

PROBLEMS IN THE GROWTH OF  
A POPULAR ART FORM: THE  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DRAMA  
AND SOCIETY IN MALAWI AND ZAMBIA

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## ABSTRACT

Title: Problems in the growth of a popular art form: The relationship between drama and society in Malawi and Zambia.

This thesis discusses theatre in Malawi and Zambia today. The discussion is done through an historical exposition of the forces behind its growth in the two countries. Until 1964 these two countries were British protectorates. It also seeks to show what sort of relationship exists between this theatre and societies in which it is growing.

In order fully to appreciate this relationship the thesis isolates for study special areas which directly deal with the operations of theatre in the two countries. This is done in the belief that true appreciation of a country's theatre cannot be grasped through a study of its playwrights and plays alone, but also through that of cultural policies of governments and their implementation, censorship procedures (whether direct or indirect), operations of companies, and radio and television networks.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is of a general nature. It consists of three chapters. The first chapter argues that there is an indigenous kind of theatre in Malawi and Zambia. The second chapter discusses the growth of African drama in general into the modern era. This has been done



in two parts: the colonial era and the post-independence period. Contrary to common belief African 'literary' drama has not come about as a result of political independence - although it has matured extensively since 'independence'. Efforts to promote drama, in the western sense, amongst Africans can be traced as far back as the 1930's. There is also evidence of a direct link between the British Drama League and these early efforts. The third chapter looks at what is called theatre for development. This is a theatre which is becoming very popular all over Africa. Its presence marks a new departure from the established 'literary drama'. But it is not a new phenomenon on the continent. The chapter shows how this work is derived from earlier work of missionaries and colonial administrators. Further than this the chapter describes this theatre. It traces its origins and development to the present. Then it dwells on the rationale for its resurgence and its nature.

The second part of the thesis takes a detailed look at theatre in Malawi and Zambia. This is done in six chapters. These examine the following: major influences on theatre of the two countries (i.e. cultural policies, censorship and education); examples of indigenous drama; an example of syncretic drama; play scripts which form the literary drama; popular drama of radio and television; and examples of theatre for development.

The picture that emerges at the end of this examination points to a development that might produce unique theatre in Africa. This is a theatre which is becoming less and less dependent on the playwright as its source of inspiration.

Most of the discussion in this thesis has been built on reviews, historical sources, interviews, field research, statements made by practitioners from the area and theses by other people. My own involvement in Malawian theatre activity can be discerned from the passionate way some of the sections of the thesis have been argued.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my beloved father.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.T.E.M.	-	Association for Teachers of English in Malawi.
C.A.F.U.	-	Central African Film Unit.
C.E. in Africa	-	Cultural Events in Africa (B.B.C. transcription centre).
D.R.C.M.	-	Dutch Reformed Church Mission.
I.T.I. (Zambia)	-	International Theatre Institute of Zambia.
M.B.C.	-	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation.
N.R.	-	Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia).
O.P.C.	-	Office of the President and Cabinet (Malawi).
U.M.C.A.	-	Universities Mission to Central Africa.
UNZADRAMS	-	University of Zambia Dramatic Society.
T.A.Z.	-	Theatre Association of Zambia.
Z.A.N.T.A.A.	-	Zambia National Theatre Arts Association.
Z.A.T.	-	Zambia Arts Trust.
Z.B.S.	-	Zambia Broadcasting Service.

P A R T O N E

GENERAL INTRODUCTION



## CHAPTER ONE

RITUAL VERSUS ART

"Let us not dress African gods in European robes"

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

The Filter

... We, the undersigned, chiefs and headmen do in the presence of our headmen and people assembled at this place hereby cede to her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, &c., &c., all our Sovereign and Territorial rights absolutely and in perpetuity and without reservation, save that on all lands hitherto belonging to us which may be leased or sold by Her Britannic Majesty's Representative a percentage of ten per centum on the selling price or the annual rent shall be recognised by Her Britannic Majesty as chief in our place, and further on the condition that none of our existing villages or plantations shall be disturbed or alienated without our full consent and proper indemnification ...<sup>1</sup>

This way land and rights were signed away to the British in Central Africa. Such treaties changed the relationship between the natives and the visitors. The relationship of 'native' and 'stranger' changed to that of 'boy' and 'master'. Whilst missionaries, preceding colonial administrators on the scene, 'participated actively in local politics as equals and sometimes even as subordinates'<sup>2</sup>, the latter came as authorities on what should constitute 'civilized life' for the natives. As the land went so did the right to their own lives. Everything the native did had to be endorsed by the colonial power.

This was particularly true of their indigenous performances which were subjected to a good deal of censure.

The first men to come to Central Africa were 'composed of explorers, traders, hunters, prospectors and missionaries'.<sup>3</sup> Those who came into Malawi regarded themselves as missionaries on a religious mission. Even when administrators trotted in behind they had to respect this group. Spreading Christianity was at the centre of all exploration and colonisation.

According to Cairns:

... Africa at the time showed ... a widespread breakdown of law and order as African societies reeled under the impact of the trade in slaves and ivory and growing diffusion of guns and powder which rendered tribal wars more bloody and destructive. Conditions of almost endemic war, to which intruding elements of 'Turk' from the north, Arabs and Swahili from east coast, and Portuguese from both coasts contributed, substantiated beliefs in the savagery of the African ...<sup>4</sup>

The missionaries who came to Central Africa therefore saw themselves coming to civilize the 'savages'. Dr Kirk's diary entry on Livingstone's second trip to Central Africa shows to what extent Her Majesty's Government saw their task:

... left much to [their] own discretion. The sum of [their orders from the British Government were to] live at peace with the natives, obtain all the information [they could] and try to begin civilisation among them by introducing arts and commerce as far as may seem proper ...<sup>5</sup>

The directive assumed there were no indigenous arts to be found amongst the natives. If there were any, they were likely to be of an inferior type not worth bothering about. No doubt then that explorers who came out to Africa got some kind of a 'cultural' shock when they met the

natives for the first time. They were completely baffled by the events and practices they found the natives indulging in. For most of these explorers the question of finding any form of drama did not even exist in their minds.

Kirk, one of the first explorers to Central Africa, responded to his first encounter of a Malawian theatrical experience this way:

March 31st (1859) ... Landed and saw the big man again. There was a great beating of drums. We went to see them. It was a mourning for a boy who died yesterday. In one place were the musicians with drums of three kinds. First the bass drums, then kettle drums ... then a long trunk of a tree one and half diam(eter) and about five feet long, hollowed out. The performer was astride this thing, like a child with a wooden horse. They all beat on the skin with the hand. Where they strike is coated with a mixture of India rubber and oil. The skin membrane is sometimes of an antelope, at others of alligator's belly. While these fellows hammered away, the boys and girls had a dance which consisted of gliding and turning about after a certain specific rule which was quite as intelligible to me as that of a ballroom in England. The motions too were quite elegant and had the great advantage that people seemed happy, no confounded white chokers or stiffness about them. They clapped their hands which might with great advantage be added to the European style. The dances of the older people were not so elegant although nothing of the disgusting nature of the Tete and Sena dances, so popular with the Portuguese.

The mourning women were at the side and at times two of them came up. One walking on hands and knees, passed through among the dancers, then rolled on her back. The other had her hair covered with raw cotton, carried in her hand a bow and a few arrows with the poison iron points withdrawn. In the other hand, she carried a bottle gourd drinking cup. Having passed through, they returned weeping. One woman fainted and was carried off. What was the meaning of the ceremony, I could not see. The mourning of the women or at least of a few of them who either really mourned or were told off for that purpose, was evident but then the mysteries of the crawling, rolling about, carrying bows and arrows and drinking cup, I don't know. Then why should the youngsters be so merry, and the old folks too in their dance, did not seem to mourn. It may be to dispel the grief which may be

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thought proper for relatives only. We returned to the chief's house [and] had a long talk with him regarding our own concerns and also things in general. ... Shimbeesa (sic) [the chief] came off with us and dined. He would soon become civilised ...<sup>6</sup>

This performance fits in with what most people are claiming to be the nature of African drama - a bringing together of dance, music and mimesis on a particular occasion to fulfil a function.<sup>7</sup> Kirk tries to give a vivid description of the drum probably because he is seeing it for the first time. Notice the analogy of the boy on a wooden horse and how it suggests the infancy of the African on the scale of evolution. There is also something missing in this description, vivid as it sounds. The link between the dancers and the mourners is not provided; this is in terms of signals suggesting when one group is to join in and play their part in the ceremony. Could it be that they were verbal? What of the separation of the old dancers from the young? Surely Kirk could not be suggesting that there were two separate groups doing their own dances to the same drumming. What of the women 'walking on hands and knees, [passing] through the dancers, then [rolling] on [their] back'? Could there have been any verbal communication either between the dancers and the 'mourners' or between the mourners themselves or indeed between the mourners and the dead? Of course even if these were there Kirk would most likely have missed them. There is no evidence at this stage to suggest that he understood the local language. This account shows to what extent he was surprised. The 'visual' rather than the 'verbal' aspects of the performance seem to be what most explorers observed and recorded. Vivid the above

description may be, still it displays a good deal of Victorian bias which runs through most literature of its kind from the time. His appreciation of the dance steps or movements are based on the acceptable English 'ballroom' dance. His failure to see the dancers as one group rather than separate groups of young dancers, old dancers and mourners must stem from his own Victorian background with its knack for 'compartmentalizing'.<sup>8</sup> Besides, there is also his Christian bias creeping into the description.

There is no doubt however that in spite of all this, Kirk was of a liberal disposition in his understanding of African behaviour. His diaries emphasize the need for understanding the native in his own terms. Rather than rush to pass judgement on what he saw he acknowledged his ignorance and attempted to get informed:

3rd September, 1859 at one chief Tshunsunze (sic):  
 ... Some of these women are very good looking (we are men accustomed to niggers) but that horrible lip ring is a most infernal invention for making all equally ugly that ever woman tried. In a conversation we had with the old chief on this subject, he said what! Horrible? Women no lip ring, why they would then be men, no longer women! So goes the world. Tshinsunze, who likes his wives, lip ring and all and we look calmly on things at home equally disgusting to others, such as Tshinsunze, who would shudder at the fearful effects of women having no lip ring ...<sup>9</sup>

Kirk's 'liberal' attitude could be attributed to his wide travelling during the Crimean war. It could also have been his scientific bearing that gave him the spirit of enquiry displayed here. He makes a very important point however in saying that people from different cultural backgrounds can view things differently. A point which critics of African drama could do well to bear in mind. Very little



influence on the various performances of the natives could have come from people like Kirk. Due to their 'exploring' objective they did not stay in one place long enough to get the full impact of the life of the places.

British attention to Central Africa coincided with the 'scramble for Africa'. In this scramble Great Britain found herself with Malawi and Zambia (then Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia respectively) amongst her colonies. Two historical events need remembering when discussing the people of this area. When Livingstone was coming into it, Arabs had already been there and they had already introduced the gun in their slave trade. The route they took crossed Lake Malawi, from the east, into Zambia up to the lands of Kazembe. Some tribes, like the Yao in Malawi followed the lifestyle of these Arabs and became slave traders too. They became raiders amongst the other tribes of the Lomwe, Manganja, Chewa and to a lesser extent the Tumbuka. Alongside these slave raiders came the Ngonis from South Africa. These were not slave dealers, but empire builders. They raided villages to exert their power. The impact of these two forceful groups disturbed the life pattern of the natives. Instead of attending to building and developing permanent life styles they lived on the brink of fear. Being mostly an agricultural people, they started giving up organising their work with the intention of accumulating food stuff to last the whole year. When Livingstone came upon their agricultural methods he could not help marvelling at them.<sup>10</sup> But by the time Fraser came to settle amongst the people of Northern Malawi he found a different

situation:

... in the village gardens [were] but maize and beans, and grain for beer, and every year before the crops could be harvested the villagers were for months in a state of semi-starvation, eating at the most but a scanty meal a day ...<sup>11</sup>

By the time missionaries and indeed government administrators came into the area the people had already lost their stability - psychologically they were already a demoralized people. The Arab guns and the Ngoni 'impis'<sup>12</sup> had done it. Whilst Arabs brought very little cultural destruction, the Ngonis did, by ensuring that all their captives adopted Ngoni ways. It has been said that due to raids from Arabs and the Ngoni the agriculture which formed the economic base of the natives' life had been disturbed. Where the Ngoni established themselves they coopted everybody into their ranks. They forced them to adopt the Ngoni way of living which was basically that of raiding other villages. Being raiders their economic livelihood was built around wars and booty thereof. So war was a significant part of the villages' life wherever the Ngonis were in control. Being a successful warrior had its own rewards - more slaves to work for you, more cattle and more respect amongst fellow villagers. War formed the basis of the life of a Ngoni village. Even their cultural life was centred on this fact. When missionaries came into Malawi they found this very much so. Fraser gives an account of how war was looked upon by the Ngoni:

Every year about harvest time a great national raid was made by the combined regiments of the tribe ...<sup>13</sup>

On account of such raids, other tribes gave up intensive work in their fields. They argued that what was the point of toiling in the field



when somebody was going to plunder the fruit of their sweat.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand the return of a victorious army to a Ngoni 'royal' village was marked with great pomp and spectacle:

... the victorious army approaches the royal village, and when they are within a mile or so they sit down by the banks of a stream to cook and eat. Those who have slain a human being smear their body and arms with white clay, but those who were not the first to dip their spears in the blood of the victims, but merely assisted in the slaying, whiten their right arms only. At the stream they rest for one day, and on the following morning the regiments are all drawn up in order, and advance to the royal village, each one singing its own war-song, and so enter the enormous open cattle kraal where the chief and his people are awaiting them.

When all are gathered inside, the general stands forth and tells the chief who were killed in the first assault, and names the young blood who first climbed the stockade and slew a villager within. This hero now advances dancing. He holds in his hand the bow or gun of the man he killed, or if the victim was a woman he carries her pounding stick. And [the chief] acknowledges him as the hero of the fight, and orders his men to give him a bullock as a signal token of his princely admiration.

When all the dancing is over, announcement of the deaths is made, and public weeping for the slain begins. But all through the long ceremony parents have been quietly glancing through the regiments, seeking for the shields of their sons, and some who could not see there the familiar marks of their children's arms, have been sitting with heavy hearts, but not daring to express their emotions.<sup>15</sup>

The dance referred to here is what is commonly known as 'Mgubo'. Although Fraser only mentions the hero dancing, carrying either 'bow or gun of the man he killed or [a woman victim's] pounding stick' we must hasten to add that the dance re-enacts how the slaying actually happened. Dancing in 'Mgubo' goes together with singing, which Fraser does not mention here. Nthara also refers to this ceremony in his biography of Namoni Katengeza, but he adds a 'prewar'

performance in which all those going to the fight said:

"Khwangwamiloyo! khwangwamiloyo!" throwing their spears down, imitating how they will do when they meet the enemy. As they did this they appeared like birds dancing.

After this performance they proceeded to a place where they placated the ancestral spirits. There they repeated the performance. Then they would go to war...(my own translation) <sup>16</sup>

Adding on to the warriors' return, Nthara says it was actually the chief who led in the performance, then he was followed by the various heroes. As the chief danced 'men whistled in admiration, women ululated! Expressing joy'. It is important to note that in these two accounts there are no elements of religion or ritual (except in the second part of the prewar performance as recorded by Nthara). The performances are not only serving as a guarantee of the well being of the people's world which ritual does. <sup>17</sup> The ceremony is both a celebration and a medium for relaying information to the community at large. When warriors returned they brought news of both victory and death. As some people celebrated others burnt with anxiety over their missing relatives. Nthara comments that 'the whole ceremony was fascinating as well as inspiring in strength to the warriors. And those men who had remained behind whilst their colleagues had gone to fight felt ashamed of themselves'. <sup>18</sup> For the warrior dancing, the occasion did not just provide a chance to display his valour, but also to re-live the fight. In his dance he mimed how he had gone about killing the enemy with his spear.

Whilst the areas attacked by the Arabs and the Ngoni had more or less unsettled economies and therefore dying cultures, there were

others which were affected not so much by war or slave trade raids as by the coming of the missionaries themselves. We do find comments (made by missionaries) which reject certain performances on religious grounds. These are labelled 'pagan', 'heathen' or simply 'obscene'. Fraser watching some natives dancing had this to say:

For an hour or two the dance went on very merrily and gracefully, girls performing by themselves, and then the boys by themselves. But as they warmed up to the fun of it all, the action became more and more obscene, urged on by the incitement of the old women, and the ribald laughter of the onlookers.

I turned aside to my tent ashamed for what I saw and burning with a sense of the loathsomeness that had been let loose. Next morning I assembled the village, and spoke to them of the degradation of last night's performance. I blushed to speak of these things, while the old women and girls looked up, unashamed and wondering at my denunciation...<sup>19</sup>

We are not given an elaborate account of this particular performance. Obviously Fraser was ashamed even to embark on a vivid description of such 'obscene' behaviour. The response the 'old women and girls' show is actually how most natives responded to missionary attacks on indigenous performances. Nthara says of Namoni Katengeza in his early days just before his conversion into Christianity:

Everyday Kuliyaazi [Namoni's name before conversion] listened to the word of God. But although he listened he could not become a Christian. There were several important issues in his heart. One of these was 'Nyau'. Kuliyaazi enjoyed watching Nyau masquerades in the night. When he thought about the word of God and how it preached against Nyau, he found it very hard to quit his old ways. He often consoled himself by saying that: Christianity is for children. I cannot fear punishment after death. Where are the ancestors who died before the coming of Christianity? I don't care about punishment. If there is fire in hell we shall warm ourselves around it. What of those people who died a long time ago, how are they managing. I cannot leave my ancestors' ways no!<sup>20</sup>

Such resistance has persisted until today. Questions posed by natives have led to certain modifications to the performances and the way people respond to them. But this is a question for later discussion. It is important to mention that Christianity did not embark on a wholesale attack of all native performances. There were those which received approval and praise as being healthy - both morally and physically - by the missionaries. After the missionaries settled amongst the Ngoni, they encouraged the performance of 'Mgubo' - minus the war element - as good.<sup>21</sup> But even then we still need a different reporter to give us fuller accounts. And this brings us to the anthropologists who came much later on the scene. They arrived after not just the missionaries had printed their mark on the lives of the natives, but also after the government administrators had fully complemented the process of 'civilizing' the natives by making them ) accept a type of government totally alien to their background; a government which was an extension of the home one minus the recognition of the natives' rights. The economic structure established was that of white master and black servant relationship (the black being inferior to the white). The appearance of the anthropologist marked a change in the approach to British colonization. The mission of civilizing the savages took on subtle shades. It changed from brute enforcement of alien values to inquiry into the natives' own life style and its adaptation to accommodate the 'civilized' world. The interests of this group were not confined to performances. They covered all walks of life. Records of performances were usually just supplementary



material to other aspects of native life. The aim was to provide as full a picture of native life as possible. People from all walks of life in the colonies indulged in this exercise. Although the anthropologist worked very close to the natives, he was still 'bwana'<sup>22</sup> before his subject. And we must bear this in mind when looking at material collected by him. How much of it is complete and freely given? This question becomes more pertinent when dealing with those practices which are classified as 'secret cults'. These are accessible to initiated members only. It is from this broad group that students of drama have sought data for their studies. Their accounts contain a good deal more of 'verbal' detail than information on spectacle and structure of performance. Whilst the missionary and traveller accounts of performances recorded the spectacular aspects without the accompanying verbal exchanges, the new group took pains to learn the native languages, because they sought to explain the symbolic significance of the performances. It was the natives' behaviour rather than their entertainment that they were interested in. As a consequence of this, such terms as 'ritual', 'rite', 'ceremony' and 'festival' became difficult to define as they were used to label practically any form of behaviour that parted from 'normal' social intercourse. This labelling was in most cases done rather indiscriminately. And this is where the problem of discerning drama in African performances begins. What is African drama like? How does the African himself look at it?

## Civilisation

The question of whether indigenous performances can pass as drama is a hot issue, raising a good deal of arguments from various quarters. As James Gibbs has observed, this debate often 'narrows down to an argument about the distinction between "ritual" and "drama"'.<sup>23</sup> The main argument is that what most people claim to be 'drama' in indigenous practices is in fact 'ritual'. The question of how the performers and the society they live in view their practices does not receive any more attention than casual mention. Instead of attending to it in depth, scholars have made assumptions which have led to a good deal of speculation.

Serious study of African indigenous performance as drama seems to have started early in the 1930's.<sup>24</sup> Reports of conferences, articles on possibilities of developing 'drama' on the continent, and criticism of these attempts can be found. Most interested in this development were educationalists. Whilst they were introducing subjects like agriculture, hygiene, and the three R's in schools, interest in the possibility of an aesthetic education was also being shown by some of the more adventurous teachers. Drama was one such consideration, not in terms of looking at what was available, but in terms of the possibility of teaching the African to groom and appreciate it in the western sense. It was felt that:

The evolution of dramatic art amongst the Africans [had] all kinds of interesting possibilities. The beginnings of ballet and opera [were] foreshadowed in some of the more highly organized tribal dances. ... If the Europeans

concerned with dramatic art [were] only [to] do a little research on the primitive theatre, their imagination would soon quicken to the possibilities latent in these situations.<sup>25</sup>

This was a radical view which certainly went against established ideas about the African amongst whites. The call to introduce drama - in the western sense - amongst the natives would be a welcome idea, but to suggest people do research into 'primitive theatre' with the view to improve their own understanding of theatre in general was going too far at the time. Stevens had a good deal of foresight though. African playwrights today - fifty years after his call - are still grappling with the two worlds in their works. Although they are trying to reassert the 'basic African-ness' into their works, they visualize their theatre in the western sense. There is still a good deal of work to be done on the 'format' and 'occasion' of theatre to make it truly African. Of course Stevens' ideas did not pass unquestioned. Whilst they were supported by many people, others expressed worry and questioned the idea of persuading African art into a juxtaposition with western art:

Art among the African is in a precarious position; the natural artistic expression of a primitive people is brought suddenly and violently into contact with a highly civilized and mechanized people. ... African art is very definitely - young - in all its manifestations; here are no memories of older civilizations, but the simplest of forms, and childlike expression. We may look to the African to show us, as a thing still alive, the origin of all our own art. ... The art of drama is so very young in the mind of the African that it can hardly be said to exist. And yet the seed of the idea is there, for the African is by nature as full of drama as he is of music ...<sup>26</sup>

Juxtaposing the two cultures was inevitable, so the lament perhaps was



not warranted. If there was damage done to indigenous art, it came from a far cruder and callous enemy in the guise of Christianity which equated all indigenous practices to heathenism. Once again Mary Kelly suggested that people should look at 'primitive art' in order to understand 'the origins of [their] own art'. Herein was a suggestion pointing at the evolutionist approach to the study of indigenous performances which is still in vogue today. Her denial of the existence of any form of mature drama is still with us today, as we are going to show later. In 1932 the Village Drama section of the British Drama League held a conference 'attended by missionaries, teachers and administrative officers from all parts of Africa' which arrived at the following conclusion on Traditional Drama in Africa:

That no drama, as such, was so far known to exist among the raw natives, but that all dancing, singing, and story-telling and drumming was intensely dramatic. Ritual drama, as an approach to the unseen, had not been found ...<sup>27</sup>

At the time these statements were being made there was no doubt about what constituted the 'accepted' drama. As one Winterbottom put it, at this time 'there was no indigenous drama, in the sense in which a European understands drama ...'.<sup>28</sup> One would like to know precisely what definition of drama was being used in the assessment. This had to wait until opposition to current views on 'indigenous drama' came up. After all, the interest shown by these 'missionaries, teachers, and administrative officers' in African performances was not really for 'study' purposes. In most cases it was only incidental to their other duties. Definitions had to wait for scholars of drama to come on the

scene. The involvement of the British Drama League opened up a new wave of interest. Even Africans themselves started expressing their views on the subject. Some of these views were quite strong:

No decent African with an average intelligence and liberal training will brook a description of what an African play does look like, or should look like, when that description takes it for granted that in Africa everything is still of the 'Stone Age' ... the Drama League [should] collect from the African himself themes and information which fairly represent him in his present state of development, instead of seeking information about 'Primitive Man'.<sup>29</sup>

What the 'present state of development' was like we cannot say. It is quite probable however that this criticism came from an individual belonging to the group of newly educated Africans who felt it was time they were looked upon as equals to the 'masters' who had colonised them. The basis of this equality was an education similar to that of the colonising country. Joel Adedeji has this to say about this background:

... the activities of the Christian missionaries were not without political motives; to effectively change the people you must change their culture, develop in them a new consciousness through a program of enlightenment that seeks to motivate them toward a new life through the doctrine of Christian salvation. In the course of time, a new 'civilized community' had begun to emerge, set apart from the 'native' one. This [body of people] constituted themselves into the 'elite' class, manning key positions in church and later in commerce and in the colonial administration to help shape the course of events ...<sup>30</sup>

A critic from this kind of people, despite the seeming difference in interpretation of African performance, would still fall back to western criteria for assessing them. The 'Primitive Man' being referred to by the unnamed critic is supposedly one who was there before the advent of

colonisation. What the criticism is saying could be applied to the present. In it is a shrewd observation of what seems to be a hallmark of the sort of evidence people like Ruth Finnegan and E.T. Kirby have used in their arguments about the subject of indigenous drama. Very few people took heed of the objection raised in the criticism of the British Drama League's work on African drama. Although the few who did, tried to 'respect whatever there [was] of good in the African's heritage' they still expressed worry over what standards were to be used in doing so.<sup>31</sup> The question of defining what African drama was, therefore still remained pertinent.

#### Definitions

Several years later, in the late fifties, when a literature sufficiently broad to be labelled 'African' became available for study Ramsaran talked of a traditional African drama. His words, it could be said, mark the beginning of attempts to define African drama:

Side by side with the formal drama of the western stage there exists a strong traditional African drama which is communal activity. This is intimately connected with religious rituals and seasonal festivals in which the entire community or that part of it associated with the particular ceremony ... This drama is processional and operatic combining the arts of singing, music, dancing, miming, and narration or declamation. This 'drama' enacted by village or tribal group is a part of the African cultural heritage that has come down the centuries through oral tradition ... the rhythm of the legend or story is therefore different from that of western drama ... A protracted dance or song or narration is absorbing in itself without the European impatience to get on with the story. It is therefore fatal to judge traditional African drama by European standards; and it is un-African to want to replace indigenous operatic and ritual drama by 'straight' drama ...<sup>32</sup>

This is an oversimplification. Ramsaran should have isolated specific examples of this 'traditional drama' to illustrate his claim. It's all right to distinguish 'formal' or 'straight' drama from 'African' drama, but we still want a picture of the two experiences. Saying that African drama 'is intimately connected with religious rituals and seasonal festivals' is not satisfactory. It is vague as it does not indicate whether this African drama has its own life within these 'rituals' and 'festivals' or not. What do the 'villagers' or 'tribal groups' enact? What does he mean by 'rhythm of the legend or story'? Is the 'absorbing' effect of a 'protracted dance or song' enough definition of a drama? It is probable that the 'straight' and 'formal' drama mentioned here is that which a European understands. In the words of Ruth Finnegan what is available in Africa defies any verbal definition because it is not a dramatic form, but merely some 'dramatic or quasi-dramatic phenomenon'.<sup>33</sup> For E.T. Kirby the situation is even worse than this in that 'with a few exceptions there is no tradition of drama' in Africa.<sup>34</sup> The basis of these conclusions is a definition of drama founded on Aristotle's Poetics.<sup>35</sup> Of course each of them gives individual emphasis to particular sections of the definition. To Finnegan it is what constitutes 'dramatic form' that is of interest whereas to Kirby it is the 'situational interaction expressed in dialogue between characters'. Without admitting to do so, they each provide their own definition of drama by suggesting some form of yardstick for measuring African performance in order to establish its theatricality. What they are trying to do is an impossible task for

as Martin Esslin warns:

... definitions are valuable and essential, but they must never be made into absolutes, if they are, they become obstacles of the organic development of new forms, experiments and invention. It is precisely because an activity like drama has fluid delimitations that it can continuously renew itself from sources that had hitherto been regarded as lying beyond its limits.<sup>36</sup>

What we need perhaps is not a definition but as Ola Rotimi says 'criteria'<sup>37</sup> for not just identifying drama in African performance but the performances' theatricality. These will be special criteria. Special not because they deal with an inferior cultural phenomenon, but because they understand the milieu in which the performance in question grows.<sup>38</sup>

Ramasaran, Finnegan and Kirby base their discussion of drama on form, which according to Herbert Read is 'the shape imparted to an artifact by human intention and action'.<sup>39</sup> This form comes out of various processes ranging from the way man relates to the material basis of his life to the psychological make-up of the [form's] creators.<sup>40</sup> It does not come about by itself and independent of other aspects of human life as the concept of 'art for art's sake' would want us to believe. If Ruth Finnegan and E.T. Kirby have problems in finding indigenous African drama, it is because this fact seems to elude them. It is not just the presence of the so called 'elements of drama' that establish drama's existence in a place, but why and how they come together. Rotimi touches on this when he looks at 'drama within a cultural setting'.<sup>41</sup> He recognizes that drama exists in context. Although it may begin 'in the make-believe, in play acting



of children' or 'in the ritual of a people',<sup>42</sup> it is not necessarily 'ritual of a primitive people or religion'. Drama might have primitive beginnings in the sense that the desire to act or to impersonate is inborn in man. To put it in Aristotle's words, 'the instinct of imitation is implanted in man from childhood, one difference between him and other animals being that he is the most imitative of living creatures'.<sup>43</sup> The knack to imitate, to enact therefore is not a follow up to the development of civilization.

The assertion that drama exists in context needs elaboration. By context we mean the situation in which particular 'human intention and action' take place. Such a situation will be created by a specific community (or indeed society) with its own conventions to be observed and to guide the life style of its members. These conventions are decided either implicitly or explicitly by the said community and not by some outside force. Events can sometimes disturb this seeming status quo; things like invasions from outside (whether in the form of evangelism or civilization or education) may quite forcefully change what norms are to pass for conventions. Evans-Pritchard quotes Montesquieu as saying that 'a people's religion being in general suited to their way of life ... makes it difficult to transport [it] from one country to another'.<sup>44</sup> We could take this outside religion to include culture in general. We cannot force conventions from one society onto another in our discussion of the latter's practices unless there is evidence to suggest diffusion of ideas from one to the other.

A notion can be culturally bound, but it can also go beyond

cultures. Not all languages have the seven colours of the rainbow, yet they do manage to accommodate these 'missing' ones in their lexicon. In Chichewa, a vernacular language spoken in both Malawi and Zambia, there is no violet or indigo in the language's lexicon although the rainbow is recognized. The notion of 'enactment' likewise transcends geographical as well as cultural barriers. What differ are the conventions that establish its nature within a particular community as well as distinguish child play or everyday make-believe from formal performance which embodies 'enactment' within itself.

Ruth Finnegan says that apart from the Bushman plays described by C.M. Doke what are available as dramatizations in Bantu Africa do not have an independent existence. They are found in 'rituals like initiations and funeral rites'.<sup>45</sup> And because of this she does not bother to discuss them. By implication she leaves them out because they are religious behaviour rather than art. For her religious activity cannot coexist with art. How much of this is typical of western thought can be shown by quoting van Gennep, an authority on the subject of ritual in anthropology. He observes that the less civilized a society is the more religious its life style is:

As we move downward on the scale of civilization ... we cannot fail to note an ever-increasing domination of the secular by the sacred. We see that in the least advanced cultures the holy enters nearly every phase of a man's life.<sup>46</sup>

We do not dispute these ideas about the religiosity of most African indigenous performances. What we question is the belief that ritual and art do not coexist. The experience of John Kirk in Malawi, quoted



at some length earlier on, casts doubt on this just as do performances we are going to look at in this study. But first we should clear the air regarding our understanding of ritual and what some people have said about its nature. Rather than attempt to cite all the works on the subject we shall confine ourselves to just a few of the views that deal with it in relation to art or drama to be more specific.

Jane Harrison defines ritual as 'a re-presentation or a pre-presentation, a re-doing or pre-doing, a copy or imitation of life always with a practical end', whereas 'art is also a representation of life but cut loose from immediate action'. The two being separated from each other as stages in a process of growth which starts with real life and ends in art. Ritual is what bridges them. In the ritual stage the activity that takes place has no audience, everybody present participates actively. Only when the end result of ritual alters accompanied by the presence of an audience aiming to observe the representation in its own right does art come into being.<sup>47</sup> What we get from Jane Harrison is a transitional theory which insists on the evolution of drama from ritual. This evolution is not a mutation in the form of a growth, but a death of some kind; for drama becomes in the presence of some form of husk vacated as it were by ritual. A few examples from Africa dispute this process of metamorphosis. Senamu argues that:

... an artistic form [in Africa] can and did exist simultaneously with religious activity and that the relationship is more accurately described as mediation rather than transformation.<sup>48</sup>

It is precisely this phenomenon that baffled Douglas Kirk when he watched the mourning villagers in Malawi. Entertainment which is 'normally' associated with art appreciation and enjoyment is not necessarily conceptualized as irreligious and as impossible in 'serious behaviour'. The understanding of ritual in the west does not seem to take this into account. When applied to the African experience it therefore becomes doubtful and inadequate as a basis for study of such experience.

The coexistence of entertainment and ritual or religious ceremony makes the performance share the responsibility of the religious activity or rite. This is why:

African theatre is 'functional' in the sense that it serves a purpose within communities and cultures [a task] much greater than simply that of entertainment or diversion.<sup>49</sup>

If this sharing is not at the level of the global intention of the activity, the art at least fulfils a role towards that goal. A ritual could be aimed at marking the graduation of an initiate from the group of young girls into puberty and therefore adulthood, at the same time embodying a dramatic performance within itself geared at teaching a specific role that she is going to play after the graduation. Throughout this dramatic performance both participants and spectators also look upon it as some form of entertainment. When we talk about 'functionalism' in indigenous Malawian and Zambian performances we should be aware of this dual role.

Creativity in such an atmosphere cannot be simply left to the individual. Nor can it all be a communal activity. Depending on the

role of the performance being envisaged will a group or an individual work on creating a dance, a mask, a masquerade, a sequence of movements, and even a song. What we are proposing here is that the method of creativity in indigenous performance is pegged to the nature of the function that the artifact is supposed to fulfil in the whole ceremony. For instance, in Nyau the masquerade into which a novice is pushed to be introduced to the masqueraders' world is constructed by the whole group; and during the initiation ceremony, the novice is taught, by participation how to do this. On the other hand, the individual masquerades which appear individually and even outside the initiation ceremony depend on individual artistry for their masks, so one finds certain individuals achieving fame and popularity for their ability to produce 'spectacular' masks.

We started off by arguing that colonial records left by early missionaries and administrators do not give a full picture of indigenous performances by themselves. This is so because they were first of all made under certain uninformed biases; they were made when in most cases the collectors were not adequately equipped culturally and linguistically to understand what they were witnessing. Another factor in this is that the relationship existing between the natives and the said collectors was not conducive to genuine interaction and trust to promote unqualified understanding of each other's cultures. We do not however advocate the idea of ignoring these records in attempts at rebuilding a picture of what indigenous performances were like, rather we suggest that the said material be used carefully as

parts of a jig-saw puzzle which must complement what we find today. From such a collage we should also derive criteria which take care of situations outside the Greek experience, for establishing the theatricality of the indigenous performances.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

- 1 See facsimile in A.J. Hanna, The Beginnings of Nyasaland and North-Eastern Rhodesia 1859-95. Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1969.
- 2 John McCracken, Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940. Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- 3 H. Alan C. Cairns, Prelude to Imperialism - British Reactions to Central African Society 1840-1890. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1965. p.7.
- 4 Cairns, Ibid.
- 5 R. Foskett (ed.), The Zambezi Journal and Letters of Dr John Kirk, Volume 1. Oliver and Boyd, 1965.
- 6 Foskett, Ibid., pp.173-174.
- 7 See M.J. Banham, introductory chapter in African Theatre Today. Pitman, 1976.  
and A.A. Roscoe, Mother is Gold. Cambridge University Press, chapter 5.
- 8 Wole Soyinka uses this word in his discussion of western understanding of African culture. See his Myth, Literature and the African World. Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- 9 Foskett, op. cit., pp.241-242.
- 10 D. Livingstone, A Popular Account of Dr Livingstone's Expedition to the Zambezi and its tributaries and the discovery of Lake Shirwa and Nyasa 1858-1864. London: John Murray, 1875. In this he says that, 'Bishop Mackenzie beheld how well the fields of the Manganja [sic] were cultivated on the hills, he remarked to Dr Livingstone, then his fellow-traveller "When telling the people of England what were my objects in going out to Africa, I stated that, among other things, I meant to teach these people agriculture; but I now see that they know far more about it than I do", this we take it, was an honest straight forward testimony ...'.
- 11 D. Fraser, Winning a Primitive People. London: Seely Service, 1914. p.304.



- 12 Impis were Ngoni warrior squads.
- 13 Fraser, op. cit., p.34.
- 14 D. Livingstone, op. cit. He records the following. The banks of the lake were now crowded with fugitives, who had collected there for the poor protection which reeds afforded. For miles along the water's edge was one continuous village of temporary huts. The people brought a little corn with them; but they said, "What shall we eat when that is done? When we plant corn, the wild beasts ('Zinyama', as they called the Mazitu [Ngoni]) come and take it. When we plant cassava, they do the same. How are we to live?"
- 15 Fraser, op. cit., p.39.
- 16 S.Y. Nthara, Namoni Katengeza. Petro Van Wyk Press: Mkhoma, Malawi, 1964. pp.14-15.
- 17 See J. Huizinga, Homo Ludens: a study of the play element in culture. Beacon Press, Boston, Mass., 1955.
- 18 Nthara, op. cit., p.15.
- 19 Fraser, op. cit., p.76.
- 20 Nthara, op. cit., p.30.
- 21 Fraser, op. cit., p.75.
- 22 The word 'Bwana' in Central Africa today refers to 'Master', but in colonial days its use was confined to whites.
- 23 J.M. Gibbs, 'List of Papers from Ibadan Conference on African Literature'. Denga, June 1977, University of Malawi. pp.33-38.
- 24 See Oyekan Oyomoyela, 'Folklore and Yoruba Theater' in Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures, edited by Bernth Lindfors. Three Continent Press, 1976. In this he records its beginnings in the modern sense as 1880. But there was no articulated discussion engaged in until the British Government started to show a keen interest in the education of the natives around the early 1920's.
- 25 G.A. Stevens, 'The Aesthetic Education of the Negro'. Oversea Education, Vol.V, no.2, January 1934. pp.112-116.

- 26 Mary Kelly, 'African Drama'. Oversea Education, Vol.II, no.3, April 1931. pp.109-113.
- 27 'Notes - "African Drama"'. Oversea Education, Vol.IV, no.3, April 1933. pp.160-161.
- 28 J.M. Winterbottom, 'Experimental Drama in the Gold Coast'. Oversea Education, Vol.V, no.2, January 1934. pp.112-116.
- 29 'Notes - "African Drama and the British Drama League"'. Oversea Education, Vol.V, no.2, January 1934. pp.125-128.
- 30 J. Adedeji, 'Nationalism and the Nigerian Theatre'. Munger: Africana Library Notes, Issue no.54, July 1980: California Institute of Technology. p.7.
- 31 In F. Melland and C.T. Young (eds.), African Dilemma. United Society for Christian Literature, 1937.
- 32 J.A. Ramsaran, New Approaches to African Literature. Ibadan University Press, 1965. pp.63-64.
- 33 R. Finnegan, Oral Literature in Africa, O.U.P., 1970. pp.500-517
- 34 E.T. Kirby, 'Indigenous African Theatre', The Drama Review Volume 18 No.4, December 1974. pp 22-35.
- 35 Aristotle, Poetics. (Translated by S.H. Butcher as Aristotle's theory of poetry and fine art.) Dover Publications Inc., 1951.
- 36 Martin, Esslin, Anatomy of Drama. Abacus, 1978.
- 37 Ola Rotimi, 'The Drama in African Ritual Display'. Nigeria Magazine, no.99, December 1968.  
African Theatre Today Pitman, 1976
- 38 See Banham, op. cit., p.3. He makes the same point and points at the magnitude of the shift one has to make in order to fully understand African drama (from the Aristotelian background).
- 39 Herbert Read, 'The Origins of Form in the Plastic Arts' in The Sociology of Literature, edited by C. Milton, et al., Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1970. pp.35-54.
- 40 David N. Margolies, The Function of Literature. Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1969.
- 41 Rotimi, op. cit.

- 42 Richard Courtney, Play, drama and thought: the intellectual background to drama in education. London: Cassell, 1974.
- 43 Aristotle, op.cit., p.15.
- 44 Evans-Pritchard, Theories in Primitive Religion. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- 45 Finnegan, op. cit., p.503.
- 46 A. van Gennep, The Rites of Passage. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960. p.2.
- 47 Jane Harrison, 'From Ritual to Art' in Elizabeth and Tom Burns (eds.), Sociology of Literature and Drama. Penguin Modern Sociology Readings, 1973. pp.323-327.
- 48 K.E. Senamu, 'Towards a definition of African Drama'. Paper presented at the First Ibadan Annual African Literature Conference, 6-10 July, 1976.
- 49 Banham, op. cit., p 1

## CHAPTER TWO

ART AND COMMITMENT

The question of 'art and commitment' in Africa is concerned with what people deem to be the function of art in society. In Africa this subject is everyone's concern. Politicians, clergymen and educationalists have a special interest in it. Either they covetously ally themselves to the arts in their work or suspiciously monitor their development to check any elements of subversion that may grow into them. In this chapter we discuss the development of the dramatic art and what are deemed to be its functions by those involved with this development. These are spelt out both verbally and practically - in the things critics and artists say or do to get certain results. To give proper perspective to the subject our approach inevitably hinges on historical foundations, but gradually it centres on fairly recent arguments on the subject. Quite apart from this, the question of 'art and commitment' is a live subject not just in Central Africa, but the whole continent. It is therefore our belief that a more general approach advances the subject in the right direction rather than one which pretends to present the region as blinkered from its neighbours.

Discussing the aims and functions of art outside the creative process is one thing and fulfilling certain objectives within the said

process is another. It is this distinction that gives us the difference between the critic (no matter how bad) and the artist. In African theatre this distinction is not an easy one to make. This is so not simply because very often the artist is found to play the role of a critic too, but because developments in it started in alien hands without the African himself making much contribution for a long time. More than this, the said alien mentors did not seem to agree on any one thing regarding the development of drama for the African.

Today there is general agreement on the contention that art should serve a purpose in society in Africa. This could be why there is so much interest shown by so many people. But perhaps this is not as important to mention as a discussion of what the nature of this purpose or function is and also of how artists are expected to go about it. The prescriptive tone of our discussion is the nature of the debate that is going on amongst all those concerned.

It is common practice amongst artists and critics to confine their discussions of the development of theatre in Africa to literary works. Even in these there is yet another distinction drawn between works written in vernacular languages and those written in foreign languages (like English and French). It is the latter works that have received detailed attention in scholarship. African drama in the vernacular only receives, if ever, casual comments, and then it gets dumped aside.<sup>(a)</sup> We propose to do more than this. We also contend that if a full study of developments in theatre on the continent is to be



achieved, we must not only treat theatre as part of African literature with its major concerns and what people think it should do (i.e. themes and function), but also as the following: the dramatic text and how it is brought about to give us a unique experience; the practice of performance, and the place or building for performance.

Only when we look at all these areas do we fully understand the path this artform has followed in its growth. This is a path which is not at all smooth. It is a path which is trodden by all sorts and sundry, going in one direction then retracting, smoothing out footmarks left behind and retracing the faded marks. The whole growth is cyclic, repetitive, retrogressive (at times) and progressive (at the best of times) all at the same time. Such a criss-crossing of paths must give rise to problems of all sorts - affecting the final outcome. These are political, social as well as economic.

Whilst emphasizing this broad perspective in our discussion we shall try as much as possible to relate it to Malawi and Zambia.

### The Colonial Era

Education was the channel through which missionaries and later on administrators enforced the process of civilizing Africans. Although a great deal of work came through evangelism, the bulk of the civilizing machinery was set in motion in the school room. And in British Tropical Africa education was left to Christian missions until around 1924 when the British Government felt persuaded to form an Advisory

Committee on Education in the colonies.<sup>1</sup> Even as late as 1947 education in most protectorates was 'still predominantly in the hands of the missionary societies who began it in the first days of their work'.<sup>2</sup> Prior to 1924 the British Government saw its role in the colonies ending at simply providing 'law and order, defence from external attack and economic development'.<sup>3</sup> It was therefore left to the missionary schools to fulfil the calling of 'introducing' arts amongst the natives. Succumbing to pressure from public opinion at home and demands for financial assistance from missionaries, the British Government, together with interested bodies within Britain and the United States of America, set up Commissions to look into the education of the natives.<sup>4</sup> It was as a result of one such Commission that the 1924 Advisory Committee was formed. In 1925 the committee produced a memorandum which spelt out the objective of education in the colonies. On the question of culture within this education it had this to say:

... on relation between indigenous culture and civilisations, and what [may be called] western life and civilization. Recognising the existence of some isolated areas, the Committee's views are based on a conception of the inevitability of this contact in a rapidly contracting world. The Committee's wish is to soften the violence of the impact, and help the primitive or oriental race to analyse its own culture, to reject what restricts growth and to intensify what fosters it by methods and in accordance with principles found useful in the west. It aims at evolution not revolution, synthesis not substitution (...) we hope that for the enjoyment and advancement of life the arts and crafts will be an integral part of the school's offering (...) Music, the drama, and the plastic arts must proceed pari passu at least with the more utilitarian arts. In West Africa (...) effective steps have been taken to weave the arts into school life and develop them on indigenous lines with tactful

assistance from western technique.<sup>5</sup>

This was a departure from what the missionaries had been doing.<sup>6</sup> The liberalism of cushioning the impact of a clash between the 'two' cultures was not important to the missionaries. As we have said already the process of civilizing the native, to them, was the stamping out of the primitiveness which pervaded his life style. The result of this was unavoidably an African who was gradually being deculturized. At the hands of the missionaries indigenous cultures received very little mercy. It was with the coming in of the government that treatment of these cultures in education began to change. People in England were becoming concerned with the effects their 'civilisation' was having on the natives of Africa. The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures after carrying out research on the breakdown of native tradition - resulting from contact with the west through new life found in towns or through general contact - recommended that people study 'details of the morality, social loyalties and religion of the African in his native environment, in order to halt the rapid disintegration his life was undergoing'.<sup>7</sup> It is probably as a follow up to this that the Margaret Wrong Prize for Literature was established.<sup>8</sup> The aim of this was to encourage creative writing amongst the natives. The issue of the native's development should not be divorced from race relations here for whilst the white missionaries and administrators worked ever so hard to 'improve' the native there were some people, on the continent, who feared such improvement especially where it brought the native too close to the white man.

These said:

The great need of Africa is the segregation of whites and blacks. Mixed civilisation is the undoing of the white population. Sooner or later it leads to bloodshed.

It is not easy to say how this kind of view influenced work amongst natives. What is definite however is that there were two schools of thought on the civilizing of the natives which had one resultant development viz.; the attempted rehabilitation of the African native culture. Of these two schools the racist one seems to be the one especially isolated as basis for attacks of the Negritudist philosophy made by Anglophone African writers like Mphahlele. But we shall return to this subject later. For the moment let us note that the process of civilizing the native still remained the goal of all education but along different lines. Lines which were less dogmatic and not entirely unsympathetic to indigenous forms of art.<sup>10</sup> The arts being taught in schools were now geared towards purifying 'the rotten tradition or lack of tradition in graphic and plastic arts'.<sup>11</sup> Some people were even ready to look at native African forms in a move towards this goal. In 1930, G.A. Stevens found the 'African Theatre' at Achimota in Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) in what he called 'the pre-Elizabethan stage morality-play phase [in which] the most popular form [was] to take a native legend or story with a moral, split up the action into as many as eight or nine different scenes, each dealing with one dramatic moment, and interspersed with considerable knock-about dancing and singing'.<sup>12</sup> He continues to report that at this point in time there was no written drama. All the work he saw was

'created on the stage', in improvisations so to speak. But who was creating this work? Winterbottom around the same period called upon Europeans to 'especially' write plays for the Africans or provide them with some adaptations as he objected to 'straight transferring' of plays from Europe.<sup>13</sup> He argued European plays would be very boring in Africa amongst Africans. J.N. Harrison and T.W. Harrison however held a different view. They thought the African could learn much from the foreign drama. They argued that the Africans did 'need new themes if their drama was to be elevated and used to enrich their race'.<sup>14</sup> But what really won the day were arguments strongly recommending some total divorce from the west. These arguments said that the African:

... must compose his own drama, and he must do it in his own way; and [the European] must be patient and not hurry him (... ) he must be encouraged to dramatize everything he sees, his own folk-stories and fables (... ) his art must have its roots in the villages and take its part in the lives of the village people.<sup>15</sup>

Of course such an argument got tempered by the other groups and ultimately produced a compromise situation which saw the transplanting of western form of drama onto the continent to house indigenous content. It would seem then that the major preoccupation of those people engaged in theatre activity was evolving an art form rather than this said content. Even in this, gradually it was generally felt that rather than impose a format from outside, they should pick one from within the cultures they were working in. The technique here was to borrow from the most obvious art form of folk-tale. Experiments carried out in Ghana and South Africa support this.<sup>16</sup> Such a move should warm the



heart of Ama Ata Aidoo who says that she believes:

... that for African drama really to be valid it has to derive lots of its strength and its impetus, from traditional African dramatic forms, however one conceives these forms because they exist. What we must do is to find out what they are and how we can use them.<sup>17</sup>

These words - although out of genuine concern - probably come about in total ignorance of the work of such colonial educationalists as those we have mentioned above. This is an observation we believe holds true with most, if not all, African literature studies so far done. But we shall get on to this later on.

It is important to stress that the concern of the early mentors of drama in Africa was the shell which would house it. In the absence of locally written plays, they brought in material from native local folk tales, legends and myths. They did not see it as their place to write for the African. There was general agreement that they:

... should not make plays for the Africans but should lead them to make plays for themselves [... as there would] be ... no service [done] to [them] if [they were taught] the latest thing from art circles in America or plays of Bernard Shaw - the African [was to] begin his drama in the right place.<sup>18</sup>

The best the expatriate could do for the African in this respect was to give him:

... a selection of themes from [his] own folk-lore, and stories of universal interest, and encouraging native teachers to work out their own dramas on them. Themes to convey moral teaching which allowed the African to express his views on life as they became affected by his increased contact with the world.<sup>19</sup>

At a time when education was predominantly controlled by missionaries this selection obviously carried a good deal of the principles they

stood for. A catalogue of the sort of literature that was produced by Africans after the introduction of the IAI Writing Competition and the Margaret Wrong Prize for Literature shows that it was either concerned with explaining African behaviour or encouraging amongst fellow Africans the essence of following what the schools taught them. This is what J. Jahn calls 'apprentice literature'.<sup>20</sup> The work of most expatriate teachers on the continent today still follows this pattern.<sup>21</sup>

Apart from nurturing cultural development amongst the natives (for whatever motives), some colonial educationalists saw the potential of using drama in propaganda campaigns linked with their work. Utilitarian motives in some places superseded mere 'artistic consciousness' development. To meet such a goal some African teachers were:

... taught the technique required for the successful production of propaganda plays for pagan spectators [in which the appeal of the plays came] not from the dialogue of the actors, but their portrayal of characters by pantomimic gesture and costume.<sup>22</sup>

Some sharp minds had noticed that 'the primitive native [saw his] art as a necessary part of his social and moral education even in his own traditional society'.<sup>23</sup> Such an approach to propaganda produced results very quickly. Native teachers were quick to grasp the potential of such a theatre; successful projects could be identified here and there. In Kenya 'a Mkanda and two Agikuyu' teachers had been able to show and convince villagers that there was more value in 'cooperative dukas' [shops] than in private concerns run for individual profit.<sup>24</sup> This kind of work goes beyond the formation of cooperatives.

