'The Politics of Design' in Community Theatre Circles:

A Comparative Analysis of the Creative Design Processes

Employed by Intuba Arts Development in *Tears of Death* (2013)

and Bambelela Arts Ensemble in *Just Because* (1999; 2013).

By

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of

Master of Arts in Drama and Performance Studies,

University of KwaZulu-Natal (Howard College), Durban

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DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

I, ...Nkululeko Sibanda...., declare that

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As the candidate's Supervisor, I agree to the submission of this dissertation.

Professor Mervyn McMurtry

Acknowledgements

Dedication

To Noe, My Angel

And

Nkue Junior, My Inspiration.

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27 June 2013

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Dear Mr Sibanda

Protocol reference number: HSS/0507/013M
Project title: Trading Places: 'The Politics of Design' in Community Theatre Circles: A Comparative Analysis of the Creative Design Processes employed by Intuba Arts Development in *Tears of Death* (2013) and Bambelela Arts Ensemble in *Just Because* (1999;2013).
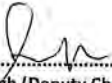
NO- RISK APPROVAL

In response to your application dated 4 June 2013, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Deputy Chair)
Humanities & Social Science Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Prof M McMurtry
cc Academic Leader: Prof Bernard De Meyer
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INSPIRING GREATNESS

Abstract

This dissertation positions the 'politics of design' at the centre of scenographic practice within the community theatre circles. The dissertation argues that the understanding of the 'politics of design' enables community theatre groups to develop designs that serve the specific needs and objectives of their productions. This dissertation hypothesizes that the practice of scenography by community theatre groups can be enhanced and enriched through mastering the politics of design. Mastering the politics of design enables theatre practitioners to understand design theory, apply it in practice and use the design terminology correctly.

The dissertation has two components: the creative project and the theoretical reflex paper. The creative project is made up of two productions: *Tears of Death* (2013) by Intuba Arts Development and *Just Because* (1999; 2013) by Bambelela Arts Ensemble. The main performance of *Tears of Death* was at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown from the 27th of June and 7th of July 2013 while that of *Just Because* by Bambelela Arts Ensemble was presented on 20th and 22nd of August 2013 in Bulawayo. The reflection paper will focus on documenting and comparatively analysing the design processes, approaches, influences and the "politics of design" (Quesenbury 2004: 2) at play within the community theatre group case studies.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Scope of the Study

This dissertation seeks to explore the "politics of design" (Quesenbury 2004: 1) in community theatre circles using Durban-based Intuba Arts Development and Bulawayo-based Bambelela Arts Ensemble as case studies. The term 'politics' in this context is used to refer to "the process and conduct of decision making for groups" (Quesenbury 2004: 2). Through exploring the "process and conduct of decision making" (Quesenbury 2004) during the creative design process of *Tears of Death* (2013) by Intuba Arts Development and *Just Because* (1999; 2013) by Bambelela Arts Ensemble, this dissertation will interrogate various politics that are at play, such as the "politics of space, corporate survival, questions and access" (Quesenbury 2004: 4) within the community theatre performance sector. Furthermore, that interrogation will necessitate the analysis of the socio-political, cultural and economic 'landscapes' in which these two groups operate.

Whitney Quesenbury (2004: 1) raises a useful and provocative notion in her use of the phrase, the "politics of design". Quesenbury, a retired Broadway lighting designer and now an interface designer and usability specialist, uses the term politics to denote a "process and conduct of decision making" (2004: 2). As a commodity design consultant, Quesenbury seeks to develop a "user-centered approach to design that puts those users in the middle of the process, working with them throughout the process to understand their requirements and to evaluate the success in meeting the usability goals defined for the product" (2004: 2). This dissertation seeks to appropriate this approach to product and commodity design and apply it to theatre design in community theatre based performances. These ideas raised by Quesenbury present new ground for exploration related to design practice within the community theatre performance sector.

Furthermore, Quesenbury's ideas relating to the politics of design provide this dissertation with a theoretical framework to challenge the notion that major problems, in design, are not the "methods or techniques" of design, but the "unmastered politics of design" (2004: 3). The challenges faced by design within community theatre circles will be explored through engaging in lighting and set design processes and presenting a complete design for the productions. The dissertation will document and analyze how the "politics of space, access and corporate survival" (Quesenbury 2004: 4) influence the design process in relation to Quesenbury's notion of the "unmastered politics of design" (2004: 3).

The first case study is centred on Intuba Arts Development, a community theatre group based in KwaMashu, one of Durban's populous and largest high density suburbs (Larlham 1985). Intuba Arts Development is a Durban based community theatre operating from the KwaMashu YMCA hall. The group draws its membership from the greater KwaMashu and Umlazi high density townships. These township suburbs in South Africa were assured of arts development, skills development and proper arts facilities (Van Graan and Du Plessis 1998) after the change of government in 1994. The June 1996 Arts and Culture White Paper for South Africa (in Van Graan and Du Plessis 1998) addresses the development of infrastructure, networks and support mechanisms for township-based theatre groups. These are highlighted as the major benchmarks towards developing community theatre in the townships, peri-urban and rural areas (van Graan and du Plessis 1998). Intuba Arts Development has undergone top leadership change over time which led the group to change names from Ubuntubesizwe (meaning the *moral fibre of the nation*) Arts Development to Ubuntu Arts Development and finally to Intuba Arts Development. Such transformations have affected the decision making process and offers the researcher an opportunity to explore its impact on design practice trends. This community theatre group and its location, therefore, present this dissertation with varied politics that need to be examined and interrogated.

Bambelela Arts Ensemble has been in existence for the past two decades in Bulawayo. *Bambelela* is an Ndebele term that means *keep going* or *hold on*. This community theatre group has been in existence for the past two decades operating from the Bulawayo City Council owned Matshobana Hall in Matshobana high density suburb. Bambelela Arts Ensemble has seen older group members leave and/or retire while a younger generation has joined to continue the vision of the group. This presents this research with a different dimension from that of Intuba Arts Development. While Intuba Arts Development's transformation has been continued by the same members, Bambelela Arts Ensemble's has seen a new different generational group come into play.

The Intuba Arts Development play, *Tears of Death,* is a harrowing story of a small village in Africa that is overtaken by crime and war. Women and children become the victims of this war, some are brutally murdered, and some are raped while some are maimed. People are unfairly sentenced and brutally executed by a kangaroo court led by former liberation fighters Zembe and Sosha. A young graduate Mholi Ngcobo, son to Mr and Mrs Ngcobo, who are murdered on their way back from receiving a Nobel Peace Prize, challenges the constitutionality and relevance of the kangaroo court in the

society. Ultimately the dead rise up to confront the leaders of the war and kangaroo court, to prove their innocence.

Bambelela Arts Ensemble's *Just Because* is a community initiative that sought to challenge the community leaders, non-governmental organisations and the government on the continued rise of spousal abuse in the city of Bulawayo. Cultural practices and beliefs that exploit and expose women to abuse, such as the belief that beating a wife is a way of showing love, are explored and challenged. Based on factual evidence from newspaper articles, police report statistics and civil society organisation's reports, the play explores the theme and definition of what constitutes a home. As a means of engaging and reaching a large audience, the group entered the play in different competitions and festivals. The group developed partnerships with a number of non-governmental organisations that sought to use theatre in their community conscientization and education drive.

The collaboration with Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble forms the creative component of this study. The creative project will involve the researcher collaborating in lighting and set design with Intuba Arts Development in *Tears of Death*. Intuba Arts Development's *Tears of Death* has been performed at various local drama competitions as well as the National Arts Festival (2013) in Grahamstown, which offered insights into the design decisions, approaches, influences and processes that this community theatre group undertook. These production runs created opportunities for the research component as different theories and approaches to design interrogated, were put into practice. With regards to Bambelela Arts' *Just Because*, the researcher worked with the group in Bulawayo on a revival that was performed in different spaces in the townships. Although the dissertation focuses on the original 1999 production, the revival will be used as a means to interrogate and examine the politics of design currently operating within the community theatre circle in Zimbabwe.

This study therefore seeks to engage these two case study groups to answer these questions: How does this new generation in Bambelela Arts Ensemble take up design? What makes the new design different from the original production (if it is) or what makes the group retain the original design (if they do not change it)? How does this new or original design augment the *Just Because* 2013 narrative? How is the story of *Tears of Death* represented through design? What are the design influences at play in the process of design at Intuba Arts Development? How has the transformation in leadership and membership affected the design endeavours by these community based groups? How have the transformations that happened in both case study groups affect the group's design processes? The contrast between Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble's transformations presents

different perspectives to the 'politics of design' for comparative analysis purposes.

Community theatre in this dissertation is used to refer to what Peter Larlham (1985: 63) calls "committed theatre". He notes that committed theatre is concerned with social and political change. Ogah Steve Abah (in Layiwola Edele 2000: 72) further adds that community theatre is "the theatre of the people, talking to the people about their own problems, in their own language, on their own terms and using their own artistic forms". While such scholars such as Zakes Mda (1993), Christoper Kamlongera (1989) and David Kerr (1995) among others interchangeably use community theatre with theatre-for-development, drama-in-education, and theatre-in-education, this research will not seek to further this debate but make a distinctive use of Larlham's definition as its basis of argument. This thesis will further argue, in Chapter 3, that community theatre finds its roots in the struggle for independence in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the dissertation will argue that the community theatre produced by these two case studies takes a different form from the ones taken by theatre-for-development, drama-in-education and theatre-in-education among other variants of popular theatre.

Community theatre, therefore, is a theatre that makes use of the resources of the people (community), devised by the community and understood by the community. The community is at the centre of all the activities that these community based theatre groups undertake. It is committed to telling the stories of the community, through the eyes of the community and with the participation of the larger community, and challenging domination and appropriation of its cultural traditions through means of performance. In this light, the performance styles and design choices become a reflection of the influences of the larger community on the process of play development, design and presentation. This type of theatre does not follow the populist trend that is the core of theatre-for-development, nor does it take the elitist approach of professional theatre companies. Committed theatre finds its roots in the liberation struggle in South Africa and Zimbabwe. This will be further explained and developed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 as the study traces the development of community theatre back to the colonial era both in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The continued production of analytical research based literature on community theatre (Kamlongera 1989; Mda 1993; Kerr 1995; Nicholson 2005) that explores the didactic and crowd pulling power of the popular arts and success stories of heavily funded non-governmental organization projects that seek to mobilise, educate and raise awareness about certain phenomena through popular arts provides gaps that this dissertation seeks to explore. These

scholars mainly seek to evaluate the success of the theatre-for-development project's ability to use popular arts as a mobilising and information dissemination tool. However, while acknowledging the use of popular art forms in the case study performances, this dissertation seeks to interrogate the creative visual aesthetics as used in case study community theatre group productions. Furthermore, these scholars tend to overlook the contribution of set, costume, sound and lighting designs in their analysis of the process of message creation and dissemination. It is against this background that this dissertation seeks to explore and interrogate the 'politics of design' within the community theatre performance sector.

Furthermore, scholars such as Kamlongera, Mda, Ross Kidd and Kerr write from a project implementer perspective. Kamlongera (1989: 439) quotes Kidd (1981) who notes that the *Laedza Batanai* project in Botswana was "a non-formal education project […] which attempted to follow a Freirean model". One of the key features of this programme (*Laedza Batanai*) was the use of popular theatre as the medium for encouraging participation, raising issues, fostering discussion and promoting collective action. Michael Etherton (1989: 440), in Kamlongera, discussing his farm project *Wasona Wamona*, further says that

> the realization that the real media for disseminating scientific information helpful to rural African communities are the so-called folk media: masquerades, drumming and dancing, story-telling and the songs of the wandering praise-singers […] which make the community development message so immediate and pertinent emphasizing the basic goals of participation and self-reliance.

Michael Etherton's 'realization' makes him concentrate on folk media and indigenous languages as the major means of communicating information over and above the visual aesthetics that come with the performances of the folk media. Folk media in this study refers to masquerades, which are highly reliant on costumes and make up, drumming and dancing, storytelling and the songs. The performance of masquerades, dance and songs demand decisions about what type of costumes will be worn, the types of drums to be played and the kind of music that needs to accompany the songs and storytelling. This speaks to design based decision making and considerations. Kamlongera (1989:441) goes on to note that, with reference to Etherton's *Wasona Wamona*, "all they cared about was the message" which is constructed and conveyed through the lyrical power of the folk language. This over emphasis on the power of the lyrics and popular indigenous languages overshadows the role played by design in these performances as well as its communicative abilities. This creates the gap that this research seeks to explore.

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Most of the theatre-for-development projects run by scholars, such as Kamlongera, Kidd and others, use community theatre in an interventionist manner. This makes the community a ground for testing theory frameworks, as these are introduced and taught to the community in the course of the project. In so doing, these intellectuals become a form of "politics" themselves, influencing community theatre trends. However, this dissertation will not seek to prescribe any one theory but rather interrogate how Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble put their own learned design theories and the effects thereof into practice.

1.2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

According to Peter Arnott (1997) design is the process of conceiving and executing a plan. The term 'plan' refers to the "creative design process through which a performance is conceived and presented" (Smith and Parker, 2002:68). Harvey Smith and Wilfred Parker (2002:70) define design as entailing the

> planning of the quality and intensity of lights that reveal a performance, selection and styling of set and furniture and consideration of the actors' costumes, manipulat[ion] [of] space in terms of its visual, auditory and all its sensual aspects in order to transform the text as well as the director and fellow artists' views and thoughts into an audible and visible expression for the audience.

This definition of design is made in relation to fully fledged European and American professional theatre companies that have full time design staff and technical and workshop facilities. The professional theatre tradition in most African states is modelled around European and American traditions due to colonialism (Desai 1990). However, while the definition by Smith and Parker encapsulates the processes and procedures in executing design, the question that remains is: Is it applicable to community theatre groups in Southern Africa?

Arnott and Smith and Parker's Eurocentric analysis of design makes its application very difficult in community theatre that uses open spaces, community centres and/or classrooms as their performance venues, with no design budgets, design specialists and lack of design practice. Exploring possibilities that lie between the theoretical and application of design as proposed by Arnott (1997) and Smith and Parker (2000) enables the exploration of Whitney Quesenbury's notion that, "perhaps it's not design – our methods and techniques – that are the problem, but that we have not mastered the politics of design" (2004: 3).

However Smith and Parker, in the above quotation, do speak to the specific, detailed and well considered design decisions that relate to set, sound and

lighting design. These specific and considered design decisions further relate to, and in the process reveal a varied politics of design as influences emerge, identities are cemented and expressions are made. This provides for an informative inquiry into the understanding of design both within the commercial, professional and community theatre performance sectors in terms of the creative design considerations and process as well as the politics of design.

Michael Gillette (1997) offers an inquiry into the technical and practical aspects of design in an attempt to realize the aesthetic outlook of a theatre production. The practical and technical aspects noted involve the design idea, generation of a design style and concept and the implementation or translation of the design concept through different design processes to achieve an aesthetic visual performance. This inquiry is made with practical examples and demonstrations that relate to European and American professional theatre design processes and performances as well.

Smith and Parker (2002: 70) define a design idea as "the individual expression of the artistic imagination and technical ingenuity of the designer through the visual control of line, color and form". Smith and Parker hereby reveal that the design idea provides for the generation of the design style and concept as it governs the exploitation of the compositional attributes of any design undertaking. This inherently means that for one to achieve this "individual expression" there is need for a deeper understanding of the aspects of design, composition and the "technical ingenuity" to transform the ideas into practical visual spectacles. Consequently, this creates a challenge for community theatre practitioners, many of whom are not technically trained. Inadequate training poses a problem this study seeks to examine: What process do community based theatre groups follow in their design endeavors to achieve visual spectacle and communicate their developmental message? How do these community theatre groups develop their design ideas and transform it into a design concept?

While Arnott, Smith and Parker and Gillette's theories are evidently of fundamental importance to anyone in the performance industry, this thesis argues that these theories are of little significance to many community theatre practitioners. This is so, because many of the practitioners have not had the opportunity of attaining tertiary education, where these theories and their application are learnt and mastered in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Therefore, while these theories give a basis for analysis of the final creative design output, considering *Tears of Death* has been performed at a national festival, it is important to note that these theories are understood in a different language and codification in the community theatre performance sector. This

dissertation, therefore, seeks first to understand and interrogate the approaches and processes undertaken by the case study groups and then apply the ideas and understandings of design of Smith and Parker (2002), Gillette (1997) and Arnott (1997) on a localised approach. Quesenbury (2004) finds articulation in this interrogation of the approaches and processes design from a practical community theatre view vis-a-vis the theoretical understandings of Arnott and others. This interrogation will be further developed in depth in Chapters 4 and 5.

Pamela Howard (2002: xx) notes that "theatre takes place wherever there is a meeting point between an actor and a potential audience". Howard hereby intimates that as long as there is a potential meeting point for the actor(s) and an audience, theatre can take place. In pointing to this, Howard seems to say that any space can be a meeting point for theatre, which challenges Arnott and Smith and Parker's notions that confine conventional theatre buildings and spaces to be such a meeting point. In the context of this research, Howard presents a form of theatre that challenges the notions of mainstream professional theatre. Robert Leach (2008: 162) defines this kind of theatre that happens outside the conventional theatre spaces as "theatre beyond theatre boundaries". The notion "theatre beyond theatre boundaries" replaces the traditional and conventional performance preparation and presentation processes and styles with experiential and embodied approaches. This "theatre beyond theatre boundaries" brings into focus community theatre in South Africa and Zimbabwe, as this type of theatre is normally performed in non theatre venues. How do these community theatre performances make use of design approaches and explore the use of design as a performance aspect to create and communicate the intended message in a manner that does not conform to Western conventions?

Howard further notes that understanding scenography starts with "understanding the potential of an empty space" (2002: xx). The demand for understanding the "potential of an empty space" brings into focus "theatre beyond boundaries" as it assumes that any empty space can be a meeting place. Most theatre beyond boundaries performances are done in open spaces, community halls and classrooms. Theatre performances that take place outside traditional theatre spaces challenge traditional notions and procedures towards design. How do the community theatre groups under study make use of this approach to design? What effect on the design process and design output does this approach have if used by community theatre groups in their design process?

Howard's understanding of scenography relates to Peter Brook's (1968; 1996) theory of the "empty space". Brook argues that all that is needed for a

performance is a bare space, a performer and a spectator. Brook further questions the validity of the 'two rooms' concept, which separates the audience (in the auditorium) and the actors (on the stage). This 'two rooms' concept further speaks to the practice of design that designates a stage and an auditorium in "non theatre" spaces. Sally Mackey and Simon Cooper (2000:369) note that Brook's favoured method of working has always been through the practical before the theoretical. In simple terms this refers to the "outside-in" approach (in Mackey and Cooper, 2000:369). The "outside-in approach" relates to an organic approach to design which puts the evolution of the design concept together with the development of the script.

Jerzy Grotowski's (1968; 1981) notion of "poor theatre", developed in and with his laboratory theatre in Poland has provided community theatre groups with alternative approaches to performance preparation and presentation. Grotowski's poor theatre is composed of two strands: the "foregrounding of an actor as a holy figure, and the establishment of a unique and confrontational environment for each production" (Mackey and Cooper, 2000: 336). The latter notion relates to the visual aesthetics of design. What are the politics that influence the "establishment of this unique and confrontational environment" to achieve what Grotowski terms "poverty in theatre" (1981:19)?

Grotowski's (1968; 1981) and Brook's (1968; 1996) theories form the principle approach of the creative project. These theories will be used to interrogate and examine the design approaches and processes employed. Grotowski's notion of the "establishment of a unique and confrontational environment" will be explored in relation to the performance spaces that these community theatre groups will perform in, while Brook's ideas of the "empty space" will influence the processes and approaches that community theatre groups adopt in their preparation process. The "outside-in" method and the destruction of the "fourth wall" by Brook become characteristic of community theatre tradition as these groups often perform in non-theatre venues. Howard's (2002) understanding of the notions of scenography will be used to understand the processes that these community groups undertake in developing their design ideas, styles and concepts.

Quesenbury (2004: 4) interrogates the "politics of space, access and corporate survival" that speak to the social, political and economic contexts which influence design decisions, approaches and processes within any theatre sector. The "politics of access" speaks to the availability of the resources such as proper theatre spaces, training programs and trained personnel, while the "politics of corporate survival" becomes a major factor in determining the nature of design decisions taken by community theatre groups, such as design budgets. Quesenbury's ideas find articulation in this dissertation through

raising questions relating to the social, political and economic landscapes in which the community theatre groups in focus operate. What are these spatial patterns that constrain creative design processes and output? How do these

"socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions" within the communities in focus constrain and/or enable creative design processes and how does this influence the "politics of design"?

