West inflicts what Spivak calls 'epistemic violence' (1988: 67) on the Other which seeks to obliterate the text that the Other can invest its itinerary. In chapter 3 I have demonstrated that Rhodesian discourse attempted to achieve the same results of 'silencing' the subaltern. It is perhaps appropriate to ask the same question that Spivak asked: Can the subaltern speak? (1988: 67). Using their own subjectivity and agency, subaltern Africans can speak and know their conditions. In this section subalterns (read: African playwrights/theatre groups and their characters) write and speak back to Rhodesian discourse.

Zimbabwe was characterised by acute inequalities and most of the plays, therefore, deal with the theme of social and economic injustice. In Moyo's *Chenga Ose* [Do not Discriminate] (1983) the plight of a farm labourer, Badza, is at the centre of the conflict. After working for his white boss for forty-two years, he is asked to retire and go to his rural home. We learn that his pension will be a bicycle. Even if it is reasonable to retire when old age does not permit, it seems unfair to live on the value of a bicycle for the remainder of his life with a family of four to look after. The white boss is portrayed as insensitive to the needs of his workers once they have outlived their economic usefulness. Hazvinei, Badza's wife, suggests that at Badza's advanced age, the white boss still flogs him for any mistake he makes and subtracts money from his pay. This violence is cyclic as Badza vents his frustrations on his wife and daughter, Sekai.

Mujajati's *The Rain of my Blood* develops the same theme. Part of the play is set in the colonial period and the plot fluctuates to and fro between the past and present. The injustice of the colonial system is epitomised by the Sanderson family – Jeffries, Francis and Bertha. Their farm (Altena) could be taken to evoke colonial Rhodesia. The interest of the family, just like the interest of colonial capitalism, is to create wealth without due regard to the ethics of wealth production. In this case black labourers are taken as human machines that can be driven, fixed and decommissioned when outdated. Act 1 Scene 1 opens with the foreman whipping Keresencia for taking a nap during critical moments of production. An old woman is fired on the spot for lacking energy to create wealth and she receives no terminal benefits. Just like the low wages given to Badza in *Chenga Ose*, the rest of the farm labourers in *The Rain of my Blood* virtually work for food and shelter with no other benefits to improve

their lives. The service they get from Jeffries Sanderson – food and shelter – is to keep them strong so that they can produce more wealth for him. Jeffries Sanderson immediately dismisses any worker who expresses an element of agency to challenge the unjust system. He dismisses Negomo for harbouring a son who fought his own son Francis. Negomo's son Chamunorwa is flogged and Jeffries immediately dismisses the whole family from work and farm accommodation.

The injustice of the colonial system is not only practised physically on black bodies; it is also a mental process that can be explained by the theories of discourse and hegemony. Kavanagh's *Mavambo* explores how colonial masters used education and religion as methods of mental colonisation. The character of Sekuru narrates how it all began by going back into history to explain the existence of the church, school and hospital in his village of Makosa; symbols of western culture which have made villagers drift from the traditional culture. Sekuru asks villagers: 'What are you learning? To lose your traditional ways? To despise us. And what will you do after that? Whose beggars? Whose slaves?' (1985/97: 198). The rest of the plays in this study present black characters who literally eke a living from slaving for and begging from white and black (after independence) masters. *The Rain of my Blood* like *Mavambo* goes back into history to explore the same theme – what Walter Rodney (1989: 261) has called 'education for underdevelopment'. Chegato Mission exemplifies this phenomenon of brainwashing African students. Mr Owen Richards, who doubles up as history teacher and headmaster of Chegato Mission, teaches Rhodesian history in a contested and controversial way. He debates with his student Chamunorwa over terms and facts of history. For Owen Richards the 1896 uprising was a 'rebellion' against a legitimate white government while for Chamunorwa it was a 'justified war' by black people to regain their lost territory. The role of traditional spiritual leaders Nehanda and Kaguvi in the uprising is contested by both as are the causes of the uprising. In the end, it is the teacher's word against the student's and the teacher orders Chamunorwa 'I want you to re-write the assignment, putting across the true facts as I taught them to you. Do you understand?' (1991: pp. 48-49). When Chamunorwa and his friend Tawanda refuse this kind of brainwashing, Owen Richards expels them from school with the blessing of the mission spiritual leader, Father Louis.

In both *Mavambo* and *The Rain of my Blood*, education and religion converge to make Africans succumbing victims of exploitation. In *Mavambo*, Reverend Mills has established a

mission in Mutoko district and has made a considerable number of converts who sing and welcome a gang of white plunderers led by Jackson. Although Reverend Mills's religious efforts are genuine and done in good faith, other white people who are not necessarily religious exploit the fruits they bear in the villagers. The leader of the white gang, Jackson, is so enchanted by the vulnerability of Mutoko villagers whom his gang intended to rape in Reverend Mills's church, that he commends Reverend Mills 'you are pretty good at taming natives' (1985/97: 197). This could be said of Father Louis in *The Rain of my Blood*. Even though he is a benevolent pastor with a heart for the disempowered such as Negomo and Munjai who have just been fired from work by Jeffries Sanderson, there is a catch to his philanthropism. Negomo and Munjai must denounce their African marriage and agree to a church wedding which will cleanse them of the 'sinful' marriage they had previously. They have to assimilate into European culture in order to be employed by the mission. Mujajati, however, unlike Kavanagh presents the two sides of Christianity – the perverted Christianity and the biblical Christianity. The first type is the one practised by Father Louis while the second type is practised by Father Lamont, both of whom paradoxically work for the same mission. Mujajati presents Father Lamont as a progressive Christian who uses the bible to support the liberation struggle; many missionaries took this stance during the historical struggle, and the colonial government persecuted them for it (Nyarota 2006, O'Callaghan 1977). In his last visit to the guerrillas, he offers the guerrilla leader Chamunorwa a bible as a present and argues that all biblical heroes were liberators – Moses, David, Jesus and others. On leaving the camp, he raises the typical ZANU (PF) clenched fist and chants '*Pambili nechimilenga!* (sic) [Forward with the revolution!]

In Tsodzo's *Shanduko* and Musengezi's *The Honourable MP*, the theme of social and economic injustice is taken to the domestic scene where domestic servants are overworked and/or underpaid by their masters. The white couple, Johannes and Theresa van de Gryp, in *Shanduko* epitomise a section of the white population that still believes in Rhodesian discourse. According to one of their domestic workers, Regina, the couple has declared 'I do what I want. I am a Rhodesian, not a Zimbabwean. My house is in Rhodesia, not in your Zimbabwe' (1983: 6). They have refused to pay their workers the government stipulated minimum wage of ZW\$50, (US\$50 in 1982). They discharge Tapiwa from work for refusing to accept a pay of ZW\$15/month instead of ZW\$50. We also learn that Johannes is sexually exploiting Regina and that when Theresa discovers it she fires Regina. Jemusi, the second

male servant, is subsequently fired when Johannes discovers that Jemusi was in love with his concubine, Regina.

The Honourable MP attacks the exploitation of blacks by the new black petty bourgeoisie. Shakespeare Pfende's wife, Immaculate, overworks and underpays his domestic servant, Spencer, the same way the Van de Gryp family does. Spencer does the work of two people – gardener and cook for a pay of ZW\$50. Immaculate realises the degree of exploitation, but displays her arrogance 'I know you want to tell me to employ someone to take care of gardens that I won't, okay? Where do you think I will get fifty dollars for paying an unschooled garden boy?' (1983/4: 25). The new black middle class has grown to be as exploitative as the colonial masters were.

Mujajati's *The Wretched Ones* develops further the black on black injustice motif. The play deals with the dilemma of the 'have-nots' under capitalist exploitation. The story of the 'have-nots' is carried by a group of squatters – Lazarus, his wife, Patricia, and daughter, Liza, as well as Povo and his mother. The other group of 'have-nots' is contained in a play within a play that one of the characters, Daniel, is writing; four paupers and their leader. Buffalo, a new black petty bourgeoisie, embodies capitalist avarice and rapaciousness. He owns twenty-five buses, a bakery and two 'highly developed' farms. At the centre of conflict is the existence of squatters on one of his peri-urban farms. Buffalo would like them removed from his property. He believes that poverty is not caused, but is a choice 'it's because they are very lazy! They don't want to work. That is why they are so poor!' (1989: 11). Ironically, the previous white farm owner, Mr Thompson, allowed the squatters to stay on his property as long as they helped him with work. The squatters think that Mr Buffalo is worse than the colonial Thompson. This view is echoed in *The Honourable MP* where Spencer, the male servant, sees Immaculate as worse than his previous white employers. Independence falls far below Spencer's expectations. Buffalo orders the eviction and whipping of squatters from his farm and pays the police to burn down the structures.

The play within a play authored by Daniel, Buffalo's son, also comments on the greed of the black petty bourgeoisie. According to a hypothetical 1997 Unemployment Act in the play, jobs are supposed to be auctioned to the highest bidder who will in turn auction each job to a prospective employee with the least monetary requirements. In one incident an auctioneer sells a position that pays ZW\$30,000 (US\$3,000 in 1997) per annum to the

highest bidder for ZW\$10,000 (US\$1,000). Immediately after outbidding three other businesspersons, the winner auctions the position to a group of 'degreed' paupers. Paupers bid for the job by indicating what percentage of the annual salary they would want to be paid. The remainder is the profit that accrues to the 'job owner' – businessman. The highest bidder in this scenario is pauper 3 who is prepared to take the position in exchange for food and shelter. This seems to parallel the plight of Badza in *Chenga Ose* and farm labourers in *The Rain of my Blood*. As long as wealth is accumulating into their pockets, the businesspersons are portrayed as uncaring to the plight of other black people despite the freedom that they both enjoy.

Temba Petros Ndhlovu's *The Return* (1990) and Mujajati's *The Rain of my Blood* look at the social side of injustice by putting the spotlight on the attitude of the black petty bourgeoisie to the plight of ex-combatants. *The Return* is a stinging attack on the moral bankruptcy of the black middle class represented in the play by Nhlanhla Dube, a top civil servant and Siphon Mkhwananzi, a medical doctor at Bulawayo Central hospital. Siphon Mkhwananzi's political party sent him to study medicine overseas during the liberation war. Six years later, he comes to work at the same hospital where Nqobizitha, an ex-combatant, is receiving treatment for war wounds and trauma. This parallels the character of Alex in *The Rain of my Blood* who goes to train as an accountant during the war and when he returns he grudgingly takes the responsibility of staying with his ex-combatant brother, Tawanda, who like Nqobizitha, is traumatised and physically handicapped. The attitude of both bureaucrats to these ex-fighters and the liberation war is negative. For Siphon, the war was a 'storm' which left 'casualties' and should be 'forgotten'. He thinks that the government, social workers and ex-fighters' families must solely take the burden of caring for ex-fighters. Nontokozi, Siphon Mkhwananzi's girlfriend describes her boyfriend as

You and the majority of your kind shied away from the war effort. You are the scavengers of the armed struggle eating off the dead bodies of those gallant young men and women who were involved in active combat and even perished in the bush (1990: 32).

These words can best describe Alex in *The Rain of my Blood*. In each encounter in the play, Alex tells his brother Tawanda to behave like a suburban resident by not drinking and singing liberation wars. At the end of the play, Alex throws Tawanda out of his Borrowdale house. Both plays spite the petty bourgeoisie for the injustice they mete out against the 'have-nots' of the ex-combatant type.

Although Nhlanhla's attitude towards the ex-combatant Nqobizitha is understandable owing to the anxiety he has about the possible reunion of Nqobizitha and Ntombikayise (the legal wife of Nqobizitha) whom he married when Nqobizitha joined the struggle (and was believed to be dead), his attitude to the war and the role fighters like Nqobizitha played qualify him to be called an ingrate. In the words of Nqobizitha, Nhlanhla is 'a typical example of what our top civil servants are' (1990: 57) whose typical style, according to Ntombikayise, is 'being arrogant, selfish, vindictive and insensitive' (1990: 58). Shortly before he leaves Bulawayo to live in Harare forever, Nhlanhla shows his contempt for what he calls the ex-combatants' 'idealism about independence' (1990: 58). He says: 'I have no time to exchange words with a dying remnant of the war. Freedom fighter? So what did you gain by your so-called heroism? To come home and die!' (1990: 57). The black petty bourgeoisie are portrayed as greedy, insensitive and practising a form of capitalism that equals the colonial one, even when the state has publicly proclaimed socialism as a philosophy to guide development of the country.

For some of the black petty bourgeois members, they acquired the wealth they possess through hook and crook. This motif of corruption is an archetypal theme in *Shanduko*, *The Honourable MP*, *Mindblast* and *The Wretched Ones*. Whereas *The Rain of my Blood* and *The Return* present impoverished ex-combatants, in contrast, *Shanduko* presents a rich ex-combatant called Wisdom Tafirenyika. He now works with the Department of Social Welfare. In his idealistic notion of independence, he thinks that he is above the law and follows a philosophy that is close to anarchism where enjoyment of freedom means being above the law. He is hardly in the social welfare offices to address people's problems. He is proud, arrogant and at times abusive with language to those who are inquisitive like Tapiwa. He has converted his house into a shebeen. In the same house he runs a brothel where Regina now works after being fired by Theresa and Johannes Van de Gryp. He preaches socialism in public during rallies and negates all its principles in private by exploiting fellow black people. When caught by the police he offers to bribe them, then threatens them with violence and his liberation war credentials.

In *The Honourable MP* another government official, Shakespeare Pfende, displays similar corrupt tendencies and hypocrisy. He enriches himself through unethical means such as smuggling precious minerals (gold and emeralds) and electronic goods through his wife, Immaculate. Like Wisdom Tafirenyika, Shakespeare Pfende uses government credentials to intimidate bank managers into favourably considering his loan applications. He gets two

loans from Barclays Bank and Standard Chartered Bank which he uses to buy a dairy farm. As a government official, he preaches socialism 'forward with socialism' (1984: 15), yet in private he lives as a capitalist and boasts of being 'a local director of several foreign-owned multi-national corporations' (1984: 12). Instead of admiring a teacher who shows knowledge of socialism, he chides and mocks him. Asked by the teacher why he is not a socialist as government policy dictates Pfende says 'I will become a socialist when I want! (1984: 43).

The same corrupt tendencies are evident in *Wretched Ones*. We see Buffalo paying police officers a substantial amount of money to have them evict squatters from his peri-urban farm. When one of his newest buses is involved in an accident, he pays an insurance agent, Mr Eagle, to falsify records in order to get compensation for his damaged uninsured bus. He does the same with Mr Boar of the local police station so that he would delay the publication of the accident until all processes of falsifying records have been completed.

Theatre Making and Commitment

The interplay between the Afrocentricity of ZIMFEP/ZACT and the Eurocentrism of NTO produced a disposition among alternative theatre playwrights that compelled them to defend the subaltern peasants and workers. This Afrocentric approach to theatre making is understandable since most alternative playwrights were black Africans and had directly or indirectly experienced the brunt of war and colonisation. In the parlance of the time they displayed 'commitment' (Chinweizu *et al* (1980, Onoge 1985, Amuta 1989). Chinweizu *et al* (1980) understand commitment as the artist's engagement with 'public themes'. Public themes are usually political and a playwright shows commitment to the African cause by implicating Europe or diasporic Europeans in their inhumanity to Africans which most of the plays above attempt to achieve. Commitment is also characterised by the position (intellectual *adjed*) that a playwright takes in his/her work:

Artistic commitment, as we see it, is therefore a matter of orientation, a matter of perceiving social realities and of making those perceptions available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and presentation of, or change in the society's values and norms. Thus the commitment of a work is a matter of its quality, its orientation and the perceptions it fosters. (Chinweizu *et al* 1980: 253)

When a piece of theatre is said to be committed, the playwright would have taken a position to defend the interests of his community through the perspective and orientation s/he adopts. According to Chidi Amuta a play is either committed to imperialism or to the cause of Africans.

We have seen that, with a few possible exceptions, most alternative playwrights during this period deal with the same themes – corruption, social and economic injustice as well as evils of colonialism. But one could want to establish the attitude of playwrights to the material that they have chosen and how that attitude is regulated at the level of production. Three Russian words sum up the kind of attitude to material that Zimbabwean playwrights had to adopt under socialist realism – ‘ideinost’, ‘partinost’⁷⁰ and ‘aesthetinost’ (Udenta 1993, Swayze 1992). Ideologically (ideinost) the work must be socialist. In terms of partinost, the work must be truthful and truthfulness is usually the correctness of government/party ideas which must be defended in a theatre piece. One of the reasons for writing *Shanduko*, according to Tsodzo (1983) was to explain the doctrine of socialism. The year 1982 had been declared by the new Prime Minister as a year of ‘national transformation’ and the play happens to have the same title. It was articulating government policies and programmes. The aesthetic to be employed should be socialist realism defined by its proponents in 1934 as ‘a truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development’ (Udenta 1993: 9).

As early as 1983, the purpose of theatre and the perspective playwrights had to adopt was made clear during a training workshop conducted by Kimani Gecau and Ngugi wa Mirii between 2 – 8 July. They wrote

Our stand! Since theatre is a medium of communication and each user as we have seen has his aim and purpose, the question is: what is our stand? What is our position? Have we got a clear conscience as to how and above all for what purpose we are going to use theatre? Our stand is our class position and our attitudes; our activities manifested on whose side we are; i.e. whether on the side of the people or on that of the enemy. (Gecau and wa Mirii 1983: 5)

It is clear that theatre is being racialised and bifurcated into binary oppositions. Indeed, alternative theatre and mainstream theatre developed antagonistically. The thirteen white theatre companies affiliated to the NTO maintained their Europeanism even after independence by producing exclusively western plays. For example, since Reps Theatre was founded in 1931 up to 1996 it only produced three plays that furthered African interests: *Svikoro* (1978), *Mhondoro* (1993) and *Vuka Vuka* (1996) (Rohmer 1999). I have watched

⁷⁰ The term is used here to mean the historical fact that writers, both party and non-party, recognize the correctness of the party’s ideas and defend them in their work and therefore naturally acknowledge the guiding role of the party in all affairs (Swayze 1962: 15).

productions at Reps Theatre several times and have observed that the actors and audiences are predominantly from the white community. Apart from the above examples, the Reps repertoire is still dominated by western musicals, comedies, realist/naturalist plays and occasional classical productions. Martin Rohmer (1999: 256-7), while commenting on white theatre (his term), argues that it lacks an organised postcolonial intellectual, theoretical and aesthetic vision to help it formulate a new cultural policy that is sensitive to the new political realities. The two camps have maintained their polarities.

Cultural production is divided into relevant and irrelevant theatre. The pressure to be 'relevant' in Zimbabwe during this period was not only felt by playwrights, but by critics across disciplines. Martin Rohmer (1999) has carried out a study to trace the etymology of the term 'relevance' in Zimbabwean cultural and intellectual production and has found that writers, journalists and critics used it to whip cultural producers into direction.

In Zimbabwe 'relevance' is a term that can be found frequently on book covers, in newspapers or magazine articles as well as in academic studies, and sooner or later it always comes up in discussions on theatre. Often it has been used for the emerging black theatre (sic) after 1980, in direct opposition to what was perceived as an irrelevant white, Eurocentric theatre practice. (1999: 21)

To be relevant in Zimbabwean theatre production was what McLaren described as the process of 'democratisation, Zimbabweanisation, Africanisation and socialist transformation' (1993: 36–37) by which he meant involvement of majority communities in creating theatre as well as employing their popular media – song, dance and mime in a work of art that utilises socialist realism as a creative method.

Dambudzo Marechera who represents the few emergent theatre voices during the period noticed that there was a 'deliberate campaign to promote Zimbabwean culture' which when emphasised in what he called a 'nationalistic way' could 'lead to fascism'. He regretted that because of a combination of tradition and socialist ideology in Zimbabwean writing, 'products of your own mind are now being segregated into official and unofficial categories, and that only the officially admired works must be seen (Veit-Wild 1992: 37). The works that were not admired by the state were not to see the light of the day. In an interview with Veit-Wild, Marechera observed that although there was no law or policy for writing, there was a 'heavy political atmosphere' which made playwrights aware of the 'national programme' (ibid) and therefore leading to self censorship. He complained that he found it

difficult to write freely in Zimbabwe as 'people try to analyse everything from the particular contemporary political view' (Veit-Wild 1992: 42).

Both Udentia (1993) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) have indicated that perspective is conditioned by ideology. How did the official ideology influence the playwrights in their presentation of social reality? Ideology, as Marechera has noted, cannot be legislated; it works as conceptual machinery. Broadly defined, it is 'more or less coherent set of values and beliefs that influence judgements of the external world and determine the behaviour of individuals, groups, institutions and societies' (Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh 1993: 11). It works in both conscious and unconscious ways and helps to shape the signs and symbols that playwrights choose to describe reality. Shlapentokh and Shlapentokh (1993) go on to argue that among the most important functions of an ideology is 'control over image management'; which information is being selected and what weight is given to single facts and processes? The July 19-20, 1986 theatre workshop conducted by ZIMFEP in Bulawayo and facilitated by Stephen Chifunyise, Ngugi wa Mirii and Robert McLaren took a stand with regards to the weight given to chosen characters and themes:

It was observed that the themes which seem to dominate many plays are the problems affecting the petit bourgeoisie/middle class. Therefore, it was agreed that more attention should be given to workers – including house workers, industrial workers and peasants – and the theatre efforts of such people should be given priority. It was suggested that issues, which should dominate our plays, are those affecting people in high-density urban suburbs and rural areas. We need to bring rural themes to urban areas and vice versa ... It was recommended that all our plays should have a clear class analysis and we should reflect the nature of class struggle through our art. (wa Mirii 1986: 12)

It is therefore not surprising that all plays under discussion in this chapter, with the possible exception of Aaron Moyo's *Chenga Ose*, give more weight and agency to black workers and peasant characters. It seems as though the playwrights are writing back at the British and giving voice to the 'savage' who in white authored plays cannot speak and lacks agency and intentionality. As noted in chapter 3, a white person could not be written as a character through the agency of a black author. The very act of authoring by black playwrights is an act of resistance, more so when they can create white characters and give agency and intentionality to workers and peasants, who in previous years were child-like and hordes.

The perspective of the playwrights can be seen in their treatment of peasant and working class characters. In *The Honourable MP* a combination of peasants and workers heckle MP Pfende for not delivering on his campaign promises. They undress him in public and tell him

to deal with the problem of drought. They sing and chant 'Long live the workers! Long live the peasants!' and they are the heroes of the play. *The Wretched Ones* ends pretty much the same. Although the squatters in the Buffalo plot are defeated by capitalism, the real war against exploitation is waged by the paupers in a meta-fictional play being authored by Daniel. The paupers murder one job owner, Mr Rufas. They are on a rampage, singing, toy-totyping and sloganeering 'one man – one job!' They march and make their demands very clear:

We must stand and fight for our rights now! If there is anybody who deserves to die it is no one else but these fat job-owners. We must kill them now before they kill us all. Now! Now! Now! (1989: 33)

In *The Rain of my Blood*, Chamunorwa and Tawanda cross the border into a neighbouring country and return to revenge their ill-treatment by killing Jeffries Sanderson, his son Francis and abducting his wife, Bertha Sanderson. Alexio takes the same course in *Mavambo*.

In *Shanduko*, Tapiwa is the positive hero who typifies the consciousness of the new black person. He tries to raise the consciousness of co-workers by telling them to refuse to be exploited by Johannes and Theresa. Despite the difficulties he faces he triumphs by joining ZANU (PF) Youth Brigade as its commander. It is as if aligning with a socialist party will solve the problem of workers and peasants. The major thrust of the play is for every worker to support the government '*kuti iunze kutonga kwegutsaruzhinji* [in order to bring about socialism in Zimbabwe] (1983: 40).

What is clear from the above analysis is that alternative theatre of this period is not just a profession, it is a service to the downtrodden people and for that reason it is unashamedly partisan. Unlike non-socialist realist plays, a single character does not exercise dominance over social forces. Peasants and workers work as a collective to fight exploitation and deprivation. Where the individual is used, s/he is a 'type' that represents the lower and working classes. The conflict is not waged among individuals in the same community, but between social classes or forces with the aim of socially and intellectually transforming the workers and peasants. The dominant peasants and workers are not (as in the case of colonially depicted masses) dull, blurred, aimless and unanchored. They seem to know their socio-political problems which they easily link to their capitalist masters. The plays depict the workers and peasants' courage, gallantry as well as their disappointments in the process of concretising their potentialities. Theatre is conceived as cultural revolutionary machinery for mobilising ordinary people towards collective development. Theatre is a weapon or

rehearsal for a revolution. That is why this type of theatre is aptly named revolutionary theatre (Chifunye and Kavanagh 1988), revolutionary aesthetics (Udenta 1993) and radical theatre (Kershaw 1992). The white characters are usually depicted as brute, perpetrators of violence, greedy, racist and intolerant. Thus while the work could be taken as progressive and radical in so far as it reoriented the African audience, it achieved this mental therapy by creating a new ideological problem. It re-inscribed the colonial binaries of white and black theatre and therefore did not aid the process of reconciliation that had begun in 1980. This theatre sharpened the racial differences and created an atmosphere where most white theatre practitioners regressed into their own spaces to practise their Europeanism.

Conclusion

In this chapter I hope to have established the fact that the socialist realism, western dramatic theatre and indigenous cultural text intermingled in the practices of alternative theatre makers in Zimbabwe. However, while ZIMFEP/ZACT and NTO agreed on general conventions of theatre, they differed considerably on particular conventions of theatre that were grounded on two antagonistic philosophies- Afrocentricity and Eurocentrism. The NTO promoted its approach through playwriting competitions, competitive theatre festivals (see chapter 9) and theatre making workshops. ZIMFEP/ZACT promoted its approach through theatre making workshops and non-competitive theatre festivals. However, even though ZACT did not officially allow its affiliates to cooperate with the NTO, this policy was honoured more in breach than in compliance. Alternative theatre groups attended training workshops and theatre festivals organised by both theatre organisations and therefore absorbed skills from both of them. While the two organisations controlled general and particular theatrical conventions, they had little control over what De Marinis calls 'distinctive conventions'⁷¹ (1993: 114-5). My observation is that agents working in the field of alternative theatre utilised conventions from both the NTO and ZACT and used their own agency to create distinctive theatrical conventions that transgressed and subverted the officially admired conventions. The degree of transgression varied from one aspect of theatre to another. In this chapter for example, thematic codes favour the Afrocentric paradigm, but as we move to other aspects of theatre such as the theatrical frame,

⁷¹ De Marinis uses this term to describe rules that are imposed by a particular performance. These are established from scratch by the director and performers and may be unfamiliar to the audience. De Marinis argues that there is no performance that is completely lacking in distinctive conventions. Distinctive conventions act on both general and particular conventions subverting them according to the gifts and talents of each theatre group.

performance text and language the weight of borrowing fluctuates between Afrocentricity and Eurocentrism.

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CHAPTER 6: ZIMBABWEAN REVISIONS OF THE WESTERN DRAMATURGICAL FRAME AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTING

Introduction

This chapter seeks to discuss how the contest of Rhodesian and African counter-discourses affected the identity of alternative theatre with respect to western dramaturgical frame and acting. The question that this chapter is answering is how does the dramaturgical frame and acting reflect, mediate, and challenge the relations of domination and subordination between western culture and indigenous African culture? I argue that the western dramaturgical frame and acting are altered through a process of 'keying' and 'fabrication' (Goffman 1974) by alternative Zimbabwean theatre makers between 1980 and 1996. Sometimes the western dramaturgical frame is deconstructed by using aspects of it alongside an indigenous theatrical matrix such as in Kavanagh's *Mavambo* (1985/97) and Mujajati's *The Rain of my Blood* (1991). I will return to the terms 'keying' and 'fabrication' shortly after this introductory remark.