It deals with changing a people's attitudes towards property. Politically (particularly in a colonial situation) this could have far reaching results. It would be interesting to see whether (and how) such cooperatives could have worked towards awakening the Africans involved to the plight of colonial exploitation. This is a typical example of how realism in literature may lead to results which contradict the political opinions of the writer. Here the contradiction is between what the educationalists intended to achieve through theatre and the 'imagined' conscientization that could have come thereof. But this is mere speculation! Would Ngugi wa Thiong'o agree that the colonialists involved in encouraging the 'cooperative dukas' were trying to create conditions necessary for 'the people to enjoy their culture'?<sup>25</sup>

The process of developing an artistic consciousness in the African did not take place in vacuo. It was being watched closely even by those people who would have had nothing to do with education. The pagans so to speak, as some people observed, were coopting the techniques of the Jeans School teachers in their own pagan performances.<sup>26</sup> This development was seen as 'repercussions on native life particularly where the techniques in propaganda work were being used in ritual and primitive dances'. How ironic this was considering that the native was supposed to be totally devoid of an art consciousness unless tutored by western minds! Of course the question of adapting indigenous performances by way of incorporating western ideas went beyond borrowing 'technique'. It was also used as basis

for satire directed against these very western ideas as the case of Nyau shows.<sup>27</sup> Another point worth mentioning is that whilst the expatriate encouraged the 'special' drama for the African amongst Africans, he continued with his own type of 'civilized' drama amongst his compatriots. This phenomenon did not go unnoticed by the 'educated' African.

In the absence of written African drama the little that was improvised was heavily didactic. As we have said earlier on, such work showed some kind of blind obedience on the part of the African. In some cases it emphasized the 'debt' he owed the white man for bringing him out of an abyss of darkness as it were into light. In 1951, in Nyasaland:

African players, led by Mr Charles Matinga performed a historical play at Sunnyside Football Ground to celebrate Nyasaland's Diamond Jubilee. A large gathering of all communities enjoyed the play, which took the form of a pageant of the history of Nyasaland from the days of the slave raids to 1951. Through the sequences [there were 18 scenes] there ran a thread of delightful humour. Misunderstandings were exploited to the full. The antics of the witchdoctor and the comic skit on Askari [African soldiers] drill raised a lot of laughter. In intervals between some of the scenes Mrs Matinga and a small choir sang various songs very effectively.<sup>28</sup>

The whole improvisation was geared towards emphasizing the obligation Africans had to whites for delivering them time and time again from such vagaries as the Arab slave trade, famines, tribal and 'international' wars. The 'antics' of the witch doctor were not merely for fun, but to ridicule and mock any belief in witches. In other words this was geared towards discrediting superstition. This was in

keeping with what the church preached. The supremacy of European culture was not in doubt here. We might add that Mr Matinga was a member of the Legislative Council in the colonial days and he became very unpopular amongst fellow African politicians for his reactionary behaviour. He actually had to migrate to Southern Rhodesia because he was branded as a 'sell out' in the Malawian fight for independence.<sup>29</sup>

Other than such adventures taking place on football pitches some teachers maximized their use of school rooms or halls (where they were provided) for drama work until expatriates started talking about the:

... need for a theatre for the cultured African [who] was hoping to use [his] folk-lore and religion as its subject and [in which] to find the drama of changing conditions ...<sup>30</sup>

Apart from the question of space there were the African's attempts at sping the white man.<sup>31</sup> No sooner than he had a bit of education did the African begin to show signs of wanting more and a desire to follow his teachers' ways. In Northern Rhodesia it was observed that:

In the industrial areas, Africans [were] urgently demanding libraries, concerts, cinemas, lecture and debating societies, classes in art and crafts, organisation of choirs and bands and all those more pleasant occupations of the mind which people in the transitional stage, from a primitive to a modern civilization take to so readily.<sup>32</sup>

Facilities provided as a response to such demands were not proper theatres. All the government provided at the time were secondary school or teacher training college and social welfare halls, which in most cases were multipurpose built. The buildings were designed to have some raised stage - approximating what was the proscenium arch stage at the time. Some of the social welfare halls or complexes were



turned into schools by the African's sense of priority.<sup>33</sup> These facilities were provided sporadically but not without apprehension. A speech made by the South African Minister of Social Welfare on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg argued that for the African it was much better to develop what was noble in his own culture than take over from the Europeans a culture which had many weaknesses.<sup>34</sup> Occasionally this kind of advice was heeded and attempts to accommodate it involved taking say a foreign story, then clothing it in indigenous robes. This was some sort of compromise. Of course as Robert McLaren points out, such calls by the South African government were part and parcel of the Apartheid system which aimed at withholding the progress of Africans in order to render them more exploitable in white man's pursuit of economic gains.<sup>35</sup> The feelings the words carried were shared by whites in Nyasaland and other colonies in Africa - certainly the East African ones.

It was at a time like this and with such facilities in mind that S.A. Paliani wrote his play Sewero la Mlandu wa Nkhanga<sup>36</sup> (the play of the Trial of the Guinea Fowl). The play was written in Chichewa - a vernacular language spoken both in Nyasaland and the eastern province of Northern Rhodesia. It was geared towards an African audience (and more also towards an African readership for he was very much aware that theatre facilities provided by the Government were not everywhere, but in a few selected towns). The didactic intentions of the play cannot be spelt better than the playwright himself put it:

In this play you will see what happened between two families;

from this you should learn and see that a thief never gets respect or blessings before other people.<sup>37</sup> (My own translation)

The business of this dramatist was to discourage the habit of stealing amongst fellow Africans. The statistics of Penal Code offences for the period between 1948 and 1950 included information on Nyasaland which showed a marked rise in crime (especially thefts and burglary) amongst the natives.<sup>38</sup> 'Recidivists' were held responsible for many of the offences against property. In Northern Rhodesia, the statistics for thefts showed a sharp rise from 5,378 in 1945 to 10,655 in 1949.<sup>39</sup> The explanation given for this rise was that:

... with increasing industrialization of the territory, and consequent growth of population in urban areas there [had] been an increase in crime ...<sup>40</sup>

In 1951 the figure for the year was up by 2,714.<sup>41</sup> We could safely assume the government was quite concerned with this rising crime wave. We can also assume that the bulk of the criminals would have been people who were leaving their village homes for the town without any educational background which would have enabled them to get a job easily. Could Paliani have been trying to help check this?

Whilst the didacticism of plays from this time was aimed at a native readership and audience, the format and fulfilment of such propaganda intentions were clearly monitored by the white sponsors. Michael Etherton commenting on the 1957 radio production of The Land of Kazembe by A.S. Masiye<sup>42</sup> of Zambia says that the play 'received praise then as a radio play; [but] it was chiefly remembered as the first radio play that brought blacks and whites together round a Federal

microphone ... [which was] typical of the Federal era [in which] irrelevancies rather than the substance of the piece received the greater prominence'.<sup>43</sup> Etherton does not seem to quite grasp the mood of the time in which the play was written. Mentioning that the play brought blacks and whites together (even if it was only round a microphone) should not be regarded as an "irrelevancy" where it marked the breakdown of the social order of the day. This symbolized an attempt (and a subtle one at that) to bring the master as it were and the slave to one table. This was a unique microphone worth our attention before we get on to the play itself as it provides the conditions of its performance. It belonged to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was an idea suggested initially by the British South Africa Company during the first world war. Its intentions were to improve the security, economic growth and other services in the three countries of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. It took more than 20 years for it to actually become a reality. This was so because most people (both black and white) opposed its formation. The white settler community of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland initially showed some reluctance about the Federation because they believed its exponents were only interested in exploiting their regions for the sake of Southern Rhodesia.<sup>44</sup> It was only after the British Government began to show signs of favouring blacks in its colonial policies that they supported the idea of a Federation in the hope that it would gain them some autonomy from the

home government.<sup>45</sup> This trend of things only confirmed the Africans' refusal of the merger. With a Labour government in power African apprehension was heeded in the British Parliament and the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland therefore remained a very remote possibility. 1941 saw the creation of a Central African Council under which the three territorial administrations met and discussed issues of mutual interest. Pro-federalists exploited this council and used it to persuade the British Government of the time (now Conservative) to allow the formation of the said Federation in 1953 in spite of vehement opposition from the Africans of the territories.

Experiences of the Federation period showed that the African was right in refusing its formation for they were losers in everything within it. Firstly its formation as we have pointed out came into being in spite of very pronounced opposition from them. Secondly public expenditure in the 'Federal' Budget clearly favoured whites although they were in a minority. The impact of taxation as Crosby says was directed towards the Africans rather than the whites as it was mostly those things most bought by Africans that were heavily taxed.<sup>46</sup> Even in health and education the picture was the same. It was for the whites that new and better facilities were being provided. Representation in Parliament was really a matter of token for the blacks. There was no equal or realistic representation. Everything that the Federation had its hands on emphasized this difference between blacks and whites. Commercial and cultural life was following this pattern too. With very little money in his pocket and laws to enforce

differences the African was prevented from joining white clubs. In some shops a black was not even supposed to buy things across the counter, but through some window specially opened for his convenience. It was a dream to imagine blacks and whites sharing anything, even a microphone for that matter. Masiye's achievement is no mean thing in the light of this atmosphere.

Masiye's play was broadcast on the Federal Broadcasting Station (Central African Broadcasting Station it was called) in Lusaka. Its presentation over the air caused a sensation because the political situation at the time was such that it did not allow blacks and whites to share cultural life together. Separate development was the basis of Federal policy. As some politicians argued in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland were 'dominated by Southern Rhodesia with its detested segregationist policies and its antipathy toward the African populace'.<sup>47</sup> Broadcasting in the Federation was split along racial lines. This was following a recommendation made by the Central African Council which said that 'all broadcasting for the three territories should be conducted by the Information Department from Lusaka and that all European broadcasting should be conducted by the Southern Rhodesia Broadcasting Service from Salisbury'.<sup>48</sup> The broadcasting from Lusaka still remained part and parcel of colonial preoccupation with the natives' education. In this light the work of the station was geared towards:

... not only, or not even primarily, entertainment but rather the enlightenment and education of the more backward sections of the population and their instruction in public health,



agriculture, and similar subjects.<sup>49</sup>

The drama that was broadcast from Lusaka bore the mark of this recommendation although it had been made several years earlier than the broadcasting came into being in the territory. Msimbi<sup>50</sup>, a Nyasaland Information Department paper for the Africans carried Lusaka Broadcasting Programme schedules every week which included 15 minute stints of improvised radio drama by tribal groups from the three territories. This drama was mostly on topical issues. Players were taken from places like the Medical Assistants School in Lusaka.<sup>51</sup> We can safely assume these presented plays dealing with health matters. Gradually, individuals - probably broadcasting personnel - started making contributions to productions. Later on Msimbi included in its weekly programmes schedule a play entitled Kwa Ogulitsa ndi Ogula (To the Vendor and the Buyer) by Victor Manda.<sup>52</sup> This title suggests the play was aimed at teaching some lessons on 'commerce'. By 1950 sufficient time had elapsed to give the broadcasting house some steady actors for its short drama stints amongst whom were people like Plias Chiwaula, Mallon Phiri, Nelson Chinyongo and Arthur Ambali.<sup>53</sup> This was the cast for a radio play entitled Mnyamata wofunsira mbeta (The Courting Youngman).<sup>54</sup> It would seem most of this work was done from improvisation. Although titles and possibly story outlines were provided no proper scripts were used. A style still very much in use by the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation on the drama programmes of Sewero (Play) and Pamajiga (Crossroads). A picture of the Malipoko players broadcasting from the Central African Station at Lusaka

published in the 1955 Northern Rhodesia Colonial Reports shows no sign of scripts anywhere around the microphone.<sup>55</sup>

We must remember that all this broadcasting work was meant for the 'backward' lot of the African populace. In other words it was ignoring a growing number of fairly educated elites who consequently turned to British Broadcasting Corporation World Service's programmes relayed to Africa. In 1951 'listener research revealed an increasing demand' for these programmes much to the surprise of the territorial governments of the region.<sup>56</sup> The research went on to say this was quite 'interesting since although the Africans [wanted] such items [as news and talks from BBC] they [did] not fully understand them [and that] the growing class of educated and politically minded Africans [was] using the radio increasingly as an educational medium'.<sup>57</sup> Whilst this phenomenon reveals to some extent the poor quality of the programmes locally produced it also indicates the presence of a political consciousness into which Masiye's play was born in 1957.

When we look at The Land of Kazembe we must do so in view of the above conditions of performance. Radio drama was in the vernaculars of the three territories of the Federation. By writing in English at a time when people were very politically conscious of their unhappy position as blacks, he broke the division of Africans into tribes (contrary to what the Federal government was trying to do). The subject matter of the play presented the white man in the most 'human' form possible thus demolishing his God-like image held by most Africans. The play marks the beginning of using the dramatic art in politics.

All work on drama before the production of The Land of Kazembe was for blacks only and done by black actors only. Now, this was broken, the segregationist policy was being challenged from a cultural front. Instead of the usual 15 minutes improvised plays, a full length and properly scripted play was being presented to the people. We can sum Masiye's achievement in this work as marking a break in the established social order of the day. It is in this light that the bringing of blacks and whites round the Federal microphone becomes a relevant issue! The Land of Kazembe marks a watershed between the 'apprentice' drama of colonial times and that which married nostalgia in the negritudist sense to political satire preceding and following independence in Anglophone Africa. This was not a common experience. In Nigeria this kind of work was carried out by people like Ogunde. In the school room which is in fact the main 'factory' of literary produce, the school teacher feeding on the mercy of the colonial master could not be so bold. He was much slower in waking up to his plight of being colonized - that is in the literary world. His advancement still remained affixed to comparing himself to the 'master'. This is why he wanted to try established western drama. Of course some of these would argue this was not a conscious effort on their part.

Rubadiri in Nyasaland had this to say on the subject:

... one cannot break away from things which nourish one's way of life. ... when I sit down to write, I don't consciously make an effort to try and be an African writer by trying to adapt some so-called African forms. The echoes of the African tradition come to me subconsciously. I hear them, and perhaps this is the only African part - or influence - that I can confess of; otherwise, I think the technical part

of it is entirely conditioned by my experience with reading European literature.<sup>58</sup>

One wonders how much of this stands to explain his production of Macbeth in 1957 at Dedza Secondary School. The Nyasaland Times reported the production's rehearsal saying that; staff and pupils were rehearsing Shakespeare's Macbeth and that the cast included Europeans and Africans.<sup>59</sup> Producing this play, Rubadiri is said to have thought that the supernatural qualities of the Scottish murder play would appeal to African members of the audience. The African members being thought of were the students and a few of the African teachers at the school. Dedza Secondary School was a little over a hundred miles from the then capital of Nyasaland (Zomba), yet the production attracted top expatriate civil servants of the day - who drove all the way to see it. The reason put forward by Rubadiri to explain his choice of the play does not seem to be the best one. This is particularly so when we hear that the leading roles in the cast were given to expatriate members of staff.<sup>60</sup> Except for the witches and the doctor all the parts were played by whites. What was Rubadiri trying to achieve? Was he trying to prove himself? Was he trying to identify with the whites of the school? The 1961 Colonial Annual Reports for Nyasaland carried a picture of a scene from a Domasi Teachers Training College presentation of excerpts from Julius Caesar which followed their production of Androcles and the Lion.<sup>61</sup> Only about 15 years earlier, this place had just begun courses for progressive village headmen in agriculture, land use, civics, and in matters concerning local administration.<sup>62</sup> It is

quite probable the kind of drama that might have been tried then would have been the 'utilitarian' type of the Kabete school in Kenya. Drama linked to the work of the school that is.

In Africa - not just Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia - the early development of drama was very much in the hands of the expatriate teacher. This went beyond simply producing plays to include ideas concerned with what path the said development should follow. We would maintain that this fact should be borne in mind whenever people are talking about the development of contemporary theatre on the continent. This should be so for a number of reasons: the arguments or suggestions being made now sometimes merely repeat what was said by these expatriates; some developments today can best be understood or explained in the light of this background; the extent to which colonial exploitation went gets revealed in a new light. Genuine interest in the development of the native racist biases on the one hand and quests for self assertion together with intentions of pleasing the white boss on the other were all bound up together to provide the function of the art form. Ideas being suggested by African playwrights and scholars today - on which direction African theatre should go - should be seen in the light of this confused background. This way we can sift those which merely repeat and tread on old grounds from the progressive ones (if there is that possibility). Consider such remarkable observations as this:

... [the] divorce between art and everyday life is not a feature of African life although it is now being induced by



European influence. A drama which appeals only to the few, a drama in which the comprehension of the English is a difficulty will lead nowhere. It is hard to see how it can do anything for the real Africa, how it can be styled African drama ...<sup>63</sup>

This sounds like today. It is as if we are listening to Dele Charley in Sierra Leone talk about his Tabule Theatre and its goals, or to Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Kenya demanding that writers be with the masses or Kabwe Kasoma in Zambia and the University Travelling Theatre in Malawi pledging to take the theatre to the people.<sup>64</sup> But these words were said at the peak of colonialism. The radicalism implied in the words could not be exploited by the African except at his own risk unless he was very cunning. We would like to argue that this is what Masiye achieved some years later in his The Land of Kazembe. Otherwise the result of such arguments amongst the many made by others apart from Clarke only served to confuse the would be African playwright or theatre enthusiast of the time. Quite apart from concerning themselves with theatre only, these ideas had implications for the African's education. What was he to make of his education which was meant to elevate him to the rank of a European? Were such calls to Africanize not some form of rebuff of his attempts at attaining a 'high culture'? Such an atmosphere must give rise to frustration. Perhaps we should see attempts to idolize the past in Anglophone Africa to be a result of this frustration. Rebuffed thus, the African - already torn between fulfilling his white teacher's quests and fulfilling his own envy and aspirations for the advanced society of the teacher - was frustrated into a re-awakening. A re-awakening which was existent

only in nostalgia for the past and for African-ness. And it is this frustration that forms the cultural front in the struggle for political independence in Africa.<sup>65</sup> In Nyasaland James Sangala - a politician - gave vent to his emotions in the paper Msimbi. Partially excited by the experience of listening to African music on record and watching a Mr Hugh Tracey - who was secretary of the African Music Society - imitate story telling as it was in a typical African village, he lamented thus:

On May 12th, at H.H.I. [Henry Henderson Institute] Mr Hugh Tracey was playing some gramophone records as he told people about his work of recording songs from various peoples of Africa (...) Oh! he reminded me of my culture (...) You, my people, this is our luck, we have been reminded we must revive our traditions so that future generations should not be rootless. Because today boys and girls cannot even tell a folk-tale. My God! "Europeanness" has unloosened [destroyed] the art of Africans.<sup>66</sup> (My own translation)

This could be said to be a precursor to what was to become a political slogan in almost all discussions of culture in independent Malawi and Zambia. For the sake of culture politicians have brought into existence ministries, official 'tourist' dance troupes, as well as the contradictory censorship procedures rife in Africa today.

### The Struggle for Independence

Although we shall be talking of the struggle for independence in Africa as if it took place in the various colonies at the same time, it is important to bear in mind this was not so. We do this as a matter of convenience. The struggle period covers a wide span of time. For

some countries it was a short struggle, whilst for others it was a long one. For instance the beginnings of the struggle in Nyasaland can be traced back to 1915 when John Chilembwe led an abortive uprising against the colonial government, yet independence did not come until 1964. In Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) the struggle started about the same time, but her independence came much earlier than Malawi's in 1957. The same is true of Nigeria whose 'real' struggle matured in 1920 leading to independence in 1960. The fact that one country rose early to challenge colonialism does not guarantee early independence. But this does not matter to us. Here, we assume that the fight for independence was a common experience and that it took more or less the same shape in British Colonial Africa. This being the case we propose to treat cultural developments of this era as common to the whole area. In Central Africa this was certainly so by the time the fight became intense since both Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia were fighting one common enemy, namely, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

In terms of the development of creative writing and theatre in this period people have tended to oversimplify matters. Although we talk of a unified front of nationalists we must acknowledge the difficulties this front underwent before becoming an entity - particularly those arising from tribalism and differing cultural values. Of course, faced with a common enemy in colonialism, politicians were able to overcome them. And as Gérard<sup>67</sup> shows, artists - particularly writers - had a part to play in this process of unifying the people. Theatre too, in its own small way made a contribution.

Contemporary theatrical activity in Africa continues to be monitored and sometimes even controlled by forces outside the theatre itself. As we have already said, many people show interest in the theatre. The presence of such people inevitably directs theatrical developments beyond the expectations and sometimes the scope of those who are strictly speaking 'professionals' in the area; namely playwrights, directors and even actors. Quite apart from showing us how 'important' theatrical activities are on the continent this wide ranging patronage has a telling effect on the theatrical conditions within which playwrights and directors work.

Theatrical developments of the colonial period clearly show that there were two societies involved in theatre activity. There was that of the white experts who were trying to create a special theatre for the Africans. And then there was that of Africans who both received and tried to put into practice ideas from the said experts. A drama conceived by whites was being created for a society of blacks. In short, during the colonial period we can talk of 'drama and society' in Africa in the way Raymond Williams finds objectionable.<sup>68</sup> It is only when Africans acquire independence that drama grows together with other things to make their new society. In this respect we cease to talk of 'drama and society' but 'drama in society'. This time, drama forms part of the culture of the people. The people inherit it as it were. This process of inheritance took place during the period of struggle preceding the acquisition of political independence. And it was manifest in the way culture was brought in as one of the fronts of the

fight for liberation. This was evidenced in the songs specially created to support freedom fighters, and later in the writing that came out of Africans.

During the struggle there was exceptional unity amongst the people as tribal conflicts gave way to nationalism. We might add here that throughout the colonial period - quite apart from tribal conflicts amongst Africans - there had also grown some form of class distinction between the educated and the uneducated masses of the villages. Although these two groups came together in the struggle just mentioned, they did so motivated by different experiences. The masses' struggle was based on refusal to be exploited by the colonial powers in the economic and political sense. The educated African who formed a group of elites within the African population - being mostly teachers or clerks in the civil service or mission schools - gave Africa her first writers. And as several people have pointed out these joined the struggle out of frustration. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (formerly James Ngugi) has said that:

The intellectuals, the elites, the middle classes [which included most writers] ... found themselves not quite accepted in the world of the conquerors. Rejected by their counterparts in the white structure, their humanity sometimes denied in the name of race, they were as it were thrown back to the masses. They started to reclaim their past, often with bitter nostalgia.

Having enjoyed some acceptance and appreciation from the colonial masters for their achievements in aping them, they found it intolerable to be denied equal status with the whites on racial grounds. In spite of achievements within the white man's culture they



were not going to wash away the colour of their skin. This was not only frustrating but traumatic. A direct result of this is the Negritude school of writing in Africa which concentrated on bringing up African culture as supreme in all senses. It is at this point that the educated 'elites' joined the masses in fighting colonialism and demanded total independence from foreign rule.

The product of this union culturally was a quick recognition of the amount of damage done to indigenous traditional life and the need to rehabilitate it. For the African elite this was one way of endearing himself to the masses who would have otherwise viewed his political involvement with suspicion. Expression of this union came through the songs created during the struggle. These were created en masse and they were sung likewise.

A typical example of these songs is given here from Malawi:

Chisoni atsamunda Manyaziwo	Sadness! Colonialists Shame!
Uzani Uzani Kapirikoni Kuti atsitse mbendela	Tell Tell all stooges To lower their flag.
A Kamuzu* A Kamuzu chaka chino Kwezani mbendela	Kamuzu Kamuzu, this year Raise your flag.
Chisoni a Chijozi** Manyaziwo	Sadness Chijozi Shame!

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\*Kamuzu is the name of Dr Banda who led the fight for Independence in Malawi.

\*\*A stooge's name.

Uzani  
 Uzani Kapirikoni  
 Kuti atsitse mbendela

Tell  
 Tell all stooges  
 To lower their flag.

A Kamuzu  
 A Kamuzu chaka chino  
 Kwezami mbendela

Kamuzu  
 Kamuzu, this year  
 Raise your flag.

Kwame Nkrumah recalled vividly some years after independence in Ghana how culture joined the fight for liberation in his country in the 1950's:

Comrades we have come a long way up the road since [the fight] I can hear once again the surging of the masses in the evenings outside the prison walls. I can feel once more the violent throbbing of my heart as the blood of inspiration runs through my veins and steels my nerves for the tough struggle ahead. I can see how the party comrades toiled day and night to keep the party flag flying in those days of severe trial.<sup>70</sup>

This phenomenon was not confined to West Africa. In East and Central Africa the case was the same. To put it in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's words, in Kenya:

In the struggle for Independence the peasants and often the urban workers invoked their ancestral gods for strength to fight the foe. They adapted traditional rhythms, songs and dances to new needs of the struggle.<sup>71</sup>

These 'traditional rhythms, songs and dances' were brought into the fight in order to unify, inspire, steel and encourage the politicians and the people as a whole. The emphasis in the struggle was on the masses rather than individuals, so the so-called elites of the time had no choice but to join incognito. Creative writing during this critical period seemed to disappear altogether. It was probably so because the

whole process of publishing and promoting writing was very much in colonial hands. It is only in the theatre that creative work seemed to have continued. In Nigeria, it even joined the fight as evidenced by the work of Hubert Ogunde.<sup>72</sup> If ever there were any works being published they would have addressed themselves to the struggle. This would have been either in favour of colonialism (some aspect of it) or against it. If the former were to be the case, then the writers would have been branded as 'stooges' and perhaps suffer at the hands of the people in many ways (not excluding physical violence). If the latter was the case, and even if they highlighted the vagaries of colonialism in their writing, artists would not have done it in the same direct manner of the politicians. Being at the mercy of colonial presses and publicity they probably would not have succeeded anyway.

What is important here about art during the period of struggle is that firstly it became the Africans' own brainchild rather than responses to European suggestions and tutoring; secondly tradition and history became important in as far as they provided sources of inspiration and style of presentation (which - ironically - as we have shown earlier on was the colonialist approach to drama in Africa), and thirdly all people were united in the purpose of opposing colonialism. And the little literature that was produced was mostly in the vernacular. It is at this point that we can begin to talk of 'art in society', but not at the total exclusion of the other relationship

implied by the phrase 'art and society'.

### Post Independence Period

#### Themes

Although it is a straight forward thing to chart out the development of writing during the post-colonial period in West Africa, the same is not true in East and Central Africa. Indeed we do find identical phases, themes or styles of writing in the three areas, but they do not occur in the same order. With the growth of African literature in West Africa grew critical awareness around it. This was given expression in print - most effectively in journals like Présence Africaine, Transition and Black Orpheus. Through such publications people in the rest of the continent got informed. Up and coming writers in East and Central Africa therefore, in a manner of speaking, short-circuited the life cycle gone through by their colleagues from West Africa. They had the chance of learning, rather than living through certain artistic experiences, from these older friends. The same thing could be said to be happening in Zimbabwe at the moment. Instead of following the steps we are going to chart down presently, as the pattern of development in African literature, Zimbabweans are calling upon established playwrights like Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong'o<sup>73</sup> to teach them 'the latest thing' in theatre practice. What all this means is that whilst we can easily track down the development of Chinua

Achebe's views on the writer and his role in society (besides the way these views are put into practice in his writing) - changing from a romantic writer, through social commentator, to a pamphleteer of the Biafran cause in the Nigerian civil war<sup>74</sup> - we cannot do the same for people like Ngugi wa Thiong'o or any post-independence writer from East or Central Africa. The latter embody all the stages of such development in one epoch of their writing. For instance, within the early work and ideas of Ngugi wa Thiong'o we trace both romantic reminiscence and disillusionment in the present as well as arguments for writing with the masses in mind. Whilst his The River Between<sup>75</sup> idealises the past and condemns colonialism, in his play The Wound in the Heart<sup>76</sup> (from about the same time) he addresses himself to brutal realities of life experienced by returnees from Mau-Mau detention camps instead of dwelling on some imagined rosy and unadulterated celebration of Mau-Mau victory and promises of a good future. As early as 1963 he could suggest the formation of a travelling theatre at Makerere<sup>77</sup> and thus bring theatre to the people. The work coming out of East and Central Africa fuses into one period those experiences which West Africans have gone through and dealt with in their writing over a period of years. By implication we are saying that what Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong'o<sup>78</sup> have outlined as the pattern of development in African literature only holds true up to a point chronologically and geographically. Theatre developments in Malawi and Zambia illustrate



this point.

Immediately after achieving independence the unity of the people mentioned earlier on remained intact. Complaints about colonialism were replaced by concern with rehabilitation of African dignity and consolidation of the nation. From politicians came calls to rejuvenate, to revive, to forestall a cultural heritage once denigrated and now in danger of disappearing.

The role of the writer in this period was put most succinctly by Wole Soyinka in Transition when he said that:

Independence in every instance [had] meant an emergency pooling of every mental resource. The writer must, for the moment at least ... postpone that unique reflection on experience and events which is what makes a writer - and constitute himself into a part of that machinery that will actually shape events.<sup>79</sup>

In practical terms this was manifest in the dominant theme which tried to redress the negative interpretation of African cultures done by colonialism. In Chinua Achebe's words:

This theme ... [was] that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry, and, above all, they had dignity ... The writer's duty is to help [his people] regain [this dignity and self respect] by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost ...<sup>80</sup>

How much this view owes to the success and critical comments on his novel Things Fall Apart<sup>81</sup> one would like to know. We would not hesitate to say that usually and normally a writer - especially a beginner - concerns himself more with telling a story than committing himself to particular creeds and dogmas. Only when he sees that he can be read and be listened to, does he begin to talk about commitment and thus establish a pattern to his work. The situation in Africa is more complicated than this. Most of the writers establish themselves from academic institutions where they do not necessarily get tuition in creative writing, but meet varying schools of literary criticism. From this, we can speculate, they get the idea of committing their writing to something. Rather than concern himself with helping Nigerians to regain their lost dignity and self respect, Soyinka felt an urge to warn his people against self-indulgent leadership as he wrote A Dance of the Forest<sup>82</sup>, which he says:

... was triggered by independence, by my knowledge of the leaders who were about to take over the reigns of the country. I realized that after Independence some of those new rulers were going to act exactly like their forebears did, just exploit the people. I was interested in taking another look at history and saying: 'the euphoria should be tempered by the reality of the internal history of oppression' ... In other words, I thought that Independence should be a sobering look at history, not just euphoria, and so on.<sup>83</sup>

In other words, Soyinka saw the writer as 'the special eye and ear, the special knowledge and response'<sup>84</sup> who should play the prophet's role in his society. Although Soyinka seemed to acknowledge the importance of having a sense of history as a writer, he like Mphahlele was not for over-romanticizing the African past. At the famous Dakar conference

in 1963 Mphahlele verbalized this quite bluntly by saying the following words:

... who is so stupid as to deny the historical fact of negritude as both protest and a positive assertion of African cultural values? All this is valid. What I do not accept is the way in which too much of the poetry inspired by it romanticizes Africa - as a symbol of innocence, purity and artless primitiveness. I feel insulted when some people imply that Africa is not also a violent Continent. I am a violent person, and proud of it because it is often a healthy human state of mind; someday I'm going to plunder, rape, set things on fire; I'm going to cut someone's throat; I'm going to subvert a government; I'm going to organise a coup d'état; yes I'm going to oppress my own people ... I'm going to attack the black bourgeoisie ... An image of Africa that only glorifies our ancestors and celebrates our "purity" and "innocence" is an image of a continent lying in state.<sup>85</sup>

Mphahlele's speech summarised the strongest objections to the line suggested by Chinua Achebe and all who stood for his views both in Anglophone as well as Francophone Africa. Such objections and those of Soyinka stemmed from a belief that:

... literature springs from an individual's experience, and its effort to take in the whole man, it also tries to see far ahead, to project a prophetic vision, such as the writer is capable of, based on contemporary experience.<sup>86</sup>

Mphahlele pushed the argument further by bringing out the implied shift in emphasis from history to the present more directly in his demand that 'contemporary experience' inform the future. Common to all these three writers however was their view of the artist as first of all an outsider holding a mirror to his society and secondly as a moral rudder to it. This marked a shift from romanticism to humanism. It also marked the break up of the union between politicians and writers. Where the former had political power and were interested in protecting their positions a direct consequence of the break was the creation of

copyright procedures aimed at thwarting attempts made by any artist trying to grow his art in the direction Soyinka chose for his.

This break came slowly and very subtly. Whilst the politicians started off by approving what writers were doing, their patronage gave way to outright rejection. Upon receiving independence most governments rushed to build or form national monuments of culture or national troupes and plans for national theatres (when money was available). Sometimes - like in the time of Nkrumah in Ghana - even Institutes of Ideology were built 'to protect the nation' from reactionary views addressed against, not just the political set up of the country, but its cultural life too.<sup>87</sup>

Pan Africanism was yet another brain child of the African politician. His calls to revive indigenous culture were usually dressed in global terms. For him the image that needed salvaging was not just a national one, but that of the whole continent.

Extending the humanist outlook of people like Soyinka and Mphahlele to a 'proletarian' one, Ngugi wa Thiong'o warned (as he still does today) in an essay entitled 'Towards a National Culture' that there was a danger in being overzealous about rejuvenating the past at the expense of emphasizing change in society.<sup>88</sup> He attacked what may be called a 'preservatory' aspect in artistic work and called for more committed attention to man's struggle, as he tried to come to terms with his environment, from writers. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o the writer's commitment starts with understanding the position he holds in his society. And this involves stepping down from a bourgeois position

that most African writers get into if they do not take care. In 1967, he said, in an interview, that for African writers:

The temptation to remain in an ivory tower is ... great. But [they] must reject this false position or else they will be alienated from the living source of their inspiration. Truth and life in a struggle.<sup>89</sup>

For him this struggle is a social crisis in which one 'can never be uncommitted'. This struggle, for the writer, goes beyond admonishing the politician or placing a mirror before society. If he confines himself to these objectives he fails. For in this he merely plays the role of a 'liberal referee'. And this is a role he must outlive, for he has played it for too long - since independence. Ngugi wa Thiong'o wants every African writer to be committed not just to the ideals so far pursued by most writers, but to be on the side of the majority too. This is a majority which he says is clamouring for change. This commitment goes beyond aesthetics. It even means creating the conditions necessary for the culture, to which artists contribute, to be enjoyed.<sup>90</sup> Towards this end Ngugi wa Thiong'o will not spare anything. He claims not to be a pacifist. He has declared, in the past, that he does 'not condemn violence indiscriminately[;] for the oppressed have no option, but to use violence'.

In practice all that is said above is not easy to follow, let alone to fulfil. Very few African writers have actually found themselves in this situation. We can only think of Christopher Okigbo and his direct involvement in the Nigerian civil war. Ngugi himself had to wait for almost a decade (1981) before he could create a theatre coming close to his ideals. A result of his attempts at working with



the people has been clashes with authorities in Kenya. His first production with the villagers of Kamiriithu in 1981 led to his detention and the banning of the play from further performance.<sup>91</sup> More recently his second attempt to produce yet another play called Maitu Njugira was thwarted by the government who refused it a permit for performance at the National Theatre.<sup>92</sup> The group he worked with was ordered to disband.

In all these suggestions or developments the African politician is affected. Firstly he is affected by virtue of his being patron of cultural regeneration of his people. Secondly he is affected as he becomes a target of attack and accusation for misguiding and mis-managing the nation. And as many people have pointed out, it is at this point he blinkers his nation towards pan-Africanism, away from his own internal failures. But the stubbornness and aggressiveness of writers persist to embarrassing proportions that he has to check their work - constitutionally or otherwise - by creating censorship procedures. This becomes ever more necessary where the writers insist on communicating with the masses. In the theatre more than stopping a show, playwrights or directors have been detained. In Kenya (as we have said already) Ngugi wa Thiong'o lost his job as Professor at the University by being detained. Theatre in Africa, as the Guardian says, has become 'a symbol of a bitter cultural battle with important political undertones', consequently it cannot escape the politician's eye.<sup>93</sup>

We can sum up the major concerns of post-independence African

literature as follows; rejuvenation and celebration of a romantic African past which also involves extrusion of realistic lessons for the present; pan-Africanism and total "disillusionment" with the politics of the period; and realignment with the masses in their 'supposed' struggle for improved living conditions. In the theatre this is reflected firstly in the way playwrights choose themes, the way they write their plays and the language they work in; secondly in the kind of theatre coming up as a physical plant or structure - buildings and companies of performers. Around all these skirt a series of problems like censorship, publishing and lack of expertise.

#### Buildings, patronage and audiences

Apart from actual writing, theatre practitioners address themselves to the problem of identifying a truly African theatre. Governments are also engaged in providing some sort of facilities which they choose to label national theatres. No definite answer to what should constitute a proper African theatre seems to be discernible in all this. Only suggestions and experiments are made. Whilst the playwright may be said to contribute towards this answer in the way he brings the African world into his creative works, there are the actors, the directors, the designers and architects who still have to join in the debate. Wole Soyinka, quite apart from being a playwright, also addresses himself to the question of buildings and setting up of proper companies with appropriate repertoires. He emphasizes that the question of structures should be taken seriously as it has a bearing on

the 'art to which it must give birth'. Apart from Soyinka very few African artists have addressed themselves to this question. It is the few expatriates who still find time to dedicate themselves to the development of a truly African drama that seem to have taken this challenge seriously.<sup>94</sup> As early as 1963 in an article entitled 'Towards a True Theatre' Soyinka discussed this question and expressed disappointment at what passed for the National Theatre in Uganda at Kampala. He described the scene as follows:

The building itself is an embodiment of the general misconception of the word 'theatre'. Theatre, and especially, a 'National Theatre', is never the lump of wood and mortar which architects splash on the landscape. [What was in Uganda] was nothing beyond a precious, attractive building in the town centre ... a doll's house, twin brother to our own [Nigerian] National Museum.<sup>95</sup>

In a few words this was a white elephant which was not fulfilling any of the functions a 'National Theatre' would engage in. Perhaps there were none envisaged when the building was being planned. Soyinka thought the blame lay in leaving such developments in the hands of amateurs. He warned there were dangers in 'resigning the initial impetus for a creative institution to the death kiss of passionate amateurs.' In such people he saw no chances of creative imagination but 'imitativeness without the substance'. In this vein Soyinka spoke against productions which bore no significance to Africans.

Moving his attention to Ibadan, Soyinka attacked the location of the University's theatre which does not allow 'the actor and audience [to] liberate their imagination'. He says:

... it ... astonishes [him] that those who planned the

university had the sense to isolate the chapels from the distractions of the ungodly, but not the foresight to place the theatre beyond the raucousness of student lungs.<sup>96</sup>

Obvious things like acoustics and ventilation should have been thought about. But also in the same article he was quick to acknowledge and applaud the initiative of the students who wanted to take theatre to the people. He thought the members of staff<sup>97</sup> leading the students were:

... conscious ... of the static imposition of the Arts Theatre, [and thus] developed sufficient enthusiasm among the student dramatic team to undertake two highly successful tours of folk theatre.<sup>98</sup>

There are two things that come to mind immediately in this commendation namely; a suggestion that dramatists should not feel compelled to live in unbecoming homes and that the best way of bringing theatre to the people is to create travelling troupes with a special repertoire for the audiences expected on the tours. This sort of imagination was necessary if what he calls 'abortions' or 'boils' were to be checked in theatre development in Africa. He argued that even if people were in a rush to build they should at least aim for creative theatre. And if need be they could 'look for architectural inspiration among countries with approximate traditions and a longer professional history - or simply use that common ordinary gift of sense and refrain from employing mud-mixers and carpenters to design media which [was] eventually [going to] control or influence the creative intellect.'

Although Soyinka did not pin the problems of Kampala and Ibadan down to cultural domination by the west, his examples of the kind of

drama found there, and the kind of theatre African elites expected from directors would suggest it. The theatres of Uganda and Nigeria required freeing from some form of colonial hangover. The same is said of the National Theatre in Kenya. Although now and again indigenous plays by Kenyans are performed there, the bulk of the repertoire is imitations of the West End or Broadway. Ngugi wa Thiong'o cites a struggle going on between the management of the Kenya National Theatre and the local people over what should be put on and encouraged there.<sup>99</sup> He argues that such struggles only show 'the extent to which theatre and [Kenyan] cultural institutions are [still] in the hands of foreigners - mostly British - whose only aim is to promote British imperialist interests in the country'. The question to be asked here is, 'who is to blame?' Okot p'Bitek refuses to push the blame on to foreign shoulders. Delivering a lecture on 'Indigenous Social Ills' as part of the National Arts Festival of Zambia in 1967, he said that:

There is a growing tendency in Africa for people to believe that most of our ills are imported, that the real source of our problems lies outside. We blame colonialists, imperialists, mercenaries and neo-colonialists (...) Another, but contradictory, phenomenon is the belief that solutions to our ills can be imported. Foreign 'experts' (...) economic advisers, military advisers and security advisers surround our leaders (...) I believe that most of our social ills are indigenous, that the primary sources of our problems are native. They are rooted in the social set-up, and the most effective solutions cannot be imported, but must be the result of deliberate re-organisation of the resources available for tackling specific issues.<sup>100</sup>

He argues that, re-organisation involves recognizing the role the masses can play in the development of the nation. It also involves



re-educating politicians and the educated elite away from capitalistic tendencies. Culturally this new education should involve redressing the process of colonial education and thus decolonising its products. Such a process will involve appreciation of indigenous art, music, dance and ritual alongside production of works of art readily accessible to the masses. Theatre in this respect becomes what Soyinka applauds at Ibadan - Travelling Theatre - or what Ngugi wa Thiong'o has been trying to create amongst the villagers of Kamiriithu. A theatre that is free from constraints of language and style, because it flows from the people themselves. Okot p'Bitek's cry is:

Let the black man use his creativity and initiative to reconstruct his own society and institutions in his own style.<sup>101</sup>

Responses to this call have tended to confine themselves to creation of playtexts and companies geared towards meeting the cultural needs of the rural community. The question Wole Soyinka initiated in his discussion of the Kampala National Theatre, vis-à-vis the question of theatre buildings, has not received as much attention as one would have expected. Whilst playwriting and directing plays have been becoming truly African, theatre architecture has persistently remained western in its outlook. Michael Etherton and Peter Magyer say that:

A number of large and expensive theatres have just been completed in Nigeria. Who the theatres are for, how they were paid for, and who will ensure their continuing function, are obviously crucial questions in determining in general the true nature of the patronage and the audiences for the development of live theatre in Nigeria (...) where, aesthetically and even functionally have these theatres come from? Probably from the contemporary international theatre for the staging of plays (dialogue drama), ballet, opera, musicals and variety performances, rather than from the non-

formalized use of space for the oral tradition in performances of masquerades, festivals, dances and story-telling.<sup>102</sup>

The questions raised here point to the rift growing between playwrights on the one hand and theatre designers and architects on the other. On top of this they also point to the need to remember, firstly where this artform is going in its growth and secondly amongst which people it is doing so, i.e., the audience.

African patronage and audience has always perplexed people interested in theatre arts in Africa. David Cook and Miles Lee tried to understand the 'lack' of sophistication in African response to tragedy when they thought that Africans laugh where one least expects laughter when watching a play.<sup>103</sup> From their observations generalizations have been made. We wonder however, whether this question might not be related to what Etherton and Magyer are talking about in the above quotation. It would also be interesting to know how much David Cook and Miles Lee actually knew about the socio-cultural background of their audience and if at all they could determine whether the said response derived from dramatic spectacle or the tragic story.

On another plain and more recently Michael Crowder has expressed worry about the Nigerian audience saying:

The state of patronage and audience in Nigeria today is still one that gives cause for concern. The opening performance of Isiburu at the National Theatre (...) was reported as having an audience of only three people. I attended a performance of the excellent production of Sizwe Bansi is Dead at the same theatre and found an audience of only sixteen, half of them expatriate ... At the University of Lagos as we discovered during our FESTAC fringe festival we

were able to pack the new auditorium for Herbert Ogunde, but our more 'serious' presentations sometimes attracted only a handful.<sup>104</sup>

So blame seems to be on the audience. Theo Vincent refuses to place the blame on the audience.<sup>105</sup> He says that it is the 'lack of a complex integrative function to produce spectacle [which should be held] responsible for the paucity of drama audiences in Nigeria'. In his argument he distinguishes two types of drama as having come up in the Nigerian theatre namely; popular drama and literary drama. The Sizwe Bansi is Dead production mentioned by Crowder above would fall under literary drama, whilst the Ogunde production witnessed during the FESTAC festival would be classified as popular drama. It is this popular drama that is successful in Nigeria (as a whole not just during FESTAC). This success stems from the nature of popular theatre. Popular drama, Vincent argues, is simply geared towards 'entertainment - through themes and motifs' which are contemporary to the audiences coming to watch it. The language used in it is: 'raw, vibrant, witty often bordering on slap-stick - either vernacular or pidgin English'. The 'acting is naturalistic'. The 'plots are simple'. On the whole:

A cross-section of the community enjoys and pays anything to see them. These plays tend to be integrative forces uniting the drama and the audience in one imaginative exploration and commentary.<sup>106</sup>

Whatever sources they use, 'their meaning is not obscured'. Unlike all this the so called 'literary drama' is 'elitist' in character. It is written in 'creative English by highly educated playwrights influenced by European theatre'. This drama usually makes 'serious

intellectual demands on the audience'. The effect of all this is 'to alienate the audience'. This shows how complex a problem the whole development of African theatre is. Wherever this artform is growing, these problems must be faced in one way or another. And whatever discussions on 'art and commitment' are to be indulged in, must extend beyond the question of the playtext and its themes to include the entire 'practice' of theatre.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

- (a) Only Gérard and Jahn have done some extensive work on vernacular drama. See Albert Gérard, African Language Literature, Longman: Essex U.K., 1981, and Janheinz Jahn, Neo-African Literature, Trans. Faber and Faber Ltd.: London, 1968, Evergreen: New York, 1969.
- 1 Arthur Mayhew, Education in the Colonial Empire. Longmans, Green & Co.: London, 1938.
  - 2 Nyasaland Colonial Annual Reports, 1947.
  - 3 Mayhew, op. cit., p.39.
  - 4 Mayhew on p.40 reports that only after the World War I was British interest in colonial education fully aroused. He says, 'the mandation of territories to the victorious Powers quickened the sense of responsibility for all primitive races'. To persuade this interest there also was the International Missionary Council as well as the Phelps Stokes Fund in the United States available for setting up commissions to investigate education in western and eastern Africa.
  - 5 His Majesty's Stationery Office, Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa (1925). The wording here reveals in what light the African was viewed. He was seen as 'primitive' and 'undeveloped'. Building on Hegel's ideas of the African, the African was an 'unfinished' product on the scale of evolution. Although 'synthesis' rather than 'substitution' was the aim of education brought into the continent, due to a lack of understanding of African life the latter is what took place. The resultant African of this education naturally absorbed the picture of himself as a half-developed person unless he went to school. And from school he came completely brainwashed - to the point of denigrating his own culture in preference of his teacher's. Black Europeans were the result of this education (no matter how ill formed).
  - 6 H. Johnston's views on what was to be made of the African suggest that early education aimed at getting the native to an employable level of academic relevancy. This was not



in the interest of the native, but the colonial master.

- 7 Nyasaland Times, Volume 35, No.11, February 9, 1932. p.2.
- 8 Gérard p.184 reports that 'In August 1926, an International Missionary Conference, held at the Belgian sea-resort of Le Zoute, decided upon the foundation of an International Institute for African Languages and Cultures which [...] was in essence the International African Institute [...] In 1930 the IAI launched an international competition for books in African languages [...] In 1950, the Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland launched the Margaret Wrong Memorial Fund Competition, which was organized every year until 1962'.
- 9 Nyasaland Times, Volume 35, No.31, April 19, 1932. p.4.
- 10 Indigenous arts (or even cultures) were sometimes encouraged as part of a growing segregationist policy in the colonies.
- 11 G.A. Stevens, 'The Aesthetic Education of the Negro'. Oversea Education, Vol.I, no.3, April 1930. pp.88-94.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 J.M. Winterbottom, 'Experimental Drama in the Gold Coast'. Oversea Education, Vol.V, no.2, January 1934. pp.112-5.
- 14 J.N. Harrison and T.W. Harrison, 'Experimental Drama in Uganda'. Oversea Education, Vol.VI, no.2, January 1935. pp.69-73.
- 15 Mary Kelly, 'A Conference on African Drama'. Oversea Education, pp.120-126.
- 16 Mary Kelly, 'African Drama'. Oversea Education, Vol.II, no.3, April 1931. pp.109-113.
- 17 Ama Ata Aidoo, Interviewed in Cultural Events in Africa, No.35, October 1967.
- 18 Mary Kelly, op. cit.
- 19 'Report on African Drama'. Oversea Education, Vol.IV, no.3, April 1933.
- 20 J. Jahn, op. cit., p.89.
- 21 With slight modifications the work of Michael Etherton and David

Kerr in Zambia as well as that of James Gibbs in Malawi may be said to be following this pattern. Part two of the thesis deals with these people's work in detail.

- 22 W.H. Taylor, 'Observations on the Dramatic Talent of Africans'. Oversea Education, Vol.V, no.1, October, 1933, p.17.
- 23 Ibid., p.18.
- 24 Ibid., p.18.
- 25 Ngugi wa Thiong'o (as James Ngugi), Interviewed in Cultural Events in Africa No.29, April 1967, p.4.
- 26 W.H. Taylor, op. cit.
- 27 Nyau is a masquerade found in Malawi and Zambia. Some of the figures found within it are take-offs of Christian figures e.g. Joseph, Mary and Simon.
- 28 Nyasaland Times Volume 54, No.40, May 28 1951. p.10.
- 29 Cynthia A. Crosby, Historical Dictionary of Malawi. The Scarecrow Press Inc.: Metuchen, N.J., and London, 1980.
- 30 'Notes: African Drama and the British Drama League'. Oversea Education, Vol.V, no.2, January 1934. pp.125-128.
- 31 McLaren in Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds 1980, talks about Blacks in South Africa who were intellectuals and as such they tried to follow a white culture.
- 32 NorthernRhodesia Colonial Annual Reports, 1948. p.35.
- 33 The Zomba Community Centre was initially built as a recreation centre, but Africans turned it into a primary school until the Nyasaland Government built a proper primary school for urban dwellers in Zomba.
- 34 Nyasaland Times, Volume 52, no.91, November 21 1949. p.2.
- 35 McLaren, op. cit.
- 36 S.A. Paliani, Sewero la Mlandu wa Nkhanga. MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1969 (first published 1952).
- 37 Ibid., p.iii. Translation of the following words:  
Mu Sewero ili mudzaona zochitika ku mudzi pakati pa

mabanja awiri; ndi motero mudzatha kuphunzira ndi kuona kuti ndi zoonadi paliponse munthu wakuba sangathe kupeza ulemu kapena kudala pamaso pa anthu ena.

- 38 Nyasaland Colonial Annual Reports, 1950.
- 39 Northern Rhodesia Colonial Annual Reports, 1949.
- 40 Northern Rhodesia Colonial Annual Reports, 1949.
- 41 Northern Rhodesia Colonial Annual Reports, 1951.
- 42 A.S. Masiye, The Lands of Kazembe. NECZAM, 1973.
- 43 M. Etherton, in Masiye's The Lands of Kazembe.
- 44 Richard Hall, Zambia. Pall Mall Press: London, 1966. p.145.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Crosby, op. cit.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid., p.49.
- 49 Northern Rhodesia Colonial Annual Reports, 1946. p.43.
- 50 'Broadcasting in the Colonies'. Oversea Education, Vol.IX, no.4, July 1938. p.177.
- 51 Msimbi was a Nyasaland African Newspaper produced by the Department of Information in Zomba. Government Archives in Zomba have all copies of this newspaper dating from 1949 when it came into existence.
- 52 Msimbi, Volume 1, no.6, 7 November 1949.
- 53 Msimbi, Volume 1, no.9, 28 November 1949.
- 54 Msimbi, Volume 14, 4 January 1950.
- 55 Other names appearing in Msimbi quite frequently were: E. Mlongoti, E. Kateka and Y.L. Zulu.
- 56 Northern Rhodesia Colonial Annual Reports, 1955.
- 57 Northern Rhodesia Colonial Annual Reports, 1951. p.69.