The desire to remain relevant in the community by these theatre groups invokes a "politics of corporate survival" (Quesenbury 2004: 5). The impact of this politics of survival on the design process becomes a major factor in the determining the nature of design decisions taken by community theatre groups. The play *Just Because* (1999) by Bambelela Arts Ensemble was funded by Transparency International in their endeavour to create debate forum within communities over the death sentence in Zimbabwe and the world over. Through interrogating the interests of the funder (Transparency International) vis-a-vis the themes of the production, presents this dissertation with a rich ground that has not been investigated. *Tears of Death* has been performed at different places and functions such as the Isigcawu Festival in 2012, at the Stable Theatre in 2013 and at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2013. Analysing the adjudication sheet of the Isigcawu Festival and National Arts Festival (Fringe Festival) will provide ideas on what the festival deemed important for a performance to win a prize which could have been an influence on the design choices Intuba Arts Development made.

The 'politics of questions' (Quesenbury 2004:5) provides for the challenging of the status quo. What could be the best practices that community theatre groups could take up to create structures (if they do not exist) or to support structures (if they are in place) that enable and perpetuate the culture of design within community theatre circles? The politics of change relate therefore to a paradigm shift from the process of design as applied and drawn from the conventional theatre. How best can the process of design be simplified and undertaken by cash strapped and technologically ill prepared community theatre groups?

Margaret Walshaw (2007:132) interrogates Michel Foucault's theory of the "notions of discourse" which provides for the examination and analysis of the socio-polico-cultural and economic landscapes of the two case studies, and their influences on the design process. Walshaw's interrogation of Foucault's theories finds relevance in this when applied with Mike van Graan and Nicky du Plessis' (1998: 6) assertion that

> the current arts and culture dispensation still largely reflects the apartheid
> era in the distribution of skills, access to public resources, geographical

location of arts infrastructure and the governance, management and staffing
of publicly funded arts institutions.

The implications of the above quotation are manifold. The apartheid legacy which created urban and peri-urban black townships as dormitories without proper infrastructure for recreation and leisure (Van Graan and Du Plessis 1998) continues the sidelining of community theatre as access to public resources, arts infrastructure, government and management staffing of publicly funded institutions is beyond their reach due to their geographical location. The situation of the analysis of the social, economic and political landscapes in created by the apartheid and colonial political and legislative governments presents a politics of space and access. Walshaw (2007: xiii) further pinpoints that the "notions of critical discourse" allows for the "explorat[ion] of the way people are positioned, how they use language to show how meanings are generated through discourses and are produced as a social fact which further shapes their viewpoints, beliefs and practices". What are these spatial patterns that constrain creative design processes and output? How do these "socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions" within the communities in focus constrain and/or enable creative design?

Jordache Abner Ellapen (2007: 116) pinpoints the dominant power dimension that resulted in the creation of the urban and peri-urban townships such as KwaMashu where Ubuntu Arts Development is based:

> the Group Areas Act of 1950 set the tone through which the South African landscape can be deconstructed as a landscape of separation that resonates in post-apartheid South Africa. Although space in South Africa was determined through a separatist ideology that constructed boundaries between blacks and whites, the dreams of 'whiter' cities could never be fully realised because white people in these same cities relied on the cheap labour of the African people who inhabited the townships.

Ellapen's notions of landscapes will be further interrogated in relation to their influences on the process of design and performance at large. The "politics of access" relate to the affordability of design as a performance aspect by community theatre groups as well as access to theatre spaces, equipment in comparison to conventional theatre, educational institutions to train young designers as well as funding opportunities vis-a-vis established state funded professional theatre groups.

1.3. Methodology

This study will make use of the case study approach as its primary methodology. To achieve objectivity and authenticity, this research will use the case study approach and performance ethnography for the creative project, while content analysis and participant-as-observer research methods will be used in developing the theoretical component.

The case study methodological approach will be used as a means to engage the politics of design in depth through developing a creative project, *Tears of Death* and the revival of *Just Because,* which will help develop recommendations on practices that could be useful for community theatre groups. According to John Gerring (2004: 342), a case study is "an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units". The case study approach allows "detailed investigation of the type that is necessary to answer the how and why questions" (Jeniffer 2002:17), which this dissertation endeavours to answer in relation to the 'politics of design' and the processes employed by the groups in focus.

Through using the case study approach, this researcher will be able to develop a framework that will enable in-depth analysis and understanding of the politics of design, design approaches and processes within community theatre circles. The case methodological approach will enable the researcher to ask such questions as: Do Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble practice design? If so, what approaches do they engage in their design process? What are the influences of their design process and design choices? What considerations did they make to decide not to practice design? These questions reveal the design approaches and processes these groups go through in their creative design endeavours. They help lay bare the politics at play which influence design and how this politics exerts its influence.

Zainal Zaidah (2007: 41) notes that one of the advantages of the case study methodological approach is that the "examination of data is most often conducted within the context of its use, that is, within the situation in which the activity takes place". Flyvbjerg Bent (2004: 421) further adds that case study produces "content-dependent-knowledge". Examining the politics of design and approaches of design within a context of rehearsal process and performance enables in-depth understanding, provides for contextual analysis and research findings validation.

The researcher will make use of the performance ethnography approach (Turner and Turner 2004; Denzin, 1997) to examine the processes and design concepts used by Bambelela Arts Ensemble and Intuba Arts Development. Kate Donelan (1997: xi) notes that "ethnographers immerse themselves in the

complexities of a social environment in order to build an understanding of the beliefs, motivations and behaviours". This approach will enable the researcher to investigate, encounter and experience the practical aspects of the decision-making processes and the design concept and approaches adopted through participating in the process of play creation, design process, rehearsal and performance of *Tears of Death*. The performance ethnography approach will be fundamental to understand the socio-political, economic and cultural landscapes that these community theatre groups operate in, and how they inform the design process and the decision making process.

Ethnography of performance comes from a general observation that in the majority of cases cultural identities are a form of lived experience. In this regard, theatre performance can reflect and enscapulate a community's values, beliefs, traditions and identities (Turner and Turner 2004). Theatre performance hereby refers to "sum totals of their constituent parts" (Sambo 2011: 47) of acting, costume, lighting, sound and make-up among other aspects. Audiences 'see' a performance in its entirety. They do not 'see' the make-up or the costume as distinct entities but as parts of a whole (Sambo 2011). Through engaging in the process of rehearsals, participating in deciding what costumes, set and properties, and how they will be used (design process and approach) this research will reveal the community's beliefs, identities and lived experiences. This will be useful in understanding the 'politics' of design.

To Carol Marie Oberg (2008:2), performance ethnography "acts as a catalyst to critical thinking and reflection". This methodological approach enables researchers to "translat[e] theory into practice among ordinary people and everyday experience" (Oberg 2008:3), which this research seeks to investigate. The theoretical component becomes a reflexive analysis that helps facilitate "new understandings, potential solutions and constructive dialogue" (Oberg 2008: 3).

Kudakwashe Shane Sambo (2011: 49) notes that ethnography is based on three central features: induction, context and unfamiliarity. The inductive process within ethnographic work "sees general statements about human society and culture – what one may call 'theory' – emerging out of the description of particular events" (Sambo 2011: 49). Context, when carefully examined, is the development of theory: description is explanation. This approach finds articulation in this study through the interrogation of the politics of space and access. Unfamiliarity finds articulation in the interrogation of Quesenbury's notions of the "unmastered politics of design". This puts the idea of community theatre or committed theatre which seeks to challenge the status quo and anything aligned to it, by devising home grown

initiatives that work as a counter to the system at the centre of this study. The challenge of theatre-beyond-boundaries will be explored.

Visual analysis will also be used as methodological approach in the writing process of the dissertation. Firstly, the researcher will make use of pre-recorded material from the 1999 performance of *Just Because* by Bambelela Arts Ensemble. Secondly, the researcher has recorded current rehearsals and performances of both *Tears of Death* and *Just Because.* The play *Tears of Death* was presented at the National Arts Festival 2013 in Grahamstown while the play *Just Because* was presented in Bulawayo in August 2013. The use of current productions has enabled the researcher to work with the directors, performers and co-designers for the respective performances through the process of play creation, design process, rehearsal and performance.

The researcher has recorded and viewed both selected productions under study in order to analyse the final creative design output. Furthermore, the researcher has observed the process from rehearsals to live performances as well as audience responses to the visual elements of the performances. The most obvious advantage of using observation as a methodological approach is that it ensures validity and authenticity through interpreting the content 'objectively' (Sambo 2011). Collins Robson's (1993:191) in Sambo 2011, view is that "one major advantage of observation is its directness. You do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes; you watch what they do and listen to what they say". However, it should be noted that directly observing what is under investigation does not guarantee an objective interpretation of the content, mainly because of the multivalent nature of the processes of seeing and interpretation. Objectivity is, in principle, impossible to achieve as all research is effectively "fiction in the sense that it views and so constructs reality through the eyes of one person" (Stanley and Wise 1983:174).

The advantage of using video recordings is that they have the highest density of information (Sambo 2011). Nehemiah Chivandikwa (2004:74) in support of Sambo, notes that

> camera recording of performance has the advantage that one can have systematic and multiple viewings. To a great extent, camera recording can mitigate some basic problems emanating from the ephemeral nature of performance. If carefully and professionally done, camera recording can capture some relevant aspects of a production and so enable researchers to have close and systematic viewing.

Recording has enabled me to view and analyze the final design after performances since I operated the lighting and sound desk during all the

performances. The recorded performances will also be included as the creative project of this study.

Another advantage of using these video recordings is that there will be no digital manipulation after initial footage is recorded. After the live recording, the video has been archived onto a DVD and the still photographs onto a data CD. Furthermore, one obvious advantage of these DVDs and data CDs is that they authentically reflect the images of the performances under discussion.

Content analysis is a "descriptive method whereby researchers systematically analyse the actual content of documents or other artifacts [and] by counting particular items within a defined category" (Andersen, 1997:55). In this light, researchers are able to systematize their observations of the content of the media (Sambo, 2011: 33). In this dissertation, this has been achieved in two ways. Firstly, the researcher has used pre-recorded videos and still photographs of performances of *Just Because* for the analysis of the dominant economic and cultural forces in which Bambelela Arts operates. Secondly, the researcher has archived, through video recording and still photographs, the rehearsal process and final performance of *Tears of Death* for analysis in the dissertation.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the background to the study, the theoretical framework in which this study is framed, and the methodological approaches to be engaged. The issues and concepts raised in this chapter will be further elaborated in the next chapters. Chapter 2 will provide the theoretical narratives and connectedness of popular culture, popular theatre and community theatre. This chapter will also interrogate the conventions of community theatre.

Chapter 3 will trace the development and growth of community theatre in South Africa and Zimbabwe from the colonial era through the struggle for independence to the post independence era. Background information on Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble will also be presented in this chapter. Chapter 4 will interrogate and analyse the process of design undertaken by Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble in *Tears of Death* and *Just Because* respectively. Chapter 5 will engage the 'politics of design' and the socio-political, cultural and economic landscape influences on the practice of scenography by the two case study groups and summarise the findings and propose scenographic best practice recommendations in as far as community theatre practice is concerned.

Chapter 2: From Popular Culture to 'Community Theatre'

We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself.

Bertolt Brecht (in Amir Abdul Zahra Al-Azraki 2012: 82)

Introduction

This chapter traces the development of community theatre from an African popular culture perspective. It will highlight the linkages that exist between popular culture, popular theatre and community theatre, as used in this dissertation. Finally, this chapter will theorise the nature of community theatre in ways which distinguish it from other forms of popular theatre.

2.1 Popular Culture: The Struggle for Space in Africa

Popular culture has proved a contested area in the academic and research fields (Dolby 2006), though an important locus for debate. John Storey (2001) posits that any definition of 'popular culture' will bring into play a complex combination of the different meanings of the term 'culture' with the different meanings of the term 'popular'. To speak of popular culture usually means to define culture as a way of life which permits the interrogation of the economic, social, religious and political systems that relate the celebration of child birth, rites of passage ceremonies and youth sub cultures as examples of culture. The definition would also engage culture as signifying practices, a process that would allow the understanding of popular music and masquerades as examples of culture. Storey (2001) notes that the examples given above are usually referred to as lived cultures or cultural practices.

In the first part of this chapter I will sketch out definitions of popular culture and how it (popular culture) negotiated the colonial political, economic and social systems in the quest for liberation of black Africans in Southern Africa. This chapter will also give an overview of the popular arts in Africa by providing a descriptive narrative of popular theatre in Africa. The final part of the chapter will seek to make associations between applied theatre and modern day community theatre in performance practice.

Raymond Williams (1983: 237) suggests four contemporary meanings of the term popular: "well liked by many people", "inferior kinds of work", "work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people", and "culture actually made by the people for themselves". However, the main interest of this study is less in distinguishing different genres of the 'popular' than in examining the way the art forms of 'popular' culture mediated colonial political, economic

and social systems in the fight for liberation, recognition and self-determination by indigenous Africans in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Related to the terms 'popular' and 'culture' is popular culture. Johannes Fabian (1978: 315) gives four characteristics of popular culture:

> (a) [it] suggest[s] contemporary cultural expressions carried by the masses in contrast to both modern elitist and traditional 'tribal' culture; (b) it evokes historical conditions characterized by mass communication, mass production, and mass participation; (c) it implies a challenge to accepted beliefs in the superiority of 'pure' or 'high' culture, but also to the notion of folklore, a categorization we have come to suspect as being equally elitist and tied to certain conditions in Western society [and] (d) it signifies, potentially at least, processes occurring behind the back of established powers and accepted interpretations and, thus, offers a better conceptual approach to decolonization of which it is undoubtedly an important element.

Fabian therefore intimates that popular culture is the fulcrum of the African people's struggles. It is a hybrid cultural form that seeks to create a new world order in-between the 'pure' and 'high' cultures and challenge the status quo (Dolby 2006). Fabian's analysis of popular culture bridges the gap between the different scholastic views that define popular culture in relation to its origins and those that define it in relation to the interests it serves (Barber 1987). This study further argues that, while there has been continued debate around the standard agreed definition of popular culture, the basis of all the definitions is in creating a culture that enhances the people's socio-political, religious and economic lives.

Nadine Dolby (2006: 33) notes that popular culture must be "understood as a site of struggle, a place for the negotiation of race, gender, nation and other identities and for the play of power". Stuart Hall (1981: 239) in agreement with Dolby, adds that popular culture

> is one of the sites where the struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged; it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises and where it is secured.

The understanding of popular culture as a site of struggle where 'hegemony is secured and/or challenged' provides for the interrogation of all the popular arts and how society uses them to oppose or maintain hegemony. This I will return to later in chapter 3 when I trace the evolution of theatre of resistance in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Dolby (2006: 42) further argues that popular culture is "not a reactive space but a formative one that has implications for other arenas of society and for the

making and unmaking of democracy". Dolby hereby intimates that popular culture is in constant transition, fluctuating in response to the specific socio-political and economic landscapes of the society. Because popular culture is influential in shaping the lifestyle and social class stratification of the society, it becomes a fundamentally important means of instituting change, instruction and a society building mechanism. It becomes a mechanism through which African people pass on tradition and culture to the next generation. Popular culture is therefore, a "central force of affective investment for the people" (Dolby 2006: 33).

However, as popular culture has historically become the dominant form of global culture, so has it become the "scene, par excellence, of commodification, of the industries where culture enters directly into the circuits of a dominant technology – the circuits of power and capital" (Hall 1998: 107). Budd Hall (1998: 107) expands in his definition of popular culture to be the

> space of homogenization, where stereotyping and the formulaic mercilessly process the material and experiences it draws into its web, where control over narratives and representations passes into the hands of the established cultural bureaucracies.

The commodification of the people's material and experiences and control over their performance narratives introduces a new paradigm in the field of popular culture in Africa: struggle for control over cultural narratives. This struggle over cultural narratives was and is fought in varied fronts inclusive of the use of restrictive legislation, education, infrastructure development and resource allocation by the hegemonic rule. The "establishment of [governing] cultural bureaucracies" (Hall 1998: 107) speaks of micro managing the cultural industries by colonial systems and political governments in Africa. I will discuss this further in chapter 3 in relation to South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The commodification and packaging of popular culture in the globalised and industrialised world created a certain stereotype of the African people in the eyes of the colonialists. To challenge this stereotypical perspective, new narratives had to be developed and negotiated between the traditional culture and the colonial high culture. The result was a new hybrid popular culture that challenged the status quo, while exhibiting and presenting the experiences of the black people.

The new hybrid popular culture took the characteristics of traditional culture in form. Budd Hall (1998: 109) highlights this when he posits that

> in its expressivity, its musicality, its orality, in its rich, deep, and varied attention to speech, in its inflections toward the vernacular and the local, in its rich production of counter narratives, and above all, in its metaphorical use of the musical vocabulary, black popular culture has enabled the surfacing, inside the mixed and contradictory mode of some mainstream popular culture, of elements of a discourse that is different - other forms of life, other traditions of representation.

Hall hereby presents the characteristics of popular culture that are identifiable in popular theatre. Because of these characteristics, popular theatre became an alternative approach to the colonial formal theatre tradition. Popular culture lays the foundations for popular theatre in the form of community theatre or committed theatre that thrives to challenge the status quo, albeit in challenging environments set by the hegemonic systems in colonial and post-colonial Africa.

2.2 Popular Theatre: The Vehicle of Change

There have been various ways and means through which popular theatre has been defined by theorists and practitioners (Barber, 1987; Coplan 1986; Fabian, 1987; Kidd, 1982; Steadman, 1986). A primary way of defining popular theatre has been to separate it from high or literary theatre. Gaurav Desai (1990: 65) argues that this "distinction has been based on several grounds, the most prominent of which have been those of language and theatrical aesthetics". The theorists that base the distinction on language follow Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986) ideas that a truly popular theatre is that which is necessarily presented and conducted in indigenous African languages. He also argues that any theatre in foreign languages plays to an elite audience and therefore is unAfrican. However, other theorists "draw the line on the basis of aesthetic criteria such as mass appeal and literary form" (Desai 1990: 66).

The above distinctions create problems in understanding popular theatre in Africa from a pan-Africanist perspective. To base the definition on 'mass appeal' creates challenges in today's global world where mass production means mass advertising and sales which leads to mass appeal. However, these theatrical products might not necessarily be truly popular. To base the definition on language as well has its own problems. Karin Barber (1987: 7) argues that popular implies some relation to "the people" and the people of Africa are a heterogeneous, "fluctuating conglomeration(s) of ethnic, regional, religious, and class groups". What, therefore, pertains to "the people" is inevitably and continually open to redefinition. The conglomeration of these different class groups results in the development of new language derivatives and sub cultures that are not necessarily indigenous African.

Given the difficulty in defining popular theatre, Desai (1990) agrees that popular theatre cannot be defined in any one way. Tony Bennett in Desai (1990: 66) posits that "popular theatre, as it is practised in Africa, ought to be thought of in relational and abstract terms, as a site, always changing and variable in its constitution and organization". The importance of conceiving it abstractly rather than definitionally is appreciated in the recognition that such theatre is always an elusive, ever changing and discursive practice susceptible to sociopolitical and economic influence (Desai 1990). Because of its functional and normative dimensions, even slight changes in contextual factors can transform an originally popular theatrical site into one which is no longer popular (Bennett, Mercer and Woollacott 1986). This use is best noted in the shifts in the articulations of the popular throughout the history of African theatre.

Throughout its history in Africa, the popular theatrical tradition has presented itself with the functional goal of social education (Desai 1990). In this respect, many of the theoretical premises of the popular theatre workers in Africa originated in the seminal work of the Brazilian adult educator, Paulo Freire (Prentki and Selman 2000). Therefore, an understanding of Freire's theory and practice of education is crucial for the appreciation of the normative dimension of African popular theatrical practices.

Paulo Freire's (1970) insistence on the reading of the world as an integral element in reading the word has been widely acclaimed in education circles. He contends that no educational practice is value-free or politically neutral, and he rejects the authoritarian practice that he calls banking education. Banking education is based on the assumptions that the teacher is the sole carrier of knowledge and that the student is the depository of knowledge. Furthermore, Freire argues that through the banking method of education, the subjective experiences of the student have little significance and the student is assigned the inactive role of an absolute recipient of knowledge, a recipient stripped of action. Freire introduces an alternative, problem-posing education that engages in a genuine dialogue with the people. Freire (1987: 41) argues that "the educator also must respect the levels of understanding that those becoming educated have of their own reality". He further posits that to impose on the learners, one's own understanding in the name of their liberation is to accept authoritarian solutions as ways to their freedom. Problem-posing education seeks to conscientize the people. It is forged 'with' not 'for' them.

To Desai, the interpretation of the world, in the problem-posing model, is conceived of as praxis, and knowledge is restored to its active form, to know.

Praxis, in this view, is regarded as the source of knowledge. Frank Youngman (1986: 58) concurs with Desai and notes that praxis

> provides the criterion for measuring the correctness of knowledge for testing the extent to which ideas correspond to reality. And, because it encourages direct involvement in the structural transformation of society, it becomes the objective or goal of knowledge.