The identity of post-independence alternative theatre can be explained through the metaphor inherent in Moyo's *Chenga Ose* (1983). In the play one civilisation – the traditional African one – epitomised by Badza has dumped Nhamo the 'bastard' child of his wife Hazvinei. In old Shona custom, children born out of wedlock were/are despised. Chitauru-Mawema (2003) has carried out extensive study on linguistic behaviour as one of the keys to understanding the nature and status of single women and their children and she has established that, as in the case of Nhamo in *Chenga Ose*, single women's children are outcasts and are often given 'marked terminology' (2003: 139) such as *murambiwa* (the rejected one), *vana vemusango* (children of the forest), *Gora* (wild cat), *mubvandıripo* (born out of wedlock) and so on. Nhamo (meaning trouble) is given a 'marked' name and Badza follows up with expelling him from the ancestral home. Nhamo is like Ikemefuna in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), except that his life is spared. He can be equated with Edmund in William Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1608) who represents the passing away of the old order (feudalism) and the emergence of a new bastard one (capitalism) with its own rules.

Another civilisation epitomised by the city woman – Marinda – herself a social outcast as she could not bear children, has adopted Nhamo. What the rural patriarchy cannot tolerate, the city is capable of giving comfort and habitat. As Chitauro-Mawema’s study has revealed, single women are also despised and shamed, more so if they cannot bear children like Marinda. This is evidenced by the mockery she is subjected to by Hazvinei when she visits her at the farm. Nhamo is educated in the city by Marinda until he qualifies as a teacher, a very high position by the standards of the early 1980s. Nhamo is neither western nor African in disposition; in fact, the African tradition has denounced him. He is both the source of conflict and peace between the rural African and the urban Afropolitan. The two worlds meet in and through him. At the end of the play Nhamo receives his estranged parents with open arms despite their neglect. However, they can only stay under his roof if they are prepared to abide by the ‘bastard’s’ rules. Nhamo issues an edict:

Pano pamave kugara pamusha paNhamo saka mitemo yamave kuzotevedzera, ndeyaNhamo ... Munotogara muimba imwe chete sababa namai. Kana kungoti semurume nemukadzi...(1983: 70).

[This place where you stay now is Nhamo’s homestead and accordingly you will live by Nhamo’s rules. You will sleep in the same room like husband and wife]

Nhamo’s parents have to give up their rules and live under new rules or they will be expelled and live destitute lives on neighbouring farms. Nhamo’s sister, Sekai, who was impregnated by a city man, Jackson, who subsequently ran away from responsibility, is also allowed to live in Nhamo’s house. Customary practice would have demanded that she elopes with Jackson; in fact, the patriarch, Badza, issues an edict that Sekai must leave the house. However, Nhamo’s new rules are non-exclusionist. The ‘bastard’ culture embraces deviance and affirms it. Even if Marinda in an act of revenge would have wanted Badza and Hazvinei expelled from the city sanctuary, the ‘bastard’ law will reign over both the city and rural members. It seems Edmund’s prayer in *King Lear* (1608) for the gods to stand up for ‘bastards’ has been answered through another ‘bastard’, Nhamo. Nhamo’s new family embraces a combination of western and African values, but follows a life of its own which is neither purely western nor African.

This metaphor of the ‘bastard’ succinctly explains the operation of alternative Zimbabwean theatre. The dramaturgical frame under discussion in this section and other frames to be discussed in the following chapters follow this logic. ‘The bastard’ son Nhamo is the bastard/syncretic theatre which welcomes vitalising contributions from western and African performance modes, which, however, have to give up their rules in order to follow new ones

that it has created. As argued above, the western and African performance modes do not enter the realm of the new theatre depoliticised or stripped of toxic elements that they bear from their source. There is a creative tension that exists in the syncretic theatre, making it a site of struggle and centre of dynamism.

Theatrical Frame

The term frame is a sociological concept first theorised by Erving Goffman(1974). Goffman uses the epithet 'primary framework' to refer to 'a system of entities, postulates, and rules' that provide 'a lore of understanding, an approach, a perspective' (1974: 21). Not all primary frameworks have a shape and written down rules, but their users, even if they are ignorant of the framework's features and are unable to articulate them with competence, will find it easy to apply such frameworks. The framework forces the human agent to perform what Goffman describes as guided doings by which he means the subjection of the doer to standards, to social appraisal of his action. Although frames differ according to the rules that govern performers who sustain them, according to Goffman, 'all frames involve expectations of a normative kind as to how deeply and fully the individual is to be carried into the activity organised by the frames' (1974: 345). When an activity has been 'framed', for example, as a performance, any competing strip of activity that is out of frame will be 'dis-attended' [withdrawal of all attention and awareness] by the participants and audiences. This explains the dis-attending of indigenous performance forms during colonialism because they did not quite fit within the western dramaturgical frame.

The dramaturgical frame has another dimension related to the actor-audience relationship. Arnold Aronson (2006) uses the term in its narrow and literal sense to refer to a boundary, real or imagined that surrounds and borders an image and separates it from the audience and other images that lie outside the border. Aronson argues that in the western sense, the term 'frame' almost invariably evokes the proscenium arch or some variant of it as in the case of performers who reframe any found space in such a way that the occupants of the space are transformed into spectators and performers without the physical presence of a stage. The baroque or Renaissance frame (Aronson 2006: 23) is a 'picture-frame proscenium' or 'a peep-show stage' that separates the viewer from the subject and establishes an aperture (frame) through which the subject is seen. One may ask how Zimbabwean alternative theatre makers have altered the western dramaturgical frame in its various senses.

Keying

I now return to the term 'keying' which I use as a concept to explain the Zimbabwean inversion of the western dramaturgical frame. The term 'key' is a pivotal concept in frame analysis and Goffman (1974: 43-4) uses it to refer to 'the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something else'. Goffman calls the whole process of achieving transformation 'keying'. However, there is no limit to the number of (re)keying to which the western dramaturgical frame can be subjected. There could be multiple (re)keyings leading to transformations or retransformations of the frame in a given alternative play. I contend that creativity is a generational phenomenon and each generation will choose a certain set of keying in order to alter the western dramaturgical frame to create a theatre identity of a generation. What separates the theatre of the first sixteen years after independence from the theatre of the crisis period (1997-2008) is the number of (re)keyings away from the western dramaturgical frame.

Goffman deploys five different ways of understanding the concept of keying in all transformations of activity, but I want to appropriate only three which apply to the theatrical frame:

- A systematic transformation is involved across materials already meaningful in accordance with a schema of interpretation, and without which the keying would be meaningless.
- Participants in the activity are meant to know and to openly acknowledge that a systematic alteration is involved; one that will radically reconstruct what it is for them that is going on.
- Cues will be available for establishing when the transformation is to begin and when it is to end...within which and to which the transformation is to be restricted. (1974: 45)

Most play texts that I have chosen for analysis operate in the western dramaturgical frame mode which, however, is altered through the process of keying in indigenous partial texts – whether those texts have already been altered through contact in their independent state or they have maintained their purity. In Moyo's *Chenga Ose* the audience watches Nhamo and Marinda in Act 3 dancing to the rhythm of African popular music coming from a gramophone. This activity is already meaningful in terms of a primary framework as the tea party. As a copy of the tea party model it has omitted other variables such as dancing girls, the sale of foodstuffs and yet it can still be recognised in terms of the tea party frame. The tea party is repeated in the last scene of the play where the whole family is reunited and

there is dancing, shouting, laughing, celebration and fanfare. As in the previous scenario, the performers dance to the rhythm of music coming from the gramophone and all shout '*chenga ose manhanga hakuna risina mhonzi* [cook all pumpkins without being choosy; they all have seeds] (1973: 71). The same partial text is keyed into the western dramaturgical frame that carries Tsodzo's *Shanduko*. In scene 6, Wisdom Tafirenyika has transformed his house into a shebeen. The guests are enjoying themselves dancing to music which is playing from a music centre at high pitch. As in the above example they are drinking and shouting. Occasionally, a man takes a woman into a private room manned by a matron to have sex. In one scene, Gonzo Musengezi transforms and combines the tea party and the *pungwe* frame and generates a new text that alters the western dramaturgical frame. In Act 2 Scene 2 of *The Honourable MP*, it is during the evening and a crowd of peasants and workers are dancing on the veranda of a rural bottle store. Music is blaring from a sound system and people share snuff, cigarettes and beer. In typical tea party style, young women dance in the arena, each of them trying to outdo the other in sexually suggestive gyrations. The *pungwe* frame is successively and simultaneously keyed into the tea party frame as performers occasionally burst into impromptu speeches. When MP Pfende arrives what can be recognised in terms of the conventions of the tea party frame transforms to an activity that can be framed as a *pungwe*. Slogans are chanted amidst a burst of short speeches and ululations. The scene ends with instant justice meted out on MP Pfende. The crowd undresses him and the teacher takes over the stage in typical liberation style *pungwe* performance. The peasants and workers burst into song using the call and response style amidst much dancing. In agitprop style performers and audience mingle and sing together *ad infinitum*.

In order for a dramatic text to fit its own frame, as we have seen above, it must have a purity and explicitness that is opposed to other extra-textual structures. The western dramatic text has an Aristotelian structuredness that gives it an internal organisation that is at variance with other texts that don't belong to it. The inclusion of indigenous partial texts in their unadulterated or hybridised form in a performance contained in a western dramaturgical frame disrupts and destabilises that purity and structuredness. In the above examples, the signs from the western dramaturgical frame such as structure and literary dialogue are combined with signs from another system –the tea party and *pungwe*. This creates a 'multimedial' theatrical text which is a text which is communicated by means of more than one medium. The inclusion of dancing, chanting, singing, ululation and sloganeering de-

dramatises the western theatrical frame by minimising the use of spoken dialogue and magnifying the corporeality of the body and paralinguistic sounds.

The *pungwe* is another hybridised indigenous text that is included in the making of alternative theatre. Writing just after independence, Zimbabwean playwrights were obsessed with the *pungwe* as a performative frame that could be used to create new theatre. Robert McLaren created his first three plays with Zambuko/Izibuko Theatre Company: *Katshaa! The Sound of AK* (1985), *Samora Continua* (1987) and *Mandela: The Spirit of No Surrender* (1990) based on the *pungwe* frame. Other playwrights utilise the *pungwe* frame in different ways in different contexts. Tsodzo's *Shanduko* opens with a group of people holding a meeting in *pungwe* style. There is much sloganeering with clenched fists, spontaneous clapping after a burst of eloquent speech, question and answer sessions replete with expressive gestures, exuberance of speech and *kongonya/sikokotsha* dance. The scene ends with a typical liberation war song to raise the morale of the participants. This dance is performed while holding the loins of a real or imagined person, with feet together and jumping forward in circular formation. In Musengezi's *The Honourable MP*, the *pungwe* is altered to suit the intentions of the playwright. In the midst of an otherwise western realist scene involving Isabella, MP Pfende and Teacher Choto, a crowd of peasants dressed in tattered garments appears singing a liberation song. This seems to happen in the mind of the teacher as a kind of cinematic montage technique to magnify the affluence of the MP and the penury of the peasants. In the same scene MP Pfende imagines addressing a crowd in his constituency and employs *pungwe* techniques – sloganeering and chanting – with Teacher Choto and Isabella joining the audience and acting as the crowd that is being addressed by clapping hands and ululating. The scene gravitates between realism and magic realism.

The Wretched Ones employs similar techniques as those in *The Honourable MP*. In Act 3, Scene 1 when the action shifts to the reading of Daniel's script, the frame used is that of a *pungwe*. The paupers sing a Christian hymn. At the end of the hymn the leader of the paupers leads others into slogans and speeches frequently interjected by other paupers with their own speeches, cheering and jeering. In Act 3 Scene 6 the paupers have gone beyond speechifying; they are toyi-toying and singing a liberation song that was composed by the ZANU (PF) choir *Mbuya Nehanda Kufa Vachitaura* [Nehanda's Final Words]. The rest of the scene continues in *pungwe* style until Buffalo closes the play manuscript.

Within the western theatrical frame when music is used, it is played from a music centre often out of sight of the audience. It is used to establish and change mood of a scene, to heighten dramatic effect, to give sense of locale and to create and support pace and movement. Music in the western sense is a separate discipline with a separate training ethos. In the case of the above plays audio signs from a different sign and cultural system are keyed into the western theatrical text. The new text that is formed requires both an actor and a singer. One notices that the singing is accompanied by dancing thereby forming a three-pronged approach to the act of visualisation – actor-dancer-singer.

With the exception of *Chenga Ose*, *The Return* and *Shanduko* where dialogue is the dominant sign system, in all other plays chosen for analysis the western dramaturgical frame and indigenous cultural texts play an equal role in terms of their place in the hierarchy. In fact, Mujajati and Kavanagh's plays border on virtually overpowering the western dramaturgical frame. It is easy to see them as traditionalists, but they are syncretic (like others in their generation). For Mujajati and Kavanagh, every activity in their plays is preceded, accompanied or followed by song and dance. For instance, in Mujajati's *The Rain of My Blood* Tawanda, the ex-combatant, occasionally sings struggle songs when drunk. As workers get paid at Altena farm, song erupts in the background to reinforce the theme of exploitation. The scene ends with a song '*Ruzhinji rweAfrica*' [The masses of Africa] which challenges other African countries to provide support for the liberation cause. When Negomo tells Father Louis how he was fired by Jeffries Sanderson, there is a song to heighten the pathos. At Chegato Mission, the school boys narrate their struggle experiences during the recently ended school holidays by teaching each other songs that they had heard at night vigils. The scene ends with all of them singing '*Mbuya Nehanda Kufa Vachitaura Shuwa*'. The rest of the play consistently follows this trend of singing and sometimes dancing. Mujajati follows the same performance techniques in *The Wretched Ones*.

The Rain of My Blood follows Kavanagh's template in *Mavambo* in so far as it intermittently uses song and dance at appropriate times throughout the play. All three plays are located within the storytelling tradition which is altered by keying in western methods. All three stories emanate from an omniscient storyteller whose images are thrust on stage. In *Mavambo* Sekuru and Alexio narrate the story, while Tawanda narrates the story for the playwright in *The Rain of My Blood*. In *The Wretched Ones*, Daniel, through the script that is

read by his father Buffalo, narrates the story. Instead of the narrator playing other characters in a typical traditional storytelling session, the storytelling frame is altered by having imagined characters physically on stage. A folktale which exists in its own right can be transformed into theatre in the western dramatic theatre sense by way of having a represented interaction of several characters. However, this comes with significant alterations of the western dramaturgical frame. The Aristotelian structure and plot is stood on its head since the narration has to depend on flashbacks. *The Rain of My Blood* fluctuates between the post-independence era and the war of liberation in the 1970s through the agency of the narrator Tawanda. *Mavambo* does the same through the agency of Sekuru and Alexio. The unities of time and place are disrupted and the Freytag pyramid structure is disfigured. For such theatrical texts, the application of the Euro-American formalist method of analysis or 'the monocultural communication model' (Balme 1999: 5) of western theatre is inappropriate since non-western methods of creating them have been used.

The frequency of song, dance and mime in the four plays can be summarised as follows. Mujajati's *The Rain of my Blood* sixteen songs (two of which are hummed), three sequences of traditional drumbeats, two sequences of mime and one performed poem. Musengezi's *The Honourable MP* has eight songs (three of which are pre-recorded), five dances, four sequences of mime and one poem grafted into the scenes. *The Wretched Ones* has six songs, six traditional drumbeats, one dance and two mime sequences grafted into the western dramaturgical frame. In *Mavambo* the audience entered the Beit Hall theatre to the rhythm of various pre-recorded *chimurenga* songs played from a music centre lasting for thirty minutes (Kavanagh 1997). When the play officially opened at 7pm the mood of the *pungwe* already pervaded the auditorium. The audience experienced thirteen storytelling narratives and the first five narratives were accompanied by pre-recorded *mbira* music which had a cumulative playing time of twenty minutes. In the other four sequences, the sound person played *mbaqanga*, *kwela* and Seekers music of the 1960s which had a cumulative length of eleven minutes. Throughout the play, the performers sang six songs and performed five sequences of mime and four dances.

The keying of dialogue, dance, mime and song into the western dramaturgical frame disrupts not only the dramaturgical frame, but western psychological acting. The very act of keying in indigenous partial texts is a form of resistance to the Eurocentric acting convention. The indigenous partial texts are derived from Zimbabwean cultural text. The cultural text affects

the way an actor performs. This is an aspect that Pavis (2003: 65-67) calls the 'anthropology of the actor' which he describes by a series of questions which include some of the following:

What kind of body does the actor have at his disposal even before taking the role? In what ways is this body already impregnated by the surrounding culture, and how is that culture implicated in the process of signification for both role and acting? What does the body show and what does it hide? What does it choose to display, and what to conceal? And from what perspectives? Who 'pulls the strings' of the body? Where is the pilot? In one's surrounding cultural milieu, what is a controlled body or an 'unchained' body deemed to be? How is the body of the actor experienced? Visually? Kinetically, in perceiving movement?

In other words, the behaviour of the body is determined by the surrounding culture that nurtured the body. Culture is not always material, but manifests itself in intangible ways such as in techniques of the body. This is a point developed further by Fischer-Lichte (1992) who asserts that not all actors of different cultural groups have the same bodily material. The actor's work, Fischer-Lichte argues, is built from the unique material inscribed within his/her individuality and also material that comes from the actor's culture as the body belongs both to nature and a particular culture.⁷² What this discussion establishes is that there is no such thing as a neutral human body, but there are various kinds of bodies that are fashioned and ingrained differently by their respective cultural environments. 'Each culture's understanding of acting as a form of embodiment is based on indigenous paradigms of the body (including voice), body-mind relationship, and consciousness or awareness' (Zarrilli 2002: 85).

I now establish a connection between this theory of acting and the real performances of *Mavambo*, *The Rain of my Blood*, *The Honourable MP* and *The Wretched Ones*. How does the acting in these performances reflect, mediate, challenge and resist Rhodesian discourse on acting? The inclusion of indigenous texts and their playing by African performers challenges

⁷² The aesthetic and non-aesthetic performances of the Shona and Ndebele performers act like theatre exercises. This lifelong training of their bodies through various aspects of the cultural text encodes certain techniques in their bodies so that the bodies become body-texts or image-texts. These aesthetic and non-aesthetic performances act as a reservoir from which performers draw certain qualities of energy which establish a second nature through their entire body-mind. In short, they perform from habitus.

the whole notion of acting as it is understood in western bourgeois illusionistic theatre. *Mavambo*, for example, proceeds mainly on the basis of a storytelling technique where Sekuru and Alexio address the audience. The first five narratives are performed by Sekuru and the last eight narratives are performed by Alexio. When a narrative delivered by Sekuru introduces new characters, the style of performance shifts to western psychological realism where in a strip of conversation between intensely psychological characters the story unfolds. At a momentous point, psychological acting stops and Sekuru moves towards the audience and speaks with great dignity and understanding to the audience. Shortly before Sekuru's last narrative to the audience, for example, the play progresses on the basis of psychological acting

JACKSON: They're a cheeky lot of bastards. But we're going to teach them a lesson. You'll see when we get there
MILLS: Jackson! We are not going
JACKSON: Listen old man, you wouldn't like your superiors to know about some of the things you've been up to here, would you?
MILLS: What on earth are you trying to suggest Jackson?
JACKSON: I'm not suggesting anything. Are you coming with us or not?
MILLS: No!
JACKSON knocks Mills aside and seizes Shonga. *The whites exit dragging Shonga behind them on a short rope.*
Mbira (music), the narrative continues
SEKURU: Shonga suffered much at the hands of the white men. They beat him. They tied his hands and let a horse drag him. They tied him to a tree and shot their guns around him...

Psychological acting is interrupted when Sekuru, aided by mbira music playing in the background, moves forward to address the audience. The style shifts to presentational acting. This technique is faithfully obeyed in the rest of Alexio's eight narratives. Kavanagh calls this aspect 'playing out'. He comments:

With our stronger narrative traditions in Africa we play out to the audience much more than the naturalistic tradition of Europe would allow. ... But if you do what you normally do and talk to each other, the audience would be shut out and soon lose interest. The actors have therefore to 'open out' to the audience. (1997: 66)

Even in what seemingly looks like naturalistic or realistic dialogue on paper, when it comes to acting the lines, the notion of contact with the audience is not forgotten. After looking at various alternative theatre performances, Kavanagh (1997: 67) notices an acting phenomenon that he calls 'referring' which he explains as 'you talk out, away from listeners and towards the audience, but 'refer' to the listener from time to time to re-establish who you are talking to'. When looking at the performance text of all the four plays under analysis

this notion of 'opening out' and 'referring' is evident not only in verbal exchanges but in dancing and singing. Looking at the statistics of the frequency of dances and songs in each of the plays, I can conclude that each of the dances and songs when it has gone through a process of concertisation (taking it from its ritual or everyday context to a western theatrical frame) is performed towards the audience.

The issue of dancing and singing, as the statistics above show, occur in all the plays. Their performance in all the above plays is an affront to western bourgeois illusionistic theatre notions of acting. The University of Rhodesia, though it did not have a drama department had an active University Drama Society which participated in the then white only National Theatre Festival (NTF). Although, according to McLaren (1993: 37), this society had lapsed by 1980 it had left a legacy of psychological realism. It was superseded by the University of Zimbabwe Drama Club which in its early days continued with the residual psychological acting techniques even if it was mostly patronised by black students, albeit the crop that emerged from former 'group A' schools, which in colonial days were reserved for whites only. That tradition was half broken in 1983 with the performance of *The Honourable MP* which incorporated some indigenous partial texts – song, dance, mime and poetry. The psychological acting technique code was so strong that even if performers who were auditioned to play in *Mavambo* in its 1985 run had a strong indigenous cultural text influence, they were reluctant or 'unwilling to perform traditional songs and dances. ...The prejudice that dancing or singing was unchristian and uncivilised was widespread' (McLaren 1993: 38). The performance of *The Honourable MP* in 1983 by the University of Zimbabwe Drama Club and *Mavambo* in 1985 by University of Zimbabwe drama⁷³ students challenged the dominance of psychological realism by including indigenous texts such as song and dance.

When performers sing and dance, they tend to break away from psychological acting and become nobody except themselves. In western psychological acting, impersonation is key to portrayal of reality and it is defined by Sam Ukala (2000: 76) as 'the imitation of the appearance, speech and behaviour of a character'. In the full sense of psychological acting, a fully delineated character has three dimensions; namely physiognomy (which encompasses

⁷³ Robert McLaren replaced Stephen Chifunyise (who had only served the university for three months before accepting a post as director of Art and Culture in the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture) at the University of Zimbabwe and began offering drama courses in the Faculty of Arts in 1984. He became the first head of a fully fledged Theatre Arts Department in 1993.

such aspects as sex, age, height, weight, colour, posture, appearance, defects), demographics (which encompasses such aspects as class, education, marital status, home life, religion, race, nationality, political persuasion) and psychological aspects such as sex life, moral standards, ambitions, frustrations, temperament, attitude to life, abilities, judgement, complexes (Ukala 2000; Archer 1983). It can be seen that the craft of the actor and visual designer converge to create the fully delineated three dimensional character.

However, due to the influence of the cultural text on performers and also due to the inclusion of indigenous texts in the performance text, the fully delineated psychological actor is not at all times present in *Mavambo*, *The Rain of my Blood*, *The Honourable MP* and *The Wretched Ones*. When performers sing and dance as happens in all four plays, they do not represent or pretend to be a character as is the case with western musicals. In other words, they do not impersonate anybody. In the various scenarios in the plays, performers certainly put on costume, move on the acting area and have recourse to language and paralinguistic signs through singing, ululation, exhortation, whistling and yodelling, but they don't impersonate anybody as is the case in western psychological acting. Michael Kirby (2002) provides terminology to describe various stages on the 'not acting' and 'acting continuum'. The dancing girls such as those in *The Honourable MP* who file past Shakespeare Pfende, Immaculate, Isabella, and Teacher Choto (who have now transformed into white tourists and mime taking photographs of dancers) dancing and swaying their hips with demonic energy (half naked) to the rhythm of rumbling drums would be deemed 'non matrixed' performers (Kirby 2002: 41). These dancing girls are 'non matrixed' because they are merely conveyed by their costumes or lack of it, but do not pretend to be other persons. They exist in real time and not stage time as would be the case with western psychological actors. The next stage on the 'not acting' side is a condition that Kirby (ibid) calls 'symbolised matrix' performing. This takes place, according to Kirby, when a performer does not intend to impersonate, yet his/her costume represents something or someone. In all the singing that takes place in the four plays, it is the performers who already have roles in the plays who double as singers. In *The Honourable MP*, for example, peasants, and workers wear tattered rags as costume and they hold axes and walking sticks. When they shift from psychological acting to presentational acting by way of singing and dancing, their costume and props give them the character of peasants and workers, but the singing and dancing does not seem to give them an identifiable character. This happens with paupers and squatters in *The Wretched Ones* as well as villagers in *Mavambo* and farm labourers in *The*

Rain of my Blood. This is 'symbolised matrix' where 'the referential elements' such as costume and props are used 'but not acted by the performer' (Kirby 2002: 41).

Even if singing and dancing is not acting, the fact that the songs and dances are performed in costume and on stage with a watching audience turns the spectacle into a condition that Kirby (2002: 42) calls 'received acting'. Since singing and dancing can happen in everyday life without it being taken as acting, in the case of the same theatrical event happening on stage the performers become honorary actors and the term 'received actor' is only used as an honorary title. When the matrices (such as costume, performance, stage area, lights make up and other things) are strong, long lasting and reinforce each other, there is a tendency to move towards impersonation of the fully delineated character type, but Kirby argues that 'non matrixed performing, symbolised matrix, and received acting are stages on the continuum from not-acting to acting' (ibid).

Direct acting or presentational acting which pervades all the four plays does not meet the western criteria for what Kirby (2002: 45) calls 'complex acting' which is described by Sam Ukala as a condition achieved by an actor:

When the actor has found the right answers to the question, feels those feelings, thinks those thoughts as truthfully as possible, and lets them determine his physical movement and behaviour on stage... He is at the brink of a precipice beyond which comes the fall into the deep and unfathomable gulf of trace, possession, and loss of self-control. At this brink, he puts himself consciously into the shoes of the character, with a degree of concentration capable of making him dead to extraneous stimuli. (2000: 77)

When performers address the audience as is the case with Sekuru in his five narratives and Alexio in his eight narratives, they resemble public speakers who are classified by Kirby (ibid) as 'simple actors'. This is the last stage on the 'not acting' side beyond which 'complex acting' begins. With the exception of moments when performers take recourse to psychological acting, none of the above examples of performance can be designated as acting, at least as it is understood in the West. Western psychological acting is challenged and resisted through recourse to dance and song, but also reflected and celebrated in chunks of dialogue where performers intermittently become fully delineated characters.

Take for example Act one, Scene one of *The Honourable MP* which presents fully psychological characters in a naturalistic setting. Teacher Choto is dressed in faded blue jeans, a khaki shirt and is carrying a green canvass bag on his shoulder. MP Pfende is dressed

in a ritzy black suit. The MP's girlfriend, Isabella, is dressed in blue, weather-beaten jeans and a lily-white shirt. They are acting in a space designed as a lounge in an affluent Harare suburb, full of realistic details such as a radio-cassette, TV, carpet and other paraphernalia. The dialogue is naturalistic and all the three characters are engaged in complex acting. The same can be said about all scenes that take place in Buffalo's house in *The Wretched Ones* and all scenes that take place in Alex's house in *The Rain of my Blood* as well as all sequences preceding Sekuru or Alexio's narratives in *Mavambo*. Indigenous texts do not necessarily dominate dialogue based text, but there is an interesting fusion of dialogue based signs, song, dance and mime. The dominants fluctuate from scene to scene and from play to play.