- 58 David Rubadiri, 'Lewis Nkosi and David Rubadiri'. Interview published in African Writers on African Writing, ed. G.D. Killam. pp.118-126. H.E.B.: 1973.
- 59 Nyasaland Times, Volume 61, no.44, June 6 1958. p.7.
- 60 From an unrecorded discussion with Mupa Shumba who was a student at Dedza Secondary School at the time of the production. This is supported by an entry in the Nyasaland Times of 17 February 1959 which said: ' In Macbeth produced at Dedza Secondary School whites took the leading roles'. p.7.
- 61 Nyasaland Colonial Annual Reports, 1961.
- 62 See Nyasaland Colonial Annual Reports, 1946.
- 63 J.D. Clarke, 'Experiments in African Drama'. Oversea Education, Vol.IV, no.4, July 1935.
- 64 Chikwakwa Reviews carry countless articles on the subject. In Malawi student fliers and theatre broadsheets speak the same language.
- 65 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'Towards a National Culture' in The Homecoming. H.E.B.: 1972.
- 66 Msimbi, Volume 2, no.22, 6 June 1950.
- 67 Gérard, op. cit.
- 68 Raymond Williams, 'Literature in Society' in Contemporary Approaches to English Studies ed. Hilda Schiff, The English Association (H.E.B.): 1977. pp.24-37.
- 69 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, op. cit., 1972, p.10.
- 70 Kwame Nkrumah, Selected Speeches, compiled by Samuel Obeng. Afram Publications: Ghana, 1961.
- 71 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, op. cit., 1972, p.10.
- 72 Eburn Clark, Hubert Ogunde: The Making of Nigerian Theatre. Oxford University Press, 1979.
- 73 In February 1982, Wole Soyinka was invited by the Government of Zimbabwe to participate in a Playwriting Workshop. The Guardian reported that the play directed and created by

Ngugi wa Thiong'o but later banned by the Kenyan Government was being prepared for a tour of Zimbabwe at the invitation of the government there.

- 74 Kolawole Ogungbesan, 'Politics and the African Writer: The Example of Chinua Achebe'. Work in Progress 2, Department of English, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, 1973. In this article Ogungbesan traces Achebe's development as a writer, which includes this stage.
- 75 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The River Between. H.E.B.: London.
- 76 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, This Time Tomorrow (3 plays). East African Literature Bureau, no date.
- 77 Bernth Lindfors, 'Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Early Journalism'. WLWE, p.34. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is reported to have 'suggested that the Makerere College Dramatic Society "organize a touring company ..."'. How much this influenced David Cook's ideas of a Travelling Theatre still needs to be established.
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- 79 Wole Soyinka, 'The Writer in an African State'. Transition, no. 31. pp.11-13.
- 80 Chinua Achebe, 'The Role of the Writer in a New Nation'. Nigeria Magazine, No.81, June 1964. p.157.
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- 83 Wole Soyinka, unpublished transcript of an interview recorded and transcribed by James Gibbs in Zimbabwe.
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- 85 Ezekiel Mphahlele, in Literature and the University, ed. Gerald Moore, University of Ibadan Press, 1965. pp.22-26.
- 86 Ibid., pp.22-26.



- 87 Address at the laying of the foundation stone of the Kwame Nkrumah Institute on 18 February 1961 - available in Selected Speeches vol.II compiled by Samuel Obeng, see footnote no.70.
- 88 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 'Towards a National Culture' in Homecoming. H.E.B., 1973.
- 89 Interview recorded in Cultural Events in Africa, no.31, June 1967.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 Gérard, op. cit.
- 92 The Guardian, Wednesday April 14, 1982.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 People like Michael Etherton and James Gibbs in Zambia and Malawi respectively initiated building of not just theatre companies but even physical plants (outdoor) which try to accommodate the typical African village atmosphere.
- 95 Wole Soyinka, 'Towards a True Theatre' in Transition, no.8, January/March 1963. pp.63-64. It is interesting to note that Michael Etherton thinks otherwise in his article 'Trends in African Theatre'. African Literature Today, ed. Eldred Jones, H.E.B., p.70.
- 96 Ibid., Soyinka, pp.63-64.
- 97 At the time Drama work at Ibadan University was in the hands of Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham, see 'Third World Theatre' in New Theatre Magazine vol.XII, no.2. pp. 17-18.
- 98 Soyinka, op. cit., 1963. pp.63-64.
- 99 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, '"Handcuffs" for a Play', in Writers in Politics, H.E.B., 1981, pp.49-52. Ngugi's words contradict Etherton's rosy and positive picture presented in article cited in footnote 95.
- 100 Okot p'Bitek, Africa's Cultural Revolution. MacMillan Books for Africa, Nairobi, 1973. pp.6-7.
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- 102 Michael Etherton and Peter Magyer, 'Full Streets and Empty Theatres: The need to relate the forms of drama to a developing society'. Black Orpheus, volume 4, no.1. University of Lagos, 1981. pp.46-60.
- 103 David Cook and Miles Lee (eds.), Short East African Plays in English. H.E.B., 1970. Their views sound sympathetic to the African whilst at the same time suggesting (by implication) their behaviour is that which should be expected from people not yet developed! See Introduction.
- 104 Michael Crowder, 'Patronage and audience in Nigeria'. Black Orpheus, volume 4, no.1. University of Lagos, 1981. pp.68-74.
- 105 Theo Vincent, 'Theatre and audience in Nigeria'. Black Orpheus, volume 4, no.1. University of Lagos, 1981. pp.80-83.
- 106 Ibid., pp.80-83.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ART AND DEVELOPMENT

Apart from indigenous, literary and popular theatres mentioned in the earlier parts of this thesis there is yet another type of theatre developing in Africa. This is what links art and development in Africa. In some way this particular theatre continues the functional nature of indigenous theatre into our modern age. This theatre is what we choose to call 'Theatre for Development'. It is the aim of this chapter to take a look at this theatre and show how it too manifests the problems that theatre is facing as it is growing and becoming more and more popular on the continent. The chapter is broken into the following areas - namely the history and development of Theatre for Development in Africa over the years, rationale for this theatre as presented by various people involved in its development, the nature of this theatre.

#### What is Theatre for Development?

Various terms are (and can be) used for Theatre for Development,

for example: popular theatre, propaganda theatre, case drama, developmental theatre or sometimes political theatre. Each of these terms indicates to some extent what Theatre for Development is about, but not fully. A look at what this theatre tries to achieve provides some clearer idea of what its practitioners are creating on the continent, whatever terminology is used.

Theatre for Development is being developed as one of the ways of helping the masses in Africa to come to terms with their environment and the onus of improving their lot, educationally, politically, economically and socially. In due course we shall be looking at how all this is gone about in various parts of Africa. But before we do that let us look at the origins and development of this theatre on the continent. We should once again point out that we shall dwell on the Anglophone side of Africa rather than the whole continent (except perhaps in very few instances where we find information outside our area of interest which helps to elucidate a point).

#### Origins and Development of Theatre for Development in Africa

In chapter one we touched on how indigenous performances in Africa contain within them some functional element. In most cases this takes the form of a didactic statement. Whilst performers might engage in doing spectacular movements and dances, they might also carry within the performances special messages or lessons to some members of their audience. Some work in Theatre for Development is a direct result of

recognizing this characteristic in indigenous African performances.

We have also established in chapter two, how theatre activities were initiated by the colonial education system in a bid to develop the cultural life of the natives in Africa. Whilst 'straight drama' was being taught and encouraged amongst the natives particularly through schools and colleges, its development was very much pegged to missionary intentions of eradicating pagan behaviour and any uncivil habits evident in their lives. So we find that even the plays which were being developed from folk tales placed heavy emphasis on the moral qualities of the stories. Clearly then, drama was not being pursued simply for its own sake, but also as a tool for inculcating certain behavioural patterns amongst Africans. In other words drama was being used as a tool for teaching something other than drama itself. The didactic possibilities inherent in the dramatic art form were thus being exploited to the full. It is also from this background that work in Theatre for Development derives its origins.

We can therefore say that the development of this theatre is due to two factors. These are: colonial attempts to improve Africans through drama and a recognition on the part of colonialists that some positive aspects of behaviour could be extruded from indigenous performances. We should mention however that although there is evidence of this theatre's existence in the early days of colonial education there has been a period of absence, during which the more literary and western oriented theatre took sway.

In 1930 G.A. Stevens reported what state African 'theatre' was in



as people were trying to boost 'the aesthetic education of the negro'.<sup>1</sup> One method employed in order to create this theatre as we have already shown was 'to take a native legend or story with a moral, split up the action into as many as eight or nine different scenes, each dealing with one dramatic moment, and interspersed with considerable knock-about dancing and singing'.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note how close this technique is to theatre for development work going on in Zambia today in spite of the wide gap between the two events.

The following year, in 1931, Mary Kelly wrote about some experimental work being carried out by missionaries at the Holy Cross Mission, Pondoland (South Africa).<sup>3</sup> Here these people 'were concerned with the fact that the Christianizing of the natives seemed to mean the removal of much of their lowest instincts rather than of any ideal, and they felt that something should be suggested to take their place'.<sup>4</sup> In other words the process of 'Christianizing' was one of deculturizing the African which needed checking without losing the 'civilizing' mission. One way of doing this was to adapt and dramatize local folk lore, giving it an obvious Christian story bias. One such attempt was described as follows:

the [folk-tale's] hero arrived at full gallop, and this was suggested in such an unmistakable way that the horse hoofs almost seemed to sound out in the dark African night. There were no costumes but a blanket or two, but no one could mistake Satanas, the devil of the folk-tale, with his name borrowed from the Christians but his characteristics completely African.<sup>5</sup>

Earlier at a conference on African Drama held by the 'Village Drama section of the British Drama League in September, 1932' this sort of

work was endorsed as one positive way towards developing African drama.<sup>6</sup> At this conference 'it was decided: (a) That a collection of themes should be made for the use of native teachers (b) That a report of this Conference should be sent to all educationalists in Africa, with a letter asking for their experience in the work, and for any conclusions that they [had] formed on it'.<sup>7</sup> The result of such a resolution was to push theatre work in Africa more directly under the wing of educationalists rather than mere missionaries. It also extended the areas of interest in terms of themes beyond the Bible story.

It should therefore be no wonder to see a report from Kenya in 1933 having nothing to do with 'religious drama', but community development. W.H. Taylor reporting his 'observations on the dramatic talent of Africans' spoke of the work which was being carried out at the Jeans School of Kabete (in Kenya) whose task as we have mentioned already was the harnessing of 'the natural dramatic talent of Africans and utilizing it for educational purposes and, finally, developing [it] in so far as it [was] amenable to conscious development for purely artistic ends'.<sup>8</sup> Here was the first evidence of direct use of a theatre art for purposes other than aesthetic education. For although the religious drama mentioned earlier on seemed to do the same, its exponents talked more in aesthetic language than anything else. The moral tone of their work was always taken for granted. The work at Kabete had nothing to do with morality - in the Christian sense. Taylor continued to say that:

In our first task we were actuated by utilitarian motives,

our aim being to use the stage for propaganda purposes. The Jeans teacher, it must be remembered, is more than a supervisor of village schools; he is a man with a new faith and a new ideal centred round 'Better Homes', 'Cleaner Homes', 'Healthier Children', 'Better Schools', 'Better methods of teaching', and 'Better Gardens and Plantations'. Various ways of instilling these tenets into the pagan population have been tried by Jeans teachers, but no one way has proved so successful in its practical outcome as the lecture combined with the propaganda play.<sup>9</sup>

In this work the technique was 'crudely' propagandist. There was no attempt to be subtle about the message. Continuing to describe his work Taylor said:

The moral or points to be emphasized were always placed in a favourable position by the use of characters personifying animals from native lore. If the object of the play was to teach the value of grainstores, it was the clever Hare who profited by its use and the Hyena who regretted clinging to the old methods; if we were trying to show the value of good management of a village school, the poor type of teacher was generally represented by the Monkey or Hyena and the better type by the Hare or the Bee. The acting was burlesque in the extreme and often overdone, but the point or points to be stressed were much discussed afterwards and taken to heart.<sup>10</sup>

This work was highly recommended by specialists outside the teaching profession too. Taylor reported that even medical officers and sanitary inspectors in the area commented favourably on the work that his school was doing.<sup>11</sup> One point that can easily be ignored in all this work is the emphasis which was being placed upon coaching the native teacher how to handle the drama work amongst his compatriots. At another conference on native drama held by the British Drama League again in 1933 it was popularly felt amongst those who attended (teachers, missionaries and administrators) that having introduced drama amongst the natives the next step was:

to ask African teachers to make a selection of the native themes, so that a large amount of African folk-tales [should] be ready for dramatic use: from [which], and simultaneously with [which], ... the African teachers should be encouraged to make plays with their pupils and the adults of the villages, and that the highly educated African should, wherever possible, see these plays and note the methods and growth.<sup>12</sup>

In another context and much later in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) H.H. Ferreira talked about 'The Use of Social Case Drama in Training African Social Workers' by the colonial Government.<sup>13</sup> Here he spelt out how in Northern Rhodesia they were using the so called 'social case drama' to combat 'the problem [...] of conveying technical knowledge and subtleties of "case work" technique to a student body whose education and grasp of English, the language of instruction, was limited; the problem of students failing to grasp abstract ideas'.<sup>14</sup> This work like that of Taylor was supplementing lectures and field work. He said that the basis of the work was role play. The technique here was simply to leave the role playing in the hands of the student who played case worker - after he had devised the whole situation together with the various characters he was to be involved with. The playing of the roles was gone into without any rehearsal. The students were just left to play their parts as best as they could. Following this would be a session of criticism from the students on how well the whole case had been handled by the case worker. For Ferreira, all this allowed two things: maximum consideration of 'cultural' issues in social work as well as maximum participation from students in the process of learning.



So far we can see how the earlier part of this century shows a clear emphasis upon propaganda theatre rather than theatre for art's sake that has dominated the later half of the century. All educational endeavours during the earlier part of the century were motivated by utilitarian aims. The emphasis in missionary schools was on moral teaching. As time went on and as the idea of developing drama caught on moves towards using drama for educational purposes became more pronounced. The concept of the Jeans school played a leading role in this development. The areas tackled through this drama ranged from hygiene to modern methods of agriculture. And these are areas which still occupy the minds of present day practitioners. There are several questions which one would like to ask concerning the kind of aesthetics this approach to drama must lead to. But perhaps we should look at the sudden re-emergence of this 'educational' drama on the continent first. Why has it come about?

### Rationale

Politics and intellectual nationalism today are responsible for the view that performing arts have always been fulfilling a utilitarian role in the community and that to encourage this serves to preserve our nearly lost African heritage. Politicians claim that:

There are many reasons why our forefathers chose to use songs, dance drums and masks to educate their young, to comment on the socio-political conditions in their societies and to preserve their historical legends. One of the reasons is that our forefathers realized that one of the most effective methods of education is through audio-visual aids of what was



familiar. In other words our forefathers subscribed to the modern education axiom that if a person only hears he easily forgets but if he sees and hears he remembers. They also realized that by presenting ideas through a variety of media such as songs, dance, mime, poetic recitals, ordinary narrative and masquerades one is able to capture the imagination of the people. It was the function of our traditional theatre, not merely to entertain, but also to instruct ...<sup>15</sup>

In this vein theatre for development on the continent must be encouraged as 'a positive effort in endeavours to build on Africa's cultural heritage'.<sup>16</sup>

Talking about the sudden resurgence of this theatre in the third world today, Ross Kidd explains the interest in it as 'an outgrowth of uses of rural theatre in the fundamental education campaigns of the 40's and 50's (... in India, Ghana, Jamaica, Mexico and Indonesia) and the search for ways of supplementing the mass media which have been shown to be incapable of effecting change on their own without some intermediary process'.<sup>17</sup> This view is partly supported by David Kerr who says that popular theatre is being encouraged as a tool for adult education 'because of deficiencies in existing educational institutions and communications media which stem from elitism of colonial education and its irrelevancy to the goals of national development'.<sup>18</sup> Both Ross Kidd and David Kerr relate theatre for development to non-formal education. They also share one philosophical basis in their discussion of this education. And this is a philosophy deriving from the ideas of Paulo Freire. Of his work in Botswana (called Laedza Batanani) Kidd says it was 'a non-formal education project [...] which attempted to follow a Freirian model'.<sup>19</sup> He goes on to say that 'one of the key

features of this programme [was] the use of popular theatre as the medium for encouraging participation, raising issues, fostering discussion and promoting collective action'.<sup>20</sup> From Nigeria, in West Africa, Michael Etherton talking about his work with students of drama at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, amongst local farmers in a project called Wasan Manoma said their intentions in this were to communicate 'to rural communities specific development objectives'.<sup>21</sup> The basis of this work was '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'.<sup>22</sup> Once again the goal is non-formal education.

On a slightly different premiss Etherton and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are developing a theatre which is more directly political in its texture although within the mode of this 'Theatre for Development'. Talking about 'Street Theatre in Northern Nigeria' Abah and Etherton lament the dearth of 'radical street theatre in contemporary African towns'.<sup>23</sup> And in trying to meet this need at Ahmadu Bello University once again students (from the Drama section of the English Department to which they belong) are trying to produce plays relevant to the needs of a neighbouring squalid suburb.<sup>24</sup> The idea here seems first of all to awaken the minds of the residents of this place to the need for knowing their rights and demanding fair attention from the government. Etherton

says that for this theatre:

to succeed, the plays must take the part of the local people. They should reflect life from the view point of the villagers themselves; and they should not avoid articulating criticism of government policy which is inadequate. Thus, although they may initially set out to be less than political in their aims, these plays may end up as the most politically active of all African theatre.<sup>25</sup>

Believing that 'crisis is the condition of social action in the Third World today', Etherton justifies this theatre by saying it is 'a legitimate political objective to discover strategies and organisation skills for functioning politically and creatively within the context of [ the ] crisis'.<sup>26</sup>

Ngugi wa Thiong'o who has consistently 'talked' of the need for bridging the gap between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in a bid to put into practice what he preaches finally got involved with his people in Limuru (Kenya) and earned himself a spell in prison. His work, one hopes, marks a shift into a 'commitment to praxis' from the inertia laden 'parrotting of the rhetoric of protest' that Africa still has to outgrow.<sup>27</sup> Working in a voluntary 'adult literacy' project with Ngugi wa Mirri, Ngugi wa Thiong'o saw the need for educating his people beyond the alphabet, to include 'culture'. This way, his people could be made ready for a true 'homecoming' which they still have to achieve when neo-colonialism is out of the way. He argues that colonialism still exists in Kenya in spite of independence. Its life depends on cultural control. And language being central to culture, any vernacular in Kenya falls victim to colonial or neo-colonial exploitation. It gets suppressed in a variety of ways by the

exploiter. Independence in Africa has failed to recognize this fact and consequently it has not achieved its true meaning. Until 'flag' independence is accompanied by cultural independence there will be no 'homecoming' for Africans. African writers can play a part in bringing this about. They can do so by addressing themselves to the majority in a language and style the majority of their people can understand.

This is how his theatre work in 'Gikuyu' came into being. Whilst he shares the ultimate goal of his work with other practitioners of Theatre for Development, he differs from them in his emphasis on artistry. He insists that whatever he does with his people should be well done, polished and professional. Other practitioners tend to de-emphasize this aspect. The message is all they really care about. However the goal of both Etherton and Ngugi wa Thiong'o here still remain non-formal education.

We are also aware of the fact that generally the artist in our present age is faced with a great threat to his continued existence. UNESCO is well aware of the need to protect the artist in his society. 'Commercialism' is the source of this worry in the west.<sup>28</sup> In the Third World it is more a question of economic priorities and post colonial debates on self-assertion. It is not strange these days to think in terms of economic viability or, to use a term more in vogue amongst international aid donors, 'developmental' and 'non-developmental' areas when talking about development in the Third World. Most prominent amongst the so-called non-developmental areas are the



disciplines having something to do with culture. Although the I.L.O. reached some agreement in 1978 that:

... artistic creation is of crucial importance for cultural and social development [and that] creators are full partners in the life of the community and [that] their cooperation is required in setting up operational structures for its development,<sup>29</sup>

there is no assurance that there in fact is any need for really worrying about perpetuating the artist's role. In the west perhaps the role of the artist as an aesthetist is the prime factor in his survival. But in the third world it is a matter of whether there is enough justification for his continued existence. The little capital that is available to governments should be directed towards more tangible results other than mere aesthetic thirst and quests.

This state of affairs explains in part why modern African theatre is becoming more and more functional. Quite apart from developments in this area stemming from colonial educationalist experiments, today cultural policies which have a bearing on this in the third world have been seen in terms of economic development. Torn between aid money coming from outside and ideologies stemming from post-colonial politics, the African theatre artist is cornered into justifying his existence before his world.

Perhaps we should explain the economics of this art in this world before we get on to the politics which seem to also have a strangle-hold on artistic endeavours. Traditionally the African artist - here we are thinking more particularly of the performing artist - lives not just by his talent but more also by involving himself in the ordinary



work of gardening, fishing etc. If his talent brings in money to him, it does so by the way and not of necessity. This therefore means that 'commercialism' as it is known in artistic circles of the west is strange to Africa. Today in the twentieth century, the west is of course only next door. One just has to look at the amount of foreign expertise and aid being poured into the Third World nations to confirm this. The ties which come with this aid have a bearing on the artistic life of the Third World nations. Priority areas are decided by donor countries. Experts are sent along with given aid not just to show how sophisticated machinery works, but also to direct decision making. Failure to follow suggestions and ideas so provided usually leads to discontinuation of aid (if not earning ridicule in the press from the donors).

One result of this situation has been the demarcation of areas concerned into 'developmental' and 'non-developmental' ones. The economic infra-structures that are coming up in the third world show a clear bias for the said 'developmental' areas. These in almost all cases include anything to do with 'material' wealth build-up. Areas like engineering and agriculture are very positively grouped under this 'developmental' category. Artistic, religious and such like areas come under the 'non-developmental' category which gets nothing or very little patronage from the state financially even if culturally the people have had a long tradition of respecting or according the arts or religion a special place within the community. Aid donors stress this observation too.

The politics said to form the other yoke upon the artist is not necessarily from outside the third world. Common now are claims which declare the need for identifying with the masses, the need to be committed to the ideals of the 'people'.<sup>30</sup> In most third world nations where the proletariat forms the majority this declaration has in fact reached the ideals or at least expectations of Marx and Engels. Isms and art are becoming bedfellows. In the spirit of this 'Ism' or that 'Ism' the artist must commit his work to a particular creed of politics. There is no sitting on the fence.

This commitment idea once again begs justification of all artists operating in the third world. Aesthetics are not of primary importance to the people. Survival is the thing. Be it political or physical, it is survival and artists must commit themselves to that end. This is an urgent matter too. In other words, the artist must also understand that their art should be an 'instant' package presented in an 'easy to carry' wrapper. This suggests the artist join the 'popular culturists'.

The result of these two parallel demands on the artist have also given Africa her 'Theatre for Development' or as some say 'popular theatre'. This is a theatre which combines use of the theatre as a medium for propagating ideas and entertainment.<sup>31</sup>

#### The Nature of 'Theatre for Development'

In almost all cases where this theatre is in existence, it is led by a team of experts who work with various types of extension workers

or 'village level workers', assisting them 'to get their health, nutrition, and agricultural messages across to rural villagers using entertainment and fun'.<sup>32</sup> We might add to this list adult literacy campaigns too. Throughout the continent we find projects of one type or another engaged in Theatre for Development. We could name a few examples like: the Laedza Batanani Popular Theatre in Botswana, Chikwakwa Travelling Theatre in Zambia, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources' Extension Aids Department and the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre in Malawi, the Kamiruthi adult literacy project with which Ngugi wa Thiong'o is connected in Kenya, the Ahmadu Bello University Drama work with farmers and suburban populations and the Government of Sierra Leone/Care project LEARN.

Areas which come under this theatre vary from straight drama to songs which are employed in any way as media for communicating ideas related to rural development. The Government of Sierra Leone/Care project mentioned above uses 'dramatizations, music, visual aids [to bring] new information and ideas to the villagers to help them keep healthy and improve their agricultural practices'.<sup>33</sup> Laedza Batanani Popular Theatre, like Chikwakwa Travelling Theatre of Zambia and the Extension Aids Department in Malawi include puppetry and dance in their work. So we can say that broadly speaking Theatre for Development involves a wide range of resources. Here we are going to isolate a few elements of this theatre in order to illustrate how it is created.

### Songs

Usually these are campaign songs composed and sung by teams of extension workers either alone or together with the people amongst whom they work. In some cases the songs are recorded on tapes and distributed all over the country for playing through the radio or portable tape recorders during working sessions. Where the latter is the case the help of properly trained musicians is sought. This is the case in Sierra Leone's project LEARN whose theme song is sung by Big Fayia and the Military Jazz Band.<sup>34</sup>

The songs are sung in vernacular languages and usually their tunes are well known adaptations of popular music styles. The guiding principles in composing such songs are:

- a) simple catchy tune
- b) simple words and lots of repetition
- c) clear message.<sup>35</sup>

### Dance

Dances employed in this theatre are those which already possess within themselves abundant mimetic potential, for what actually takes place here is what should properly be termed dance drama. An example of such dances is Malipenga or Mganda found in both Malawi and Zambia. Although it is danced to the accompaniment of songs, the dominant part of the music comes from drums, whistles and gourds which are specially designed to play like some form of trumpet. To the beat of such instruments, dancers mime several scenes in which they can depict

whatever message they choose to show. In theatre for development these messages fall within the total intentions of the project. We have watched school children in Malawi use this dance to give audiences a lesson on child care. In Botswana's Laedza Batanani Popular Theatre dance drama is specially created to repeat and emphasize the message of improvised drama which precedes it.<sup>36</sup>

### Puppetry

This usually forms part of mobile information campaigns. In Malawi this has been used most extensively by the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources. The Department of Extension Aids which services not just Agriculture, but Forestry and Game sections of the ministry prepares and performs puppet shows up and down the country. The idea in such campaigns usually is to teach farmers and villagers in general, modern methods of Agriculture as well as forest and game conservation.

In spite of its popularity amongst practitioners puppetry is losing its grip on its adult audiences. It is found to be too childish<sup>37</sup> in some cases, whereas in some places it is found to be culturally not admissible.<sup>38</sup> We intend to look at this subject in greater detail later on.

The puppet show takes on a simple story line which the audience is supposed to follow without problems. Usually it builds on stock characters which can easily be identified. Most campaigns using puppetry employ popular recorded music to go with the show. Oftentimes



the show is interspersed with such music and commentary other than the puppets' own dialogue. A typical puppet show outline from Botswana's Bosele Tshwarayanang was reported as follows:

The show opens with two men and two women dancing at a drinking party. They are all drinking and throwing away the cans and cartons. When the girls go home, the men discuss the new council rubbish disposal scheme. They argue about whether to use the new bins and who pays, one explaining the scheme to the other. They then go home for bojalwa. On the way, one meets his wife and quarrels.

At the levapa, one man wants to go to the toilet but is told there isn't one so he must go up the hill. While he's away the other man goes off and beats his wife. Returning from the hill, the man vomits because of all the excreta around. He discusses this with his friend and they kill flies. (Throughout, a pig comes in amongst the rubbish etc. and has to be chased away.)

Finally, the wife comes in and another woman. They discuss the need for a latrine. The scene finishes with all four digging and shouting together 'One family, one latrine'.<sup>39</sup>

The problems this show tried to tackle would have been a common phenomenon amongst the audience, so that there would be no questions about the clarity of the message. The setting too, is a direct take-off of everyday life. The drama is sustained by the quarrels. Inclusion of the pig is probably an aid to emphasize the despicable state of the filth surrounding the characters of the show.

### Drama

This is the most extensively used of the art forms of the lot said to come under Theatre for Development, and it is mostly this that we intend to dwell on in this section of our thesis. The work in drama

varies from plays performed for villagers by outside groups to plays created and performed by the villagers themselves. As the Sierra Leone experience shows:

[ these] dramas feature the adventures of a typical village farm family. In each story a situation is presented that a villager might encounter. Some of the dramas show ways that the problem might be solved, while others are left unresolved to encourage the listeners [or audience] to work out their own solutions. Each drama is in [the vernacular languages of the people] in which the Project is presently being implemented.<sup>40</sup>

This work is presented as radio drama as well as stage presentations. The aspect of how 'the problem presented might be solved' in work, like that of Laedza Batanani Popular Theatre, sometimes becomes the king pin of all work in Theatre for Development. This is particularly so where it is felt, by the organizers that there is 'low community participation and indifference to government development efforts in the area'.<sup>41</sup> In such a situation, rather than solve problems, the drama is supposed to be thought provoking.

All this work is improvised. Teams of extension workers and sometimes, students collect problems prevalent in particular areas of campaigns. Using these as themes they develop improvised dramas which are rehearsed very briefly and quickly before presentation. This technique has its own flaws, especially where aesthetics are concerned. There is not enough time and thought given to the format of the presentation and styles of acting. The idea in most projects is to minimize theatricality as much as possible, so that everybody attending the project can participate without feeling inferior to another person.

To attend to such issues would run contrary to the aims of some of this theatre's proponents which are, as we have said already, 'to increase participation of community members in development projects by involving them in the planning and running of the theatre programme'.<sup>42</sup> But to limit this theatre to such intentions also suggests it has no future. More important than this perhaps are the implications such a fast-growing and widely used theatre has for theatre per se. This is the kind of theatre people like Soyinka, Rotimi and even Ogunde have been promoting in West Africa.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work which seems to be the only one type, in this theatre, to care about proper theatrics starts from a script written by one author who presents it to the masses to re-write and direct en masse.<sup>43</sup> Talking about how I will marry when I want<sup>44</sup> is a product of his work in Limuru, he says he was commissioned by the Adult Literacy organizers to script a play as a supplement to the straight teaching going on at the centre. What they had in mind was a script for 'modern' theatre but in the vernacular. Artistic intentions were to be primary. When he presented the script to the centre and was made to produce it, the students at the centre were more than willing to participate. Rehearsals were open to the whole group of students there - even if they were not participating in the play. Directing was helped by a good deal of comments from the entire public watching the rehearsals. A direct result of this was that several criticisms and alterations were made to the script. This was in terms of language as well as plot and theme. What ultimately came out (as

claimed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o) was the people's own play.

The success of such work goes beyond mere numbers of people who saw the performance. Ngugi says that after the production he noticed how people came together to share ideas; families which were disintegrating became reconciled and wanted to confer amongst themselves before decisions on projects were made. For the writer, the whole experience revealed a new dimension to the relationship between the writer and his readers or audience.

Returning from detention, Ngugi wa Thiong'o could not resist the temptation of producing another play. This time it was a musical Mother, Cry for Me.<sup>45</sup> The play was banned in rehearsal. Why is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work being thwarted by the Kenyan authorities whilst that of people like Ross Kidd, Etherton and David Kerr is surviving in spite of their sharing similar goals?

Such a question and others related to aesthetics as well as educational theory are what specific examples of this Theatre for Development from Malawi and Zambia will attempt to answer. We hope to give a full picture of this theatre through case studies in chapter nine.

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- 3 Mary Kelly, 'African Drama'. Oversea Education, Volume II, No.3, April 1931, pp.109-113.
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P A R T T W O

MALAWIAN AND ZAMBIAN THEATRE

## CHAPTER FOUR

MAJOR INFLUENCES ON THEATRE ACTIVITIES OF MALAWI AND ZAMBIA

Talking about the 'entire picture of theatre' in Malawi and Zambia (in 1977) Roscoe says that,

it lacks the quantity, and vitality of its counterpart in West Africa [...] there is not yet that solid flamboyant dramatic presence here that one has come to admire in West Africa.<sup>1</sup>

He finds the development of drama in Central Africa much slower than that of West Africa. He goes on to suggest that possibly such a situation has arisen out of historic or political or social causes; if not all three together. But still he recognizes evidence of growth which he attributes to:

a blend of forces; political independence, a burgeoning of new schools, colleges, and universities; the desire to repatriate the syllabus, increasing economic prosperity, the spread of radio, television, and the printed word; the desire to encourage popular and effective modes of crystallising distinctly national identities, and finally the catalytic example of West Africa.<sup>2</sup>

One must hasten to add that these views are based on published play texts rather than theatre practice. James Gibbs has pointed out that whilst it is true that very little has been written on theatre work in Malawi, it is not entirely true to imagine there is hardly any work going on. He argues that:

[...] there is indeed a dearth of internationally - and even locally - available material on Malawian theatre. This is partly because of the ephemeral nature of drama. Partly because those who are most concerned with theatre sometimes feel compelled to make it rather than to write about it.<sup>3</sup>

The same is true of Zambian theatre. Etherton confirms this view when he says that:

People tend to come to Zambia and say that there's no theatre culture in Zambia at all. They're wrong, of course, because there's a great dance theatre culture existing already. But even accepting a more conventionalized Western idea of theatre, there exist already [...] a hundred and fifty Bemba plays on tape. There is also a lot of theatre work being done by the community development people; there is a really great touring theatre group performing in Tonga in the Southern Province who wander around various villages doing religious plays. There's a group of schoolboys in Luapula Province who really built themselves a great reputation just going around the villages putting on plays.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter aims to look at some of the forces that are shaping this theatre activity.

It must be stressed right from the outset that there are two groups of people involved in theatre work of this sort in both countries, namely: expatriate amateur dramatic societies and African drama groups. This division springs from the politics of colonialism which encouraged development of any sort along racial lines. Of these two groups, the expatriate one 'seems' to have a longer history than its counterpart. This impression is created by documents collected in archives. And it is a natural development from the kind of journalism that existed during the colonial period. In Malawi, Patience Gibbs points out that 'expatriate' theatre dates as far back as 1902 whereas African theatre (in the western sense) involvement only surfaced in the



papers around the early 50's.<sup>5</sup> For Zambia, Chifunyise also records an earlier presence of expatriate theatre clubs in the country than that of Africans.<sup>6</sup> This being the case it is very tempting to assume there has been some interaction between the two races in theatre activity. But there is no record which suggests this. If anything the contrary seems to be the truth. Chifunyise quotes the Reverend Houghton, from Zambia, as saying that apart from schools' drama there was:

no Africa [sic] theatre, no groups, nothing. Although ironically the country was full of very active theatre clubs - every town had one. But they were all exclusively white and determined to remain so. So there was no possibility there for any African individual whose theatre appetite had *been* whetted in school, to pursue his interest in the white [...] theatre groups.<sup>7</sup>

If ever expatriates have shown interest in 'African' theatre it has not been through their exclusive 'clubs' or 'theatres', but through their work in church, schools and occasionally in African recreation centres. Expatriate theatre clubs in Malawi and Zambia existed (and they still exist today) exclusively for expatriate 'entertainment', 'relaxation', 'seasonal celebration' and 'imperial anniversaries'.<sup>8</sup> Those involved in this theatre were very often not interested in Africans (let alone their recreation).

For these people, as Pownall says,

Theatre is a camp-follower of colonialism, classifiable as a 'comfort for the troops' - it gives life and spirit to the fantasy of the homeland being transplantable, a thing that can be carried on the back like a galvanized-iron hip bath or faded photograph of the wife and kids. [Theatre for them has not been] done as a grafting operation onto the African theatre stock - mainly because African theatre [has been] unrecognizable to them as theatre, and also because they [have] liked to keep entertainment strictly to themselves.

Proscenium theatre was a racial preserve, a picture frame of values.<sup>9</sup>

The repertoires of their theatre groups have not been, even in the remotest sense, close to their African experiences. During the colonial period performances were restricted to their exclusive venues, which never opened their doors to Africans. Press coverage of cultural activities during these days ignored the African presence.

One would have thought with the coming of independence to the two countries (from 1964) the situation would change. Things did not work out that way. Whilst Africans took over the reins of power, expatriates created their enclaves which in a sense became their cultural reserves. Even as late as 1983 expatriate theatre groups exist in the same clubs that used to house them in the colonial days. The repertoires continue, for most of the day, to be meant for expatriate audiences.<sup>10</sup> In place of racial legislation to restrict membership to expatriates, there have come exorbitant membership fees which an 'average income earning' African cannot afford.<sup>11</sup> Even the few Africans who can afford to join such expatriate-dominated clubs do so to patronise the more stylish bars within them rather than much else.<sup>12</sup>

In Malawi theatre groups have never attempted to form an umbrella organisation like they did in Zambia. With the exception of University colleges (through the University Drama Festival) and Teacher Training Colleges and Secondary Schools (through the Association for Teachers of English in Malawi - A.T.E.M) all theatre groups function independently. This is probably because government interest in cultural activities in

the country has for a long time lacked clear policy. In Zambia the case is different. There are two bodies embracing all theatre activities in the country. The existence of two separate groups instead of one however symptomizes the differences existing between expatriate dominated theatre and indigenous Zambian theatre. These two organisations are Theatre Association of Zambia (T.A.Z.) and the Zambia National Theatre Arts Association (Z.A.N.T.A.A.). The former group grew out of a token wish to marry expatriate theatre activity with African endeavours. The latter was a result of disillusionment and disaffection with the working of the other group. Those who formed Z.A.N.T.A.A. felt that expatriates were too steeped in their prejudices against the potential of Africans to evolve a theatre of any kind without their patronage. This was something being carried over from colonial days.

As far as Europeans were concerned, during the colonial days, there was nothing deserving the name of theatre amongst Africans in Zambia. Whilst expatriate theatre in one of the Copperbelt towns could boast thus:

In the theatre field, The Repertory Society, about 150 strong, produces about eight plays a year of various kinds for public production as well as plays, play readings, and talks for private enjoyment by its members on society evenings [...]<sup>13</sup>

the official brochure of the Municipal Council of Ndola within the same Copperbelt recorded that:

Dancing is a particular form of recreation and an African Ballroom Association coordinates all activity under this head [...] There is a first-rate African dance band subsidized by

Council. This band plays at dances and provides music for Beer Hall patrons. It also plays at the not infrequent concerts and variety shows. The musicians show a great deal of talent and the African's natural bent for music is shown too, by the band of the African School. With nothing more than drums and whistles, these youngsters give an excellent account of themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly life here was lived on two scales. The first and 'acceptably civilized' one could talk of a 'repertory society' whilst the other one was made up of the 'beer hall' and 'unique' Kalela dancing youngsters. In other words there was no meeting ground for these two groups.

Having said that 'western' African theatre learnt nothing from 'expatriate amateur' theatre one needs to establish where influences on the former came from. There is evidence to suggest that as early as 1950 this kind of theatre was already going on. The Municipality of Ndola in Zambia claimed, in 1955, that African recreation centres had 'ballroom associations', concerts and variety shows.<sup>15</sup> Patience Gibbs also talks of concerts and variety shows as a common feature in Malawi at about the same time.<sup>16</sup> South African blacks played a big part in this type of recreation. Malawians and Zambians have been going to work in South African mines as migrant labourers since the turn of the century. Usually such people returned home completely changed, bringing with them not just habits, but items like: gramophones, gramophone records, bicycles, and a love for a particular type of life common amongst city dwellers of South Africa. Apart from this by the 1950's, South African blacks had already developed a popular theatre tradition which married music, dance and improvisation. As early as 1929 one could find groups:

performing [...] with a repertoire of original didactic and satirical comedies in Zulu, based on Zulu traditional life, employing much music and dance. Their plays were improvised and extemporised on stage when the spirit moved or a crisis demanded it.<sup>17</sup>

Groups like these went on tours all over South Africa and neighbouring countries of Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. The 'concert and variety show' common in Malawi and Zambia in the 50's is a by-product of this kind of theatre. Concert groups could be found everywhere in the two countries, not just in large urban centres, but even in remote mission schools and their neighbouring villages.

With the coming of independence and consequent emphasis on promoting the indigenous cultural heritage of the people (by politicians) Malawians and Zambians are seeking to be original in their theatre. Such work is being spearheaded by particular institutions, amongst which theatre groups are but one. The work of such institutions is worth looking at in depth for it reveals not just the extent to which success has been achieved in theatre work, but an explanation of the way it is growing.

Roscoe claims that:

Zambia and Malawi share common approaches to modern drama. Both have vigorous annual festivals (Malawi's much the biggest on the continent); both make good use of radio (and in Zambia's case T.V.); both have active Travelling Theatres; and both have rejected the proscenium arch in favour of outdoor theatres.<sup>18</sup>

What Roscoe does not talk about are the operations of these groups, their ideas and the obstacles they have to surmount in their work, especially where their work shows some 'political awareness' and desire



to 'comment'.<sup>19</sup>

This chapter seeks to identify the background to these operations. It will look at certain specific bodies or issues having a direct bearing on the way drama is developing in the two countries. These have been divided as follows: cultural policy, education and censorship.

### Cultural Policy and Theatre

#### 1 Malawi

If an official statement regarding government involvement in the development of theatre in Malawi is sought one may be referred to the Cultural Affairs Department in the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The main functions of this department have been given as:

to awaken, preserve and develop Malawi's culture, tradition, art, music, drama and dances; to enrich the social, cultural and material life of Malawi; to project most effectively Malawi's cultural heritage; to assist in the teaching of music, drama, and dances by holding specific demonstrations from time to time as need arises; to provide public entertainment of the highest quality [...]<sup>20</sup>

Talking about drama specifically, the department says that this is 'predominantly a secondary school and university form of entertainment [...]'. But in spite of this, the department still considers drama as one 'medium through which the norms, values, traditions and customs of the people are easily brought to the public'.<sup>21</sup> One is not sure then whether this is what the department expects drama in the country to do

or what drama is actually doing as it is being promoted by the said secondary schools and the university.

The functions given above remain to be fulfilled by the department. As will be shown later on, the Malawi Government has had no cultural policy for a long time.<sup>22</sup> Although the Department of Cultural Affairs has been in existence for over ten years, its personnel seems to have limited its activities to the organisation of Beauty Contests and 'identifying' people believed to be in the forefront of cultural activity of one sort or another. (Since 1983, Beauty Contests were banned by Presidential directive.)

If cultural activities have been promoted in the country they have been done so at the people's own initiative, not through the department's. Of course whenever an important cultural activity has taken place the department has always been able to send a representative. Perhaps this has been so simply to give moral support or simply as an attempt to fulfil one of their responsibilities, which is:

to observe, maintain and promote Malawi's cultural heritage, and to formulate policy to control some aspects of foreign culture.<sup>23</sup>

In 1979 the department reported that:

it attempted [...] to conduct research on the traditional ceremonies of the various people of Malawi, their child rearing and up-bringing, various cultural aspects, as respect for elders, mothers, fathers, and the whole family circle [...]<sup>24</sup>

The results of this research are still to be made available to the general public.

The nearest the department ever came to direct involvement with

the development of drama in the country was in 1974 when it sent delegates to a 'conference on drama in Malawi' held at Chancellor College (University of Malawi).<sup>25</sup> At this conference the department explained what plans it had for drama in the country. These included 'encouraging participation in international festivals and the formation of a National Theatre'.<sup>26</sup> To date Malawi has not sent even a single theatre group to perform outside the country let alone attempt to form a National Theatre. Perhaps it is just as well that nobody has jumped for the last idea. As James Gibbs has advised, Malawi should learn from Wole Soyinka's observations of the mistakes of the Ugandan National Theatre. He argues that:

The origin of a national theatre is not in bricks and mortar, but in thought, experiment, research and discussion.<sup>27</sup>

One hopes this is the line the department will pursue when a clear cultural development policy has been established.

## 2 Zambia

### (a) Zambia Arts Trust (Z.A.T.)

In Zambia, during the colonial period all efforts at cultural development were confined to the 'white' population as part of the racist laws of the colony. Such development (in theatre) included the inviting and sponsoring of professional theatre companies from abroad exclusively for whites. Money was made available by the colonial government to expatriate drama groups to recruit professional personnel to work in their theatre clubs. Accumulation of such personnel in the

colony gave rise to the formation of the Northern Rhodesia Drama Association. Exclusion of Africans from the activities of this association included attendance at theatre functions. Only in very exceptional cases was this ever waived.<sup>28</sup>

It would be wrong to assume that such separate development did not embarrass some of the Europeans in the country - especially when colonial policy always paid lip service to the 'development of the natives'. In 1958 after the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland had been consolidated a merger of the Northern Rhodesia Drama Association (NRDA) and the Southern Rhodesia Drama Association came into being. This was known as the Federal Theatre League. In each country the original associations continued to exist as regional groups retaining their old names. As part of this 'development of the native' and the idea of selling the Federation to Africans, some attention was paid to African drama. An African (whose name is not recorded) was coopted into the new association to help investigate how European theatrical organisations could help the African theatre grow.<sup>29</sup> For the first time attempts to meet Africans in theatre were made by the NRDA when they organized a multi-racial Festival of Drama. This was hailed as a great success:

The winners were an African Theatre group from Kitwe with a play written by the producer and performed in Bemba.<sup>30</sup>

In 1960, a multi-racial theatre group just formed, Waddington Theatre Club, was admitted to the membership of NRDA. Whatever good work this group did was attributed to the 'white' members in it. That is why in spite of the group winning the Best Production Award during

that year's NRDA festival, the government could report that:

very little interest [was] shown by Africans in theatre although a few [of them were] beginning to patronize the theatres in town.<sup>31</sup>

It was only the Northern Rhodesia Youth Council Festival which saw increasing participation from Africans.<sup>32</sup> Through this festival which was more than just a drama festival African interest in theatre increased and became well-known in government circles. Later on, after independence ex-participants of this festival spearheaded the evolution of a new Zambian theatre and cultural revolution.<sup>33</sup>

Soon after gaining independence Zambia embarked on building an economy worth the status of a sovereign state. For most people this task excluded cultural development. This is what prompted President Kenneth Kaunda to warn his people against ignoring culture in the process of nation building.<sup>34</sup> It was not surprising therefore to see the Zambia Arts Trust (Z.A.T.) come into being in 1964 with the full backing of the government. Although not a government group the Trust still carried out the government's policy towards the arts.

Chifunyise says that this policy was to hold a watching brief on cultural activities and assist in any way it could with cultural problems.<sup>35</sup> In 1966 the government formally established a Department of Cultural Services to pursue the goals that the Z.A.T. was trying to fulfil. This new department's task was seen as to re-educate 'the people about the richness of Zambian culture, and the need to retain their traditional way of life and guide the process of discovering national culture and national identity'.<sup>36</sup> The United National



Independence Party's (UNIP) national policies on cultural development for the 1974-84 decade declared that the party was committed to:

- (1) intensifying the programmes for promoting Zambian culture and restoring it to its place of dignity and respect within and outside Zambia;
- (2) encouraging the efforts to preserve the best in the nation's culture and to institute changes or improvements where necessary to maximize people's enjoyment of their rich culture;
- (3) improving and expanding institutions designed to promote, preserve and improve culture;
- (4) strengthening and widening the scope of cultural education, particularly among the young, so that, growing in it, it can become part of them and they part of it;
- (5) discouraging traditions which retard development;
- (6) improving programmes of cultural exchange between Zambia and the rest of the world so that the Zambian way of life can spread its influence beyond the nation's borders and in turn can assimilate that which is good in other cultures.<sup>37</sup>

Such declarations and government involvement in cultural activities have led some people to see a permanent wedding between the party (with its ideology of humanism) and African theatre activity going on in the country.<sup>38</sup> But as Chifunyise and Kerr have pointed out:

The rhetoric of student drama workers [and more importantly, the playscripts themselves in Zambia] did not always synchronize so harmoniously with the official government ideology.<sup>39</sup>

Plays having either elements of satire addressed to some aspects of government inefficiency and corruption (as in Matteo Sakala) or criticism of its ways have been written and performed in the country (The Cell).

The existence of Z.A.T. was hailed as a landmark in Zambia's cultural revolution. It was seen as the only viable challenge to the expatriate-dominated theatre of Zambia. The individuals who established this Trust set out to promote 'Zambian dramatic activity and forms on the one hand, and 'traditional arts on the other'. The idea behind this being to promote the development of indigenous culture. The organisation was operating under two departments namely: Traditional Arts (led by Gideon Lumpa) and Theatre and Drama (led by Kenneth Nkhata). The former department sought to encourage 'the development of Zambian dramatic activity and forms [...]'.<sup>40</sup> To this end the Trust organized Arts Festivals. These included traditional dancing, singing, jazz and drama competitions. The plays that were entered for the 1966 competition included vernacular ones like Gideon Lumpa's Kalufyanya (based on the story of a miner whose wife is enticed away with a prestige job of mine-clerk).<sup>41</sup> Whilst this play dealt with contemporary issues Z.A.T.'s work covered a very broad perspective. It included plays from other cultures like The Oresteia (which was adapted and produced by Bill Harpe).<sup>42</sup> The production of this play (under the title of The King Must Die) was 'put on at all Zambian main towns [...] until 19 November 1967'.<sup>43</sup> Mr Harpe was assisted by Zambians like Laban Nyirenda, John Simbotwe and Kenneth Nkhata who had just returned from a theatre study tour which included a 'stage craft' course at the British Drama League in London as well as Israel and West Africa.<sup>44</sup> The play was interpreted in terms of Zambian performing arts. This way the production was seen as an attempt to marry 'Ancient Greek culture with

African culture'.<sup>45</sup>

The work of Z.A.T. impressed the government so much that it started getting some financial assistance towards its existence and development. Some of the leading members were given scholarships to study theatre abroad.<sup>46</sup> It was because of guaranteed support from the government that the Trust resorted to hiring expertise from Great Britain. This was an unfortunate move. For, within certain circles, the Trust became equated to the expatriate-dominated theatre. Some people thus questioned the Trust's stand as regards the promotion of Zambian theatre.

The success of its theatre activities<sup>47</sup> was not matched by the other section of the Trust. This was due to the fact that those who held top offices in the Trust were basically theatre people. Another reason put forward by Chifunyise is that the Trust relied too heavily on the commitment of individuals as a result of which the effect of the Trust's work was restricted to a very small area.<sup>48</sup> But in spite of these limitations some prominent names of Zambian theatre like Kabwe Kasoma had their theatre experiences develop under the Trust's wings (as playwrights, actors and directors).

Following the success of Z.A.T. other people tried to start their own companies. The Zambia Dance Company was one such group. Under the leadership of Titus Mukupo, the Zambian Dance Company recruited a Sierra Leonean, Pat Maddy, to be its first director. In the absence of a theatre house, the company bought and renovated a warehouse into a rehearsal room in Lusaka.<sup>49</sup> Due to lack of funds which would have

enabled the company to engage full-time actors and dancers its operations were hampered. The director also wanted to work on typical Zambian material, but there was none available. With such problems on its hands the Zambia Dance Company folded soon after its one and only production of Wole Soyinka's The Road in 1969.<sup>50</sup>

The fate of the Zambia Dance Company and problems which it faced have been shared by other aspiring groups in the country. It would seem that time is still to come when people can make a living entirely from stage work. So far most groups coming up in the country are made up of students (either from secondary schools or the University). Occasionally they will also have some members who have permanent jobs elsewhere and only show up for rehearsals whenever it suits them rather than when they are required.

(b) Theatre Association of Zambia (T.A.Z.)

It has already been established that during the colonial era both Malawi and Zambia had three theatre traditions, namely: indigenous, colonial (western) and syncretic ones. By the time of independence the situation was pretty much the same. Whilst the government was determined to rehabilitate the country's cultural heritage, they were not going to ignore this fact. Neither were they going to ignore the existence of an expatriate theatre community and its long history (no matter how bizarre). Recognizing that power had changed hands in the country, expatriate theatre groups which hitherto could not admit Africans into their membership made some moves to become multi-racial.