It is through such an understanding of education as social praxis that one ought to approach popular theatre in Africa. Desai further pinpoints that regardless of the conscious or unconscious political affiliations of the theatre workers, African popular theatre has continually articulated itself as an educational medium and thus as a primary arena for social struggle.

Tim Prentki and Jan Selman (2000: 8) define popular theatre

> as a process of theatre which deeply involves specific communities in identifying issues of concern, analysing current conditions and causes of a situation, identifying points of change and analysing how change could happen and/or contributing to the actions implied.

This definition augments and fits well within Freire's ideology of critical analysis, participant learning and solution-seeking processes that reflect on the issues of the community from an 'involved' position.

Through critical analysis, action and social change, popular theatre provides the "social and political structure and presumes that there is a more egalitarian social makeup possible" (Prentki and Selman 2000: 9). In this light, it is a theatre that expresses and grows out of the "immediate social contexts" and makes use of "forms which are recognisable, attractive and shown to be highly challenging in numerous ways" (Prentki and Selman 2000: 9) to achieve social change.

In their definition, Prentki and Selman (2000: 9) refer to popular theatre as a "theatre process and performance" which is used as part of social change mechanism. When the process of making popular theatre is given over to the community members, communities come to control the content and the form of this powerful medium. This process can then be used by the community to "clarify their views, investigate their dilemmas and analyse their social, political and economic situations" (Prentki and Selman 2000: 8) to challenge assumptions, strategise, and share their insights within their immediate community (Mda 1993). A space is therefore created where the community can afford to work on challenging issues and work towards social change. As Prentki and Selman (2000: 8) note: "when the process of making popular theatre is given over to the community members", questions of ownership and

intent are raised. This will be addressed when I deal with community theatre later in the chapter.

Popular theatre is therefore best thought of as a normative discursive practice that engages in dialogues with other theatrical practices of the society (Desai 1990). The social utterance that is conceptualized as popular theatre arises from and constantly interacts with other modes of social discourse in the quest for social change. Popular theatre is never in an exclusively advantaged position and thus constantly negotiates and renegotiates its own articulations in the larger societal context and challenges the status quo (Desai 1990). These negotiations are carried on in dual processes and levels: that of theatrical content and of theatrical practices. It is the changeable and constantly changing nature of the relationship between the discursive practices of popular theatre and those of the larger society that revives the theatre in an active process of social change. This relationship makes popular theatre an active interpretive and socially unpredictable process that conscientizes people towards social change.

2.3 Applied Theatre: Community Theatre in Perspective

The accounts of popular culture and popular theatre offered above point towards applied theatre in contemporary practice. Helen Nicholson (2005) posits that the term 'applied theatre' gained currency during the 1990s, finding particular favour with academics, theatre practitioners and policy-makers who have used the term as a kind of shorthand to describe forms of dramatic activity that primarily exist outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions, and which are specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies. Included in the different terminologies of applied theatre are practices as diverse as community theatre, prison theatre, drama-in-education and theatre-in-education, theatre-in-health education, theatre-for-development, heritage theatre and reminiscence theatre. Each of these terms indicates to some extent what the kind of theatre tries to achieve and each has its own theories, debates and highly specialized practices.

James Thompson (2009: 16) notes that applied theatre has two related definitions for the performance practice that falls within its interest:

> [1] It is clearly concerned with projects that claim they are focused on change, on issues of social justice and on the participation of those who are economically, socially or culturally marginalized or discriminated against.
> [2] it is also about practice that is closely connected to particular sites – for example, prisons, camps, or schools and attached to the interests of particular communities, for example, refugees, disabled people or the elderly.

Thompson implies that applied drama is bound by context and its commitment to social change. The reliance on the community realities and context as well as the strong commitment to social change holds strong linkages to Freire's model of praxis and social change identified with popular theatre.

In applied theatre, processes of working are embodied and involved rather than passive and detached, as participants are invited to engage physically and emotionally with the work by professional practitioners with special expertise in developing community-based practice (Nicholson 2009). I will argue that the engagement of professional practitioners who do not come from the community in context invokes an idea of "concealed ideologies and intentions" (Prentki and Preston 2009:10). This speaks to the application of theories and study rather than collective work towards challenging hegemony and achieving social change. Thus, it takes the term 'applied' theatre. Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston (2009) concur with this view that applied theatre may be alien to communities as it does not resonate with anything linked to them beside the narratives and content of the developed work.

I consider 'community theatre' rather than 'applied theatre' as the most appropriate term to define the type of theatre used in the context of this dissertation. As stated in the first chapter, community theatre in this dissertation is used to refer to what Peter Larlham (1985: 63) calls "committed theatre". For Ogah Steve Abah (in Layiwola Edele 2000: 72), community theatre is "the theatre of the people, talking to the people about their own problems, in their own language, on their own terms and using their own artistic forms". It is theatre that is committed to creating platforms for debate, discussion, mobilisation of the community and initiating the process of social change. However, for community theatre to remain relevant in modern day performance industry, it is vital that it takes a multidisciplinary approach of performance practice. This multidisciplinary approach allows community theatre some fluidity between professional conventional theatre, other forms of social based theatre, and indigenous traditional forms.

Barber (1987) posits that to claim that a work or genre represents a certain communal view or consciousness, one must be able, at least in principle, to show that the audience reads it in the way the artist intends it. This speaks to agreed conventions that define a work of theatre as community theatre. However, difficult as it may be to pinpoint the agreed conventions of community theatre, as an unofficial theatre genre it can be argued that it is characterized by "hybrid and syncretic combinations of traditional and elite genres" (Barber 1987: 9), "spontaneity, fluidity and unpredictability" (Barber 1987: 39), "its presentational and demonstrative style" (Barber 1987: 43) and is "informally learned, performed and transmitted" (Barber 1987: 63).

Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei (2006: 491) defines syncretism as the "merging of different systems of beliefs, social practices or aesthetics, from sources inside and/or outside of cultures". The emergent hybrid theatre may represent an influence by the dominant hegemonic power or an assimilation that respects the less powerful. It could however, also result in an equitable amalgamation of both cultures to develop a hybrid performance style that serves the community, both the powerful and powerless.

Of fundamental importance to this dissertation is the aspect of aesthetics. Aesthetics in this dissertation is used to refer to the creative visual design that include among other things lighting, set, costume and make-up. Because community theatre is a hybrid form that borrows from the indigenous traditional performance forms and elite forms that came through colonialism, how does it make use of lighting and set design? How does it use these foreign forms in performance? These questions will be addressed in chapter 4.

The colonial elite theatre introduced theatre styles that followed the Western trend of realism in scenography and performance trends. These kinds of styles were a challenge to popular theatre as it was presentational and adopted a demonstrative performance style. However, new theatre spaces that moved away from the proscenium arch and its representational style (Seda 2004: 141) were introduced. Such models as open air theatre, arena stages and theatre-in-the-round became, again, prominent theatre performance stages. How does community theatre make use of these stages, if it does, and what are the politics that determine the usage of these stages? I will discuss this further in chapters 4 and 5.

Barber (1987: 39) posits that

> the fluidity and unpredictability makes unofficial art exceptionally difficult
> to interpret. The conventions by which it constructs its meanings are always
> escaping and transforming themselves.

This fluidity mainly manifests itself in the choice of style. The unpredictability is a result of spontaneity popularly referred to as the "notion of rehearsing revolution" (Etherton 1988: 2). This notion emphasizes that community theatre pieces should be uncompleted plays (Etherton 1988) that continue to evolve in response to the audience and performance space during the presentation. In agreement with Michael Etherton, Barber (1987: 39) postulates that the "audience plays a crucial constitutive role and is the main regulating influence on the production of new forms". Community theatre, therefore, is regulated by the audience based on the use of art forms and material they relate to. The success and/or failure of a community theatre piece is determined by the audience in a specific context.

The presentational and demonstrative style of community theatre enables an aesthetic of immediate impact. Barber (1987: 43) posits that this style allows the exploitation of each moment or possibility within the artistic construct for its maximum effect: its most powerful appeal. Consequently, this style should engage what Barber (1987: 55) terms "ethnographic categorization", a process of engaging ways of "finding meanings of non-verbal communication in community theatre". This process introduces supplementary readings of and analysis of the visual aesthetics and performance styles to arrive at the intended message by the audience. Visual aesthetics speaks of the aspects of design. In this dissertation, I will engage the process of design and performance styles used by the case study community theatre groups to understand this process of "ethnographic categorization" in chapter 4.

Because community theatre is considered unofficial and a "theatre beyond boundaries" (Leach 2008: 162), the trend has been that those in community theatre practice tend to learn informally from experienced practitioners, and usually practice and perform without tertiary and proper theoretical grounding. This exposes community theatre to a variety of experimentation in terms of design practice, writing and performance styles. However, it liberates it from older indigenous traditional and colonial elite arts and legitimation by institutions and theory. What are the politics that continue to force community theatre to be a self-taught practice?

Conclusion

This chapter set the contextual background of community theatre by tracing its roots and development from popular culture and popular theatre. Community theatre was and continues to be presented as a locum and site of struggle for the powerless majority. The conventions of community theatre were discussed in light of the dissertation's context of design rather than a formal literary and project based commentary like the *Laedza Batanai* project in Botswana.

Chapter 3 will trace and discuss the development of community theatre in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The chapter will interrogate Black Consciousness theatre in South Africa and liberation theatre in Zimbabwe as forerunners of new theatre forms that emerged in the 1980s in Zimbabwe and 1990s in South Africa.

Chapter 3: Historical Overview: Locating Community Theatre in South Africa and Zimbabwe

If the new form catches on, many more artists will then initiate it. What is important is that it should catch on; that is, it should appeal to the audience by corresponding to something in their own experience or desires

Karim Barber (1987: 39)

Introduction

This chapter traces the linkages that exist between the political struggles of the peoples of South Africa and Zimbabwe and community theatre. The chapter will define community theatre in the context it is used in this dissertation. It will set out the characteristics of community theatre that will inform the interrogation of the process of design and the "politics of design" in chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

3.1 The Cultural Struggle in Southern Africa

The cultural struggle in Southern Africa is strongly rooted to the political ideologies of the liberation nationalist movements (Kerr 1995). Kerr (1995) and Kavanagh (1985) allude that the Black Consciousness ideology gave popular theatre an identity in South Africa, while Preben Kaarsholm (1990) and Stephen Chifunyise (1990) posit that popular culture was integrated into the liberation war as a means of mobilising people in Zimbabwe, communicating liberation ideologies and providing entertainment. The liberation nationalist movement's ideological inclination that sought to declare Africa for Africans (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2008: 62) meant that popular theatre was referred to as black theatre. Black theatre is used in this dissertation to refer to performance initiatives practised by African theatre practitioners to challenge hegemony. It derives its inspiration and emphasizes "religion, familial and cultural virtues and communal strengths" (Steadman 1994: 47) as the ways in which hegemony, colonialism and neo-colonialism were and are challenged.

The colonising white settlers, however, sought to counter this popular approach through restrictive legislation that ensured the cultural life of the indigenous people was curtailed (Peterson 1994). In response, the indigenous peoples adopted a radical stance in as far as their cultural performances were concerned, challenging the status quo. Popular theatre thus became a site of the struggle for the control of political, social, economic and cultural life of the indigenous people.

The parallels between the cultural and political struggles of Zimbabwe and South Africa present this dissertation similar historical timeframes to work with. With respect to South Africa, the three major time frames that this chapter will engage with are: the colonial period, the apartheid era, and the post-apartheid era, while for Zimbabwe, they will be: the colonial era, the liberation struggle and the post independence era. However, this dissertation will not use a chronological approach, but will weave different scenarios and strategic dates in the development of the community theatre in the two countries under study.

3.2 The Struggle for Cultural Space in South Africa and Zimbabwe

The historical predominance of coercion as the base of hegemony in the South African and Zimbabwean social formations marked out the social terrain as a key area for contestation between the state and its radical oppositions (Peterson 1994). Cultural performances, therefore, became the centre of the resultant conflicts due to their potential to give meaning to people's lives in the social transformation process. Black theatre addressed itself as part of the projects initiated by radical oppositional movements, to challenge the states' myths about South African (Peterson 1994) and Zimbabwean history and society by presenting alternative historical narratives and aspirations. This put the relationship of an "oppositional cultural aesthetics and popular performance" (Steadman 1994:11) at the centre of the cultural struggle and development in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The growth and development of an adversary idea in the South African theatre must be analysed against a background of repressive legislation and hegemonic co-option (Steadman 1994), while that of Zimbabwe needs to be analysed against the background of a long-drawn-out liberation struggle (Kerr 1995). This sets the background to the analysis of the politics and challenges that affected the development of black community theatre mainly in the urban centres of South Africa and Zimbabwe. While access to the media and capital ensured that for decades a dominant hegemonic tradition of theatre was established, the activities of theatre practitioners creating work in opposition went largely unrecorded (Kavanagh 1985).

The growth of South African community theatre entailed a continuing struggle against the dominance of a British colonial and imperial centre, compounded in the post colonial period by the powerful influence of the emergent North American metropolis (Orkin 1991). Martin Orkin (1991: 12) maintains that

> the sense that South Africa is a country on the periphery of a metropolis
> destined always to be situated six thousand miles or more away and the
> cultural denigration attendant on this, the belief that anything imposed is

somehow of superior inherent quality and anything locally generated inferior persists.

Orkin hereby, identifies the cultural industry as a site for the struggle of perpetual dominance and control of the South African indigenous people. The denigration and downgrading of the popular cultural traditions, lives and practices of the South African indigenous peoples further speaks to the destruction of the means of survival, production and community life by the colonial system.

In Zimbabwe, then Rhodesia, Preben Kaarsholm (1990) and Stephen Chifunyise (1990) posit that the cultural industry became a site for struggle from the early 1890s, through the liberation war era in the 1960s, to post independence Zimbabwe today. During the colonial era, the white settlers sought to reproduce and imitate the London West theatre of the 1890s to reinforce a conviction of closeness to their mother country, provide legitimation and consolidation of its very existence and values - both in order to harmonize the white community internally and to put on a show of civilization the world of black Africans (Kaarsholm 1990).

Bhekizizwe Peterson (1990) points out that the imitative high end West London type of theatre was initially set out for the colonial sojourners, but due to their desire to 'civilise' the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa, these practices were further forced on them. In South Africa, the white settlers introduced mission schools which taught the basics of drama and theatre to the young black South African. Peterson (2000:218) explains that "drama was seized by missionaries and promoted as an art form amenable to the needs of evangelism, pedagogy and the spread of wholesome recreation among urbanised Africans". The plays produced, therefore, presented the South African ruling classes, and particularly their preferred religious discourses, as the bringers of civilisation and order to an otherwise barbaric people (Kerr 1995). The drama-in-education model, consequently, was meant to break down the pre-colonial political and micro-economic systems, and legal and cultural practises which provided the ideological bases (Kerr 1995) of indigenous societies.

However, in Rhodesia, Kaarsholm (1990) posits that the early white settlers set up segregated white only amateur Repertory Theatre groups, Dramatic and Choral Societies in Salisbury (Harare), Bulawayo, Gwelo (Gweru), Umtali (Mutare), Fort Victoria (Masvingo), Que Que (Kwekwe) and Gatooma (Kadoma) that performed in whites-only playhouses and little theatres in mining towns. These repertory groups directed their energies "towards the cultivation of settler voices and cooperating with theatre groups in the staging

of musicals, and help Welsh colonists resist the temptations of a relapse into barbarism" (Kaarsholm 1990: 249).

Peterson (1990) argues further that the Rhodesian colonial cosmology, firmly situated the dramatic and other cultural modes of expression of black Africans outside the boundaries of art and/or culture and relegated them to the dark hinterlands of anthropology. Since indigenous 'cultures' and 'arts' were not regarded as cultural activities, the Dramatic and Opera Societies sought to acculturate the 'uncultured' black indigenous blacks through teaching them 'civilized' music, and theatre traditions.

Peterson (1994), in agreement with Kerr (1995), points out that the western settlers' colonial approach of dislocating cultural practices from the social struggles of the indigenous people and marketing them instead as universal and trans-historical 'civilising forces' was meant to dismantle the black South African and Zimbabwean struggle for survival and independence. This would force them into practising a "theatre of surrender", which Sam Ukala (2001:30) identifies as the first phase through which African theatre responded to colonialism; as he notes:

> the African surrenders to the aesthetics of his colonial master and is content with abridged translations, adaptations or reproductions of popular European plays, music and dance.

To Ukala (2001), this process would provide 'distraction' to the African cultural performer and make him or her an imitator of European cultural traditions, thereby succeeding in its attempt to dismantle the African's hold on his or her indigenous cultural traditions. This "theatre of surrender" had its foundations in colonial missionary education system. The "theatre of surrender" resulted in performance versions of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Julius Cesear* in Natal (Orkin 1991) and *Macbeth* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Kaarsholm 1990) in Zimbabwe.

Ukala (2001) argues that western education influenced African students of Western literature, as well as a great number of non-student theatre-goers to interpret the world the way colonial planners of the African curricula wanted them to, and to imbibe the Western social habits and pastimes in Western drama. In this light, traditional performances were not allowed by the colonialists because they were considered potentially detrimental to the safety of whites and colonial government. This resulted in the abolishment of the *Mhande* dance through the 1899 Witchcraft Suppression Act in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) (Ukala 2001:29) which the colonial government considered as witchcraft.

Kaarsholm (1990) posits that from the 1950s a more apartheid-like, more brutal and more sophisticated policy of cultural and political management vis-a-vis black African aspirations was introduced in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, cultural practitioners were left despondent in the 1950s and 1960s due to the restrictive legislation introduced by the Nationalist government. This period was characterized by a number of legislations, such as the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act of 1967 in Zimbabwe (Chapman 1996) while in South Africa, David Kerr (1995: 216) notes that the most prominent laws were

> the Entertainment Act of 1931 which introduced legal censorship, the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act which forbade any quotation from banned authors, the Public Safety Act of 1953 and the Entertainment Act of 1963 which segregated white and black audiences except under special licence.

Coupled with the Urban Areas Act of 1923 and Group Areas Act of 1965 in South Africa, Southern Rhodesia's Subversive Activities Act of 1950 and the Residential Property Owners' (Protection) Bill of 1971, the apartheid and colonial governments controlled the use of city based theatres, officially segregated performers, audiences and venues. Black audiences were banned from attending public performances in white areas and black performers from performing there (Kavanagh 1985). The banning of black audiences meant that the Nationalist and colonialist governments' policy on the political status of the urban Africans obviously contradicted its refrain of separate but equal facilities.

3.3 The Struggle for Control

In Zimbabwe, the National Theatre Organization (NTO) grouped together 'whites-only' clubs operating from what had been 'whites-only' playhouses and little theatres in Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru, Mutare, Masvingo, Kwekwe, Kadoma, and other urban centres and mining towns during the Rhodesia era (Chifunyise 1990), while in South Africa, the National Theatre Organization (NTO), formed in 1947, promoted Afrikaner and English plays performed to white audiences only. Orkin (1991: 56) posits that the NTO in South Africa never had a place for black creative participation; however, it relied on blacks for the carrying out of menial jobs. Orkin (1991:43) further highlights the NTO's disdain on the active participation of the African cultural activists, when he notes that Herbert Dlomo's dramatic presentations argued that

> the African dramatist cannot delve into the past unless he has grasped the present. African art must deal with the things that are vital and near the African today.

In all this, Dlomo was contesting prevailing ruling class indifference to the development of a South African theatre in his plays and even more fiercely the segregationalist discourse designed to position black history in positions of savagism and absence, childishness, inferiority and subjugation (Orkin 1991). This also applies to the role of the NTO in the Zimbabwean context as well.

David Coplan (1985:71) postulates that the South African conditions continually favoured whites because "they could command greater organizational and financial resources" through grants and funding from the NTO. The continued refusal by the colonial government to provide financial support to African artists invigorated a new desire of "creating a cultural front towards self determination" (Coplan 1985: 169). The apartheid period in South Africa led to the rise of the Black Consciousness theatre, while Zimbabweans responded with a violent, traumatic and long-drawn-out armed struggle.

Chifunyise (1990) argues that in Zimbabwe, the liberation war gave rise to its own genres of cultural expression that challenged the supremacy of white pride on one side and mobilized black African people and promoted mental decolonization on the other. The genre that sought to promote mental decolonization was ideologically influenced by the Nationalist Liberation ideology of African nationalism and Afro-radicalism (Gatsheni-Ndlovu 2009: 63). The nationalist and Afro-radicalism ideologies sought to declare Africa as for Africans and as such enabled the growth of cultural performances that made use of indigenous African arts.