However, owing to the importance of Africanisation and Zimbabweanisation of theatre during the early 1980s and mid 1990s, available literature (wa Mirii 1986; Tsodzo 1983; Kavanagh 1997) tends to stress the aspect of traditionalism and ignores western traditions, even where they are evident in a work of art. What I am noticing from the available theatrical productions of the time is the convergence of western staging techniques and traditional texts to create an alternative theatre. The inclusion of traditional texts is not however an unconscious endeavour devoid of political connotations. It is actually a political project even if in some cases the performance is not openly political. Rohmer notices a similar trend during the same period and argues that:

Song, dance and mime are only considered as indispensable ingredients of Zimbabwean theatrical performance, but viewed as a conscious act of catching up with traditional artistic conventions, and therefore as a tool of decolonisation. In this sense the use of performance forms is politically significant even where the individual pieces do not deal with politics explicitly. (1999: 261)

From the foregoing discussion, it seems to me that directors, playwrights and performers consciously choose to include indigenous texts for the purposes of Africanisation and decolonisation of theatre. Because of the nature of how those indigenous texts are performed and the irreducible underscore inherent in the African performers, it appears that the creative collective consciously refuse to be actors and choose to be performers. From Kirby's theorisation on acting, performers are mostly found on the 'not acting' side of the continuum. They are close to themselves as opposed to being impersonators and they normally exist in real time as opposed to stage time. However, this distinction should not be stretched too far since parts of plays under examination are made up of psychological characters and dialogue which allows the performer to enter the character and impersonate the appearance, speech and behaviour of the character. However, due to the fact that

characterisation is not sustained or is not persistent, the actor-dancer-singer remains a performer as Ukala asserts:

...the performer is not expected to present a coherent personality developing consistently through time. Rather, he may sketch out a social type inside an image and then vanish mid-sentence into another image, or return simply to himself doing a task in real time. (2000: 77)

I am arguing that if western bourgeois illusionistic theatre's interpretative strategies and canons are used to evaluate such syncretic works, they will find the works faulty (Ravengai 2001; Chinweizu et al 1980; Verma 1996). I may even add that if western strategies of actor training are used on African performers with the aforementioned underscore it may put them in a disadvantageous position as compared to other students with western groomed bodies and the reverse may also be true.⁷⁴

Fabrication

Goffman (1974) offers another concept – 'fabrication' – as a way of transforming a strip of activity based on a pre-existing model. At some point the two terms 'keying' and 'fabrication' overlap in so far as both of them can be executed on the basis of a model that is already meaningful in terms of primary frameworks. In sociological terms, which is the sense Goffman uses the term, fabrication has negative connotations. It is:

The intentional effort of one or more individuals to manage activity so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on. A nefarious design is involved, a plot or treacherous plan leading – when realised – to a falsification of the world. (1974: 83)

In this sociological sense, those who engineer the deception are crooks, deceivers or simply fabricators. Fabrications are short lived; once they achieve their goal and the deceived realise their folly, they crumble.

When this sociological concept is transferred to engineering science, it is a creative process that produces structures of outstanding quality. It means to make, build or construct structures or equipment by cutting, shaping and assembling components from raw materials. This metaphor of assembling from different parts can be used successfully to

⁷⁴ This is an issue that I deal with at length in my book chapter entitled 'The Dilemma of the African Body as a Site of Performance in the Context of Western Training' (2011: 35-60). I suggest a training pedagogy that makes sure that whatever a performer (however their background) brings to the acting practice is of value and should be used during the theatre making process.

explain the mechanics of alternative Zimbabwean theatre. Where industrial fabricators use raw materials such as plate metal, formed and expanded metal, tube stock, square stock, sectional metal, welding wire, hardware, castings and fittings, cultural fabricators use found cultural texts such as legends, epics, novels, rituals, dances, songs, poems and so on to create a performance that would be recognised in terms of a primary framework – the theatrical framework of that specific culture. Kavanagh's *Mavambo* and Mujajati's *The Rain of My Blood* used this method of transformation as a way of negotiating the western theatrical frame as will be revealed shortly.

In theatre that uses this fabrication approach, the process is similar to industrial fabrication. The subjects involved begin with a statement of intention that will shape everything else that comes into the new text. Aspects of texts that already exist are chosen and cut out to suit the intentions. Those that are uprooted unchanged are re-contextualised, altered and stitched together to form a seemingly seamless whole. Finally, the theatrical text is packaged for public consumption. For Kavanagh's *Mavambo* the intention was to subvert the western theatrical frame through a process of what he calls the 'democratisation, Zimbabweanisation [and] Africanisation' (1993: 367) of Zimbabwean theatre. There are two positions of interpreting the indigenisation or Africanisation of theatre which are related to the two polarities within Pan-Africanism – traditionalism and modernity. For traditionalists, these terms mean isolation from acculturation processes leading to separatist artistic tradition where the process of Africanisation is pursued tendentiously. In the modernity sense, the terms evoke an acculturation process where the common and outstanding features of African performances are creatively blended with western theatrical elements. However, in Zimbabwe, even if the theatre innovators of the period in public speeches, language and theory sound traditionalist, in practice their works combine elements from both African and western traditions. In his comment about *Mavambo* Kavanagh confirms this notion of the modernisation process, 'it was important that this production (*Mavambo*) should feature the indigenous performing arts – dance, song, drumming, *mbira*-playing, recitation, storytelling, and so on – but also be modern and relevant to present-day Zimbabweans' (1993: 38).

The metaphor of fabrication resonates with what Fischer-Lichte (1992: 197) calls 'global transformation' and for the same term what Patrice Pavis (2003: 203) calls 'synchronic' transformation. Whereas in the western dramatic theatre tradition, performers work from a single existing text, the process of fabrication works with an idea which is used to recruit

various disparate texts with a single theatrical text emerging at the end of the process rather than at the beginning of the process. The idea in *Mavambo* was:

- To present a recreation of Zimbabwean history which demonstrates how, even for those black Zimbabweans who were primarily concerned with advancing their own individual interests, the colonial system made the armed struggle for liberation inevitable.
- To base the performance in the indigenous cultural forms of the Zimbabwean people in order to suggest a way forward for the post-independent theatre movement. (Kavanagh 1997: 185)

The same ideals guided the making of Mujajati's *The Rain of My Blood* as asserted by Tawanda: 'the story of our sacred liberation struggle must be salvaged and should be preserved in the highest archives of national history' (1991: 10). The subject(s) involved in the fabrication/synchronic transformation of found raw materials draw from disparate sources. Kavanagh based his story on an already existing novel, Wilson Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil* (1976). The copy, however, does not replicate the novel faithfully – it simply appropriates the storyline involving the main character Alexio and adds other indigenous texts not drawn from the novel. The story of *The Rain of my Blood* is based on four sources – indigenous texts, the legendary story of a liberation fighter, Kid Marongorongo, who in real life operated in the Mount Darwin area in the early 1970s (Chiwome 1990), the biography of Bishop Lamont of Umtali (Mutare) , a white Catholic priest who openly supported the liberation struggle and was incarcerated for it (Godwin and Hancock 1993: 166-70) and another biography of Marc de Bochgrave d' Altena who owned Altena farm which was attacked by ZANLA forces in 1972 (Godwin and Hancock 1993: 85) and appears as Jeffries Sanderson of Altena farm in the play. Everything is fictionalised to the extent of destabilising the historicity of the texts. The texts cannot be depended on as sources of history. Chegato Mission, which in the play is geographically located in Centenary – Mashonaland and is written as a Catholic station, is in fact in Midlands and is a Lutheran Mission School.

This concept of fabrication when used by African(ist) theatre makers is an act of resisting the dominance of the western theatrical frame. The western dramatic theatre tradition projected itself during colonialism as the standard that all African performances were meant to emulate if they intended to qualify as drama and theatre. In order for the western tradition to survive, it had to exclude other theatres and to consolidate the process of homogenising its theatre practice. If racial boundaries were to be kept 'pure', cultural boundaries strove for stylistic purity as well. Commenting on the same phenomenon, Balme asserts that 'in this world-view, which encapsulates the essence of colonialism in both its

paternalistic and aggressive, exploitative manifestations, any suggestion of mingling and interchange was synonymous with dilution, deracination, and breakdown' (1999: 8). However, *Mavambo* and *The Rain of my Blood* destabilise this purity and homogeneity of the western theatrico-dramatic tradition by incorporating ethnic music, dance, poems, recitations, masks, legends, and chants. In the western tradition, these partial texts are assumed to exist in their own right with their own specific mechanisms of production, transmission and reception. Kavanagh and Mujajati consciously engage in programmatic strategy to fabricate different cultural texts to create texts that celebrate and mock the western theatrical frame.

Mavambo begins with a storytelling session with its ritualistic call and response beginning '*kwaivapo – Dzepfunde*' and it is narrated by Sekuru after a brief philosophical introduction by Alexio. When Sekuru walks to the platform and begins his story, he is accompanied by the sound of the mbira. Whereas mbira music is normally played during a *bira* (ritual prayer to ancestors) here it is used in the western sense to establish and maintain mood, to accompany the story, give it a sense of locale and to heighten dramatic effect. Sekuru asks the performers to start with a song. The song is a folkloric one that has been taken out of its original context to serve a new purpose in a new story. The narrative is interwoven with indigenous texts consistently till the end of the play. When the Pioneer Corps invade the village of Makosa they are fought back through the performance of a war dance accompanied by singing

Zirume rinogaro virimira vamwe [This man is always proud and insulting]
Tondobayana, ya ya, tondobayana [We shall fight, oh yes we shall fight].
(Kavanagh 1997: 192)

Though the song was historically sung when fighting other invading ethnic groups; here it is used to face the new challenge of white invaders. The women ululate in the background to encourage the warriors and to celebrate the anticipated victory. These are suprasegmental features of speech which require an African groomed vocal ability and a cultural body with ethnic-specific codes to perform it. When the Makosa warriors lose the battle, the women sing a dirge to send forty men to their graves. On a different day two vigilant warriors capture a white priest, Rev Mills, and women celebrate the event by performing Soko clan praise poetry [*chidawo/izibongo*]. This is performed with careful traditional codes, idiophonic and paralinguistic signs learnt through lived experience. Rev Mills' expulsion from the village is celebrated in song and dance. It is as if every activity in the village is marked by an appropriate cultural performance.

When Alexio ends his narrative guerrillas enter the stage with AKs and bequeath a gun to him. The rest of the company enters the stage and sings a liberation song '*Nyika yedu yeZimbabwe* [Our Country Zimbabwe]. While this is a liberation song believed by many to be rooted in traditional performing arts, the reality of the matter is that it marries both traditional and western forms to create a song that mocks colonialism in content but celebrates it in form. The four part harmony is a western form of singing, but at the same time it uses the traditional call and response style for each first line of every verse. Once the call has been made by the soloist, the rest of the choir joins in four part harmony to sing the rest of the verse.

I have established that the process of fabrication involves lifting texts from different sources and welding them together to form a new text. When the various texts enter the new text they undergo what Balme (1999: 5) calls a process of 'recoding'. This involves converting codes from one format to another or in other words decoding old ones and then encoding anew with a different one. This is achieved mostly through two processes –(re)modification and re-contextualisation. In the first instance, a partial text such as the ritual beginning of storytelling session is uprooted from its context, but its structure and style is maintained but the content and performance is (re)modified to suit the new circumstances. There is no limit to the modification – thus it can be modified and re-modified. In the second instance the indigenous text such as the Soko praise poem is taken into the new text, but retains its original form. Its use in the new social context however alters its function and meaning. These two processes are then used to fabricate the indigenous texts with western ones to form a syncretic theatrical text, where, according to Balme, 'there exists a consciously sought-after creative tension

between the meanings engendered by these texts in the traditional performative context and the new function within a Western dramaturgical framework' (1999: 5).

Conclusion

In trying to theorise an identity of theatre for the period I would argue that alternative theatre relies on appropriating a range of texts from the Zimbabwean cultural text and arranges them within a western theatrical frame, which is itself altered due to the intrusion of 'foreign' texts. The work is unashamedly provocative and this provocation is to stimulate other ways of experiencing, seeing and analysing theatre. Alternative theatre of the period rejects the dominant western theatrico-dramatic tradition. While dramatic theatre depends on psychological characters for the development of both story and character, alternative theatre 'de-psychologises' dramatis personae. When performers dance and sing, they are themselves and not characters. Again this process does not negate psychological acting, but subverts it through transformation from psychological acting to presentational acting. The notion of acting as it is understood in dramatic theatre is contaminated through parataxis. This mode of acting also problematises the purity of the audience. This chapter offers, in part, a way of analysing alternative syncretic theatre. However, the theatrical frame that I have discussed in this chapter would not paint a complete picture of alternative theatre. The next chapter looks at how actor/performer/singers execute their performance to negotiate their theatre identity in the context of a convergence of discourses on performance.

CHAPTER 7: SITES OF STRUGGLE: THE BODY AND SONG IN PERFORMANCE

Introduction

This chapter builds from the previous one by focusing on the behaviour of the African body in performance as well as the internal organisation of the songs. In focusing on the body and mechanics of songs, I aim to answer the major postcolonial theoretical question: How does the body and song reflect, mediate, and challenge the relations of domination and subordination between western dramatic theatre and indigenous cultural text? What identities of theatre emerge out of this process and how are they produced? I argue that Zimbabwean alternative theatre makers created a deconstructive theatre aesthetic which adopted and separated elements of dramatic theatre for use in a radically new way. While the content of songs resists Rhodesian discourse, some of their stylistic features are adapted from western music making the notion of resistance an ambivalent one.

The Body as a Site of Struggle

Song, dance and mime utilise the body as their medium of expression. First of all, the creative combination of dance, song and mime in a theatre performance challenges western dramatic theatre. Dance, music and mime are different disciplines studied and practised under different roofs in western tertiary institutions and their overseas adherents. Each of these disciplines has a rigid code of its own that allows it to express reality in its own particular way. There are established western mime practitioners such as Marcel Marceau, Etienne Decroux and others, so it is with concert music and dance. What we see in western bourgeois illusionistic theatre is the purity of disciplines which is challenged in Zimbabwean alternative theatre through the convergence of song, dance and mime in a single performance. In colonial Harare, for example, there was Salisbury Repertory Players (REPs) which specialised in dialogue drama and musicals while, on the other hand, there was Salisbury Operatic Society which specialised in music and then National Ballet which specialised in dance.⁷⁵ Hardly did any of these disciplines combine to create theatre together.

⁷⁵ Musicals are not to be confused with the way songs are used in alternative Zimbabwean theatre. When actors sing in a musical, opera, operetta or singspiel they present the singing as the embodied actions of a fictional character. They sing the lines instead of speaking them. Fictional characters do not know that they are singing, but they express their feelings through song. Actors are conscious that they are doing drama using a musical form. In alternative theatre, singers perform themselves and do not sing in character as in musicals. In colonial Zimbabwe and other western societies, ballet, opera and orchestra were separate disciplines which were not accepted in the fold of theatre. This is still the case in some parts of Europe and in Zimbabwe. Salisbury Municipal Orchestra used

What is unique about Zimbabwean alternative theatre and perhaps theatre of sub-Saharan Africa is that there is no clear distinction between mime, dance and song. Most of the dances are mimetic dances which replicate in movement an activity in real life as opposed to abstract western dances that communicate mostly through stimulation rather than attachment of meaning to a particular movement. Even if they are mimetic, they are recognised as dances and not mime. Similarly, when singing, the songs do not follow the western concert style; the performers dance and act out the songs. This linkage of various disciplines owing to the influence of the traditional cultural text contradicts the principle of purity of form that is characteristic of western dramatic theatre. *Mavambo* exemplifies this blurring of distinctions through a combination of mime, dance and song. The Pioneer Corps invade the village of Chief Chuma and the invasion is mimed by four performers who enter the stage miming riding horses, kicking and careering all over the village. There is a sudden shift to dialogue where the Pioneer Corps demand labourers from Chief Chuma who refuses to acquiesce to their demands. There is a shift back to mime where the Pioneer Corps mime cocking their guns ready to fight the warriors of Chief Chuma. A battle ensues in mime. The Chuma warriors take to a dance which combines mime, dance and song simultaneously. They perform mbira dance which is executed by hopping up with both feet and then landing on one foot, repeating the same procedure, but landing on another foot. The torso is inclined forward and movement takes place in the shoulders and feet. As they perform this dance they sing the song:

Zirume rinogaro virimira vamwe
Tondobayana, ya, ya tondobayana
(1997: 192)
[This man is always proud and insulting
We shall fight, O yes, we shall fight]

Courtauld Hall for performances while choral societies performed at the Civic Theatre. Both of these were not designated official theatre spaces (George Maxwell 1974).

On the second verse 'We shall fight, O yes, we shall fight', the movement mimes throwing a spear towards the Pioneer Corps. The women performers are not onlookers during this spectacle. They perform praises to the fighting men. When the Chuma warriors surrender to the invading forces at the command of the chief, the Pioneer Corps mime tying a rope around the necks of captured warriors and exit the stage by executing the same mime of riding, careering and kicking horses. As they exit, the women sing a *Chimurenga* funeral song:

Torai hama tiende nadzo kumakomo
Vandovigwe kumusha
Isu kwaMutoko hatidi
Tondovigwepi
Tinondovigwa kumusha
(Kavanagh 1997: 192)

[Take our people into the mountains
They must be buried at home
We don't want to die in strange lands
Where shall we be buried?
We shall be buried at home]

The song is not sung in concert style, but it is performed using gesture and mime. Kavanagh (1997) who codified the acting style of alternative performers comments on how songs have to be performed:

Performing a song in a play is not the same as performing it in, say, a concert. In concert it is the musicality that matters most. In a play songs need to be acted out more. We have to try harder to project the meaning of the song in the context of the play. This can mean adding descriptive action to singing. ... Acting out a song also demands gesture, facial expression and, above all, emotion. Sometimes this emotion may distort the voice and the melody and bring song closer to speech. (1997: 95)

This comment is true to all the songs in *Mavambo*, *The Rain of my Blood*, *The Honourable MP* and *The Wretched Ones*. A theatrical convention has power over all performance texts that are a result of it. The very nature of alternative theatre that its kinetic signs (dance, mime, song) are almost similar and that they are located in the same performance text resists Eurocentric dramatic theatre practice which insists on their separation and purity.

To shift from the dominance of dramatic dialogue to the body is an insurgent act. What all the above examples point to is a performance technique that is inclined towards utilizing the performer's body as the focal point. Stephen Chifunyise (1997), indeed notices the centrality of the body in Zimbabwean alternative theatre and asserts that 'the main characteristic of theatre in the region – and perhaps southern Africa's contribution to world theatre – is that the body is the most critical tool in creating theatre' (1997: i). In talking about the centrality of the body from a regional perspective, Chifunyise has in mind the role he played in decolonising Zambian theatre while he was still in exile. He was instrumental in establishing Zambian National Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA) as a counter-weight to

the white-oriented Theatre Association of Zambia (TAZ). Chifunyise's achievements in Zimbabwean theatre had already been 'rehearsed' in Zambia.

The deployment of the body as a nucleus of performance and meaning is in itself subversive in the sense that it dispenses with western technology and civilisation.⁷⁶ Western dramatic theatre practice utilises what Tadashi Suzuki (2002) calls 'non-animal energy (read: electric power, electronic technology) while the non-western theatre practice utilises 'animal energy' (read: physical energy supplied by human beings, horses, or cattle). While it is true that both the non-western and western worlds utilise animal and non-animal energy the ratio of animal energy to non-animal energy is higher in Africa and the Near East. The lighting, sound system, stage, the theatre building itself, scenery and sometimes elocution are electronically aided in western dramatic theatre. The body is a part of other things and does not constitute a performance nucleus as is the case in a typical alternative Zimbabwean production of the period. Thus instead of using microphones and amplifiers for performing songs, Zimbabwean theatre performers convey songs directly to the audience through their bodies.

While Rohmer attributes the use of the body in alternative Zimbabwean theatre to poverty, which he argues forces performers to turn 'the disadvantage into a virtue and concentrate on the body as a medium of communication' (1997: 17), this is not always correct in all situations. Alternative theatre in Zimbabwe is created out of dance, song, mime and dialogue. The first three elements (even from their cultural origins) do not require extraneous material such as props and expressive lighting and for that reason they carry the same influence with them in the performance text. This condition remains the same even in fairly rich theatre companies such as Zambuko/Izibuko, Amakhosi, Meridian Theatre and the University Theatre. The reliance on animal energy can also be noticed in very developed countries with a strong traditional background such as Japanese Noh Theatre which Suzuki, even though he concedes the use of lights, argues that it is largely 'a creation of animal energy' (2002: 164). This phenomenon is true to Zimbabwean alternative theatre and the focus on the body is a choice rather than an imposition by exogenous factors, although in other cases Rohmer's point remains valid. Miming

⁷⁶ Tadashi Suzuki uses the term civilization as 'the expansion of basic functions of the human body or the extension of the physical faculties – of eyes, tongue, hands and feet. For example, the invention of such devices as the telescope and microscope is a result of human aspiration and endeavour to see more, radicalising the faculty of sight. The accumulated effect of such endeavours is civilisation – the product of the expansion and extension of physical faculties'. (2002: 164)

is not always explainable in terms of lack. It is a legitimate 'language of African theatre' (wa Thiong'o 1981: 34) which Kavanagh exhorts others to utilise whether they are rich or poor:

Mime is deeply rooted in the performing arts of Africa Let us not pay attention to those who call theatre that is derived from the narrative traditions of all human society and from children's games 'unsophisticated'. When bourgeois Europe's great mimes, like Marcel Marceau, create similar effects they find nothing 'primitive'. Our performers do not need to whiten their faces and wear black tights in order to place the mime in the 'sophisticated' artistic milieu of Pierrot but they nonetheless mime and do it with skill. The more we employ such skills in our drama the more expressive our plays will be and the more audience will take us to their hearts. (1997: 83-4)

This centrality of the body is highlighted by the frequency of dance, song and mime in the plays. All of these partial texts utilise the body in movement.

In theatre some realistic details are hardly possible to depict naturalistically on stage. Kavanagh (1997), for example, attacks the REPs Theatre production of *Puss in Boots* for attempting to create a fire by utilising a painted globe connected to a power point, an attempt which he describes as 'a slavish obsession with naturalistic detail and a complete poverty of ideas and underutilisation of language of theatre' (1997: 83). In alternative Zimbabwean theatre, naturalism and its cousin realism are dispensed with through recourse to miming some of the things that cannot be realistically put on stage. In Act 1 scene 2 of *The Rain of my Blood* for example, dialogue is interspaced with mime. In a conversation between the Foreman, his boss, Jeffries Sanderson, and Keresencia the inhuman treatment of farm labourers is enacted. The conversation shifts to a mime in which farm labourers enter the stage miming carrying bags of shelled maize at a trotting pace. The Foreman mimes driving the farm labourers with a whip while Jeffries Sanderson watches them until the first group of labourers exits. The second group of labourers comes in and the audience's attention is drawn to an old woman who is being pushed by the Foreman. She falls down and in mime the Foreman commands her to rise and work. She mimes struggling to lift up her fallen bag of maize. At last she secures the bag on her head and staggers forward. When this mime sequence ends with the exit of labourers, dialogue between Jeffries Sanderson and the Foreman continues briefly until the end of the scene. The same miming device is utilised in *Mavambo* to enact a piece of action that cannot be realistically put on stage. The sequence enacts the approach of a bus at a rural bus stop and its movement to Mbare, a bus terminus in Harare. All the action is carried out utilising performers' bodies. While the villagers are waiting for the bus to Harare, they mime seeing it approaching and burst into song. Through movement, the performers acting villagers transform into a bus which comes to a standstill. This is a typical example of performing as it is

defined above where the performers are themselves when singing, transform into villagers when talking and subsequently into a bus when moving. Once the performers become a bus the audience's focus is drawn to the driver who mimes changing gears with amazing dexterity. This is to depict a typical Rhodesian bus of the 1960s which had a long gear lever dangling some distance on the left backside of the driver. It was a spectacle watching a driver manoeuvring a bus. The exit, driver's cabin, windows and aisle are carefully established through the arrangement of human bodies. When the bus moves, performers physically move on their feet from 'the upstage acting area onto the downstage acting area, which now becomes Harare *musika* [market place]' (1997: 199). The same performers transform into other characters – bus touts, vendors, *tsotsis* [thieves] - and they move into the audience selling oranges (mimed). They act hauling some members of the audience to board a bus they don't want while the other performers act pick-pocketing some members of the audience.

The above examples demonstrate the fact that alternative theatre in Zimbabwe has developed a language of the body that can put on stage 'anything' without following the laws of realism. This exploitation of the body may not have anything to do with the poverty of performers, but a technique that comes from the cultural text of the performers. Act 1 scene 4 of *The Honourable MP* involves five characters who would use a carving axe, snuff box, plate of *sadza* (pap) and another of relish if it was naturalistically transformed. These properties would not be difficult to get even if a theatre group was one of the poorest. However, mime is exploited as an art form to heighten the pathos of the scene. When the lights flood the stage the audience's attention is drawn to an old man miming carving an axe handle. He briefly stops carving and mimes taking snuff, sneezes and blows his nose. When the old man resumes carving, another family – husband, wife and two hungry children - arrive at his homestead clapping hands in a ritualistic Shona greeting. The old man's wife comes to sit beside her husband. The visiting family through the husband tells its story in mime – that they had spent three days without food and several days without water. The eldest boy of the visiting family constantly shakes his head and cries throughout. The hosting old woman consults her husband in gesture and brings a bowl of *sadza* and another of relish. The visiting family in mime eats the food. The youngest baby (who is mimed) strapped behind the back of the visiting wife cries with the hosting woman equal to the task of quietening him. The mime is interrupted by a procession of peasants who enter the stage singing a song.

The tendency to use mime as reportage is also evident in Mujajati's *The Rain of my Blood*. In act 1 scene 2 we see Negomo, who has been unfairly dismissed from work by Jeffries Sanderson, reporting the

incident to Father Louis. Instead of reporting what the audience has already seen (the fighting of Chamunorwa with Francis, Jeffries Sanderson's son, leading to Chamunorwa's public flogging and Negomo's dismissal from work) Negomo mimes the story to Father Louis who watches the drama together with the audience and projects the feelings of the audience through his reactions to the mime. Father Louis shakes his head, brooding in sorrow and at times exclaiming loudly in surprise.

What is evident from the foregoing discussion is the use of mime as an artistic concept that supports other expressive forms of theatre such as dance and song. However, there is also a tendency to use mime as a means to substitute for stage properties. This is the area where, perhaps Martin Rohmer's point about poverty exerting influence on theatrical style is valid. In this case, movement of parts of the body is executed as stage business. These are detailed actions mostly done by hands to do day to day chores such as cleaning, lighting a cigarette, arranging furniture, opening a window, eating, drinking and so on. The rest of the scene mostly progresses in dialogue, but when it comes to doing stage business, performers mime the action because the props that are mimed are mostly not there and/or are unaffordable to the theatre group. The venues for performing alternative theatre – stadiums, community halls, beer halls, open air, gardens, and street corners – also dictate that theatre groups use the principle of minimalism which is complemented by miming spaces and props that are not physically present or discernible. In act 1 scene 1 of *The Honourable MP*, for instance, Shakespeare Pfende describes the good service at Meikles Hotel. For the reason that the hotel cannot be recreated just for that beat in his living room, Pfende describes the good service at the hotel by miming it. He tells Isabella, his girl friend, that one simply presses a button (miming it) and the food is delivered by the waiters. Pfende sees the food in his mind and mimes eating it by going 'through the motions of joyous eating and ceremonious pomp' (1984: 19). The miming happens simultaneously with dialogue. In the prologue to *The Wretched Ones*, the same technique of miming business is employed by the pregnant woman - Patricia. There is rhythmic drumming in the background which increases in force and loudness reaching a climax. When the loudness subsides Patricia staggers on stage and mimes searching for food in a bin. She finds nothing and limps offstage at which point a fat cook enters miming carrying a tray laden with food. In mime Patricia pleads with the cook to give her the leftovers, but the cook ignores her. In act 2 scene 1 of the same play Buffalo, the rich businessman, walks on stage inspecting his maize field. He mimes walking past maize stalks while holding a tin of pesticides which he empties to sprinkle on mimed maize cobs. On hearing footsteps, he mimes hiding behind maize stalks. When Lazarus, the squatter, emerges holding two stolen maize cobs, Buffalo jumps from his hiding place and arrests Lazarus. While

the scene progresses in dialogue the business of swaying maize stalks to create way is mimed throughout to establish a sense of space. During the subsequent scene, police destroy a squatter settlement and the business is mostly mimed as there is no physical presence of squatter structures except for a few items that serve as suggestive props.