The government of Zambia was thus inevitably caught up in a situation which demanded that they recognize their presence in the country. Since these expatriate groups were the only ones which had an umbrella organization (Northern Rhodesia Drama Association) in the country and since they had also opened up their doors to Africans, the government had no option but recognize their work as exemplary. The formation of Theatre Association of Zambia (T.A.Z.) received government blessings. But as Chifunyise and Kerr say:

Although T.A.Z. [purported] to represent all theatre groups in Zambia and [had] official government backing (with President Kaunda as its patron) [it] in fact differed very little from the colonial Northern Rhodesia Drama Association. The organizers of T.A.Z. were drawn exclusively from the Theatre Club "expatriacy", the adjudicator for the annual drama competition was invariably from Britain, and the aesthetic criteria promulgated by the Association were those of the "grand" European dramatic tradition of the literary illusionist play set on a proscenium arch stage.<sup>51</sup>

Being such the Association could never claim to be able to know how to cope with the indigenous and syncretic forms of theatre common and popular amongst the masses. The government's answer to this was to set up a National Dance Troupe (modelled on other African countries) and the Department of Cultural Services. The problems of the National Dance Troupe will be dealt with in chapter five. The problems of the Cultural Services department surfaced in the operations and failures of T.A.Z. as far as theatre work was concerned.

The dominance of expatriates in T.A.Z. attracted a good deal of criticism on continued government support. African theatre practitioners questioned the idea of supporting an association whose



work was not in the remotest sense concerned with promoting Zambian theatre, but providing self-indulgent westerners with finances to import their own culture into the country. The University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UNZADRAMS) and some lecturers from the university tried to change the policies of TAZ, but failed. It was not until 1973 that the Government actually withdrew financial support to this association.<sup>52</sup>

(c) Zambia National Theatre Arts Association (ZANTAA)

At the centre of criticism of TAZ was the Chikwakwa Theatre from the University of Zambia. Chifunyise and Kerr say that UNZADRAMS (parent organisation of Chikwakwa Theatre) objected:

to T.A.Z.'s domination by white expatriates and the imposition of British theatre experts to adjudicate the annual T.A.Z. drama festival. The feelings of UNZADRAMS were exacerbated by the decision of the 1972 T.A.Z. adjudicator, Arthur Hodgson to single out the ineptness of Kabwe Kasoma's play, The Fools Marry (an UNZADRAMS production), despite the play's enormous popularity with Zambian audiences and despite the adjudicator's admitted ignorance of the play's cultural background.<sup>53</sup>

UNZADRAMS felt that there was some cultural domination at play in the operations of T.A.Z. It argued that time had come for the white members of T.A.Z. to realize that Zambians were not going to 'bend over' any more whilst the whites themselves were remaining adamant about learning anything from Zambians. UNZADRAMS therefore split with TAZ. Following this split several independent groups came up and provided enough numbers to justify the creation of a new theatre association (ZANTAA). This was dominated by Zambians and it laid 'greater

emphasis on indigenous Zambian theatre skills and organizing an annual non-competitive Drama Festival'.<sup>54</sup>

The aims of this new association included:

- [promotion and support of]: dramatic and other performing arts in Zambia; the writing and, production of plays and other performing arts by Zambians.
- [creation of] theatre awareness among the people by
  - i) taking theatre to them and bringing them to theatre
  - ii) using local languages
  - iii) reducing production and admission costs to promote and support the utilisation of African and in particular Zambian folklore, myth, ritual, song and dance.
- [promotion of] the formation of dance groups, drama groups and other performing arts organisations in educational institutions and the wider community.
- [coordination] and [promotion of] intergroup activities.
- [promotion and organization of] representation by drama, dance and other performing arts groups at provincial, national and international cultural functions.
- [promotion of] theatre committed to the principles of Zambian Humanism, National Development and the liberation of Africa within the framework of pan-Africanism.<sup>55</sup>

Immediately after its formation, ZANTAA faced two problems: it had no funds nor full-time officials to run it. Kabwe Kasoma and David Kerr, who were members of the National Executive embarked upon various schemes, trying to raise funds for the association. These included soliciting funds from donors, and mounting shows for Zambia Television. Towards meeting its goals ZANTAA organized drama workshops in the regions. This was done in the hope that with time Zambia could boast of a National Theatre.

## Education and Theatre

### 1 Schools' Drama

#### (a) Malawi

In Malawi schools' drama is organized by the Association for Teachers of English in Malawi (ATEM). This association was formed in the 1960's to coordinate and encourage efforts aimed at improving the teaching of English in the country's secondary schools and teacher training colleges. Its main function was to organize conferences for teachers of English in such institutions throughout the country. From time to time they organize workshops on English language teaching methods. The work of the association however spilled over and started to include direct involvement of students. At first the association organized the National Oral English Competition for secondary schools and encouraged teachers to select short pieces of English prose from their best students for inclusion in the association's newsletter. The oral English competition comprised: recitations of a poem and a prose passage, and attending an interview conducted in English by a panel of native speakers of English.<sup>56</sup>

In 1969 however, the oral English competition was dropped and instead a drama festival was established. This is still going on today. It is:

open to all secondary schools and all post primary educational institutions - Teacher Training Colleges, Technical Colleges,

with the exception of the Colleges of the University of Malawi.<sup>57</sup>

In order to make sure that the festival still assisted in the improvement of English language teaching; its organizers sent out rules to all schools regarding how they should prepare for it:

[...] actors must be drawn from forms I - IV of the school, or in the case of Teacher Training College, from students in any year who have gone straight from Secondary School to Teacher Training College [...] Girls' schools or colleges may use up to two make actors from another secondary school or college in their production.

Each play or extract from a play must have at least four parts (characters) each played by a different student actor or actress.

[...] The producer of each entry must choose a play in English with a running time of at least twenty minutes, but not more than thirty-five minutes.<sup>58</sup>

Such rules were only concerned with the running of the festival itself and ATEM's basic idea of improving the spoken English of participants. The audience did not feature at all. It was assumed that audiences coming to it would in any case be students from secondary schools either involved in the festival directly or from schools surrounding the venue of the festival. As it turned out the audience included people other than students (from the town or city dying for entertainment of this kind). Whilst festival organizers thought of their festival as an exercise in English language teaching, their audience was seeing it as theatre. Since the festival was public, the latter group directed the course of events in schools' drama. It did not take very long before people started talking of adapting plays for not just student actors, but expected audiences.<sup>59</sup> Most teacher producers in

the schools did not really know the mechanics of producing a play, so they turned to ATEM to help them either through workshops or notes on play production. One might add that until recently English language teaching in Malawian secondary schools and teacher training colleges has been dominated by expatriate teachers. The schools that turned up for the festival most times had such teachers. It is therefore not surprising that suggestions like the following could be made:

For the producer looking for material to adapt, I have a few suggestions. First of all, I think he should have a look at European plays from the medieval or renaissance periods. These are the periods in Europe when society most resembled society in Malawi today. The peasant population lived much the same sort of life as the Malawian villager, and you had the rapidly growing sophisticated town population that you also find here. So the situations and characters in these plays should be meaningful to our students.<sup>60</sup>

The limitations of such a line of thought are obvious. The analogy made here only holds in as far as one talks about the existence of a large rural community. But when one looks at the history of the people, the experiences being lived through by the people and their political as well as cultural consciousness, one finds no basis for comparison. In spite of this, it would seem the advice was taken by many people. Many schools tried adaptations of old English plays. James Gibbs observed that:

[this] English bias [had] led to some ludicrous selections and productions, but in recent years most entries have been based on intelligently chosen scripts.<sup>61</sup>

The effect of Stuart Lane's suggestion has been to encourage writers to look at life in a 'reformist' way i.e., resigning themselves to the belief that things will happen exactly the same way they did in Europe,



they need not be enhanced. Playwrights thus do not write with the hope of changing the world they live in. Nor do they think of really committing themselves to particular dogmas. They are passive socially. The bulk of the plays that have come from products of the Drama Festival show a clear lack of interest in the immediate present. Instead of talking about the lives, problems, dreams, worries and hopes of their people, they continue to harp on themes dealing with pre-industrial village days and ways.

Commenting on the festival as a whole Patience Gibbs had this to say:

There has not been as much originality as there has been general improvement [...] widening objectives of the Festival might stimulate greater originality, particularly in the non-verbal aspects of drama and theatre.<sup>62</sup>

With ATEM remaining the sole custodian and organizer of the Festival this was unlikely to happen. The only possibility of such change rested with those theatre people who were being invited to adjudicate the festival. Left to devise his own adjudicating criteria (as Chief Judge) James Gibbs swung the pendulum from the language oriented approach of A.T.E.M. to one keen on promotion of theatre. He complained that he did not have much faith in marking schemes for adjudicating plays. Nevertheless he suggested one which he called an aid to the 'decision making process'. This included marks being awarded for the following things:

- (a) Production (out of 40)
  - choice of play (5 marks)
  - costumes and sets (10 marks)
  - use of stage and movement (15 marks)
  - grouping (10 marks)

(b) Acting (out of 60)

- general acting ability (10 marks)
- interaction of actors (10 marks)
- diction and audibility (10 marks)
- understanding of the play (10 marks)<sup>63</sup>

Although one can read into this an awareness of the need for competence in the English Language, it was clear that it is subsumed into theatrical presentation. The highest mark to be given out is in 'use of stage and movement' not elocution. To date this suggested scheme has remained the adjudicating guide for judges at the National Drama Festival Finals. Commenting on the 1980 National Schools' Drama Festival award winning production of Chiwaleso (an adaptation of Medea) by Chichiri Secondary School, the present author who was Chief Judge for that year wrote that:

The judges were all agreed on the winner of the year 1980 - Chiwaleso, Chichiri Secondary School's presentation. I do not think that, as a text, it is a good play. Yet it won the festival trophy. Despite lacking a good story, the choreography of the entire group, the pacing of the action and delivery of the whole play showed sharp, imaginative craftsmanship and a deep understanding of stage movement. Audiences love spectacle, and it was there in Chiwaleso. At certain moments (particularly on the first night) it was breath taking.<sup>64</sup>

This shows how festival participants now regard A.T.E.M.'s National Schools' Drama Festival.

Although those who organize it still talk in terms of English language teaching, most people see it as a theatre event. After the 1982 annual festival an open letter to ATEM was published in the Daily Times by one observer:

The Annual schools' drama festivals are over. However their

results (and implications thereafter) leave much to be desired. [...] the scoring system was neither clear nor consistent. The same applied to judgement criterion and the rules governing these festivals. [...] Judges should not only have sound knowledge of the English language and drama, but they should also be conversant with and involved in various types of performing arts [...] could not these young brains [actors] be used to explore a traditional Malawian Theatre?<sup>65</sup>

Not all these claims are true. ATEM tries very hard to get 'qualified' people as adjudicators for their festivals.<sup>66</sup> These people's credentials are not made known to the public as it is not found necessary. The audience expects big things to develop from the national drama festival. They have come to see it as the possible lead into what may become Malawi's national theatre. Remarks made in this letter are representative of what people have always felt since the festival started. With the competitive element ever present those who do not win always go away disgruntled and dissatisfied with the whole exercise. The writer of the above letter recognized this. He said:

These festivals began as a simple exercise. However, providing the only outlet for performing artists, they have become more popular and gained larger audiences. Inevitably this has made them lose direction. Instead of being schools drama festivals, they are now referred to as national drama festivals, a misleading term in itself. Although the original aim was not competition, unfortunately that's what they have become. So long as a winner is to be chosen, there is bound to be competition. Therefore there is need for A.T.E.M. to review its policies.<sup>67</sup>

This letter summed up what problems surround the ATEM's efforts to promote drama in the schools. Some of these were there right from the beginning. As early as four years after the festival was established organizers acknowledged that there were bound to be problems in a

competitive festival. They said:

The competitive element in the Festival produces more antagonistic comments than any other aspect of the Festival. In fact it is not really the competition itself so much as the inevitable emotions that go along with any competition, which are detrimental to an Arts Festival; the idea of get-in-there-and-win, which is more in keeping with the 100 metre spirit than a drama festival.<sup>68</sup>

Why nobody has bothered to look into this problem to some extent reveals how the A.T.E.M. functions. Drama exists only when the festival time comes around. After all the A.T.E.M. claims that:

Although the schools' drama festival has been [its] major activity over the past few years, it is not the main aim of the association as it was established.<sup>69</sup>

This perhaps indicates how popular drama has become. It also shows what pressure drama is bringing to the Association for Teachers of English in Malawi.

(b) Zambia

In Zambia, the work of the Northern Rhodesia Youth Council Festival fulfilled the role that A.T.E.M. is doing in Malawi. Since this festival became defunct, there have remained T.A.Z. and Z.A.N.T.A.A. drama festivals which are open to all theatre groups in the country. This includes schools' theatre groups. Unlike Malawi, Zambia is a vast country. It is practically impossible to get all the schools to come to one venue nor indeed send out adjudicators to all schools. What has therefore tended to happen is that theatre activity still remains dominated by the Copperbelt and Lusaka areas of the country.

From time to time one hears of school productions going on in remote areas, but these are very rare moments. Very often such adventures are led by expatriate teachers posted into remote areas. Their reasons for promoting drama in the school are often very different from the outspoken ones of the city. The enthusiasm of the English Language teacher counts most in starting a 'theatre tradition' in the school. Records of performances in remote schools can be found here and there. A report made by a former teacher at Luwingu village (near Kasama) talks of expatriate efforts to create recreation facilities at a remote school in the following words:

In the first year Jim had led the attack on the surrounding bush and, at last, a football pitch appeared. We followed with a netball pitch, which had to be re-sited when it transpired that we had built it over an old pit-latrine [...]

Jim was an enthusiastic amateur actor and, by the end of year two, an open-air Greek-style theatre had been built. It seated more than 700 and was the venue for a full-scale musical and costumed production of the Agamemnon of AEschylus, which was easily understood by people whose traditional tales told of family loyalties, spirits and blood guilt.

The electricity did not come to the school until nearly two and a half years after it had opened, and even then we had only a generator. It proved a mixed blessing indeed! For the production, lighting was provided by old motor vehicle head-lamps run off my car, idling at the rear, and the whole was operated by an assortment of dash-board switches, likewise purloined and fastened into a tea-chest lid. The thing that caught us off balance was the fact that until we put the play on for public performance, it had not occurred to us that no one, except the Head, had ever been to a play. In their villages the Africans told their stories, sang their songs and did their dances - but formal drama was alien. Consequently, audience participation took unexpected, hilarious and often disconcerting turns, but it was a huge success.

Wole Soyinka's adaptation of Everyman [sic] was later equally



well-received. It was prefaced by a session in which staff and students sang folk songs from different parts of the world to illustrate the music of common man - a main plank in Dr Kaunda's [Zambia's President] Humanist philosophy.<sup>70</sup>

This passage has been quoted in full to show the kind of work that has been possible in remote schools in Zambia. It also shows the many problems that are faced by the drama enthusiast in such a situation. There is the lack of facility, but also the shock of living in a foreign culture. The resulting development from all this is indescribable, but undoubtedly unique to the place. Often such experiences are ignored by those who record the development of theatre in Zambia. The impression that is created most of the time is that theatre starts in the towns and cities of the country and that gradually it permeates into villages. This particular example shows how erroneous such a view is.

## 2 University Drama

### (a) Malawi

The Department of Cultural Affairs in Malawi recognizes the work of the University of Malawi in the promotion of drama in the country. This work is spread out into the four campuses making the University of Malawi, namely: Chancellor College (Zomba), Bunda College of Agriculture (Lilongwe), Kamuzu College of Nursing (Lilongwe) and The Polytechnic (Blantyre). The most active of these is Chancellor College where there is a Department of Fine and Performing Arts under

whose patronage comes the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre. Just ~~as~~ the work of the A.T.E.M. drama festival has spread the concept of modern drama far and wide beyond expected proportions the work of this Travelling Theatre is also at the centre of the development of theatre in the country. This has come about over the years through the persistent and untiring efforts of particular individuals working for the University.<sup>71</sup> It is worthwhile to see the various stages this work has gone through.

Prior to 1981 there was not a Department of Fine and Performing Arts at Chancellor College. All drama teaching was done <sup>within</sup> ~~within~~ the ambit of the English Department. Most of this work was dramatic literature rather than drama as performance. The only practical course offered was a two hour session in 'Practical drama and film' to 'third year' majors of English. In this course, students were introduced to arts of the theatre and filming. It is through this course that the Travelling Theatre really came into being. Although the Travelling Theatre was a direct responsibility of the English Department, it was an extra-curricular appendage, and therefore it was open to staff and students from all departments of the college.

Records of performances in the college indicate that the first production ever to be put on there was Wole Soyinka's The Trials of Brother Jero directed by Trevor Whittock. This was followed by The Crucible by Arthur Miller.<sup>72</sup> In 1969 Trevor Whittock was replaced by John Linstrum as lecturer in drama. During his two years stay at the college, he directed two plays The Chalk Circle (an adaptation of

Brecht's The Caucasian Chalk Circle) and Everyman by Obatunde Ijimere.<sup>73</sup>

All these productions except the last one were done in the college Hall and nowhere else. The production of Everyman broke the tradition.

John Linstrum had been joined by a Malawian, Mupa Shumba (a veteran of the first Makerere College Travelling Theatre in Uganda).<sup>74</sup> Together

they formed and organized the first ever Travelling Theatre in Malawi in 1970. The first tour of this company was confined to nearby towns and suburbs.<sup>75</sup> As John Linstrum's term of office was coming to an end

Mupa Shumba left for Canada to pursue post-graduate studies. James Gibbs came in to take over John Linstrum's work (from 1972 to 1978).

It was during this period that the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre really took root and reached almost every district in the country. The bulk of the Travelling Theatre's work remained presentation of plays in English in schools and urban centres, never in villages. When James Gibbs left, the present author took over his job and was subsequently joined by David Kerr (from the University of Zambia). Now the company's repertoire includes vernacular plays. Tours have been extended to include drama workshops in rural areas amongst villagers. Chapter nine deals with an example of such work.

The affiliation of the Travelling Theatre to the English Department at Chancellor College had its own consequences as Patience Gibbs points out:

The curriculum [pursued in the department] determined partly the selection of plays produced.<sup>76</sup>

As time passed, with James Gibbs as its leader, the Travelling Theatre

showed more interest in other areas than just dramatic literature:

[...] the interests of aspiring writers, producers, actors, technical workers and critics were considered in planning the general "framework" for theatre at Chancellor. The overall consideration [became] to expose theatre enthusiasts to a wide range of both foreign and local dramatic theatrical forms, thereby widening the scope of their experience.<sup>77</sup>

At the same time the English Department was changing its syllabi to include more material from Malawian Oral Tradition and Black Aesthetics. All this produced phenomenal results. Students took to playwriting, producing plays and acting. From such activity came the first anthology of Malawian plays in English edited by James Gibbs, Nine Malawian Plays.<sup>78</sup> James Gibbs' concern with establishing theatre in Chancellor College was hampered by a lack of space. The College did not have a theatre where students could mount shows. For most of the time they used an empty cafeteria or some steps in front of the college library. Later on the Travelling Theatre decided to construct an open-air theatre. And this became the home of all productions in the college, until December 1982 when a new Arts Complex with two theatres within was opened on campus. The open-air theatre received an unprecedented welcome from both students and staff of the college. The first big event to take place at this theatre was the 1974 College Drama Festival. A.A. Roscoe commented on this event with enthusiasm:

An important fact the Festival underlined is the presence here of a large and enthusiastic student audience for drama and a group of writers who know this audience and understand its special tastes and responses. For theatre arts this is indeed a healthy situation. Time and again there was evidence of playwrights encouraging a response amounting almost to participation. This was theatre getting back to a

genuinely communal mode of existence, close to its roots in ritual and story.<sup>79</sup>

Six plays were presented that evening. They were Julius Caesar (Shakespeare), Song of a Goat (Clark), Who Will Marry Our Daughter? (Mosiwa), Phuma-Uhambe (Ngulube), Ology of Ism (Gibbs) and Keeping Up With The Mukasas (Zirimu). This was found to be too long for Roscoe, but as it turns out these days the festival goes on even beyond the 10 p.m. of this particular night.<sup>80</sup> Roscoe ended his assessment of the evening's events by commenting on the idea of an open-air theatre in the following words:

[...] congratulations must go to those who insisted on open-air theatre. It's hard to understand now why Ibadan, Makerere and Nairobi have saddled themselves with "proscenium-arched importations" built into the depths of tropical ovens when the advantages of fresh-air and moonlight theatre are obvious. The Greeks were wise in this and so was traditional Africa. Sanity and wisdom are being resurrected in Zomba. Never again do I want to sweat it out inside any dark hall, with all that fag smoke, claustrophobia, itching buttocks, neck-craning, nausea, eye-strain, curtain-swinging, chair scraping, and general dressed up, straight-jacketed suffocation [...]<sup>81</sup>

Over-enthusiastic perhaps, but the open-air theatre at Chancellor College was thus firmly established. Whereas hitherto rehearsal space was fought for against other societies on campus, the Travelling Theatre had its own base now.

With a place to work in now available and totally under the company's own control, the pressure to mount shows regularly built up. Students expected to see plays there as often as possible. Inevitably this meant a special type of drama was going to dominate in the repertoire the Travelling Theatre was building. The plays turned out



to be mostly short, slap-stick comedies or a continuation of the A.T.E.M. schools' drama festival repertoire built on oral tradition of Malawi or adaptations of short European plays. Occasionally serious plays like The Exception and the Rule (1977) and Riders to the Sea (1976) were attempted to give the younger members of the Travelling Theatre some experience of 20th century serious drama.<sup>82</sup>

The desire to produce as many plays as possible in a year had telling effects on the type of acting that students were giving. The quality of work coming on stage was diminishing. One critic complained that:

there[was] lack of appreciation, lack of realisation on the part of the actors and actresses of the absolute importance of excellence.<sup>83</sup>

This particular critic also cautioned the belief that an open-air theatre was the answer to all problems of space. He pointed to the operations of the seasons in the country and called for a proper theatre to be built on campus.<sup>84</sup>

Some of the plays presented in the festival aroused heated critical discussion - particularly as regards clarity of the texts and the question of culture in African drama. Commenting on one of the plays production, Roscoe complained that whilst the audience responded with 'noisy enthusiasm' to the production, he 'couldn't say what it was about'.<sup>85</sup> Replying to this criticism, the playwright of this particular play complained that:

It is becoming a tendency for people to criticize rather intellectually, that [some] plays included on [sic] the Travelling Theatre repertoire do not conform to Aristotle's pattern of a well constructed plot [...] Did Aristotle foresee that a kind of 'African Theatrical Revolution' would take

place which would probably necessitate flexibilities in his rigid pattern for a good plot? Do plays which are fundamentally based on African traditions have to conform to Aristotle's pattern in order to be applauded by the critic and classified [...] MAGNIFICENT DRAMA [...] How can a person who does not understand our African traditions and has no knowledge of our cultural background understand and appreciate Phuma-Uhambe?<sup>86</sup>

The issues that this playwright raised here are the same ones that cloud all discussion of indigenous theatre in Africa as chapter one has shown. This exchange of views shows what problems are being gone through by not just theatre artists, but critics as well in Malawi.

The question of 'cultural clarity' was not going to remain a problem for a touring company which was building a repertoire of plays based on local myth, legends and life. It is when attempts to publish such plays outside the country are made that problems come up. In 1980 the Travelling Theatre mounted a successful production of Chauta's Wrath (Kamlongera)<sup>87</sup> which was later submitted to Heinemann Educational books. The following is part of a reply the Managing Director sent back to the author:

It shows considerable promise but [...] it is not sufficiently developed to be publishable at this stage [...] Personally, I found the play obscure in places and I am sure this would be true of all non-Malawian readers. Perhaps you can re-work it and give it wider access by developing your themes further and bringing them up in a manner which outsiders can also share.<sup>88</sup>

Successful performance does not ensure acceptability outside one's own immediate audience. Much as most playwrights would refuse to give in to the 'diluting' expectations of such demands as those made in this letter, one can see why they are necessary in the world of publishing.

This is going to remain a problem as long as people share different cultures in the world. Unfortunately as James Gibbs says, it is publications rather than performance that really measure dramatic activity in our world today.

Theatre life on Chancellor College campus includes visits made by outside theatre groups who perform in the open-air theatre at the invitation of Chancellor College. One such visit was that made by the Zomba Community Centre Drama Group in the 1970's. This group is now defunct, but it brought some insight to the Travelling Theatre. They brought two plays: an adaptation of The Pardoner's Tale (in English) and Kambale, The Famous Boy (in Chichewa, a vernacular language). The latter is the one which aroused interest and discussion amongst theatre enthusiasts. This is a story of a trickster boy who fools everybody around him by all sorts of antics. In spite of being merely primary school boys and girls with no formal training in drama, they won the hearts of the audience. One critic marvelled at the work of these children and speculated on the reasons for their success. The comments he made at that time have remained at the heart of theatre work by the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre:

What is it that makes us fall in love almost at first sight with [the work of these children] I think part of the answer must lie in language - Kambale's rich colloquial language "sans" pretensions to bookish grammar and all the rest of it [...] was just the kind of language that appeals to me. It is the language of the people, straight from the vocal cords of the man who treads the modest paths of the village, of life. That language, sir, can work wonders, as was illustrated by [Kambale]. Anyone with playwright dreams would do well to bear this in mind [...] the fact that [the play] was in

Chichewa is the most important factor: it was the language best suited to the theme, the setting, the characters, and [...] the audience [...] the playwright in Malawi should always decide beforehand what audience he wants to amuse and educate. If he is sensible he will first and foremost think of the man in the street most of the time; and hence use the language that best suits the man.<sup>89</sup>

This outcry was a precursor to what has now become the slogan in the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre: "Taking theatre to the people".

It has taken five years to actually put this into practice. The first time that the Travelling Theatre actually worked with ordinary villagers was when the company went to Mbalachanda Rural Growth Centre in the Northern Region. Chapter nine will look at this particular tour. For the time being it suffices to say that following the success of this tour the Travelling Theatre has swung the weight of its work in favour of vernacular plays. Steve Chimombo's second play Wachiona Ndani (1982)<sup>90</sup> marks a firm establishment of Chichewa plays in the Travelling Theatre repertoire as well as a turn-about point for Chimombo himself who is well known for his English verse, short stories and his first play, The Rainmaker.

Taking theatre to the people has its own problems. First and foremost there is the question of finances. Although the Travelling Theatre has been under the English Department, and now under the Department of Fine and Performing Arts, there is no money marked out for its operations. From time to time it has thrived on support from outside bodies like the Schimpennick Fund, the Morel Trust Fund, the British Council and the Christian Service Committee. Of late it has taken to charging a fee for its shows - although this is in fact a

contradiction in terms of what it wants to do.

The question of what language to use is central to any moves towards taking theatre to the people. Although Malawi is fortunate to have one national language, Chichewa, in the country when it comes to working in certain places, particularly in the Northern Region, one has to know the language of the people there. To some extent this explains why the Travelling Theatre has until recently restricted its repertoire to plays in English. Having expatriate artistic directors has not helped the language question either. None of them could have been confident enough to operate in the vernacular. In the 1981/82 academic year the Travelling Theatre produced, for the first time, some plays in Chichewa and Tumbuka. These were didactic pieces linked with extension work done at Mbalachanda.<sup>91</sup> Following the success of the Mbalachanda tour, two members from its team went on to devise improvisations in Chichewa Maliro (Funeral) and Nsomba-Nsomba (Fish).

Responses to these productions referred to the authenticity of the language used. One observer remarked that:

One remarkable thing about this play [Maliro] is that the Chichewa used is very 'deep' and by [sic] the very nature typical of the village setting.<sup>92</sup>

This observer went on to show that the problem of producing a 'people's theatre' also involves discovering and using an appropriate 'theatre language':

Alongside [the Chichewa language used in the play] the players sit in a circle which is typical of "pa bwalo" [palaver grounds] Though there has been much dwelling on the importance of plays in vernacular, one or two points worth



talking about have not been mentioned. One such point is gestures. Often times one is more familiar with gestures of his own people than with those of other people. Hence it is relatively easy to make gestures in consonance with what an actor says in his language than the case is with an alien language.<sup>93</sup>

This critic was pointing at the problems of shifting from an English language script oriented theatre to one which is basically oral. The shift does not stop at language and literariness. It also involves a shift or re-adjustment in one's way of thinking and relating to one's world.<sup>94</sup>

Because the company is semi-autonomous, in the sense that there is no financial support from the department which houses it, some organizational problems come up. Left very much to himself, the artistic director of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre relies very heavily (if not totally) on the good will of enthusiastic students. The extra-curricular nature of the Travelling Theatre itself only emphasizes this reliance. The most obvious problem is that of not making a part of the student body appear like favourites and professionals amongst colleagues who also want to try their hand on stage. David Kerr replied to suggested queries of dictatorship and professionalization thus:

I don't believe that the so-called 'professionalization' of the T.T. is a genuine problem. [...] I am convinced that is not happening. More insidious is the suggestion [...] that there is some kind of subtle dictatorship in the [Travelling Theatre] Nothing could be more ludicrous.<sup>95</sup>

Moving on to what he calls 'real' problems of running the Travelling Theatre on his own he says that:

Since I am running a one-man mini-department of drama at a time when a whole new drama syllabus has been introduced, the demands of teaching and administering leave less time for rehearsals, workshops, and guidance of T.T. productions than I would ideally want.<sup>96</sup>

He also identifies other problems like: shortage of directors, choice of plays, lack of indigenous dance groups on campus. The problem of choice of plays he says is 'a complex one':

One complexity is the Censorship Board. I had hoped one group would perform John Ruganda's fine play The Burdens. Unfortunately, the Censorship Board vacillated with its reading of the play [...] eventually the Board prohibited production of The Burdens, while allowing the script to be still read in private by consenting adults. Similar problems have plagued the Travelling Theatre throughout its history including the current season 1981/82.<sup>97</sup>

The involvement of the Malawi Censorship Board is crucial to the development of theatre in Malawi. For it is required by law to submit all prospective production scripts to this board before any theatre group performs it. This is a subject of the next section, but first let us turn to the work of the University of Zambia and the Chikwakwa Theatre.

(b) Zambia

In Zambia the university's involvement in theatre activities comes through the work of Chikwakwa Theatre. The name Chikwakwa Theatre applies both to the open-air theatre (located some 7 kilometres from Lusaka campus) which was constructed by the University of Zambia Dramatic Society (UNZADRAMS) as well as the company which own the place.

It is the Chewa word for sickle. The history of this theatre dates back to the establishment of the University in 1965. Although the name Chikwakwa did not come up until 1969, the seeds for its growth were planted, so to speak, by the work of UNZADRAMS. Through the efforts of influential and committed drama teachers (in the person of Michael Etherton and Andrew Horn) drama as an extra-curricular activity was established in the University. These two lecturers together with some students and colleagues operating from the English Department, started UNZADRAMS. Some of the ideas that Chikwakwa Theatre espouses today can be traced back to these early days. Right from the start theatre activity at the University of Zambia has shown political awareness - particularly an anti-colonial attitude. Chifunyise and Kerr attribute this to the background of the expatriate teachers who were responsible for drama during the early days (Michael Etherton and Andrew Horn). They say that:

Several of these drama enthusiasts (Etherton, J. Reed, later Fay Chung) were Zimbabweans with some links to freedom fighter movements.<sup>98</sup>

Productions from the early days also support this; Houseboy (Etherton's adaptation of Oyono-Mbia's novel by the same name) in 1968, Che Guevara (Mario Fratti) in 1970, Kazembe and the Portuguese (Masiye) in 1971.

Commenting on the production of Houseboy Etherton had this to say:

The exciting thing about the production [...] was that for the first time things were being said on stage that a number of Zambians had felt were not possible to say on a public platform. Things were being said about the White colonial period, about their white masters in a way which absolutely indicted them [...] people felt at last things were being

made articulate - that their own thoughts, their own ideas were being made very articulate.<sup>99</sup>

The second production Che Guevara (1970) was Etherton's choice too. This time the choice was dictated by a wish to produce something that was going to have relevancy to an on-going 'Non-aligned Summit Conference' being held in Lusaka at the time. Although Idoye claims that this choice was made to show Zambian youth the meaning of revolution, Etherton himself says that:

At first we tried to find a suitable play by a Zambian playwright. But it was necessary to think primarily of the relevance of the content of the play to the conference.<sup>100</sup>

Both plays were clearly dealing with modern life as opposed to rural life. Although the production style from time to time involved borrowing from indigenous performance techniques like drumming and dancing, Etherton's ideas of theatre started off very much for the townships. He saw very little contact with the rural side of life much as he might have sympathized with it. For him:

[...] the great poet rarely allows his conception of his art to become confused with political parochialism; and what he writes is frequently at variance with what he preaches about writing [...] going to the village for inspiration produces 'back-row' political agents.<sup>101</sup>

One could understand this as a lack of confidence to face indigenous material. This is especially so where the team leader was an expatriate and he was surrounded by expatriate colleagues who also knew next to nothing about indigenous African performing arts.

By the time Etherton was leaving Zambia, this view had changed completely.<sup>102</sup> After all this view was incompatible with his views

about creating a theatre for the people where the said people were predominantly villagers. In his production of Kazembe and the Portuguese, the university company:

were anxious [to experiment with] integrating Zambian music and dance with the dialogue and action of the play, and also to experiment further with the use of the local language in certain parts of the play. These experiments were part of a wider concern of UNZADRAMS and Chikwakwa Theatre [...] to relate their work in theatre to all sections of the Zambian communities.<sup>103</sup>

To this end UNZADRAMS also embarked on tours of the rural areas of the country. Experiments such as the production of Kazembe and the Portuguese showed them how far they could go with marrying 'western' theatrical forms with indigenous arts.<sup>104</sup> The people who took over from Michael Etherton acknowledged and pursued his ideas religiously. In 1972 Fay Chung took over the running of Chikwakwa Theatre. In that year:

Chikwakwa basically continued to develop along the lines established by [...] Michael Etherton and Andy Horn, that is as a people's theatre committed to dramatising ideas, issues and, conflicts which are at present preoccupying Zambians in the rural areas, in towns, at schools and at university.<sup>105</sup>

Although most accounts of the Chikwakwa Theatre give the impression of a smooth life, things have not been so all the time. The deportations of Etherton and Horn indicate how authorities in Zambia viewed theatre activity at the University. One could say Etherton, to some extent knew this, for he says that 'two crucial statements can be made about Zambian theatre: "In Zambia cultural discussion is ... political discussion; in particular, discussion on Zambian theatre is nearly always political".'<sup>106</sup> For instance when Houseboy was being



rehearsed, students at the University insisted that the play should be made 'to extend the criticism of treatment of domestic menials and indeed their whole situation to the black bourgeoisie' of the country.<sup>107</sup> Chikwakwa theatre has always refused to compromise over issues affecting the people its work is intended for.

From another quarter altogether Chikwakwa's existence hung in the balance for some time. Although not enough reasons beyond academic rhetoric are given by the Department of Languages and Literature's temporary decision to axe drama from its curriculum, the move was imminent in 1975, if it had not been for David Kerr's presence in the department. The removal of drama from the curriculum would have meant killing the nucleus of all Chikwakwa activity in the University.

David Kerr argued that:

The drama course, with its strongly practical emphasis and with its close links with the Provincial Travelling Theatre projects might well be the kind of course which could help Language and Literature avoid the image of an "ivory tower" discipline.<sup>108</sup>

Out of Kerr's retort, proposals for an even larger drama component in the department were proposed and later on passed. It would seem it was the arguments related to 'how useful drama would be to Zambian society' that were most persuasive. The proposed syllabi for new courses showed this bias. What at first were merely Michael Etherton's wishes became Chikwakwa Theatre's philosophy. Etherton expressed his wishes thus:

We want a theatre which stands as a sort of contradiction to the typical white bourgeois theatre that one has here [in Zambia] which is so limited in its scope and when I say

bourgeois theatre I mean a theatre which observes the typical social behaviour patterns of the bourgeois-people who dress up, and people who come in their cars and sit quietly, and do a number of conventional passive things during the production, comment on such things as the set and the costumes and individual acting techniques. We want instead to actually involve people in issues, to get them talking about what the play is about rather than about individual acting merit or how lovely the costumes are, or anything like that.<sup>109</sup>

These wishes sometimes reached romantic proportions and so sounded unreal. Offering some kind of rationale for the structure of Chikwakwa Theatre (the place) Michael Etherton said:

The idea is that people, we hope, will walk around as the productions are going on and observe the production from different angles and feel free to altercate with the actors,<sup>110</sup> to come in and to even take over the action if they want to.

These ideas remind one of Arden's preface to his play The Workhouse Donkey.<sup>111</sup> In order to dispel any sense of awe from the people, the Chikwakwa Theatre builders tried to make it as 'pastoral' as possible. The lighting there was provided by open fires, gas lamps and paraffin lanterns.<sup>112</sup> The location of the theatre is in a bush isolated from amenities easily available at the Lusaka campus of the University of Zambia.

The choice of plays done by Chikwakwa Theatre has already been mentioned as central to the nature of theatre that was to be developed by this group. The choices Etherton made were in keeping with his ideas about the kind of theatre he envisaged for Zambia. He did not hesitate to employ indigenous performing styles in order to make the plays more Zambian than ever. His actors employed vernacular songs specially created to carry the stories through. From the West he borrowed what he found most appropriate to his intentions of creating a

theatre aimed at not just entertaining, but teaching and provoking people into thinking about the issues raised by the performances. For this purpose he picked none other than Brechtian theatre to learn from. He says that:

In UNZADRAMS productions most of the white characters were played by Africans in white-face; and the progress of the scenes was underlined in the Brechtian manner with music and songs.<sup>113</sup>

The choices of plays that Etherton made did not just pass without opposition from other people interested in theatre at the University. Where he had chosen to even participate in national events like, entertaining participants to the Non-aligned Summit Conference held in Lusaka, he must have expected more than just theatre people to be interested in the work of Chikwakwa Theatre. The choice of Che Guevara for example did not pass unchallenged. Having chosen a particular ideological and political stand UNZADRAMS was courting opposition from those who did not share its ideals. Etherton says that although student response to his choice of Che Guevara was most encouraging UNZADRAMS was:

being attacked from certain quarters for [its] choice of a play: we were Red, we were undermining the non-alligned [sic] aspect of the Summit, we were failing Zambia in not producing a play by a Zambian, and so on.<sup>114</sup>

In spite of these objections the play was performed. A good deal of effort and help from people outside the University came forth. Quite apart from participating in the Summit period UNZADRAMS and the Chikwakwa Theatre were provided with a wonderful publicity opportunity. Etherton called:

The production of Che Guevara [...] a great achievement for UNZADRAMS. [And he hoped that for] Chikwakwa Theatre [this was] the beginning of a tradition of political theatre involving workers, students, scholars, and perhaps visiting theatre groups from elsewhere in Africa ... 115

How much this work courted suspicion from Government authorities can only remain speculation. But working with students, like Etherton was doing, sometimes can easily get out of hand. It is very easy to forget the limits of tolerance that authorities allow for the political development of students. A typical example of this is given by Etherton's own observation:

Many Zambians involved in cultural work [use theatre] to offer criticisms of policies of their own government. 116

Granted that Etherton concedes this political involvement of Chikwakwa Theatre, it should come as no surprise to hear that, what Chifunyise and Kerr call the 'honeymoon' period between theatre in the university and the government lasted a very short time. 117 In such an atmosphere theatre censorship is bound to come up either directly or indirectly. After all Dr Kenneth Kaunda, the president of Zambia, has been quoted as complaining that the press in his country had been preoccupied with the failures of the nation. And he warned that his government would no longer allow newsmen or anybody else to mislead the masses through misrepresentation or distortion of facts. 118 Although theatre is not specifically mentioned, this anger shows in what light a politically-conscious theatre tradition would be seen if it did not toe the government line.

The ideas and wishes of Michael Etherton were articulated more

clearly in his productions of Houseboy, Che Guevara and Kazembe and the Portuguese rather than elsewhere. By the end of the 1971 academic year when the first review of Chikwakwa Theatre activities came out, his followers and successors had been able to refine them into a philosophy of some kind. This was condensed as follows:

The main Chikwakwa Ideals:

- To be a people's theatre that embraces the intelligentsia;
- To perform relevant social plays;
- To encourage new Zambian drama;
- To integrate the concept of theatre with ancient and traditional elements of the Zambian performing arts;
- To take theatre to the people.<sup>119</sup>

This philosophy led to a two-way approach to the work of Chikwakwa Theatre. Whilst it continued with the tradition of performing plays at the Chikwakwa Theatre and the University campus, it started a programme of rural drama workshops and tours to be done by its members during vacation times. At first (early 70's) these rural workshops and tours were being fed by material initially produced for campus audiences. But with time, the group began to understand the needs of the rural population, and turned to creating dramas on the spot wherever a group went. This has more recently (1978) led to adoption of improvisation as the basis of most work being done by Chikwakwa Theatre. Chapter nine looks at this type of work and provides an analysis of a play Matteo Sakala which exemplifies work resulting from this improvisation.



Having matured a philosophy of its own Chikwakwa Theatre was faced with the question of translating it into action. The whole tone of this philosophy suggested that time had come (in the late 70's) for the creation of a truly Zambian theatre, not just performance-wise, but even in play-writing. None other than Michael Etherton could have hinted at the way this should go:

In a country like Zambia - and I should imagine East Africa - where a large section of the community are not included in theatre activities, and therefore show some reticence in participating, sketches which only need a couple of rehearsals, can demonstrate fairly rapidly and without too much effort the essential experience of theatre participation.<sup>120</sup>

Although Etherton did not have time enough to pursue his suggestion, his words developed to be the pattern of student work in Chikwakwa Theatre until some members felt it was not right. As it has been shown, in Etherton's own time (1968-71) the pattern in Chikwakwa Theatre was to mount one big production per year rather than several short plays as he suggested in the review just quoted. His successors however either consciously or unconsciously drifted into doing short plays without retaining the one 'big show' expected annually. At a meeting preparing the Chikwakwa Theatre programme for 1974-75 both staff and students present agreed: to keep Chikwakwa Theatre as an experimental place where aspiring playwrights, producers and actors could try out their ideas; and to make it a theatre which could provide as much dramatic experience as possible to all interested in gaining it.<sup>121</sup> There were also a few criticisms raised at this meeting concerning the operations of the last two years (1972-73 and

1973-74 academic years):

Firstly it was felt that large scale productions of the size of those put on by Michael Etherton should be done every year: this would help project the image of Zambians participating in drama more spectacularly than at present. These large-scale productions should be well advertised to the general public and should be well-covered by all news media. Secondly it was felt that there should be more use of epic folk themes in our plays than at present [...] more exchange between schools, colleges and the university was felt to be necessary.<sup>122</sup>

Such demands could easily be met by Chikwakwa Theatre which has a 'proper' committee of the Vice-Chancellor to manage its finances. Unlike the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre of Malawi, the Chikwakwa Theatre has money allotted to its activities annually, therefore its members could sit and plan well ahead of schedule. The Chancellor College Travelling Theatre in Malawi operates on a 'hand to mouth' existence for most of the time.

It is interesting to note that David Kerr, who is now in charge of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre in Malawi speaking about his work there, has said:

The production of a large prestigious play might have been very gratifying for [him], but [he does not] think it would have been in the best interests of Chancellor College or of theatre in Malawi. [His] encouragement of and assistance to student-directed short, unambitious plays is meant to provide the beginning of a solution to other major problems at Chancellor College.<sup>123</sup>

He cites these other problems as: administrative, shortage of local scripts and local directors. Perhaps the argument he raises here could also explain the development of events that students and staff of University of Zambia criticised.

Whilst problems of finding the right plays for performance were being solved through experiments with improvisation Chikwakwa Theatre tours were also being besieged by problems of their own. These were mostly managerial. Not being used to the rigours of remaining a team beyond the performance time, or to staying together as a family outside the comforts of campus life, most students could not cope with the tours. Personality clashes became imminent. There was also need for cultivating some discipline amongst company members. Some of them were not taking the tours seriously. They could walk out on colleagues for petty reasons of all kinds. The Chikwakwa Theatre committee back on campus needed to make preparations and plans for the tours well in advance of trips. Certain problems were being experienced by members on tours as a result of lack of adequate preparation by the committee. As one member put it:

exactly how these problems came was not the fault of the actors. Disorganisation started at home. There was little time for rehearsals so that we had to rehearse at [the venues of our tour].<sup>124</sup>

Liaison with contacts in the rural areas needed improving.

Some of the problems that came up resulted from the group's inability to understand the culture of the people they were working with. It was not enough to assume that because they were Zambians therefore they would understand all the people they were to come in contact with during tours. David Kerr remarked after a visit to the Western Province of the country:

In future trips it might be necessary to pay more careful attention to the moral and social values of traditions of the

society which we are visiting. Our attitude of breezy revolutionary fervour was perhaps not appropriate to the feudal praxis which we encountered [...] Plays, dialogue and acting conventions which are successful in one province or village may not be successful in another.<sup>125</sup>

Such problems were paralleled by praise from villagers who saw the group's performances. Most villagers commended the group for its educational value. They found their plays enlightening over issues relevant to their own lives. This was likely to be where the emphasis had become to create plays on the spot rather than an already made play-package. The step towards a more didactic form of theatre was therefore an easy one. Plays like Kasoma's The Poisoned Cultural Meat (which is looked at later on) were therefore a natural development within the policy of creating theatre for the people. Worries of relevancy and appropriateness led to what has now become the pattern in play creation in Zambia i.e., collective creation as opposed to individual play-scripting. The discussion of Matteo Sakala in chapter nine provides the background to this development more fully than can be attempted here.

#### Censorship and Theatre

Moves to rescue indigenous culture from disappearing in African countries usually involve proclamations made by politicians (encouraging the masses to revive and take pride in their own cultural heritage on the one hand and government controlled conservation and protection of the people's cultural heritage on the other). Governments establish

departments of cultural affairs and institutionalized censorship procedures to monitor and check cultural development going on in the country. Theatre work very often is taken care of by such censorship.

In Malawi there is a Censorship Board whose duties include keeping a check on all theatrical life going on in the country. Before any play is performed in public, it must be passed or even previewed by this Censorship Board. This requirement is understood by all involved in theatre activity. Sometimes it is interpreted quite broadly, as Andrew Horn does:

The statutes establishing the Censorship Board in 1968 require that any play-or anything the board wishes to consider a play - be formally approved before it may be performed, that a licence be obtained for every venue (whether a purpose-built theatre, an open meadow, or a private living room), and that separate permission be sought for each and every performance. A schedule of burdensome fees for these various permits further restrict theatre activity.<sup>126</sup>

Throughout the present author's entire work in theatre (which covers Secondary School 1974, The Malawi Polytechnic 1975-78 and Chancellor College 1978-1981) in Malawi, he was never charged a single fee for a permit. In fact the censorship board's charges exclude non-profit making enterprises. Probably the expatriate community which runs its business along commercial lines has. Andrew Horn's claim holds true for Malawian theatre only as far as he talks about the need for a permit.

Talking about the nature of censorship in Malawi Victor Ndovi (one time journalist with The Daily Times) says:

Censorship in Malawi doesn't follow any particular line - it can be political or it can be social. Sex, for instance,



any nude pictures are out. But equally books with a great deal of political content will be banned outright.<sup>127</sup>

James Gibbs referring to the same Censorship Board as he knew it between 1973 and 1978 described it in the following words:

My impression is that the Board is ignorant and confused, but that it can tell a direct attack when it encounters one. My conclusion is that, although the Malawian writer suffers severely under the Censorship Board the devices it forces him to are not in every way detrimental to the shaping of his work.<sup>128</sup>

When the Censorship Board was being set up in Malawi it was aimed at ensuring that plays, books, films and gramophone records were going to be 'censored and controlled [...] according to [...] Malawian standards in the interests of morality, decency and public order'.<sup>129</sup> An act of Parliament was passed to establish this board. The act reads as follows:

A publication, picture, statue or record shall be deemed to be undesirable if any part thereof -

- (a) is indecent or obscene or offensive or harmful to public morals; or
- (b) is likely to -
  - i) give offence to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the public; or
  - ii) bring any member or section of the public into contempt; or
  - iii) harm relations between sections of the public; or
  - iv) be contrary to the interests of public safety, or public order [...]<sup>130</sup>

This act's interpretation is very wide and debatable. It is no wonder that some people have found the Censorship Board's work or recommendations confused. James Gibbs says that in following this act

the Censorship Board has banned books, plays, newspapers and magazines.

He says:

The Board sees part of its job as being to "protect" Malawians from books about the anti-colonial struggle, about socialism, religious dissent and birth control, and books in which corruption in Post-Independence Africa is described.<sup>131</sup>

In theatre this censorship is based on the script rather than the performance. This is because the latter is difficult to censor. Although the board insists on having a preview of all shows, it cannot go to all the theatre places in the country given the distances viewers would have to cover. Most of the scripts that theatre groups produce are written in English which means that for the board to work adequately it must have censors who are competent in the English Language. Ndovi has commented on this in the following words:

[...] the majority of the censors are not well educated and therefore don't have a proper understanding of what [they censor]. They are thus bound to make quite arbitrary decisions.<sup>132</sup>

Experiences of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre between 1973 and 1978 seem to support this. Some of the plays submitted by the group during this period were rejected on all sorts of grounds:

'inclusion of direct or indirect sex discussion'; showing 'a woman [...] deceiving her husband'; promoting political 'subversion'; where 'European way of life [is being] encouraged on [...] African youth'; where the 'play makes fun of the Police and the Church by showing that the Rich, the Law and the Church exploit the poor [...]'.<sup>133</sup> Given this kind of situation it should come as no surprise that Malawian theatre appears to depend on:

[...] playwrights [who] have avoided the central problems of their society and have concerned themselves with now virtually exhausted themes of old vs western [; and on] plays [that] often service [a] conservative national ideology by offering models of chiefly wisdom, marital stability, and acquiescent labour.<sup>134</sup>

What exists in Malawi is ideally precensorship not censorship as far as theatre is concerned. This gives the board absolute control over the drama and it does not permit any appeal against its decisions. The powers of this board may be compared to those enjoyed by the Lord Chamberlain in England in the Eighteenth century.<sup>135</sup> The Malawi Censorship Board can stop the production (not just performance) of any play for any reason thought fit by its members. Like the Lord Chamberlain in 1737, it is not required to give any reasons for decisions so taken. Nor can one appeal against the decisions.

The Malawi Censorship Board has been described as:

acutely biased ignorant and utterly unsympathetic to attempts to promote African drama or to encourage Malawian creativity.<sup>136</sup>

This view is supported by the inexplicable contradictions that it has shown in its decisions on what plays it has deemed acceptable and not acceptable. The list of plays rejected by the board includes those that have been accepted and passed at one time. In 1975 the present author submitted his own play entitled Tongues on behalf of the Malawi Polytechnic Drama Group who wanted to produce it, but the censorship board rejected it without explanation. In the same year the play was re-submitted under a new title Graveyards by the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre and it was passed. Later on it was included in the anthology of Malawian plays edited by James Gibbs Nine Malawian Plays.

A submission of Sizwe Bansi is Dead (Fugard et al) by the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre was turned down by the censorship board without any explanation in 1976, but in 1980 a re-submission was approved. The Island (Fugard et al) which was submitted together with Sizwe Bansi is Dead on the second occasion was approved for production initially, but a week later the Travelling Theatre was asked to withhold production until later when the Office of the President and Cabinet (not the board) gave the go ahead.<sup>137</sup> This experience shows how far the power of the Censorship Board goes. Whilst it may pass judgement on a particular script, there is yet another 'power' base which can veto such a decision for reasons probably outside the act which informs official censorship.