Kerr (1995) identifies three forms of cultural performance styles that were used by Zimbabwean liberation political parties during the struggle: the *Bira*, praise poetry, and agit-prop. The *Bira* was a Shona spirit possession ritual which was later politicized by the freedom fighters through "linking the power of ancestral spirits to the struggle against white regime" (Kerr 1995: 211). *Bira* songs were transformed and linked to the struggle of the 1970s and legitimized the support for freedom fighters across the length and breadth of Zimbabwe. Through this process of legitimizing the freedom fighters, liberation movements managed to win the support of peasants and the spirit mediums.

Kerr (1995) notes that the Zimbabwe African People's Union's (ZAPU) refugee camps in Lusaka engaged in improvised theatre pieces and Ndebele praise poetry or war chants which had been radically changed to fit the situation of struggle against the Rhodesian military forces. Kerr (1995: 213) also acknowledges another kind of analytical theatre genre that had "its aesthetic roots in the *Pungwe* and radical popular theatre emerging in

Zimbabwe": agit-prop. Agit-prop dramas provided a critical analysis of the situation of the refugees in camps and problems arising from the struggle, condemned capitalism, and the 1978 Muzorewa settlement (Kerr 1995). These plays used episodic plots where fairly realistic scenes with improvised dialogue were interspersed with direct addresses to the audience accompanied by drum or *mbira* music, revolutionary songs or traditional songs (Kerr 1995: 214). I will argue in this dissertation that contemporary community theatre has continued to be influenced by the aesthetics of this theatre genre. Kaarsholm (1990: 259) highlights that out of the liberation struggle, two types of theatre emerged: a neo Maoist type of hortatory, authoritarian drama, and a more democratic, critical mode. The democratic, critical mode would later develop into modern day community theatre.

3.4. The Black Consciousness Theatre in South Africa

During the apartheid era (1948-1994) in South Africa, the Black consciousness ideology inspired militancy among cultural activists and "required [them] to [...] perform to blacks only in black areas" (Kavanagh 1985:53). The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) influenced cultural activists to "forsake the foreign avant-garde models of recent serious theatre in favour of black material relevant to the black experience in South Africa" (Kavanagh 1985:53). This resulted in a far more militantly and aggressively positioned theatre genre against the state (Orkin 1991). The modern day community theatre is arguably a result of the fundamentals of the Black Consciousness theatre, in terms of form, style and content.

During the 1970s, theatre became a crucial area of cultural and commercial conflict (Kavanagh 1985) in South Africa as the apartheid regime increased legislative restriction and the black liberation movement fiercely fought for independence. The BCM played a significant role and influence in building the resistance mechanisms to the legislative restrictions to cultural practice. Kavanagh (1985) posits that the organizations of the BCM were concerned with influencing this important area of cultural activity for ideological and not commercial reasons. This development found structural expression in the formation of the Music, Drama, Arts and Literature Institute (MDALI) in 1972, in Soweto, and on a national level, the South African Black Theatre Union (SABTU) (Peterson 1994). Peterson adds that the BCM took on board a number of themes including "black initiative, self determination and liberation" (1994:40).

On the occasion of its founding, MDALI adopted the following manifesto:

> We aim to liberate ourselves mentally, to believe in ourselves, to forge our
> standards and to stop accepting standards dictated to us by other racial

> groups. We aim to expose pseudo-organizations and pseudo-representations
> purporting to represent Black Theatre and art. (Kavanagh 1985: 162)

MDALI made its attitude very clear to any organizations that they would work with in these aims: black practitioners who were members of MDALI should not work with whites or their agents.

SABTU plays like *Shanti* (1973), by Mthuli Shezi, attempted to combine the theme of anti-colonial rebellion, the rhetoric of black consciousness, and the desire of young intellectuals to see themselves as the vanguard of the armed struggle (Kruger 1999). In his analysis of this play, Kavanagh (1985: 195) notes that *Shanti* was

> obviously a play of students and the intelligentsia, expressing in their idiom their particular needs and interests, the play in performance went some way towards achieving its objective of speaking to all (urban) blacks and preparing their minds for the demands the political and possibly armed struggle might make on them.

Shanti sought to educate blacks of the need of the anti-colonial rebellion through presenting the blacks as revolutionary players. This militancy was to develop through the years and culminate in the 1976 Soweto uprisings. Of importance in *Shanti*, was the authentic articulation of the frustrations and disadvantages of black South Africans by a black playwright and a black theatre group (Kavanagh 1985) which could not be found in Athol Fugard's *No Good Friday* (1958) and other white liberal collaborations (Mda 1984). Sitas (1996) argues that after the Soweto uprisings, the value of *Shanti*, thus, lay less in any representation of political militancy than its dramatization of the dilemmas of intellectuals and the majority populace, only partly prepared for the demands of a potentially revolutionary situation.

Kavanagh (1985: 151) argues the BCM's awareness of class stratification, which is an "awareness of the objective realities of one's class position" based on the black person's position in South Africa introduced an ideological period of radicalism that set out to "break received norms and conventions" (Steadman 1994: 24) and create "harmony with the growing political conscientization of their audience" (Steadman 1994: 23). This feeling of harmony was based on the ideas of "unity of the black peoples of South Africa and building of black self-respect through psychological decolonization and resistance to white oppression" (Kerr 1995: 221). In this manner, the BCM's ideology gave black theatre an identity and managed to initiate cultural resistance through performance.

In his analysis of the role of BCM, Kavanagh (1985: 150) notes that

the movement's appreciation of the importance of history and culture and the inward forms of oppression led it to make the comprehensive attempt to identify the mechanisms of cultural oppression.

The only way to unlocking this oppression was by exposing the mechanisms of cultural oppression. The BCM's understanding of the hegemonic Nationalist government strategy of dismantling the historical and cultural underpinnings of the black African life enabled blacks to "begin the slow, painful process of clearing their minds and hearts of oppressive values and images upon which their condition of bondage so depended" (Kavanagh 1985: 150).

The realization that conquest and colonization, together with Christian proselytization, had distorted the history and culture of the indigenous peoples (Kavanagh 1985) inspired the BCM to initiate a process of reconstituting the crushed and dominated personality of the black person. The BCM, therefore, encouraged blacks to

> organize their own lives, struggle together to solve their own problems themselves and in so doing recover their confidence, their faith in their ability to organize, to be responsible, to lead, to take decisions [and] cope with freedom. (Kavanagh 1985: 155)

This resulted in the rejection of a role for whites in black liberation and cultural work and the severing of links with the multi-racial accomodationist ideology (Steadman 1994).

For Francis Rangoajane (2011), the debate around alienation of white South African writers from blacks was mainly owing to the fact that white liberals did not fully represent the black situation, as they had limited knowledge about blacks, and their attempts were negated by avoiding offending their fellow white nationals in power.

In the terms of the BCM, this process of withdrawing from the all association with white practitioners was the essential initial step towards rebuilding morale and producing a creative confident personality (Kavanagh 1985). The second step was to develop and evolve "alternative cultural values and concepts" (Kavanagh 1985: 155) upon which a future South Africa might be built. This was a process of self-re-identification through critically analysing the situation and locating one's traditional roots.

Kavanagh (1985: 156) posits that "acceptance of one's people's history necessitates the acceptance of traditional culture". However, this process needed to be revalued, re-evaluated and liberated from the misconceptions and degradations propagated by the colonial master. The revived culture would then become an inspiration as well as provide a cultural critique of the

oppressor's society and the defining characteristics of the new one (Kavanagh 1985).

These ideological perspectives of the BCM resulted in the development of direct, militant and radical black theatre "proclaiming a new, assertive cultural renaissance and rejecting the aesthetics of humility" (Sitas 1996:84). By the mid-1970s, BCM cultural activists had established their dominance everywhere. Sitas (1996) adds that the BCM argued that black and/or African theatre was different from the Bourgeois theatre of the colonialist, and with this declaration of difference came new demands and contexts. Ensembles like Theatre Council of Natal (TECON) founded in 1969, and People's Experimental Theatre (PET) founded in 1973, became centres around which performance experiments were done. Sitas (1996) further adds that the new approach involved interaction and participation of the audience during the performance, serious and epic theatre, and the transcendental and prefiguring the return of Africa. The new context assumed that being black was a license to speak for the black community and self-advancement.

In this approach, the black radical theatre practitioners were further strengthening their link with the audience (Steadman 1994). Their performances ceased to be utterances and self conscious literary expressions but performed images of black anger and resistance (Sitas 1996; Steadman 1994). Furthermore, the performative interactions refused to imitate tribal performances which were encouraged among migrant workers in the mines and by the government (Kruger 1999), but presented a sense of crafted history of power, of resistance, which did not collapse into a forced heroic rendition (Sitas 1996).

The other characteristics of the all new work were formal innovations like episodic structures, quick shifts of scenes and tempo, oral narrative, music and street rhythms, jazz and factory work-rhythms (Steadman 1994). One practitioner who took up these characteristic trends of theatre was Gibson Kente.

Kente's approach to performance was commercial musical, a genre that made him popular and influence younger practitioners such as Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa. Coplan (1985: 208) highlights that Kente avoided dramatizing the

> wider political issues underlying the suffering and frustrations of urban Africans, [and instead] concentrated on personal morality and social responsibility based on African Christianity as the foundation of community life.

Kente's approach put him on a collision course with other BMC aligned practitioners who openly engaged in political drama. However, of fundamental importance was Kente's practice of scenography. Coplan (1985: 209) notes that Kente realized that the "costly sets, crew, and equipment required by white theatre were not necessary in the townships and would only serve to reduce mobility". In response, Kente made use of "young, newly trained actors, simple costumes and a few crudely painted flats and backdrops" (Coplan 1985: 209), performing under house lights to standing room only audiences in the township halls. Through adopting the minimalist design approach, he introduced a new performance style and rejuvenated black commercial performance in the township.

Sitas (199: 87-88) makes reference to the role played by the performance style used by Kente, Ngema and Mtwa, when he notes that

> what was exciting was their performance, their movement, their shifts from aggro to soft, from poise to the ridiculous, from humour to protest. By the time of *Sarafina* [Ngema] found himself developing a musical style which launched hundreds of imitation effects into the townships. Sarafina, the part, became the archetype of emancipated, political young-black-womanhood.

The shift to the role played by performance and presentation styles which were developed out of the everyday life traditions of the townships finds articulation in the creative project of this study. These types of performances helped dismantle the conceptions of the elitist discourse because they were rooted in the township dealing with problems such as unemployment, alcoholism and alienation.

Intuba Arts Development's performance ideology and techniques are inspired by the musical theatre of Kente, Ngema and Mtwa that targets revolution on stage. The themes Intuba Arts Development engages are conversant with the continual Black Consciousness renewal ideology. The performance style that involves storytelling, street rhythms and music seeks to create a close relation and engagement with the audience as they are used to explore issues that affect the black people in the modern day townships. I will discuss this further in chapter 4.

The ideological ideas of the BCM and black theology in South Africa and nationalism and Afro-radicalism in Zimbabwe influenced a new trend of theatre in post apartheid and independence era. In his article, *Theatre in Transition: The Cultural Struggle in South Africa*, Larlham (1991: 210) identifies five characteristics of this new theatre trends, which are:

> a theatre that addresses issues of immediate relevance to South African society with a de-emphasis on producing Western works; an eclectic, intercultural theatre that integrates performance conventions and acting

styles from diverse cultures; [and] playmaking, rather than working from preexistent scripts, often with a director-playwright who organizes and records improvisations. The actor is regarded as a role-maker rather than an interpreter of roles; actor's theatre with an abundance of song, dance, and music; a de-emphasis of technical theatre or lavish productions; [and] a theatre that records the cultural history of the people, that assists in reeducation after the long period of enforced censorship and disinformation.

These characteristics of the new theatre point towards community theatre in the South African and Zimbabwean context. Community theatre in post-apartheid South Africa and post-independence Zimbabwe, has disengaged itself from overt politics and moved towards the kind of indirect social change achievable through NGO work (Kerr and Chifunyise 2004:301). In his article *Apartheid and the Political Imagination in South African Theatre*, Peterson (1994) conclusively notes that despite the problems of the transition, the astonishing fertility and versatility of South African popular theatre performance, as well as the theoretical debates which accompanied the dialectic of theatrical activism, and its linkages to the broader history of the colonial struggle in South Africa, offered foundations for modern day community theatre.

3.5 Post Independence Theatre: Community Theatre in South Africa and Zimbabwe

As the exiles returned to South Africa and the machinery of apartheid was being dismantled, the opportunities for strategic community theatre increased enormously (Kerr 1995). However, it was no longer time for generalized consciousness, but for grappling with a host of complex, localized political, economic, social and psychological problems (Kerr 1995), and linking to the broader strategic struggle to replace the authoritarian apartheid structures of control with those of democracy (Kavanagh 1985). A new approach of popular theatre was needed, which Nicholson (2005) highlights as theatre for development, drama-in-education and community theatre.

In the case of Zimbabwe, Chifunyise (1990: 277) argues that at independence in 1980, theatre artists who had been involved in the use of theatre as a revolutionary tool for articulating both that experience and the ideological dynamics of the liberation struggle, returned home to be appointed either to senior government positions or joined the newly integrated national army. This meant that they did not have time or the structure to use their experiences in the development of theatre, and thereby a valuable opportunity to make maximum use of the novel form of theatre in the newly liberated Zimbabwe was lost (Chifunyise 1990).

For the decade following the attainment of political independence, Zimbabwean theatre initially continued along a path of nearly resolute

segregation, fragmentation and, at times, confrontation (Seda 2004). This segregation and fragmentation resulted in black theatre practitioners setting up their own organizations. Out of these new organizations, three distinct strains of theatre emerged from independence: the university theatre, well-endowed white theatre, and grassroots community based theatre (Seda 2004; Chifunyise 1990; Banham 2004).

The university theatre came to life after the appointment of Robert McLaren, formerly Robert Mshengu Kavanagh, to the University of Zimbabwe's Faculty of Arts to initiate and head the Department of Theatre Arts in 1984. McLaren's work was concerned with

> articulating [the University community's] ideological orientation, its understandings of the socio-economic and political realities of Zimbabwe and Southern Africa as well as critically examine itself and its relationship with the wider Zimbabwean society. (Chifunyise 1990:281)

This program, founded upon indigenous performance idioms, sought to illustrate the use of theatre to develop ideological direction in line with the liberation struggle, the struggle for majority rule, against racism, colonialism and for a socialist Zimbabwe (Chifunyise 1990). The university theatre trend had little influence on the cultural development until the new millennium when graduates from the Department of Theatre Arts became visible in the performance industry.

Chifunyise (1990) posits that the white cultural institutions responded to the new policies of non-racial society and cultural development with extreme caution. In the early years, Repertory Companies (REPS) and the NTO maintained their conservative policies of performing British plays, and for exclusively white audiences (Banham 2004). However, there were policy shifts in the NTO when Susan Haines became Chairperson in 1985. She worked hard to make the NTO inclusive of black theatre, taking plays written and performed in any language for the Winter festival. In 1986, some white groups pulled out of the NTO in protest against Amakhosi's *Nansi Le Ndoda* (Here is the Man) winning the festival competition (Banham 2004).

The black theatre artists who joined the NTO at independence were determined to introduce the kind of theatre that was consistent with the expectations of a new social order (Chifunyise 1990) into the white theatre establishment. However, white theatre clubs and Repertory Companies totally ignored plays written by black playwrights, although they were administratively affiliated to the NTO. As a result, Chifunyise (1990: 279) argues that

> most of the NTO outstanding directors have remained as isolated from the theatre of majority as they were in the pre-independence era. Neither have

they been exposed to many exciting experiments in other theatre movements of independent Zimbabwe.

Consequently, this made the contribution of white theatre practitioners in the development of independent Zimbabwean performance culture insignificant.

The 'inclusiveness' of the NTO needs to be interrogated in relation to the Winter festival in the development of Zimbabwean culture. Chifunyise (1990: 279) raises two important issues concerning the NTO Winter festivals:

> [i] the question of co-adjudicators has highlighted the fact that a trend has developed since 1980 which shows that white Zimbabweans are not prepared to produce African plays and plays which deal with the concerns of Zimbabwe, [ii] competitions threaten to undermine the significance of the excellent work of the black artists in the development of Zimbabwean theatre, as these artists become pre-occupied with theatre for competitive festivals which are completely cut away from their own communities and the working class.

The grassroots community based theatre sought to counter these challenges and develop a specific Zimbabwean theatre trend that responded to the socio-economic and political issues faced by the people. The grassroots theatre was supported by two institutions, the Department of Arts and Culture, in the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, under the leadership of Stephen Chifunyise, and the Zimbabwe Foundation for Education with Production (ZIMFEP) under the tutelage of Ngugi wa Mirii and Kemani Gecau (Chifunyise 1990).

The Department of Arts and Culture oversaw the government sponsored theatre and performance, and supported community theatre, dance and music groups in the country (Banham 2004), while ZIMFEP sought to use theatre as one of its major communication strategies. These two institutions sometimes formed a loose, sometimes acrimonious alliance to promote a radical socialist theatre in chiShona and isiNdebele (Banham 2004; Chifunyise 1990). The acrimony was due to lack of co-ordination and duplication of programs between these two institutions.

In 1986, an umbrella organization of community theatre groups, Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatres (ZACT) under the leadership of Ngugi wa Mirii was founded. ZACT sought to provide overall national co-ordination in organizing workshop training of theatre practitioners and logistical support for the community theatre network (Banham 2004). Owen Seda (2004: 137) adds that ZACT was formed to promote new theatre in the townships that would assist the post independence state to establish a just and democratic society.

The objective of placing the community theatre movement prominently in the struggle against neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism created a 'cold war' between ZACT and the NTO. Martin Banham (2004: 300) posits that ZACT accused the NTO of being contaminated by its Eurocentric origins, while the NTO accused ZACT of being too slavishly towing the government line on socialism. However, with government policy blunders and corruption in the late 1990s, and change in political conditions with the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, the relationship between ZACT and the NTO seemed to improve.

At the time, the Zimbabwean government implemented an International Monetary Fund (IMF) Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) that exposed the population, including the artists, into the world of the so-called Free Market Forces (McLaren 2000: 5). The effects of ESAP, coupled with corruption scandals by Ministers such as the Willowgate scandal, Harare food riots and high youth unemployment rates, transformed the activity of community theatre groups. Banham (2004: 301) adds that it was as if "many of the radical activists after the failure of Zimbabwe's socialist dream had decided to invest much of their energies in building a new generation of theatre practitioners".

At the turn of the century, ZACT managed to get offices at the National Sports Stadium and working space in the township of Waterfalls in Harare. This created institutional co-ordination and provided space for workshopping plays and experimentation. One of the positives to come out of the grassroots theatre movement administered by ZACT was the establishment of full time community theatre groups.

Another major feature of the ZACT programming was workshops, which were held for drama clubs in schools and newly community based theatre groups. These workshops mainly dealt with theatre development techniques, collective play making and the use of indigenous performing arts in the production of theatre. However, one notes that while these community theatre groups regarded themselves as 'professional', that should mean a proficient approach to production, they were in principle not. This would include and involve the training and practice of design in community theatre performances. Conversely, this did not mean community theatre performances did not nor do not use design.

Since the new millennium, a younger generation, such as Davies Guzha of Rooftop Promotions, Daniel Maposa of Savanna Arts Trust and Raisedon Baya of Homegrown Arts, among others, have shown less interest in the ideological trends of the 1980s and concentrated on social commentary and critique of the current status quo. New theatre venues such as Gallery Delta,

Theatre-in-the-Park, and Alliance Françoise became experimental spaces for new trends of theatre that moved away from the rigidly specific western forms (Seda 2004). Plays performed in these venues relied on minimal casts, sets and properties, something that allowed them to borrow from the production styles of Brook and Grotowski (Seda 2004). These production styles have become the general trend in current community theatre performance practice in Zimbabwe.

In the case of South Africa, performance was historically constituted political action often by the simple fact that it took place at all, thereby breaking laws against racial segregation (Marlin-Curiel 2004). However, a new constitution in 1994 meant that cultural production became a constitutional matter, protected and celebrated as a right of the peoples of South Africa by acknowledging and compensating for the imbalances of the past (Mistry 2001: 3). The celebration of the arts and the commitment of the government of South Africa to developing infrastructure, personnel and providing resources were further elaborated in the *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* (White Paper 1996) that would govern and inform cultural policy in post apartheid South Africa.

Until the 1990s, Stephanie Marlin-Curiel (2004: 96) posits that what existed in South African theatre was a strong anti-apartheid theatre tradition which included protest and resistance theatre movements that exhibited strong physical and 'poor theatre' techniques, as well as a combination of township theatre and Brechtian techniques. This dissertation will argue that these characteristics of the anti-apartheid theatre highlighted by Marlin-Curlie (2004) formed the foundations upon which post- apartheid theatre was built.

To Loren Kruger (1999: 183),

> an account of theatre practice in the 1990s should include practices ranging from the internationally inspired and acclaimed *Faustus in Africa* (1995) and other collaborations between Handspring Puppets and director/designer/animator William Kentridge, to the functional skills performed in clinics, schools and bus depots by health workers or voter organizers as well as by trained actors, to the role-playing at the heart of *Heart to Heart* (1991-96), a graphic romance-in-progress, many of which have originated outside the usual theatre venues or outside theatres all together.