By centring the performance in the body rather than slavish adherence to the dominant text-based convention of Rhodesian mainstream theatre, alternative theatre is challenging Rhodesian discourse and also negotiating an identity that both reflects and resists western bourgeois theatrical practice. The use of the western theatrical frame is to make the new theatre somewhat familiar to the former coloniser while at the same time shocking him by seriously questioning his theatrical conventions through centring the performance in the body. The inclusion of indigenous partial texts de-familiarises alternative theatre and gives it a characteristic 'otherness' which according to Jatinder Verma (1996: 195) is marked by 'provocation'. This provocation is to stimulate other ways of seeing and experiencing the other and can lead to a reconsideration of one's own aesthetic paradigms as is the case with the western modernist movement which retheatricalised its dramatic tradition by appropriating non-western models. The above productions point to a different way of acting which is valid in its context.

Dance also acts as an incendiary device in the performance text. Traditional dance was despised by the colonial government and various branches of its superstructure such as education and Christianity. This is a point also raised by Kariamu Asante

Numerous European observers saw African dance as 'wild' and 'exotic' with little aesthetic value. Aesthetically, the African differed so much from the European that there was an immediate aversion and, indeed fear and ultimately alienation. Because of this..., dance was aesthetically ignored or misplaced in the literature. (2000: 4)

The incorporation of traditional and neo-traditional dance in alternative theatre of the period, therefore, is a provocation to the western dramatic aesthetic which provides a theatrical framework for the realisation of alternative theatre. In Zimbabwe dance manifests in three major ways. The first one is the utilisation of traditional dance which is altered through a process of concertisation when it is put on stage and becomes neo-traditional dance. The second category comprises dance steps that were imported from Europe, America and lately Asia. The last category comprises contemporary dance which fuses (neo)traditional dance movements with western ones to form dances like *tsavatsava*, *digong*, *borrowdale* and *mbaqanga*. In most of the plays that were produced between 1980 and 1996, the

western dance category is largely ignored while the first and second categories feature more prominently. This of course was consistent with government policy on culture as articulated by the then director of Arts and Crafts in the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, Stephen Chifunyise, who criticises western dramatic theatre:

This is why the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture pays less attention to theatre which is for an elite audience, dealing with imported and irrelevant themes, or theatre which is created mainly to compete for trophies and names. Theatre artists must therefore realise that government and Arts Councils at district, province and national levels have a right to ignore theatre whose practice is in direct conflict to our national goal of creating a classless society – a society where no one ethnic culture is considered more superior than others. We have a right to ignore these practices whose main role is to consolidate cultural imperialism. (cited in wa Mirii 1986: 16)

The Honourable MP, Mavambo, The Wretched Ones and *The Rain of my Blood*, as texts, bear testimony to African resistance to western aesthetics through incorporation of dance in the performance text. In the previous mime involving the heavily pregnant woman Patricia in *The Wretched Ones*, the sound of a barking dog is heard offstage prompting Patricia to scamper off the stage. At the same time drums rumble providing the rhythm for dancers to perform on stage. The dance evokes 'sadness hunger and lack of energy' even though the dancers 'are fluid in their motions and coordinated in their style' (1989: 1). *Mavambo* offers an interesting example of mime dance. When Rev Mills has been chased away from Chief Chuma's village he returns to his Mutoko mission station. The stage is filled with men drinking traditional brew and women working in the fields. The working is not done realistically, but is performed through song and dance. They perform the traditional *mbira* dance which in its entirety mimes digging and sowing. While the dancing is going on, Shonga, the African Christian assistant, moves around preaching to the villagers, who agree to leave their fields and gather around him. At this juncture a white gang led by Jackson, in a similar conquest mime as the one at Chief Chuma's village bursts into the village miming firing shots, whooping and careering all over the place on their horses. They mime disembarking from their horses and take to dancing a caricature of the *mbira* dance that the villagers have been dancing.

In *The Honourable MP* the dance style shifts to contemporary dance. In act 2 scene 2, for instance, music by Oliver Mtukudzi is playing in the background. The peasants and workers are dancing to the music in free style rhythm. In African free style dance, each performer does as they please with their body as long as the performance is in tune with the rhythm of music. When MP Pfende arrives at the shopping centre where the peasants and workers are dancing, they shift to live music by singing a *chimurenga* song *Uya*

uone Mashura [Come see ill omens]. The free style dancing changes to the liberation style *kongonya/isikokotshi*. This dance combines western styles with African movements characterised by the movement of the pelvis. This fusion is perhaps marked by the physical appearance of Shakespeare Pfende in an expensive brown suit. His wife, Immaculate, wears a contemporary West African dress which underlines her eclectic nature lacking in her husband who wants to be seen as western. Both Pfende and Immaculate mingle among the people, dancing and shaking hands with them. They weave through a crowd of peasants wearing dirty and tattered rags mingling, dancing and creating culture together as if this is a metaphor of syncretism. It seems to me that this syncretism seeks to deface western culture and only accepts it when it is impure, dirty and tattered. This metaphor is spectacularly dramatised when peasants and workers boo down Pfende while he is addressing them. When the people accuse him of infidelity and bring forward the now pregnant Isabella as evidence of his promiscuity, Pfende points a pistol at them but is quickly disarmed by Teacher Choto. Pfende collapses and the people disrobe him of his western brown suit. The peasants and workers celebrate their victory in song and dance, but this time without the participation of MP Pfende who has lost consciousness.

While the western style dances in their pure form, with a few possible exceptions, are absent from the performance texts of the period, *The Honourable MP* has one Asian dance performed by MP Pfende. This has to be understood within the context of logistical and ideological support that Zimbabwean liberation movements enjoyed from the Eastern Bloc and some Asian countries like North Korea and China. In act 1 scene 3 Pfende's wife Immaculate has bought a present for him which is a replica of safari suits usually worn by communist leaders – a jacket with several front pockets, a matching cap and trousers. These types of suits can still be seen on old pictures of Lenin, Mao Tse Tung, Fidel Castro, Robert Mugabe, Samora Machel and others. When Pfende puts on the suit he looks at himself and sees that the attire has suddenly transformed him into a figure resembling Kim III Sung of North Korea. He dances the Korean goose step amidst much laughing. Rhodesian discourse was anti-communist and like colonial discourse was anti-orientalist with all its cultural symbols like suits and dances. The inclusion of this type of dance in a western framed play is an irritant.

As a way of wrapping up the discussion on dance, I want to focus on how the African body behaves when dancing and how that behaviour is almost transposed into alternative theatre. Asante (2000) relying on Gerhard Kubrick divides African dance into two basic categories – the central African Bantu category and the southern African Bantu category. The chief characteristic of central African Bantu

category, which is where some dances of Zimbabwe belong, is the motional prominence of the pelvis (Asante 2000). The *mbira* dance, the *pungwe* dances such as *kongonya/isikokotshi* and free style dances of Zimbabwe all exude the pelvis prominence. The southern African Bantu category is characterised by 'foot stomping and reliance on the percussive quality of the stomp, stamp, or clap, all done with the foot' (Asante 2000: 96). These two categories, however, should not be taken as entirely discrete due to the migrations in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ Rohmer (1999), after analysing Cont Mhlanga's *Dabulap* (1992) and Chevhu ndeChevhu's *Animal Farm* (1993), notices the foot stomping characteristic in the performances. It is safe to assert that both the pelvis prominence and foot stomping characterise dance in Zimbabwean alternative theatre of the period.

African performers dance flat footed. They have closeness with the earth that is not found in most pure western dances. Because of this flat footedness, the performers' movements are characterised by 'gliding, dragging or shuffling steps' (Asante 2000: 91). Rohmer (1999: 156) notices a similar characteristic in the performers of plays he studied where the 'feet are firmly grounded' which can be contrasted with western dances where contact with the ground is minimal. Movements include dancing on tips of toes, stretching of hands and lifting of fellow dancers. Western dancers are in love with the sky while African dancers are in love with the earth. This love of the earth is also demonstrated in the posture of the African dancer where a dance is 'performed from a crouch, knees flexed, and body bent at waist' (Asante 2000: 91). This crouching position which lowers the body to bring it closer to the earth hence characterises dance in alternative Zimbabwean theatre and perhaps dance in sub-Saharan Africa. This get-down posture is in contrast to western dance which is dominated by the efforts to escape the limits of gravity and express lightness.

African dance, particularly the free style is characterised by its propensity for improvisation and individual creativity. When observing dancers performing to pre-recorded music such as Oliver Mtukudzi's music in *The Honourable MP*, one can observe that all dancers are in tune with the music, but there is no unison and coordination of movements. Each one of them stylises their own movements according to inspiration in the moment of performance.

⁷⁷ The Zulu *indlamu* dance, for example, which is characterised by foot stomping was taken over by migrating Nguni groups and is now performed in Zimbabwe by the Shangaan, Ndaou, and Manyika as *muchongoyo* which they claim to be their own. The Sotho, Tswana, Ndebele, Swazi, Chewa and Zulu perform a similar dance.

Song as a Site of Struggle

In addressing song as a partial text of the performance text my focus is on how songs reflect, challenge, resist, and mediate Rhodesian discourse. Like mime and dance, traditional songs were denigrated by the colonial establishment and even within the Christian church. In areas under the jurisdiction of missionaries the trend was to ask Africans to assimilate to Europe's concept of Christianity including its manner of singing. When Henry Weman, the Swedish musician, visited the Lutheran church in Rhodesia in 1954, for example, he found out that the melodic material of the liturgy was based on the Swedish Missal of 1897 which was to a very large extent outdated in Sweden (Axelsson (1974: 96). This applies to the period 1890-1954 but thereafter missionary attitudes changed to accommodate African ways of worship. The post 1954 church songs are built on a combination of western four part harmony and traditional African forms of singing. Most of the liberation songs are invariably based on church songs (Pongweni 1982; Kwaramba 1997; Jones 1992) even if in their content they denounce colonialism and Rhodesians. I now address how the subaltern-dominant relationship is reflected, resisted, negotiated and challenged in the songs.

In Mujajati's *The Rain of my Blood* one out of sixteen songs is a church song. In *The Wretched Ones* four out of the six songs in the play are church songs. All of the church songs in the two plays are borrowed from the cultural text of the Roman Catholic Church where playwright Mujajati worked as a teacher (at Saint Albert High School) during the early 1980s together with Gonzo Musengezi, the writer of *The Honourable MP*. On the surface, this appears like western music dominates African music in a typical African performance text, but a closer look at African music's structure and historiography reveals spaces of assimilation and resistance. In *The Wretched Ones*, when the police have finished destroying the squatters' camp and push Povo's mother off the stage, the squatters break into a sorrowful Catholic hymn to the tempo of low drumming:

Imi tenzi tichengetei
Tichengetei tenzi tirege kuwira
Mumaoko avakaipa
Tenzi tichengetei
Tirege kuwira mumharadzi
Dzinofunga, nezvekundiparadza

Imi tenzi ndibatsirei, ndibatsirei tenzi
Ndirege kuwira mumaoko avakaipa
Tenzi ndibatsirei ndirege kupinda
Mumharadzi
Dzinofunga zvekundiparadza
(1989: 25)

[You Lord look over us
Lord keep us that we may
Not fall into the hands of our
enemies
Keep us Lord
That we may not fall on the path of
destroyers
Who plan to annihilate us

Oh Lord help us, help us Lord
That I may not fall into the hands of
evil ones
Help me Lord to resist destroyers
Who plan to finish me off]

The chants echo the psalms of David, but here they are re-contextualised to speak against the police who want to dispossess the squatters. Historiography may also help us in revealing the ambivalent nature of Christian songs such as the squatters' hymn above. After a series of papal edicts expressing the wish to accommodate African ways of singing, Pope Pius XII gave the impetus for change in his 1955 papal instruction *Musicae Sacrae Disciplina* which made it clear 'that there was no longer merely a wish for adaptation of secular African tunes, but a desire for a new music similar to the indigenous music' (Alexsson 1974: 95). There were two approaches that could be chosen, either a complete break with old western tradition of liturgical music prompting a new music composed by Africans or adapting African indigenous tunes that did not have ritual religious connections. Within the Catholic Church, the second approach was adopted. Within the traditional African musical milieu antiphonal and responsorial chants such as those sung at threshing meetings closely resembled what could be termed in the western Christian sense 'Gregorian chants'.⁷⁸ Gregorian chants originated from the eastern and southern countries around the Mediterranean and therefore are considered to be non-western because of their impurity, albeit they have a universal Christian musical expression. The similarity in tonality and singing style between African chants and the Gregorian chants makes it difficult to say with certainty which form the resultant new songs took. Since there is a difficulty in distinguishing between the two types of chants, there is probably a convergence which does not result in any alteration of the original African form. However, in order not to break with western tradition, the chants were sung in western four part harmony – first part (alto), second part (soprano), tenor and bass (baritone). In the squatters' hymn above, the first part (alto) chants the first line of the first stanza with all the other parts joining in the subsequent lines. The same

⁷⁸ Gregorian chants were named after Pope Gregory I (590-604) and are also called the plainchant owing to the absence of metre as is the case with other western songs. They are sung on a single syllable and are not located in a major key or minor note. They are sung in modes. (Kephart. 2010)

procedure is repeated in the second stanza till the song is finished. It is as if there are two choirs singing in alternation. When all the other parts respond, the term 'refrain' or 'antiphon' is used to describe the response. And thus the term antiphonal chant. While the singing style, tonality, drumming and language is African (Shona), the frame is a western four part harmony. This syncretism mocks both Africanness and Europeanness in the sense that the resultant work is neither African nor European. The work is characterised by ambivalence and it obeys its own rules.

I look at the liberation songs based on church songs first. When observing the lyrics of the liberation songs, they are blatantly anti-Rhodesian, anti-West and anti-imperialism. They denounce, caricature, satirise and reject the West and Rhodesians. They encourage, exhort, exalt, empower, teach, educate and incite the oppressed people to fight and change the status quo. They also plead, ask, and appeal to the rest of the non-western world to assist the oppressed people of Zimbabwe. Sometimes they lament the oppression and appeal to the conscience of the oppressor so that the oppressor may 'repent' of the evil doings. Pfukwa (2008) argues that *chimurenga* songs were part of contested spaces during the war. Apart from fighting on the Rhodesian landscape, Pfukwa argues that music provided 'ideological and psychological space where more subtle struggles were played out. Music became another site in the political, cultural and ideological...struggles to break free from the constrictions of colonial culture' (2008: 31). From a content and ideological point of view, it is easy to see liberation songs as negating and denouncing the West and its aesthetics.

A closer examination of the songs reveals their ambivalent nature. Apart from the Roman Catholic Church, other western affiliated churches stationed in Rhodesia followed a similar route of Africanisation of music and worship. In 1954 the Evangelical Lutheran Church with the aid of a Swedish musician, Henry Weman, began the process of Africanisation in Rhodesia. According to Alexsson (1974), the resemblance between the Gregorian style and African folk music was further developed by Weman. Weman took the tonality⁷⁹ of Shona singing and got rid of the western metre giving the singing 'no faulty word accent' (ibid: 97). He also appropriated the antiphonal and responsorial style of African singing as this was common in vocal singing. In the fashion of most African songs, Weman adopted their brevity of structure for easy learning and grasping. He also took to researching, studying, writing and teaching African rules on music which according to him differed from those known in the West, however, the western four part harmony was maintained. Alexsson

⁷⁹ This was on the advice of Father A.M Jones working at Mapanza in Northern Rhodesia who had noted that indigenous languages seldom complied with the rhythmical metre of the western melody and commented that to force the African to use European tunes was to ask him to distort his own language so cruelly that at times he would refuse to do it (see Alexsson 1974).

recounts that the Methodist Church, under the mentorship of Robert Kauffman, followed almost a similar procedure as the one done by the Catholics and the Lutherans:

- Original secular songs to be used as a point of departure for something new, i.e., slight changes, particularly in melodic flow.
- The use of a particular musical style, i.e., its form, mood and rhythm to make something new which is similar (Alexsson 1974: 99).

From the evidence of various attempts by the above churches, it can be noted that there is a convergence of African and western forms in the resultant music. The liberation movements did not change those forms, but they simply added lyrics to the already existing tunes. Take for instance *Tora Gidi Uzvitonge* [Take up the Gun and Fight] which appears in *The Rain of my Blood*, *The Wretched Ones* and the ending of Jeremy Summerfield's *Mhondoro* (1993):

Mbuya Nehanda kufa vachitaura shuwa
Kuti zvino ndofire nyika
Shoko rimwe ravakandiudza
Tora gidi uzvitonge

[Mbuya Nehanda died prophesying truly
 That I am dying for this country
 She told me one thing
 Take the gun and liberate yourself]

Mbuya Nehanda kufa vachishereketa
Kuti tinofire nyika
Shoko rimwe ravakandiudza
Tora gidi uzvitonge

Mbuya Nehanda died in style
 That we should die for this country
 She told me one thing
 Take the gun and liberate yourself]

This liberation song is based on a song sung by a western affiliated church, but is used to exalt the prophecy of a Shona national spirit [*mhondoro*]. It seems blasphemous in the sense that a Christian spiritual tune, though developed from a traditional secular song, is used to magnify a Shona ancestral spirit. In terms of structure, African and western aesthetics stand side by side. The African technique of singing antiphonally and responsorially is deployed side by side with the western four part harmony. The first line of each stanza *Mbuya Nehanda Kufa Vachitaura Shuwa* is sung by a soloist while the rest of the choir is quiet. At the end of the chant, the rest of the choir in its four part harmony sings a refrain or antiphon until the end of the stanza when the soloist alternates with the choir and takes the first line of the next stanza. The characteristic African brevity of structure inheres in the song for easy grasping. The characteristic western four part harmony is also present. While the song celebrates traditional African religion and exhorts blacks to take up the gun and fight the white oppressor, it does so in the very presence of western aesthetics that it seeks to challenge. The song *Nzira Dzamasoja'* [The Soldier's code of conduct] sung in *The Rain of my Blood* is modelled after a Methodist hymn and can be interpreted in the same way.

Liberation songs were based on traditional songs. Examples abound in all the four plays such as *Zirume rinogaro virimira vamwe* [This man is always proud and insulting] in *Mavambo* and *Vana Ndevani?* [Whose children are these?] in *The Honourable MP*. These songs completely defy western aesthetics except by only accepting to go through the process of concertisation for the stage and to be contained in a work of art that follows the western theatrical frame. What characterises these songs is the call and response structure. Take for instance *Vana Ndevani?* in *The Honourable MP*:

SOLOIST: <i>Vana ndevani</i>	SOLOIST: Whose children are these?
CHORUS: <i>He-he panyika nyoro</i>	CHORUS: He-he in a wet country
SOLOIST: <i>Vana ndevani</i>	SOLOIST: Whose children are these ?
CHORUS: <i>He-he panyika nyoro</i>	CHORUS: He-he in a wet country
SOLOIST: <i>He-he panyika nyoro ndeve Zimbabwe</i>	SOLOIST: He-he in a wet country, they are Zimbabweans
CHORUS: <i>Panyika nyoro</i>	CHORUS : In a wet country
SOLOIST: <i>Vanodyeiko</i>	SOLOIST : <i>What do they eat?</i>
CHORUS: <i>He-he panyika nyoro</i>	CHORUS : He-he in a wet country
SOLOIST: <i>Vangafare Seiko</i>	SOLOIST : How cant hey be happy ?
CHORUS: He-he panyika nyoro, ndeve Zimbabwe, panyika nyoro	CHORUS : He-he in wet country, they are Zimbabweans in a wet country.

Unlike the antiphonal chants where the choir sings the whole stanza, in this call and response structure, the soloist (*mushauri*) alternates with the chorus (*vabvumiri*) verse by verse. The chorus is divided into two – male and female voices (western four part harmony is ignored). The females sing in a high pitched style (*kutema*) while the males sing in a heavy roaring vocal style (*kudzvova*). Both females and males in the chorus have freedom of improvisation and insert a low pitched yodelling style of singing which sounds like humming (*mahonyera*) characterised in the song above by ‘*he-he*’, ‘*ya ya*’ in the song *Tondobayana* [We shall fight], ‘*woye woye*’ in the song ‘*Kusarima*’ [Laziness], and ‘*yowerere yowe yowere*’ in the song ‘*Tanda ngozi yapinda mumba* [Expel the accursed spirit] in *Mavambo*.

In all the plays pre-recorded music of a jazz type is played – *Tumira vana kuhondo* [Send children to war] by Thomas Mapfumo in *The Rain of my Blood*, *tuku* music by Oliver Mtukudzi in *The Honourable MP*, *mbaqanga*, *kwela* and *Seekers* music in *Mavambo*. Alice Dairai Kwaramba (1997) who has carried out research on Zimbabwean popular music argues that both Mapfumo’s *Chimurenga* music and Mtukudzi’s *tuku* music borrow western trumpets and heavy bass line from heavy rock which they blend with indigenous rhythms to come up with their varieties of jazz music. The same is true for *kwela* and *mbaqanga* music. *Kwela* music is mainly played from the pennywhistle popular in the 1960s and 70s and it evolved from *marabi* sound which has a jazz flavour. Due to the nature of migrations during the period, *kwela* music is popular in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Malawi.

Mbaganga is also syncretic in the sense that it mixes *marabi* and kwela music and uses western instruments, keys and modes to create a variety of jazz music. The vocal version of *mbaqanga* is *simanje-simanje* or *mqqashiyo*. What is clear from all these versions of jazz is the amalgamation of western and African forms to create distinctly hybrid versions of jazz. All live songs and pre-recorded music played in the above performances with the exception of mbira, traditional and Seekers⁸⁰ music are syncretic.

One may ask how song resists Rhodesian discourse. All points on how mime and dance resist western illusionistic aesthetics also apply to song. In the West music is considered by a concertgoer as a stimulant for relaxation and edification while the orchestra is playing. The concertgoer is a passive listener who receives from the orchestra for purposes of recreation and enrichment of life. Henry Weman (1960) who spent years observing and recording Zimbabwean and South African music observed that:

In Africa, such a performance or such music making (as the western orchestra) is far less frequent. Music making is instead the concern of everyone. It is uncommon for the African to play for someone; he would rather play with someone. In popular music-making there are seldom passive listeners. The solo singer draws a spontaneous reaction from those who stand around, expressed by dancing, singing and handclapping. (1960: 17)

In the early to the late 1980s when the above plays were performed, audiences rarely watched the spectacle without themselves taking part by joining in the singing with performers. This is a point substantiated by McLaren (1992) based on his productions with university students and Zambuko/Izibuko theatre company. Rohmer (1999) noticed the same trend particularly with the Makokoba Township audiences, although he argues that audience participation was not highly profiled amongst intellectual audiences at Belvedere Teachers College and the University of Zimbabwe. All the four plays end with singing and *The Rain of my Blood* which transcribes a previous performance records the involvement of the audience in the last song, *Ropa rakadeuka* [Blood was spilled] 'the voices move nearer and nearer, they become stronger and stronger...they become deeper and deeper...Even the audience too is starting to sing' (1991: 99). The separation of audience and performers celebrated in western illusionistic theatre is questioned in alternative Zimbabwean theatre.

⁸⁰ The Seekers were a group of Australian folk-influenced popular musicians based in Melbourne since 1963. They were popular with Rhodesians.

Unlike the western concert singer, the body of the African performer continues to be mobile as in the case of mime and dance. Kavanagh (1997) demonstrates how the body mimes the meaning of the song in what he calls the people's theatre. The vocals are also accompanied by handclapping, ululation, whistling and body movements which have been observed by Weman (1960) as a result of freedom from ordinary western musical rules. Weman observes the following about an African performer:

His wholehearted participation in the song is unmistakable; freely flowing and unrestrained, it is often accompanied by rhythmic handclapping and graceful body movements. The listening westerner experiences a new sensation: he finds it difficult to decide what is the connection between melody and movement (1960: 12).

By way of concluding this section one can observe a number of characteristics of songs inherent in performance texts under study. The singing is antiphonal and responsorial and the songs are based on the tunes of traditional music of a non-religious nature. While the singing follows the tonal pattern of an African language (Shona/Ndebele) rather than the western metre and intonation, structurally it follows western four part harmony. The melodies are short in structure in order to aid memory. What can be observed when performers are singing is that the body is implicated through movement, dance and handclapping. All these characteristics of African music with the exception of the four part harmony are not normally found in a typical western concert. The body and the sound that it produces refuse to be dominated by western aesthetics, although in that moment of contest the resultant work of art employs some western techniques.

Conclusion

While Zimbabwean alternative theatre during the period 1980 to 1996 subverted techniques of dramatic theatre, it certainly did not develop into post-dramatic or postmodernist theatre. The subversion of dramatic theatre did not absolutely negate its techniques. There was a productive synthesis of dramatic theatre techniques and indigenous texts with a strong socialist inclination to produce syncretic theatre that both celebrated and mocked dramatic theatre. In alternative theatre of the period the cumulative constellation of visual dramaturgy dominated theatre. While the story/plot/action remained the backbone of this deconstructive theatre, it problematised dramatic theatre through a process of de-dramatisation. Hans-Thies Lehmann uses the term 'parataxis' (2006: 86) to describe this process. When parataxis takes place it dissolves the dominance of the word and assigns dominance to other modes of performance of a visual dramaturgical nature. Since action on stage ceases to be an imitation of an action, but the action itself, it forces the audience to wonder whether they are watching the event as fiction or as reality. This occasional irruption of the real on

stage compels audiences to react to the event as real and more often than not join in the performance with performers at appropriate times. The following chapter looks at language as a site of struggle in Zimbabwean theatre between 1980 and 1996.

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CHAPTER 8: THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE ON THE ZIMBABWEAN POSTCOLONIAL STAGE

Introduction

Through the study of language as it used in *The Honourable MP (1983/4)*, *The Wretched Ones (1988/9)*, *Mavambo (1985/97)* and *The Rain of my Blood (1989/91)* I want to investigate how language reflects, mediates and resists the relations of domination and subordination in alternative Zimbabwean theatre. While the new Zimbabwean government pursued decolonisation more rigorously in other areas of culture, it maintained English as the country's official language. English language teaching followed the native speaker model through the Cambridge examinations system and remained largely insulated from the anti-colonial discourse. However, in practice, a new English language emerged in the outer circle due to a cross-fertilisation of linguistic structures between the native speaker model and African languages. A closer examination of the speech patterns of characters in the plays reveals that there are sites where characters both resist and affirm the native speaker model through nativisation of lexical items such as similes, proverbs, idioms and the use of culturally dependent speech styles. Whilst alternative theatre of the period, in the main, utilises English language, it challenges it from within by de-anglicising it.

Two theoretical positions dominated the discourse on the decolonization of African theatre. The first calls for the abandonment of European languages in the writing and performance of Zimbabwean theatre (wa Thiong'o 1981a, wa Mirii 1988, Tsodzo 1983a). The second position calls for the use of a europhone language on the postcolonial Zimbabwean stage. This latter position is a national policy which prescribes English as the only official language with major African languages (Shona and Ndebele) only taking the position of national languages. The language debate in Zimbabwe revolved around the europhone/afrophone binary that is, use of either English or an African language on the stage. Despite the theoretical attractiveness of the first position, theatre making in Zimbabwe during the period has been mainly in English with very few plays written in either Shona or Ndebele. African playwrights of English expression have completely overshadowed their African languages counterparts in terms of their coverage in the media and exposure to most sectors of the population. It appears as if the gains achieved in challenging the dominance of realist performance styles are eroded by recourse to performing in English. However, I argue that the use of English is ambivalent in the sense that it both affirms (neo)colonialism by celebrating it and challenges it by polluting the purism of the native speaker model – Received Pronunciation (RP). The affirmation and celebration of (neo)colonialism is achieved through writing and sometimes speaking Standard English while performers resist the native speaker model by employing a number of rhetorical

strategies such as plurilingualism, code-switching, interlingualism (relexification), translation (African discursal thought patterns) and the superimposition of mother tongue accent on spoken English. The Africanisation of English has not been a one way process; the English language has also anglicised some Shona words challenging the purism of Shona preferred by African linguistic prescriptivists. Where English was unsuccessful in establishing communication between diasporic Europeans and Africans, diasporic Europeans created a language, Chilapalapa/Fanakalo, which mixes English, Afrikaans and mostly Nguni languages. In this case, diasporic Europeans are complicit in their own decolonisation by eroding the power that English wields, but at the same time establishing an alternative power base where they only can participate in its creation. The attitudes, mannerisms and social psychology carried from English establish themselves in the language. In Chilapalapa/Fanakalo, the binaries of European/African, language/vernacular are questioned or shattered.