In Zambia theatre activists have insisted on making their work serve politics. This political commitment ranges from interest in internal affairs to the political struggles of the people of Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Most of the plays dealing with internal politics have centred on the successes and failures of the country as a nation. Inevitably this has attracted some concern from authorities in the country. This is more so because most of the plays concentrate on the negative side of development than otherwise. Horn says that the government of Zambia shows some 'skittishness' when 'considering plays which articulate social or political notions in any way deviant from current official policy'.<sup>138</sup> Like Malawi, Zambia has legislation which justifies censorship if authorities choose to apply it. The Theatre and Cinematographic Exhibition Act covers such work. Under it

come the 'Film Censorship Board' and the 'Publications Censorship Committee'. The former group ensures that only acceptable pictures are shown in the country's cinemas. The latter addresses itself to publications. The Film Censorship Board tries to control films according to:

the amount of excessive acts of brutality, cruelty, physical violence, torture and abuse, indecent or undue exposure of the human body, sex relationships and scenes violating common standards of decency.<sup>139</sup>

The Publications Committee also tries to control obscenity in publications. For most of the time its work is addressed to imported publications rather than local ones. Banning of material is based on:

- (a) whether it would offend the masses of the Zambian people or not;
- (b) whether it undermines the morals of the country's youth;
- (c) whether it displays or suggests nakedness of both sexes, because in Zambian society nakedness in public is condemned.<sup>140</sup>

Although these bodies do not directly speak to theatre activity, they do nevertheless act as a **rudder** to all theatre activists. Where theatre is concerned it has been the Ministry of Culture more than anybody else who have exercised censorship on productions deemed not to follow the line advocated by the government. Horn says that:

Indirect pressure on stage writers [in Zambia] has, [...] increased in recent years, more usually exerted by the Ministry of Culture than by Home Affairs.<sup>141</sup>

Usually this pressure has come about after a particular play has been found to be either pursuing ideas contrary to known government policy or criticizing the government. This happens only after the play has



been performed. Most plays which have been censored have been done so after a run or two and usually after the political climate has changed. The case of Kabwe Kasoma's Black Mamba is a classical example of how censorship operates in Zambia. This is a play dealing with the rise of Kenneth Kaunda and his party the United National Independence Party (UNIP) to power in Zambian politics. Before there was a rift between President Kaunda and, his right hand man and friend, the late Simon Kapwepwe, accounts of the struggle for independence could include them together as the father figures of politics in the country. But after Kapwepwe's defection from the main party, he ceased to be a political hero. He had to be erased from the country's history. Therefore any play that presented him in good light seemed to be reactionary and warranted stopping. On the international scene, the Government of Zambia has been keen to see that no political ally is made target of attack by theatre practitioners.<sup>142</sup> Horn cites the example of how a play depicting Lobengula being outmanouvered by Cecil Rhodes was stopped by the government, because it feared such a story would be offensive to the Si Ndebele speaking wing of the Zimbabwe Patriotic Front, based in Lusaka.<sup>143</sup>

The Cell, a play by Dickson Mwansa was turned down as Zambia's entry to the Canadian Festival of Indigenous Arts in 1980 because it reflected how the government was failing to provide essential services to the community. The author says that:

The message of The Cell [is] central to Zambia of today. It is set in prison and poses many questions about prison life, in a country which saw crime increase by 500% in the first

half of 1980. A number of questions asked in the play have implications for the community at large [...] what the play is saying is that 'no man is born a criminal but society makes him so'.<sup>144</sup>

After performance by the Bakanda Theatre, The Cell was hailed as 'a very powerful play about crime and punishment in our urban society' and as having shown 'the author's piercing depiction of corruption as shown through the bribery of the prison governor'. A Roman Catholic Church paper hailed the play as 'food for thought'.<sup>145</sup> On the whole the play was dealing with issues that are close to the heart of the common man in Zambian society. In this it had gone too close for some people's comfort, therefore it had to be killed in the bud. Very tactfully Mwansa's play never managed to get to Canada. The censorship mechanism took on a more subtle style than brute castigation. Starting with a negative press coverage in terms of the authenticity of the play's claims to be indigenous. Dickson Mwansa (writing from Canada about this) was bitterly disappointed and says that he left his:

country without offering any defence for [his] play: not because [he] was not capable of doing so, but because scope for speaking out is limited [...] Zambia has not seen many bannings of plays, but there are indications that plays which touch on internal political issues receive less support and face the prospect of the axe [...] The future of Zambian theatre will depend on how those that control the state react.<sup>146</sup>

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 Adrian Roscoe, Uhuru's Fire African Literature East to South, Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- 2 Ibid., p.261.
- 3 James M. Gibbs, 'Theatre in Malawi'. Paper presented at the First Ibadan Annual African Literature Conference, 6-10 July, 1976.
- 4 Michael Etherton, 'Indigenous Performance in Zambia'. Theatre Quarterly Volume III, No.10, April-June 1973, pp.44-48.
- 5 Patience Gibbs, 'Drama and Theatre in Malawi'. Unpublished M.A. thesis University of Malawi, June 1980. See chapter two of this work.
- 6 Stephen Chifunyise, 'The Formative Years (An analysis of the development of theatre in Zambia 1950 to 1970)'. Staff Seminar Paper, Language and Literature Department, University of Zambia, January 1978.
- 7 Ibid., p.47.
- 8 Patience Gibbs, op. cit.
- 9 David Pownall, 'European and African Influences in Zambian Theatre'. Theatre Quarterly, Volume III, No.10, April-June 1973, pp.49-52.
- 10 Titles like The Waltz of the Toreadors, The Cherry Orchard, Tom Sawyer, Under the Milk Wood, The Country Wife are not uncommon.
- 11 Daily Times (Blantyre, Malawi), Monday 7 February, 1983, p.16, carried an article entitled 'Encourage Malawians, sports clubs told'. In this article, the Minister of Local Government Mr D. Katopola was cited as urging certain sports associations to open up to Malawians. He cited prohibitive membership fees and some administrative structures as the main reasons that restricted participation by some people.

- 12 Chifunyise, op. cit.
- 13 Hub of the Copperbelt, a Kitwe and District Chamber of Commerce Publication, June 1955, p.33.
- 14 See 'Ndola's African Townships' in Ndola, Official Brochure of Municipality of Ndola, 1955, pp.79-81.
- 15 Ibid., p.81.
- 16 Patience Gibbs, op. cit., chapter 2.
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## C H A P T E R F I V E

INDIGENOUS DRAMA

This chapter will look at indigenous theatre in Malawi and Zambia. The practitioners of this theatre can be drawn from both the village and the town or city. This reflects the dual nature of the lives of present day Malawians and Zambians. For these people the village plays a very important part in their lives. It does not matter even if one is educated in the western sense and one has a good job in the city. One always maintains some link with one's village. The same can be said about those who have not attended 'formal' institutions of learning today. These too imbibe and display knowledge of what would otherwise be exclusive to city dwellers or 'educated' people. There is interaction between the town and the village. Each of these has some influence on the other.

Government policies in both Malawi and Zambia insist on introducing modern facilities and services to the rural communities of their countries. In so doing they usher in urbanisation to replace traditional ways of behaviour. Whilst doing this they also insist on cultural policies which aim at keeping intact their people's cultural heritage. This seeming contradiction in the government's behaviour produces cultural forms which sometimes bear no resemblance to the traditional ones. We could say that such results extend the definition of 'folk culture' beyond what would otherwise be considered

static, conservative and archival. The indigenous theatre we want to look at here is one manifestation of such a culture.

When we speak of indigenous theatre in Malawi and Zambia, we are thinking of those dramatic performances which have their roots in the traditions of these places, but not at the exclusion of interference or borrowing from others. This is a theatre which we could classify as 'folk theatre'.

Let us first turn to the performances and then show how they fit into the category of 'folk theatre'. Our aim here is to illustrate the nature of this theatre as it exists in Malawi and Zambia, so we only pick two examples to do it. One of these performances is part of an ongoing girls' initiation ceremony. The other is what may be termed a therapeutic performance geared towards appeasing the dead.

#### A INITIATION CEREMONIES

Of particular interest to us here are those initiation ceremonies which involve the general public in their observation and celebration. These must be distinguished from those which are held in private - either within one family or a clan at the exclusion of fellow tribesmen or villagers.<sup>1</sup> We shall not go into the debate on when exactly such ceremonies occur. Van Gennep and Audrey Richards deal with this debate most conclusively.<sup>2</sup> What we learn from them is that we cannot peg the occurrence of such ceremonies to puberty as a physiological phenomenon. What is important to note however is that there is

general agreement over what they stand for. They are a mark of transition in the social status of those involved. Those undergoing initiation are seen as belonging to a particular stratum in society - often inferior to the one which they graduate into after the ceremony. Their world in a sense expands both by way of new knowledge acquired and by being accepted into another stratum of their society. Usually everybody in the community supporting such ceremonies believes this.

Speaking of initiation rites J.G. Frazer said that:

Amongst many savage tribes, especially such as are known to practise totemism it is customary for lads at puberty to undergo certain initiatory rites, of which one of the commonest is a pretence of killing the lad and bringing him to life again. Such rites become intelligible if we suppose that their substance consists in extracting the youth's soul in order to transfer it to his totem.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of this observation Frazer acknowledged his ignorance of what exactly the whole business meant.<sup>4</sup> But however shallow his observation might seem, we cannot help noticing the importance of 'transformation' in the whole experience. This forms the basis of all initiation ceremonies. It is this fact inter alia which points to the dramatic nature of such ceremonies. We could say that initiation ceremonies depend for their survival upon some agreed suspension of disbelief on the part of the community which also recognizes the said transition. And this is a characteristic they share with the dramatic art. Audrey Richards rightly observed from her Zambian experience that such:

rites include dramatic episodes which could not fail to strike the imagination of any onlooker, but these were interspersed with days and nights of incessant dancing.<sup>5</sup>

Now let us turn to some specific examples to illustrate this point.

The first performance to be looked at here is called Nyongolo. The name refers to a special dance performed during a girls' initiation ceremony. The ceremony itself is commonly known as Chinamwali. Girls' initiation ceremonies are still common in Malawi and Zambia. Reference to their existence is readily available in ethnographic studies done mostly during the colonial days.<sup>6</sup> But all these studies are by social anthropologists whose definition of drama has been questioned by scholars of 'folk drama'. These see the anthropological use of the term 'drama' as too lax and consequently less meaningful.<sup>7</sup> What is of importance to us however are the detailed records of performances they provide.

Only very few studies carried out by students of drama on such ceremonies are available. Patience Gibbs' work on the Yao girls' initiation ceremony in Malawi is one of these.<sup>8</sup> Oftentimes such studies have been built on the Aristotelian model which, as we have shown in the first chapter, has been used by others to question the theatricality of such performances. We hope this study will provide some fresh criteria to deal with such performances to establish their theatricality.

### The Chinamwali

This is done amongst the Yao, Chewa, Manganja and Lomwe tribes which are found in Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia. Only initiated females are allowed to attend such a ceremony. The Nyongolo performance we are going to look at here belongs to the Lomwe of Southern Malawi. Our information is drawn from an informant who underwent this initiation ceremony upon reaching puberty. Our informant made a distinction between her particular ceremony as a Christian one and therefore more 'dilute' than would otherwise be where the participants were not Christians. This is an important point to make as it shows how such events have responded to contact with outside cultures.

The main purpose of such initiation ceremonies amongst the Lomwe is to 'ensure that children are taught obedience and brought up according to the culture of their ancestors'.<sup>9</sup> Initiation ceremonies are usually held during the months of August and September which are the dry season in Malawi. This period, today also coincides with the long vacation for school children. During this period people will have just harvested their crop from their gardens. They will be waiting to go back to prepare their gardens for the new planting season which follows the rains from about late October. So one could say initiation ceremonies take place during a recess period for the whole community.



### The Ceremony

When a girl reaches the age of seven or thereabouts (in some cases this is deferred until the age of eleven) her parents consult an instructress known as Nankungwi to make arrangements for the ceremony to take place. If the instructress is free and ready to do so she seeks the village headman's permission to hold the ceremony. The girl whose parents made the first approach to the instructress is referred to as Mwini Thezo (owner of the initiation ceremony). Because of this, her parents give gifts to the village headman. When the village headman's permission is granted, word is sent out to neighbouring villages announcing the approach of the initiation rites as well as inviting other parents who have daughters to be initiated, to send them along.

As the time for the ceremony approaches, the girls are each provided with a guide (or protector) called Phugu (or Kholozolo Adzina or Amboniye) to take care of them during the ceremony. The ceremony lasts from one week to two months. As they wait for the day of departure each girl's head is shaven clean. On the day of departure, at night, the guides along with other initiated girls and women coming to witness the ceremony assemble all the novices and make ready to leave for a clearing in the bush, away from the village. Meanwhile the instructress and her entourage go ahead of the rest.

Before leaving the village (for the clearing in the bush) each initiate is covered from head to foot with some cloth. On the way to

the initiation place they are flanked on all sides by singing and dancing women. Just outside the initiation ground the group stops moving and starts to sing a special song which announces the group's arrival to those who came ahead (the instructress and her group). The words of the song go like this:

Ndinadza, ndinadza ndinadzaee	I came, I came, I came
Ndinadza, ndinadza	I came, I came
Ndiri mlendo kwa Chiuta	As a visitor to <u>Chiuta</u> *

In response to this song those already at the ground sing a reply (without which the new group will not move):

Alonjereni alendoee aa ee	Welcome the visitors
Ee Ee Ee	Yea Yea Yea
Alonjereni alendoee aa ee	Greet the visitors
Ee Ee Ee	Yea Yea Yea
Alendoee aa ee	Visitors yea yea
Ee Ee Ee	Yea Yea Yea.

After this song the new arrivals enter the initiation ground. Around the initiation ground are erected some temporary huts into which each initiate and her protector are taken. Here the initiates are stripped naked and provided with a small piece of cloth to cover their waist. From this moment the initiates are told not to speak a single word. This silence lasts the entire ceremony. It is during this period that the initiates receive their instructions. We can divide the initiation procedures into three phases of morning, afternoon and evening. And the following is the pattern of what happens:

Morning:

- (a) Initiates bathed by their guides
- (b) Eating breakfast
- (c) Rest

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\* Chiuta is the traditional god of creation.

- Afternoon:
- (a) Everybody moves to the ground where others from the village join in to watch events of the afternoon. This is a time of instruction - given through song, dance, mime and direct word
  - (b) Those with a good reputation have an easier time whilst those with a record of rudeness behind them are teased, bullied and laughed at
  - (c) The whole afternoon is seen as fun by most people (women only) and they try to inject as much of it into the instructions imparted

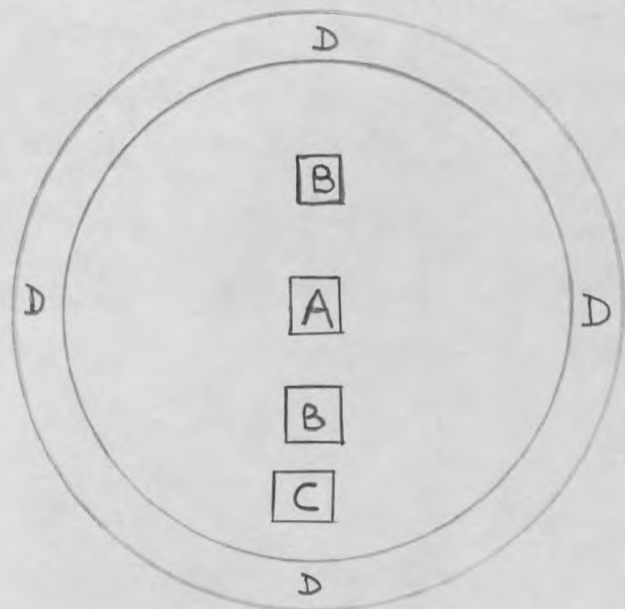
- Evening:
- (a) Lessons continue through song, dance and mime
  - (b) Lessons on code of conduct for and amongst initiated people - instructress takes an obvious lead in this helped by the comments on the girls' behaviour from those who know them very well
  - (c) Groups of singers go out to dance in the village. Songs sung are similar to those sung during the normal birth of a female child in the village. The groups collect money and gifts in so doing. These (gifts and money) are brought back to the initiation ground.

This pattern may be repeated over and over depending on the number of girls present. Our interest here is in the use of songs, dance and mime in the instruction of initiates. We believe it is here more than anywhere else that the theatricality of such ceremonies surface. We are aware of the broad generalization other scholars have made in simply classifying the whole initiation ceremony as drama or theatre.<sup>10</sup> We are not sure if this is not an oversimplification which invites outright rejection of these performances as drama or theatre at all from scholars like Kirby and Finnegan. If we are prepared to isolate instances of drama or theatre in the initiation ceremony we are then saying or suggesting that the whole ceremony may be seen as some composite of theatrical vignettes which are whole in themselves.

These - often improvised around known themes - then add up together to form the well-known overall plot of the initiation ceremony which re-enacts re-birth in a ritualistic manner. At this 'global' level entertainment may be said to be secondary. Perhaps it is not even talked of.

### The Nyongolo Dance

The dance takes place outside, in the open at the centre of the initiation ground. It is held in the afternoons of the ceremony. This enables even those women who may not stay for the whole duration of the ceremony to come and watch part of the ceremony after their morning chores at home. Our informant said of these people (women only) that 'others go there for the pleasure of singing and dancing. Some may go to enjoy the discomfort experienced by one rude initiate and jeer at her'. During this period the initiate cannot reply to any of the rude remarks made against her. She just bows her head. The following is the seating arrangement during such sessions:



- A - position of initiate.
- B - possible positions of instructress.
- C - position taken by any woman with grievance from D.
- D - spectators/audience



Our informant did not say whether one initiate is taken at a time, but we may assume that the pattern would be to take more than one at a time.

Before the dance begins a person from the spectators group starts a song, the rest of the group responds by clapping hands and singing along. The words of the song go like this:

Ali mulukhu ndani	Who is uninitiated
Abwere kuno adzaone	Tell her to come
Adzawone yekha	To come and see for herself
Momwe afulira njuchi	How honey is obtained.

As the song is sung a woman from the spectators dances towards a particular initiate sitting in the centre and hooks her fingers to those of the initiate. Having done so and still dancing and singing she pulls the initiate to a semi-standing/lying position. At this stage the initiate is supposed to imitate the dancing and movements made by the woman holding her. These are mostly wriggling and shaking of the middle and hips in a circular motion which results in 'an up and down movement'. After the dance the old woman mimes wiping something off the initiate's hands with her own fingers. Following which she tells the initiate to do the same. Then she mimes pouring water from a bowl for the initiate to wash her hands. Then it becomes the initiate's turn to mime pouring the water for the woman. All this is done to the beat of a song and drums. The significance of this sequence is to teach the girl sexual intercourse etiquette. She is taught how best to bring satisfaction to her husband and then the necessary ablutions. Spectators sing, ululate and applaud those initiates who master this dance quickly and perfectly.



A follow-up dance which is done in the evening takes place around a fire lit in the centre of the open ground. After the fire has been lit and women together with the initiates have assembled around it, a woman carrying a long stick comes up to one of the initiates and orders her to stand at the opposite side of the fire. Then she gives her one end of the stick (over the fire) and asks her to grip it with both hands. They then together swing the stick over the fire singing a song which everybody joins in. As they sing and swing the stick above the fire another woman appears and undresses in front of everybody. At this point the swinging of the stick stops, the initiate sits down once more with her head bowed down. The naked woman starts another song and begins to dance moving towards the initiate until she stands, legs astride, in front of the initiate, in so doing flouncing her genitals in front of the initiate's eyes. The dancing is very much that of the afternoon, involving shaking of the waist and hips to simulate the act of sexual intercourse.

At this point another woman disguised as a man appears on the scene and begins to chase the naked woman, gesticulating, pretending she wants to rape her. She would wear a man's clothes and even carry a stick. She makes her disguise as explicit as possible. The chase is accompanied by a song which is sung by the spectators this time; and it goes like this:

Mauyauya wene e Mauyauya  
 Weeaa Mauyauya wene  
 Eee ndati ndibisale  
 Pansi pa mulatho ee rjoka  
 Inandilume eee eee

'Mauyauya' you 'Mauyauya'  
 'Mauyauya' you 'Mauyauya'  
 I wanted to hide  
 Under a bridge eee  
 So that the snake should not bite  
 me.

Our informant told us that these two dances are 'lessons' on sex education to the young initiates. In both cases song, dance and mimicry accompanied by a minimum of words were being used. In the first dance the initiate was being taught sexual behaviour as it will be expected of her in her own family. In the second one, a word of caution as it were against a loose life. If she behaves like the naked woman she would be calling for trouble from men 'who can bite like a snake'.

We should stress here that these lessons only form a part of ongoing verbalized and perhaps even straight-forward instruction led by the instructress.

#### B THERAPEUTIC PERFORMANCE AS THEATRE

By therapeutic performances we mean those performances which participants engage in believing the experience will either heal them from some ailment or alleviate some expected danger. Such performances are what social anthropologists term 'cults of affliction'. Such rituals may be performed for individuals, but they are carried out by the entire community from which the said individual comes. In such performances the dramatic is much more pronounced as the whole act depends for its acceptability on the willingness of participants to accept without question the existence of another world other than the everyday one, which has special power over the latter. The entire performance aims at reconciling these two worlds in the hope of making

the 'earthly' one better. This bettering is made possible through certain individuals - in the community - who have to undergo a certain cleansing experience either for their own good or for the sake of the entire community. Mabzwoka is one such performance.

Mabzwoka is known by various names in Malawi and Zambia. In Southern Malawi the name Mabzwoka may be used interchangeably with Malombo or Mashave. In Central/Northern Malawi and Eastern Zambia it is either called Mashave or Vimbuza. Our example here is taken from Chikwawa among the Mang'anja of Southern Malawi where the name Mabzwoka is more common. Later on when we look at how traditional performances are responding to urbanization we shall look at a very modified performance of Vimbuza as practised in Northern Malawi and Eastern Zambia.

Our informant on Mabzwoka comes from Chikwawa.<sup>11</sup> His mother is a practising priestess of the performance. Being a priestess means she is looked upon as the village's medicine woman too. When there is a performance to be done in her village, she leads the community on such occasions.

Mabzwoka like other performances in Malawi and Zambia is referred to as a dance by those who practise it although it is more than just dance per se. It takes place when a person either shows signs of being 'possessed' by some spirit through inexplicable illness or when he reveals to his elders in the village that he was visited by ancestral spirits in a dream. People so visited end up becoming medicine men themselves - after the performance.<sup>12</sup> To be visited by such spirits

is not a welcome thing amongst the Mang'anja. Oftentimes people visited by such spirits are feared by the community at large - for they are believed to possess knowledge of medicines that others do not have and therefore they can easily bewitch others if they wish to do so. And because of this belief, those people who have dreams of this nature hesitate to reveal themselves until illnesses surface, and fail to be treated by ordinary medicine.

It is when ordinary treatment fails that patients reveal their dreams to those close to them. The latter take the patient to a medicine man/woman (Sing'anga) along with money or some other means of payment for the services to be rendered by the medicine man. The visit at the medicine man's establishes the source of the illness as ancestral spirits in need of appeasement. So a Mabzwoka performance is 'prescribed'.

### The Performance

Having returned from the medicine man with specific instructions a public announcement is made to the entire village revealing that one particular individual's illness was not due to witchcraft, but the doings of ancestral spirits who demand the performance of Mabzwoka.

The performance is held either at the home of the sick man or a relative's. The medicine man who was consulted is always invited as a special guest to help organize the performance. The performance is in two parts; namely the chasing of the evil spirits known as Chikwangwali

and the final communal celebration known as Malombo. Let us look at these closely.

### Chikwangwali

This is led by the 'guest' medicine man. The whole process is a ritual of purification which involves everybody in the village. Adults and children gather at a crossroad of paths leading into the village. There they dig a hole. The 'sick' person is made to sit on a special seat made out of a Mvunguti fruit with his legs resting in the hole. A white, or brown or black hen and sometimes a sheep are brought along to this place. These together with the special fruit of Mvunguti are believed to have powers to attract evil spirits. Along with these things the villagers bring waste matter from pigs, dogs and chickens. These are the things which are used to chase the evil spirits away. The waste matter is heaped together and burnt to produce a pungent smell necessary for the chasing of evil spirits. It is the medicine man who sets these on fire.

Whilst he does so the villagers sing songs and invite the evil spirits to come. Holding out the sheep and chicken, they sing, clap their hands and dance to the following song:

Bwera bwera bwera	Come come come
Ng'ombe yako ikukudikira	Your bull awaits you
Ng'oma ndi manja	The drums and the hands
Tirikuyimbira iwe	We clap for you
Bwera bwera bwera	Come come come.

At this point, as the singing rises to a crescendo, the sick person



starts to shake all over. The spirit is said to have 'entered' him. In response to this, amidst the singing and dancing, the villagers shout obscenities which only reinforce the entry of the 'evil' spirits. The sick person then begins to utter unintelligible sounds or words in some unknown language. At this point the medicine man gives him some fresh blood to drink (a dog's, or a pig's or a lamb's). Women with small babies hide them at this time to save them from the ever-hungry evil spirits which can kill them.

Upon drinking the blood, the spectators (villagers) resume shouting obscenities; they bring to the sick person's nostrils the still-smoking excreta to repel the evil spirits. In response to this, the evil spirits - through the sick person - hoot like an owl. He continues into a state of paroxysm. This encourages the villagers to shout even more for their departure. The hooting continues into sobbing and what is believed to be crying for mercy. The villagers insist on their departure by continuing to chase them away. This goes on until the sick person quietens and returns to normal. At this point the evil spirits are said to have taken their leave of the sick person. This calls for a celebration back in the village. So Malombo takes place.

#### Malombo

This celebration involves communal eating, drinking, singing and dancing. Specialist musicians are hired to perform at such an occasion. The celebration could be said to be in two stages. The

first stage is held indoors and in the evening by the sick person, hired musicians, medicine man and a few attendants. The rest of the village waits outside. The singing inside the hut is led by the medicine man. It goes on for some time and then rises to a crescendo. At this point the sick person shows signs of going into a trance. He is said to be 'possessed'. He stands up of his own accord and begins to utter strange words in a foreign language; he joins in the dancing. His dancing is even more vigorous than that of the medicine man. Still in this state of frenzy, accompanied by the drumming and singing, he is led outside where the rest of the village waits. There, the musicians are joined by the villagers. The celebrations are now open to the public. For another couple of days and nights, people are given food and drink. Later on as the dancing goes on others will be 'grabbed' by the music and take the place of the sick man as lead dancers to help him celebrate his recovery.

Before analysing such ceremonies we must distinguish between a 'dramatic experience' and 'theatre'. Put simply the 'dramatic experience' is lived through by an individual who temporarily suspends disbelief and in so doing believes that he can be transformed into a new being. Initiation ceremonies and therapeutic rites depend on this suspension of disbelief. People submit to them because their societies believe that whoever undergoes them comes out either an adult (in the case of the initiation ceremony) or a cleansed person (in the case of the therapeutic ceremony).

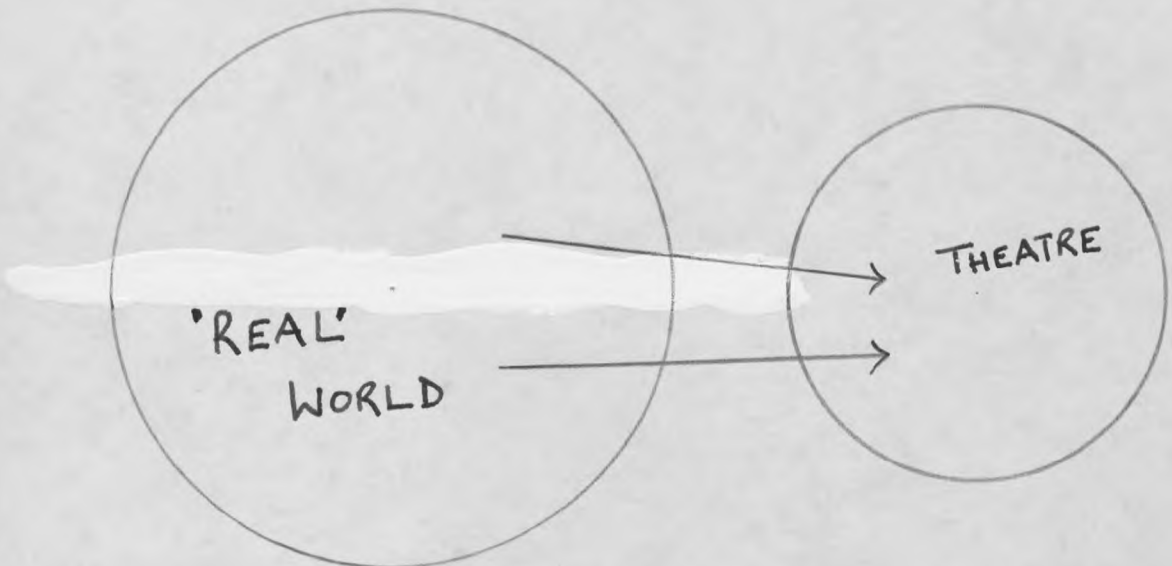
However, such suspension of disbelief by itself does not give rise to theatre. Neither does the resulting transformation bring it about. The transformation that takes place must be enhanced by some means which embody within themselves the qualities of the spectacular for theatre to be. This is a transformation in which the 'actor must not be lost in the character into whom he has transformed himself: the action [he engages in] must not be sensed as reality but as theatre'.<sup>13</sup> In other words there must be a performance. In this respect 'drama' is the experience whilst theatre is the means through which it is articulated by the individual undergoing transformation for the benefit of some observers. This enhancing of the dramatic experience is done through various signs taken from the world of those involved either directly or as observers. This means that such signs will vary from place to place or even from time to time. Lionel Gossman says that these 'signs [...] are organized in a system that refers to another system of signs'.<sup>14</sup> He goes on to say that it is the way they are used that distinguishes different theatrical schools and traditions.<sup>15</sup> Ideally then one should understand a people's theatre best when one has a mastery of their culture.

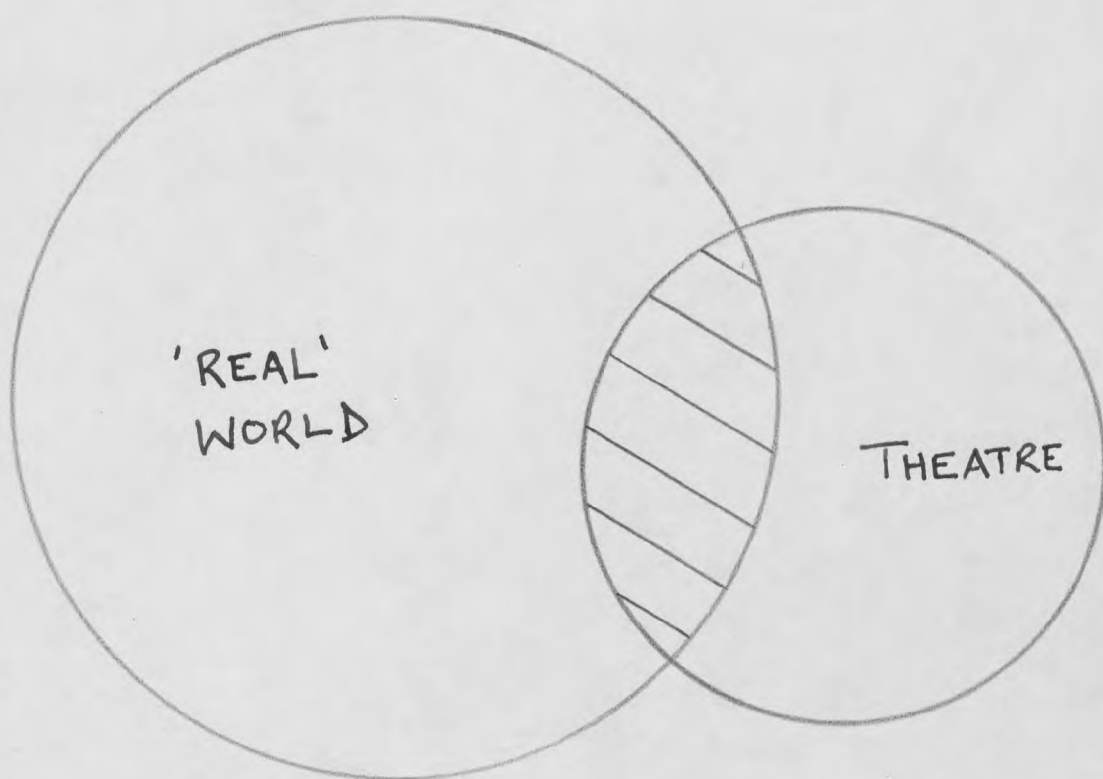
The theatricality of initiation and therapeutic ceremonies depends on whether they can be classified as 'performances'. We can establish this by assessing the following; how the people involved in them view themselves with regard to the activity as well as to those who stand around them as spectators and what actually goes on in the ceremonies. If the ceremonies are performance how do people actually perform them?

In other words, what do they bring to the performance to enhance its creation? These questions seek to establish if the performance is the organizing principle in the ceremonies. It is this that brings to the fore the aesthetic in theatre.

At this juncture it is imperative to reiterate that the distinction between a work of art and natural phenomenon commonly made in the west is difficult to discern in the African experience. In Malawian and Zambian traditional life these two are not marked out by separate existences. They, in fact, do co-exist side by side in one life experience. Diagrammatically our argument may be shown thus:

A NORMAL 'WESTERN' ESTABLISHED OUTLOOK



B THE MALAWIAN/ZAMBIAN TRADITIONAL OUTLOOK



Soyinka has put this in the following words:

Theatre [...] is one arena [...] in which man has attempted to come to terms with the spatial phenomenon of his being.<sup>16</sup>

The 'spatial vision of theatre' is not yet contracted into purely physical acting areas on a stage as diagram A suggests. It is still a 'symbolic arena for metaphysical contests'.<sup>17</sup> In diagram A the two are separated from each other. Theatre feeds on the 'real world' without necessarily giving back anything in return. In this conceptualization the onlooker is capable and encouraged to look at the two as separate. In diagram B however, there is an area of co-existence in which the functional nature of theatre takes root. The onlooker at one point looks at the two as separate entities, but at another he sees them merge and feed on each other - theatre borrowing signs from the real world whilst at the same time being of service to it through its overt functional qualities. The co-existence of art and the real world spelt out here explains why it is possible to have entertainment within a funeral situation. It also makes it very difficult to see the 'transformation' said to be fundamental to drama when we look for it in Malawian and Zambian indigenous theatre. Let us turn to the examples of Nyongolo and Mabzwoka just described to see how this is.

On one level the ceremonies are loaded with ritual significance. This is what most studies of initiation ceremonies and therapeutic rites have stressed. Because such studies stress 'function' rather than 'performance', the aesthetic qualities embedded in the ceremonies

have not been fully recognized. This has been so in spite of acknowledging that most of the action in these ceremonies is advanced through song, dance and mime among other things. On another level we find that performance is the organizing principle in them. The people who are not undergoing either initiation or the 'cleansing', talk of the ceremonies as 'dance'. In fact both occasions are referred to as 'dance'. When a girl is to be 'initiated', people refer to her as 'going to be danced'. The same is true of Mabzwoka which people refer to as 'dance' rather than treatment. Preparations for these ceremonies involve finding inter alia the right costumes, properties, musical instruments and indeed professional singers and drummers. All these are sought to enhance both the aesthetic and the functional aspects of the ceremonies.

The relationship of the people to the ceremonies depends on what part they are to play in them. In the case of the initiation ceremony the girls being initiated cannot be said to be there for their own entertainment. They believe, or at least they will have been told, that the initiation ceremony will see them through to a different and new experience. And since they are warned against speaking (that is active participation in the events is denied them) they cannot be said to be enjoying the experience nor to be entertained. For them the ritual aspect of the ceremony is not accompanied by entertainment even when it is obvious. Our informant's experience in the case of the initiation ceremony - particularly during the dance dramas - was initially one of shock and disbelief because she was still thinking of

the real world she had come from. The warnings she had received at the very beginning of the ceremony did not help in this matter either. However by the middle of the ceremony she was able to differentiate the world of the initiation ceremony and the one outside. The necessary suspension of disbelief and consequent transfer took place. She understood that she was being 'born again'. Having done so, everything fell into place. She no longer saw the naked women, the abusing women, not even her guide and instructress in their everyday roles as ordinary women from her village. She now saw them as people of the initiation arena whose identity was protected from the world outside by agreed etiquette learned and observed by all those who are initiated. This is something everybody attending the ceremony understands. That is why they can laugh, sing and dance as the various stages of the ceremony are gone through.

The instructress of the ceremony has a different relationship to the ceremony. Because of the job she has, to further the beliefs of her people, she sees the ceremony not only as a celebration, but a necessary event to be gone through by all girls. On this score the ceremony is ritual, but when the 'vignettes' are performed and the 'instruction' is taken over by the actresses of such playlets she becomes part of the audience. At this point, just like other women spectators, she waits to be entertained.

The 'patient' in the therapeutic ceremony has to revoke a special relationship with the ceremony. As a sick person the experience must be real. But his treatment demands that he be ready to play a part at

certain times in order for the ceremony to proceed towards its completion. So even if he is deeply engrossed in getting treatment, he has to keep one eye open, as it were, in order to respond appropriately to the demands of the ceremony. In such a situation the so called 'possession' has to be qualified as 'semi-trance' not complete possession. For even in the possessed state the patient responds aesthetically to the music and drumming that build him up to this state of being. Once again then the world of art co-exists with the real one.

What we have been labouring to say here is that what goes on in these ceremonies is both ritual and theatre. Ritual elements are summed up in the overall intentions of those who initiate the ceremonies in an attempt to reconcile man and his environment. Theatre surfaces as part of the actual fulfilment of these intentions. In this respect ritual is bigger than theatre. But the two are not exclusive of each other. The relationship of the various people surrounding these ceremonies to the ceremonies themselves is double-faced. Whilst fulfilling ritual calls they also in a very self-conscious way 'stage' activities specifically meant for an audience. This is an audience which shares the ambivalent attitude just described towards the ceremonies. It is because of this aspect that such ceremonies can also be seen as performances.

People employ costumes, make-up, masks, music, dance and mime in these performances. The 'attempted rape scene' in Nyongolo must depend, for its success, on elaborate and perhaps even symbolic



costuming in order to draw a sharp distinction between the characters and also to bring out pictorially the message of the scene. In other initiation ceremonies (from Malawi and Zambia) make-up is used both on initiates and figurines employed in the ceremony.<sup>18</sup> Masks are not unknown in certain instances. The well known Nyau cult of Malawi and Zambia is a masquerade rooted, as spectacle, in the use of masks and make-up.<sup>19</sup>

Both ceremonies described here are performed at specially selected places. The girls' initiation ceremony is carried out away from the village in an open clearing for most of the performance. The therapeutic performance seeks an open ground too, though not as secluded as the former. The stage in both cases is the inside of a circle that audiences create as they surround the performers. Here then we may talk of 'theatre-in-the-round'. Such an arrangement allows the impromptu role playing that goes on as instructions are being given out through mime in the Nyongolo dance without too much fuss. It also allows maximum concentration amongst the audience as they sing songs together. Soyinka talks about the discipline of such an audience:

Any individual within the 'audience' knows better than to add his voice arbitrarily even to the most seductive passages of an invocatory song, or to contribute a refrain to the familiar sequence of liturgical exchanges amongst the protagonists. The moment for choric participation is well-defined, but this does not imply that until such a moment, participation ceases. The so-called audience is itself an integral part of that arena of conflict; it contributes spiritual strength to the protagonist through its choric reality which must first be conjured up and established, defining and investing the arena through offerings and incantations. [...] Overt participation



when it comes is channelled through a formalised repertoire of gestures and liturgical responses. The 'spontaneous' participant from within the audience does not permit himself to give vent to a bare impulse or a euphoria which bring him out as a dissociated entity from within the choric mass.<sup>20</sup>

If there is need to participate in the dancing going on, it is into the middle of the circle that dancers go. Where the action of the lead performer depends on the support of an audience like in the Mabzwoka patient, the audience's proximity is important. His ability to transfer into a 'trance' state depends on the strength or power of music, singing, drumming and clapping of hands around him. The greater the musical 'din' the more the chances of his achieving the desired goal. In other words the 'venue', the 'stage' and the positioning of the audience described here support his role play.

When we talk of role play in these ceremonies we confine ourself to that which is consciously gone into towards fulfilling the 'performance' aspect of the ceremonies only. As such, in the girls' initiation ceremony we only look at it in the said 'vignettes'. Taking the case of the 'attempted rape scene' in Nyongolo dance once more, there is no doubt about the players' and audience's ability to distinguish the real from the fictive in their minds.

In the case of the patient in Mabzwoka things are not so clear cut. As we have said already the patient is both 'real' and imaginary as demanded by the performance. Joe de Graft talks of 'the awesome relationship between role-playing and sympathetic magic' as illustrated by a voodoo substitution sacrifice. Of role-playing in this he says that:

the decision to enter into an act of impersonation is always a conscious one, more or less, requiring some kind of physical and psychological preparation. But the form of the impersonation, in terms of what the impersonator does and how he does it, is sometimes not possible consciously to determine.<sup>21</sup>

This could also be said of the patient in the Mabzwoka ceremony.

Wanting to be healed and also being aware of the means by which this can be achieved he consciously submits to the procedures of the ceremony by responding to the music, drumming and incantations of the medicine man to the point of possession necessary for his taking on the characteristics of the 'spirits' that 'haunt' him in preparation for their exorcism. Such procedures in some societies, as Joe de Graft says, involve the use of 'potions, drugs, spells, chanting and powerfully rhythmic drumming'.<sup>22</sup> In Mabzwoka chanting, powerful rhythmic drumming and potions are evident. In the Vimbuza variant of this ceremony the medicine man who also has to reach the point of 'trance' before he can treat his patient may actually stop the singing and drumming if they are not powerful enough. In other words he engages in a 'conscious selection and shaping of creative elements' in order to enhance the ultimate goal. This again points to the kind of role-playing that goes on. It is difficult to determine the demarcation line between 'acting' meant to lead to 'possession' and 'possession' itself. But both are there or at least we are made to believe 'possession' takes place.

TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCES IN A DUAL SOCIETY

So far we have been looking at the performances as they exist in a village. Today village life in Africa, not just in Malawi and Zambia, is confronted by various influences from the processes of urbanization, modernization and politicization just to mention a few. The performances we have been looking at now exist in a dual society (rural and urban). Quite apart from the indigenous people being ready to protect their heritage there are others also interested in doing this in their own way. It is now almost a truism to say that missionaries in Malawi and Zambia were the first to have an impact on such traditional performances as they insisted on christianizing the natives of these countries. For most people this impact was negative as it was mostly built on denigrating native life rather than understanding it. Most commonly picked as examples of pagan or heathen ways were such performances as these just discussed and dances.

When David Livingstone first came across typical African dance his response was interesting. Though a pioneer missionary himself he did not rush to condemn them. Fascinated he certainly was. He describes one such experience thus:

The people usually show their joy and work off their excitement in dances and songs. The dance [of the Makololo] consists of the men standing nearly naked in a circle, with clubs or small battle-axes in their hands, and each roaring at the loudest pitch of his voice, while they simultaneously lift one leg, stamp heavily twice with it, then lift the other and give one stamp with that; this is the only movement in common. The arms and head are thrown about also in every direction; and all this time the roaring is kept up with the utmost possible vigour; the

continued stamping makes a cloud of dust ascend, and they leave a deep ring in the ground where they have stood. If the scene were witnessed in a lunatic asylum it would be nothing out of the way, and quite appropriate even, as a means of letting off the excessive excitement of the brain [...] As I never tried it, and am unable to enter into the spirit of the thing, I cannot recommend the Makololo polka to the dancing world [...] They [the Makololo] often asked if white people ever danced. I thought of the disease called St. Vitus's dance, but could not say that all our dancers were affected by it, and gave an answer which, I ought to be ashamed to own, did not raise some of our young countrywomen in the estimation of the Makololo.<sup>23</sup>

We quote this passage at such length to show the comparative and unique attitude Livingstone had in the face of strange phenomena. Condemnation of the dances is there alright, but it is not confined to African dances alone. Even English dances sometimes display features quite ludicrous. Throughout his diary entries he shows an acute awareness of how man's interpretation of his world often depends on his culture. This is very different from what later missionaries showed. Of course these are people who actually lived amongst the natives for longer periods than people of Livingstone's brand ever did. These criticized native dances with an air of authority. Compare Livingstone's entry and Fraser's here:

Now, some of the dances are very pretty, and healthy exercises, against which one can make no moral objection. Especially [...] the kraal dances of the Ngoni, called Ingoma. But I do not think the same can be said of most of the Central African dances. There are not many Europeans who have seen these village dances worked out to their climax. But I have frequently, especially in the earlier days, before our strong objection to them was universally known. And now the presence of a European in the village makes them ashamed to repeat all they do when they are alone, for they know it is foul.<sup>24</sup>

If missionaries objected to African dances, it was on moral grounds.



These were morals as they were known in their home countries.

Whittaker says that:

... whilst the presence of missionaries in an area is now seen as a kind of environmental pollution, the early missionaries saw moral pollution around them, hence their interference with other people's cultures, including religion.<sup>25</sup>

The only things missionaries seemed to respect were the tribal structures and their emphasis on bureaucracy. U.M.C.A. and D.R.C.M. 'were particularly anxious not to disrupt these'. It is easy to speculate on the reasons behind this. With as rigid a hierarchy and sense of bureaucracy as observed by the people they worked amongst, their job must have been made slightly easier if they dealt with just the leader of the tribe than the whole community. However liberal they might have tried to be there were occasions when they felt their European culture better than that of the native. Katengeza's experiences quoted earlier on is evidence of this. It did not take long before anthropologists questioned this attitude. This is as it was likely to be. The anthropologist in Africa was actually interested in those very things the missionary condemned and intended to eradicate. Culwick called for a halt to the unsympathetic condemnation of African ways of behaviour which was based on nothing more than biases and uninformed opinions from the west. These were his words:

it has profoundly shocked me to see with what alacrity [the European minority in Africa] lays down the law to the latter. Even in matters whose true appreciation requires years of painstaking study, we come across snap decisions and hasty expressions of opinion based on nothing more than prejudice and western convention, and in no case is this more true than in the moral field.<sup>26</sup>



Unfortunately such opinions came from scholars rather than those people who had actual contact with Africans. Missionaries controlled, for the most part of the colonial period, the education of the African in Malawi and Zambia; so such views as those held by Fraser held sway and had far reaching results, more so than those of people like Culwick. It is against these former views that most political sloganeering in the field of culture has addressed itself. If Malawians and Zambians talk of cultural revolution, they start from this premise. Politicians talk of their culture as having been debased and denigrated in the colonial days. They insist on restoring these to their rightful place in society. For it is through such a restoration that African people will really 'discover their national identity'.<sup>27</sup>

But if indigenous performances suffered persecution in the colonial period, they lack support in independent Africa. In spite of the calls for cultural revolution made by politicians from all over Africa 'many people within [governments consider it] as less of a priority than economic and political revolutions'.<sup>28</sup> President Kaunda in Zambia, arguing for the revival of his country's cultural heritage, has pointed out that this is necessary although many people would regard spending money and energy on culture as irrelevant to national development.<sup>29</sup> Another problem faced by indigenous culture is the competition from foreign cultures. With urbanization have come a good deal of foreign cultural artefacts and modes of behaviour whose influence goes beyond the towns. It is not uncommon today to find, even in the remotest of places in Malawi or Zambia, that the 'jukebox'

has replaced the village dance group or communal dancing and singing at a beer party.

Aware of these problems, governments of Malawi and Zambia have agencies whose duties in a nutshell are those of a watch-dog, conservator and promoter in one. In 1966 the Government of Zambia established the Department of Cultural Services:

whose objectives [were] basically to foster the interests of all institutions and organisations whose aims [were] directed towards the promotion and preservation of culture in Zambia, and to provide and to recommend where appropriate financial and other assistance which the government may approve.<sup>30</sup>

Amongst the projects to be launched by this Directorate was the support and development of a Zambian Arts Trust whose duty was to promote 'drama, dance and music with Zambian flavour'.

In Malawi, it has been the political party which has had obvious and direct interest in indigenous culture.<sup>31</sup> Unlike the Government, the Malawi Congress Party's stand as regards say initiation ceremonies and other traditional institutions has been clear. At its 1972 annual convention which was held in Zomba, delegates passed a resolution inter alia calling for the revival of some positive aspects of traditional institutions and initiation rites through which young people are taught good behaviour and prepared for adult life. The Ministry of Youth and Culture in Malawi was set up almost at the same time as the Directorate of Culture in Zambia, but its effect upon cultural life in the country was only felt in the organisation of traditional dances and beauty contests nationwide more than in other areas. The ministry had no cultural policy to guide its activities. In 1981 a UNESCO consultant,

Mr Phillips, was sent out to Malawi with the express purpose of assisting 'the government of Malawi to elaborate its Cultural Development Policy and Plan'.<sup>32</sup> In the same year the Ministry of Youth and Culture shed its cultural wing to the Ministry of Education. One hopes 'culture' there will mean more than dancing and beauty contests!

The UNESCO consultant sent to Malawi was supposed to review the Government's activities in its attempts to preserve its cultural heritage as well as give some guidelines for policy formation on cultural development and implementation in the country. Amongst the recommendations he made, he suggested that 'an association of the Performing Arts (with the task inter alia of promoting public interest in dancing and organising amateur and professional dance groups') and a national travelling troupe be formed.<sup>33</sup>

Zambia already has a national dance troupe made up of specially selected traditional dancers and musicians from all the provinces of the country. Chifunyise has identified three problems inherent in such schemes. The first problem is that of truly representing all ethnic groups equally at the expense of popularity. Sometimes it may happen that all popular dances come from one area in which case selectors have the problem of leaving some out for the sake of equal representation. The second problem is that:

Many people [do] not like the way the troupe [represents] the dances outside their original, realistic and functional contexts. They [believe] that this [is] neither promotion nor preservation of Zambian traditional dances but a deliberate process of transformation.<sup>34</sup>

In the process of fulfilling its objectives the National Dance Troupe of Zambia has been destroying the major aesthetic elements and functional characteristics of the traditional performing art forms.<sup>35</sup>

The third problem arises out of the dual nature of Malawian and Zambian society. The urban part of this society is receiving a good deal of ideas and modes of behaviour from foreign cultures. Cultural organisations see it as their duty to check the alien influences.

Most obvious amongst foreign cultural elements permeating urban Malawian and Zambian life are ways of dress. The mini-skirt has always been isolated as enemy number one in this respect. In Malawi it was subject of a ban. In Zambia the U.N.I.P. has been trying hard to get it off the scene. When the National Dance Troupe puts on shows, its costumes and ways of dancing, though traditional, seem to go contrary to the very ideas the government and cultural organisations are trying to promote. Most traditional dances like the Nyongolo dance from Malawi involve what may be termed erotic gestures. The costumes worn here and indeed in most traditional dances reveal more of the performer's body than does say a mini-skirt. Here then was the dilemma in Zambia:

[ ... ] many traditional dance groups, including the National Dance Troupe, in their efforts to be as original and as realistic as possible, performed in traditional costumes which were controversial considering the [ Department of Culture's ] war on immoral forms of dress.<sup>36</sup>

Michael Etherton sums the attempts by governments to preserve and promote indigenous cultures in words which further compound the problems given here, thus:



there is the contradictory relationship between the traditional performing arts and the new elites. On the one hand the cultural bureaucrats and theatre artists transform the art of the people into a product for bourgeois and international consumption - whilst at the same time professing to revive the traditional cultural values of the people. On the other hand, traditional performances with a conservative or reactionary function are often made to appear radical in the politics of the new nation-state, and the new urban culture of the proletariat is derided even by those who manoeuvre themselves into marketing it.<sup>37</sup>

There is yet another way in which such performances have responded to the onslaught of urbanization and its allies. If we return to the initiation and therapeutic ceremonies once again we shall see how this has been done.

The Nyongolo dance discussed in this thesis is part of an initiation ceremony whose performance is restricted to the village. The same is true with the Mabzwoka performance. If township parents want their daughters initiated into adulthood they have to send them to the village. Due to detribalization associated with urbanization most parents living in town have given up observing such practices. So one finds a great many girls going into marriage without undergoing initiation (which used to be a prerequisite to family life). An interesting phenomenon is however taking place in most urban centres of Malawi and Zambia today. This is the Kitchen Party held for all girls about to be married. We see this as the girls' initiation ceremony's response to present day demands. A brief discussion of the Kitchen Party should therefore demonstrate how this is so, as well as show how tradition interacts with modernity.

We also need to show how the work of the so-called 'cultural



bureaucrats and theatre artists' is transforming 'the art of the people into a product for bourgeois and international consumption'. For this we shall look at Vimbuza (a variant of Mabzwoka) as presented in its 'entertainment' form from Malawi and Zambia. But first the Kitchen Party.<sup>38</sup>

### The Kitchen Party

The Kitchen Party is held at the suggestion of the girl's parents. Its organisation is left in the hands of someone outside the immediate family of the girl to be married. The organisation involves establishing a Kitchen Party committee which looks into selecting a venue, getting donations of food and money ready for the occasion as well as sending out invitations. The committee also identifies elderly women of good 'moral' standing in the community to help in the instructing of the girl on the day of the party, and a younger, but married, woman who plays the guide for the novice.