In this quotation, Kruger gives an overview of the different genres of theatre that developed in the 1990s in the 'new' South Africa. The genres that most strongly developed include professional theatre and community theatre.

The production of new work and new ways of creating theatre for new audiences in the 1990s happened mostly on the festival circuit or in non-

theatre spaces rather than on the main stages of subsidized theatre (Kruger 1999). The main stage theatres hosted revivals of plays developed and performed during the apartheid, such as Jerry Mofokong's *Nongongo* (Civic Theatre 1994) and Matsemela Manaka's *Egoli* and *Ekhaya* (Playhouse 1995). The Market Theatre, an institution that gained a reputation of turning protest theatre into world class masterpieces (Malin-Curiel 2004) and the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown provided venues for new plays dealing with the social, cultural, and economic upheavals of transition, such as Neil McCarthy's *Rainshark* (Market Theatre, 1991), Fugard's *Playland* (Market Theatre, 1992) and Paul Slabolepszy's *Mooi Street Moves* (National Arts Festival; Market Theatre 1992) (Kruger 1999). The pre-eminence of festivals was mainly due to high production costs which community theatre groups could not afford, as well as limited local audience interest for the subtle, allusive productions (Kruger 1999: 187).

Festivals enabled community theatre groups to draw on the experience of practitioners trained in fine art, professional theatre, and agit-prop productions to combine classic texts of European drama and South African themes, and experiment with puppetry, animation and live performance, to explore historical and contemporary interpretations of their stories (Kruger 1999). Thus, community theatre groups with limited resources were able to contribute to the growth and development of new forms of theatre in the new South Africa.

However, while community theatre practitioners demonstrated that theatrical skill and compelling stories and theatre could also come from the community theatre stables (Kruger 1999), their lack of technical training hampered these developments. The aspect of lack of technical training finds articulation in this dissertation as it relates to the current situation to be found in community theatre in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, this forced community theatre practitioners to be creative and experimental. How do Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble creatively deal with these technical training shortcomings? This will be explored in the next chapter.

According to Kruger (1999:191), community theatre groups used

> topical scripts written for performance by people with multiple skills, using functional, portable sets and props, for audiences whose engagement with the subject and occasion of the performance plays at least as great a role in the production of the event's meaning as the text.

These collaborations led to the formation of the Community for Theatre for Development Trust in 1992 which would complement the work of the Market Lab and the University of Zululand's Drama Department in training and producing committed community theatre work. The work of these three

institutions encouraged the growth of community theatre groups to perform at the Market Lab's Zwakala Community Theatre Festival, Windybrow's New Play Series and Baxter Theatre's Ikwezi Community Theatre Festival.

The continued growth of the community theatre tradition placed it on a collision course with 'professional' theatre companies and provincial arts councils. Marlin-Curiel (2004:100) noted that South African theatre remains geographically divided largely along lines of class and race; as such, the perception is that "anything worth seeing will come to the Market Theatre". The Market Theatre came to be regarded as representative of the mainstream 'professional' theatre institutions. This meant that any work of the community theatre groups presented in alternative theatre spaces was therefore not considered worth watching by the mainstream theatre institutions. The reluctance of white audiences to see theatre from a community perspective was made clear during John Hunt's 1999 production *Stand in the Sun*. Marlin-Curiel (2004) maintains that the play was staged at venues in Alexandra and Sandton with the intention of bussing audience members from Alexander to the Sandton venue and vice versa. However, the Alexander performances were discontinued for lack of patronage as the white audience felt 'unsafe' in Alexandra, watching a social critique that put them in the spotlight (Marlin-Curiel 2004:102).

The community theatre practitioners also contested the

> privilege habitually accorded the tastes of 'professional spectators', those schooled in the viewing and polite applause of Western decorum, arguing that the active (but often subtle) responses of audiences not beholden to this decorum reflect a serious engagement with the occasion and effect of the performed action. (Kruger 1999: 191-92)

In contrast, community theatre practitioners proffered a theatre of engagement that addressed and sought the participation of audiences to address economic, political and socio-cultural issues. Professional spectatorship is characterized by passivity and gaze, which community theatre practitioners felt did not support social redress.

Mda (1993: 293) develops this argument further when he posits that the social critical drama on the main stage of the Market Theatre and other established theatre institutions is a process of artistic work and careers rather than the process of developing social agents out of performers and spectators. Marlin-Curiel (2004) identifies the main stages of the Market Theatre and Playhouse Theatre as "safe havens" that cushion the 'professional spectators' from alternative politically charged community theatre, when performed in these spaces.

Community theatre as a genre, crosses and re-crosses the border between experimental theatre, culture-for-development and professional theatre. Kruger (1999:195) posits that the conceptual framework and fluidity of the community theatre brings

> together apparently incompatible places, occasions and practices - performances for the Market's "professional audience" alongside those in community halls in Soweto or Lenasia for the people directly engaged by the action; drama that focuses primarily on the appreciation for character alongside more explicitly issue-oriented plays that allow participants to face hidden problems in community - but it is also this very fluidity that makes possible the revision of the axioms of anti-apartheid theatre and the re-negotiation of the relationship between aesthetics and politics, form and function, subjunctive enactment in the theatre and indicative action in streets and houses.

Because community theatre intersects aesthetically and institutionally with theatre at places like the Market and National Arts Festival, overlaps with pedagogical theatre sponsored by non-theatre professionals in institutions like the Johannesburg City Health Department or the Institution for Applied English Language (AELS) and culture-for-development, it becomes the major genre that has had an impact on the lives of the majority of theatre practitioners in the new South Africa. What is of interest in this dissertation is the relationship of the aesthetics, politics and performance in community theatre productions. This will be explored in Chapter 4 and 5.

The community theatre tradition in post-colonial Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa became an alternative performance platform that sought to explore the socio-cultural, economic and political situations within the respective countries. Community theatre became the vehicle for challenging institutions, initiating debate and a platform for experimentation by young practitioners.

Conclusion

This chapter traced the development of community theatre in South Africa and Zimbabwe from the colonial through the liberation and anti-apartheid eras to independence and post apartheid. The investigation highlighted that the ideological influences became the foundations of black theatre. The engagement with the post independence situation in Zimbabwe and post apartheid in South Africa has been addressed on an aesthetic level rather than on a literary level. Chapter 4 will present and analyze data on the on process of design.

CHAPTER 4: The Process of Design: Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble

The scenographer must be in command of the theatre, its master.

<div align="right">Josef Svoboda (in Jarka Burian 1971:20)</div>

Introduction

This chapter seeks to contribute to the understating of design by examining and analysing the processes of design in set and lighting design implemented by Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble in their productions of *Tears of Death* and *Just Because* respectively. To understand the processes of design by these case study groups, it is necessary to provide background information on the organisations and the case study productions. The engagement of the set and lighting design will be done on a comparative basis. This chapter will also underscore the challenges that Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Development faced in realising the designs in the live performance events of *Tears of Death* and *Just Because* in 2013 respectively.

4.1 Intuba Development Arts

Intuba Arts Development is a community theatre group that was formed in October 2012 by a group of young theatre practitioners who sought to create a framework that would challenge the exploitation of artists while producing relevant work in the township community of Durban. Intuba Arts Development is composed of young community theatre practitioners who come from different backgrounds, and from various community theatre groups, in Umlazi and KwaMashu.

The organisational structure of Intuba Arts Development has a Board made up of four members, namely, Xolani Dlongolo, who is the chairperson of the Board and the Artistic Director, Gugulethu Makhosazane Nkosi, Deputy Chairperson and Stage Manager, Noxolo Mathunjwa, Marketing, and Fezeka Shange, the Secretary. The group has four members: Zanele Nduli, Andile Msomi, Andile Ngcongo and Mpilo Magubane. Intuba Arts Development recently lost Sihle Cele and Siyabonga Mbili, who left owing to work commitments, however not in the performing industry.

Intuba Arts Development was formed after the four members of the Board attended a capacity building workshop organised by the Cultural Development Trust (CDT) on arts management. The CDT is a Johannesburg based, Africalia Belgium funded, membership based organisation that assists artists with research work, training and development in financial management and other administrative processes to facilitate economic development. The four

Board members attended this workshop while they were still members of Ubuntu Arts Development. After the workshop, the Board members decided to form Intuba Arts Development as a skills and performance development platform for township performers. Most members of Ubuntu Arts Development joined Intuba Arts Development. Due to sustainability challenges, the group has found itself focussing on performing more than training and developing young talent.

The group has a standard recruitment criterion that looks into three elements from a performer: acting, dancing and making music. In addition, prospective members must write a motivational letter stating the reasons why he/she wants to join Intuba Arts Development rather than other community theatre groups. Finally, the prospective member must state what additional talents he/she is bringing to the group besides acting, dancing or music-making.

Initially, Ubuntu Arts Development was operating from the YMCA hall in KwaMashu, but when it transformed into Intuba Arts Development, it moved to the Stable Theatre, located along Johannes Nkosi Street, in downtown Durban. The group has been operating from Stable Theatre rehearsal room 3. The group has so far produced two productions: *Tears of Death* (2013) and *The Legend Will Never Die* (2013).

4.1.1 *Tears of Death* (2013)

The Intuba Arts Development play, *Tears of Death,* is a harrowing story of a small village in Africa that is overtaken by crime and war. Women and children become the victims of these wars, some are brutally murdered, some are raped, while some are maimed. People are unfairly sentenced and brutally executed by a kangaroo court led by former liberation fighters Zembe and Sosha. A young graduate, Mholi Ngcobo, son to Mr and Mrs Ngcobo, who are murdered on their way back from receiving a Nobel Peace Prize, challenges the constitutionality and relevance of the kangaroo court society. Ultimately the dead rise up to confront the leaders of the war and kangaroo court, to prove their innocence.

Tears of Death was performed at the K-Cap Theatre in KwaMashu in 2012, the Stable Theatre in 2013 and the Kingswood Theatre in Grahamstown at the National Arts Festival in 2013, the Catalina Theatre in 2013, and the KwaXimba community hall, 50 kilometres north of Durban, in 2013 as well. The K-Cap run was for a competition at the Isigcawu Community Theatre Festival, while that, at the Stable Theatre was a technical rehearsal for the National Arts Festival as well as a fundraising drive. The National Arts Festival performance was the main creative project performance of *Tears of Death*.

During the Stable Theatre and the Kingswood Theatre runs, Intuba Arts Development were given access to all the equipment in the theatres, while for the K-Cap Theatre and the Catalina Theatre runs, the group was only allowed to use the bare stage and general lighting only. The KwaXimba performance did make use of the sound system only as it was just a bare hall which neither had a lighting rig, backstage nor change rooms.

The cast for *Tears of Death* was Mbili, Msomi, Nkosi, Nduli, Ngcongo, Cele and Shange. The stage manager was Mathunjwa and I was the lighting operator. On the second day of the run of the National Arts Festival, Dlongolo operated the image projections.

4.2 Bambelela Arts Ensemble

Bambelela Arts Ensemble is a fulltime community theatre based organisation made up of youths representing a broad range of groups and interests, who have worked together in a broad alliance concerning their common interest in Community Development and other related matters. The Ensemble was formed in response to an increasing demand in Zimbabwe for overt organised support and comprehensive development delivery services. The Ensemble has a long standing history of activism on development, dating back to its inception on the 20 of June 1992 at Matshobana Township in Bulawayo.

Bambelela Arts Ensemble was formed by Aldof Phiri (late), Naison Dube, Allen Sithole (now in the United Kingdom) and Liwena Mathe (late). The founding members recruited Nonhlanhla Sibanda, Nomsa Sibanda, Khumbulani Mathe, Likando Mathe, and Witness Tavarwisa, who starred in the 1999 performance of *Just Because*. Currently, Tavarwisa is the Organisational Director, while Mathe is the Artistic Director. Naison Dube is currently based in Swaziland, working with community based theatre groups in Mbabane. In addition to Tavarwisa, Mathe and Dube, the current membership of Bambelela Arts Ensemble includes Leonard Phiri, Prosper Sibanda, Pride Mpofu, Bongelani Ncube, Tawanda Mukoma, Shelton Mpofu and Josphat Ndlovu.

Bambelela Arts Ensemble hosted the Masakhane Arts Festival (1995) and performed at the Harare international Festival of the Arts HIFA (2000 - 2007), the Ibumba Arts Festival (2001 - 2008), the Umzingwane AIDS Network (2000 - 2007), the SADC Multi-disciplinary Festival (2003) in South Africa, the Abangane Arts Festival (2003 - 2007), Savanna Trust Community Arts Festivals, Patsime's BAFA (2008 - 2010), the Great Zimbabwe Arts Festival (2008 - 2012) and the Intwasa Arts Festival koBulawayo (2005 - 2013).

Due to the past achievements of Bambelela Arts Development, and the fact that the issues around which the group was formed continue to prevail, the

individuals who have been involved have decided to take up the challenges of ongoing development work. For the Ensemble, what matters most is not the number of followers it has, but the ideological unity, mutual trust, understanding and solidarity of purpose through which they implement the organisation's activities.

Bambelela Arts Ensemble has produced a large number of productions, including: *Garikai* (2005), which was banned by the government and the cast detained for three hours in Hwange, *Social Hanger* (1999), *The Roadside* (2003), *Naked Truth* (2004), *How Long?* (2006), *Tomorrow's People* (2006), and *Wish List* (2009).

4.2.1 *Just Because* (1999: 2013)

Just Because is a community initiative that seeks to challenge the community leaders, non-governmental organisations and the government to act on the continued rise of spousal abuse in the city of Bulawayo. The cultural practices and beliefs that exploit and expose women to abuse, such as the belief that beating a wife is a way of showing love, are explored and challenged. Based on factual evidence gathered from newspaper articles, police report statistics and civil society organisation's reports, the play explores the theme and definition of what constitutes a 'home'? Is it the buildings or the inhabitants of the building? Is it the community and neighbours?

As a means of engaging and reaching to a large audience, the group entered the play in different competitions such as the Habbitat Peace Day competitions, and festivals such as the Linkfest Festival in Bulawayo. The production caught the interest of a number of non-governmental organisations such as Women Action Group, Women and Law in Southern Africa, ZimRights and Legal Resources Foundation that employed Bambelela Arts Ensemble in its programmes. These partnerships enlarged the outreach base of Bambelela Arts Ensemble as they performed in Harare, Hwange, Mutare and other remote areas of Zimbabwe. The cast 2013 for *Just Because* was Ncube, Sibanda, Mpofu, Mukoma, Phiri and Mpofu with Mathe as the Director.

4.3 The Process of Set Design: Cases Studies in Context

Josef Svoboda (in Howard 2002: xiv) defines scenography as the "interplay of space, movement and light on stage". This interplay enables the "manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment" (McKinney and Butterworth 2009:4) to suit the specific performance needs of different productions. Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth (2009) maintain that the analysis of this scenographic interplay on the stage space is key in determining the design idea, design concept and production style. This speaks

to the conscious creative decisions that are taken to configure and manipulate the stage for performance purposes, and determine the type, source and nature of light used creatively during the performance, among other decisions that deal with costume, properties and sound. The choice of design materials and timeframes for the technical processes are contributory factors in determining the scenographic interplay. The analysis of the scenography will be informed by the political, socio-economic and cultural influences on the process of design and design in performance.

Svoboda's definition of scenography highlights an interesting point that this dissertation challenges within the mainstream professional theatre. The reading of his definition implies that scenography can be a conscious or unconscious process. Linked to Howard's (2002:1) performance idea that "theatre takes place wherever there is a meeting point between actors and a potential audience" and Brook's (1968; 1996) notions of the empty space, the practice of scenography in performance can be redefined. Brook (1968; 1996: 1) notes that

> I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.

A number of ideas can be read from Brook's statement. Firstly, his reference to an "empty space" can be used to mean any space from streets, classrooms, theatres, and/or community halls. Brook's notion finds relevance in this chapter, in that it opens up the definition of what could be called a performance space. Secondly, the quotation proposes a redefinition of the characteristics of an "act of theatre". Brook intimates that once an empty space is inhabited by a body with a spectator watching, an act of theatre can take place. In that act of theatre, scenography is inherent as a performer-spectator spatial relationship is created and the empty space is re-configured through its occupation by the 'body' of the performer. This is the case with many 'theatre beyond boundaries' productions. The role of scenography could be creatively decided or it can be implied through analysis of the spatial arrangement of set items, costumes and sound. To understand the decisions on design, design processes and specific roles for the particular type of scenography, one has to engage the politics of design, the socio-political, economic and cultural influences on the production.

The 'theatre beyond boundaries' productions, therefore have their performance spaces configured by the performer-audience interaction. This is due to the fact that most of these performances take place in open spaces, community halls or classrooms, spaces that do not have a performance area and auditorium configured by architecture. These configurations are,

however, influenced by cultural performative conventions and the socio-economic landscapes impacting on the community. While, these performance space configurations can be negotiated during the performance event, this dissertation argues that it is scenography based on McKinney and Butterworth's (2009) assertion that any performance space possesses the same characteristics as designed spaces of width, length and depth. McKinney and Butterworth's (2009) assertion provides a point of departure for this dissertation: every performance makes use of design, consciously or unconsciously.

Linked to Grotowski's notion of poor theatre, which underscores that a performer is part of scenography, the performance spaces in 'theatre beyond boundaries' productions are, therefore, also configured when a performer inhabits the space. However, during the design process, Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble did not understand that the use of the stage in its emptiness could be integral to scenography that would evolve during the performance. This can be attributed to the lack of understanding of Grotowski's and Brook's theories, in relation to scenography.

Howard's (2002: 1) emphasis that scenography must be a seamless synthesis of space, colour and composition, performers and spectators, provides a foundational standpoint for analysing the design processes and designs of Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble. The emphasis highlights the importance of the process rather than the object of design. To achieve the synthesis, there has to be a process that enables the harnessing of the characteristics of space, colour, composition, and arrangement of the performers and spectators. The object of design becomes a component of the process as the design continues to develop even during the live performance event.

Intuba Arts Development employed an 'outside-in' approach in their design approach. The 'outside-in' approach is synonymous with the processes of workshopping and improvisation. This approach enabled the whole group to contribute to the creative process as they made suggestions of different set items that could be used, and where they could be sourced from, during the rehearsals. In this light, the rehearsal became a process of achieving a unified effect in the visual and performance aspects of the production. The collaborative design process in set and costume meant that group members would assist each other in sourcing costumes and properties. As a matter of fact, the design process became a collection activity of the most possibly available set items and properties, rather than a process of planning, designing and executing the design plans.

While this design process approach is financially feasible and adaptable to community theatre performance practice, the implementation of the process by Intuba Arts Development left many questions unanswered. The choice of set items and properties was based on the availability of the 'found' sets, costumes and properties rather than fulfilling specific pre-planned design objectives, or complementing and commenting on the action, or enriching the audience experience (McKinney and Butterworth 2009). However, the found set items managed to achieve the "manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment" (McKinney and Butterworth 2009:4) to suit the production needs of *Tears of Death*. This highlights that the application of design processes by community theatre groups might differ from those proposed by design theorists such as Gillette, Howard and Arnott, but will usually deliver the expected results.

The theoretical underpinning of Intuba Arts Development's set design process pointed towards the minimalist approach, Brook's 'empty space' and Grotowski's poor theatre. The use of minimal set items such as the wooden poles that were neatly tied together to create a symbolic barricade, resembled traditional Zulu homesteads. The barricades were used fluidly to represent the community court fencing, watering area barricade, Ngcobo homestead and Sosha's homestead. The transformations into these different settings were executed by the characters inhabiting the space, and through set items that were brought in by the actors. The courtyard was identified by the benches, Zembe's chair, the beer casings and the hangman's noose, while the watering area was identifiable by the washing line. The fluid use and transformations of the placement of the wooden barricades enabled Intuba Arts Development to successfully apply the minimalist approach, as well as Brook's empty space approach, in the *Tears of Death* performances at the Stable Theatre and National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

It is also important to note that these wooden barricades belonged to the Stable Theatre and had been previously used in the production *The Legend will Never Die* (2013) by Intuba Arts Development and in other productions by other professional and community theatre groups. The decision to use these barricades was made by Xolani Dlongolo, the scriptwriter and Artistic Director of *Tears of Death*, while we were preparing for a technical run. While other design decisions, except those relating to lighting design, were made collectively by the group members, this was an individual decision by Xolani Dlongolo.

This individual decision by the Artistic Director of Intuba Arts Development highlights two points about the design process of community theatre groups. Because community theatre groups do not have a design team, most technical decisions and implementations are made by the directors who are usually

arguably versed with the design demands for their specific types of productions. Secondly, it was necessitated by the level of disinterest among community group members in participating in the major creative design decision making process. Instead of the active participation of the group members in deciding what was available for use in the *Tears of Death* production, their disinterest stemmed from lack of understanding of the design terminologies and finer details of stage design.