In Zimbabwe during the period 1980-1996, the linguistic dominance of English in theatre has been challenged through a two pronged approach – the exclusive use of African languages and the mediated use of English on stage. Those who advocate for the use of African languages have published and produced close to ten plays in Shona and five in Ndebele during the period. The reasons proffered for the exclusive use of African languages on the postcolonial Zimbabwean stage are that, firstly, language is a carrier of culture and it therefore accumulates concepts and ideological assumptions that the language's history inscribes on its users (wa Thiong'o 1981a; Ngara 1985). The native speaker model, for instance, carries the concerns, social psychology, attitudes, worldview, assumptions, prejudices and mannerisms of the English. Such worldviews and prejudices are carried in loaded words such as savage, vernacular, primitive, kraal head, bride price, black spot, black sheep, blacklist, black market and so on. When a non-native speaker uses English s/he consciously or unconsciously assumes the native speaker's store of prejudices and mocks himself/herself through its learning and use. Secondly, if the neo-liberal economic exploitation of Africa by the West through Breton Wood institutions could be taken as dangerous, the use of European languages and paying homage to them on stage could be taken as neo-colonial cultural exploitation (wa Thiong'o 1981a).

Thirdly, English language even in its native speaker model is discriminatory in the sense that it segregates lower class varieties of English on the basis of Basil Bernstein's deficit hypothesis (Dittmar 1976) who argues that lower class English speakers are socially handicapped as a result of their inadequate linguistic competence vis-a-viz their middle and upper class counterparts. This means that the lower class speakers can only gain social success if they possess language abilities that are considered as the standard code controlled by the dominant bourgeois class. The use of English by

Zimbabweans could be taken as promoting western bourgeois prejudices which could be used against fellow black English users who have less standard English skills.

Finally, even where other African writers and theoreticians like Gabriel Okara, Chinua Achebe, Emmanuel Ngara, Ola Rotimi have proposed an Africanised variety of English and have even gone to demonstrate how it can be used, the coterie that supports a complete break with europhone languages (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ngugi wa Mirii, Thompson Tsodzo) has dismissed the proposal as preying on African proverbs and other discourse thought patterns which tends to enrich foreign languages at the expense of African ones.⁸¹

However, the contact between the metropolis, diasporic Europeans and Africans is a reality that cannot be ignored and it is evident in theatre production. Those who favour creating in 'engineered English'⁸² demonstrate how alternative theatre has responded to the domination of English performance forms. Their response has not been drawn into the europhone/afrophone debate, but they have created theatre mainly in English, but incorporating African languages and this is parallel to the keying in of dance, song and mime into the western theatrical frame that I discussed in previous chapters. Rather than acquiesce to the whims of cultural purists by creating works either in African languages or English, theatre makers have resorted to plurilingualism, which is the use of more than one language in a play. This position is supported by Robert Kavanagh who argues that:

The result of this (colonialism) is the dominant tendency to produce plays all in English (...) or more rarely in one indigenous language. Theatre must reflect life. Where life is bilingual or multilingual, the theatre should be bilingual or multilingual. There is absolutely nothing wrong, or inferior, or even unusual about a theatre performance being in more than one language. (1997: 97)

All the four plays, *The Honourable MP*, *The Wretched Ones*, *Mavambo* and *The Rain of my Blood*, embrace the notion of plurilingualism. While dialogue is largely in English, all the songs in all the four

⁸¹The separation of people according to language and culture is attributed by Yvonne Banning (1989: 78-9) and Robert Kavanagh (1997: 96) to colonialism which manipulated the Pan-African feelings of Africans to restrict their cultural and social mobility through 'culturalism' in Rhodesia and apartheid in South Africa. Such separateness limited the audience for African cultural productions and restricted access to western culture. It has created an attitude that sees plays in English as better than those in African languages resulting in a tendency to create works in English and more rarely in African languages.

⁸² The reasons for favouring creating in English are many. Politically, English provides a common language to about fifteen ethnic groups in Zimbabwe and emerges as a force for opposition. If it can be used for domination, English is malleable enough to be used to combat (neo)colonialism. Attitudinally and linguistically, English has acquired a certain level of relative neutrality in a context where ethnic languages sometimes have acquired undesirable connotations such as caste, region, religion etc. English has no such markers. Language on its own may not be taken as crucial generator of African values and may not on its own determine the outlook of a play. As long as the play is addressed to Africans, expresses the national and cultural consciousness of Africans through the agency of the playwright and characters, it does not matter in which language it is written or performed. A play can still preserve values or change them and be committed to the cause of Africans while still written in a europhone language.

plays are sung in Shona. Performers sing in Ndebele in Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative*. The notion of plurilingualism is ambivalent; two opposing attitudes or feelings co-exist in the performance texts. The performance texts are sites of cultural struggle between the dominant English and the dominated Shona. It is an ideological struggle between linguistic purists/cynics/prescriptivists (Kachru 1986) or conservationists (Banning 1989), who are cynical about the intrusion of Shona and non-native models of English into Standard English texts, and linguistic pragmatists/functionalists (Kachru 1986) or liberationists (Banning 1989) who see language as innovative, living and changing which in the process of its development acquires new identities. The co-existence of Shona and English in one text introduces a sense of uncertainty and indecisiveness as to which course to follow – purism or pragmatism. However, the fact that two languages co-exist in one text is in itself a choice which denies or ruptures the colonial traditions of separateness and purism. The linguistic choice both celebrates and mocks Rhodesian discourse.

The notion of plurilingualism should not be taken to mean a balance between the various languages that obtain in the four performance texts. In all four of them, English is the major language with an average dominance of ± 80 percent. In the main, most of the characters such as Lazarus (who dropped out of school in Grade 6) in *The Wretched Ones*, uneducated villagers in *Mavambo*, farm labourers in *The Rain of my Blood* and peasants in *The Honourable MP*, speak impeccable English – the native variety or the educated English variety. Kachru (1985: 12) offers a model of the spread of English that helps to explain this phenomenon. Kachru represents the spread of English by means of three concentric circles which he aptly labels (1) inner, (2) outer and (3) expanding.⁸³ The inner circle represents the native variety of English spoken by first language users of English in the metropolis (Britain). This standard form was transplanted as part of colonialism to English colonies and in our case, Rhodesia. This is represented by the second circle 'outer'. At the moment of contact, the native speaker model is introduced and in the case of Zimbabwe it is codified through the education system where compliance to the native variety is enforced by the Cambridge examinations system where all 'O' and 'A' level papers are set and marked in the United Kingdom. Kachru (1986: 21) calls this the 'exo-normative model' or British English which is used for emulation and teaching. Thus during the period 1980-1996, there is no recognised variety of English spoken by Zimbabweans, although as the performance texts would reveal, there are tentative attempts to break from the purism of the exo-normative model. This variety of English may be a reality in the near future owing to the breaking away of the Zimbabwe school system from the Cambridge University system which began in 1995.

⁸³ The expanding circle is not important to this chapter, but Kachru uses it to represent varieties of English which typically occur in countries where English functions as a foreign language. Learners have little contact with users of English e.g. South Korea, China etc.

Zimbabwe is perhaps located in the 'imitation model period'⁸⁴ which is normally characterised by the non-recognition of a localised variety of English. Sometimes the playwrights comply with the educated variety of English to a point where mimicry results in slippage and threatens Standard English as it is used in a face-to-face interaction. Take for instance Tawanda's speeches in *The Rain of my Blood*:

After all, I can see that your play might rekindle the dying embers of patriotism and the spirit of the liberation struggle. I believe that the story of our sacred struggle must be salvaged and should be preserved in the highest archives of our national history. Heroes like Kid Marongorongo should be immortalised. Their sacred vision should never be allowed to die. (Mujajati 1991: 10-1)

Or the other speech by the same character in the last act of the play

We shall fight until we completely dismantle the system of policies designed to breed hatred and mistrust among the people of this country. A system designed to suck this country dry, milk its wealth into the never-filling tummy of Capitalism. That system has made the black man of this country a contemptible creature without rights, it has turned the black man into a beast of servitude! We shall smash that system with everything at our disposal! (Mujajati 1991: 93)

This verbosity and lack of spontaneity is repeated in Tawanda's speech on page 67-8 of the same play. In such speeches, linguistic structures are normally archaically longer than is the norm in first language competence, combining compound, multiple and complex sentences together in a grammatically sound way. A peasant in *The Honourable MP* (1984: 38-9) rises during a meeting in the last act of the play and delivers an eloquent speech with exuberance. This educated variety of English in these speeches characterise speech patterns of speakers who are more familiar with the written than spoken forms of English. It makes the speech, according to Yvonne Banning (1989: 149), 'faintly anachronistic'. A native speaker of English would not speak like that in a typical face-to-face interaction. The consequence of this mimicry of the educated English variety is quite contrary to the intentions of the linguistic purists among diasporic Europeans in that mimicry produces speakers who are not quite the same as the native speaker of English. According to Moore-Gilbert (1997: 121), this "'not-quite sameness' acts like a distorting mirror which fractures the identity of the colonising subject".

If English dominates ± 80 percent of the writing in the four plays, it is in the other ± 20 percent that writers express their agency by employing African languages and Africanising English to both

⁸⁴ Kachru identifies three phases in the development of Standard English into other varieties. (1) Imitation model where there is non-recognition of localized varieties, (2) extensive diffusion of local varieties resulting in controversy between defenders of local varieties (endo-normative model) and those who prefer the exo-normative model and (3) recognition of local varieties characterized by the process of codification where some agency such as an academy writes dictionaries and grammar books to fix the variety so that members of the speech community agree on what is correct.

celebrate and mock the purity of the exo-normative model of English. I have already indicated that the performers in all four plays sing their songs in Shona. The degree of usage of Shona varies from play to play. In *The Honourable MP* characters resort to Shona through code-switching or code-mixing, terms linguists use to refer to the plurilingual's ability to express themselves in one language in one sentence and in another in the next sentence or to use the different varieties of language in different parts of the same sentence depending on what Kachru (1986: 57) calls the 'linguistic or verbal repertoire'⁸⁵ functional within a specific community. The plot unfolds in the educated variety of English. However, Teacher Choto and the peasants code-switch between English and Shona in the last act of the play. While addressing the dancing peasants and workers, Teacher Choto shouts 'Okay, lets us now be quiet. *Nyararai, nyararai*' [Be quiet, quiet] (1984: 37). After Teacher Choto tells the peasants that the MP was supposed to leave for a holiday overseas the day before, a peasant shakes his head and shouts mixing Shona and English 'Ah, *mari yose yapera vakomana*. All money gone to England, ah, *nix*/ Oh all our money is gone gentleman. All of it has gone to England, oh, no' (1984: 38). Throughout this act this style of speech continues to unfold. When the MP finally arrives to address the crowd, he chants slogans in Shona and the crowd responds in Shona. More examples abound in other plays.

Kavanagh in *Mavambo* uses a similar technique. In this play the percentage use of African languages is almost 40 percent. Kavanagh establishes the code-switching technique quite early in the process. There is no pretension that the characters who are mostly Shona engage in drama using exclusively English. There is a deliberate mixing of Shona and English traditions of performance. The ritualistic beginning of story starts in both languages – Shona and English. Sekuru, the custodian of Shona customs and values, addresses his audience (of mainly Shona children) in English while the audience responds to him in Shona. This is an incendiary device thrust into Shona through the intrusion of English in an intensely African performance space – a circular space inside a hut. English which is associated with the educated and elite is used impeccably by an old rural man. The myth of language as a marker of status is shattered. The notion of language as a marker of status is shattered by the white priest – Reverend Mills who speaks to Chief Chuma's court in perfect Shona. It is as if the roles of white and black have been reversed by giving a white character Shona speech and a black character English speech. Once the convention has been established that they speak in Shona, the rest of the conversation continues in English though 'the audience is expected to understand that they would be talking in Shona' (Kavanagh 1997: 194). Shonga, the first African convert, switches

⁸⁵ The terms 'linguistic repertoire', 'code repertoire', and 'verbal repertoire' are used as synonymous words to refer to the total range of codes which members of a speech community have available for their linguistic interaction..

between Shona and English by choice when addressing fellow villagers. He does not mix two codes in one sentence, but shifts the codes between sentences. I will not discuss the socio-linguistic reasons for code-switching as that would be irrelevant in this chapter. However, what needs to be emphasized is that the mixing of English and Shona is in linguistic terms 'interference' since there is clear linguistic and cultural interference of the exo-normative model of English which challenges its dominance and purity.

All theatre makers in the four play texts rely on the linguistic concept of interlingualism as part of their agency to accommodate and challenge the dominance of English. De Katzew (2004: 2) uses the term interlingualism to mean a 'linguistic practice highly sensitive to the context of speech acts, able to shift add-mixtures of language according to situational needs or the effects desired'. This concept is broad enough to subsume a number of rhetorical strategies such as Zabus's relexification (1998), translation, neologisms, productive hybridization and even some aspects of code-switching. Interlingualism may or may not mix two languages so that they are put into a state of tension which produces a third 'inter' possibility. In some cases, the lexicons of either Shona or English are manipulated so that one of the languages serves as the matrix language into which another language is inscribed. It is not only the lexical items that are transferred to another language, but the cultural values of the new socio-cultural and linguistic contexts. The interlingual language becomes a vehicle of non-native English users' social norms and ecological needs.

This interlingualism is, indeed, a concept that was advocated by Gabriel Okara and Chinua Achebe:

As a writer who believes in the utilisation of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and imagery to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literally from the African language native to the writer into whatever European language he is using as a medium of expression... Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas, thinking and philosophy in our own way? (Gabriel Okara, cited in wa Thiong'o 1980: 8-9).

Chinua Achebe adds his voice to the creation of a new language that thrives on altering the native speaker variety of English. He argues:

I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings (Cited in Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1980: 8)

I would begin with the first theoretical construct of interlingualism – relexification. This term embraces the proposals of Gabriel Okara and Chinua Achebe above in that it is defined by African philosophy, imagery, concepts, thought patterns, values and lexical items thereby altering both the English language and African episteme. Christopher Balme argues that while the language deployed

by the playwrights remains recognisably europhone, it is altered in its 'rhythm, grammar, and idioms by the presence of an indigenous language, which is present as a kind of palimpsest beneath the European language' (1999: 127).

All the four plays have some sections of dialogue where Shona is the matrix language within which English is embedded.⁸⁶ Take for instance Act 1, scene 4 of *The Rain of my Blood* where all the action is taking place inside Negomo's hut at the farm compound. In other spaces on the farm English is used for practical purposes to carry out the key day to day communication needs, but when the space changes to the hut of an African family, language takes on the extra burden of carrying African philosophy, values and episteme. Although it reads as English, it follows the discursal thought patterns and morphological structure of Shona language.

(They have settled down in the hut. Maidei blows into the fire. Chamunorwa squats on the floor near to his father who sits on a stool)
Chamunorwa: Are you in good health, my mother?
Munjai: I am in good health, my son
Chamunorwa: Are you in good health, father?
Negomo: I am in good health, my son. Our ancestors have been keeping a good watch over the family. (Mujajati 1991: 24)

The composition of the characters as they sit inside the hut reflects a typical Shona protocol – the father is sitting on a stool and has the power; the son, Chamunorwa, is squatting on the floor and has less power while the mother Munjai sits on the mat to give her feminine dignity. The language used in the excerpt reflects Shona discursal thought patterns. Long greetings are taboo in a typical English play, but are included here to capture the tone and flavour of African culture. The greetings are not in the usual exo-normative model of English, but translate how Shona people greet each other in a typical face-to-face interaction. This includes the explanation of how the characters are related to one another and to other characters in the play.

While most playwrights of English expression translate their dialogue in small sections of their plays, Stephen Chifunyise translates the dialogue from Shona in virtually the entire play. *Medicine for Love* (1984) is entirely translated from Shona by the author himself through a process which Balme (1999: 128) calls 'implicit translation'. In this process the author consciously or unconsciously thinks in Shona and translates the language implicitly into English. The matrix language becomes a form of 'indigenous palimpsest' (ibid) which cannot be seen, but is discernible through English whose lexis

⁸⁶ Owing to my less than perfect competence in Ndebele, I will be limited to studying plays written and performed in English and Shona. The conclusions that I draw from this analysis also apply to plays written and performed in Ndebele as evidenced by a study carried out by Nehemiah Chivandikwa where he analyses Raisedon Baya and Township Artists Theatre Group's *Township Poverty* (1993) and other plays and concludes that Zimbabwean theatre makers are 'ndenglishing and shonglishing the stage' (2010: 105).

and structure is altered in the process. Examples abound in *Medicine for Love* (1984): 'good morning mother of Tendai'(3), 'he has not touched me two months in a row' (5) [he hasn't made love to me in two months], '...we shall tie him to the house' (5) [he will never leave the house], 'some of us have wives who know that husbands must find food ready' (22) [my wife prepares food well before I come home], 'I am told I ate this type of food a long time ago and now I am completely cooked' [my wife gave me charmed food and I am now in deep love] etc.

In *The Honourable MP* all the characters speak the exo-normative model of English, but there are moments when MP Pfende imitates speech patterns of students that he has met in some city hotels in Harare. When that happens MP Pfende's English has a translated feel. He says:

You know nothing, woman. I have seen these young men with these eyes of mine. You see a small boy of seventeen in the arms of an ageing sugar mummy. These young men just want this ...and ... (stands and touches his chest, then his behind. Immediately sits down). And the girls are no better. You meet a girl at the Oasis Motel, you ask her where she has come from. You hear her say, 'I am reading law at the University of Zimbabwe'. Go to Monomotapa, the Jameson, the Meikles, the Ambassador, the Queens, Scamps, the story will be all the same. 'Eh I'm reading B.A at the UZ, eh I'm reading B.Ac at the UZ'. You know, people like myself – a mere standard five – can easily get a sweet eighteen, those very ones with B.As. B.Acs, B.Ls. (Musengezi 1984: 10-1)

The cumulative effect of relexification is that it questions the whole debate about which language to use in postcolonial African performance – African or European. Both Shona and English cultural norms constantly break into each other to form an interlingual language where binaries of afrophone/europhone are blurred. The playwright in the process of relexification becomes an interlingual translator who undermines the dominant text (English) and reconfigures it by way of producing new expressions and new syntactical constructions that mix both languages. Bearing in mind that these were acted mostly by black performers, relexification on stage attains a magnified transgressive potential. Even though some characters speak the exo-normative model of English, Received Pronunciation is not always achieved in performance (even if this is feasible)⁸⁷ as performers superimpose mother tongue accents, pitch, intonation, vocal grain and resonance to their dialogue. While indeed English is celebrated through its use, it is challenged and resisted

⁸⁷ In Zimbabwe speaking in British or even American RP accent is considered snobbish, distasteful and pedantic. The audience will boo down any black actor who attempts RP accent on stage. This happened at the University of Zimbabwe Beit Hall in 1993 during the performance of *Midnight Hotel* and again in 1995 during the performance of *Our husband has Gone Mad Again* when an African American actor was delivering lines of the journalist. Tsitsi Dangarembga was heckled while on stage at the University of Zimbabwe for her RP accent (Plastow 1996: 246). During the same period, a ZBC Radio 3 presenter Simon Parkinson used to chide callers with an American accent by saying comments like 'hello caller. Are you calling from America?'

phonetically, morphologically and lexically. The two languages (Shona and English) are put into a state of creative tension that produces ambiguity, ambivalence and indecisiveness.

The second interlingual technique that theatre makers use to decolonise English is what Kachru (1986: 153) calls 'productive hybridization' where playwrights Africanise rhetorical devices through recourse to African similes and metaphors resulting in collocational deviation. Productive hybridization is a two way process where Shona words are anglicised or English words are shonalised. Language rivalry and borrowing sit side by side in a love-hate relationship in some linguistic structures. When it suits MP Pfende in *The Honourable MP*, he translates Shona proverbs literally into English: '[e]very man is wise and wisdom is like a penis, every man carries his own' (11). Stephen Chifunyise in *Medicine for Love* (1984) employs imagery from his culture as in the case of Mrs Mhizha who says the following to Mrs Matamba 'Look, you are my best friend and I am very sad to see that your marriage is breaking to pieces like a clay pot' (7). In Standard British English, similes have been codified and English users are expected to use those that are officially recognised (Best 1958). The intrusion of similes and proverbs from other cultures de-familiarises English. English is now acculturated to a distinctly 'un-English' context and its capacity to carry an exclusive English culture is frustrated by infusing values from other cultures.

In some instances productive hybridisation takes place through the characters' shonalisation of English words. Characters phonetically tailor English words to a Shona sound. Although Foreman Bulala in *The Rain of my Blood* speaks good English when conversing with other farm labourers, his English is consciously shonalised when talking to his boss Jeffries Sanderson, probably to highlight the difference in status or perhaps to deny himself a chance to be as English as his boss. Reporting Kerencia Janhi whom he allegedly found sleeping during working hours, Foreman Bulala converses as follows:

Bulala: *Bass! Dis a razi bagas. I kachi her sreep mukomboni Baas! (pause) Other work hard Baas. She sreep!... I kachi her sreep 10 kiroko, Baas (points to his watch*
....
No Baas, not ten kiroko, Baas; I kachi her at half pas nine zack!
.... (Foreman interrupts)
Rayas, rayas! (stamping his foot; turns to Jeffries in a servile manner) I never sreep with her Baas! I am a good boy! Rayas! (the white farmer grunts and nods his head) She is rayas, Baas. Dis a razi bagas. Sreeps everyday, she must... (Mujajati 1991: 15)

[Boss! This is a lazy bugger I caught her sleeping in the compound Baas. Others work hard. She sleeps!... I caught her sleeping at 10 o'clock boss. Not actually at ten o'clock boss, but at half past nine exactly...(Foreman interrupts) Liar liar. I

never slept with her boss! I am a good boy! Lies! She is lying boss. This is a lazy bugger. She sleeps every day, she must...]

In this case English is the matrix language where Shona lexical items inscribe themselves. The language is recognisably English, but phonetically Shona. The same shift to what can be called 'Shonglish' happens with Negomo in the same play when he speaks to Jeffries's son, Francis. He speaks like Foreman Bulala again to underline the difference in status. Where status is not contested, as in the case of Negomo's conversation with Father Louis (a white priest), Negomo speaks in perfect English. The Shona language does not use the consonant /L/ in any of its word formations, thus sleep becomes *sreep*, and lazy becomes *razi*. The language constructs its words by means of a combination of consonant and vowel (e.g., ba, be, bi, bo and bu) thus catch becomes *kachi*, compound becomes *komboni* and o'clock becomes *kiroko*. This shonalisation of English is also found in *The Honourable MP* and used to create comic relief in an otherwise tragic situation of domestic worker exploitation. Spencer the manservant of MP Pfende and Immaculate complains:

Baas let me talk. I work thirty years here in Highlands for Baas Herbedeen. He live here in Grey Avenue. Thirty years. (counts his fingers as he counts in fives) – 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and no 'pfitseke' from Mrs Herbedeen. She give me off one day, week every week. You wife give off she want. Mrs Herbedeen give pint milk everyday and half bread and you give me nofing for breakfass. My wardrobe full of suit, shirt and shoes. I no open account at Amato. All clothes given by Baas Herbedeen. But you, what you give me? Nofing. Only dis khaki uniform. Dis Rotary watch Herbedeen give me and de bicycle I come to work his daughter give me. Herbedeen, a white man give me all dat.

.....

Okay Baas. Madam is hear now. African oppress African now. This independence – ah ya. Tichatambura sitereki. (Musengezi 1984: 26)

A comparison between Foreman Bulala and Spencer's speeches reveals that while there is indeed an attempt to resist the purity of English by creating what appears to be a local variety of English, the deviant form is not codified by any formal academy to establish what can be called an endo-normative model that establishes rules of grammatical construction and pronunciation. The two versions of non-native English above testify to this claim. Thus Zimbabwean English during this period is still in the imitation stage.

In sections of dialogue where characters use Shona such as Kavanagh's *Mavambo*, some Shona words are anglicised resulting in the formation of new words, for example *vakondakita* (199) [Mr Conductor], *vadhiraivha* (ibid) [Mr Driver], *mubhurumu* (200) [by the broom], *wafoota?* (203) [have you footed?], *rega kundidhistebha* (200) [do not disturb me], *mabhazi* (ibid) [buses], *dhiribhura* (201) [dribble], *madhojero* (203) [the way to dodge] and *kumahosteri* (212) [in the hostels]. In the above examples, the Shona language serves as the matrix language into which English is inscribed. The

English word can still be experienced phonetically, but it is embedded in Shona lexical items. These innovations make the new words linguistically deviant from both native Shona and English speakers' norms. The innovation introduces into both languages some dimensions that are alien to the canons of morphological and grammatical construction.

The third theoretical construct of interlingualism is a concept that sociolinguists have called pidginisation to refer to 'a process of creating a new variety of language out of two (or more) existing ones' (Hudson 1980: 61). The process takes a number of different forms and in my case the process of variety synthesis results in the creation of an artificial auxiliary language Chilapalapa/Fanakalo, which is evident in Mujajati's *The Rain of Blood* and Tsodzo's *Shanduko*. This particular example is unique in the sense that it is not the African who takes the initiative to form Chilapalapa/Fanakalo, but the diasporic European. This language was created originally in South Africa by diasporic Europeans for very practical and immediate purposes of communicating with Africans who didn't understand English and it became the lingua franca in most South African mine settlements. In this case diasporic Europeans are complicit in their decolonisation by de-anglicising their language through employing the few words they knew of Nguni to communicate orders to their black work force. It mixes mostly Nguni languages – Zulu, Ndebele with English. When it was transported to Zimbabwe it incorporated some Shona words and even some ways of pronunciation as can be seen from the shonalised spellings of some words in the speeches below. When Jeffries Sanderson in *The Rain of my Blood* realises that his black foreman, Bulala, struggles with English, he shifts to Chilapalapa/Fanakalo to aid better communication, but still retains the power that English has by investing in directives, imperatives and declaratives. Take for instance Jeffries's response to Foreman Bulala's flogging of Keresencia Janhi:

White Man: (sneering, holding the girl by the chin) *Wena fucking razi bagas huu! Una funa musebenzo rapa Alterna Farm huh!....*
Foreman, wena chaya lo razi bagas maningi stereki. Tata lo sjambock, (points to the Foreman's whip) bulala lapa fat buttocks maningi stereki (Foreman nods his head)
If you find her lazing around again, then fire her straight away. Do you understand?

[You fucking lazy bugger hey! Do you want work here at Alterna Farm huh!
Foreman, you must hit this lazy bugger too much. Get that sjambock and whip those fat buttocks too much, huh!]

This language is also evident in Tsodzo's *Shanduko* where Johannes Van De Gryp is giving orders to his manservant, Jemusi. He says:

Kandi roMugabe naro bhururu wake Kangai vhane skopu yakaita sei? Mina haikona yazi kuti kabanga anabhuyisa munye mali kunika wena, kabanga afuna kuti ndipumise wena musevenzo. He? (1983: 8-9)

[What kind of brain do Mugabe and his friend Kangai have? I don't know where he wants me to get money to give you, unless he wants me to sack you from work. Is that so?]