Strictly speaking invitations to such parties are only sent to those women who were properly married (i.e. those whose marriages are traditionally recognized). Occasionally girls not fitting such a category gatecrash, whereupon they are sent away in a very rude manner. No men are allowed to the parties, although their help may be sought where finances and transport are wanted. Usually such parties are held on the Sunday a week before the wedding.

When the day arrives the committee women and some helpers assemble

at the selected venue early in the morning to prepare food and the house in readiness for the party (which usually starts at about 1 p.m. and goes on to about 6 p.m. in the evening). The following is the procedure of events on the day:

1. A specially appointed lady Master of Ceremony (M.C.) organizes usherettes to welcome invited guests who bring along gifts (usually kitchen items and utensils). The girl will have come much earlier and been 'locked' away in a 'secret' room.
2. M.C. leads team of relatives in song and some gentle dancing as they wait for more people to come.
3. When a sufficient group has gathered in the sitting room, the girl is brought out into the room. Her face is covered so that people do not see her yet. She comes at the back of a line of singing and dancing women. The songs sung here are mostly from initiation ceremonies of the village.
4. The girl is seated where everybody can see her. She is flanked by a guide and an elderly woman. Before her is placed a table on which are put two plates. These plates are for donations to be made by whoever wants to say something when the time comes.
5. M.C. calls upon a specially appointed woman (usually a church elder) to open the ceremony with a church hymn and prayer. This is followed by a short sermon on the need for proper weddings and marriage between man and woman. Genesis usually provides the text for this sermon.
6. M.C. calls upon a second woman to give the meaning and function of a Kitchen Party. This is there, they say, to replace the traditional 'initiation ceremony' which prepared girls for married life. It also gives the girl an opportunity to collect a few items which might be handy in the early days of her married life (referring to the gifts brought by guests).
7. M.C. asks the guide to unveil the girl so that everybody knows her. Then she introduces the mother. Preceding these two tasks the M.C. sings two songs which ask the gathering to make some donation, so that

she can reveal the two people's identities.

8. M.C. calls on another woman to give the girl a few tips on Home Economics.
9. M.C. opens the floor to all who wish to give some advice to the girl. Before anybody does so, they make a donation in the girl's (and sometimes the mother's) plate. Usually all this will be accompanied by some singing and dancing. On some occasions short skits have been known to be employed by instructors.
10. After some time, just before the party comes to a close, the M.C. summarizes major points raised by the various women who gave some advice.
11. M.C. declares the Kitchen Party over. Everybody except some women leave the house.
12. Remaining women (specially requested to do so) retire with the girl back to her room for further 'intimate' instructions. These instructions concern sex matters in the family - the instructions might involve some demonstrations not too far removed from the Nyongolo 'sexual intercourse' dance.

If we are to compare the Kitchen Party to the girls' initiation ceremony from which the Nyongolo dance has been extracted we find there are a few things that have been added to the ceremony as well as others that have been subtracted from it. We can only speculate about the reasons for such modifications, for nobody can really say for sure why these have taken place. The same is true about the origins of the Kitchen Party in Malawian and Zambian urban centres. Let us look at these changes.

The most obvious addition here are Christian elements. There are the opening prayer, the church hymn and the sermon based on the book of Genesis. Considering that for most of the colonial period initiation ceremonies were not welcomed by the church, one sure way of making them

acceptable, was to incorporate into them obvious elements central to church etiquette. The idea of a Master of Ceremony is also strange to the initiation ceremony. Its inclusion ensures the observation of time - a phenomenon which is very western in origins. Although attendance strictly speaking remains open to all married women, the invitation letters carry a good deal of weight. Some women will not show up at a kitchen party even if it is for a girl they are related to unless they receive such a letter. The idea of gifts for the girl and her mother is another new thing, which has come for economic reasons (more than anything else) mostly meaningful in an urban setting. The advice or instructions given to the girl come from women of various tribes. The Kitchen Party unlike the traditional initiation ceremony is not tribal. This is very much in keeping with urban life, which is seeing more and more people become detribalized. In both Malawi and Zambia politicians are insisting on NATION building rather than tribal differences. On another level politicians would like to see the church adopt more and more local methods and ideas. So it is not easy to determine who is actually causing cultural change in this area. The practices of a money economy should also be taken into account here.

Whilst we note additions to the initiation ceremony we cannot ignore the subtractions it has suffered. The duration of the ceremony is now only one afternoon instead of a period varying from one week to sometimes two months. Instead of a village ceremony the whole rite has become an individual affair, for Kitchen Parties are only held for girls whose wedding date has been fixed and each such girl expects her



'own' party. The Kitchen Party instructions are in two parts whilst the traditional initiation ceremony instructions were all open. There is now a tendency towards confidentiality over matters pertaining to sex in the Kitchen Party, whereas in the traditional ceremony everything was open. On the whole we could say the Kitchen Party is a shrunken initiation ceremony. This seems to be what is happening to all indigenous performances. Vimbuza is another example of such a phenomenon.

### Vimbuza

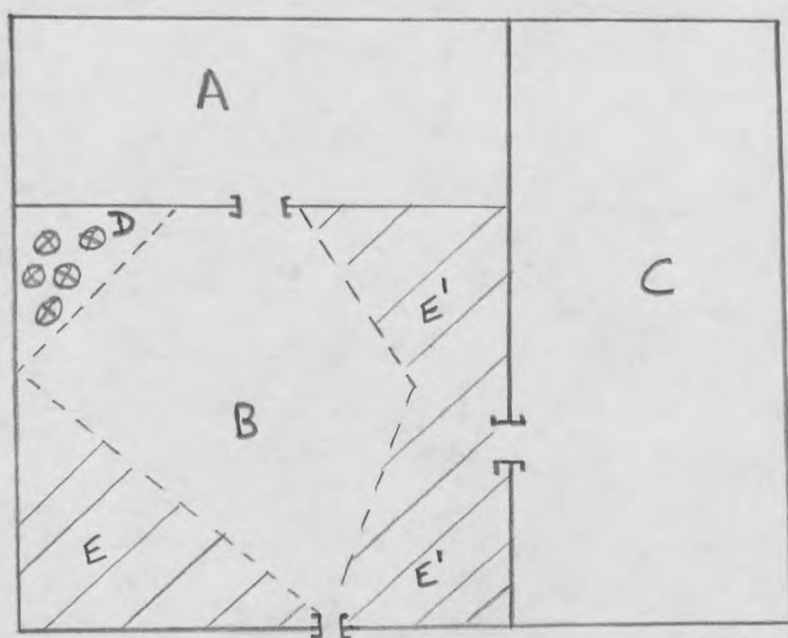
Our discussion here is based on a field trip we made to one Buki Banda, a herbalist in the Northern Region of Malawi, in September 1979.<sup>39</sup> When we went to see this man he confirmed he practised Vimbuza as a therapeutic performance. He agreed to hold a special performance for us after pointing out that he did not quite like the idea of people coming to take pictures of him at work without ever letting him see the pictures. (We had a video recorder with us on this occasion.) We assured him he could see his performance on the following day if he wanted. The performance was arranged for the following evening.

When we arrived at the agreed time we found our performer preparing for the dance. He had his team of drummers ready and warming their drums outside the hut in which the performance was to take place. Soon the drums were ready and the drummers started playing them without songs. They were drumming a beat which they claimed people as far away as 10 miles would recognize as Vimbuza drums. This was their



call. Ideally this should be an invitation to everybody, both the sick and those who simply wanted to be entertained. And sure enough a crowd began to collect outside the hut.

Unannounced, the herbalist left us for the hut soon after lamps were lit inside. The drummers were called in. The drumming resumed from inside. Then the audience followed in. The herbalist was inside another room as the drawing shows:



- A — Dressing room for herbalist.
- B — Performance area.
- C — Side room for herbs, water etc.
- D — Drummers.
- E — Men audience.
- E' — Women audience.

The drummers went on for some time before the herbalist appeared. The audience, made up of men, women and children, joined the drumming by clapping to the drums. The herbalist appeared wearing bangles, leopard skin, raffia and other ornaments. He started a song which was reciprocated by the audience. After singing for some time he started to dance. Occasionally he would stop the music and shout at the drummers as well as the audience for failing to drum and sing correctly

respectively. Then he would resume with more vigour. The audience and drummers did likewise. Nobody danced except the herbalist.

His dancing was a demonstration of what he was singing about. In one song he was singing about the return of soldiers from the 1st world war, and in his dancing he imitated their marching, saluting and shouting commands. All this was syncopated with the drumming, clapping and singing of the women. In another song he was singing about the burrowing bug, demonstrating its movements using his body. This dancing went on and on. At one point he just uttered unintelligible words which later on we were told marked a state of trance.

We were at this place from 7 p.m. to 12 midnight when we decided to drive back to town. As we were leaving outside the hut there was an elderly man who was just getting ready to come in and take over the dancing from the herbalist. We could not stay to watch him, but on the following day when the herbalist came to watch our video recording of his performance, he told us that this man was actually responding 'spiritually' to the music and drumming inside. In other words we had found this man in the process of being 'possessed'.

When we were showing the video, the herbalist constantly marvelled at the way he was arching his back and the way he leapt to the drums and clapping. Clearly he was quite happy with the results of his work.

Let us now turn to the changes that have taken place in Vimbuza as it attempts to accommodate environmental requirements. If Vimbuza is to have a hold on any audience the performer must recognize the

importance of time. No audience in the 20th century will be prepared to watch a show day in day out, let alone for weeks. Therefore the peripheral medicinal elements are dispensed with. The whole performance is shortened. It can now take place even if there is no patient. The performer can hold a show as long as he has drummers. He can even build a reputation as a dancer. Such is the case of Siyayo Mkandawire from Malawi (also very well known in Zambia).<sup>40</sup> The authenticity of the performance gradually becomes dilute as performers try to incorporate elements of other popular performances. The Vimbuza dancer of our study identified types within his dance; for example he talked of Vimbuza proper, Vyanusi and Virombo dance steps. The last one being an imitation of Nyan from the Chewa of Central Malawi and Eastern Zambia.

Because the 'performance' aspects of the phenomenon are emphasized, more and more pre-eminence is given to the audience and its positioning. Whilst the therapeutic performance is clearly separated into stages which restrict participation to the various groups present, the Vimbuza for entertainment is open to everyone present. Instead of confining the indoor part to patients, audiences can now come in. As numbers swell inside the hut, the performance can be moved back to the open ground.

The presence of these performances in the face of urbanisation

should not mislead us into believing that there is co-existence between urbanisation and tradition. The changes that have taken place in the two ceremonies suggest a one-way process more than interaction which co-existence implies. That both performances have been diluted and that they have shrunk in texture goes without question. We can safely conclude that these are disappearing, even with the political slogans pronouncing the return to the people's roots in the air.

The next chapter looks at what would have been a possible development from the meeting of urban and traditional culture, A culture which some people call syncretic. But again this culture's survival remains in question, so that we are left with the big question of 'what in future years will be seen to be Africa's indigenous performances?'

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

- 1 Such ceremonies as those held soon after the birth of a child are sometimes held privately within the family concerned. See J.P. Bruwer, 'The Composition of a Chewa Village (Mudzi)', *African Studies*, Johannesburg, December 1949.
- 2 See Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977, chapter VI, p.68 and Audrey Richards, Chisungu: A girl's initiation ceremony among the Bemba of Zambia, Travistock Publications, London 1982.
- 3 Sir J.G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, MacMillan Press Ltd., (abridged edition) 1978, p.905.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Audrey Richards, op. cit., p.55.
- 6 Work done by Victor Turner on Ndembu and Audrey Richards on the Chisungu amongst the Bemba of Zambia are well known examples. From Malawi there are studies done by Mary Tew, Clyde-Mitchell, Stannus and Werner to name but a few.
- 7 See Thomas A. Green, 'Towards a Definition of Folk Drama', Journal of The American Folklore Society 91 (1978), p.846, and Anne C. Burson, 'Model and Text in Folk Drama', Journal of The American Folklore Society 93 (1980), p.369.
- 8 Patience Gibbs, 'Drama and Theatre in Malawi: A Study of their Development and Directions', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Malawi, 1980, Chapter 1.
- 9 This is the way my informant, Miss Jessie Sagawa from Mulanje (Malawi), put it as she described the Nyongolo dance-drama.
- 10 Patience Gibbs, op. cit. She does so in the first chapter of her thesis.
- 11 My informant was Mr Pandukani Banda from Chikwakwa, Malawi.
- 12 Victor Turner would support this, judging from his work on Chihamba.



See his Revelation and Divination Ndembu Ritual, Cornell University Press 1975, Part One pp.37-158.

- 13 See Petr Bogatyrev, 'Semiotic in the Folk Theatre', in Semiotics of Art, eds. Matejka and Titunik, M.I.T. Press, Massachusetts, 1976, p.52.
- 14 Lionel Gossman, 'Signs of the Theatre', Theatre Research International, Vol.II, No.1, October 1976, p.5.
- 15 Ibid., p.11.
- 16 Wole Soyinka, Myth, Literature and the African World. Cambridge University Press, 1975, p.40.
- 17 Ibid., p.40.
- 18 Audrey Richards, op. cit. and Patience Gibbs, op. cit.
- 19 See Mary Tew, Peoples of the Lake Nyasa Region, Oxford University Press, 1950.
- 20 Wole Soyinka, op. cit., pp.38-39.
- 21 Joe de Graft, 'Roots in African Drama and Theatre' in African Literature Today, No.8, Drama in Africa, H.E.B., 1976, pp.1-25.
- 22 Ibid., p.1.
- 23 David Livingstone, Missionary Travels, Ward Lock & Company, 1910, pp.196-197.
- 24 Donald Fraser, Winning a Primitive People, pp.75-76.
- 25 P.H. Whittacker, 'Some aspects of educational development in Nyasaland/Malawi from its beginnings to 1974', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1975.
- 26 Culwick, Good out of Africa: A Study in Relativity of Morals. The Rhodes-Livingstone Papers No.8, 1943, p.42.
- 27 Dr K.K. Kaunda, A Humanist in Africa, Longmans, London, 1966, p.59.
- 28 Stephen Chifunyise, 'The Formative Years: An analysis of the Development of Theatre in Zambia from 1950 to 1970'. Staff Seminar Paper, Literature and Language Department, University of Zambia, January 1978.

- 29 Dr Kaunda, op. cit., p.59.
- 30 Cultural Events in Africa, No.18, May 1965, p.5.
- 31 There is only one political party in Malawi namely, the Malawi Congress Party.
- 32 In 1981 Mr Charles Phillips (a Ghanaian) was sent out to Malawi by UNESCO as a cultural policy consultant. See Charles Phillips, Towards a Cultural Development Policy, UNESCO (UNDP), Paris, 1982, p.1.
- 33 Ibid., p.2.
- 34 Stephen Chifunyise, op. cit., p.78.
- 35 Ibid., p.78.
- 36 Ibid., p.79.
- 37 Michael Etherton, The Development of African Drama, Hutchinson, 1982, p.23.
- 38 This information has been drawn from informal discussions with several women. I am particularly indebted to Mrs Grace Mainala and my own wife for detailed outlay of procedures in the Kitchen Party.
- 39 Mr Buki Banda is both an ordinary herbalist as well as a Vimbuza dancer.
- 40 Etherton, op. cit., p.355.

## CHAPTER SIX

AN EXAMPLE OF SYNCRETIC DRAMA: MALIPENGAIntroduction

Chapter five has dealt with a theatre form which has tradition at its base. Whilst emphasizing the indigenous qualities of this theatre and the problems of demarcating where it emerges from normal activity, it has also been pointed out that forces were brought to bear on it during the colonial period. In more recent times political awareness in the region has brought in attempts at cultural reforms with their own effects. On the surface these efforts seem renovative, but, on closer scrutiny, they show up as contradictory and retrogressive. One thing that the chapter has not done however is to look at the possibility of a resultant culture where colonialism met indigenous cultures. This chapter aims to do so.

Such a possibility has been charted out by other scholars elsewhere. Without necessarily talking about this issue specifically A.M. Jones' description of the Mganda dance from East and Central Africa points to it.<sup>1</sup> The work of Clyde-Mitchell on the Kalela dance of Northern Rhodesia<sup>2</sup> (now Zambia), was, as T.O. Ranger says, an attempt to

demonstrate 'how the performance of a dance by a group of young men [...] could serve as an analogue or metaphor for the essential pattern of urban social relations'.<sup>3</sup> These are social relations resulting from the impact of colonialism on indigenous populations of East and Central Africa. Ranger's own work on the Beni Ngoma emphasizes this same possibility.<sup>4</sup> This culture, which David Kerr refers to as 'a child of dialectical interaction with colonialism' is the subject of this chapter.<sup>5</sup> In Kerr's words:

The impact of colonialism and rapid urbanization created an urgent need for new cultural forms through which the uneducated and semi-educated populace could meditate and interpret the rapid economic and social transformation it was experiencing.<sup>6</sup>

Kerr refers to such cultural forms as 'syncretic' ones. We are aware of the oversimplification implied by such a classification when the collision of cultures is confined to forces of colonialism and tradition. The possibility of tribal differences and influences upon a people's cultural life, as Herskovits points out, should not be ruled out when considering cultural change in Africa.<sup>7</sup>

Although it is not the primary concern of this thesis to chart out such cultural changes, this chapter aims to examine an example of a cultural form which some people have used as an index for measuring such change. This is the Malipenga dance-drama as practised in Malawi. Malipenga should serve as an example of a syncretic art-form for both Malawi and Zambia because it is common (though with slight modifications) to both countries. Several people who have looked at its ancestry seem to agree about its origins and relationship to other variants of

the dance. We shall look at this presently. But first what is Malipenga?

What is Malipenga?

Malipenga is found in the Central and Northern Regions of Malawi.<sup>8</sup> It is commonly classified as a variant of a dance-drama which started as Beni in East Africa.<sup>9</sup> Other variant forms associated with Beni are Kalela from Zambia and Mganda from both Malawi and Zambia.<sup>10</sup> In Malawi the name Mganda is used interchangeably with Malipenga.<sup>11</sup> All studies on these various forms suggest a common ancestry. They all show that the variants of the dance-drama still share basic features. It is only recently that a shadow of doubt has been thrown over this agreement. This is Malawi has suggested a possible alternative to the origins of Malipenga, by saying that it could have come from South Africa, and thus removed it from the family of Beni.<sup>12</sup> However it is not the intention of this chapter to enter into a dispute of such an issue. Suffice it to say this study is based on the popular belief that Malipenga, Kalela and Mganda are variants of Beni. So it broaches the subject of Malipenga first from this general ancestry and finally it settles on a specific example of Malipenga from Nkhata Bay District in Northern Malawi.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest study of these variants of Beni is that of Jones (1947) on Mganda.<sup>14</sup> He described the dance as:

a ceremonial dance [which] is frankly a burlesque of a military parade: in its full form [...] it lasts from mid-



day to sunset. It has two distinct parts: the Procession, and the Dancing in situ.<sup>15</sup>

Such a description takes the performance beyond mere dancing to include mime and role playing as the word 'burlesque' suggests. Later on in the same study he compared the Mganda dance to the English Morris Dance and pointed to some striking parallels between them.<sup>16</sup> Jones' treatment of the Mganda dance is quite full for he distinguished the two parts of the performance as well as looking at the songs that accompanied the actual 'dancing'. The dramatic qualities of this performance surface more obviously in the 'procession' than in the dancing at the end.

These qualities are understood even more clearly when one reads Clyde-Mitchell's discussion of the Kalela variant of the dance-drama. His study starts rather simply, but it reveals a good deal about what the dance might mean. Starting with an explanation thus:

Kalela is the name of a popular 'tribal' dance on the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia [now Zambia].<sup>17</sup>

he proceeds to discuss the significance of the performance and reveals how it is in fact a parody or metaphor of the social relationships of the time between blacks and whites. In a rather definitive way Clyde-Mitchell says that:

Whatever form modern Mbeni dances may take it is abundantly clear that these early dances were a sort of pantomime of the social structure of the local European community.<sup>18</sup>

Koma-Koma's book on the same dance is entitled Malipenga kapena Mganda (Malipenga or Mganda) stressing the close relationship between the two names.<sup>19</sup> In fact as far as he is concerned this is even

closer than the term 'variant' suggests. For him Malipenga and Mganda are interchangeable. However it should be borne in mind that Koma-Koma is referring to a specific variant found in Malawi. Going back to the question of establishing what Malipenga is, he opens his book with the following words:

Mganda is not like an animal or a man. It is a form of recreation which is common in our country of Malawi, particularly in the Northern and Central Regions of the country [...] and in some parts of Lundazi in Zambia [...]. This form of recreation resembles, very much, a military parade.<sup>20</sup> (My own translation.)

Extending the locality of the dance into Tanzania and Kenya, Ranger compares what he describes as:

a most enjoyable dance to watch and listen to [...] performed by a team [...] organized on the basis of rank<sup>21</sup>

to the Charivaris of 16th century France, especially in the way they reflect some of the realities of the 'colonial situation'.<sup>22</sup> He says that:

sometimes the dance [took] the form of a parade, a procession, a march past; sometimes it took the form of dance in platoon form. Sometimes it took the form of a circling drill step.<sup>23</sup>

He, like Jones, recognizes the procession part of the dance. So for him once again this is not just a dance, but a performance with a message. He also establishes that Mganda, Kalela and Malipenga are all variants of Beni.<sup>24</sup>

More recently This is Malawi talked of Malipenga as 'a modern dance for men'.<sup>25</sup> And indeed it is modern when it is compared to other indigenous dances of the country. The restriction of the dance to men, only holds if we ignore the processional aspect of the

performance. Even without this aspect women have a part to play in a typical Malipenga performance as we are going to show later.

Going back to the question which opened this section then, we might say that Malipenga is a dance-drama which has grown out of an African experience and understanding of western military behaviour as exemplified by 'colonial' soldiers. But how did the dance come about?

### Origins of Malipenga

Our search for Malipenga's origins is more concerned with what actually gave rise to it than anything else. Once again the studies cited above provide a most convenient and perhaps even more reliable source for such information. It is important to stress that a discussion of this nature is at best speculation. Jones concedes this point when he expresses a desire for more information on the origins of Mganda. His speculation starts with the following words:

[Mganda] took its rise in East Africa during the Great War, 1914-1918, and was brought to Northern Rhodesia [now Zambia] by the Tonga tribe [of Malawi]. It became popular on the Copperbelt and down the railway line [...] During the years it has spread to the villages round Fort Jameson [now Chipata] where it has undergone certain important modifications.<sup>26</sup>

Clyde-Mitchell on the other hand talks of the variant of Kalela as having 'started around the year 1930 on Chisi Island in Lake Bangweulu'.<sup>27</sup> He even names one Kalulu as the creator of the dance. But the dance's spread had to await the man's joining the Northern Rhodesia Regiment of the King's African Rifles in 1939. How much of Clyde-Mitchell's information is true has to be weighed against the possibility of his

being told fibs by his informants, particularly as regards the man named Kalulu (which is the Chichewa/Nyanja name for Rabbit). In local folklore this animal is associated with cunning and cleverness. So one wonders whether Mitchell was not simply being made fun of. He also says that it is from Mbeni that Kalela grew. In Nyasaland (now Malawi) the word Beni was a corruption of the English word Band. The semantic link is the key to the question; since the essential feature of the Beni is a 'mock military band'.<sup>28</sup>

Referring to the origins of this dance Koma-Koma has this to say:

In 1914 during the First World War people from Usisya [Northern Malawi] saw soldiers marching; as they marched they played their trumpets and drums. All walking in step. When the war came to an end, after the soldiers had gone, Usisya people started imitating the way the soldiers had been marching.<sup>29</sup>

So once again the source of this dance comes back to soldiers. Koma-Koma of course does not subscribe to the idea of East African origins. Rather he makes the dance indigenous to the Lakeshore of Malawi amongst the Tonga (these are the people of Usisya) who in turn, if we accept Jones' speculation, brought it into Zambia.

Ranger, anxious to establish a connection between the dance and colonisation, says:

In its region of origin Beni was co-existent with colonial rule.<sup>30</sup>

He sees it as an 'attempt to reproduce the effect of a military brass-band'.<sup>31</sup> This is Malawi taking a rather non-committal look at its origins gives two possible sources:

It is believed that [Malipenga] developed [...] from the military parades of the old King's African Rifles. But it



also could have been brought here by Malawians who were working in Zimbabwe and South Africa, where they developed it from the Salvation Army type of brass bands.<sup>32</sup>

Our interest here is simply to indicate what some people think about the origins of the dance. Out of these speculations there are a few observations one can make. There is general agreement that the dance stems from the meeting of different cultures. In other words Malipenga (or whatever its variants) is indeed a 'syncretic' performance. Another observation to be made is that the origins also point to clear affiliation between the dance and military behaviour and etiquette.

Having seen the speculations, one wonders whether the claim that Malipenga or Mganda is a variant of Beni, as Ranger suggests, holds. In Malawi both Malipenga and Beni exist as two separate dances. The former as Koma-Koma says is confined to the Northern and Central Regions whereas the latter is common in the Southern lakeshore area amongst an entirely different ethnic group - the Yao. It is clear that both dances display an influence of the 'military' in their performance. But there are basic differences in the songs, dance steps, musical instruments and costumes used as well as their organization. We shall not look at these differences here. Suffice it to say they are both cultural forms of a syncretic nature. Let us now look at the occasion when Malipenga is held.

#### The Occasion

Although Malipenga performances seem to be common during the



fallow period in Malawi, it would be an over simplification to associate this phenomenon with traditional beliefs. The choice of the fallow period for performances is something new. It would seem that traditionally any occasion of celebration could be enough reason for having a performance. Indeed it is this very 'fluid' nature of occasion that gave rise to concern amongst political leaders in the late sixties and early seventies in Malawi. Malipenga dancing was a subject of discussion during the 1970 annual Malawi Congress Party Convention. The President of Malawi had this to say about it, after his appeal for hard work had been followed:

I [...] thank you [...] my people [...] because [you] respond to my appeal to work hard.

An excellent example is the people of Nkhata Bay and [...] Nkhotakota too [...] When I spoke in 1966 and 1968 [...] I said that [these people] were just playing Malipenga [but now they are working hard].<sup>33</sup>

Jones talks of a Christmas celebration as one occasion for the dance to take place.<sup>34</sup> Clyde-Mitchell mentions the inclusion of Beni at a Yao boys' initiation ceremony.<sup>35</sup> This is an example of how indigenous culture gets infiltrated by foreign elements. Apart from this mention nobody else seems to see the dance as being held for anything more than provision of fun and entertainment in a recreational way. The history of the dance both in East and Central African urban centres suggests this recreational aspect more than anything else. This is in spite of the content or messages of the songs which everybody agrees express something more significant than mere recreation.

Today in Malawi it is not uncommon to witness Malipenga at political

party rallies more than elsewhere. In this respect the dance has been grouped together with traditional dances. In other words, although the dance might have started as a fairly urban and modern one, it has been indigenized and become possessed by the rural community. Jones was quick to make this observation.<sup>36</sup>

The dance is very popular amongst those who dance it. Concluding his book *Koma-Koma* says:

The M'ganda dance is very good because it provides people with an opportunity to visit different and distant places. For example a group from Chizumulu or Likoma Island [on Lake Malawi] may be invited to go and perform as far as Tanganyika [now Tanzania] or Portuguese East Africa [now Mozambique]. On top of this, such dancers develop many acquaintances whose value goes beyond the performance of M'ganda itself.<sup>37</sup> (My own translation.)

Such popularity depends largely on its organisation which is as meticulous as the dance steps that dancers execute in the dancing arena.

### Organisation

The existence and consequent success of a Malipenga group largely depends on the efficiency of a committee called Boma. The word refers to the dance field where the performances are held. A Boma is presided over by a 'King' who is supported by a 'council' of elders. As a watch dog there is a man who liaises between the 'council' of elders and the ordinary dancers. He is called Ajiteti (Adjutant). There are also a doctor and a nurse. Each of these ranks has a duty to perform during the performance.

The Boma, through its King and Council of Elders, is responsible

for raising funds for holding a Malipenga performance. Such funds take care of the purchase and making of the big drum, trumpets, costumes, and the upkeep of the group and invited teams from neighbouring villages who stay nights during the period of performance. It is left to the 'King' as head of a Boma to spearhead this fundraising, through dipping into his own coffer. Consequently all Malipenga performances are referred to as being performed in honour of the 'King' whenever they are held. The Council of Elders is there to support and advise the Boma on matters of organisation. The Council is also charged with the responsibility of representing the Boma wherever it is involved in a dispute (civil or criminal) in the village. The Ajiteti who is elected from the group of 'commoners' by the 'commoners' themselves is the one who controls dancers during meetings, rehearsals and performances. This is a very respectable position amongst Malipenga dancers. Remaining in office very much depends on how effective one is. The rest of the Boma is responsible for preparing the auditorium and stage, food and accommodation for visitors. As a result of this work women are allowed membership into a Boma. Membership to a Boma under normal circumstances is confined to people who come from the same village.

When a performance of Malipenga is about to be held, members of a Boma meet to decide how they might raise funds for a performance. Very often the Boma in question agrees on working for somebody with money to pay them. Alongside the fundraising, the ground for the occasion is cleared and made ready for performances. The site of such a place is very often the big Bwalo (ground) surrounded by some trees

to provide shade for the audience. When the area has been enclosed rehearsals begin. During this period new songs, new dance steps and costumes are discussed and agreed upon.

After the rehearsals, invitations are sent out to neighbouring Bomas asking them to come over and join their colleagues in a Malipenga performance. The invitations are done very formally, that is, they are written letters following a specific pattern. Koma-Koma gives an example of one such invitation as well as a reply to it:

The writing of an invitation letter is the duty of the Captain or Adjutant of the Boma [...] The letter is written as follows:

Bwaila Boma  
Maponba  
P.O. Nkata Bay  
1st January, 1963

To: The Adjutant  
Koleji Boma  
P.A. Chiwina  
Dear Koleji Boma,

Members of Bwaila Boma invite you to a performance of Mganda starting from Friday 3rd May. We shall be grateful if you can send your acceptance of this invitation as soon as possible.

Other Bomas also invited to this performance are: Landani [London], India and Nyanja.

We insist on your bringing enough properties and instruments, as we do not want you to borrow such things from others.

Yours,  
John Nkhata  
Adjutant for Bwaila Boma

The reply would be:

Dear Bwaila Boma,



Thank you very much for your letter of 1st January, 1963. Koleji Boma is ready to come and join you in the performance of 3rd May as you indicated in your letter.

Yours,  
 Mlongola Chirwa  
Adjutant for Koleji Boma  
 (My own translation.)<sup>38</sup>

On the day of the performance, by 10 o'clock people will already have started to assemble at the Bwalo. The invited Bomas will have come the day before. This is Malawi gives a vivid description of the dancers:

The dancers wear fezes, starched tunics with matching trousers and various medals and decorations. [They] make their own instruments from gourds and reeds and use whistles, empty buckets and drums in addition.<sup>39</sup>

The guest Boma make ready to go and collect their 'King'. The audience as well as the visiting groups escort them to the King's house. When the group arrives at the house, they start singing a song softly until the appearance of the 'King' when they raise their voices. He is given a salute by beating the big drum three times which is followed by absolute silence. Then a representative of the Council of Elders introduces the King, his 'attendants', the 'nurse' and the 'doctor' to the visiting groups and the audience. The audience applauds and almost instantaneously the host group begins to sing, forming two lines. Spectators familiar with the songs join in singing them. Then the procession for the Boma (the arena) begins. The 'King' walks in front flanked by members of the 'Council of Elders'. During this march-dance the doctor and nurse move up and down the procession to ensure



that everyone is alright. The nurse carries a handkerchief and a mirror. The handkerchief he uses to wipe sweat off the faces of the dancers. The movement of the procession can be compared to a 'slow march' in modern military drill. The songs during this procession are addressed to the 'King'. They express gratitude and happiness towards him for the honour of escorting him to the dances. As they do so they also promise him that they are going to be the best dancers of the day.<sup>40</sup> When they arrive at the Boma, the procession circles the arena twice. Then the 'King' and his 'attendants' retire to a shade specially set aside for them (from where they watch the dancing).

The dancing is opened by a speech made by the King. In this speech he welcomes everybody and mentions how long the day's events are going to last. Jones describes the dance as:

a circular dance with the drums in the centre, and is for men only. The big drum is slung on a stout pole fixed vertically in the ground, and is beaten with sticks [...] It is only the performers who dance [...] spectators do not take part.<sup>41</sup>

From time to time the 'King' calls a break during which he asks for donations (in cash) towards the upkeep of his Boma and future trips to other Bomas.

The guest Boma opens the dancing in situ. Having seen the 'King' to his seat they withdraw to the entrance of the arena. Drums and whistles announce their preparations. As these are going on their 'adjutant' walks around the field shouting praises of his Boma. The audience responds by cheering and applauding him. Then the Boma walks in. The word 'walks' does not capture a full picture of what actually

goes on. One might say the group 'half marches' and 'half dances' into the Bwalo. This is done to the beat of one major drum. With their heads bowed down they shuffle their feet in such a way that no dust is stirred by their movement. At the same time they make timely turns to various directions in unison. They circle the bwalo once and exit. This is the opening of the dancing. It is called Chiromo. Basically it serves to impress the audience.

The Boma returns into the bwalo in a slow march. This time they carry their 'trumpets' made out of gourds. The group is made up of two sections - bass and tenor. The bass section leads in front whilst the tenor one follows behind. Only the trumpets are played and nothing else. Meanwhile the adjutant resumes his praises of the Boma. All the time as they return into the bwalo, the dancers do so just as a group - not in neat lines. After a couple of tunes the Boma forms lines whilst the adjutant takes the 'trumpets' away from them. Then dancing resumes. This is done to the big drum. All Malipenga dancers consider this as the central piece of their presentation. Depending on how good the group is members of the audience enter the arena to give the dancers 'presents' of various types - ranging from money to bananas.

The climax of the show is when the 'King' stands to do the 'guard of honour'. As soon as he rises from his chair all those who were inside the arena, to give presents to the dancers, go back to their seats. The 'King' is accompanied by the adjutant, two attendants, a doctor and a nurse, and they enter the arena. The dancing becomes

more vigorous. Especially when he 'inspects' the rows. Each time he passes a row the dancers bend down low in unison as a mark of respect. This is some form of salute. After the inspection he stands aside (to attention). The 'doctor' and the 'nurse' begin their duty. They walk around the rows of dancers and pretend to be taking the pulse and the temperature of the dancers. Occasionally they give out some medicine. This turns out to be some soft drink. As this takes place the audience applauds.

When the 'doctor' and the 'nurse' have finished their rounds the 'adjutant' marches to the 'King' who whispers some orders to him. Upon these the 'adjutant' walks over to the drummer to stop him playing. Simultaneously the dancing stops and everybody stands to attention. The audience keeps quiet. The 'adjutant' marches back to the 'King' who gives him further instructions. These turn out to be the 'King's' words of appreciation for the whole occasion. To mark these words he makes a donation of some money to the host Boma. Soon after this, the 'King' retires to his seat. The dancing and singing resumes for a short while. Then the host Boma retires to give way to the guest Bomas. The pattern for the rest of the performances follows this pattern. The 'King' comes into the arena for every group. Dancing goes on up to just before sunset (5.30 p.m.). One could say a Malipenga performance lasts for about five or six hours.

Comment

We should mention that our description of Malipenga has left out a good deal of happenings behind the scenes. There are such things as preparation of accommodation and food for participants at the performances which are taken care of by womenfolk of the host Boma. So a Malipenga performance should be seen as some kind of a village festival rather than an isolated performance enjoyed by just a clique of would-be dancers and their immediate friends.

All studies done on Malipenga or its variants emphasize the burlesque qualities of the dance. A.M. Jones was the first one to mention it. In the Mganda he observed in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) he saw the dancers perform what was a take-off of the European social structure of the day.<sup>42</sup> For him Mganda was a caricature or parody of this structure. He observed that the performers danced about and burlesqued with extravagant airs of the British Army Officer. His description of the behaviour of the dancers goes like this:

In the centre is the big drum carried in the European manner and beaten by two sticks with the rather pompous display exhibited by a European big drummer [...] During the Procession [the medical officer] walks freely about with the dignity required of an M.O. (Emphasis is mine.)<sup>43</sup>

But more than this he says that the dance also embodied commentary on the African's own life in the urban centres. This was particularly so in the content of the songs that were sung during performances. There was much more to them than one might have thought. Usually they had a story and moral behind them.<sup>44</sup>



In discussing the popularity of Kalela on the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) Clyde-Mitchell said:

There are several reasons for [the dance's] popularity. The drumming is spectacular and the dancers are well dressed, but [...] by far the main attraction lies in the songs of the team.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from being sung in the vernacular or some form of 'pidgin' accessible to everybody in the community their content was 'witty and topical'. The songs very often made some 'incisive comment on the way of life of the Copperbelt Africans' (in Zambia), for example:

some of the verses refer to typically urban situations. In one, the smart modern miss, who uses powder and paint is lampooned. In another the mercenary interest of parents in marriage payments is deprecated.<sup>46</sup>

Malipenga songs still carry this commentary aspect in spite of being heavily and overtly politicized. Such commentary is of course topical. Koma-Koma records a number of Malipenga songs common in the Nkhata-Bay district. One example goes as follows:

Tipempere, Tipembepe KWACHIUTA  
Andinina  
Mafumu mwananga chalu e aye  
Chifukwa cha ufumu winu mwananga-nanga  
Ndalamazo mwalonda zamtayanimu  
Sereni mwanamata azeruzao  
Tiriya chalo; tiriya chalo  
Tiriya chalo chidu cha Malawi.<sup>47</sup>

Let us pray to Chiuta (God)  
You chiefs have spoilt our country  
Your chieftaincy has led you to corruption  
Money, which you were after, has corrupted you  
Listen you young people with wisdom  
We are crying for our country  
We are crying for our country Malawi.<sup>48</sup>

This song could be referring to two historical contexts: either the period of the struggle for independence during which most traditional



chiefs were being blamed for selling the country to colonialists in exchange for money or some other personal rewards; or the period soon after independence when in the excitement of newly acquired powers corruption and embezzlement of public funds was rampant. Whichever the case may be one can see quite clearly how the song castigates traditional leadership as well as offer a lesson to the community.

There are other songs which praise political leadership but as Landeg White observes even these can be just as critical. Very often one finds that in these songs:

There is a good deal of comparison of pre- and post-Independence conditions, with the Life-President being congratulated on having overthrown the Central African Federation [...]. At the same time, the songs contain muted criticism, making use of the convention of Praise-Poetry that permits comment on the operations of power.<sup>49</sup>

Malipenga, like other dances of Malawi, continues to be a medium for expression of praise, criticism and joy both at village and national level.

Let us turn to another aspect of Malipenga which reveals how the performance is related to society. This is 'dress' or strictly speaking, 'costume'. Once again scholars have always acknowledged the emphasis that Malipenga dancers place upon exquisite dress during performance. The imitation of military behaviour required this. Quite apart from collecting and making 'regalia' going with different military ranks, Malipenga dancers insist on smartness. Clyde-Mitchell observed that:

The salient feature of both Mbeni and Kalela dances is the great emphasis that is placed on correct clothing.<sup>50</sup>

This is Malawi spoke of the attitude of the 'corporal' and 'ajiteti' towards dressing in Malipenga as follows:

They insist on cleanliness and tidiness and those who fail to keep up to the standard can be punished.<sup>51</sup>

To meet this requirement most people will go out to get employment in town or indeed as Koma-Koma puts it, migrate to neighbouring countries where they might acquire new suits and equipment. Koma-Koma says that:

There are many young men particularly from Northern Malawi who go on long journeys to seek employment outside the country on account of M'ganda [or Malipenga]. Some go out to find clothes or European drums, side drums [...]. In the old days most of them used to go to South Africa or Northern Rhodesia [now Zambia] or Congo or Tanganyika [now Tanzania]. And if they went out to fetch these things they never settled there, but returned home as soon as they acquired what they had gone out for. In certain instances people would not be able to go out of the country.<sup>52</sup> (My own translation.)

One might speculate about the kind of results this 'migratory' aspect of Malipenga dancers brings about. Surely those who go out do not only return with the things they sought to bring, but new ideas embodied in the cultures which produce the sought for goods. This must have effect on such an 'imitative' dance. A performance so heavily dependent for its 'creation' and 'dress' on foreign modes of behaviour must inevitably include some borrowings, beyond the parody level, and foreign ways of behaviour in its 'repertoire'. Although the dance has receded into the village and thus more or less become indigenized, it remains in touch with urban life as experienced by the migrant worker who returns home after a spell abroad. As the 'immediate and local' alien culture gives rise to this 'syncretic' performance, the 'migrant-worker-performer' compounds the process of

syncretization by bringing in his own interpretation of the 'visited' country. For example, one would expect the 'King' to be garbed in some imitation of the former governors of the country, but this is not so. Instead of this 'Kings' are known to go to South Africa or indeed the larger towns and cities of Malawi to buy suits and hats for the occasion. A suit has become the symbol of power. The military aspect in the marching is giving way to more and more production of dexterity in dance steps. One wonders how much of this is a result of close association or observation of black South African urban dances.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

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- 3 T.O. Ranger, Dance and Society in East Africa, Heinemann 1975, Chapter 1, pp.41-44.
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- 5 David Kerr, 'Didactic Theatre in Africa', Harvard Educational Review, 1 (51), February 1981, p.148.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Merville Herskovits, 'The Role of Culture-Pattern in the African Acculturative Experience', Presence Africaine, Volume 6/7, Nos.34/35, pp.7-16.
- 8 This is Malawi, Vol.10, No.12, December 1980, Department of Information (Malawi), p.8.
- 9 Ranger, op. cit., p.5.
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- 11 W.P. Koma-Koma, M'ganda Kapena Malipenga, Malawi Publications Bureau, Limbe, 1965, p.35.
- 12 This is Malawi, op.cit., p.8.
- 13 My informant was Miss Thandie Kamanga of Nkhata Bay.
- 14 A.M. Jones, op. cit.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid. See footnotes in Jones' article.
- 17 Clyde-Mitchell, op. cit.
- 18 Ibid.

- 19 Koma-Koma, op. cit.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ranger, op. cit.
- 22 Ibid., p.2.
- 23 Ibid., p.5.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 This is Malawi, op. cit., p.8.
- 26 A.M. Jones, op. cit.
- 27 Clyde-Mitchell, op. cit.
- 28 All studies cited so far agree on this aspect of the performance.
- 29 Koma-Koma, op. cit.
- 30 Ranger, op. cit.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 This is Malawi, op. cit., p.8.
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no pagination. Dept. of Information, Blantyre, Malawi.
- 34 A.M. Jones, op. cit.
- 35 Clyde-Mitchell, op. cit.
- 36 A.M. Jones, op. cit.
- 37 Koma-Koma, op. cit.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 This is Malawi, op. cit., p.8.
- 40 Miss Thandie Kamanga, my informant.
- 41 A.M. Jones, op. cit.



- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Clyde-Mitchell, op. cit.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Koma-Koma, op. cit.
- 48 I am indebted to Mrs Emily Nyirenda of Blantyre Teachers College and Mrs Mandalasi of Blantyre Secondary School for this translation.
- 49 Landeg White, 'Power and the Praise Poem', Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.9, No.1, October 1982.
- 50 Clyde-Mitchell, op. cit., pp.8-32.
- 51 This is Malawi, op. cit., p.8.
- 52 Koma-Koma, op. cit., p.20.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

LITERARY DRAMA

This chapter will turn to playwrights (and their work) that have come up within the atmosphere described in previous chapters. Although playscripts are not the best indicators of what drama exists in a country, the tradition has been established which puts them in the forefront of all discussion of theatre activity on the continent. Discussion of African drama centres on published texts rather than performance. And Michael Etherton points out that:

[...] literary conventions are often the criteria for publication by a commercial publishing house. [These] same criteria are then used by the readers of these published literary works in African societies.<sup>1</sup>

Such criteria are neither informed by the sort of influences recorded in this thesis nor, as Etherton says 'by the mass of the people who make up the audiences for the plays themselves.' This inevitably removes the playscripts from the reality which informs them. This chapter will look at the playscripts within their reality. Its concern is not so much with establishing the literary worthiness as to show what drama is growing up in the two countries and how it relates to society.

Chapter two has argued that whilst it is possible to see clear

movement from theme to theme in the development of West African literature, the same is not true of Malawian and Zambian literature. So, instead of presenting plays in an order which suggests such transition (i.e.: colonial plays, cultural rehabilitation plays, political and social plays) the chapter will only present two categories. These will be 'colonial' plays and 'independence' plays. The colonial period will be represented by Sewero la Mlandu wa Nkhanga (Paliani) and The Lands of Kazembe (Masiye). The other category will be represented by The Rainmaker (Chimombo), Wachiona Ndani (Chimombo), Not Sparing the Flock (Ng'ombe) and Daughters of Their Mother (Mbilizi) from Malawi; Shaka Zulu (Mulikita), The Fools Marry... (Kasoma), The Poisoned Cultural Meat (Kasoma) and Soweto: Flowers Will Grow (Phiri) from Zambia.

These plays have been selected purely as samples of what Malawians and Zambians are writing. They do not exhaust what is available in the two countries. Unlike other countries (like Cameroun) these two countries have not yet established centres where scripts can be deposited for consultation even if they are not yet published.<sup>2</sup> However the two universities in the region usually have stencils of scripts that are written for their respective theatre companies.

#### Plays of the Colonial Period

Chapter two has pointed at the two types of drama that came up during the colonial period, namely: integrative propaganda like that

evident in Sewero la Mlandu wa Nkhanga (Paliani); and political protest seen in The Lands of Kazembe (Masiye). Now it is time to turn to these plays to show exactly how they fit their roles.

Sewero la Mlandu wa Nkhanga

This play is set in a village in colonial Malawi. There are two families which provide us with protagonists of the play. Kalumbuka is from the 'righteous' family and Chizukuzuku from the 'evil' one. The two clash over a guinea fowl which the latter has stolen from the former's trap. To avoid a quarrel Kalumbuka takes his case to the chief's court where Chizukuzuku is found guilty, imprisoned and humiliated. Through this clash, Paliani shows how bad theft is, and through the trial how it leads to shame not just for the culprit, but the country as a whole as the guards shout at Chizukuzuku:

Guards: Come on go inside the cell. Learn to stop stealing! You are besmirching the reputation of our country with your thieving behaviour.<sup>3</sup>

(My own translation)

Paliani also seems to suggest that theft by a person manifests the presence of other undesirable tendencies in his behaviour - a total lack of human values. On the other hand righteousness is fundamentally rooted in good family background. The whole play unfolds over 6 acts subdivided into 12 scenes. The first 3 acts are geared towards establishing the contrast between the two families and perhaps providing some explanation of the behaviour which unfolds in the rest of the play. The fourth and fifth acts show us the two

protagonists meeting and how each handles the question of the stolen guinea fowl. The last act takes us to the chief's court and the finale of the culprit's punishment and humiliation.

The two opening scenes of the play take us into the 'righteous' family of Kalumbuka. Herein are found all the attributes of a good and happy family. Responding to her husband's question about what is on for supper Naculu reveals it is ochre and not meat that is going to be served that evening. This puts Kalumbuka off and on to a plan for finding meat to substitute the said ochre at least in the coming days. The idea of setting traps for guinea fowls comes in as an answer. Kalumbuka takes his only son and child to work in their garden, at the same time to give him a lesson on how to set guinea fowl traps. Right from the word go the tone of the conversation between man and wife shows fondness for each other. The atmosphere in this family shows total harmony. In spite of their missing something they are calm, they do not lose their tempers, quarrel or use abusive language. Even when the young boy comes into the conversation he shows remarkable obedience and respect for his parents. The conversation between Kalumbuka and his wife shows they plan their life very strictly. Through it we discover the ochre being served that evening is being done so in spite of the presence of some goats in the family which could have been easily slaughtered had it not been for the need to save them for some rainy day. This family is an ideal one. Love, riches, obedience, planning (even family-wise it seems) and calm all abound in it. All these add up to make ingredients for a 'righteous' life.



A total contrast to this amiable family is what we see in the next two scenes that make up the second act of the play. Here we are allowed into the 'unrighteous' family of Chizukuzuku. The very opening is a tornado of tempers, rudeness and complaints:

CHIZUKUZUKU: Nangeya, I am going to the garden to see how it's doing.

NANGEYA: What for? What's there to see? Didn't I go there the day before yesterday?

CHIZUKUZUKU: It's not just the garden, I also want to kill some mice for relish.

NANGEYA: That's more like it! Don't be late though. This grain store needs a roof you know.

CHIZUKUZUKU: I shouldn't be late! (shouts in anger) Do you think you can order me about?

NANGEYA: That's not the point. You know it will soon be raining. What are we going to do if that happens? Our grain is going to go bad.

CHIZUKUZUKU: Ah bullshit! Let it germinate. Do I care? Where is my hoe? I must go.<sup>4</sup>

This is the pattern of conversation in Chizukuzuku's family. Whether between adults or amongst children it is laced with carelessness, rudeness and abuse. Terror reigns in this family. The father here, is a typical tyrant full of abusive language. He is a brute! His children are: 'fools', 'stupid' and 'idiots'. In response to this kind of environment the children only grow to be disobedient and without moral values. Materially this is a poor family. Digging and killing mice for relish is not part of a plan to save what they have somewhere like it was with the Kalumbuka family. For them the mice are the only alternative. Extreme poverty and ill health abound in

this unplanned family. The children have jiggers. Greed is the hallmark of meal times in this household. When Chizukuzuku gets to the field, he has no time to explain how he goes about catching mice to his son who is more than willing to learn. When they fail to get any mice and move on to discover a guinea fowl caught in Kalumbuka's trap, father and son have no qualms about stealing it. And when they get home greed guides them. Normal etiquette in the home is pushed aside when Chizukuzuku gets hold of the cooking pot even before his wife to prepare the bird for cooking. It is actually ironic to see an otherwise very discordant family brought together by greed. This family lacks proper leadership. 'What sort of children does one expect from such a family then?' Paliani seems to be asking. Presenting the two families the way he does helps the playwright towards his didactic intentions.

Having shown us the two families Paliani treats us in the fifth act to an episodic plot which continues the contrasting of the two families' behaviour - particularly the men of the families. A confrontation between Kalumbuka and Chizukuzuku becomes inevitable where the latter in his hurried greed leaves behind a trail from the guinea fowl trap to his house which Kalumbuka follows without any problems. As expected, without thought and rudely Chizukuzuku denies the charge insinuated by Kalumbuka's tactful questions. This leaves Kalumbuka no choice, but to resort to his unexplained magical powers which bring about the inexplicable dancing and confession from the Chizukuzukus. Paliani does not elaborate on these powers. Having

obtained confessions Kalumbuka takes the matter to the court where the case is heard and Chizukuzuku is sentenced to three months imprisonment and charged to pay five shillings to the court.