The run of *Tears of Death* at the K-Cap Theatre in KwaMashu, the festival venue for the Isigcawu Community Theatre Festival competition, and the run at KwaXimba did not use the wooden barricades as a territorial pre-setter but used the stage space in its emptiness, to use Brook's terminology. The new performance space at the K-Cap Theatre and KwaXimba community hall, created a "unique and confrontational environment for each [performance]" (Mackey and Cooper, 2000:336), different from the environments at the Stable Theatre and Kingswood Theatre at the National Arts Festival.

The reason behind the lack of planned stage design at the K-Cap Theatre was the festival's consideration of acting, script and direction of the play over design technical elements. While the competing groups did not know the adjudication criteria, the prevailing attitude was the importance on acting, projection and characterisation. However, the production that won the competition had a comprehensive stage design that complemented the live performance event and captivated the audience's understanding of the story, themes, plot and characters.

Edmund Mhlongo, the Founder and Artistic Director of the Isigcawu Festival competition, also intimated that "stage and lighting design are complicated and a step far away from the standard of these community theatre groups" in his response to a query I had raised, on the third of November 2012, in relation to the adjudication criteria that did not recognise scenography. This can also be noted as a contributory factor to the lack of practice of scenography by community theatre groups in KwaMashu. The festival they perform at does not motivate them to make use of scenography as part of production; thus, they concentrate on what is considered important in the adjudication process.

The KwaXimba performance took place in a community hall with an end on stage without a backstage, wings or a lighting rig. This performance took place after the National Arts Festival run in Grahamstown. The expectation would have been to transport the usual set, but because the group did not know the type of performance space they were going to perform in and the fact that it was considered as merely a rural performance, not much effort was made in keeping the standard of the creative visual aspect of the production. This

laissez-faire attitude towards rural performances and the ignorance of community theatre festivals such as the Isigcawu Festival competition affect the growth of the practice of scenography in community theatre practice.

Smith and Parker (2002: 70) argue that the process design begins with a design idea that is developed into a design concept, which should be in tandem with the overall production style. Fletcher and Wainscott (2004) define a design concept as the artistic decision taken to visually and aurally communicate a specific interpretation through scenery, costume, lighting and movement as well as composition. In agreement, Smith and Parker (2002: 71) add that the design concept is often evident as a visual theme with variations that weave through a complicated setting or series of settings, bringing unity of thought to the whole. The process of developing a design idea, design concept and production style is a collaborative process between set, costume and lighting designers, directors, producers and choreographers.

The design process employed by Intuba Arts Development reveals a lack of a comprehensive design idea, design concept or a unified production style. During the creative process for *Tears of Death*, it became very difficult to develop and pin down a design concept, because the narrative was always changing as actors improvised the development of the dialogue and the story. The other challenge was a lack of understanding of the scenographic terminology by the group members. Making reference to a design idea and concept would have confused the group members, but what seemed to come out of the engagements during the rehearsals could have pointed towards a specific design idea and design concept.

In general, this has proved a challenge among community theatre groups, as most do not know or understand technical language. This was further observed when the National Arts Festival sent Intuba Arts Development a technical questionnaire for *Tears of Death*. The group failed to complete it until they asked me to assist in explaining what was expected and needed by the festival organisers. In the process, I became the contact technical person for Intuba Arts Development. In this regard, I would argue that Intuba Arts Development's design challenges are a microcosm of the macrocosm. The group has performers that have been in the industry since 1993, and yet they still have difficulty in understanding technical language. This highlights the general trend among community theatre groups of an over reliance on the narrative rather than balancing it with scenography.

However, my analysis of the design process revealed that the general design idea was a setting of a rural community at breaking point with, however a glimmer of hope of good overcoming evil. This design idea necessitated the adoption of the minimalist approach alongside Brook's theory of the empty

space and aspects of Grotowski's poor theatre. The adjustments and readjustments of the design to fit different performance spaces such as the end on open stage of KwaXimba community hall, thrust stage of the Stable Theatre and the proscenium arch of Kingswood Theatre in Grahamstown and K-Cap Theatre in KwaMashu, I will argue were necessitated by the application of these theories.

In contrast to Intuba Arts Development, the process of design for Bambelela Arts Ensemble's 2013 *Just Because*, was to creatively modify the design that the group had been using since 1999. *Just Because* has been repeatedly performed in different places and spaces since 1999 using the same design ideas and material: a yellow backdrop inscribed with messages of gender based violence, vigilantism and substance abuse. As such, the creative process was a negotiation between this old open design and a new design approach that sought to create a feeling of containment in space. Consequently, during the initial process of creative brainstorming of the new design with Tavarwisa, the Director of Bambelela Arts Ensemble; there were two general ideas that were agreed on as alternatives: a cage barricade made of aluminium pipes or a cage made of plastic pipes. However, it became difficult to develop this design idea that sought to symbolize the feeling of containment of the performance space and the real lived spaces in Matshobana Township. Rather, the design idea was modified to fit into the design that the Ensemble had used since 1999.

The contributory factors towards the modification of the design idea into the 1999 original were time constraints and availability of funds. Time constraints came in a two-fold manner. Firstly, Bambelela Arts Ensemble has performed the production *Just Because* so many times, that the cast became so complacent that the agreed two weeks rehearsal schedule was cut down to just four days. As such, introducing an aluminium case cage of two cubic metres (2m x 2m x 2m) over four days would have proved problematic to the technically untrained cast. During the first rehearsal, I asked the director, Khumbulani Mathe, to apply the performance space dimensions which proved challenging to the cast. They either forgot and ended up outside the space parameter or always complained that the space was inadequate for their blocking. Thus, the decision not to use an aluminium or plastic pipe cage was partly due to these challenges. Secondly, the welder who had been commissioned to make the cage needed a minimum of two weeks, a privilege we did not have as a production team. Finally, Witness Tavarwisa suggested that instead five steel poles could be used with multi-colored ropes to create a space with the same sense and atmosphere of containment.

The new performance design had its own advantages over the initial agreed ideas. The setting-up process and striking of the set was easily achieved,

especially since the performances were done in open spaces such as Cowdray Park Terminus and Nkulumane Sokusile Shopping Centre in Bulawayo. The use of ropes enabled re-adjustments to the performance space to suite the spatial demands of the actors. Transporting the set was also easy, and cheap, as the steel rods, ropes and other set items could be accommodated in a kombi doing its routine route operations. In this regard, the Ensemble used public transport for all of its performances.

While Intuba Arts Development collaboratively discussed and made decisions with the exception of lighting design and the wooden barricades, the responsibility of developing designs was left in the hands of Witness Tavarwisa. It is important to highlight that Tavarwisa is the Director of Bambelela Arts Ensemble and not the Director of the 2013 *Just Because* production. This is significant because it highlights the difference in the decision making process at Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble. Xolani Dlongolo, the Director of *Tears of Death,* was the co-ordinator of the rehearsal and design process, while Witness Tavarwisa, the Organisational Director of Bambelela Arts Ensemble, did not attend any rehearsal of *Just Because*, but made the decision on the designs of the production. Thus, the challenges that the cast faced in terms of the performance space configurations of the cage emanated from his lack of knowledge of the transformation and changes in the setting, spatial demands and technical adaptability of the actors. In this regard, while Xolani Dlongolo made his technical decisions with the cast based on practical information gathered during the rehearsal, Witness Tavarwisa made his decisions based on the knowledge of the play as they had performed it over the years.

The pre-2013 performances were open space performances. The group would choose a corner in a street, shopping centre or outside a community centre where they would set up. The front side of the yellow background cloth would form the 'stage' and the back side, the backstage area for the actors. The depth, width and length of the performance space were negotiated with the audience as they gathered around. The 2013 production maintained the yellow backdrop to serve as a dividing mechanism for the 'stage' and backstage. The 'stage' was, however, not negotiated with the audience, but determined by the use of the multi-coloured strings tied from one pole to the other. Therefore, the spatial characteristics of the stage were determined by the members of Bambelela Arts Ensemble who could enlarge or reduce the space without inconveniencing the audience.

The new design for *Just Because* enabled the audience to be as close as possible to the created performance space in contrast to the 1999 version. The process of negotiating for space between the performers and the audience in the 1999 performances meant that the performance space dimensions were

determined by the type of the audience: at some places the audience was very close, such that the performance space was very small, while at some places the audience would stand at a distance, creating problems for the performers as they tried to contact them. By contrast, the 2013 design of the space allowed Bambelela Arts Ensemble to adapt this audience-performer relationship by re-configuring the performance space.

Bambelela Arts Ensemble's design processes sought to transform found open spaces into performance spaces that would create an audience-performer relationship similar to conventional theatres, while Intuba Arts Development's strategy was to collectively identify, from personal resources and those of the group, set items that could be used in the production *Tears of Death*. The common denominator that these two groups share is the dependency on available resources. The decisions on design are based on the availability of resources.

The process as set down in theoretical teaching and published works on design demands a chronological order of events: a clearly thought through production style, design idea, design concept and design sketches and plans. However, the design processes of Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble highlight that this approach cannot be consistently applicable in the community theatre circles, because it demands committed, fully trained design teams with supporting workshop staff to transform and execute design ideas, concepts and plans into design objects, which they do not have the capacity and resources to support. It is also not applicable because the process of design in community theatre groups, as in the case of Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble, is highly dependent on available resources, which is the basis of decisions regarding design.

The design processes as set down by theorists and mainstream designers such as Gillette (1997) and Arnott (1997), and similar writers in tertiary scenography modules, denote that design should "evoke an atmosphere, give some kind of expression and illustrate a location" (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 5), while that of community theatre groups as practised by Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble seek to explore the "potential of scenography as an expressive and effective agent of performance" (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 5). Conventional mainstream design, therefore, leaves the creative work of design solely in the hands of a specially trained designer, while the community driven scenography responsibilities

> sit uneasily within the existing functions of writer, director, choreographer, designer and performer because each or any combination, of these roles is capable of producing scenography in ways that will not accept restriction implicitly imposed by such singular identities. (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 5-6)

The practice of scenography by community theatre groups, therefore, is a means to resist restrictions and the imposition of ideas on the production by trained specialist designers. It is a collaborative process that usually involves everyone in the production. Ideas on set, costumes, make-up, sound and lights are discussed during improvisation and rehearsal sessions. Responsibilities are shared among production members. The final design is therefore a collective, negotiated factor of the live performance event.

With regards to Intuba Arts Development, the design process became a repetitive procedure, as set considerations changed owing to new ideas being added into the 'script' of the play or the story took new shifts. The repetitiveness of the process, however, enabled the design to be adaptable to different performance spaces as the play was performed in many spaces such as the K-Cap Theatre, the Stable Theatre, and National Arts Festival's Kingswood Theatre and KwaXimba community hall. While it was noted that the Bambelela Arts Ensemble's design decisions for the 2013 *Just Because* were made by Tavarwisa, the fact that he did not attend rehearsals and the first performance at Cowdray Park Terminus reveals that the other technical decisions were taken by Mathe, in consultation with the cast. Decisions concerning costumes, sound, and determining exits and entrances were taken collectively on the final day of rehearsals.

4.4 The Process of Lighting Design: Case Studies in Context

Lighting design is a process of manipulating the properties of light and elements of composition, by understanding the human visual process and the effects that light has on them (Essig 2005), to enable the audience to see the stage and the performers in an exclusively focused way. The lighting designer creates a unique visual environment through imposing the quality of light on objects and people on stage. This should be well planned process that leaves no room for chance.

Linda Essig (2005:5) identifies four distinct steps in the lighting design process:

1. Read/ assimilate/ understand the material being designed

2. Decide what it should look like

3. Figure out how to make it look that way

4. Make it look that way on stage, in the theatre

Essig's definition of lighting design and the steps that she identifies demand a deeper understanding of the characteristics of light, the technological tools of lighting, electricity, and correct terminology. The process as proposed by Essig is individualistic, as opposed to collaborative; an approach that limits

teamwork between the lighting designer and other members of the designer team, which creates challenges in community theatre circles. The lighting designer collaborates with other visual designers and performers on three levels: the conceptual level, the graphic and the technical level.

On the conceptual level, the lighting designer works with other designers to conceptualize the visual elements so that they are working towards the implementation of shared ideas (Essig 2005). The conceptual level deals with Essig's step number one and two. At this level, the creative team generates the production style, design ideas and concepts that will become actualised set, costume and lighting designs. The shared idea can only be achieved once there has been an understanding of the material being designed and performance needs by all the creative team members.

The graphic level involves the collaborative work by the director, set and costume designers in establishing the visual hierarchy and compositional focus (Essig 2005). The creative team discusses how various design elements will function in the overall design at this level. This level is a response to Essig's step three. Preliminary ideas can be communicated through story boards of images for each scene, coloured sketches of key moments, and visual research materials that will help express the lighting possibilities and intent (Essig 2005:8). The third and final collaborative stage is the technical level. The technical level explores Essig's step number four. The creative team works together on technical issues involving the placement, rigging, focusing lights and lighting equipment in and around the set (Essig 2005) to complete the *mise-en-scène.*

The lighting design for *Tears of Death* was a collaboration between Dlongolo and the researcher, Nkululeko Sibanda. This was mainly owing to the fact that the group openly declared that they did not understand much of the technicalities of lighting design. Thus, because Dlongolo was the Artistic Director of the production, it was ideal to work with him. Secondly, it was because the group had asked me to be the technical contact person, owing to their challenges in understanding the questionnaire from the National Arts Festival technical office. Dlongolo made the decisions with regards to the kind of light he wanted and where he wanted it, and I explained it in design terminology. My role was to advise in terms of the technical possibilities in lighting the production. Thus, the major lighting decisions on the process and lighting needs were made by Dlongolo while I advised and operated the lighting switch board.

By contrast, Bambelela Arts Ensemble did not have a lighting design process except the discussions I had with Witness Tavarwisa over the possibility of performing one of the shows in the evening. This would have highlighted a

major challenge facing lighting design within community theatre performance circles, as also noticed at Amakhosi Cultural Centre and Intwasa Arts Festival koBulawayo in Bulawayo. Community theatre groups use lighting for visibility only, nothing more. In this regard, lighting design is the last thing that they consider when they are setting up and preparing for a performance. The Plays on Sunday programme by Intwasa Arts Festival KoBulawayo which brought together community theatre groups to perform ten minute pieces revealed the following at Amakhosi Cultural Centre in as far as the practice of scenography is concerned. Firstly, community theatre groups lacked the technical knowledge in lighting design, as light fixtures were connected directly on wall plugs and operated on an on and on-off basis. Secondly, community theatre groups lacked trained personnel that would operate lighting technological tools correctly and effectively. The lighting operator for Plays on Sunday at Amakhosi Cultural Centre was a resident lighting designer at the Centre. However, he did not show any understanding of the lighting design process, lighting fixtures or creative use of lighting in performance. Thirdly, the performances of community theatre groups suffered because of lack of preparation at Intwasa Arts Festival koBulawayo in 2013. Productions such *The Village Bull* (2013) by Umthombo Arts and *Song of a Woman* (2013) by Women in Theatre would have been better presented had the cast been responsive to the special lights their directors requested. The actors would not move into light in specialised areas of lighting, because it had shifted away from the spot the director had asked them to be in. The actors would deliver punch lines in darkness, which disrupted the spirit of the performance.

The above background highlights that while Intuba Arts Development endeavour to develop a lighting design, Bambelela Arts Ensemble did not have a reason to because it performed during the day in open spaces. The other challenge that indirectly led to the non usage of lights was the fact that Bambelela Arts Ensemble performs mostly in the townships and rural areas where there is little or no likelihood of electricity, while Intuba Arts Development performed in properly built and serviced theatre spaces such as the K-Cap, Stable and Kingwood Theatres. As Bambelela Arts Ensemble did not use lights in its production, the analyses of the lighting design process will focus on Intuba Arts Development's *Tears of Death*. However, works from other community theatre groups based in Bulawayo will be used to assess the influence of the socio-cultural and economic landscapes on design endeavours for comparative analysis.

The lighting design collaborative process does not occur in a vacuum but should be supported by an in-depth lighting design research which provides for the synthesis with other forms of design. Dramaturgical research in the lighting design should delve into the critical history of a play and its

playwright. The trend in many community theatre productions is that the playwright, choreographer or director is the same person. Dlongolo, the writer and director of *Tears of Death* considers himself a product of the Sifiso Drama Society which was founded and managed by the late Sifiso Mabaso. His interest in drama began when he watched Mbongeni Ngema's *Sarafina* in 1996, whose ideological methods of performance have underpinned all the productions he has written and directed. His work is also highly influenced by the works of Kente and John Kani. However, like many community theatre directors, Dlongolo has not been exposed to practical and theoretical training in design but only training in directing, choreography and dance through Mepsita Community Theatre Directing Learnership and the Sifiso Mabaso Drama Society.

Historical research relates to socio-political and economic contexts in which the play is written and performed. Essig (2005: 51) points out that historical research aids in developing an approach and in assimilating contemporary parallels between the playwright's time and the time of performance. This helps in developing initial ideas about the play's style and a point of view towards the production. *Tears of Death* was written in 2012 as a twenty minute play for the Isigcawu Community Theatre Competition and was developed over the year into a one hour show for the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in 2013. The play engages the contemporary South African context, interrogating kangaroo courts in rural communities, the abuse of community relations and advocates peace. Because the design process did not have a set down design idea and concept, historical research was never done.

The visual and technical researches are usually done concurrently. Visual research provides a visual inspiration for specific moments in a performance, while technical research provides information inclusive of details on physical size of lights, wattage, materials, ventilation, special features and accessories (Essig 2005). Of the performances of *Tears of Death*, that at the National Arts Festival was the only for which technical research was conducted, because the information was readily available on the Festival website. The K-Cap and Stable theatres were a challenge in that no one in the cast and crew had the technical information needed for the technical research. Intuba Arts Development engaged in visual research but unknowingly so; as a result it did not have the desired effect on the lights used during performances.

The final influence on the design process is the relevant use of personal experience in lighting design. Drawing from personal experiences, recalling impressions of natural and artificially lit world, virtual storehouses of images and mental picture files as a source of visual inspiration (Essig 2005), a lighting designer completes the process. The challenge with Intuba Arts Development was that all the cast and crew members had visual impressions

of the set, sound and costumes but, not, the lighting design. As such, as a group, personal experience was restricted to previous productions that they participated in; however, they had no idea of how those were achieved. In this regard, my personal experience in lighting design became a reference point in advising and helping Intuba Arts Development develop a lighting design for *Tears of Death*.

This lack of lighting design knowledge in the Intuba Arts Development cast and crew necessitated that the approach to lighting design be based on the availability of lighting resources in theatres where the production was performed. Ideas on the lighting needs were discussed during the rehearsal process with Dlongolo; however, they remained as ideas until the group gained access to the theatre and lighting equipment.

The performance of *Tears of Death* at the K-Cap Theatre made use of flood lighting for the sake of visibility. This was due to the fact that it was a competition and the group was only allocated time to perform for the judges. It became difficult as well to creatively use the lights during the performance as no one understood the patching system, except for just providing a general wash for all the productions competing. The group was able to use creative lighting at the Stable Theatre and Kingswood Theatre. This was necessitated by the fact that Intuba Arts Development was allowed to run technical rehearsals, which enabled creative improvisation with lighting at the Stable Theatre, while at the Kingswood Theatre, the technical research allowed the group to modify the lighting design and plan for the Stable Theatre runs to suite the available lighting resources at the theatres. The KwaXimba performance did not use any artificial lighting because the venue did not have a lighting rig or lighting accessories.

In line with Howard's (2002) notion of scenography as a continuing process until the production has ended, the lighting plan for *Tears of Death* was in a constant process of change during performances as the group sought to improve the lighting experience for the audience. The lighting plan changed because of the use of visual projections in some runs at the National Arts Festival. The constant change of the lighting plan had a positive effect in that it enabled Intuba Arts Development to develop and improve the lighting. This meant that the lighting experience was not always the same on the different runs of *Tears of Death*.

4.5 Realizing the Designs: Challenges and Opportunities

The process of design is not complete until the live performance event has finished. It continues to develop and transform during the live performance event as performers inhabit the space and relate to the stage sets and lights.

The process of realizing design highlights opportunities and challenges for the community theatre sector.

The operating context of community theatre groups creates possibilities of growth for design practitioners. Operating context speaks to the prevailing socio-political, economic and cultural landscape. The socio-political context in South Africa that seeks to develop "facilities to educate, nurture, promote and enable the enjoyment of the arts, music, visual art, dance, theatre and literature" as well as the opening up of infrastructures such as playhouses (White Paper 1996) provides opportunities for community theatre practitioners. While this was the government's position towards the cultural sector transformation, eighteen years later there has not been much improvement in the state of educating, training and providing performance spaces for community theatre groups in townships and rural areas.