In Chilapalapa/Fanakalo, the matrix language is English and Nguni words are organised in each sentence following English canons of grammatical construction. In performance all words are articulated with an English accent and English vocal qualities such as pitch, lip control, glottis control, rhythm control, tempo and resonance. While Chilapalapa/Fanakalo appears mainly Nguni on the surface, it follows the dictates of a simmering English palimpsest text beneath. The language challenges the purism of Nguni while at the same time 'desecrating' English. Black Zimbabweans detested it during the colonial era for its promiscuity and for its explicit display of white power and values.⁸⁸ Aaron Hodza is cited by Julie Frederickse as saying about the unacceptability of Chilapalapa/Fanakalo:

You are only given orders in that language. You cannot even tell a story successfully in Chilapalapa because it hasn't got much of a vocabulary. Most of the words are imperatives, given to an inferior, a servant. *Enza so* or *hamba so*, that's an order, an imperative. If a white man speaks to me in that language, I will scold him. (1982: 20)

From the above discussions, it can be noted that the major medium of expression between characters is Standard English, but this model is consistently challenged by most of the characters depending on the participants in a speech event. Jeffries Sanderson deploys an exo-normative model when speaking to his family but switches to Chilapalapa/Fanakalo when speaking to his foreman, Bulala. Paradoxically, Foreman Bulala shonalises his English when speaking to his boss Jeffries, but approximates a native model of English when speaking to his fellow workers. There are thus degrees of approximation to the preferred exo-normative model of English depending on the context and participants in a speech event. Thus through these shifts, English is both endorsed and undermined by the characters and of course the playwrights.

Another site of struggle within language is the area of paralinguistic or suprasegmental⁸⁹ features of speech which are vocalic sounds with which a speaker embellishes his/her speech such as pitch, loudness, tempo, timbre and non-verbal sounds or extra phonemic sounds such as clicks, *haaibo*, *yho-o*, *uh*, *huh*, *agh* and so on. I am more interested in vocal segregates as they are easy to pick from

⁸⁸ After independence in 1980, partly because of the expansion in education rendering Chilapalapa/Fanakalo almost useless, lack of codification of the language variety and of course its intrinsically racist undertones, Chilapalapa died a natural death in Zimbabwe.

⁸⁹ According to Keir, Elam (1980) George L Trager founded paralinguistic studies in 1958 and identified three classes of paralinguistic features (1) voice qualities which subsumes pitch range, lip control, glottis control, rhythm control, tempo, resonance etc, (2) vocalisations which subsume laughing, crying, giggling, shouting, whispering, moaning, groaning, yawning and (3) Vocal segregates which are distinct but are extra-phonemic sounds such as clicks, uh, huh, ssh, and so on. (See Elam 1980: 78-83).

the performance text. Elam (1980: 78-9) argues that paralinguistic or suprasegmental features of speech are learned from the speech community one grows up in and therefore do not have a universal meaning. They are culture-specific. When looking at vocal segregates in all the four plays under discussion, I have noted that they are loan-sounds that are borrowed from Shona even though the characters involved speak impeccable exo-normative English model. While the characters speak good English they seem not to employ native English suprasegmental features of speech, but Shona ones.⁹⁰ By merely reading Mujajati's *The Wretched Ones* without watching the play, it is easy to read Mr Buffalo as a white character judging by the way he uses language. It is only when the paupers compare him to the original white farm owner that one accepts him as a black farmer. However, his vocal segregates such as 'hu-u' with which he occasionally endows his speeches, indicate him as an African English user. In *The Honourable MP* MP Pfende acts as if he is addressing an audience while hosting Teacher Choto and Isabella at his house. After finishing his speech and slogans in English, Isabella and Teacher Choto clap hands and ululate. While handclapping is universal, ululation is a suprasegmental feature of speech normally associated with African celebration and acts as an incendiary device within what appears to be Standard English vocalisations. *The Honourable MP* is replete with vocal segregates such as 'ah', 'ah ya', 'yaa' and 'hahaha'. In *The Wretched Ones* the same vocal segregates 'ah-ah' are used by mostly labourers when communicating utter surprise. Even though Chamunorwa is educated and speaks an educated variety of English that is even acknowledged by Francis Sanderson as 'good', when he is publicly flogged by Francis for fighting him, he screams and groans using Shona segregates 'maiwe-e-e'.

What all the above examples demonstrate is that the English that is deployed in the plays only nominally carries British culture, while a significant volume of it is able to successfully carry the depth and weight of African values and experiences. English, as it is used in the selected plays, has acculturated to the African environment, but as Kachru (1986: 93) argues this acculturation is characterised by two processes – the 'de-culturation' of English and its 'acculturation' to the new context. This interlingual language forms a third space that is neither purely English nor purely Shona. This space between Shona and English is a forbidden zone for linguistic purists and the resultant speech patterns located in this zone are linguistic outlaws for purists at either pole. In this space, English is celebrated, altered and mocked through the addition of impurities.

⁹⁰ I have noticed a similar trend in South Africa where African users of English occasionally punctuate their speeches with segregates from their African languages 'yo-o', 'haibo' 'agh', 'neh' and so on.

On an ideological level, the very notion of plurilingualism that inheres in different degrees in most of the plays of English expression during this period is an affront to the (neo)colonial domination of English. During this period English was the language of instruction and performance as highlighted by Robert McLaren after his first attempt at plurilingual theatre in Zimbabwe in 1985:

The misconception that drama must necessarily be in English was deeply entrenched. This assumption arises from the convention that it is the English teacher who handles extra-curricular drama. There had been Shona and Ndebele drama in the schools for many years but theatre in these languages was invariably regarded as inferior to plays in English. (1993: 38)

The very idea of bringing what was assumed to be 'inferior' languages on a professional stage had the effect of demystifying English and raising the status of African languages. In an introduction to the 1986 edition of *Mavambo*, Stephen Chifunyise, then director of Arts and Crafts in the Ministry of Youth Sport and Culture, raises similar sentiments and even suggests that the binaries of English/vernacular theatre are moribund and should be questioned through plurilingual theatre:

This strategy (plurilingualism) also raises the status and role of indigenous languages in the promotion of Zimbabwean theatre while it shows the fact that these languages are a means of communication which can be used irrespective of racial and ethnic origin of the artists.

The effective use of Shona and English by Raymond Brown as the missionary in the play showed how easily white Zimbabweans can perform in Shona or Ndebele just as black Zimbabweans have acquired proficiency in English on stage. *Mavambo* demonstrates how ridiculous and irrelevant those advocates of 'vernacular theatre' are (Chifunyise 1986: i)

What the above discussion demonstrates is the fact that English is the dominant language of Zimbabwean alternative theatre, but that dominance is celebrated and challenged through a number of linguistic strategies which de-aculturates English and acculturates it to the new Zimbabwean context. Both europhone and afrophone languages inhere in a kind of interlingual language where binaries of language/vernacular are blurred.

Conclusion

In terms of language, what has emerged is that the debate on which language to use – afrophone or europhone – has been superseded by the debate about how to use English in the new African context. Based on a number of examples of theatrical texts and performances, I have noticed those playwrights and theatre makers both resist and affirm English by using a number of strategies. In the main, their characters use the Standard exo-normative English model, although in practice they colour it with their mother tongue accents. The dominance and purism of Standard English is mocked through recourse to plurilingualism, interlingualism, relexification, productive hybridization, pidginisation and the use of mother tongue suprasegmental features of speech in English dialogue. While all these linguistic strategies are evident in the plays, I put forward the claim that they have

not yet developed into a Zimbabwean variety of English that is codified in a local endo-normative model. African English users in the plays are imitating the Standard English model, but through mimicry there is slippage which mocks the native English purists.

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CHAPTER 9: THE DYNAMICS OF RECEPTION OF THE THEATRICAL TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

Introduction

This chapter investigates the reception of alternative Zimbabwean theatrical texts and performances between the period 1980 and 1996 and how that reception had a controlling effect or lack thereof on the identity of theatre of the period. I depend for my analysis on records of live performances, letters to newspaper editors, editorials, records of playwrights' engagement with the public and state agents outside of the theatre event, legal procedures for arrested playwrights, commentaries by critics and journalists, reviews, features, and records of the consecration or lack thereof of playwrights and performers by publishers and festival organisers. I argue that the consumption habits of readers and live audiences were influenced by the two competing discourses in the field of theatre- the Eurocentric theatre aesthetic promoted by the NTO and the new national theatre aesthetic promoted by ZIMFEP/ZACT and the department of art and culture. The strictures provided by the two competing discourses in the field of Zimbabwean theatre in turn compelled readers and audiences to receive dramatic texts and performances in particular ways which in turn forced playwrights and theatre makers to create theatre in particular ways preferred by the two competing discourses. However, these strictures were not absolute as evidenced by the emergence of a new modernist theatre that resisted both bourgeois and Africanist aesthetics such as Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* (1992), Dambudzo Marechera's *Mindblast* (1984), *Scrapiron Blues* (1994) and Andrew Whaley's *The Rise and Shine of Comrade Fiasco* (1990). In this chapter I will look at how theatre was received at theatre festivals and playwriting competitions. I will also base my discussion on two case studies of theatre (Marechera's *Mindblast* and Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative*) that refused to comply with strictures set up by the state and arts organisations. The following diagram highlights endogenous pressures that affect the output of the theatre makers and in turn the tastes with which audiences consume theatre



Figure 9. 1 showing endogenous strictures affecting Zimbabwean playwrights, performers and performances

I am using the term reception in this chapter to cover two processes, that is direct experience of live theatre by a live audience and secondly, the indirect experience of either a theatrical text or a performance through other processes that do not involve a live experience of the theatrical event. Whereas the first process of direct experience is relatively familiar and does not need further nuancing, the second process needs some explanation. Temple Hauptfleisch (2007) confirms that, indeed, theatre can be experienced through secondary means and that secondary receivers may take action to ban and/or alter theatre without having watched it. Hauptfleisch argues that:

The fundamental hypothesis here is that theatre is social activity, consisting of a complex system (or indeed a poly-system) of dynamic processes, nestled in, and interacting with, various layers of the broader society (itself a complex of related sub-systems). If one accepts this, then we might also argue that each theatrical event is (potentially) a shock-inducing societal event which sets off a series of rippling shock-waves that pass throughout the larger theatrical sub-system and beyond to the various encompassing layers of the social system...and (may) cause subsidiary shocks in various parts of that larger system (2007: 262-3).

Hauptfleisch goes on to suggest thirty-four tentative ways in which the theatrical event or dramatic text can be carried beyond the immediate experience of performer-audience interface. This suggests that these recipients of the dramatic text and/or theatrical event have also the potential to alter the identity and meaning of theatre just like a live audience.

Whereas production (writing, rehearsal, directing, designing) is a process of constituting meaning whereby the aforementioned artists select, develop and combine signs for the realisation of a theatrical text under set conditions, reception is not a passive act, but a process of attaching

meaning to the signs provided by the producers also under set conditions. However, this attachment of meaning to the text by the audience is not without complications. The analyst doing the viewing or reading is a product of history, society and his/her personal biography and these aspects of the analyst's life 'determine the process of interpretation' (Fischer-Lichte 1992: 207). Fischer-Lichte labels those pre-receptive conditions the 'prejudice' which the analyst brings to the theatrical event. These 'prejudices' also called 'competences' (Pavis 2003: 267) depend and are determined by the analyst's tradition and experience which Pavis calls the 'structured complex of factors' comprising of cognitive, psychological, ideological, affective and material factors, which, he argues, 'influence the behaviour, cognitive or otherwise, of the theatre spectator, providing him with specific competence' (2003: 267) and/or prejudice. It can be seen that the sum total of these 'prejudices' or 'competences' precipitate what Fischer-Lichte calls a 'fore-understanding', or for the same concept what Pavis calls a 'horizon of expectation' (2003: 266) with which the analyst approaches a theatrical text. There is a complication here in the sense that if the text does not lend itself to analysis by means of a theory or procedure which the analyst possesses through fore-understanding, there is a chance of negatively judging the product and in the process altering it. Included in the sum total of these prejudices/competencies are cognitive, psychological, ideological and affective factors which are the domain of theory and procedures of understanding a text. From the foregoing discussion, reception/consumption is a complex process that can be understood fully by way of reflecting on the pre-receptive conditions of the audience, including their horizon of expectation;⁹¹ and investigating a specific theory/procedure of attributing meaning to the text prevalent to the audience of the time.

It is common practice in theatre that a dramatic text or a performance is always received in tandem with a specific normative theatre practice which is assumed to be binding within a geopolitical space where it is used and that measuring up to it brings the symbolic capital (prestige) and consecration to the playwright and director. However, the field of theatre in the new Zimbabwe between 1980 and 1996 was contradictory and as a result did not offer a homogenous way of appreciating theatre. The structure of the field of theatre significantly changed in 1980 when a new government came to power. In colonial times the field of power was dominated by a minority white government which also controlled the field of cultural production in which theatre is a subfield. However, after 1980, the field of power was dominated by a black government which, though it ran a capitalist economy, preferred a socialist discourse in the field of cultural production. The field of theatre became a more

⁹¹ Patrice Pavis uses this term to describe expectations of an audience at a particular moment in history including the audience's knowledge of the theatrical genre, its interests at the time of enunciation and the influence all these factors exert on what is being analyzed at that moment (Pavis 2003: 266).

dynamic one as agents occupying it (NTO, ZACT, publishers, critics, academics and arts journalists) jostled for what Bourdieu (1993) calls symbolic capital- the authority to recognise, give prestige and consecrate performers, playwrights and directors.

The complexity of the Zimbabwean field of theatre production was enhanced by the various conflicting positions occupied by institutions of consecration and legitimation. In colonial times, publishers, even though in theory they had independent editorial policies, preferred to publish books (including plays) that furthered colonial ideological interests, but as Veit-Wild (2004) notes, publishers after Zimbabwean independence preferred plays that dwelt on public themes and could be used in the school education system. Thus publishers forced playwrights to produce plays that were compliant with the national socialist cause. On the other hand, even though the government of Zimbabwe owned and controlled all available national newspapers- *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *Chronicle*, *Sunday News* and *Manica Post*- editors inherited white theatre columnists from Rhodesia⁹² who continued to influence Eurocentric reception of theatre (Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988). On the same note, the white dominated NTO continued to run competitive theatre festivals like the National Theatre Festival (NTF) and the National High Schools Theatre Festival which were predominantly white. When ZACT and other intellectuals like Chifunyise and Kavanagh (1988: 11) complained about the Eurocentrism of these festivals, the NTO responded by creating the Popular Theatre Festival which was meant to cater for locally produced plays which were however adjudicated by Eurocentric standards. The first two festivals were judged by foreign adjudicators from the UK and entered plays mostly from the western world (Zinyemba 1986, Plastow 1996, Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988). Furthermore, the NTO ran annually the CABS Play of the Year Competition employing Eurocentric standards (Hains 1984, 1993, *The Herald* Reporter 1984).

In the same theatre field, the effort of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture⁹³ countered the Eurocentrism of NTO by blessing the formation of a counter organisation (ZACT) in 1986 which had already begun its activities as ZIMFEP in 1982. It immediately began a rival non-competitive National Music, Dance and Drama Festival employing indigenous and Africanist approaches to theatre making. However, by 1986, ZACT with a membership of sixteen theatre companies was both

⁹² Some of them included Ian Hoskins, Susan Hains, Andrew Whaley, Denis Granger and John Wilkins. Soon a few black columnists also joined the fray such as Godfrey Moyo of *The Chronicle* and Steve Mpofo who ran the Scribe's Scroll of *The Herald*. Robert McLaren (Kavanagh), a Marxist academic, often contributed articles to *The Herald* defending indigenous and Africanist approaches to creating theatre.

⁹³ The Sport and Culture department continued to shuffle between Education and Youth Ministries between 1980 and 1996. I use the youth and education ministries interchangeably depending on where the culture department was located in each given year.

qualitatively and quantitatively dominated by NTO which had stronger institutions and more theatre groups under its fold than ZACT. Nonetheless, towards the end of 1996 ZACT dominated NTO numerically, rising from a mere sixteen theatre groups at its founding on 15 February to a staggering 250 theatre groups as compared to fifty theatre groups under the ambit of NTO. Thus the theatre field was a site of struggle between the then dominant NTO and the emerging ZACT over the power to consecrate participating agents in the field. This is important to this chapter because it underlines the various ways dramatic texts and performances were received by readers and audiences occupying these varied positions in the field of theatre.

Dambudzo Marechera as Case Study

Given these varied and contested aesthetic tastes, one is tempted to ask how theatre was received by the audiences during this period. I want to look at the case study of Dambudzo Marechera as a playwright and performer and how his audiences received his work. Hauptfleisch (1997: 264) argues that through the conduit of a playwright or performer the theatrical event may be carried beyond the immediate experience of the audience-performer interface. As Marechera was a playwright and performer, his work was consumed either directly in a performer-audience interface or indirectly through him talking about or defending his work in Harare's night clubs, as he often did.

Marechera often performed his poetry to the public in Harare's First Street or at the University of Zimbabwe's Beit Hall. In April 1982 after writing a long poem, *The Alternative Graduate*, (now published in Veit-Wild 2004) which he printed and sold on the university campus, he performed it during a poetry reading evening at the university Beit Hall. Like most of Marechera's works, the poem was critical of the Zimbabwe government. The fact that there were very few black Zimbabwean writers of English expression in 1982 made Marechera an instant hit, but at the same time, his anti-government themes and anti-African languages stance made him a controversial figure. White liberals praised Marechera for his bravery in newspaper theatre columns. While the British literary field consecrated Marechera and the local white population praised him for his bravery (or perhaps for speaking for them), he created enemies amongst some blacks including state agents who often boxed and insulted him (Veit-Wild 2004).

On 6 May 1982, Dambudzo Marechera came to perform a one person show at the University of Zimbabwe Llewellyn Theatre, although the event had been advertised as a 'farewell lecture'⁹⁴ under the theme 'The writer in the new Zimbabwe' (Veit-Wild 2004: 306). During this performance

⁹⁴ Dambudzo Marechera was supposed to leave for the UK the same day.

Marechera criticised writing in Shona and Ndebele which he called 'ShitShona' and 'ShitNdebele' (Veit-Wild 2004: 307). Since the mood during the early 1980s encouraged the rehabilitation of African cultures and languages, Marechera was cautiously warned by academics and students who attended the performance through inaudible interjections. Marechera spared no one; he attacked the government, independence, African literature, African tradition and what he called 'bourgeois academics' who had hosted him (Veit-Wild 2004: 306-7). Marechera went on to criticise the construction of the Heroes Acre and commented that 'half of the heroes ha[d] been buried alive' (ibid: 308). There was a growl that ran through the theatre as his audience thought that he had gone too far. Then one of the students shouted '[t]hen why don't you leave?' (ibid: 308) upon which Marechera reached for his large dilapidated cardboard suitcase from the auditorium onto the stage and left in a huff for the airport. The response to this particular performance and to Marechera as a playwright was varied and ambivalent. As a consecrated⁹⁵ writer, he was received by students and academics at the University of Zimbabwe as a hero. Students took turns to offer him accommodation and Marechera fed from the university Manfred Hodson Hall at the expense of the English Department where he was often invited to deliver lectures (Veit-Wild 2004). Despite some of the students' admiration of Marechera, others shocked by Marechera's cynical views of the new government as Duncan Mukondiwa, a student at the time, explained: 'the mood at the university had not changed yet... We were still very positive and optimistic. We could not understand his [Marechera] negative attitude and why he desperately wanted to go back to England' (Veit-Wild 2004: 300). One of the students who hosted Marechera was Gonzo Musengezi who was to write his own play in 1983, *The Honourable MP*. *The Honourable MP* took the critical dimension of Marechera's writing but inscribed it in the preferred socialist realist aesthetic. There is strong suspicion that the strictures of the state which were at the time shared by an intellectual audience entrenched a style of writing that pervades the first sixteen years.

The only places in Zimbabwe where Marechera's works were received without controversy were spaces created by foreign cultural organisations like the Zimbabwe-German Society. In February

⁹⁵ When Dambudzo Marechera returned to Zimbabwe from exile in the United Kingdom, the British field of literary production had already consecrated him as a writer by publishing through Heinemann *The House of Hunger* (1978) and *Black Sunlight* (1980). *The House of Hunger* (1978) won the Guardian Fiction Prize which Marechera shared with the Irish writer Neil Jordan in 1979. At the award ceremony Marechera, in a drunken state, turned the tables upside down and broke plates and wine glasses much to the embarrassment of the organisers (Veit-Wild 2004: 186-91).

1984 Marechera was invited to do a public reading of *Mindblast* and parts of *Killwatch*⁹⁶ at Harare's Courtauld Theatre under the auspices of the Goethe Institute. The audience which was predominantly white was impressed by Marechera's work. Surprisingly, the Zimbabwe Minister of Education and Culture, Dzingai Mutumbuka, who was invited to give an opening remark praised Marechera:

This occasion gives us the opportunity to acknowledge with pride the very considerable literary achievements of one of Zimbabwe's foremost writers. It also offers us the stimulating experience of hearing work read by the author and the opportunity of meeting the author... It is very clear that Marechera's work has contributed in no small way to a wider appreciation of aspects of Zimbabwean history and to a greater understanding of the psychological pressures experienced by Zimbabweans during the ruthlessly oppressive colonial period. (1984: Department of Information)

While at public forums the state acknowledged Marechera's writing as outstanding, in private the state was infuriated by the absence of socialist commitment in Marechera's work and worked hard to stifle his creativity through legal procedures, arrests, violence, containment and refusal to publish his work. I shall return to the state's political control shortly.

However, during the same time that Marechera's plays and performances were ambivalently received by an intellectual audience at the University of Zimbabwe, those plays that dwelt on social issues and employed a critical realist style were warmly received. In 1982, the same year that Marechera was both liked and reproached, Juliet Chikanza, then a student and a member of the UZ Drama Club, wrote and produced a Shona play, *Vakasiwa Pachena* (1984) [They were Shamed], which entered the 1982 Arts Festival of the University of Zimbabwe. Unlike Marechera's political plays which attacked the new government, Chikanza wrote on social domestic issues where Ray impregnates his rural girlfriend, Lizzie, but runs away to the USA where he pursues further studies. When he comes back to Zimbabwe, he marries another lady, Diana, whom he met in the USA, but gets the shock of his life when Lizzie attends Ray and Diana's wedding and offers her child as a present to the new couple. The play ends with Ray's uncle, Zanolaviri, admitting the family's guilt and apologising to all invited guests for this public embarrassment.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ This collection of plays was not yet published in 1984 and remained unpublished during Marechera's life time. It is now published under the title *Scrapiron Blues* (1994) and contains five plays *The Alley* (1994), *The Breakdown Scrapiron Blues* (1994), *The Servants' Ball* (1994), *Alien to the People* (1994) and *Killwatch* (1994).

⁹⁷ Juliet Chikanza (now Thondhlana) wrote and directed the play and doubled as a performer playing the character of Sabhina who is a close friend of Lizzie. Lizzie was played by Rutendo Manzvanzvike, Diana by Tendai Manzvanzvike, Ray by Noah Mahohoma, Zvanyadza by Khatazile Neusu, Nyari by Ruwa Matewa, Mai Zvauya by Jane Juru, Zanolaviri by Hlukaniso Sithole, Baba Zvauya by Alvord Sithole, Mushamarari by Mike Hakunavanhu, Tete, by Charity Nzenza, Mai Rugare by Inviolata, Baba Rugare by Charles Kwinjo. (see Chikanza 1984: cover page).

The play *Vakasiwa Pachena* was well received by the students, publishers, broadcasters and the Ministry of Education and Culture. The playwright/director/performer Juliet Chikanza recalls:

The house [Beit Hall] was full and the reception was amazing; more than we had expected. It was good entertainment and the actors were brilliant... The audience participated excitedly particularly in scenes where audience participation was obvious such as the wedding scene. The play was talk of the town for some time and those who watched it still remember as do the students who studied it (Chikanza 2011: email interview).

Unlike in the case of Marechera where publishers refused to publish most of his plays because of political incorrectness, Chenjerai Hove, a writer himself, who was at the same time editor of Mambo press and was an audience member during the show, encouraged Chikanza to incorporate rehearsal improvements to the script for possible publication. Indeed, Mambo press published the play in 1984 together with a second play *Ndaiziveiko* (1984) that Chikanza subsequently wrote after the Arts Festival. According to Chikanza (2011), ZBC TV solicited the script for production, but shooting did not materialise due to financial constraints. When I briefly worked as a teacher, the Ministry of Education and Culture prescribed the play as a set book for 'O' level examinations for the period 1997-1999 and the play is currently a set play script for the same examination for the period 2010-2012. This attests to the acceptability in the education system of plays that toe the government line. None of Marechera's plays published in *Mindblast* were prescribed as set books during the same period, although his works were/are studied at Zimbabwean and regional universities.

Through a comparison of the reception of two kinds of performances that took place during the same year 1982 and were watched by the same intellectual audience, I can safely conclude that reception was relatively in favour of performances that did not play rough on the politicians and employed either a critical or socialist realist style. This level of patriotism can be understood in terms of black contentment after the brutal years of war and the independence euphoria that still pervaded the nation in the early 1980s.

Publishers also played their part in enforcing the state's preferred creative method. Although publishers were private entities, they relied on the public school system for business. It was the Ministry of Education and Culture that had the final say on which books would be allowed to circulate in its schools. Even private schools participated in the only government authorised examinations syndicate- Cambridge University- which collaborated with the Ministry of Education and Culture on all matters relating to syllabi and set texts. Consequently, to remain viable, publishers

cooperated with the state on book production policy. For this reason, most publishers refused to produce Marechera's works on the basis of Marechera's public anti-government image, his self-proclaimed intellectual anarchism and modernism which contradicted the state's preferred nationalism and socialist commitment. In a discussion with a *Moto* magazine reporter, Marechera highlighted his dilemma with publishers 'the publishers are afraid of the government attitude towards anything they publish which may or may not be considered patriotic (1984: 5).

When Marechera finished writing *Mindblast* (1984) he gave it to the Zimbabwe Publishing House (ZPH), but got no response six months after submission of the manuscript (Veit-Wild 2004: 338). ZPH never published *Mindblast* and Marechera withdrew it in protest. Charles Mungoshi, a nationalist writer himself who was literary editor at ZPH at the time later revealed the reasons for not publishing *Mindblast* in an obituary to Marechera:

...while I felt the stuff was good, I knew I couldn't persuade my publishers to publish it. One, because of the well-known reputation you had made for yourself which my colleagues in the publishing house did not feel was commercially profitable. Two, I thought if the book was difficult or is it difficult for me to understand- who is going to understand it? Dambudzo I felt you were not communicating to the people. (Veit-Wild 2004: 338)

The 'well-known reputation' of Marechera that Mungoshi refers to is the public performances of Marechera where he criticised government. Interestingly, the proprietors of ZPH, David Martin and Phyllis Johnson were friends of the ruling party and had in 1981 opened their publishing house by writing a history of the liberation struggle that favoured ZANU PF in their book *The Struggle for Zimbabwe*. Their editorial policy was unambiguously pro-state.

When Marechera took *Mindblast* to College Press, the literary editor, Stanley Nyamfukudza, expressed the same fears as Chenjerai Hove and Charles Mungoshi that the work was politically incorrect and that it followed modernist trends not yet easily accessible to the Zimbabwean audience of the time. When Marechera refined the modernist style to the satisfaction of Nyamfukudza, the editor experienced problems with management at College Press as '[t]hey felt that the book was anti-government...that it was obscure and liable to be banned' (Veit-Wild 2004: 339). The College Press editor prevailed over management and *Mindblast* was published in 1984. After *Mindblast* none of Marechera's many manuscripts was published by any Zimbabwean publisher during his life time.