This play is written very simply. Structurally it helps the audience to follow the story without problems. The almost parallel introduction of the two families brings to the fore without any complication everyday situations from the lives of Africans of the 1950's. The episodic nature of the plot need not be looked upon as lack of sophistication on the part of the playwright but the inevitable outcome of writing visualized along the lines of folktale narration and didacticism. The juxtaposition of the good and the bad might initially appear as an attempt to present some unbiased portrayal of the two families involved in the scandal, but a closer look at each family shows quite clearly how Paliani boosts the 'good' whilst denigrating the 'bad'. Whilst trying to show how the two families compare under supposedly similar conditions Kalumbuka's family shows no weaknesses at all. Everything in this family is placed neatly in its position. Arguments are reduced to flirtation between husband and wife. The ignorance of the child is treated sympathetically and responded to patiently - the bush where the guinea fowls are to be trapped becomes some kind of classroom. When Kalumbuka is offended and treated rudely by his offender he maintains a cool head. He does not even take to ridicule when the guilt of the offender is proved. In everything he is right, correct and exemplary. The vivid picture of the Chizukuzukus we are allowed to see is that of their weaknesses rather than anything

else. Pandamonium reigns in this family. At work, brute behaviour is the guide. At table, greed takes the day. There is no diplomacy even where there is obvious defeat. What Paliani presents in this family is the exact opposite of the Kalumbukas. The contrast between Kalumbuka and Chizukuzuku is so strong that it is not difficult for the audience to see who is the 'goodie' and who is the 'badie'. The treatment of issues worth aping is given thorough attention. Consider for example the lesson in laying guinea fowl traps and the elaborate explanation Paliani provides. One wonders how much of this owed its inclusion to the expatriate demands for cultural material being written about by Africans themselves. Contrast this with the summarily treated mice hunt by Chizukuzuku and 'juju' implications of Kalumbuka's threat when Chizukuzuku denies having stolen the guinea fowl from the trap. The bringing in of the chief at the very end of the play with his admonition turns rather abruptly, but conveniently, the funny courtroom scene to a serious and an obvious didactic ending:

CHIEF:       What you have done Mr Chizukuzuku is a very bad  
                  thing.<sup>5</sup>

The guards' comment as they usher the culprit into prison, as we have said earlier on, broadens the intentions of Paliani's play from a village story to a national concern - perhaps an attempt to change the statistics on penal code offences.

Paliani's main preoccupation in his play was to fulfil didactic intentions. His style had to subscribe to this. This is why we end up dissatisfied with his characterisation and his point of view. We

cannot discuss Sewero la Mlandu wa Nkhanga artistically. The work does not celebrate life or lament its loss. It is merely a propaganda tool for the forces that were behind the ideology presented. But even as such the logic it follows is questionable.

The characterisation here is unsatisfactory because it cannot be tested against other situations than the family circles of the protagonists. Individuals in the play do not matter except as parts of family types. The playwright emphasises this point when he categorises the two families as 'righteous' and 'unrighteous'. But to accept the credibility of the families as such we want more information about their background. Why is one family rich, small and well organized whilst the other is in total chaos and poverty-stricken? Some information along these lines would help to make the characters - even as types - credible and acceptable.

The effectiveness of the play even as propaganda does not lie in the summarily executed justice in the final scene, but in the portrayal of the contrast between the exemplary family and the ridiculous and 'unrighteous' one. Chimango, a lawyer, has objected to the unsatisfactory presentation of the whole court scene by Paliani.<sup>6</sup> He questions: the characterisation of the chief as unsatisfactory by traditional standards; the presence of court messengers as an addition alien to traditional courts. He points out that there is a confusion of civil court procedures with those of a criminal one in the levying of the fine of five shillings simultaneously with a prison sentence. But Paliani might argue this is a traditional court in the colonial era.



And as we have shown the play owes its conception to colonial developments in the protectorates of the 1940's and 1950's. Whilst Chimango rightly argues that the trial scene, in real terms, would have sparked off dissatisfaction amongst most people as it did not give the culprit much of a chance to prove his innocence before being convicted, we hasten to add that Chimango's court is not of the colonial era. The native courts of the fifties were not independent of the colonial administration. Their authority to try cases came from the Department of Justice not tradition as Chimango implies by his criticism. The actual picture of the law as far as this matter went was like this:

In general the jurisdiction of Native Courts [was] limited to "cases and matters in which all parties are Africans and the defendant was at the time when the cause of the action arose resident or within the jurisdiction of the court". The purpose of the courts [was] to administer a justice which is understood and appreciated by Africans and is as far as possible in accordance with accepted native customs [...]. In cases of a criminal nature a Native Court may impose a fine, or may order imprisonment or both a fine and imprisonment.<sup>7</sup>

It is quite clear from this that it would be naive on our part to think such courts were independent of sanction from the colonial bosses. The inconsistencies we see in the play go beyond the playwright. They are a reflection of the world of the time. Sometimes such a reflection is not intended by the playwright. Whilst all the queries cited and made here may be sound we have to understand the so called shortcomings in terms of the propaganda which fostered such creative efforts. Depicting the truth about traditional or 'native' life was secondary to curing the disease of thefts by natives in this play. The question of realistic presentation was immaterial. It should therefore not be

surprising when modern readers of the play find it infuriatingly banal. Chimango charges the playwright with having failed to present the 'truth':

Gone are the days when the theme of plays was to please and entertain the white missionaries.

These words should go to a modern (or better still a present day) playwright, not Paliani. Of course more important than this the words reveal the predicament that the playwright of the colonial days found himself in. He found himself in the awkward situation of having to satisfy both his foreign sponsor and his people. This was a task rife with contradictions.

But this was not to continue for ever. Colonialism has always had the intrinsic quality of breeding its own opposition. Protest during the colonial days had to be tactful and veiled if the person protesting did not want to be thrown into jail or punished in some other way. The Lands of Kazembe provides an example of this veiled criticism of the political situation of the time.

#### The Lands of Kazembe

The discussion of this play here is based on a revised version of the play published by NECZAM. Michael Etherton, who directed the first stage production of the play preceding its publication in 1971, says that:

During rehearsals only one major change was suggested to, and accepted by the author, namely, to revise the ending so as to clearly focus the play on the adroitness with which Chigf Kazembe defeated the aims of the Portuguese expedition.

The play was based on Sir Richard Francis Burton's translation of Dr Francisco de Lacerda's diary Journey to the Lands of Kazembe.<sup>10</sup> Of immediate interest here is how close and truthful the playwright has been in sticking to history. It is also interesting to see what he makes of this history. Whilst Binyon would insist that a:

writer [...] should surely feel, having picked a [historical] period and its personages, that to distort his facts for the sake of his fictions is too much like playing tennis with the net down,<sup>11</sup>

one may say that rather than advocate such a stasis in works of fiction measurement of the truth should be based on how realistic it is in its depiction of the relationships of its characters and how relevant the work itself is to the period it is being written for.

The Portuguese made this trip in 1798 led by a certain Dr Francisco José Maria de Lacerda newly appointed Governor of the Sena province of Portuguese East Africa. The purpose of the trip was:

to discover or to confirm the feasibility of overland transit between the Eastern and the Western coasts of Africa.<sup>12</sup>

This purpose grew to include a visit to Mwaata Cazembe, not just to gain passage to the western coast, but also to establish a more lucrative trade with him in ivory and thus 'supplant' the trade of their rivals - the 'Mujao'.<sup>13</sup> It is a result of this shift in emphasis that the trip came to be called the 'Cazembe Expedition'. Lacerda's diary from which the play was adapted became The Lands of Cazembe - and as translated by Sir Richard Francis Burton a sub-title was included reading as 'Lacerda's journey to Cazembe in 1798'.<sup>14</sup> Historically this trip's record is interesting in the way it brings to the fore the

conflicts amongst the various groups that had dealings with the area. Firstly there is a conflict between the leadership of the explorers and the rest of the group. Secondly, throughout the trip the Portuguese are constantly harrassed by the various native tribes - from these one is given some impression of the native's cunning and the Portuguese's brutal treatment of their native carriers. Thirdly the translation by Sir Richard Francis Burton is laced with comments which bring other explorers' work to fresh light whilst at the same time showing the conflict that existed between the Portuguese and the British over charting this particular part of Africa. Masiye ignores this last aspect of the diary in his adaptation. For Masiye the diary offers a different opportunity to play with ideas which perhaps can only be read in between the lines. There is no question about Masiye's intentions to ridicule the white man. Oftentimes in his play he grossly exaggerates events to develop caricatures rather than real personages. The priest who is left to take over the heavy responsibility of seeing the mission to its conclusion when Lacerda dies is a buffoon who cannot control his treasury and his company. He is a man who cannot distinguish between his pastoral duties from the expedition's mission and demands. When he meets Kazembe he shows a complete lack of diplomatic acumen. The crude characters like Pereira and Caleja are developed even in brief episodes to maximize their inhumanity and rebellious tendencies respectively.

The play opens with Masiye's own creation of Portuguese characters from the letters and notes that precede the actual diary. The first

scene is a typical diplomatic exercise in which letters of credence as it were exchange hands from Lacerda to the Governor General of Mozambique. The meeting between the two men can best be summed up by the following part of their conversation:

GOVERNOR GENERAL: Well that's clear enough. I shall of course give you every assistance to get to Sena but I am afraid that once you are there it will be up to you.

LACERDA: I understand, Your Excellency.

GOVERNOR GENERAL: I'm not sure that you do. For instance I doubt very much if you will get enough soldiers and carriers for your expedition from Sena alone. You may have to call in at Tete and see if the Governor there can help you.<sup>15</sup>

This is Masiye's rendering of the following entry which appears as part of a letter by Lacerda to Portugal explaining what steps had been taken immediately after arrival at his new post:

I have made every arrangement that is here possible. A company of fifty soldiers with officers has been recruited, to assist me in carrying out the measures which their knowledge of the country suggests. Want of time prevents my applying for aid to the Mozambique nor do I regret it. The Governor-General there informed me that, though ready to assist in all requisites, he did not wish to know or to hear a word about my undertaking.<sup>16</sup>

The Governor General's refusal to be involved in Lacerda's mission is only the beginning of a catalogue of problems which the latter meets right through the trip, viz.: lack of cooperation from traders and team members, 'native' problems, desertions from carriers and sickness. These Masiye unfolds throughout the length of the play in order to develop his characters. People like Caleja (the main opposition to



Lacerda's plans in the Portuguese camp) are introduced and fleshed out with detail right at the beginning of the play instead of the middle of the trip, as the diary does, in preparation for what they are to stand for later on. In doing this Masiye takes liberty with history and behaves more like a creative writer than a chronicler without losing the diary's layout.

The source of these problems is a dying loyalty to the crown amongst Portuguese subjects in the colony. In both the diary and Masiye's play Lacerda is depicted as an extremely loyal and pragmatic subject of Queen Donna Maria. Dramatically Masiye achieves this by making him refer to her in almost every argument he makes before both the Governor General and his colleagues on the trip. Such loyalty blinds him to the realities of the trip. Despite signs of subversion showing up quite early he proceeds with it, even with those very people who will stand in his way, because he believes all men are as loyal as he is to the crown.

Whilst it is true Masiye sticks to the diary fairly closely we cannot turn a blind eye to some of the gross exaggerations he indulges in in order to advance his plot. The meeting between Lacerda and the envoys from Kazembe (Chinimbu and Katala) has been manipulated both to draw the sharp contrast between the Portuguese Governor's court and Kazembe's; and also to show Lacerda's total ignorance of the African. Things like time duration for a trip from Sena to Kazembe's court is liberally interpreted by the playwright; 60 days become 3 moons in the mouth of Chinimbu when the diary says 1 moon equalled 30 days.<sup>17</sup>

Kazembe's envoys are made to ward off a Malawian attack with guns instead of 'spears 6 feet long and shorter assegais for throwing, with broad-bladed and well worked viol-shaped and pointed knives, and shields'.<sup>18</sup> The excitement Kazembe is made to show at seeing and hearing the firing of guns into the air does not support this either - although the probability that Lacerda in the diary exaggerated the absence of the gun within Kazembe's court is very high when we are told he (Kazembe) traded with the Yao.<sup>19</sup> Father Pinto, the man who took over charge of the trip after Lacerda's death is depicted as a 'fool'. A priest who cannot distinguish between clerical matters and serious discussion of the trip's problems:

PEREIRA: Sir, the Malawi are very troublesome. They don't allow travellers through their country without extracting heavy tribute. But I know how to treat them. My whip and guns speak for me ...

PINTO: I don't like your boastful talk Pereira. It's unchristian and shameful. Thank God, we shall not need your guns and the whip this time. Providence has smiled on the righteous and benevolent intentions of our Queen, by bringing us guides from Kazembe. O glory be to God. Let's pray ...

LACERDA: Oh - no, no, Father Pinto. Not now. We'll have plenty of time to pray in the bush. This is not the proper occasion. Let me talk to Chinimbu and arrange for carriers.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst Pinto is reduced to a ridiculous character and so represents the missionaries' role in the colonial experience we cannot fail to see Masiye's own re-interpretation of the ironic situation that came to be as Africans took to Christianity beyond the expectations and the

practice of those who actually introduced them to it. Pinto notices this irony:

PINTO: Excuse me, sir.

LACERDA: Yes, Father Pinto.

PINTO: Now that all the members of the expedition are gathered, perhaps you should talk to them.

LACERDA: What about? I have already spoken to them all.

PINTO: It is about prayers. Many of them have stopped coming for the morning Mass. And when the service is on, some of them sing most unholy songs.

LACERDA: Father Pinto, I understand your troubles. These men have no time for spiritual matters. Only gold, diamonds and ivory have any real meaning to them. They think in terms of money all the time.

PINTO: The African converts are all right. It is the Portuguese, the white men. Talk to them please, Dr Lacerda.

LACERDA: Another day, Father. Let me go away now and prepare their food. Here, come with me. It will be hard work sorting the goods. Call Velasco.<sup>21</sup>

The picture that comes out of the first act is one of total chaos, confusion and inconsistency on the part of the Portuguese. This could be a deliberate move on Masiye's part as he tries to show the weaknesses of colonialism and its exponents. All in all one might ask 'how relevant is all this to the Federal situation?' As has been said already, for the African of the time, there was no distinction between white races. They were all considered to be one. Any discrediting of a white group - be it Portuguese, Dutch or English - besmeared all.

Act 2 takes the reader deep into the journey itself. In it one sees further elaboration of the things brought to the fore in the

introductory first act. Pereira's fierceness and brutality amongst Africans are given prominence - more to show the growing chasm between Lacerda and Caleja. Whilst the diary blames unwilling white settlers for this, Masiye makes Lacerda place it on Caleja. And to authenticize it he engages Caleja in persuading Lacerda to call the trip off. This suggestion is made even stronger by the latter's illness. An abortive mutiny planned and led by Caleja is uncovered, but Lacerda forgives him. He does so more because he needs every man he can get than out of kindness, as he says:

LACERDA: (surprised) You Caleja? I probably am being a fool in letting you continue; but I need every man I can get. I hope I won't regret this decision.

CALEJA: You won't sir, I promise. Forgive me I am very sorry.<sup>22</sup>

By the time one gets to the end of the play one finds that Caleja's promise is empty talk as he spearheads the group which objects to Pinto's leadership upon Lacerda's death.

The final act presents the meeting of the Portuguese and the people of Kazembe. The etiquette of the court referred to earlier on is projected most pronouncedly as it is done in the diary:

KASHIBA: What do you want in the land of Kazembe?

VALESCO: We have come to visit the chief.

KASHIBA: And these other friends of yours?

VALESCO: This is Father Pinto, and this is Colonel Araijo. They are both Portuguese.

KASHIBA: The people of Chief Kazembe don't open their mouth to strangers for nothing. Give me something for having loosened my lips.<sup>23</sup>

In the diary this exchange of gifts (as it is not a one sided affair) is everywhere. Obviously Lacerda and Father Pinto did not quite understand it. Masiye provides, in his dramatisation, a lucid and straightforward explanation of what it is. The straightforwardness and ease with which Kashiba handles the visitors contrasts remarkably with the dismissive welcome the Governor General gives Lacerda at Beira on the latter's arrival. The African here comes off as being more humane than the Portuguese. Kazembe's court presents the reader with a unified culture. The welcoming of the Portuguese incorporates prayers (traditional) to the ancestral spirits, celebration and hospitality unlike the summarily presented drink of wine in the Governor's residence. Masiye gives some edge to the superiority of African life when compared with that of Europeans. Contrast the loyalty of the African to tradition with the lack of it amongst the Portuguese as they refuse both to obey Lacerda and observe their own customs:

PEREIRA: Chief Kashiba, please allow us to take Dr Lacerda into the village. He is a very, very sick man.

KASHIBA: Stay where you are. The ceremony of the Masanza will finish tomorrow. Then, you can come in. Not now.

PEREIRA: But you cannot let him die outside here.

KASHIBA: Here in the lands of Kazembe, no one disobeys the Chief. I am on my way to the masanza. I just came to see how you are getting on. I must go now.<sup>24</sup>

Lacerda dies without seeing Kazembe. This leads to yet another feud amongst the Portuguese. Instead of mourning their leader, they



scramble over who is to lead the group. Instead of honouring 'the dead' as it were they embark on quarreling over their property. It is even very ironic that this happens in front of the 'natives' and that Kazembe at some point even admonishes the Portuguese for their quarrels amongst themselves and bad behaviour:

KAZEMBE: What did you say this shining thing is?

CALEJA: A mirror, chief. You can see your face in it.

KAZEMBE: (annoyed) I am talking to the leader. Who are you?

CALEJA: Surely, chief, you know me. I am Caleja (laughs)

KAZEMBE: When I am talking to the leader, I want no interruptions. Kashiba!

KASHIBA: Mwaata!

KAZEMBE: Watch this bad mannered Portuguese.

KASHIBA: Eya mwane, mwane! [ Yes lord! ] <sup>25</sup>

And so the impossible is silenced! Pinto's credibility as leader of the Portuguese entourage had to wait until this moment to be established. But this is a leadership within the ambit of Kazembe, for it is he who has the last word in his land:

KAZEMBE: [...] All you travellers are strangers in my country. You must live in peace. Put away your quarrels until you return home. Heed my warning.<sup>26</sup>

Kazembe does not only say the last word here, but also makes a bold statement and judgement of the white man that no ordinary black man could have made:

KAZEMBE: [...] I didn't know white men behaved like children, Kashiba (Both men laugh) <sup>27</sup>

The trip to the western coast, by this time, is foiled at least for the time being. Masiye does not go into the rest of the diary except to take the reader back to where the play started - the Governor General's residence - where through a diary entry being read before the Governor a report of the return journey from the Lands of Kazembe is to be heard. The trip as reported here was a failure. It speaks of nothing but the misfortunes (which included the losing of Lacerda's exhumed body) of the return from Kazembe's. The Governor simply sighs, expressing wonder and doubt about the future:

GOVERNOR-GENERAL: (sighs) Ah poor Lacerda! Still, no doubt there will be others who will follow in years to come. I wonder what the future holds? (He rises) Come Fernandez I feel restless. Let us walk.<sup>28</sup>

Mark the uncertainty and restlessness of the scene as this play comes to an end. All in all Masiye has tried to be as close as possible to the diary.

This is an opportune moment to return to the relevancy of the play to the period in which it was first produced as a radio drama by the Central African Broadcasting Service (a federal broadcasting house).

The bringing together of blacks and whites which this meant was relevant to this particular time. To a modern reader this is a play concerning Portuguese colonialism and nobody else's. But it is well known that whilst amongst whites the cultural differences between the British and the Portuguese are big and recognized by the said nationalities, for the African of the colonial period they were not. They did not distinguish between the races of Europe. The comment by

Kazembe at the end of the play is true manifestation of this. To Kazembe all whites were one race. Masiye's nationalistic message should not be looked for in the relationship of the Portuguese and Kazembe, but the implications of having said what he did to the British in the light of this fact. It is here that Masiye's hidden political intentions surface. Whilst the British might have laughed at the Portuguese and even enjoyed doing the play for radio, they failed to see that Masiye's snubbing included them.

David Kerr indicates the nationalistic traits of this play when he talks of the 'pointed ironies' and how 'the whole epic structure of the play refers to the power of Africa in its physical natural forms as well as human'.<sup>29</sup> One might hasten to add that this quality of the play's structure and the constant reference to Kazembe (the King) makes a hero of the man in spite of his brief appearance towards the end of the play. If The Lands of Kazembe is seen from Lacerda's point of view then surely there is no hero in the play because Lacerda himself is a 'reactionary' whose exploitative intentions are thwarted and defeated as he represents and fights for a losing side - looking at the play from the time it was published that is. One feels that in The Lands of Kazembe, the process is not one of emancipation but one of protection. In the successful protection provided by Kazembe a particular type of life is celebrated. It is this last aspect that ennobles Masiye's work beyond Binyon's implied stasis quoted earlier on.

It should be emphasized here that The Lands of Kazembe must be visualized as a Radio play. Being thus it places the onus on the

reader to evoke aural as well as visual images as he reads it. Constant reference to a name in a radio play establishes the character's presence. Although Kazembe does very little by way of action in this play, the fact that so much is done in his name by the other characters, he gains stature which justifies calling him a hero. More than this, Kazembe achieves his goal by thwarting the intentions of the Portuguese with remarkable wit. The calm with which the natives from Kazembe's court take the trip contrasts remarkably with the impatient attitude and bickering of the Portuguese. This only emphasizes the triumph of African culture over that of their counterparts. Veiled criticism like the one The Lands of Kazembe makes coupled with outright political action shaped the political consciousness of the people of Zambia. This prepared them for independence and the task of creating a new nation. This had to wait for almost ten years to come into fruition.

#### Plays written after independence

Whilst it is generally agreed that soon after attaining independence, both Malawian and Zambian politicians called for the rejuvenation of their countries' indigenous cultures, the task of doing so mostly fell on the educated élite. These were people who had been through colonial schools and curricula which did not prepare them for such a task. Very often such people were bewildered by doubt and indecision. As Michael Thorpe puts it, too many questions had to be answered:

What with the coming of Independence, is to be retained, what discarded? What, after perhaps a hundred years of empire, remains of vital worth from the native culture? What part, many of [these people] asked themselves, can they play in 'forging' [...] the conscience of [their people]? Yet many [agonized] over the conflicting loyalties to art and country; some looked beyond colonial traumas and national issues, [and saw] a universal audience.<sup>30</sup>

Such a dilemma arose from the type of culture they had fed on in school. In Malawi and Zambia the main dish on this 'cultural menu' was the English language and literature. This did not prepare them for the task of working as a nation, but as individuals. Pathé Diagne puts it more succinctly when he says that:

The French, British, Spanish or Portuguese colonial cultures do not unify. They impose their own social, historical and literary heritage, their educational or institutional machinery, their conception of man's relations with his fellows and with the objective world - and these things become a tremendous burden. They spawn an élite which is cut off from the masses, as was the élite of Blyden's nineteenth-century independent and Americanized Liberia.<sup>31</sup>

Calling such an élite to carry out the process of renaissance meant they had to undergo a process of 'decolonization' on their part. They had to do a number of things in order to truly serve the needs of their people. They had to:

cast off - scientifically, and on the purely rhetorical and conceptual level - specifically European terms; [they had] to imagine - again at a theoretical level - a purely African renaissance and universality leading to a praxis and the establishment of an official programme liable to liberate art, the imagination and ethnic, not to say tribal and individual creativity [...]<sup>32</sup>

In practical terms there was no time for this. Getting to such an ideal situation was a matter of hit and miss. Theatre work in Malawi and Zambia shows exactly how true this is. Plays selected in this



chapter exemplify the problems of this period. They are products of such élites.

Malawian Plays:

The Rainmaker, Wachiona Ndani, Not Sparing the Flock, Daughters of Their Mother.<sup>33</sup>

The Rainmaker by Steve Chimombo

So far The Rainmaker has only been performed by the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre (1975 and 1980). The first production was directed by James Gibbs at the Chancellor College Open-Air Theatre. This was prior to the publication of the text in 1976. The second production was directed by a student member of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre, Zangaphee Chizeze, in-the-round. This was done in one of the students' cafeterias on Chancellor College campus. This play deals with Malawi's traditional past as well as modern life. To fully appreciate how the play exemplifies a theatre of cultural renaissance one must look at the ideas of the people who shaped the play into its existence. In other words, one must look at the conditions of performance that existed at the time the play was being conceived. This was in 1975.

By 1975 Malawi had been independent for some eleven years. The Association for Teachers of English in Malawi had been hosting its Schools' Drama Festival for seven years. Plays being performed at this festival included: adaptations of Shakespeare's work, and those

written by local playwrights. Some of the latter were dramatisations of local myths and legends. James Ng'ombe's The Banana Tree and Joe Mosiwa's Who Will Marry Our Daughter are examples of such plays.<sup>34</sup> Apart from A.T.E.M.'s work, the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre had been in existence for six years. Its repertoire had shifted from a western dominated one to an African one. More and more plays by African playwrights and about African experiences were being done. Local playwrights were being encouraged. James Gibbs was the man at the centre of this shift. In order to help local playwrights he himself wrote plays based on African folk-lore and experiences.<sup>35</sup> He also passed around stencils of myths, folktales and legends to students and colleagues in and out of Chancellor College in a bid to get these dramatized. Ng'ombe's The Banana Tree and The Beauty of Dawn and Mosiwa's Who Will Marry Our Daughter were products of this effort. At the same time the college had seen the formation of traditional dance groups: Beni, Malipenga, Gule wa nkulu (Nyau), Chioda etc. The first and only conference on theatre in Malawi had been hosted in Chancellor College.<sup>36</sup> Chimombo was present at this conference. Mathew Schofelleers spoke about the dramatic potential of some of the country's traditional cults etc. at this conference.

At the time The Rainmaker (1975) was being written Chimombo was a lecturer of English Language and Literature at Chancellor College. This is a job he took up after returning from post-graduate studies in England (Bangor and Leeds). Quite apart from taking care of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre, the English Department had, for

well over five years, been running a writer's workshop on campus. The idea of this workshop was to provide an opportunity to aspiring writers to share ideas on their own writing. Most of the work done in this workshop was prose and poetry rather than playscripts. However, playwrights like Chimombo and Ng'ombe have had strong links with this writer's workshop. The workshop provides an initial testing ground for all budding writers.

Talking about the audience for his work Chimombo has said that:

[...] the audience that I have in mind are the people who can actually appreciate what I'm trying to do. I wouldn't say that what I write should only end in my own drawers and so on. But we have tried here at Chancellor College to have a certain audience. We have got the Writers Group so that when anyone writes and he thinks that it's good enough to be shared around then we meet every Thursday and we discuss what we have written. And after that the beginning of publication because every writer would like to get published and have his work also read by other people apart from his own close friends.<sup>37</sup>

The basis of his work being traditional Malawian material, he uses this in all his writing, namely: drama, poetry and short stories. He argues that:

[...] from what foundation or what basis are you going to write if you're not going to write about the experiences that have formed you and the experiences that are part of your own psyche we might say? [...] it's a valuable piece of experience to work within [one's] cultural milieu so that one can at least have this sense of belonging to a certain tradition and living with it.<sup>38</sup>

For him it is not simply a matter of rejuvenating the Malawian cultural heritage, but finding a place for himself within it. One could say that Chimombo recognizes the possibility that perhaps it is not his culture that needs rehabilitating, but the alienated African scholar/

writer. If his work is bringing Malawian culture to the fore, it is for colleagues in his estranged position that it does so. He does not write for the ordinary man in the street and village in this case.

The Rainmaker shows how this is so. The source of the play, the style of writing and the language that Chimombo uses, all suggest this.

In a dedication note in his play The Rainmaker, Chimombo says:

Gratitude is expressed to all who directly or indirectly helped shape the existence of the play, especially to Dr M. Schofelleers for permission to use original research material.<sup>39</sup>

So, although the play displays a dramatization of traditional life, the playwright did not collect information about this life from the people of the country. In a typical academic style, the playwright used other written sources to create his play. Chimombo is not the first one to do this. Other well known playwrights in the world have done it. The only question that arises in Chimombo's case is, 'how much sifting does he do to the material so borrowed?' There is no doubt that such material was collected within the confines of the researcher's own biases and aims of his research.<sup>40</sup> It is important to bear this in mind when trying to place The Rainmaker amongst playscripts that help to rehabilitate Malawi's cultural heritage.

The Rainmaker dramatizes an historical event which has come through to the present via oral tradition rather than archival documentation.

Chimombo says it is:

a historical play in which one rainmaker [Kamundi - the python priest] fails to make rain in a village situation and another one [Mbona] comes in to succeed where he has failed. And the first rainmaker grows very angry about it and decides that he wants to kill him. But the one who had made the rain decides

to flee in the night and he's pursued across the countryside by pursuers until he's found in the southern region of the country where he is killed. But at his death the pursuers in turn come to recognize him as a real man and they build a shrine and start worshipping him. It's a dramatization of events which happened in the fifteenth - sixteenth century in the country.<sup>41</sup>

What Chimombo leaves out in this summary is the fact that the drama is not built entirely on this historical myth. The linear sequence of events given here is laced with direct interpolation of anthropological material from current Chewa customs and traditions. This fact more than anything else has led some people to refer to the play as:

an Anthropological Drama [...] in which excuses are found to interpolate information about traditions, religion, and culture.<sup>42</sup>

This 'anthropological' mission overshadows all other intentions that the playwright might have set out to achieve. Planted into the text crudely, descriptions of tradition take precedent over exposition of the action. A good example is in the dialogue between Kamundi and other officers of the shrine at Msinja. After Kamundi has danced (Mgwetsa the rain-dance) and failed to produce results he turns round to find a scapegoat:

KAMUNDI: Tsang'oma what is the meaning of this?

TSANG'OMA: What, Nthunga

KAMUNDI: (thunders) You know what I mean! Why are the skies so clear? Why are there no thick, black clouds, thunder and lightning, after the python's dance?

TSANG'OMA: It is indeed strange, giver-of-fire.

KAMUNDI: Is that all you can say?



TSANG'OMA: The spirits of the forefathers may be annoyed, my lord. Or some among the assembly were unclean.

KAMUNDI: Malemia, did you tell the people to keep themselves pure before the Mgwetsa?

MALEMIA: I went to the town square, to crossroads, to all zipata of Msinja, and even to Makumbi. Every head of family was given the order to quench their fire a week before the rain dance.

KAMUNDI: They might have chosen to disobey you.

MALEMIA: I don't think so. They themselves begged you to make rain because of the drought. They would not be so foolish as to go against the ritual of purification. All these years we have observed it a week before the rain-making ceremony.<sup>43</sup>

This conversation goes on to a description of other rituals of purification. Finally it dwells on Kamundi's threats of punishment to all office bearers, should rains not come. A good deal of time is spent on what sort of punishment this would be for Tsang'oma. This is the kind of punishment a typical Tsang'oma in real life (olden days) would get. The conversation is geared towards giving the audience this information rather than towards advancing the action of the story. In some cases Chimombo just transposes this anthropological material on to the stage without bothering to churn it as it were. After Mbona has been killed, Kamundi shows signs of hallucinations - a direct repercussion of disturbing the creator's course of action. A senior priest Mlauli is called upon to cure Kamundi. A therapeutic dance ensues:

MLAULI: We will have to sing again.

(Kamundi jerks up.)

KAMUNDI: Stop! Stop! M'bona! M'bona (Paralysed silence.)

MLAULI: Mother-of-children, you did not tell me the whole truth. I thought I came here to exorcise a witch's spirit. But I find it is a prophet's. This will require a different approach. I know M'bona. He was once my apprentice ... Who are you?

KAMUNDI: It is me.

MLAULI: I said who are you?

KAMUNDI: I am M'bona (Assembly says, Oooo!)

MLAULI: What do you want?

KAMUNDI: I want to come to the other side of the river.

MLAULI: No, this side is closed to you now. There is no landing here for boats to stop after crossing. What have you brought with you? Have you come with relish?

KAMUNDI: No.

MLAULI: Have you brought a goat? Mee! Mee!

KAMUNDI: No.

MLAULI: Have you come with a chicken? Kwiyo! Kwiyo!

KAMUNDI: No.

MLAULI: What have you brought then?

KAMUNDI: Rain.

(Assembly jumps up and down, ululates, claps hands).<sup>44</sup>

This quotation is a direct transposition of a typical dialogue between a young novice and senior Nyau members during an initiation ceremony. Chimombo has simply changed the occasion. Schofelleers gives a full account of this dialogue in his doctoral thesis.<sup>44a</sup> This is repeated in several places. Instead of sifting the material and creating an

original play, Chimombo frequently leaves anthropology to tell the story. Another example is provided by Mlauli, after he gets to the root of Kamundi's ailment:

MAKEWANA: It's all M'bona's doing.

MLAULI: It is more than that. Hasn't it been like that since the cradle of mankind? The python invents fire and pushes Chiuta from Kapiri-Mtiwa, so Chiuta brings death to mankind. Man kills animal, and if he doesn't appease its spirit, he runs mad from Chilope. The animal takes its revenge. Kamundi kills M'bona, and M'bona takes his revenge by afflicting Kamundi with Chilope. The only salvation is to follow the sacred ordinances, or else man suffers untold miseries in this world. And here, more urgently, the only course is for the Nyau to perform. We are not only observing the proper funeral rites of a great man, we are bringing about the reconciliation between god and man, man and animal, animal and spirit. All three<sup>45</sup> are united, however temporarily, in the Nyau dance.

This is a well known myth which explains the rift between god, man and animals caused by the invention of fire. Whilst such myths by themselves have inspired full length plays Chimombo brings them into his one play whole and unrefined. It is no wonder that those who witnessed the first production of the play questioned this. Jim Stewart disagreed and disapproved the idea of putting a myth straight onto the stage without trying to interpret it.<sup>46</sup>

Borrowing from Schofelleers' anthropological research material is but one road that takes Chimombo back to his cultural roots. The Rainmaker also incorporates a good deal of traditional songs, traditional 'prayer' styles and traditional dances. These are interesting in themselves, but they do not necessarily stem from the

heart of the drama. They appear like an imposition on the events taking place. The characters of the play use a language which is built on vernacular styles of speech. For example, they use proverbial language. When Kamundi is persuaded to give way to the unknown young man who claims to have powers to bring down rain, he says:

Maybe you're right. I always say: Let the elder fold his legs so that the youth may pass [...] <sup>47</sup>

Later on, during the chase of M'bona, one of the pursuers complains about the illusiveness of M'bona and says:

M'bona seems to have eaten the buttocks of a dog. Something always happens to make him move on to the next hill.

Another replies:

Well, a crocodile's child does not grow in one pool. <sup>48</sup>

Other examples of this transposition of typical Chewa proverbs are:

'when a leaf falls, shame goes to the tree' <sup>49</sup>, 'the squirrel mocks the hunter when its hole is nearby' <sup>50</sup>, and 'our elders say: to know the roots of anything, you should first ask what broke the elephant's tusk'. <sup>51</sup>

Another element in his transposition is the way he has borrowed, directly, figurative speech from Chichewa. This is exemplified by statements like: 'every head of family was given the order to quench their fire a week before the rain dance' <sup>52</sup>, '... none of them [Matsano] has gone to earth this week ...' <sup>53</sup>, meaning every husband was asked to abstain from having sexual intercourse with their wife and that none of the Matsano were menstruating respectively. Brilliant and exotic this language might sound, but transplanted the way it is into the play, it leaves the audience cold. It has no life.

The foregoing exposition is not there to discredit the idea of borrowing from other sources, nor indeed from one's own cultural background, but to show what task a playwright faces in his creative efforts having chosen to work within this area. Much as The Rainmaker rediscovers part of the Malawian past, it reveals what problems exist for playwrights of the cultural renaissance mode. As Patience Gibbs would put it:

[...] the problem faced by a writer who has 'rediscovered', through learned articles and theses, the past of his people [is that of forging] a relationship which is living rather than merely academic.<sup>54</sup>

Whilst it might appear as if Chimombo fails to forge a satisfactory drama out of the abundant cultural material at his disposal, he nevertheless offers interesting ideas thematically. The obvious and central theme in the play is the question of power or authority in society. Through the character of Kamundi, Chimombo shows how an individual trusted with authority by society can grow to be greedy and tyrannical against the very people he not only works for, but from whom he gets both spiritual and physical support. When the play opens Kamundi has been the python-priest for some time. He is called upon to fulfil his duty to the community. Should he fail, he must give way to another person. This is a well known fact in the community. There is nothing strange about it. After all Kamundi seems to be ageing although he refuses to recognize this fact. Having danced several times, in a bid to bring down some rain and failed, he insists he must go on dancing. The reason for refusing to give way is not that he can



still perform his duties, but because he believes he is infallible:

KAMUNDI: The Great Spirit works his wonders through the python. I am your god on earth.<sup>55</sup>

He insists that he cannot learn from puppies. His justice is specially created for his own convenience not for protecting society. After M'bona has danced and brought down the rain, instead of thanking him, Kamundi charges him with sorcery and demands that he be tried by going through a test which he well knows is not a fair test:

KAMUNDI: ... Malemia, arrest that young up-start immediately. Tie him up and throw him into the Dzala, where women and children can jeer and throw rubbish at him. He must learn that a cock does not crow away from home. Tomorrow morning bring him back here for the mwabvi, to see if he is a sorcerer or not.<sup>56</sup>

This is done knowing fully well that the young man would die if he took the 'mwabvi' which is poisonous.<sup>57</sup> The real issue here is not witchcraft or sorcery as Makewana reveals, but what the challenge means to him:

MAKEWANA: The royal python who fails to make rain, or who gets too old or ill, takes poison and makes way for the new python priest. Otherwise he infests the whole land.<sup>58</sup>

This is what Kamundi is not willing to face. Although he knows that tradition demands this he is ready to bend it to suit his greed as he insists on the death of M'bona:

KAMUNDI: ... M'bona will die tomorrow or kill me.

MAKEWANA: He will be my next python priest unless you succeed. The mother-of-children will not live with a python who cannot perform his duties.

KAMUNDI: I know, but if I kill him, every man, woman and child will know why M'bona died ... But what do I

care? The sacred flame is still with me. The python will not be made the laughing stock of Maravi by that nobody.

MAKEWANA: You'll have to find a powerful reason for his death.<sup>59</sup>

The unreality of Kamundi's justice is not only evident when it affects him directly, but in the way he executes it summarily over even those that are close to him. His interaction with others is based more on threats of punishment than goodwill. It is inevitable that he comes off as an alienated character in a society which is very strongly together. The people who execute his justice do so out of fear. The image that comes through is that of a disintegrating society.

What is Chimombo's aim in presenting this picture of disintegration? Schofelleers in the introduction to the text says that:

The symbolism of the play is extremely dense and would require more than [what he provides] to do it justice.<sup>60</sup>

That there is sexual innuendo in the text goes without question. The references to the python coiling itself around Makewana and Kamundi's fire are explicit enough. One must understand these as springing from the nature of speech patterns of the people from whom the story comes. If the claim that symbolism abounds in the text stands, then its meaning far exceeds contrasting:

the history of the northern and southern [historical M'bona] shrines in terms of peace and war, tradition and change, and female versus male ascendancy.<sup>61</sup>

as Schofelleers sees. The limitation of meaning to history may well be too narrow. For as Michael Thorpe says, the rehabilitation process in African writing has gone beyond the process of simply taking a look

at the past to include recognizing similar situations in the present.<sup>62</sup> The case of Soyinka's A Dance of the Forest comes into one's mind here. 'Rehabilitation [can be] a stark and anguished reappraisal of the present condition'.<sup>63</sup> And this is where problems of censorship come up. For, those in authority often dislike the possibility of an audience at a performance making associations between actions of the drama and current experience.

When The Rainmaker was produced by James Gibbs at the Chirunga Open-Air Theatre there were mixed reactions from actors, the director and the audience. Chimombo's observations on reactions to the performance of his play are worth quoting in full:

[...] the academics at Chancellor College [are] trying to categorize or trying to fit it into a certain dramatic compartment. And they're trying to decide whether it is influenced by great plays or Western plays or whether it's just purely a Malawian play. Whilst from the people who are not concerned so much about these classifications, they quite enjoyed it because it takes its inspiration from very local material like [...] praying and dancing for rain and Nyau dances and people enjoying themselves in a village situation. So that at that level it quite communicates. Because we had children from the villages nearby who attended and they quite enjoyed the action-packed scenes. They didn't quite understand it because it was in English but it goes across all right and even today they are still singing some of the catchy tunes that were incorporated in the play.<sup>64</sup>

Fliers that came out soon after the performance at Chancellor College expressed varied reactions indeed. There were comments which talked about the acting abilities of individuals in the production. Other comments were about the text and how it reflected the playwright's own personality, his satirical humour, his 'famous subtle and not so subtle allusions to sex ...'. Some people praised the inclusion of

traditional songs and Nyau. James Gibbs speaks of this particular aspect of the production in terms of the problems he met in trying to fuse Nyau into the whole production. Nyau is still a secret society. The group which agreed to prepare the dance refused to operate within standard theatre procedure. They insisted that they be left alone to rehearse their dances and masks in private (not even allowing the director of the play to attend rehearsals). When the dancers were ready obvious problems of timing and pacing arose, but the director could do nothing to change things. This problem was also experienced when the present writer's play Chauta's Wrath (which includes Nyau dancing) was produced in 1980.

Some members of the audience complained about the structure of the play, especially where the Matsano were presented separately both in language and acting style, from the rest of the play. This was found not only confusing but inaccessible. Their language is highly poetic whilst the rest of the play is plain everyday speech. Perhaps it was not so much that the Matsano spoke poetry, but the type of poetry it was. An extract reads as follows:

MATSANO: Fractured elongations of circles  
ride the ripples of the pool  
and multiply in the crest  
only to die on the mossy banks  
of oblivion.

Atomised reflections reveal phantoms  
smuggling skullfuls of teeth  
crawling to gnaw  
at the python's mind.

Phantoms traversing the same pathways

that led to the sacred grove  
of Msinja shrine.<sup>65</sup>

One reviewer wrote that he heard people sigh gratefully when one of the Matsano said 'We are now going to vanish...'.<sup>66</sup> He went on to say:

It appears from the actions in the poem that Mr Chimombo wanted us to go away from the performance feeling very grim and serious, like when you are on your way from a Shakespeare tragedy picture. Right? Well I wasn't, nor was anybody else I saw. The death of M'bona provoked nothing but hilarious laughter from the audience. The actors [...] became overenthusiastic and misplaced their comical acts [...].<sup>67</sup>

Another observer commented with excitement, particularly about Chimombo's control of language:

How enthralling to see the story being worked out so clearly and honestly with no false obscurities in the language - well, hardly any, though we all rather stuck at those fractured elongations, and punctured ventricles.<sup>68</sup>

So again, the poetry was isolated as a problem in the play. This observer found the language:

too consciously poetic, or too stuffily civil service, but mostly it was rather fine, filling the play with a steady clear air.<sup>69</sup>

The poetry on its own was commendable. But this was not what the playwright wanted. Much as this last critic praised the language of the play, he found its drama wanting. He argued that there was not enough characterization done in the play. As if answering the query of the last critic he said that:

It was hard to play Kamundi except for laughs, for what moral dimension does he have, what motivation, for good or bad, except a rather grumpy self-protection? If characters are going to be put on the stage to act, and matter, and be interesting, they must have true range of motive, of caring or of corruption. Mere naked contestation and self-survival



are not enough! The characters of the myth, when turned into myth, cannot be only lofty; they must have blood, not celestial ichor in their veins. The myth must (as Soyinka implies) be re-interpretted as human psychological drama, otherwise the opposite will happen; they have only the shallowest motive, they'll sound petty. Achilles, no longer a hero, will bicker and dwindle.

This was where the play for me did not work [...] The truth [...] that Steve [Chimombo] with characteristic spirit has got himself into big league problems, which genius has sometimes solved, sometimes not. How do we keep the mystery and force and truth of myth, while putting it into dialogue and lively dialectical exchange, on stage?<sup>70</sup>

The arrival of The Rainmaker was on the whole looked forward to by not just students of literature in Chancellor College, but people outside the college as well. On the opening night of the show people from all walks of life came to see the play. They had heard something was happening at the Chancellor College Open-Air Theatre. Even the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation was there. Perhaps people were expecting a major break through in theatre life of Malawi. But it was not. Another critic pointed out:

It's a pity that multi-theme treatment of the play withdraws the play from the illiterate [sic] masses, who can only follow by what they can see. It seems Chimombo directed his play to the intellectuals - but intellectuals enjoyed the naked simplicity of Kambale equally well. Let us try to get the masses involved.<sup>71</sup>

Whether it is in response to this call or simply a matter of experimenting, Chimombo's next play was written in Chichewa rather than English. The writing of this new play, Wachiona Ndani (1983) coincides with a change in the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre's work (which is promoting vernacular plays in a bid to satisfy the masses).

Wachiona Ndani (1983)

The arrival of Wachiona Ndani was preceded by a change in theatre work at Chancellor College. This change coincided with the arrival of David Kerr from University of Zambia. Whereas in the past most theatre work hinged on plays written in English, David Kerr initiated improvisatory drama in the vernacular languages of the country. This swing was started by a practical project done as part of the 3rd year drama course in 1981. The class produced through improvisation a play entitled Eviction. It was performed at the Open-Air Theatre in May 1981. Although the title is in English, most of the play was in Chichewa. It was the story of a city dweller who gets evicted from a corporation house and his subsequent suffering and retreat to a shanty location which he used to laugh at. This was a very successful production. In July of the same year the Travelling Theatre was invited by the Office of the President and Cabinet to go and perform at one of the country's newly opened Rural Growth Centres in the Northern Region at Mbalachanda. Although the aims of the O.P.C. were mainly to get the theatre company to help publicize the Community Hall at the Centre, the people there and around it were mostly rural and illiterate. This meant that the usual repertoire of English plays had to be abandoned. The Travelling Theatre thus produced short sketches in Chichewa and Tumbuka for this tour. Chapter nine deals with this work in greater detail. A follow-up of this work has been described by David Kerr thus:

In the new academic year of October 1981 the Travelling Theatre decided to hold a workshop in improvised vernacular theatre led by some of the Mbalachanda veterans. The workshop was a great success and led to the creation of four sketches. Two of these were dropped, one because it was weak, another because of anticipated censorship problems, but two of these sketches, Maliro about the problems of women's rights of succession, and Nsomba! Nsomba! about the penetration of capital into the fish industry, were further worked on and polished into finished plays. They were first performed at the [...] open-air theatre and then became part of the Travelling Theatre's repertoire for the 1981-82 academic year.<sup>72</sup>

The success of these plays firmly established a trend of vernacular theatre in Chancellor College. Wachiona Ndani was thus part of this trend when it was performed in the Great Hall of Chancellor College.

Mupa Shumba has had this to say about this trend:

On 13th [May 1983] we had the play [Wachiona Ndani] on the stage of the Great Hall, produced by Mike Nambote. It was an interesting production though it dragged somewhat. One thing is certain, Chichewa theatre has caught fire in the country and any popular playwright will have to write for mass audiences.<sup>73</sup>

It appears as if the trend is not confined to Chancellor College alone, but the other theatre groups operating in the country.

Wachiona Ndani, literally translated, means 'who has seen it?'

It is the name given to a cards gambling game. It is often associated with layabouts and crooks. For a long time (since colonial days) the government has been trying to discourage it. The game has nothing to do with Malawian tradition. Neither is Chimombo's play. Moving from social anthropology, Chimombo goes to living people found in the streets and towns of Malawi. Wachiona Ndani teems with people who have abandoned village ways and moved into town to make a living by hook or by crook. Their attempts to succeed in this world are

hampered by: a lack of knowledge and sympathetic leadership; ill founded motives and selfishness.

The play has been described as a 'comically allegorical [and] literary' one by David Kerr. The story is about ordinary peasants and their abortive attempt to form a cooperative modeled on a capitalist enterprise, in order to maximize their incomes. The group comprises: shoe-repairers, tailors, watchmen, prostitutes, caddies and ball-boys from a local expatriate club and layabouts who live on petty thefts.

Through such people Chimombo paints a vivid picture of Malawian life as it is experienced by the country's ordinary people - those who fill the country's market places, suburbs, ghettos and shop veranda as opposed to those who enjoy a posh life resulting from political, economic and academic power. The picture shows Malawian peasants and their lives, dreams, passions, motives and relationships.

For a leader the peasants go to a small businessman around whose business enterprise they all seem to thrive. For instance, the watchman works for him, the shoe-repairer and the tailor use his shop veranda as a working place - they also wait for customers from his shop. The layabouts use his veranda as a meeting ground for their gambling game. His involvement however leads to the failure of the group. Towards the end of the play one of the characters complains about the failure of the group and attributes it to the involvement of this gentleman in the whole affair. And indeed one wonders why he had to come in. Right from the start his presence before the peasants is arrogant, oppressive and exploitative. He shouts at them, he

constantly threatens to chase them away from his veranda. One wonders what sort of cooperative it was going to be with him at its centre.

Chimombo seems to be challenging the concept of organizing peasants through people who are not only ignorant about peasants, but having no peasant experience at all. Without saying it, he seems to be suggesting that peasants should be left to organize themselves.

On another score, and perhaps a more important one, the play's depiction of the bourgeoisie - coming through the wishes and dreams of the peasants - shows a life that leaves a lot to be desired. Through and through it reeks of emptiness, exploitation and waste. Perhaps this is why dreams founded on such a life only flounder and fail instead of maturing into fruition. It is at this point that the 'allegorical' qualities of the play may be gleaned from it.

Unlike The Rainmaker, Wachiona Ndani is not poetic nor does it wallow in the playwright's metaphysics. It is a play built on the peasant's own language and experiences. Whilst a picture of the bourgeoisie comes through in the text, it is drawn very tactfully. It is created through the eyes of the peasants rather than the bourgeoisie themselves. This helps to heighten the painful economic differences between the two groups. It also helps to place the play within the reach of peasants themselves. Wachiona Ndani is a concrete attempt by an academic playwright to join theatre practitioners who are trying to forge a theatre for the masses. It may also be seen as an ironic and pessimistic comment on such attempts (seeing as they are being made by university dons and undergraduates not by the people themselves).



Not Sparing the Flock (or Chilembwe the Martyr) by James Ng'ombe

James Ng'ombe's background in theatre has been given elsewhere.<sup>74</sup>

To date he has written several plays: Echoing House (1972), The Banana Tree (1975), The Beauty of Dawn (1975), Not Sparing the Flock (1976), The Painter (1976), The King's Pillow (1976) and Sikusinja's Song (1977). Two of these, The Echoing House and The Painter were refused permission for performance by the Censorship Board. The former on grounds of sex and religion, whilst the latter's rejection was not explained. The author received the following letter in the case of The Painter:

11th November, 1976

Dear Sir,

Please find attached the scripts of the play 'The Painter'.

The play has been rejected.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

signed.<sup>75</sup>

The Painter is a story of a young unemployed graduate who makes a girl pregnant, but refuses to face up to the responsibility of taking care of her for reasons best known to himself. On the other hand the girl rebels from her family - a deeply Christian one for that matter. Perhaps it is the subject of the unwanted pregnancy and the girl's rebellion that led to the play's rejection by the censors.

In spite of these rejections Ng'ombe has continued to write. His subject matter covers myths, folk tales, history as well as modern

Malawian society. Elsewhere the present author has looked at his first three plays.<sup>76</sup> Not Sparing the Flock (or Chilembwe the Martyr) has been described by the author as an historical play about the Chilembwe Rising of 1915.<sup>77</sup> In it the playwright tries to recapture the last days of Chilembwe's life and his fight to free his people. The subject of John Chilembwe has inspired a monumental study by Professor Shepperson The Independent African and several other studies in the history of African Nationalism.<sup>78</sup> Ng'ombe does not say whether his play is based on any of these studies or not. John Chilembwe is a well known historical figure in Malawian politics.

The story of John Chilembwe talks of a young man who went to the U.S.A. to train as a preacher. After his training he returned to Malawi to evangelize amongst his people. During this period he clashed with white settlers and the colonial government over the treatment of Africans. In a series of letters to the Governor of the Nyasaland Protectorate he protested and called for change. But the authorities were stubborn and refused to listen to him. This left him with one option - to fight. He died during a skirmish with government forces. Today John Chilembwe and those who died with him are looked upon as Martyrs who died for the liberation of the country. 3rd March has been set aside as a Martyr's day in the country to remember not just John Chilembwe's death, but also other people who died, in subsequent years before independence. By choosing to write on this subject Ng'ombe was creating a political play of a kind. Or at least he courts a political interpretation of his work.

The first performance of Chilembwe the Martyr was done on 2nd March, 1983. The first draft of the play was written on 9th March, 1976 as Not Sparing the Flock. This was revised on 25th October, 1977 still under the same title. Most of the script remained unchanged except for the ending. But the performance of Chilembwe the Martyr on 2nd March, 1983 was based on the 1976 draft. The uprising of Chilembwe has inspired two other plays by The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation and Jane Winters, and a song by the M.B.C. Band. The theme of John Chilembwe is therefore a very popular one.