The former Natal Performing Arts Council, now The Playhouse Company, has continued to retain an elitist attitude with a few well known and connected practitioners performing and staging their production there. The majority of community theatre groups are left to perform in school and community halls, a continuance of the apartheid period cultural practice. The concern with community theatre groups is that only those close to the coordinator of the Playhouse Community Theatre Festival are given opportunities to perform at this Festival, which is therefore regarded by the community theatre groups as the 'ticket' to performing profitably at the Playhouse Theatre. Performing at the Playhouse Theatre would expose community theatre groups to design which would be an ideal method in generating interest in apprenticing and developing practical skills. This attitude by community theatre community groups towards the Playhouse Company is similar to the analysis, by Marlin-Curiel (2004), of the perception of township based community theatre towards the Market Theatre. She maintains that community theatre practitioners believed that "anything worth seeing will come to the Market Theatre" (Marlin-Curiel 2004:100), a perception that adversely affected self-belief in the theatre groups that performed in the townships and rural areas. This lack of self-belief among community theatre groups continues to limit them to perform in open spaces and community halls rather than seeking to perform in functional, fully equipped theatre spaces.

Intuba Arts Development's designs relied heavily on available resources within the personal and group's collection, and outsourcing from the Playhouse Theatre Company workshop. I will argue that the expensive price of hiring set items such as artificial rocks, backdrops, and theatre masks forced the group to improvise. The commercial business approach of the Playhouse Theatre Company workshop makes the hiring of sets and equipment by community theatre groups very difficult. While it is understandable for

cultural industries to operate profitably, it becomes a hindrance to the practice of design by community theatre groups such as Intuba Arts Development.

While community theatre groups can apply for funding from the National Arts Council and other funding organizations such as Hivos and proHelvetia, the group cannot apply because they do not have a bank account. The fact that they do not have a bank account necessarily means they do not have a financial history or audit reports that are usually a requirement by funding organizations. Partnerships such as the one Intuba Arts Development has with eThekwini Municipality, where the municipality pays for all the transport and accommodation needs, do not enhance responsibility and growth within the group. Rather, this kind of partnership encourages a dependency syndrome within the community theatre industry.

The fact that community theatre groups, such as Intuba Arts Development, do not have bank accounts forces them to operate on a hand-to-mouth approach with regards to financial usage and management. All finances that were fundraised were instantly disbursed and distributed among group members as performances fees and transport reimbursements. This had a manifold effect on the groups. Firstly, this approach does not provide financial sustainability as planning is hampered by lack of finances. Intuba Arts Development did not have any money set aside as savings, thus, Dlongolo had to fundraise and outsource funds for rehearsals and transport on a daily basis. Secondly, it is very difficult to budget to hire sets, costumes or lights without finances that belong to the group. The challenges Intuba Arts Development faced in the process of hiring artificial rocks, backdrop and huts were owing to the fact that the group did not have money saved. As a result, the scenographic process for *Tears of Death* was compromised.

The lack of a paying audience attending community based theatre productions can be noted as an additional hindrance to the development of the practice of scenography. The run of *Tears of Death* at the Stable Theatre was a fundraiser for the trip to the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Over the three day run, the group made just over a thousand rands which was not enough to hire a backdrop and a follow spot. In this regard, the few resources that Xolani Dlongolo and I managed to raise had to be used to hire a backdrop rather than a follow spot. This is the dilemma that community theatre groups find themselves in, which has affected the practice of lighting design.

The performance styles of *Tears of Death* and *Just Because* were similar. The two productions used a presentational and demonstrative style that mixed dance, music and dialogue. Music was mainly used as an introduction and an environment setter. The Zulu *Indlamu* traditional songs accompanied by fast paced drumming, foot stamping dancing, and praise poetry in *Tears of Death*

provided a Zulu traditional setting for the play while a mixture of Ndebele and Shona songs in *Just Because* highlighted a mixed ethnic setting characteristic of Matshobana, and Bulawayo in general. This style of performance adopted in the two productions enabled continuous development and evolution during the runs, confirming Etherton's (1988) notion that community theatre pieces should be uncompleted plays that continue to evolve in response to the audience and performance space. This also enabled the creative design team to improvise and introduce the use of technological devices such as the projector, in the case of *Tears of Death*; however, to the detriment of the performer, as stated earlier, while in the case of *Just Because*, music and drumming was used for scene changes. In this light, it did not have a significant effect on the design process.

Performing in open spaces has created technically unaware performers at Bambelela Arts Ensemble, especially, when they perform in custom built theatres. When Bambelela Arts ensemble performed *Kolobeja: Folktales from a Zimbabwean Childhood* (2013) with School Playwrights and Actors' Academy (SPAA) at the Intwasa Arts Festival KoBulawayo, they did not seek to discuss their lighting needs with the lighting operator. The group simply walked onto the stage, which forced the lighting operator to flood the whole stage. However, their production had many possibilities for creative lighting which could have improved the performative effect for the audience. The lack of technical awareness and knowledge for a performance on the main programme of the theatre festival revealed a continuing challenge facing community theatre groups.

Bambelela Arts Ensemble was performing collaboratively with SPAA, a project by Nhimbe Trust. Nhimbe Trust is an arts organisation based in Bulawayo that is funded by Africalia Beligium to run programmes in arts education, performance and theatre-for-development. The productions of SPAA and Women in Theatre, also funded by Nhimbe Trust, highlighted that the main thrust of the productions at the Festival was to spend allocated monies so they could access further funding in future. These performances were video archived with sophisticated cameras and a large post production budget. While Bambelela Arts Ensemble could have benefitted financially from this donor funding from Nhimbe, the outlook of their performance highlighted that their production, together with that of SPAA, was mainly for archiving for donor fundraising.

On a positive note, the engagement and discussions that I had with Bambelela Arts Ensemble members with regards to the use of design, highlighted a shift of interest in scenography. The adoption of the iron poles and the multi-coloured ropes as an initial starting point for other design endeavours

presented a positive picture on the practice of design by Bambelela Arts Ensemble. The emergence of the Centre for Talent Development (CTD) in Bulawayo, run by Raisedon Baya and Thabani Hillary Moyo, also presents community theatre practitioners with an opportunity to gain knowledge about and use scenography in their productions. The CTD seeks to train young performers, practically and theoretically, in all the aspects of performance with design as the major aspect, owing to the fact that it is not properly understood or not understood at all.

With regards to Intuba Arts Development, the partnerships with Musho Festival (Durban), K-Cap Theatre, and good working relationships with established directors such as Jerry Pooe and Edmund Mhlongo, present possibilities for the growth of design practice. The collaborative work I have done with Intuba Arts Development has laid a foundation on which the group can build through personal development and practical experience gained by performing at festivals such as the National Arts Festival and the Market Theatre's Zwakala Festival. While these festivals provide an opportunity for Intuba Arts Development to raise funds through ticket sales and funding from the Ethekwini Municipality's Department of Arts and Culture, they also enable the group to creatively improvise with available resources and accessories in the theatre. This process of improvisation is important because, over time, it builds the experience that will enable Intuba Arts Development to practice design more effectively.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 interrogated the process of design in *Tears of Death* and *Just Because,* outlining the design decisions and the reasons behind them. This chapter also interrogated the resultant effects of the design process decisions taken by the respective groups on the live performances of their respective productions in different spaces.

Chapter 5 will engage the 'politics of design' and its effect or influence on the design processes of Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble and provide conclusions to the dissertation.

Chapter 5: The 'Politics of Design' in Community Theatre Circles: Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble

And I've begun to think that perhaps it's not design – our methods and techniques – that are the problem, but that we have not mastered the politics of design.

Quesenbury (2004: 3)

Introduction

This chapter seeks to engage the 'politics of design' in the design processes of Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble. Between practice and theory, the politics of design influences the practice of scenography in community theatre circles. It is envisaged that this interrogation will raise pertinent issues for the contemporary practice of scenography in community theatre performances. The chapter will also provide a conclusion to the dissertation.

5.1 The 'Politics of Design'

'Politics of design' is a new phenomenon that has arisen in the design field, including architecture and commodity design. However, in the performance sector, 'politics of design' is understandably defined by Quesenbury (2004: 2), who uses it to mean a "process and conduct of decision making" (Quesenbury 2004:2) in the creative process of developing and implementing designs. In this chapter, I will discuss the 'process' and the 'conduct of decision making' as interrelated, rather than as separate contributors to the 'politics of design'.

The 'process' of the creative endeavours is defined and influenced by a number of factors, chiefly: politics of place, politics of corporate survival and politics of questions. The 'process' seeks an approach that is understandable by the creative team and the audience, is usable, and achieves the defined goals set down in the initial planning stages. The 'process' of design manifests itself in different formats due to the influences of the "politics of space, place, corporate survival and questions" (Quesenbury 2004:3).

The 'conduct of decision making' determines the process. These decisions, however, should be taken in cognisance of the surrounding landscape. The budget allocation, performance space, objectives of performance, the socio-political and cultural influences prevailing at any particular point during the process or performance justifies the decisions taken.

The notion of 'unmastered politics of design' speaks to a shared understanding of the design process in terms of theory, practice and the correct use of scenographic terminologies. This notion seeks an approach to design that

enables the correct, application of the theories in the practice of scenography based on the context and genre of the performance art.

Through engaging and discussing the 'process' and 'conduct of decision making', this dissertation will support the notion that major problems, in design, are not the "methods or techniques" of design, but the "unmastered politics of design" (Quesenbury 2004:3). The challenges faced by Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble were explored through engaging in lighting and set design processes and presenting a finished design for the productions. The chapter will document and analyse how the "politics of space, access and corporate survival" (Quesenbury 2004:4) influenced the design process in relation to Quesenbury's notion of the "unmastered politics of design" (2004:3).

5.1.1 The Politics of Access

The politics of access speaks to the availability of resources, such as proper theatre spaces, training programs and trained personnel. The access to proper performance infrastructure develops a professional attitude within community theatre circles. Access to theatres, theatre workshops to construct sets, working with experienced theatre managers all positively develops young theatre personnel. However, the political history that sought to under-develop and curtail cultural development in the townships where most community theatre groups operated from, has continued to influence the process of development. The main proper theatre infrastructures are usually priced out of the reach of the community theatre groups or are generally far away from the community. Based on an invoice from the Stable Theatre, it costs four thousand seven hundred rands (R4 700) to hire the theatre per day for performance, while it costs approximately three hundred American dollars (US$ 300) to hire the Bulawayo Theatre. Those groups without partnerships with the Stable Theatre would not be able to perform there while those without money to pay at the Bulawayo Theatre would never be allowed to access the theatre.

The pricing of theatre hiring therefore continues the exclusion of community theatre groups from performing at these normally subsidized theatres. While the South African government continues to subsidize the playhouses, there is no reciprocal act towards the community theatre groups by these institutions. As such, community theatre practitioners now view the productions performed at the playhouses as a kind of elitist theatre that is segregative; in Bulawayo, two distinct theatres based on racial lines continues to thrive thirty years into independence: white theatre and black theatre.

Consequently, the effect of the racial divide impoverishes community theatre, which is usually black theatre. The paying white audience only attends performances by white practitioners, while the usually non-paying black audience attends productions by black theatre practitioners. This results in lack of financing for community theatre productions, while there has been improvement and notable development in the productions of white practitioners. The lack of financing has a net effect on the practice of scenography. The only time there is a mixed paying audience is during the Intwasa Arts Festival KoBulawayo.

For black theatre practitioners, using the Bulawayo Theatre does not guarantee them access to all the accessories in the theatre. The theatre manager does not allow black theatre technicians or designers who accompany productions to refocus lights, or change positioning or patching systems in the theatre. How do black theatre practitioners acquire the practical experience without participating in actual practice? Thus, the challenges faced by Bambelela Arts become a problem of the system, a system that continues silent segregation. Their lack of knowledge and technical skills can therefore be a result of this politics of access to infrastructure and resources that would enable them to practice design. The fact that they have no access to the infrastructure, such as lights, sound equipment and workshops, hinders understanding of how lights are designed and used during a performance, other than that they should provide visibility of the performers on stage.

In contrast, Intuba Arts Development was allowed full access to the sound and lighting box, lights and all the available accessories at the Stable Theatre. However, periodical access to the theatre spaces will not help the development of a technically aware group of performers. It will not help the young design enthusiasts who want to learn design through practice. The cast and crew of Intuba Arts Development were allowed into the theatre only when they had a technical rehearsal and performance. Thus, accessing the space on its own will not help improve the practise of design, rather access to the theatre spaces, accessories and practical practice in the use and operation of the theatre technological accessories will contribute to the knowledge through experience.

Most theatres are in the city centres, in low density suburbs or in institutions of higher learning, such as universities and creative arts schools. With reference to Umlazi and KwaMashu, Durban's largest black townships, where members of Intuba Arts Development come from, Larlham (1985: xviii) points out that they are situated approximately fourteen miles from the main theatre area in Durban's city centre. The distance between their place of residence and the theatre hampers a politics of access. Firstly, performing at the Playhouse Theatre means that there is need for transport for the cast and

crew for the duration of the technical rehearsal and performances, which has been cited as unsustainable by Dlongolo. Dlongolo noted that transport costs end up more than returns from ticket sales. The consideration would be to weigh the advantages of investing in design and paying performance fees or transport fees to the cast and crew. Usually, the rational decision would be to pay the cast and crew and as a result design suffers in the process. Owing to the difficulties in securing access to proper performance infrastructures, community theatre groups are forced to improvise on design and provide for the financial needs of their members.

These design decisions taken by Intuba Arts Development are evidence of a lack of politics of access: access to theatres, design resources and accessories. The improvisation and instant decisions concerning the use of wooden barricades by Intuba Arts Development in *Tears of Death* is proof of this lack. Intuba Arts Development made use of the wooden barricades after an attempt to hire a backdrop, artificial rocks and huts from the Playhouse workshop proved too expensive. The group had to divert some of the funds that had been set aside for hiring these items towards transport monies for the cast who came from Umlazi and KwaMashu. While the wooden barricades became a mainstay of the design for *Tears of Death*, the basic argument is that they were an improvisation, owing to the politics of access.

In KwaMashu, there is currently one privately owned functional theatre, the K-Cap Theatre. The theatre was built through donor assistance funding and is owned by Edmund Mhlongo, who is the resident Artistic Director. While this theatre is considered a community initiative, community theatre groups have been made to pay large amounts, which they failed to recoup through ticket sales, to perform there. Thus, while there is a functional theatre in KwaMashu, it is of little significance because it perpetuates the exclusion of community theatre groups performing in functional theatre spaces, except during its Isigcawu Community Theatre Festival competition. In Zimbabwe, the whole of Bulawayo has only one functional theatre, the Bulawayo Theatre, which is located on the eastern low density suburb, The Suburbs. Community theatre groups from the western townships have to travel into the city centre, across the city into The Suburbs to use the Bulawayo Theatre. This applies to the audience who would want to support these two groups. The expenses involved are a deterrent to community theatre groups such as Bambelela Arts Ensemble using the Bulawayo Theatre. Amakhosi Cultural Centre, a community initiative built in the early 1980s, has become dysfunctional owing to lack of funding. The centre was built through funding from Scandinavia to non-governmental organisations such as HiVos, NORAD and DANIDA. The dsyfunctionality of Amakhosi Cultural Centre denied community theatre groups rehearsal spaces and performances spaces, as equipment in its open air

theatre has been removed. The challenge of accessing functional theatre and rehearsal spaces for community theatre groups like Bambelela Arts Ensemble has had a bearing on the practice of scenography in its productions.

The training of design personnel in Zimbabwe and South Africa is largely limited to tertiary institutions. In Zimbabwe, until 2009, the University of Zimbabwe was the only institution with a proper and recognised programme in Theatre Arts that taught design theory and practice. Institutions such as Amakhosi Cultural Centre had programmes that trained actors, dancers and theatre-for-development as a communication model. Access to the University of Zimbabwe's programmes demanded three Arts subject passes in Advanced Level. This is a challenge for community groups such as Bambelela Arts Ensemble as the membership is mainly composed of school drop outs, Ordinary level graduates and an Advanced level graduate who unfortunately failed to get the desired number of points for admission at University. In this case, community theatre practitioners find themselves in a difficult situation of self-teaching a practice they do not understand. The challenges in accessing proper design training and practical applications for community theatre are therefore a challenge created by the politics of access. The ultimate result is for community theatre groups to concentrate on the acting and plots, rather than taking conscious scenographic decisions.

The politics of access also speaks to the access of a paying audience for community theatre groups. The profitability of a production is judged against the returns it manages from ticket sales. In the early 1980s and 1990s, Amakhosi Cultural Centre had developed a good paying audience that offset the challenges faced by community theatre groups at the Bulawayo Theatre. However, due to its dsyfunctionality, the paying audience has disappeared, forcing community theatre groups to perform free of charge. As a result, comunity theatre groups resort to the available resources design approach, which only takes cognisance of that which is essential for use. This is a survival strategy by community theatre groups that enables them to continue to perform and support their casts and crew.

5.1.2 The Politics of Corporal Survival

The politics of corporate survival engages strategies of survival both organisational and performance-wise in light of the "barriers or opportunities for good design decisions" (Queensbury 2004: 3). Therefore, the politics of corporate survival influenced all the production design decisions taken by Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble in an attempt to continue performing and sustaining the upkeep of the groups. Ultimately, these decisions furthered or deterred the practice of scenography by these two community groups.

The design ideas that were discussed for *Just Because* (2013) were highly influenced by the possible budget available. While there was a need to keep costs in check due to the fact that these were open space performances with no paying audience, it became apparent that the most important thing we had to consider was: the welfare of the artists. In this regard, besides the time factor alluded to earlier, the decision against the use of aluminium and rubber pipes for the cage was also taken in light of the transport expenses and lunches for the artists.

The plays performed by Bambelela Arts Ensemble highlight that there is an inclination towards seeking issues that are donor funded. The play *Tears of Death* has been performed in partnership with more than nine non-governmental organisations, inclusive of international NGOs like Women and Law in Southern Africa, ZimRights, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers' Association and Legal Resources Foundation. While the play was a response to the growing gender based violence at the time, I will argue that the play was crafted as a means of engaging NGOs and raising funds for the sustainability of the group. This is so because it was differently crafted, in the form of travelling community theatre, from the other plays such as *Wish List* (2009) and *Tomorrow's People* (2006) written by Raisedon Baya. The design detail in the performances of *Wish List* and *Tomorrow's People* highlight that they were created for a theatre space while the loose improvisations of *Just Because* enabled changes to the script to suit different environments. Whereas, Bambelela Arts Ensemble would claim that *Just Because* was a response to trends of gender based violence in the community, I argue that the Ensemble realised there was an opportunity to raise finances for survival through partnerships. The fact that *Just Because* was entered into competitions such as the Linkfest and a poverty alleviation competition run by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is testimony to this. Community groups enter festivals principally for the prize money.

The engagement of NGOs as the funders of productions means that they dictate to the community groups the content of the plays. This, coupled with the lack of understanding of design by NGO programmers, necessitated that Bambelela Arts Ensemble concentrated on the storyline and acting techniques that would ensure further discussion and debate after the performance. In this process, the design elements are sacrificed for a street theatre type of performance. Therefore, due to the desire to continue performing in a society that is governed by the politics of corporate survival, Bambelela Arts Ensemble had to forego scenographic considerations in their production *Just Because* in order to meet the needs of sponsoring NGOs.

In contrast, Intuba Arts Development relied heavily on funding from the eThekwini Municipality's Department of Arts and Culture for accommodation and transport to and from the National Arts Festival and KwaXimba. However, the initial idea for creating *Tears of Death*, according to Dlongolo, was to seek a partnership with the eThekwini Municipality's Department of Traditional Affairs for funding to tour the play to rural areas such as KwaMaphumulo, besides the townships. The funding partnership offered by the varied departments of the provincial government to community theatre groups highlights an overdependence of groups in securing tenders rather than creating works for community audiences. This has created unsustainability challenges among community theatre groups, as they only produce work for special occasions that will be funded by the government.

Intuba Arts Development's production of *The Legend Will Never Die* (2013) in a space of two weeks highlights this unsustainable model. This play was created in light of the African National Congress' (ANC) celebrations of the death of Steve Biko. While the partnership never materialised then, the group was later requested to do a presentation to the provincial African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) leadership as they were preparing and developing the campaign strategy for the 2014 elections. This further reveals that Intuba Arts Development's corporate survival strategy hinges on identifying possible funding opportunities and creating work that appeals to the objectives and needs of those funders. The net effect of this strategy is the dependence on the story and acting over the scenographic elements in performance. The performances of *The Legend Will Never Die* and *Tears of Death* on tour will mean design elements such as set and lights will be sacrificed in order to make money for the group to survive and continue operating and performing.