The fears of College Press management were proved right as the state moved in to contain Marechera's intellectual anarchism through violence and arrests. In order to discourage the writer

from writing similar works, the writer became an enemy of the state. The state stopped invoking the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act (1967), but used harassment and detention as a method of containing Marechera.⁹⁸ In 1984, Marechera's collection of plays, prose and poetry was published by College Press under the title *Mindblast*. *Mindblast* presents government officials in bad light. Drake, the white manager, sleeps with Minister Njuzu's wife, Lydia, who in turn uses her romantic influence to talk her husband into offering more business contracts to Drake's company. Minister Njuzu is also paid by Drake for covering up corrupt deals. This touched on the vital nerve of Robert Mugabe's cabinet which was to lose a significant number of its ministers in the following two years when the Sandura Commission implicated them in corruption involving car deals in what became known as the Willowgate scandal (Nyarota 2006). Marechera was arrested the very day *Mindblast* was published during the second Zimbabwe International Book Fair after giving an interview to two Dutch journalists. He was later released from detention. The police started visiting Marechera at his work place at People's College asking students 'What does Marechera tell you when he is teaching, does he talk politics, (and) does he insult the government?' (Veit-Wild 2004: 35-6).

The secret service and the army had to do their part after the detention by police. While showing the first review of *Mindblast* to people who were drinking with him at Holiday Inn, he was followed by a man, who was later identified as an army colonel, when he went to the toilet. There, he was physically assaulted verbally abused and warned that he should stop publishing his 'filthy writings (which) deformed his country and his government' (Veit-Wild 2004: 335). Marechera occasionally suffered threats and insults from strangers while he was drinking with friends. Total strangers would come and challenge him to prove his sanity and to attack his writing, but Marechera defended his work intelligently and often lost temper when strangers told him how he should write (Veit-Wild 2004: 322-6). Marechera was seen by his Marxist contemporaries as 'a man who betrayed Africa' (Chennells and Veit-Wild 1999: pp. xi-xix). For Marechera's modernist approach to writing, Zimunya censures him:

[In Marechera]...masochistic artistic engagement overwhelms the social and moral intent. Pleading for admission into the neurotic twentieth century is the worst way to go about revitalizing a culture depleted by the self-same Europe. ...The 'eclectic babble' does not, as a rule, enrich one's own culture, and it certainly chokes the artist himself! (cited in Shaw 1999: 7)

⁹⁸ *Mindblast* (1984) was not banned as the state had learnt from its mistakes in 1981 when it banned Marechera's internationally acclaimed novel *Black Sunlight* (1980). The ban had received local and international condemnation causing a serious backlash which increased Marechera's reputation rather than diminish it. It was an embarrassment to the state when it was forced to lift the ban the same year.

All these examples demonstrate the fact that the State and individuals who had a say on the construction of national discourse converged to control how theatre was to be written, produced and ultimately received by the audience.

Reception at Festivals and Playwriting Competitions

The reception of theatrical texts in the field of theatre was contradictory. While consecrators of alternative theatre makers preferred indigenous and Africanist approaches to creating and consuming theatre, the NTO through its annual Play of the Year Competition judged (a form of reception) drama entries utilising elitist bourgeois standards.⁹⁹ Winners of the competition were rewarded with prize money¹⁰⁰ and publishers normally worked with winners towards publishing the winning plays as in the case of Mujajati's *Children of God* (1988) and *The Rain of my Blood*. The position of drama consumers in the field of theatre determined their aesthetic disposition with which they consumed theatre. Thus the strictures provided by the NTO compelled playwrights to create theatre in ways consistent with the Eurocentric demands of NTO in its early days. At the same time playwrights lived in the same geopolitical space as those affiliated to ZACT and tended to be informed by both elitist and popular theatre approaches resulting in the production of syncretic playtexts that dominate alternative theatre during the period between 1980 and 1996. Since the NTO was the only 'national' body running this competition, it became the gatekeeper of dramatic standards which were increasingly Eurocentric as insinuated by Susan Hains

As far as the judging of plays is concerned there are international standards and parameters in addition to our conditions of entry, with which our judges are fully conversant. An effort is made to ensure that Zimbabwean playwrights set their targets at an internationally accepted level. (1984: 9)

Discourses of internationalism and universalism are implicated in projecting Eurocentrism as the norm and common sense. Indeed, when the first black playwrights entered the competition in 1983 and 1984, the NTO judged that there were no winners for those years, since the plays submitted did not reach the required international standard. The 1984 adjudicators Noel McDonald, Anne Fischer and Tony Gaynor listed a number of controversial 'problems' of the entered plays which I will return to shortly.

⁹⁹ This competition began in 1965 and between that year and 1980 there is no evidence of black writers or plays dealing with black or multiracial issues which entered the competition (see Plastow 1996: 111).

¹⁰⁰ Central African Building Society (CABS) was the main sponsor of the event since colonial times up to 1985 when they withdrew their support after an adjudication controversy in 1984. The event became known as Kine Play of the Year Competition and was sponsored by United Bottlers, manufacturers of Coca-Cola, Fanta, Sprite, Shweppes and Sparletta.

If the playwrights wanted to be successful in the competition, Hains (1984) advised that they should visit the NTO library to read plays with excellent notes on what a good play should aim to achieve and this is a point she repeats in her training manual (1993). I visited the NTO library situated at the corner of 2 Robert Mugabe Road and Rotten Row in Harare in 1995 and noted that there was not a single African play in the library. The insistence that the western Aristotelian play should be the role model for African writing is a point also echoed by an NTO theatre columnist, Denis Granger:

We must encourage local writers, particularly in the local languages and I gave a special prize to an author and director of a play in Ndebele which was worthy of publication; but until, and it will take a long time, we can establish work of the calibre of overseas scripts, we must learn from them, and we can only learn by seeing and studying them. (1984: 12)

Granger's article drew angry responses from Chifunyise (1984) and Ndema Ngwenya (1984), defenders of the indigenous and Africanist aesthetic. What is clear is that theatre between 1980 and 1996 was consumed in two different ways dictated by sharp differences in ideology and theatre approaches amongst readers and audiences belonging to the two national theatre associations-NTO and ZACT.

The absence of winners in the 1983 and 1984 playwriting competitions may be interpreted in different ways. Since the NTO had never withheld prizes in colonial times as its Eurocentric taste was commensurate with Eurocentric play submissions, it is inappropriate to apply the same standard to a new crop of writers using a different writing approach. The NTO adjudicators had never produced an African play and therefore could not have been expected to judge an essentially African playwriting competition. The international standards that Hains referred to and which she insisted needed to be applied to Zimbabwean plays did not incorporate local performative modes and could be seen as an excuse to impose the Aristotelian European theatre practice.

In order to remedy the problems of 1983 and 1984, the NTO proposed a playwriting workshop before calling for entries to the 1985 competition. The workshop deliberations and a summary of adjudicators' guidelines compiled by Susan Hains (1993) testify to the elitist standards of the NTO in its early days- 1980-1988. In a report compiled by Hains from earlier reports 'Kine Play of the Year Competition: What the Judges Look for' (1993), it is clear that the standards were Eurocentric. The report lists five areas that judges evaluated- plot, characterisation, thematic value, entertainment value and stage-ability. The report insists on the observance of the Aristotelian plot, the psychological three dimensional character associated with western realist/naturalist plays, and universal themes such as murder and intrigue that are easily deduced. On the aspect of theme, the report discourages the exploration of domestic issues like mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law

squabbles as well as political themes. In terms of the utilisation of space and properties, anything that cannot be realistically depicted on stage should not be part of the play. The report states that writing scenes that are unstageable such as 'use of vehicles or bombs blowing up people and big traffic accidents' reveals lack of knowledge of stage limitations. However, this is what we exactly find in Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* (1992) which I will discuss shortly. What the adjudicators are calling for is an essentially realist well made play. As theatre has got different ways of performing reality there is no limit to what can be put on stage through the medium of theatre. All these points contained in the report are reinforced by another NTO consultant Bertha Msora (1990: 1-8) in her workshop paper which lists the characteristics of a good play as based on a good story, original, holds attention, has conflict, unity of time and place, dramatic tension, cause-to-effect and resolution. What all these examples point to is the fact that any writing which deviated from the bourgeois illusionistic model was going to be failed by the adjudicators as I suspect happened in 1983 and 1984. In fact, the report is unambiguous about its rejection of modernist techniques, 'the stream of consciousness technique preferred by some playwrights is still too metaphysical for Zimbabwean audiences' (NTO 1993b: 3).

The adjudicators also had a scathing attack on playwrights of African languages expression

Many writers clearly manifest their lack of exposure to playwriting skills. This is prevalent among those who either write in Shona or depict typically black Zimbabwean life. It has to be frankly pointed out that these need to be taught the basic principles of playwriting. (NTO 1993b: 3)

The question perhaps to be asked is which principles? While, indeed there may have been some problems with Shona plays, the weaknesses that adjudicators go on to point out reveal their lack of understanding of African performance and the African world in general. Some of the weaknesses include the following: lack of unities of time and place, too many characters, long scenes and the use of figurative language. Most of what the report lists as weaknesses are in fact markers of African performances. Ceremonies, weddings, rituals and group actions such as those in *Vakasiwa Pachena*, *The Honourable MP*, *Njuzu* and *The Wretched Ones* constitute the staple of alternative theatre and normally require more characters that are less developed than one would find in a typical western illusionistic play. Again, the Shona language especially as it is used in rural areas is naturally figurative, idiomatic and metaphorical and its reflection as it is used in typical circumstances cannot be considered a weakness. While arguing about the African novel, Chinweizu et al (1980: 17-33) explain the African cosmography and how it frustrates unities of time and place demanded in western novels. Chinweizu's vision on time and place can be applied to counter arguments raised by the report on the same subject.

Just as reception of theatrical texts was contradictory at publishing houses and playwriting competitions depending on the position and disposition of agents in the field of theatre, so was reception of performances at theatre festivals. There were two kinds of festivals- NTO run and ZACT run festivals. Reception of theatre at these festivals also followed the chosen aesthetic tastes of each one of them. Even though the public attended NTO festivals, their reception of plays was less important than the adjudicators' reception. An imported theatre personality assumed to be all-knowing on all matters of theatre watched all theatre entries and wrote a review of each play which *The Herald* and *Sunday Mail* featured in theatre columns. Using this reception system, theatre was created to win trophies where a single individual had the power to confer or deny consecration. The adjudication process contradicted the ethos of the ZACT run NDMDF where community participation in the theatre event was the core reason for creating theatre. Chifunyise and Kavanagh point out the Eurocentric reception lens of NTO festivals and how they prejudiced locally written plays.

The groups that have a genuine community base not only face estrangement from this community [white] by entering the festival; they also submit their art to an aesthetic that is derived from alien and often unsuitable traditions, resulting in either humiliating failure or, even more dangerous, a seductive success. (1988: 11)

Just like the NTO Play of the Year Competition, the NTO festivals received theatre performances through western bourgeois theatre standards under the following categories: Best actor, Best actress, Best mime and movement, Best comedy, Best technical, Most improved actress, Most improved actor and Best all round achievement.

The plays that entered the NTF were 99 percent commercial European and or American plays (Plastow 1996, Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988). Consequently, adjudicators favourably received those performances that displayed excellence in established mainstream European standards. Alternative theatre companies had to comply with those standards and the result was humiliating failure of black groups which could not successfully imitate European standards or seductive success in the case of compliance. Although The People's Theatre Company, an all-black cast and performing Zimbabwean written plays, participated in almost all NT Festivals, it never won a prize except in 1981 when Ben Sibenke's *My Uncle Grey Bonzo* won in the best all round achievement category (Plastow 1996: 167). In the 1983 Festival the only black theatre group which entered an English play *Macbeth* did not win a prize in any of the categories (ibid: 167). Those theatre groups that usually entered a European play and successfully complied with European standards were consecrated. In the 1982 National High Schools Theatre Festival, Chinhoyi High School entered *Julius Caesar* with an entirely black cast and won the prize for best all round achievement, a record which was repeated by

Rakodzi School of Marondera in 1984 when it entered Peter Shaffer's *The Royal Hunt for the Sun* (Granger 1984: 12). Performing in typical western bourgeois productions, Walter Muparutsa became the first black actor to win the NTF Best actor award in 1982 (Plastow 1996: 167), a record that was repeated in 1985 when Livias Dube won in the best comedy category. Apart from these five paltry awards over a period of six years that went to the few blacks who participated in the NTO festival, all other awards went to white theatre companies, performers and producers. During the first six years after independence, the reception of theatre at the NTF was through the jaundiced eyes of British adjudicators with a penchant for London West End aesthetics. Before 1986 the NTO invited Richard Warner and subsequently Gordon House¹⁰¹ to adjudicate performances at the NTF. Both of them were accomplished British theatre makers in the West End and were invited precisely for those qualities that the NTO wanted enforced in all its productions.

However, the bourgeois theatrical canon came under fire in 1986 when the NTO invited Chris Hurst to adjudicate the NT Festival. Hurst was a Rhodesian who escaped to Britain in the 1970s, perhaps running away from conscription and pursued a career in theatre while in exile. Unlike Richard Warner and Gordon House, Hurst was a fringe theatre practitioner. Earlier on in 1984 Hurst had appeared on a ZBC radio 1 programme called *Spectrum* urging all Zimbabweans to produce indigenous plays and break away from what he called 'foreign theatre', drawing veiled criticism from Denis Granger, a conservative theatre columnist (Granger 1984: 12). Indeed, when Amakhosi, a black theatre company from the city of Bulawayo, entered Cont Mhlanga's *Nansi le Ndoda* [Behold the Man] (unpublished), Chris Hurst who was adjudicating the 1986 Festival gave it first prize and the performance was received enthusiastically throughout Zimbabwe and Botswana (Plastow 1996: 176).

Hurst¹⁰² did not return to England, but stayed behind to work with Amakhosi on the play *Children on Fire* (unpublished) which again won first prize in the 1987 NTF edition together with another multi-racial theatre company – ZAP - which entered Andrew Whaley's *Platform Five* (unpublished)

¹⁰¹ Richard Warner was educated at Oxford, joined RADA where he taught various acting courses and participated in various West End productions. He is remembered in Zimbabwe for having said that he had never seen a black cast performing in a show after watching the People's Theatre Company's entry to the NTF (Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988: 11). Gordon House went to Cambridge, joined the BBC in 1971 and became the Executive Producer of World Service Drama Unit. As of 1985, he had directed over 100 radio plays working with most British film and stage stars of the period (Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988: 25).

¹⁰² Christ Hurst worked with Amakhosi Theatre Company on NTO salary. It is clear that when Susan Hains became chairperson of NTO she sought to revolutionise the Eurocentric aesthetic by encouraging black participation and even sponsoring their theatre companies. Hains attacked the NTO in public forums for being 'a disgustingly racist organisation' (Plastow 1996: 165). Susan Hains' own training manuals (1993) reveal a radical departure from bourgeois conservatism of the early to mid 1980s to syncretism.

(Chifunyise and Kavanagh (1988: 14). White theatre companies responded to the dominance of local plays and black or multi-racial theatre companies by announcing their non-participation in the 1988 National Theatre Festival. By 1991, white theatre companies that entered the festival were outnumbered by black ones by almost three times. Only 15 out of 53 theatre groups were white (Rohmer 1999: 86). In 1988 a multi-racial cast of the Meridian Theatre Company won the NTF award with Andrew Whaley's *Nyoka Tree* (unpublished) which utilised an admixture of Ndebele, Shona, Rhodesian English slang, *pungwe* dances and songs. Andrew Whaley's other play *The Rise and Shine of Comrade Fiasco* (1990) won the NTF prize in 1990. Black and/or multi-racial theatre companies producing local plays as opposed to western plays dominated the festival causing a serious threat to the Eurocentric canon and white captains of industry responded by unplugging financial support resulting in the demise of NTF in 1994. Industry also withdrew similar support from the National High Schools Theatre Festival, but donors – SIDA, Dutch embassy and Monte Carlo Theatre – filled the vacuum but did not continue with financial support beyond 1998. At the time of writing this thesis, the NTO exists only in name and ceased its operations around 1999.

On the other end of the field of theatre were theatre institutions that supported the new government cultural policy of 'promot[ing] mass-oriented, democratic, non-racial socialist cultural transformation' (Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988: 34). These included the University of Zimbabwe, ZACT and the government department of Art and Culture. The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, then headed by Stephen Chifunyise, propagated cultural policies and guidelines which the National Arts Council through ZACT implemented. This coterie was in competition with the NTO and ran an alternative National Dance, Music and Drama Festival (NDMDF) on a non competitive basis. I look at how the audience, that includes reviewers, received theatre productions at this festival. Unlike the Eurocentric standards of the NTO national festival, Chifunyise and Kavanagh evaluated performances through Marxist eyes and labelled the 1987 ZACT national festival 'a socialist arts festival' (1988: 37), although it is not clear what a socialist festival is or ought to be.

The strictures that festival organisers brought to bear on the theatre makers altered the identity of theatre during the period. The plays had to be relevant and relevance in Zimbabwe at that time meant that thematically plays had to deal with typically Zimbabwean or African issues expressed in Zimbabwean languages and utilizing indigenous performative modes as the dominant media. Thus for example, in the 1987 ZACT national festival only one play *Breaking Branch* (n.d) was Kenyan and all the other eight plays were authored or workshopped by Zimbabweans as opposed to western plays in the early days of NTO. If the NTO in its early days failed Zimbabwean authored plays, ZACT

national festival reviewers were, on the other hand, unkind to performances that slavishly imitated bourgeois illusionistic theatre standards. Mkoba Teachers' College Drama Club, for example, brought a production entitled *Kunyengerwa Hakuna Akura* (unpublished) to the 1987 edition and Chifunyise and Kavanagh criticised the club's obsession with illusionistic theatre techniques. Although the play was performed in Shona, produced collectively according to the ethos of socialist directing and dealt with a typical Zimbabwean domestic theme of trickery, Chifunyise and Kavanagh censured the production for being:

Restricted and constrained in many departments by rigid adherence to conventional theatre techniques ... [its] realisation [was] hampered by convention ridden theatre techniques which unfortunately have for so long imprisoned the dynamism of our creative personality and the expressiveness of traditional performing arts in our theatre. Each time these actors let go these conventional restrictions and spontaneously expressed the indigenous symbols of sadness, happiness and wisdom offered by rich and expressive Shona, the plot of their play became less ordinarily universal but significantly relevant to the Zimbabwean situation. (1988: 43)

The reviewers did not celebrate the double heritage of Mkoba Drama Club- western and African performance forms that they successfully utilised. The NTO funders and audiences also wanted to maintain European purism and did not take kindly to performances that destabilised that cultural hegemony. Thus the two forms of reception maintained their polarities in cultural production without being sensitive to the changed political realities in the country.

Mkoba Teachers' College Drama Club being the only exception, the reviewers were highly impressed by the other seven productions.¹⁰³ What made these productions impressive was, according to Chifunyise and Kavanagh, the ideological and political correctness of the material characterised by song, dance, poetry, mime and the use of Shona and Ndebele on stage. All the performances attempted in one way or the other to involve the audience as part of the performance and the reviewers were excited about opening up theatre to the working class and using its modes of expression which wasn't recognised during colonial times. Singling out Magijani's *Aluta* (unpublished), Chifunyise and Kavanagh pitched it as a play that has 'ideas, languages, theatre techniques and ideological orientation that characterise a trend of a type of theatre that is not only truly Zimbabwean but a revolution in itself' (1988: 37).

¹⁰³ Magijani's *Aluta* (unpublished) which was performed by Tsungubvi Primary School, Zvido Zvenyu Theatre's *Chirwirangwe* (unpublished), Moses Bhowa's *Ndizvo Here* (unpublished) performed by Nyanyadzi Secondary School Drama Club, Bulawayo Association of Drama Groups' *Osekulile Kakululwe* (unpublished), Rakodzi Drama Club's *Nyika Yaora Rutive* (unpublished), Pioneer Theatre Group's *Siyakuqheda Njani* (unpublished) and Willie Chigidi's *Imwe Chanzi Ichabvepi* (1986) which was performed by Kadoma Theatre Club (See Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988: 37).

Looking at the aesthetic standards with which the NTO and ZACT received performances it can be noted that theatre was (still) a site of struggle for dominance. However, the theatre field in which this cultural struggle occurred was occupied by the same creative and consuming agents. For example, whilst BADG was officially affiliated to NTO it brought its own group to ZACT national festival. Rakodzi Drama Club, for example, won a prize in the NTO National High Schools Theatre Festival in 1984 but participated in the NDMDF of 1987. Thus the boundaries set by the cultural belligerents only remained institutional and organisational policy while theatre groups moved across them undeterred. Theatre makers of the period used their own agency to choose what was best for the type of theatre that they wanted to create. Thus in the plays that I have analysed in this thesis there is a preponderance of texts which mixed indigenous elements with an Aristotelian theatrical frame to create syncretic theatre performances that are neither essentially African nor European. After the successful experiments of Meridian Theatre with Andrew Whaley's *Nyoka Tree*, *Chef's Breakfast* (unpublished) and Zimbabwe Arts Productions with Andrew Whaley's *Platform Five* as well as Amakhosi's awards from Cont Mhlanga's *Children on Fire* (unpublished), *Nansi le Ndoda* (unpublished) and *Workshop Negative*, most theatre makers moved away from the Afrocentrism demanded by ZACT and the Eurocentrism demanded by the NTO (in its early days) to a middle ground that celebrated and mocked both philosophies.

Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* (1992) as Case Study

In *Workshop Negative* and its performance text, Ray Graham, an ex-Rhodesian soldier finds himself working for Mkhize, the new black owner of a tool manufacturing company who himself joined the liberation struggle as a soldier, but ended up pursuing his intellectual work as a socialist political commissar in Cuba. It is performed on a minimalist set comprising a pair of drums representing the working places of two tool-makers, a table with an orange telephone and a mug of traditional brew. When the play opens, Mkhize is in the process of hiring Zulu to replace David Grey who died in a car accident. Interestingly, Zulu was a freedom fighter and trained together with Mkhize, but came back home to fight in the Zambezi Valley. When Ray sees Zulu he remembers that they had made contact during the war resulting in the capture and torture of Zulu who was dramatically rescued by his comrades in a shootout that killed eight Rhodesian soldiers and spared Ray who became a prisoner of war. It was Zulu's turn to torture and humiliate Ray. When Ray and Zulu face each other in the workshop after independence, those memories of the war become alive and they are performed in flashback in intriguing physical and total theatre. In the new working relationship, Ray and Zulu do not forgive each other and their relationship is dictated by their past throughout the performance. The production of tools slumps due to the fact that the two spend much of their time fighting

instead of working and for this reason Mkhize occasionally gets involved in the fight either to stop them from fighting or to push them to increase production. When pushed too far Ray and Zulu temporarily forget their enmity and join hands to fight Mkhize who they allege is exploiting them without commensurate salaries.

On a metaphorical level, the play is satirical. The workshop may stand for Zimbabwe of the 1980s. The physical fight between Ray and Zulu may be taken to mean the political, cultural and economic struggle between whites and blacks. The fight between Mkhize and Zulu may be taken to mean black on black violence in parts of Midlands and Matabeleland that resulted in the death of an estimated 20,000 people. Ray complains about the fighting between Mkhize and Zulu 'he is black and you are black. You speak the same language and you fight one another like animals' (35-6). This is glaringly satirical in the sense that the Minister of Defence during the civil war was Enos Nkala, a Ndebele who ironically deployed troops in Matabeleland and Midlands to terrorise his fellow people. When Ray fights Mkhize, Zulu is convinced that 'people in this workshop are mad' (56) and all three end up realising that the fighting is fuelled by statements that they say about each other and resolve to be more circumspect in future. Prime Minister Robert Mugabe often articulated inflammatory statements during the 1980s which he still does now towards Zimbabwean whites and the West. The country cannot move forward because its citizens are pulling in different directions. The performers physically dramatise this disunity by pulling each other in three different directions three times without success. They resolve that a new plan should be hatched which will harness all the different energies in one direction. The new plan thrives on 'all the ideas that the world has taught us, we put them together for the new plan' (59). This new plan ditches the West associated with capitalism and the East associated with socialism. The new plan is not going to be theoretical, but practical; based on notions of truth and reconciliation. All the three characters take turns to kneel down, raise their hands to God and take an oath to bury the past, stand up and cross a drawn line to become new persons. The government of Zimbabwe took it as an insult to socialism which exclusively rested on Karl Marx's theory of social development. The Zimbabwean government frequently mobilised history to speak against the white former coloniser and it wasn't prepared to forgo that history for purposes of reconciliation. When the play ends, each of the characters shouts to the audience for 'unity', 'peace' and 'reconciliation' and each of them asks a rhetorical question 'but is it easy?' in order to underline the impracticalities for some belligerents of achieving that unity, peace and reconciliation.

For a play that is historically located in the 1980s, Mkhize is an embarrassment to the socialist government. ZANU PF's socialist leadership code prohibited its leadership from owning a business or

shares in any business venture or to receive more than one salary. It further prohibited its leadership from taking any leadership position in a private firm or to own real estate or more than one house for purposes of earning rents. It moreover criminalised the owning of more than 50 acres of land by its leadership and the loaning of money to any second party for purposes of earning interest (see Chunga and Ngara 1985: 4-5). Contrary to this leadership code, Mkhize is chairman of five boards of different organisations and a shareholder in six high profile companies. As a party leader of note – member of the Politburo, Member of Parliament and a member of the National Defence Council- Mkhize has contravened the leadership code in many areas. He owns three farms and a fleet of four top brand cars contrary to the 50 acre limit per leader. Indeed, Zulu describes Mkhize aptly;

With his stinking mouth, he is for socialism, yet in this workshop he is just the opposite. *UMkhize! Skelema* [Mkhize! He is dangerous]. Dangerous daytime socialist and night-time capitalist. I wonder why some people just can't do as they say. ((1992: 30)

Mkhize's hypocrisy resembles that of Shakespeare's Pofend in Musengezi's *The Honourable MP* (1983/4). Zulu and Ray's increased frustration with corruption of political leadership resonates with Nyika's anger at politicians amassing wealth while the ordinary person wallows in poverty in Magwa's *Njuzu* [Water Spirits] (1991).

Although the Zimbabwean government chose to see only the part that attacked it, the play itself spares no one. Like Marechera's *The Coup* (1984), *Workshop Negative* exposes the destabilising acts of white corruption where Ray uses Mkhize's material resources to make tools that he exports to South Africa through the former owner of the company Rowland. This is despite economic sanctions imposed on apartheid South Africa by SADC and the international community. Ray's racist attitude is revealed through his interactions with Zulu and Mkhize. He has a negative view of Africans which when he is pressed to account for blames on his upbringing where 'we were taught how to see. We were taught to live in Africa and see Africa and Africans as we do. We were taught to see the world as black and white' (39). The whites who are epitomised by Ray Graham have refused to accept the hand of reconciliation extended to them by boycotting national celebrations and taking an aloof attitude to national problems and Zulu is impatient with Ray for this. Zulu answers back to this racism by a neo-racism which views all whites as inherently bad and deserving no share in the national economy. Zulu successfully lobbies Mkhize not to sell his business to Ray, 'this workshop must not slip back into white hands. Your ancestors, your generation, will both curse you' (52).

Unlike other politically correct plays that appealed to either ZACT or NTO audiences, *Workshop Negative*, with the exception of the state, was enthusiastically received by both white and black

audiences. The state through its institutions ZACT and NACZ declared it 'unsuitable' (*The Herald* 1987: 16) and denied it the clearance to tour Botswana and Zambia. When *Workshop Negative* toured Matabeleland the response was overwhelming. Chris Hurst who played Ray Graham remembers the play's reception at Wankie Colliery in Matabeleland North:

When we used to play in Makokoba- you need all your energy to control that audience... I remember touring with Amakhosi. We would go into a beer hall in Wankie Colliery. And the audience would shout all the way through it and talk to each other about the play. (Rohmer 1999: 80)

Reception of *Workshop Negative* was not only warm in Matabeleland, but all over the country such as Chipinge, Chiredzi and Murewa- representing Manicaland, Masvingo and Mashonaland provinces respectively (*The Sunday Mail* reporter 1987: 17). After assessing most of the performances of *Workshop Negative*, Chifunyise and Kavanagh conclude that Amakhosi 'has attained impressively high artistic standards and much popularity with grass roots audiences' (1988: 14). Makusha Mugabe who watched *Workshop Negative* at Stoddart Hall in Mbare Township, Harare remarked that '[t]he play [*Workshop Negative* was] presented in the most exciting and natural agit-prop style and show[ed] the maturity of an author who [was] comfortable with his subject' (1987: 16). Concluding his review, Mugabe turned to the content of the play which highly impressed him:

Workshop Negative is in a class on (sic) its own as a play. It rises above other plays I have seen here by asking and answering what to do about 'now', while delivering a message that is bound to stick in the minds of all who see the play, that of strength and unity. (1987: 16)

Workshop Negative played to full houses across the country and audiences were demanding further shows especially at Murewa Cultural Centre (Chifunyise and Kavanagh 1988: 16).