The politics of corporate survival forces community theatre groups like Intuba Arts development and Bambelela Arts Development to sacrifice scenographic considerations so they can perform in any space to sustain the survival of the group and its members. The need for financial resources supersedes scenographic considerations such as sets, light and sound.

5.2 The 'Conduct of Decision Making' in the Creative Process in *Tears of Death* (2013) and *Just Because* (2013)

The 'conduct of decision making' in the creative design process is a result of various influences, some of which have been highlighted in chapter 3. I will discuss the politics of place and space as socio-cultural and political indicators of an unmastered politics of design in the scenographic processes undertaken

by Intuba Arts Development's *Tears of Death* and Bambelela Arts Ensemble's *Just Because*.

5.2.1 The Politics of Place and Space: Socio-Cultural and Political Contexts

The politics of place engages the influences of the dynamics of the place from which community theatre groups operate, while the politics of space relates to the considerations of the performance spaces used for rehearsals and for performances. These types of politics explore the social, cultural, economic and political contexts that influence the practice of design within community theatre circles.

Bambelela Arts Ensemble rehearsed *Just Because* at the Matshobana Youth Centre in Matshobana Township. The Youth Centre was built by the Bulawayo City Council as a means of creating spaces for young people to use for extra-curricular activities. The rehearsal space is an empty room with a table and three benches. Rehearsing in such a space creates what Grotowski calls "poverty" in the preparation process. In this regard, the rehearsal space becomes embedded in the production as a performance space, thereby adopting Brook's notion of the empty space. It is important to note that these performance theories were only arrived at, after close analysis of the rehearsal and improvisation processes. This lack of knowledge and understanding of design terminologies and theories of design is what Quesenbury (2004) calls the 'unmastered politics of design'. The net effect of the lack of relevant knowledge and understanding of scenography by Bambelela Arts Ensemble is that design decisions are done without deeper consideration of the role they play or have to play during the live performance.

Understanding the implications of design theories and the practicalities involved in the live event enables community theatre groups to correctly apply design. For example, if Bambelela Arts Ensemble understood the theories of the empty space and poor theatre, they could have managed to usefully apply them in practice. This is what Quesenbury highlights as the challenge in the practice of design, especially so by community theatre groups such as Bambelela Arts Ensemble.

Intuba Arts Development's work is largely influenced by the work of Kente, Ngema and Mtwa. The works of Ngema and Mtwa were grounded on the theories and practice of Grotowski and Brook, while that of Kente reveals this influence on close analysis. The inherent implication of all this is that the theoretical underpinnings of *Tears of Death* were Grotowski's and Brook's theories. Whereas Bambelela Arts Ensemble did not have design theoretical grounding in the form of reading, studying or practice, Dlongolo noted that during his ten month directing training with Mepsita in the Netherlands, he

studied Grotowski and Konstantin Stanislavski in the acting studies. However, in this dissertation, Grotowski's theories are engaged on a design perspective which is normally not applied when one engages them as acting theories.

In engaging Growtoski's and Brook's theories in *Tears of Death*, Dlongolo applied the theories to determine acting styles and blocking. However, the analysis of Grotowski's theory of poor theatre shows that it was propounded to be applied principally as an acting style and a design approach. Therefore applying this theory in part reveals an 'unmastered politics of design' on the part of Intuba Arts Development. The lack of understanding of Grotowski's and Brook's ideas on design was therefore a contributory effect to the design failures for *Tears of Death,* to the extent of using improvised sets.

The socio-political and economic landscapes that Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Development operate in are similar. Whereas the government of South Africa has made a commitment towards developing community theatre through improving funding opportunities and infrastructures, the Zimbabwean government has considered community theatre practice with contempt. Through exposing and lampooning government officials, policies and corruption in performance, community theatre productions have been banned and performers arrested. Community theatre therefore resorts to agitation-propaganda performances. These agitation-propaganda performances rely heavily on the sporadic performances in towns, streets and malls where performers sing and play drums to attract people. Once the audience is gathered, community theatre groups perform short plays that directly communicate the message through poetry, music and dance.

These political persecutions and social conditions have forced community groups to develop plays that directly address and communicate the intended messages within a short period. While this did not apply to *Just Because*, previous productions such as *How Long?* (2001) and *Tomorrow's People* (2006) were banned or had the police interrupting performances. The effect of such political situations on the design practice is negative. Bambelela Arts Ensemble was forced to perform in their own clothes as they did not have the time to change into costumes relevant to the production. In all the persecuted productions, Bambelela Arts Ensemble did not use a set, forcing the actors to mime. This was not basically a decision made in light of the needs of the play, but to enable the performers to be able to run for safety, had the police arrived to stop the performances.

While the government of South Africa is 'politically' committed to developing community theatre in the rural areas and townships (Van Graan and Du Plessis

1998), the economic realisation of this commitment has not had recognisable outcomes. The creation and support of exclusionary festivals, such as the Market Theatre's Zwakala Community Theatre Festival and the Playhouse Theatre Company's Community Theatre Festival, continues to deprive the community theatre groups of an opportunity to perform on the main stages of mainstream theatres. These community theatre festivals have a non-paying audience and community theatre groups are offered transport and meals in exchange for performing. The consequence of such programming further impoverishes the development of community theatre. The main reason why community theatre groups perform is to gain financial reward for their efforts. Lack of financial reward affects performance preparation processes including scenography.

Linked to Barber's (1997) notions of 'unofficial art', the politics of space highlights the challenges at the behest of scenographic practice within the community theatre circles. The fact that community theatre work is considered 'unofficial art' by the status qou creates challenges of funding and technical support such as provision of proper theatres, rehearsal spaces and equipment for community theatre groups. Because it is 'unofficial', it is not important. Official in this regard refers to the elite, professional theatre, practised by the learned. In this regard, community theatre groups find themselves having to perform at school halls, community halls and open spaces without lights, set and sometimes properly designed costumes because the genre they perform and the audience they perform for is regard not important by the status qou.

McKinney and Butterworth (2009: 104) note that the configuration and manipulation of space in relation to the performance event is the key in determining the nature of scenography. This speaks to recognising and realising performance space as an influence on the process of design. Linked to the theoretical underpinnings of the design processes of Grotowski's poor theatre that seeks a "foregrounding of an actor as a holy figure, and the establishment of a unique and confrontational environment for each production" (Mackey and Cooper, 2000: 336), performance space therefore becomes an important aspect to explore in relation to the processes of design undertaken by Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble.

5.2.2 The Politics of Questions

The politics of questions provides for the interrogation of the kind of questions that Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble ask themselves during the design process. It seeks to engage and explore why those questions are asked and to what effect. In the process, the politics of questions

challenges the status quo, questions the process of negotiation and power, and the stating of goals (Quesenbury 2004:5).

During the design process, Intuba Arts Development did not set down design questions that would guide the process. As stated in chapter 4, the design process was a collective, collaborative approach, based on the available resources from personal and the group's resources, making it difficult to evaluate the final design. Quesenbury (2004: 5), in analysing product design process, posits that

> when you start the decision-making process, if you have not asked the right questions, if you have not considered all of the people who will use a product, all of the requirements, you will get a product that has not considered them either.

Quesenbury associates a good design product with the right questions and good decision making. Because Intuba Arts Development did not set questions that would guide the design process or the improvisation process, it engaged in a process of negotiation only as far as the spatial considerations were concerned. In negotiating the process rather than realising the design process, Intuba Arts Development failed to master the politics of design.

Whereas Intuba Arts Development failed to understand the politics of questions, Bambelela Arts Ensemble's understanding of the socio-political and economic situation and their performance spaces enabled the generation of ideas that were cognisant of the politics of questions. Bambelela Arts Ensemble wanted to create a practical representation of Matshobana residents through costume, set and setting. Therefore, in the initial design process, Witness Tavarwisa asked such questions as: What set items can truly represent a poor family of Matshobana? What set items can reveal the poverty of the Matshobana families?

While the two groups finally improvised or negotiated the final designs, the difference between the two design outcomes is that Bambelela Arts Ensemble sought to respond to the design questions, while Intuba Arts Development sought to use the available resources at their disposal. The modifications to the initial Stable Theatre design were owing to the availability of funds to hire a backdrop from the Playhouse Theatre Company Workshop. Whereas the backdrop played an important role in setting the atmosphere and locale during the National Arts Festival, it was highly unnecessary, based on the impact of the Stable Theatre improvised design on the live event.

The failure to understand the politics of questions by Intuba Arts Development is microcosm of the macrocosm in the community theatre circles. Intuba Arts

Development tended to make design decisions that had financial implications only because they had money to hire a backdrop rather than ensuring it served a specific role during the live event. Such decisions also had an impact on the creative process. For example, at the Stable Theatre, we had used shadow lighting for the final hanging scene, but we were not able to replicate it at the National Arts Festival, because it needed a space where we could hang the white cloth on the last bar. This is the bar that was used for hanging the backdrop. Thus, owing to the failure of Intuba Arts Ensemble's lack of understanding of the politics of questions, the creative lighting that had supported the climax of the play had to be eliminated in favour of the backdrop.

Intuba Arts Development made use of a projector in the second performance at the National Arts Festival without asking questions concerning its relevance and role. Changes to the design elements and using technological accessories such as projectors demands preparation and test runs to determine that they fit perfectly into the realisation of the objectives of the live event. However, Intuba Arts Development had not used the projector in any of its previous performances or productions; thus, deciding to use it minutes before the beginning of the performance highlights a lack of understanding of design in relation to the politics of questions.

5.3 Technology and the Live Event: *Tears of Death* at the Kingswood Theatre

McKinney and Butterworth (2009: 147) posit that the contributions of computer-controlled technology and computer-created scenography offer metaphors of transience, instability, multiple framing and interactivity to the world of performance. As a performance aspect, three aspects of technology emerge: scenic representation, interaction between scenic devices and performers, and the ability of scenic objects and materials to perform independently of a theatrical text. Intuba Arts Development sought to make use of projected images to achieve all the three aspects, albeit unknowingly.

While it has been stated that the performance of *Tears of Death* at the K-Cap Theatre was specifically for purposes of the competition, and that the Stable Theatre performance was a fundraiser and a dress rehearsal, the Kingswood run was the main performance as far as Intuba Arts Development was concerned. This was due to two reasons: the National Arts Festival is considered as the major festival in South Africa and performing there earns some dignity and respect, and it was the only fully funded performance by the eThekwini Municipality's Department of Arts and Culture. In this light, this

run was a culmination of a long journey of improvisations, technological challenges and self-teaching in the practice of design.

The lighting plan was modified during the first two performances. On the opening night, the group did not have adequate time to set up; thus, the stage had dark spots and off-focused lights. On the second day, Dlongolo improvised with still images which necessitated the re-focusing of the lights so the images would be visible. However, the use of the projector created technological challenges. Firstly, the projected images had not been arranged in the correct order and as a result the timing of the projection was either late or the wrong image was projected. This created a disjunction between the dialogue and the storyline. Secondly, the battery of the laptop died in the middle of the performance.

While improvisation has been the mark of Intuba Arts Development's design and play development approach, it highly disrupts the flow of the performance and the blocking of the performers. This was in contrast to McKinney and Butterworth's (2009: 134) assertion that the

> projection of images can shift effectively between visceral and emotive images, which offer captivating associations between performer and environment and images which offer visual and spatial intervention.

To achieve this there is the need for technical knowledge and technical preparedness from the directors, actors and the operator. In the case of Intuba Arts Development, the performers did not have any prior knowledge that, in that particular performance, a projector was going to be used and where it had been set up. Secondly, the operator, Dlongolo, was not technically prepared as his laptop battery died, midway through the performance. Thirdly, he had challenges switching off the projector during the performance as the show had quick transitions between scenes.

While the projected images or the would-be-projected images were meant to "speak their own various languages while working along the text" (McKinney and Butterworth 2009: 145), the failure to project the images at the correct places and the unpreparedness by Dlongolo, adversely affected the performance. In so doing, the live event became a process of improvisation and negotiation as the performers were forced to accommodate the use of the projector which had been set up on the stage as well.

Whereas Intuba Arts Development failed to optimise the use of new technology in community theatre performance, I argue that such technology "opens up the possibility of a theatre of scenography" (McKinney and Butterworth (2009: 145), if available, in community theatre practice. In these

possibilities, lie varied opportunities for the growth and well-executed design practice in community theatre performances.

I have comparatively engaged the 'politics of design' in the design processes of Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble. The interrogation of the varied politics of design within the socio-political and cultural landscapes was a means to an engage the 'process' and 'conduct of decision making' in *Tears of Death* and *Just Because*.

5.4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The dissertation posited that the understanding of and/ or lack of understanding of the politics either facilitates community theatre groups to develop designs that serve their production needs more effectively or equally hinders that process. It further hypothesized that mastering the politics of design will enable community theatre practitioners to understand design theory and subsequently apply it in practice and use its terminology correctly and effectively. The premise of this dissertation is that the practice of scenography by community theatre groups can be improved by mastering the politics of design. In so doing, community theatre practitioners would better understand scenographic theory and its practical application during the design process, in a manner that would enhance scenographic experience and allow for the realization of the specific design objectives and demands of their productions.

This dissertation proposes a context based approach to scenographic practice which is in harmony with Grotowski's notion of an "establishment of a unique and confrontational environment for each production" (Mackey and Cooper, 2000: 336). The context based approach takes cognizance of the socio-political and cultural influences, of the place where the community groups operate during the design process, and would enable scenography to complement the production style. In this light, scenographic decisions and budgets are made with the knowledge of available resources and personnel that would better achieve the production's scenographic objectives.

By reviewing literature on the black consciousness theatre, this dissertation revealed that the community theatre, in the form of township musical theatre, of Kente, Ngema and Mtwa, introduced the minimalist approach. Grotowski's "poor theatre" and Brook's "empty space" theories were applied in performance and scenography, by Ngema and Mtwa. This dissertation further revealed that while Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble's production styles were also influenced by Grotowski's and Brook's theories,

they did not show an in-depth understanding of the theories and their application in practice.

This dissertation further challenged the application of design theories as propounded by European and American design theorists such as Gillette (1997) and Smith and Parker (2002), by proposing an approach that expropriates these design ideas and applies them in the context of the locale, and the community theatre production genres. The design theories of Gillette and Smith and Parker are effectively applied at theatre organizations with workshops, and trained and skilled technicians, which community theatre groups such as Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble are not privileged to have. In this regard, a simplified approach that integrates the scenographic process and play development was used in the Creative Project. This process enabled information sharing, talent development and the identification of members who have an interest in scenography. This will help in participating in and learning through workshops such as the Crossings International Artistic Workshop.

Crossings International Artistic Workshop is a ten day training workshop for international and South African choreographers, composers and lighting designers, that aims at giving them the time and space to explore the relationship between dance and music. Throughout the workshop, lighting designers are exposed to the practicalities of the lighting design process and are given space to design for a twelve minute dance piece as well as operate the lighting desk. The first two components of the Crossings workshops were held in Johannesburg while the third was held in Cape Town at the Baxter Theatre with support from the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts, UCT School of Dance and the French Institute of South Africa.

The use of the Creative Project as a research methodology provided me with new learning points. Firstly, when the design process responsibilities are shared among group members, creativity is enhanced. Secondly, the Creative Project enabled information sharing between the members of Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Ensemble. The information sharing process helped create a working relationship that altered the researcher-subject dichotomy during the varied production development stages and performances. Thirdly, the run of *Tears of Death* at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown revealed that a considerable amount of performance work taking place in South Africa is from the community theatre circles, as the majority of productions presented alongside *Tears of Death* were by community theatre groups.

This dissertation highlighted the design processes and approaches adopted by Intuba Arts Development and Bambelela Arts Development. The greatest challenges for the two groups were the lack of understanding of design terminologies and theoretical explanations of the processes they engaged and the expected outcomes. This was mainly due to the lack of theoretical grounding and practice of scenography by the members of the group. While it can be noted that the case study community theatre groups lacked theoretical grounding and practice in scenography, the Creative Project highlighted that community theatre practitioners have skills and a different understanding of scenographic processes. Concluding, therefore, that because community theatre practitioners lack theoretical scenographic understanding as taught and practised at universities, would be a disservice to the creative and adaptability capabilities of these personnel.

However, to counter the challenge of a lack of theoretical knowledge and grounded scenographic practice, community theatre groups need to identify among themselves, individuals who are interested in scenography. This will assist community groups in development and training through workshops, such as Crossings International Artistic Workshop, that offer practical and theoretical training for lighting designers. This workshop exposes lighting designers to varied design processes and offers them an opportunity to creatively use different lighting fixtures and programs. This exposure would better prepare community based lighting designers and enable them to design and execute their designs in any given space with any given lighting program or lighting desk.

Secondly, the identified individuals can be attached to prominent designers that can teach them the practice. Furthermore, identifying someone to specialize in design would help community theatre directors focus on their creative work with performers rather than having that focus hampered by also organizing sets, costumes and lights. For example, the Head of lighting Department at the Baxter Theatre maintains that he was trained through attachment at Jazz Art in Cape Town where he worked under a number of different prominent lighting designers.

While the financial support of different eThekwini Municipality departments to Intuba Arts Development is welcome, there is a need for the Department of Arts and Culture to move beyond funding and introduce training programmes that improve the creative work of performing artists. With regards to scenography, besides the Crossings International Artistic Workshop, there have been no other workshops that have been done in the past two years in Durban. This curtails the development of young scenographers, as such community based training workshops by experienced designers will enable the

continuous progression in the work of young designers. The Zimbabwean situation is similar to that in South African.

I attended the third component of the Crossings International Artistic Workshop at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. The workshop approach was practice based from the perspective of lighting designers. As lighting designers, we worked collaboratively; a process that enabled knowledge sharing. Having studied scenography from a theoretical perspective and practiced for a relatively short period, I worked with other experienced lighting designers such as Sonnyboy Pule Setlhako, who has worked as a lighting designer at the Baxter Theatre for more than ten years and Wilheim Disbergen, a graduate from the University of Witswatersrand. Wilheim Disbergen has designed lights for productions such as *Amambazo* (2013) by Edmund Mhlongo, which premiered at the Playhouse Theatre. The kind of practical experience I gained at the workshop through learning from these two experienced lighting designers and the facilitator, Flaurian Ganzevoort, would be fundamentally important in the process of developing young lighting designers.

While the Crossings International Artistic Workshop was held at the state of the art Baxter theatre, the facilitator adopted a minimalist approach in lighting design. This highlighted that while community theatre groups do not have resources, lighting equipment and fixtures, it is however possible for community theatre groups to use the minimum available resources and creatively use lighting design in their productions. For community theatre lighting designers to attend such workshops that directly address challenges they face in their practice of scenography would enhance the creative application of lighting design in their productions.

Furthermore, there is need for the integration of young graduate designers from various universities into the performing industry, specifically the community theatre circle. Universities and tertiary colleges in Zimbabwe and South Africa are the only institutions that have produced graduates with theoretical grounding. However, because these young designers have not been integrated into the performing arts industry, they are either lost to the educational field or other industries, as they seek employment to survive. For example, Chipo Mawarire, a young graduate from the University of Zimbabwe's Department of Theatre Arts, has been out of work for a whole year, apart from working occasionally with the Centre for Talent Development and Intwasa Arts Festival koBulawayo as a lighting designer and operator. However, these two organizations do not have finances to employ her on a fulltime basis; as such, she might leave the performing industry if she gets employment elsewhere. While she is one of the few graduates who has shown

interest in continuing their work as a lighting designer, the lack of finances and an integration model continues to deprive the community theatre industry of trained and skilled personnel.

The Centre for Talent Development (CTD) provides an opportunity for the growth in scenographic practice in Bulawayo, if it is supported. The productions that the CTD has produced and the technical awareness and astuteness of their members when performing reveals, that their training in scenography can be productive. The CTD training programme covers performance styles, but has an emphasis on the scenographic aspect, a programme that is cognizant of the 'politics of design'. However, the CTD will not single-handedly train and develop designers; thus, there is a need for support from the Ministry of Arts and Culture and various Department of Education dealing with Arts and Culture.

Intuba Arts Development's partnerships with the Stable Theatre, the K-Cap Theatre and Twist Projects, and tertiary institutions such as The Creative Arts Centre and the Durban University Technology (DUT) provide community theatre groups with a possible awareness of a politics of corporate survival. The provision of rehearsal and performance spaces from DUT and the Stable and K-Cap Theatres as well as financial assistance from Twist Projects and eThekwini Municipality enabled Intuba Arts Development to produce works and perform throughout 2013. However, these partnerships must be developed into platforms for the training of performers and young designers, through funding, to attend design workshops, organize design workshops for community theatre designers and sponsor design budgets for productions by community theatre groups.

This dissertation positioned the practice of scenography as a necessary and possible element in production practice within community theatre groups. Through appropriating Quesenbury's (2004) notion of the 'politics of design' in commodity design, and applying it to the practice of scenography, this dissertation proposed a new synergy of approaches in addressing scenographic challenges within the community theatre circles.

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