Workshop Negative was also well received by an intellectual audience at the University of Zimbabwe where it played to a 'packed house' (*Sunday Mail* 1987: 17) in the Beit Hall. Like the Wankie Colliery audience, a lot of statements raised in the play 'brought continuous applause from the university audience' (*ibid*). A post-performance discussion in a plenary format comprising a panel of speakers, cast and students had been arranged by Robert McLaren, the University drama lecturer at the time to comment on the show. Cont Mhlanga recalls:

You could tell it was a day of judgement... I said to the guys 'this is not a play'. They said 'Yes Cont! From here we're all going to prison'. And I said 'it looks like it. So you just have to make a choice. We perform or we don't perform' ... so there was a 'performance' backstage ... Eventually we agreed ... And it was like a heavy show. After that there was silence. ... We realised that everything had been set up ... the panel just stood up one after another and we didn't even know they were panellists. Everyone in the panel was against us. They had like eight people. But funny enough, the whole student body stood alongside us as well as Susan Hains of NTO. And

the debate was hot. It went on till 12 midnight and it went out of the theatre to the streets. And we left the streets at about quarter to one. (Mhlanga 2008: Interview).

The students expressed solidarity with Amakhosi Theatre, as *Workshop Negative*, by this time, had been prohibited from touring Zambia and Botswana by the parent Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. According to *The Sunday Mail* (1987: 17) the audience raised their concern at why the play had been stopped from touring Zambia and Botswana.

The racial divide that seemed to dictate the aesthetic tastes of audiences was not a factor in the reception of *Workshop Negative*. Whereas other non-western performances had been poorly attended at Repts theatre throughout its history (Cary 1975, Rohmer 1999), *Workshop Negative* played to full houses throughout the week at its 1987 Repts run (*The Herald* 1987: 16). Denis Granger, *The Sunday Mail* columnist who had previously commented that African playwrights should ape western models, changed his thoughts after watching *Workshop Negative*. Commenting on the writing Granger (1987: 15) asserted that the play 'place[d] Cont Mhlanga in the forefront of contemporary Zimbabwean playwrights'. Turning to the performance of the text, Granger showered Mhlanga with praise:

Cont Mhlanga's direction is sure and compact, and the play's success is ensured by the strength of characterisation conveyed by Chris Hurst as Ray Graham, Mackay Tickey as Zuluboy and Thokozani Masha as the (sic) Mkhize. The realism of the fights between Hurst and Tickey is almost unbelievable and shows great technical ability and split second timing. Throughout, the acting was superb, and the climaxing and build had sure professional touch. A memorable performance and another milestone in our indigenous theatre. (Granger 1987: 15)

Indeed, the support for *Workshop Negative* was not only aesthetic appreciation by a predominantly white audience at Repts, but also financially. *Workshop Negative* was bankrolled by the white dominated NTO, the British Council, Anglo-American Corporation as well as individual audience members ranging from farmers to urban intellectuals (Chifunye and Kavanagh 1988: 14).

It was perhaps for this reason of being bankrolled by capitalists that the state thought the play was anti-socialism and moved in to control it. While audiences across the racial divide enthusiastically received *Workshop Negative*, the state proceeded to take action against it. When the play was performed especially in Harare, several arms of the state competed to have a stake in stifling *Workshop Negative*. The Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture asked for the script and according to Cont Mhlanga (2008: interview), they wanted to convey it to the secret service. It now became political control rather than legislative control as required by the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act (1967). A secret service agent called Munyaradzi was assigned to follow the goings-on at

Amakhosi Theatre (Mhlanga 2008: interview). After the chairman of the NACZ board, John Mapondera, and some of his staff members saw the last performance of *Workshop Negative* at Reps Theatre on a Saturday, they reached a decision the following Monday to declare it 'unsuitable'. This decision was endorsed by the parent Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture, although none of them had legal powers to do so. The power of banning a performance lay with the Censorship Board. The reason for *Workshop Negative's* cataloguing as unsuitable was the ministry's concern that 'the depiction of corruption in Zimbabwe [was done] through characters regard[ed] as being far-fetched and therefore render[ed] the play implausible and thus an attack on socialism itself' (*The Herald* editorial 1987: 17). Although Mhlanga was not physically abused in the same manner as Marechera, he was threatened with unspecified action by two state agents¹⁰⁴ if he didn't bring *Workshop Negative* to the University of Zimbabwe where a panel of assessors would help him to write responsibly. The Drama section, then headed by Robert McLaren, prepared for the show and kept calling Mhlanga to know if he would make it to Harare. Soon Stephen Chifunyise, of the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture and later Ngugi wa Mirii of ZACT became involved by calling Cont Mhlanga about a possible performance of *Workshop Negative* at the University of Zimbabwe (Mhlanga 2008: Interview). When Mhlanga agreed to perform the play, under pressure from the secret service, other stakeholders were invited to give the panel a semblance of democracy – Susan Hains of NTO, students and arts editors of *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Chronicle*. The CIO also attended the performance including Cain Mathema and Paul Themba Nyathi who were calling Mhlanga.

Although the audience across the racial divide wrote reviews and letters to state newspaper editors supporting the play, *The Herald* editorial harshly attacked *Workshop Negative* by linking its sponsorship by the British Council as revenge by the British.¹⁰⁵ Querying British interests in *Workshop Negative*, *The Herald* editorial quickly linked the play to British capitalist interests:

It will also be interesting to know why a department of a foreign mission [British Council] in Harare which protested to our Government when its leader was portrayed in the anti-imperialist play *Katshaa* during the NAM Summit last year [1986] found it necessary to support the promotion of *Workshop Negative* which carries, one may say, a message favourable to capitalists and imperialists. We find it hard not to

¹⁰⁴ In an interview with me, Cont Mhlanga revealed that the two state agents were Cain Mathema and Paul Themba Nyathi. Cain Mathema is the current ZANU PF governor of Bulawayo Metropolitan province. Mathema had written in 1985 a political play in Ndebele that explained the doctrine of socialism entitled *Silubhekise Ngaphi?* published by College Press. He was perhaps incensed by a play that countered his party's philosophy. Paul Themba Nyathi resigned from CIO and defected to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) when it began in 1999.

¹⁰⁵ Robert McLaren and Zambuko/Izibuko had performed *Katshaa* (1988) at the 1986 Non-Aligned Movement summit in Harare, which according to McLaren (1992: 99-100), mocked Thatcher, Reagan and Kohl's imperialistic exploitation of South African blacks. The British High Commissioner to Zimbabwe wrote a letter of protest to the Zimbabwean Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

believe that the idea was to use the play, no doubt unbeknown to Amakhosi Productions, to avenge the Katshaa performance at NAM Summit. (*The Herald* Editorial 1987: 17)

The Chronicle (a Bulawayo based newspaper) then edited by Geoffrey Nyarota was the only one that supported the play. Nyarota was later forced out of *The Chronicle* for his role in supporting dissenting voices and reporting on cabinet ministers' corrupt dealings in the Willowgate scandal (Nyarora 2006).

Conclusion

The theatre of the period developed a reflexive idiom which while struggling against strictures on culture imposed by the state and NTO worked to liberate the same culture by introducing new tastes and new creative methods. I have established the fact that audiences and readers consume texts according to received aesthetic tastes. If a dramatic text or performance does not quite follow the expectations of the reader or audience, the latter responds in various ways such as boycotting the 1988 National Theatre Festival by white theatre companies and subsequent withdrawal of funding or even booing down the performers or walking out as was the case with the Makokoba and University of Zimbabwe audiences. I have also established the fact that in the field of theatre, aesthetic competition is institutional. Institutions like ZACT, NTO, culture ministry, publishers, politicians and the legal system enforce aesthetic standards with which audiences invariably receive performances and dramatic texts and these institutions reward compliance and punish deviance. Because of the strictures that these institutions bring to bear on the playwright, performer and the performance, there is a tendency to create works that qualify for consecration. For this desire to be consecrated, which is one of the motivational reasons for creating theatre, theatre makers tend to follow a preferred style. However, the controlling forces are not absolute; there is room for resistance by theatre makers. The major achievement of endogenous strictures in fig 9.1 was to successfully dislodge the dominance of the Eurocentric illusionistic theatre standards by 1988 which in the process became a residual aesthetic. Socialist realism became the dominant marker of alternative theatre between 1980 and 1996 and this is the area that I have chosen to focus on in this study. Despite the limitations imposed by various agents in the field of theatre, this chapter has demonstrated that those limitations were not absolute. A modernist type of theatre, which however, only assumed an 'emergent' status during the period, emerged. This theatre is typified by Marechera's *Mindblast*, Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* and Andrew Whaley's *The Rise and Shine of Comrade Fiasco*. I suspect that this is now the dominant form in Zimbabwe and it would be an interesting area for another study. Finally, the dramatic text or the theatrical text is not something to be consumed without having an effect on the taste of the consumer. The text is clearly capable of

modifying the 'fore-understanding' inherent in the audience and therefore contributes to a new meaning of the performance. Judging by the multi-racial nature of audiences at HIFA, I also suspect that the old racialised tastes of the 1980s and early 1990s have now disappeared and have been replaced by a new cosmopolitan taste.

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CHAPTER 10: OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The Decline of Socialist Revolutionary Theatre

Towards the end of 1996 the dominant socialist revolutionary theatre started to decline, giving way to a new modernist aesthetic aptly named hit and run theatre (Zenenga 2011) or panic theatre (Wrolson 2009). This chapter accounts for the decline of socialist revolutionary theatre and then summarises the findings of this study. I end the study by recapping on the emerging trends of alternative Zimbabwean theatre.

I begin with exogenous factors and their alteration of the structure of feeling of Zimbabwean theatre makers and audiences. After the programme for change (*perestroika*) was introduced by Michael Gorbachev in 1986 in the Soviet Union, the super power finally crumbled in 1991. All satellite socialist/communist Eastern European countries followed suit. This had a knock-on effect on socialist African countries like Zimbabwe. While this was going on, Bernard Chidzero, the then Zimbabwean Minister of Finance, in his 1990 budget, announced the introduction of IMF/World Bank sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which reversed Zimbabwe's socialist thrust and geared the country towards an open market economy. While there were many positive developments such as availability of commodities, improvement of communication and infrastructure, ESAP ushered in a number of negative developments. Economic growth declined from 4 percent to an average of 0.8 percent between 1991-1995 (Muzondidya 2009; Makina 2010). As local industries and factories competed with foreign firms for markets in Zimbabwe, the consequences were much felt by the ordinary worker. Between 20,710 and 30,000 workers were retrenched by 1994. Playwrights and theatre makers of the period, sensitive to the plight of peasants, labourers and workers, shifted the focus of critique to the new government that allowed such an economic policy to bear on the lives of peasants and workers. The narrative preoccupations for new plays changed to accommodate the new circumstances.

The Zimbabwean crisis alienated theatre makers from the government resulting in the government withdrawing financial support from theatre groups. This had a negative impact on the growth of alternative theatre. The events of ESAP, poor governance and the worst drought in living memory (1991-2) coalesced into a crisis which began in 1997 and ended in 2008. On Friday 14 December 1997 the Zimbabwean dollar crumbled after President Robert Mugabe paid nearly 60,000 war veterans a gratuity of ZW\$50,000 (US\$5,000) each and a monthly allowance of ZW\$2,000 (US\$200) which had not been budgeted for. Thus the plight of ex-combatants which had enchanted

playwrights in yesteryears such as Nqobizitha in Ndhlovu's *The Return* and Tawanda in *The Rain of my Blood* is conclusively resolved, albeit at a great cost to the economy. Playwrights and theatre makers had two choices – to celebrate the achievements of government or to criticise it for lack of fiscal discipline. They chose the last option. Robert McLaren and the UZ Theatre students workshopped *The Darkness of Our Light* (1992) and *Simuka Zimbabwe* (1993) to criticise the government for its excesses. Stephen Chifunye followed suit with the *Retrenched Ones* (1993). The government responded by withdrawing financial support.

The withdrawal of funding backfired on government. NGOs filled in the vacuum created by the withdrawal of government financial support and theatre groups supported by donors abandoned their earlier political and socialist realist thrust to focus on issues dictated by the funders – such as gender/women's rights, human rights, democracy, voter education, civic education, environment, sex education and health related issues. This had a bearing on the direction, identity of theatre and consumption habits of the audiences. Donor funded productions normally open their doors to non-paying audiences. While financial benefits that accrue to the respective theatre group are satisfactory, it results in audiences not wanting to pay for commercial theatre. The role of donors is ambivalent in this regard.

The agit-prop techniques that mostly characterised socialist revolutionary theatre lost their power. Indeed, a number of scholars (Plastow 1996; McLaren 2000) document the lack of audience interest in these styles once the independence euphoria had disappeared. McLaren is more specific as he comments on the changes within his own theatre company:

In the five years of its existence Zambuko/Izibuko has already seen changed political strategy express itself in aesthetic form. The exciting agitprop techniques which characterised *Katshaa* and to a lesser extent *Samora Continua*, while effective and appropriate in the heady years of revolutionary and socialist optimism, began to lose their power. Other forms of political mediation such as satire and realism are called for. This found partial expression in the Mandela play, and it no doubt will be taken further in future productions. (1992: 110-1)

From an artistic point of view, the agit-prop plays employ the same techniques and themes over and over again. The Zimbabwean audiences withdrew their support for socialist realist theatre demanding other forms like satire and modernism.

Whilst the zeal and enthusiasm to create theatre was there, as evidenced by the proliferation of drama groups all over the country, this lack of funding affected groups in a profound way. The easiest way was to take theatre to the people in schools, colleges, and community halls to earn money from gate takings. This practice has been known to destroy the audience base. A constant

programme of theatre needs to be followed throughout the year in order to build an audience base. If groups visit theatre spaces haphazardly, they do not promote the building of a culture of attending theatre. Experience has taught us that theatre spaces which have been around for quite some time and have been able to provide theatre consistently throughout the year manage to build a faithful audience. Examples are the lavish theatre buildings in Harare, Masvingo, Bulawayo, Kadoma and Mutare which continue to create theatre for a predominantly white audience and have managed to retain a reasonable audience base. Even though the state and its municipalities have failed to build a single theatre space since independence, those black theatre companies which have managed to appropriate certain buildings/spaces for theatre such Rooftop Promotions and Amakhosi Theatre Company have been very successful in creating an audience for their theatre. This is evidence of the importance of an audience for any programme for promoting theatre.

Consumption of goods may be viewed as an activity that creates socio-cultural differentiation. Bourdieu (1984) developed a theory which asserts that consumption, while a material activity, is also a symbolic activity. What people consume and how they consume products gives or takes away from their symbolic capital. Commodities have social importance since they have identity value. Alternative theatre of the period was specifically created for the urban worker and rural peasantry and is therefore marked as a commodity for middle to low income people. If this theory is to be applied faithfully, it follows that an audience member is marked as belonging to the working class and peasantry by virtue of watching this type of theatre. This has a tendency of pushing away consumers who want to keep their class positions uncontaminated by the products that they consume. There are two substantive conclusions that can be reached on the basis of this theory.

The first one is that the theatre maker creates theatre with a particular imagined consumer - the poor. The consideration about the identity of the imagined consumer has a further impact on production in that the theatre maker customises the product or begins to tailor the product to meet the needs of the workers and peasantry. It is important that theatre must be cheap in order for the ordinary worker or peasant to watch it. Thus the theatre of the period is characterised by minimalism which allows a given theatre company to move from one venue to another without incurring exorbitant costs. This also explains the conscious recourse to the performer's body as a nucleus of performance as opposed to the reliance on other extraneous material for theatrical spectacle. All the plays that I have discussed in the preceding chapters have this quality. But the low cost of the ticket has been the worst enemy of alternative theatre of the period in the sense that groups have not been able to gain high profit margins for the sustenance of members and future

productions. This has led to the decline of not only socialist theatre, but the whole theatre movement outside the NTO.

Secondly, for the reason that socialist realist theatre is marked as a theatre for the workers and peasantry and for engaging thematically with motifs of exploitation and veiled racism, it alienated most white audiences and the black middle class who ironically have the capital to sustain the growth of alternative theatre. During a period in which the official policy was reconciliation, socialist revolutionary theatre employing agit-prop techniques aimed not at unity, but at sharpening class differences to mobilize working classes to take action against the bourgeoisie. While socialist realist theatre was perhaps successful in raising the consciousness of workers and peasants, it was not self-sustaining as its consumers were not rich enough to support it financially. And from a theoretical point of view, the black middle class and white audiences shunned it as it acted as a primary index of social status – associated with the urban and rural popular culture as opposed to high art.¹⁰⁶ Even during colonial times the black middle class identified with bourgeois culture which in Zimbabwean theatre is characterised by western musicals, classical plays, realism and naturalism.

Another factor which led to the decline of socialist theatre was the collapse of state institutions created to promote it. At the time of writing this chapter, the NTO only exists in name and has shut down all its operations. The same can be said of ZACT and ZIMFEP. Cultural nationalists who used to lead these institutions responded either by resigning or taking a back seat in the implementation of theatre programmes. Robert McLaren, for instance, resigned from the University of Zimbabwe to join voluntary service. Stephen Chifunyise left the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2000 to pursue voluntary work with Chipawo. Kimani Gecau left ZIMFEP in the early 1980s to join the English Department at the University of Zimbabwe where his interest shifted to African literature, media and communication. Ngugi wa Mirii withdrew the bulk of his efforts from the official sphere to the voluntary sector before his untimely death. All of them indicated to Plastow that 'they regretted the necessity for this move, as they were ideologically committed to supporting Mugabe's socialist state, but only so long as artists were allowed freedom of expression' (1996: 234).

¹⁰⁶ Some scholars, for example Du Gay et al (1997) do not subscribe to this theory of consumption as social differentiation. They argue that Bourdieu's structuralist argument appears to unduly constrain agency in consumers to the extent that consumers are rendered passive. Meaning does not reside in cultural products, but is produced by consumers through the use to which they put cultural products like theatre. Since there is nothing inherently poor about alternative theatre any class of audiences can watch it and attach its preferred meaning.

In the absence of national cultural institutions to guide the development of theatre, alternative theatre was left to chart its own path. The Zimbabwean government abandoned the initial Russian model of cultural nationalism. This involved the imposition from the top of cultural homogeneity through state action – ‘Russification’. However, in the absence or lack of effectiveness of state institutions which ensure that the programme reaches from top to bottom, there is a tendency to leave theatre to chart its own path without direction from the state. This gives birth to plurality of influences or cultural democracy which celebrates the variety of artistic tastes and forms. When theatre is left to the communities to do as they please, it becomes difficult to regulate the political ideology and aesthetic. The socialist realist aesthetic diminished in its prevalence in originally radical socialist theatre groups.

Reflections

The contact between Zimbabwean indigenous performative texts and western dramatic theatre produced alternative Zimbabwean theatre which is a hybrid of both performance forms. This is represented by the intersecting space in figure 4.1 which Bhabha calls the third space. In this study I hope to have established the fact that this third space is a space of dynamism that is constantly changing. Alternative Zimbabwean theatre can therefore not be essentialised. At the moment of encounter with western cultural forms in 1890 the third space did not exist. The cultural condition could be described as cultural islands characterised by separation and contrast. Western dramatic theatre then existed independently of African performance in the various forts and towns dotted around the country. After the defeat of the Shona and Ndebele in the Anglo-Ndebele (1893) war and First Chimurenga (1896-7), the third space was characterised by cultural imperialism. A new theatrico-cultural system was introduced which eclipsed the existing one. Isolated elements of the African performance traditions, however, remained present especially in remote areas where Rhodesian direct contact was minimal. Between 1968 and 1979 African playwrights supervised by the colonial Rhodesia Literature Bureau copied western dramatic theatre models, but with minute spaces of resistance. This trend continued as residual culture up to 1987 as evidenced by Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *She No Longer Weeps* (1987).

After independence in 1980 the third space was characterised by cross-culturalism or cultural creolisation which mixes two performance traditions to form one performance. The culture of the African indigene was hybridised, involving a dialectical relationship between British ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent alternative identities. Song, dance, mime, dialogue and indigenous suprasegmental features of speech were keyed and fabricated into the western dramaturgical frame to form syncretic theatre. All these elements were either de-

hierarchised or the indigenous texts dominated dramatic dialogue. During the same period, a new emergent theatre changed the nature of the third space. It was characterised by what can be called cultural cosmopolitanism characterised by absorption, fusion and interweaving of various influences to create a modernist type of theatre. As Zenenga (2011) and Wrolson (2009) have indicated, this modernist cosmopolitan theatre is the dominant form in Zimbabwe.

A number of things can be noticed within the third space. Alternative theatre appropriated western dramatic theatre by creatively recombining it with indigenous texts in projects of counter-colonial resistance. The Zimbabwean theatre identities formed at each given period were not fixed. The emergent hybridity was not just a literary and/or performance device, but a political project. The decolonisation of theatre is an ongoing dialectic between British cultural systems and Zimbabwean subversion of them. Every theatre of a given period bears the stigma of its ancestry. Consequently, it is not possible to create or recreate a national style of theatre wholly independent of its historical implication in the British colonial enterprise.

With regards to the suitability of western dramatic theatre analytical models, I hope to have problematised them in this study. Theatre makers under the influence of this tradition tend to create theatre and analyse it from a single privileged view point which valorises dramatic theatre and condemns any form of deviance from the norm. When the dramatic theatre's analytical model is applied to theatrical texts that do not necessarily follow the dramatic tradition it finds them faulty. As Chinweizu et al (1980) have demonstrated, such theatrical texts are criticised for thin plots, or having no plot at all, undeveloped characters (flat characters), presentation as opposed to representation (immediacy/presence), unrealistic dialogue, problems in the handling and conception of time and space, preoccupation with protest and topicality, loose narrative structure and characters who lack adequate motivation. This study has critiqued the universalisation of Eurocentric norms by proposing a methodology and theory of analysing hybrid, post-linear, post-realist and postcolonial theatrical texts. I have demonstrated throughout the study the importance of cultural and theatrical contexts under which a theatrical event takes place and how those contexts have a role in production of meaning. This is not an analytical system for Africa, but for any play which refuses to abide by the established dramatic tradition. In other words, it is a polycentric approach to theatre and performance analysis.

From the evidence of the above chapters, alternative theatre of the period, especially of the dominant type, can be recognised by its major thrust of de-dramatisation of dramatic theatre. This is

achieved by a number of strategies. While alternative theatre maintained the dramatic tradition of plot/action/story with a beginning, middle and an end, it problematised other aspects of drama traditionally regarded as infallible in Zimbabwe. To the dramatic text (which altered to theatrical text) alternative theatre added song, dance, mime and indigenous suprasegmental features of speech such as whistling, shouts, yodelling and ululation. Through this process theatre is ceremonialised where the director or the creative collective take indigenous texts from their ritual contexts and add them to the theatrical text. They then valorise these texts for their spectacle and aesthetic quality. The meanings that these indigenous texts carry from their ritual origins are altered when they enter the western dramaturgical frame and implicitly also alter the western theatrical frame. Both of them decompose to form something new.

During the actual theatre event, alternative theatre is characterised by important key features. Since the theatrical text is made up of dramatic dialogue, dance, song and mime, there is a constant shift from psychological acting (representation) to presentational acting (performing). The result is that the three dimensional psychological characterisation is not maintained consistently. This juxtaposition of presentational and representational acting is what I have called de-psychologisation of actors. When performers sing and dance to the audience, they become non-matrixed actors or more aptly performers who perform very close to themselves as opposed to playing a character. The songs performers sing neither proclaim nor heighten the text as in the case of musicals, opera, singspiel, or operetta. Songs are separate texts on their own sung by performers out of character, but consonant with the theme of the play.

In performance, alternative theatre is also characterised by either parataxis/non-hierarchy or reverse dominance of indigenous texts. Whereas in dramatic theatre, the *mise en scene* is characterised by a system of texts grouped in a complex hierarchy where dramatic dialogue predominates other texts, alternative theatre is marked by either de-hierarchisation of elements or the dominance of indigenous texts. In a performance text which favours de-hierarchisation, dramatic dialogue, song, dance and mime gain equal weighting in performance and the paratactic valency leads the texts to be experienced simultaneously without any of them framed or marked as dominant. Other alternative performance texts however key in and fabricate song, dance and mime into the western theatrical frame but the indigenous texts are marked as dominant.

During live performance, alternative theatre is marked by a condition which Boal (1979) calls 'metaxis' where the fictive world on the stage physically and emotionally interacts with the real

world occupied by the audience. Alternative theatre subverts and democratises the theatre space by giving equal access, within the theatrical space, to performers and audience. When performers shift from psychological acting to presentational acting they exude a present-ness and immediacy which takes them into real time and life. Consequently, the audience who reside in the real world join the performers who have intruded into their world. Thus the irruption of the real into performance aids the audience-performer interaction.

In terms of language, alternative Zimbabwean theatre of the period is recognised by its use of plurilingualism; that is deploying all Zimbabwe's three national languages – Shona, Ndebele and English- in a single theatrical text. In cases where English dominates the theatrical text, English is acculturated to the new African context through a process of de-Anglicisation. This acculturation to the African context is a form of resistance to the purism of English as advocated by proponents of conservatism. This study has demonstrated the use of relexification, productive hybridization, pidginisation and African suprasegmental features of speech as means to both affirm and resist English.

Finally, alternative Zimbabwean theatre is politically engaged. It represents the social, political and economic interests of women, peasants, and workers. For this reason it is a democratic, peasant, proletarian and politically committed theatre. Such a theatre is not based on a party-dominated, rigid ideology, but is one which firmly takes the side of the subaltern.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A (Zimbabwean Drama Since 1958)

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Appendix B: Pungwe Slogans

Viva ZANU

Viva

Pamberi nehondo

Pamberi!

Pamberi neZANLA

Pamberi!

Pamberi nekunzwisisa

Pamberi!

Pamberi nekubatana

Pamberi!

Pasi nevatenges

Pasi!

ZANU

Iwe neni tine basa!

Icho

Charira!

Kupiko?

KuZimbabwe!

[Forward with ZANU

Forward!

Forward with the war

Forward!

Forward with ZANLA Forces

Forward!

Forward with understanding

Forward!

Forward with Unity

Forward!

Down with sell-outs

Down!

ZANU

You and I have work to do together!

Hear hear hear!

The rocket has exploded!

Where?

In Zimbabwe

Appendix C: Pungwe Farewell Song

Soloist: Vana mai tave kuparadzana hoye

Chorus: Tave kuparadzana

S: Vana baba tave kuparadzana hoye

Ch: Tave kuparadzana

S: Vana mujibha tave kuparadzana hoye

Ch: Tave kuparadzana

S: Vana chimbwido tave kuparadzana hoye

Ch: Tave kuparadzana

Munoendepi?

Tave kuparadzana

Tinoendavo

Tave kuparadzana

[Our mothers we are now parting yow

We are now parting

Our fathers we are now parting yow

We are now parting

Our *mujibha*¹⁰⁷ we are now parting

We are now parting

Our *chimbwidos*¹⁰⁸ we are now parting yow

We are now parting

Where are you going?

We are now parting

We also want to go with you

But we are parting

¹⁰⁷ *Mujibha* was war time term to refer to teenage boys and young adults who collaborated with guerrillas in intelligence gathering, carrying arms and mobilising masses.

¹⁰⁸ *Chimbwido* is the feminine term for unmarried women who performed similar roles including cooking and washing for guerrillas. They are now registered as war collaborators.