James Ng'ombe's treatment of the theme is fairly original in the way he tries to wrestle with the personality of the man, but the play is not sufficiently long to allow for a satisfactory exposition of the man. Nevertheless within its brevity he manages to give the man's background, his charisma and the source of his grievances (which are both personal and patriotic). He also manages to create a plot which renders the tragic ending of the protagonist credible.

The prologue establishes the background of John Chilembwe quite clearly:

Peter: Mother, do you remember that man who used to work for Bwana Butu?

Mother: Which one in particular? I've known several.

Peter: The one who went away with him. You remember him mother; he used to be friends with father.

Mother: You mean Chilembwe? Of course, I know him! Did you say he is back my son?<sup>79</sup>

In such a short space of time Chilembwe's background, his trip abroad

and his return are firmly established. The stage is set for what this man has brought from abroad:

He is completely changed. He wears a suit, covers his eyes with glasses and the shoes he wears make him walk exactly like the white man - like Livingstone - the landowner himself [...]<sup>80</sup>

The social gap between Chilembwe and his compatriots is thus established. His presence helps to demystify the existence of white people in the world before the Africans. Having achieved this he himself becomes a natural leader in any moves towards challenging alien forces in the area. What his followers do not know is that Chilembwe is not in good health. He has recurring pain in his sides. But Chilembwe himself is very much aware of it. He even believes that he is going to die from this illness. But he only wants to die after he has led his people to freedom. In this way he displays his love for them. Using the church pulpit as a political platform, he fires the people's imagination about their freedom. Using quotations from the Bible he awakens the people's political consciousness. Of particular significance to his intention is the struggle of the Jews under Pharaoh and their subsequent emancipation led by Moses. He compares his people's bondage under colonial rule to that of the people of Israel:

CHILEMBWE: [Addressing a crucific in the church] Oh Master, my master (swiftly turns to face the audience and falls on his knees) My Master, do not let me die without doing thy will (Suffering with a contorted face.) This pain, Dear Lord, this pain is killing me. But why, why should I suffer like this when I've your work to do, Lord. I haven't led thy flock home. I haven't freed them from Egypt yet. They're still Whiteman's slaves. Yet it is thy will

that I should free thy children of Israel. What wrong have I done? Must I not see Canaan? Moses had sinned, Lord. What have I done, "Thy will be done, Lord". Just let me do thy will before I die. That's all I ask from thee [...]<sup>81</sup>

His fight against white men in Nyasaland is not only motivated by love for his people. There is also the element of personal vendetta in the matter:

CHILEMBWE: (moved to tears): Livingstone the slavemaster. He is occupying my father's land. I'm glad you understand the urgency of the matter. I hope we are fighting in the interest of Nyasaland as a whole - not Chiradzulo alone. It is our Beloved country we are fighting to save. We expect reinforcement from Ncheu. Now we have to launch a planned attack if we are to succeed. But before we go into that, I want to appeal to Peter and Bwanali: Please bring me the head of Livingstone (Angry approval) That's the first head I want to see. I can't forget the way he chased my father from his land. Saturday night, while the rest proceed bring me the head. I won't rest until I've seen his head removed from his body. Don't touch the women or children.<sup>82</sup>

Livingstone is a white settler whom the playwright only mentions, but we do not meet. The question of land is central to the uprising, but so too is the question of African involvement in the first world war. In a letter to the Governor he raises this particular issue. His argument is that it is unfair to involve innocent Africans in a war which has nothing to do with them:

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER: (Holding the letter up with some interest, after some time) This really sounds interesting. "Let the rich men, bankers, titled men, store-keepers, farmers and landlords go to war and get shot



[...]

Instead of the poor Africans who have nothing to own in their present world, who in death leave only a long line of widows and orphans in utter want and dire distress [...]"<sup>83</sup>

It is this concern with a national issue that diminishes personal vendettas in the story. Ng'ombe's treatment of the interaction between blacks and whites is restricted to official matters. Even the 'hated' Livingstone is not allowed space in the unfolding drama. This way Chilembwe's enterprise assumes magnitude of a national issue. The play thus fits with Malawi's Martyr day observation.

One reviewer in The Daily Times described the performance of the play at the French Cultural Centre in Blantyre as a soul searching experience one. He said that the play:

vividly depicted causes of the 1915 first uprising against the colonial administration, people's reaction of the white rulers, John Chilembwe's open attack on the administrative system, and his death which did not spell the end of the struggle.<sup>84</sup>

'Vivid' is not an appropriate word for the picture that the play portrays. It is true that the playwright presents conflicting factions in his play. But they are not satisfactorily established to allow a vivid picture of their intentions. Throughout the play the only time the two groups are brought together is towards the end of the play when government soldiers are chasing Chilembwe and killing his supporters. Where we have been shown the colonial presence what has come through is the cynicism of the government administrators rather than their exploitative or cruel intentions as mentioned in Chilembwe's letter and

his pulpit complaints.

Steve Chimombo points out that the performance of Chilembwe the Martyr 'requires some objective reviewing ... because the subject matter is of historical import' and also because 'the performance and the script reveal some of the problems of transporting history onto the stage'.<sup>85</sup> The product in question here used choral music to help expose and explain certain aspects of the characters as well as to forward the drama as scene changes were being made.<sup>86</sup> Chimombo found fault with the songs. He felt some of them were not appropriate to the mood of the play. He went on to complain that:

The chorus, on an open stage, using minimal props and sets, was visible to the audience throughout the performance, providing a source of visual distraction.<sup>87</sup>

The French Cultural Centre out-door theatre has a huge stage. There is no provision for an orchestra pit nor is there any place in which the company could have conceivably hidden the chorus without affecting the singing. Another problem mentioned by Chimombo was the style of singing. He found it too modern for a story which took place in 1915. Nowhere in the script does Ng'ombe call for music in the play. What he calls for are blackouts or cross fades during transition from scene to scene. The inclusion of music in the production was thus purely a directorial decision.

Having talked about the production Chimombo moved on to the script itself. He complained that the playwright drastically reduced historical time to stage time at the expense of characterisation in the play. He questioned the episodic nature of the plot, pointing out

that it 'resulted in rapid scene changes of events separated in space and time being patched together by choral music, to pass for continuity'<sup>88</sup> He went on to complain that Ng'ombe's play leaves the audience's expectations unfulfilled, giving them fragments instead of full scenes in which 'cause and effect' are not fully explored. Chimombo's views echo what Jim Stewart felt about his own play The Rainmaker when it was performed at the Chancellor College open-air theatre in 1976. These views point to the problem that Malawian playwrights, who choose to work within historical material, must face. They have to decide how much history, as they see it, they want their audiences to learn from their drama. The other option is simply to tell a story.

Daughters of Their Mother by Owen Mbilizi

This play was Chichiri Secondary School's entry at the A.T.E.M. Annual Schools Drama Festival in 1981. The performance won the best production award. It was directed by the author himself, who describes it as:

a play about two women [Laweni and Wanga] who talk about what they really are as typical Black Mothers. They talk about their role as wives to their husbands, and mothers to their children. They also talk about their role in the community.<sup>89</sup>

The talking reveals a good deal about the hardships a Malawian woman goes through in life. These start from childhood to motherhood. The play opens with some kind of libation to a mango tree which is a provider of comfort to the women:

LAWENI: Under the merciless sun of October  
You give us shade dear tree

WANGA: In the scorching heat of the sun  
 So thick is your shade  
 Ever cool [...] <sup>90</sup>

And referring to the confines of a homestead they go on to express themselves:

LAWENI: [...] Inside here is where we women  
 Are at peace with ourselves  
 At liberty.  
 So free, so relaxed. <sup>91</sup>

Having poured the libation at the foot of the tree amidst such praise they settle to pounding maize in one mortar. It is at this point that the talking really begins. It comes as some form of gossip between them. The setting is very appropriate, for the mortar traditionally excludes men. It is where, through pounding, songs, laughter and straight talk, women unlock their hearts to each other. Laweni and Wanga take the audience on a round trip starting from the role of a woman as wife, then motherhood which in turn via the child takes them back to childhood days, adolescence and finally where the trip started, womanhood. The whole trip is set in the two women's memories of their experiences in society.

Throughout the trip Mbilizi gives his audience glimpses of what the two women really feel about their position in life. For most of their life they are an unhappy lot. They have to put up with all sorts of hardships. For instance in the family, at the womanhood stage there is the inconsiderate behaviour of the husband who is either sexually insatiable or just a brute. This is the husband who only sees his wife as a vehicle for his pleasure and nothing else. The

following dialogue provides an example of such behaviour:

LAWENI: As the fading blanket of darkness  
Wore off along the horizon, to give the  
Golden rays of the sun their manifestation  
I was already up and snapping  
The joints of my bones.  
The grass and leaves, soft and wet  
With dew.  
My ears ushered the first songs  
Of the early bird to my hearing  
Wanga were you up that early?

WANGA: I wish I was up that early.

LAWENI: But I heard you up so early.  
Did I not Wanga?

WANGA: You heard me alright Laweni.

LAWENI: Hmm!! Chinangwa?

WANGA: Mmm Chinangwa indeed.

LAWENI: I knew, I knew, tell me what  
Happened? Tell me?

WANGA: (Ignores her) The last one for the husks  
Laweni. The little hens are waiting.<sup>92</sup>

The shame of coming out so late from one's hut in a village is indescribable. Mbilizi does not overtly reveal that it was Chinangwa's sexual demands that delayed Wanga, but the hints are there. It is not just in the home that women suffer sexually. The whole male population in society seems to think that a woman exists only for one thing, man's sexual gratification. Every man, regardless of his position, thinks of a woman as an instrument of sex.

Then there are the other things that a woman has to put up with: looking after the home, giving birth to children by the gross and nursing them to adulthood with very poor support from the husband.



Whilst she is busy looking after the family, the husband is busy enjoying himself elsewhere.

The picture that comes out of the play is one in which the woman is a sufferer of innumerable injustices in society in spite of the abundant good things she does. And this is a situation she cannot get out of.

When the play was performed at Lilongwe Teachers' Training College in 1981 during the National Schools Drama Festival finals there was no doubt that the audience enjoyed watching it. A few things about the play came out during the performance: Mbilizi's attempts to get over strict theatre censorship and his astute observation of Malawian society. Right from the outset Mbilizi established that his play was tackling issues considered taboo in Malawian society. The play opened with a parade of all the characters involved in the drama. Leading the group were the main characters, two women (Laweni and Wanga) followed by the smaller ones in their order of appearance. When Wanga's husband (Chinangwa) appeared he was chewing a piece of cassava. Immediately he did so the audience burst out laughing and calling out his name. The name Chinangwa is the Chichewa word for cassava. And raw cassava is commonly believed to possess powers of enhancing man's sexual strength. By introducing this character this way Mbilizi was directing the audience to understand the man's role in the play was going to be - a symbol of male sexuality. This registered with the audience perfectly for even without saying a word there was the uproar of recognition just referred to earlier on. Mbilizi was discovering

that a playwright does not have to say everything in words, particularly where he is faced with strict theatre censorship. Insinuation can be employed to get a message across.

Accompanying such use of innuendo Mbilizi also created visual images to suggest sexuality. He had two pestles and a mortar which the leading women used. All references to these implements suggested sexuality:

LAWENI: The secrecy that lies between the mortar and the pestle  
The grain is poured in the mortar  
The mortar has the grain.

WANGA: The water is poured in the cup.

LAWENI: A trickle of water from the cup to wet a little grain.  
The grain is wet.

[...]

The pestle stout and stiff vibrates to its own stoutness

WANGA: The mortar expectantly gaping  
Awaiting  
Awaiting.<sup>93</sup>

Another element that Mbilizi brought out in production was the way he used the properties to support the words as sound and suggestion.

For instance the following lines:

LAWENI: The pestle crushes the grain

WANGA: And the grain breaks

LAWENI: Pounding

WANGA: And the grain breaks

LAWENI: Pounding

WANGA: The grain breaks

LAWENI: Pppouunnddinngg

WANGA: And ... the grain ... Brrreeaakkingg.<sup>94</sup>

were delivered more like a pounding song sung alternatively with actual pounding going on. The thud of the pestle as it crushed the grain in the mortar punctuated and separated the speakers' lines. Through this process, and use of particular gestures and movements, comment on social issues relating to women was made accessible to the audience without suffering censorship. Like James Gibbs would say, the playwright here was forced to develop a very original and rich drama as a result of trying to get around the Censorship Board.

Mbilizi's work shows an original approach to employment of traditional indigenous culture in the creation of his theatre. This ability has come out of a readiness to learn and explore from various sources. He is also a very good and dedicated actor.

#### Zambian Plays:

##### Shaka Zulu by Fwanyanga Mulikita

This play was published in 1967. By this time the Zambian Arts Trust was steeped into its work to promote the development of Zambian theatre. A year before Zambia had just seen the setting up of a Directorate of Zambian Cultural Services, whose objective was basically 'to foster the interests of all institutions and organisations engaged

in the promotion and preservation of culture in Zambia.' The Directorate's programme of activities included provision of support to the work of Z.A.T. in theatre.<sup>95</sup> Apart from the existence of Z.A.T. and the Directorate of Cultural Services, there was the expatriate-dominated Theatre Association of Zambia in existence. By 1967 the rift between expatriate theatre practitioners and Zambian ones had not yet opened. The main feature of this association's work was the annual festival. Speaking about this period and the T.A.Z. drama festival Peter Chakulanda says that:

although plays were too often judged from the stand point of Western Culture, there was no doubt that interest in drama continued to grow, particularly among Africans, they wanted plays that reflected Zambian life and culture [...] in order to achieve these aims [...] in the late sixties the Department of Cultural Services and the Ministry of National Guidance organised play writing competitions and budding playwrights began to come forward. From them we had Fwanyanga Mulikita's transcription of Chaka Zulu.<sup>96</sup>

Fwanyanga Mulikita is a man of varied experiences. He has been a court clerk, teacher, welfare officer, permanent secretary, diplomat and cabinet minister.<sup>97</sup> At the time he was writing his play he was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture. He majored in English Literature at Fort Hare University (South Africa). One may speculate here that his interest in the story of Chaka, the Zulu king, may have been aroused by this South African connection. This coupled with a political atmosphere in Zambia, which was not only trying to salvage a nearly lost culture, but trying to prove to the world that Africans also had a history - provide enough justification for writing the play.

Of course the theme of Chaka has been tackled by several writers, particularly in Francophone Africa. Schipper lists Seydou Badian's La mort de Chaka (1962), Abdou Anta Kâ's Les Amazoulous (1972), Djibril Tamsir Niame's Sikasso ou la dernière <sup>citadelle</sup> suivi de Chaka (1971).<sup>98</sup> Dorothy Blair includes Senghor's Chaka (which she calls a dramatic poem for several voices) and Condetto Nenekhaly-Camara's Amazoulou (1970).<sup>99</sup> The reasons for Chaka's popularity particularly in Francophone Africa has been seen as the way the story helps to articulate the essence of Negritude in its fight to re-instate black people's dignity. In their treatment of Chaka they all draw parallels with the present and point lessons in Negritude or political commitment.<sup>100</sup> The source for all these Francophone writers is Thomas Mofolo's novel Chaka: an historical romance first published in the author's mother tongue in 1925 and subsequently translated into English in 1931. Fwanyanga Mulikita's however is based on Ritter's Shaka Zulu which was published much later in 1955. The difference between these two sources is that Mofolo's work, though biographical, is fictionalized, whereas Ritter's tries to be as objective as possible.

Talking about his book, Ritter says that:

When I started writing my book, I thought it might be read only by <sup>101</sup>students of Native history in this country (South Africa).

This is how he collected the material:

As a child in Natal (South Africa) his playmates were Zulu children and with such a background it was inevitable that at night he squatted in the kraals to hear the elders recount the great tales of battles.



He talked for many hours with Chief Sigananga Cube who served with Shaka as an u-dibi (mat-carrier and general body servant) and who [...] took part in the Zulu rebellion of 1906.<sup>102</sup>

Ritter also served as a trumpeter with the Natal Carbineers during this rebellion. This gave him a chance to see how the Zulus fought. It was also from this that he developed an admiration for the people:

His imagination was fired by what he had seen and heard [of the Zulus]. He determined that one day he would put Shaka in his perspective - not as a cruel despot, but as one of the greatest generals in history. [He hoped] that his book [would] result in the European having more respect for the Native and the Native having more respect for himself.<sup>103</sup>

It is probably this hope that persuaded Mulikita to use Ritter's book rather than Mofolo's. For although Mofolo's handling of the story is more literary than Ritter's biography, his book suffers from the writer's Christian background. As Blair says, Mofolo:

saw the Zulu chief as a savage and terrifying matricide who had received from the sorcerer Isanusi the secret of omnipotence in exchange for the promise of utter ruthlessness; his death being thus the just retribution for his paganism.<sup>104</sup>

Mulikita's treatment of Shaka certainly brings dignity to the hero. Right from the beginning of the story Shaka is showered with praises through the lips of the chronicler:

U-Shaka the captain and creator of the famous regiments, Amawombe, Ufasimba, Belebele, Izipholo, Ukangela and many others whose names will be remembered while there are Zulus in Africa. U-Shaka defied tradition and armed his warriors with the short stabbing spear. He killed a lion single-handed. He danced barefoot on a field of thorns to inspire his soldiers with courage to follow him. First he conquered; then he built a nation; then his greatness turned upon him and he died from a traitor's spear. This man's story have I come to tell you.<sup>105</sup>

Presented in thirteen scenes Shaka's life unfolds to reveal him not as

a tyrant, but a man - who through no personal choice - is surrounded by misfortune of one kind or another. In scene one the beginning of such misfortune is firmly established. His birth is illegitimate. His upbringing starts with a very loving mother, but an unloving cruel father. Socially Shaka should be rejected, but his own deeds and personality redeem him. Right from the start Shaka, as a public figure, is admired. It is only those who envy his esteem that hate him. Shaka's first murder is done in self-defence more than anything else. Clearly Mulikita intends to create like Ritter, an admirable character of Shaka. His rise to power is charted out in the second scene. This is something he earns through his prowess as a soldier, not through foul means. His installation as chief in scene three reveals the style of his rule and ambition. He says:

There must be absolute obedience and loyalty. I wish to create a powerful nation that will be respected all over the world.<sup>106</sup>

His justice is merciless, but all within tradition. This makes it acceptable and absolves any charges of tyranny that he might suffer. He refuses to negotiate when dealing with the enemy. He says:

I believe 'negotiation' is not part of the Ndwandwe vocabulary. The only language they understand is 'impi ebomvu', red war, war to the finish.<sup>107</sup>

And as it turns out, his fears are proved true for no sooner than this conversation is over do the said Ndwandwes attack this kingdom. Shaka once again is provided with an excuse for displaying his ruthlessness in dealing with the enemy.

The crowning of Shaka as overall chief, after Dingiswayo's death,

is interesting in the way it establishes a break from tradition. Not being part of the royal family Shaka should not take over the chieftaincy, but his achievements make it possible as the people show:

We want Shaka as our chief. He is not an Mtetwa, but he is the only man to lead us and protect our people.<sup>108</sup>

Parallels can be drawn here with modern political leadership in Zambia (if not the whole of Africa) today. It is every politician's wish to see tribal differences give way to nationalism. They themselves are, in ideal situations, selected or elected on merit not tribal grounds. Shaka's ascendancy and style of politics here may have appealed to Mulikita's sense of politics. Look at the following conversation:

MGOBOZI: It is the pleasure of the Great Elephant that today the soldiers may speak their minds. This is the first time in the history of the land that a King has ever granted such freedom of speech. Anyone who wishes to criticise the policy of King Shaka is free to do so. The King will answer him without anger.

(There is a lot of hesitation, [but] at last one of [the soldiers] steps forward rather nervously)

1st SOLDIER: I am speaking for many. Why are outsiders promoted over the heads of Zulus?

(There is a low murmur of support from the soldiers)

SHAKA: When a man joins the Zulu army he becomes a Zulu. There are no outsiders. Do you question me being Dingiswayo's successor though I am not an Mtetwa?<sup>109</sup>

This 'question time' goes on like this with Shaka establishing his adeptness at matters of court not just the battle field. Asked why he did not destroy a particular enemy, he responds:

You do not destroy a pup that bites. You train it to bite your enemies. The Quabes are our brothers - we want them to be our friends.<sup>110</sup>

To another question on his inexplicable restraint he responds:

Does the spear tell the warrior when to strike, or is it the other way round?<sup>111</sup>

Asked about marriage and having children to succeed him (for he remained single for a long time) he responded thus:

The kingdom's heir is its greatest soldier.<sup>112</sup>

This is a clear refusal to accept nepotism and favouritism. Addressing the same question, he says:

Listen to me. Be sure I speak the truth. I have not taken a wife myself. There is a woman of this tribe whom I respect and well enough to prove myself before her. If I marry now, I do not trust myself to go into danger with thoughts of her in my heart. And my greatest responsibility is to my soldiers. I will never marry and leave you to fight my battles. My first and last thoughts are for you.<sup>113</sup>

All these clever words are Mulikita's addition to the story of Shaka Zulu in a bid to bring credit to the Zulu hero. But they spring from Ritter's portrayal of the great warrior. An example is the way Shaka refrains from any hints of self-praise. Returning from a victorious encounter with an enemy, he recounts his victory in a very brief and uncolourful way to the consternation of the chief (Dingiswayo), who exclaims:

Is that all you have to report of so great a deed?<sup>114</sup>

To which Shaka characteristically replies:

Oh! Chief, what more is there to say? I am but a warrior who makes his report.<sup>115</sup>

The chief is quick to notice Shaka's modesty and cleverness. And

Mulikita uses such events as basis for the language he gives Shaka in his play. It is through these that Mulikita's political ideas surface. Scene eight is full of these wise cracks: 'Power is worth winning but not through treachery'; 'The law puts chiefs above witchcraft - but you have put yourself outside the law'.<sup>116</sup> Notice the comments the white characters make about Shaka:

And then he asked about our Parliament, local government, police. He seemed to understand what we told him as readily as if he had lived in London Town. And yet maybe it is not so amazing. For what did we find in his kingdom, Farewell, but those very institutions - monarchy, government, cleanliness and discipline and social security. He didn't have so much to learn. He had already learned the need for these things, and that is most of the battle.<sup>117</sup>

Through these comments on Shaka, Mulikita voices his advice to his Zambian compatriots. He turns the history of the Zulu into a moral lesson for his own people. By going outside his own immediate 'home' material for such work, he extends the moral to people outside Zambia. Very much in keeping with Zambia Government's pan-Africanist views Mulikita's Shaka Zulu addresses itself to the goal of shaping an African identity and political awareness through the past.

This seeming progressive outlook is however occasionally marred by Mulikita's attempts to remain very close to his source, Ritter's Shaka Zulu. There are moments he could have sifted and recreated scenes out of the source. Compare Shaka's conversation with Dingiswayo on the arrival of white people in South Africa:

DINGISWAYO: [...] But let me tell you a bit of my history.  
 [...] My father's loyal supporters put my brother to death, but I escaped and wandered about for many years until I reached Delgon



Bay, where I met a white man, Dr Cowan, who told me something about the white man's civilization many months' journey to the south. Beyond the seas, the white men are more numerous than all the Ngunis combined, their armies uncountable, armed with death-dealing sticks which vomit thunder, fire and smoke. They have powerful medicines to heal, though none for witchcraft. They have a system of government in which all small chiefs obey one big chief as head over all, which does away with petty fighting and ensures peace for the whole land. That is what I am trying to do in this land.

[...]

The white man's system of justice ensures a fair trial for everyone, chief and common man alike, and men are put to death only for the most serious crimes, like treason and murder.

[...]

The great chief rules the lesser chiefs, and the lesser chiefs rule the villages. Power is divided so no man has too much. These chiefs are not born, but are chosen by the people.<sup>118</sup>

Very little reworking has gone into this speech. The following passage from Ritter's biography shows this:

[...] In the course of [...] conversation Dingiswayo told Shaka of a great white civilisation which had established its advance posts many moons' journey to the south, and an allied civilisation which had an outpost at Delagoa Bay. That beyond the seas the white men were far more numerous than all the Ngunis combined, and that their armies there were uncountable, and armed with death-dealing staffs which vomitted thunder, smoke and death, and still bigger ones like logs (cannon) which were the most fearsome of all. He stressed the importance of keeping on friendly terms with the whites, as quite apart from their death-dealing instruments, they had powerful medicines to heal, though, strange to say, none for witchcraft.

Above all they had an orderly system of government, in which

all lesser chiefs acknowledge one supreme chief as head over all, which did away with petty fighting and ensured peace for the whole land. Their system of justice ensured a fair trial for every man, chief and commoner alike, and the death sentence was only inflicted for treason, murder and the most serious crimes [...]<sup>119</sup>

By sticking to his source too closely, Mulikita denies himself the opportunity to evolve an original play. It is probably because of this that one reviewer found the play 'episodic and non-theatrical, with no central theme or workable climax'.<sup>120</sup> The story of Shaka is so rich that anybody trying to dramatize his whole life as presented by Ritter is likely to give it thin treatment.

The moral and political lessons that Mulikita is trying to develop for his modern audience have been mentioned already. They can be gleaned from the philosophical statements he places into Shaka's mouth wherever he is confronted verbally by other people - particularly from amongst his own followers. Shaka comes through as a leader who knows what is best for his people. At times Mulikita includes direct allusions to the presence of colonialism in Zululand. Two white people are discussing Shaka's cruelty soon after his mother's death:

FAREWELL: His people aren't going to take it much longer, I can tell you. These atrocities are too much. They need a lot of our civilising influence yet.

LYNN: Don't be so smug. What is your influence? Bogus concessions, legalised robbery, penal settlements, and indignities of their emissaries. If they ever turn against us in war, Farewell, let us hope it is not with the brutality we have taught them.<sup>121</sup>

When Mulikita was writing this play he was imagining a proscenium

arch stage with all the trappings of a western conventional theatre like: sophisticated lighting and elaborate sets. Throughout the play he calls for these to highlight the drama unfolding. The whole play is exposed through a series of cross-fades. The costumes envisaged are typical Zulu ones, just like the set is supposed to be. Scene two's setting is a typical example:

[ The stage lights up to reveal Oyengweni, Dingiswayo's capital. Seated on a stool is Dingiswayo, King of the Abatetura. He is wearing an animal skin kilt, ivory bangles on the legs and arms. His prime minister Ngomane is seated on a mat of rushes. There are the Iziewe regiment. The men are seated outside a thatched hut of pole and dagga - the Council Chamber. Its semi-circular door is open. In the background are thousands of beehive-shaped huts.]<sup>122</sup>

Such elaborate instructions are difficult to visualize on the proscenium arch stage of a community or school hall (as this was likely to be the venue for such a play). Probably Mulikita was not thinking of performance as much as readers when developing the play. The only record of this play's performance that has come to the present writer's notice is from Malawi. An amateur group, the Malimodzi Drama Group, has done an abridged form of the play at Chancellor College Open-Air Theatre. (The performance was well received by the audience.) Unlike Chimombo's The Rainmaker, it did not present any problems to those who saw it.

The Poisoned Cultural Meat and The Fools Marry by Kabwe Kasoma

Kabwe Kasoma is perhaps the most well known playwright in Zambia. His work has been done both on the stage and on television. He

himself often attends conferences on drama and gives comments on  
Zambian theatre. Michael Etherton has described him as:

both a dramatist and politician [...] a popular dramatist  
whose plays about the Copperbelt township life are widely  
performed and appreciated in Zambia.<sup>123</sup>

Elsewhere he has said this of the playwright:

Kasoma is very much involved in all aspects of theatre; he  
has been producing, acting and writing for over ten years  
[...] and he has recently done a lot to take theatre to the  
people rather than expect people to come to the theatre.<sup>124</sup>

In his own words he says that:

In Zambia we believe that theatre can instruct as well as  
entertain

[...]

Dance, music and poetic song form integral parts of an  
African play

[...]

The most apt model for our social development concerns is the  
epic theatre. Like Piscator's and Brecht's

[...]

For such [work] you need a simple catalyst theatre which is  
usually improvised. For such plays you need themes and  
ideas that are readily recognisable by the audience in order  
to ensure their participation<sup>125</sup>

So far all his plays reflect this commitment to social development.

Here, only two of his earlier plays will be looked at to show how he  
goes about achieving this goal as a playwright. These are The Poisoned  
Cultural Meat and The Fools Marry.

The Poisoned Cultural Meat

In a brief introduction to The Poisoned Cultural Meat he says the play:

departs from the usual Western form in that it does not rely on the memorized line, but the improvised line by the player [...] it merely provides the guidelines which can be filled in by the players. Neither is it in one particular language, English and Bemba are used side by side [...] it also gives a lot of latitude to the creative producer.<sup>126</sup>

Having said so he still envisages his theatre in a realistic form. He wants to see on stage: real 'thatched huts, mud walls [...] a bit of bush in the fore and backgrounds. A banana and mulberry plantations in the background'. Only the background of 'forest and sky' is left to a mural on the backdrop.

This was a play initially put together for the Non-Aligned Conference in September 1970. In 1971 Kasoma revised it for the Kitwe Drama and Cultural Society. In his own words, the play was:

an attempt to portray Zambian culture. In the first act we see village life with its slow communal pace. In act II we see a contrast between village life and the impersonal town life. Here, an old couple comes to the capital to see their son who has been so successful that he has climbed to the mantle of a Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry. The big government man gives his parents a cold reception especially when the poor old couple interrupt an important reception held in honour of delegates to the Copper Sales and Price Stability Conference. He angrily tells his parents they should have warned him that they were coming. That they cannot stay in his house as he has no room for them due to the international visitors. And that they should go to sleep in the house servant's apartment. The old couple are shocked. They curse their son and his white civilisation. They elect not to sleep at the servant's house but to go to the bus station to sleep there until the following morning when they should go back to Kasama.<sup>127</sup>



The village life (which is in this case Zambian culture) is established through indigenous Zambian music, dancing, stage set, decor, and properties. Created in a realistic mode, Kasoma incorporates typical Zambian dances Ingoma, Vimbuza and Ndendeule in the drama. To justify their inclusion he presents them as part of an ongoing girls' initiation ceremony. But the three dances selected here are not normally associated with girls' initiation ceremonies nor are they traditionally performed on one occasion. Ingoma is war dance (see chapter one); Vimbuza is a therapeutic dance (see chapter five). Ndendeule is just a recreational dance (see Atta Mensah's Music and Dance in Zambia). By presenting them on one occasion Kasoma is dispensing with traditional format like the National Dance troupe does (see chapter five). The format in which the dances are performed supports this view:

Drums are heard from off stage at first distantly. Presently, enter the drummers and musicians. Enter Mbeleeta [the initiate] carried on her aunt's back. She is beautifully smeared with inkula. She has breasts almost bare except for a small band of cloth tied across her chest. She is wearing a beaded skirt quite distinct from the rest of the women who are wearing long bark clothes. (Sacking) She is placed in the centre while the dancers and musicians perform, before her. The Chief is seated on a raised platform. For some minutes each:-

- (a) Ngoni War Dance [Ingoma]
- (b) The Vimbusa Dancers
- (c) The Ndendeule Dancers.

They enter and exit successfully at a signal from the Chief.<sup>128</sup>

What Kasoma is presenting here are 'staged' dances like those one would get at a party political rally in Zambia. Whilst it is true that a

chief in a traditional village is accorded special respect, the raised dais suggested here is a modern idea borrowed from political public rallies which often have political leaders seated on platforms. This setting confuses the purpose of the dance (especially when the chief is actually left to conduct the dancing as it were). One is not certain whether the performances are in honour of the initiate or the chief. The playwright is caught up in the problem he is trying to deprecate. He is also the victim of those 'books' which:

have eaten too deep  
 Into [his people's] cultural meat  
 [Books which] take out the maggot  
 And the sweet stale  
 [that] are better than  
 The poison that the books  
 Infuse into our cultural meat  
 And make it stink foul  
 With alien flavours<sup>129</sup>

Doing traditional dance anyhow is not sufficient into itself even if it only reminds people of their cultural heritage. The playwright, unlike politicians and government cultural officers, has the unique opportunity of creating proper milieu through which he can present the people's cultural heritage. Kasoma's problem here is finding an objective stance which will allow him to see his theatre in the same light he sees his themes.

Kasoma's improvisatory drama which started in 1970 together with his freedom to use both English and vernacular languages in one play have now become the pattern of work in Zambian theatre in general. This is typical of any popular theatre tradition growing in Africa. Combining two languages in one play might seem extra-ordinary to

African drama critics used to plays written in English about African experiences born out of the playwright's own imagination not the people he tries to depict. Code-switching in the speech of present-day Africans is a common feature on the continent. Where most people are likely to be bi-lingual or even multi-lingual this should not be surprising. In spite of his failure to find a proper vehicle for articulating his ideas Kasoma is on his way to becoming a true popular artist like those found working with Radio Broadcasting Houses of Malawi and Zambia.

#### The Fools Marry

This play was performed by the Chikwakwa Theatre in Lusaka on 11th June 1970 and 21st June 1970.<sup>130</sup> The performance was so successful that it was performed at the Chikwakwa Open-Air theatre twice. On the second occasion:

the theatre was packed with about 700 people [- ]students [... ] the friends [... ] local drinkers [... ] from a nearby beer-hall

[...] The play was received by a predominantly Zambian audience, noisy and enthusiastic and making a direct response to the play.<sup>131</sup>

The play was originally meant for 1970 Theatre Association of Zambia's annual festival where it was judged the worst entry by the visiting British adjudicator.<sup>132</sup> It was this play's performance which caused the rift between the University of Zambia Dramatic Society and T.A.Z.

The Fools Marry is about life amongst urban Africans on the Copperbelt region of Zambia. This is a life full of marital unfaithfulness,

drunkenness and deceit. This is a life that has inspired a good deal of writing not just in drama, but prose and poetry too. Kasoma says that:

All the characters in the play bear no relation to any person except in the case of Maria Sampule who gave [him] her consent [...]<sup>133</sup>

implying that his story is taken from a real life incident. The ending of the story seems to belie this, as Maria Sampule commits suicide. It is possible this is an ending created by the playwright purely for dramatic convenience. A radio play, Akaboshampuku, by Mwansa Kapeya deals with a similar theme - this will be looked at in chapter seven.

In the play Kasoma gives his audience a slice of township life in Zambia. This is a selective slice for it concentrates on the bad side of things. He peoples the play with familiar indicators of economic and moral decay: pubs, prostitutes, 'kapenta fish' and 'starved children'. The characters of the drama are people who live in poor houses. They have very low and inadequate incomes. These are people who are struggling to make ends meet. They are people in whom one gleans the beginnings of frustration and disappointment with the politics of the country:

KAMANGU: [...] I may be meeting the deputy mayor tonight. I am not sure but I will let you know by four this afternoon I shall be free. You know I am pressing hard on the Council to grant me a trading license. I want to take over the Patel tea room at Makolingo and turn it into a 'nshima' eating house for workers. But you know I have been told this and that by the Council. I applied for the license just after the MULUNGUSHI Economic Reforms were announced. Up to

now they haven't given me a license.

MBELETA: Ha. The Zambia of today my sister. It is Zambia if you have friends in high offices.

KAMANGU: True my sister, very true. What pains is the fact those who did not throw stones are reaping the fruits of our labours. You know I began politics while there was only Congress, you remember those days when I led a protest march to the D.C. at the Boma. You remember those days [...]

MBELETA: But why is it that some Freedom Fighters are not repaid for their labours during the struggle?

KAMANGU: You must have a lot of money to bribe a few influential fellows in the Council. Buy them a lot of beers whenever you meet them. If you are lucky to have a beautiful face, beautiful legs, a good behind like yourself, my sister, lie flat on your back and offer them part of you as part of the bargain. How do you think Susana happens to have been given that Tea Room near the bus stop?<sup>134</sup>

The issue Kasoma is tackling in The Fools Marry is a national malaise which needs eradicating. For him there seems to be only two ways towards achieving this goal. One way is through the ballot box, where those who are corrupt should 'not be returned to the Council'.<sup>135</sup> The other way is perhaps the one suggested by the ending of the play where the corrupt ones meet death in one way or another.

Although Kasoma now wants 'simple' theatre technology, his play was envisaged in a conventional mode and for a typical proscenium arch stage with elaborate sets. For the reality of his urban characters to come through he calls for a set which will present a typical urban Zambian house-hold: a room with tables, pans, fires, 'a water bucket, pots and a few other kitchen things', beds and linen etc. He even suggests the sophisticated technique of using a tape recorder to



accompany the reading of a letter by one of the characters. There is no question of trying to create an indigenous Zambian theatre by way of bringing in such things as song and dance. The presence of the narrator in the play is the only thing that seems to suggest an attempt towards this goal - that is if one is prepared to see him as the conventional storyteller in a typical village situation.

Soweto: Flowers Will Grow by Masautso Phiri

Although this play bears the name of Masautso Phiri as its author, it really is a result of a group creativity by the Tikwiza Theatre group. Masautso Phiri himself says that the play was initially:

conceived as a result of the massacre of school children [in Soweto] protesting against the imposition of Afrikaans language in schools. The protest, which occurred on the 16th June, 1976, resulted in 160 killed and many injured.

[...]

In Zambia, Tikwiza Theatre was at that time asked to prepare a series of short plays to be performed on the 8th August, 1976, a date celebrated as youth day at the time. Several ideas were discussed and put forward as a basis for communal development of themes [...] These were themes on the Soweto massacre, and the trial of mercenaries in Angola then taking place.<sup>136</sup>

At the time of the play's creation Masautso Phiri was the group's production chairman. Tikwiza Theatre group has been described as:

a group so well publicized and financed as to be almost Zambia's unofficial National Theatre.<sup>137</sup>

This support was coming from the government. It was based on the good record the group had established for itself through successful productions of other plays like Uhuru Wa Ndongo, Soweto: Flowers Will Grow, Christ

Unlimited and Death of a Cockroach. Tikwiza Theatre group represented Zambia at the 1977 Second World Black African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC). Phiri speaks of the group as a club which is:

non-institutional i.e. not attached to a college or school, and the only Zambian Theatre group in the capital [Lusaka] at the time (1977).<sup>138</sup>

Being such he sees the group's role and responsibility as projection of 'a mature approach to theatre, especially in relation to its role in society'.<sup>139</sup> Towards this goal the group's first production Uhuru wa

Ndongo:

dealt with precolonisation, colonisation, the African reaction and the struggle for independence and lastly independence and the crisis of expectation.<sup>140</sup>

Tikwiza Theatre group's attempts to generate a theatre that is relevant to Zambian society have inevitably led them into political issues. How far the group could remain political without arousing suspicion from authority or without compromising over certain issues were trends that Chikwakwa Theatre at the University of Zambia was anxious to see. In 1978/9 drama in Zambia suffered a set-back. There was an increase of censorship. The Ministry of Culture prevented the presentation of some plays like Lungu's The Man in the Street and Kasoma's Lobengula. Chikwakwa Theatre Review editorial speculated over this development thus:

In a sense the deteriorating security situation in Zambia perhaps gives the Party and Government some justification in being sensitive to creative expression which might conceivably appear to have a "destabilizing" effect in the nation.<sup>141</sup>

In the same editorial Tikwiza Theatre was reported to be losing its

initial political verve. The editorial lamented this in the following words:

One might regret that the group's driving critical energy, which created its first production Uhuru Wa Ndongo, has been tempered by the somewhat less controversial tone of more recent productions.<sup>142</sup>

The writer continued to say that this was the cost of being too close to the coffers of the government.

As far as Tikwiza Theatre people themselves were concerned, they were going to remain 'loyal' to the country's authorities. Their production of Soweto: Flowers Will Grow was an example of how they, as a theatre group, could play:

a role similar to that played by the political state i.e. giving refuge to the displaced persons of Southern Africa as well as speaking on their behalf in the international forums.<sup>143</sup>

One has to measure this against the criticism made by the Chikwakwa Review. Was Tikwiza Theatre really trying to join the liberation struggle in South Africa or merely trying to escape from the realities of Zambian life?

The production of Soweto: Flowers Will Grow was performed both in Zambia and neighbouring Botswana. This is apart from the FESTAC performance in Lagos. Responses to the play centred on how accurately the play had managed to bring up a picture of South African politics. President Kaunda commented on the production thus:

Your message was loud and clear. Africa is not without history [...] You touched on great names [...] I am sure you touched the hearts of all your guests [...]<sup>144</sup>

Soweto: Flowers Will Grow has been described by the author as a

catalogue of 'pain and suffering beyond human comprehension' being experienced by black South Africans. And in the spirit of a catalogue there is no main character, but several experiences of suffering presented in various forms ranging from statistics of brutal massacres to recitations of news casts, poems and songs recalling and re-living the suffering of black people in South Africa.

Masautso Phiri's theme is that, in spite of such suffering, the fight against suppression must continue. In what he calls 'movement one' of the play he presents 'a dirge to the Youth of Soweto' in which he concentrates on justifying the need for fighting on and not just standing 'with arms folded in the sterile posture of the spectator' in the face of human carnage. This carnage is re-lived through recalling the many people who have been killed or imprisoned in the course of trying to make the black man's voice audible in one way or another. Starting with protest against imposition of Afrikaans on school children and subsequent massacre of 160 protesters in Soweto in 1976, the dirge presents economic facts revealing which foreign companies bust United Nations sanctions against South Africa and thus have a part in the country's atrocities. It then moves on to resurrect heroes from the past: Mimi Khayinga, Luthuli - to name just a few. The recitation breaks into song taken from both traditional Zulu war chants and recent creations inciting and encouraging the fighter spirit.

'Movement two' is called 'Soweto Revisited'. In this the playwright presents the forces working against the fighting spirit of the oppressed. These are Calvinism and Afrikaanerdom. But before

all the suffering the African, driven by patriotism, must fight on if anything is to be salvaged from what is being torn apart from him and his country. The horrors of Soweto should serve as a reminder and fuel for fighting:

with Soweto, the struggle in the whole Southern Africa has risen to new heights, heights which are already the springboards for the final assault.<sup>145</sup>

'Movement three' is entitled 'Soweto Remembered'. This takes the audience into more recent events of the creation of Black Consciousness movements through the efforts of Steve Biko in South Africa (Soweto to be more exact). In remembrance of all this and what happened to the leaders and followers, those still alive re-dedicate themselves to the struggle:

If I forget you, South Africa, let my right hand wither, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, and let my breasts fall like dead leaves from a tree ...<sup>146</sup>

The remembrance is built on the political biography of Steve Biko. Through his courage others steel themselves and make ready to fight to death. The play ends with victory in sight as blacks take to arms and fight back.

Phiri envisaged a production which mixes direct narrative, acting and song. These are done by various actors in the cast. There are no leading parts. Whilst one person is narrating, say a piece of history, others mime it at the end of which they might altogether break into song. The effect is one of montages being put together rather than one whole story line. The coherence of the piece is brought about by the theme and the common experience being talked about. This is a



play which has to be seen to be fully appreciated.

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## C H A P T E R E I G H T

POPULAR DRAMA: RADIO AND TELEVISIONDRAMA FROM MALAWI AND ZAMBIA

This chapter will look at what is commonly known as popular drama. Just as there are many discussions of this particular type of drama, so too are there definitions of this genre. It is impossible to come up with one definition which satisfies all. There are still a few things that are common to most definitions, if not descriptions, of this popular drama. There seems to be general agreement on what popular drama should be about. In David Mayer's words such a drama must be 'of the people' and it must be 'concerned with the widest reach of audience available at a given moment. [It must be] produced by and offered for the enjoyment or edification of the largest combinations of groupings possible within that society'.<sup>1</sup> He goes on to point out that although it is often assumed that all such drama is never scripted one can indeed find scripted drama which can pass for popular drama. He argues 'that scripts are not an indication of popular drama ... nor does use of scenario rather than a script necessarily decide that the drama is popular'.<sup>2</sup>

Popular theatre in Nigeria as understood by Theo Vincent refers to the work of people like Ogunde, Alawada, the different "arm-chair"



theatre groups that perform on television. This is a theatre whose aim is 'to instruct, inform [and] entertain'.<sup>3</sup> The moralistic strain hinted at here is said to be a hangover from the traditional theatre of ritual festival.<sup>4</sup> Other characteristic features discernible in this theatre refer to the way the genre is prompted by itinerant groups aiming to entertain and communicate with the people on events that touch their everyday life:

Their themes and motifs are contemporary and easily understood by their audience, their language, raw, vibrant, witty often bordering on slap-stick - either one of the indigenous languages or pidgin English, their acting [...] depending much on improvisation.<sup>5</sup>

Discussing popular theatre in Europe, Louis James breaks it into four categories of: folk drama, commercial working class theatre, mass media of film and television, and agit-prop.<sup>6</sup> Such categorization places emphasis on the industrial revolution of Europe which saw a break down in the social structure of the western world and made way for the creation of what is known as popular culture. The picture in Africa is more complicated than this. The seeming fluid transition from folk drama through to agit-prop seen in Europe is not evident in Africa. Such changes do not follow one after the other so simply here. Whilst acknowledging the impact of colonialism and subsequent industrialization or urbanization on the continent's life:

[...] the acculturative experience is nothing new to Africa [...] what has been witnessed during the past half-century is no more than the continuation of a process that in all likelihood has been going on as long as the continent has had human inhabitants.<sup>7</sup>

Africa therefore presents 'a continuum of change and not a dichotomy to

which we can refer [...] instances, placing them in well defined categories'. Johannes Fabian says that in African countries 'popular culture comprises a complex of distinctive expressions of life experience'.<sup>8</sup> He argues that this culture in Africa:

is not merely a series of breakdowns of 'traditional culture'; and it is not [merely] made up of ill - or half-understood 'reactions' to the onslaught of westernization [...] the emerging forms of expression and consciousness of the masses [should be taken] as evidence for cultural independence and creativity.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the difference in origin the basic nature of popular culture is the same world over. There is emphasis placed on the 'masses' as the ones who give it birth. In the 20th century the fluidity with which technology is being transferred from place to place makes its influence on culture inevitably a shared experience all over the world. So it could be said that Africa too has its own category of mass media theatre growing alongside the so called folk-drama and agit-prop types all at the same time - not in an evolutionary sequence. It is to this mass media category that radio drama (and television drama in the case of Zambia) from Malawi and Zambia belong. Examples of this theatre are the work of Thonyi Gondwe, Smart Likhaya Mbewe (on Malawi Broadcasting Corporation) and that of Kabwe Kasoma, David Yumba and M. Kapeya on Zambia Broadcasting Service.

#### Mass Media and the popularization of theatre in Malawi and Zambia

Mass media comes into contact with theatre in Malawi and Zambia in two ways. Firstly it does so in the way it covers theatre activities

of the people in reviews and notices. Secondly it does so by providing a medium through which theatre itself is articulated or made known like in radio drama, film and television drama.

The presence of these media (particularly radio, film and television) has led to the evolution of what may be termed popular theatre in Malawi and Zambia. But first let us turn to newspapers.

#### Newspapers and African Culture

On the whole the colonial period does not have a good record where coverage of African cultural life in Malawi and Zambia is concerned. Although Malawians and Zambians have always had a cultural life one does not get this impression in the press of the day. Most mention of African cultural activities came through the critical writings of missionaries or exotic reports of social anthropologists. Chapter one has pointed at how biased such reports could be. When it came to coverage of 'learnt' culture as displayed by Africans the situation was very much the same. As far as the papers were concerned, only Europeans were indulging in cultural activities worth reporting. If ever there was any theatre in the two colonies it was the one being promoted by expatriates. The only things that Africans did, and found a place in the pages of the local papers were those related to some empirical celebrations of some kind. Events like the King's Birthday, Empire Day and Christmas Day, and how Africans celebrated them appeared in the papers very consistently. These celebrations were a symbol of

the African's transition into civilized life. And very rarely did they include theatrical presentations. Very often they were made up of 'funny games' like climbing up a greased pole to get at a joint of meat hung at the end of the pole or three-legged races, or women racing with pots of water on their heads. A select few Africans would be invited to the Governor's residence for a garden party.

Even soon after independence the situation was very much the same. African theatre reportage had to wait for the arrival of African journalists. Unfortunately, for most of the time, these did not have the slightest idea about how to go about it. Instead of providing theatre reviews, they simply reported what happened, so that one only gets records of events rather than a picture of the quality of what was being performed. It is only recently that theatre coverage is veering towards true reviewing of theatre activity.

#### The Radio and Drama

Unlike newspapers, radio - which was introduced into Zambia around the late 1940's - gave room to drama. This was a particular type of drama aimed at satisfying the goals of establishing theatre in the region. Chapter two has already discussed the kind of radio drama that came up during the colonial period. It was due to the availability of this facility that Masiye was able to have his play The Lands of Kazembe on the air in the 50's. Most radio work of this time was in the various vernacular languages of the region. Zambia has continued

with the policy of broadcasting in English and almost all the vernacular languages of the country in an attempt to satisfy the many tribes of the country. Malawi on the other hand, which has been able to establish a national language, Chichewa, broadcasts only in English and Chichewa. The drama that is produced in English is modelled on British Broadcasting Corporation's World Service 'African Theatre'. But the vernacular drama coming out has stuck to the colonial style of improvised plays projecting didactic stories built on topical issues. Unlike its English counterpart, vernacular drama has tended to be identified with specific individuals who work for the radio stations. In Malawi it is the name of Smart Likhaya Mbewe and his series of Kapale-pale and Pamajiga that have remained prominent for a long time. From Zambia it is people like David Yumba and Mwansa Kapeya that are fulfilling this role.

Quite apart from these people there are radio dramas put out on the radio by government departments engaged in rural development work, as part of their extension services. The content of such dramas is obviously related to the problems that parent departments are fighting against, for example: agriculture, health care, adult literacy and home economics, just to mention a few. Usually such work comes as a supplement to what extension workers do in the field.

Malawi Broadcasting Corporation's 'Theatre of the Air' and 'Sewero' (Play)

'Theatre of the Air' on M.B.C. is modelled on B.B.C.'s World



Service's 'African Theatre'. The programme is done in English and broadcast at around 9.30 p.m., by which time most rural people are already in bed. It can be safely assumed that this programme is mostly aimed at urban listeners rather than rural people who do not have electricity to continue life into late evenings. Like the general pattern of work coming out of this broadcasting house, 'Theatre of the Air' carries plays aimed at projecting the culture of the country. A letter written to the present author gives concrete evidence of this:

Dear Sir,

Writing a Radio Play

We would like you to write a play for Theatre of the Air Programme on the following lines:-

- a) Tragedy - handled lightly but with a serious underlying tone;
- b) Material drawn from the rustic society;
- c) Characters between two and six;
- d) To run for 30 minutes.

What is your offer?

Let us know as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

F. Longwe.<sup>10</sup>  
(Producer)

This programme has been running for more than ten years. Thonyi Gondwe is a regular contributor to it. He has had six of his plays produced. His work should serve as an example of what plays are being encouraged by the M.B.C.

Thonyi Gondwe is a law clerk employed by the Ministry of Justice in Malawi. His interest in drama was fired by the work of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre in 1973 when he was still at school. He says that:

In October of that year [1973], several plays were staged. Two productions impressed me - The Banana Tree by James Ng'ombe and Childe Internationale by Wole Soyinka. Since that day I had developed an interest in wanting to write a play.<sup>11</sup>

In the following year (1974) he played Everyman in Obatunde Ijimere's play of the same title which was a schools drama festival entry by Chaminade Secondary School. His writing did not start until 1976 when he wrote a radio play for the M.B.C.'s 'Theatre of the Air' entitled Which Way based on a short story by James Ng'ombe. Since then he has not looked back. He followed this play by others: The Harvest (1977), a stage play performed by Blantyre Secondary School and Mulanje Secondary School during the 1977 Southern Region Drama Festival; Emma (M.B.C. 1980); Message from Jubeki (M.B.C. 1980); Pacharo (M.B.C. 1981); The Project (M.B.C. 1981) and Mwiza (M.B.C. 1982). In 1981 Thonyi Gondwe was voted entertainer of the year by Malawi Broadcasting Corporation.

Although Thonyi Gondwe writes about what Andrew Horn might call 'exhausted' themes of old versus western, most of his work shows an acute awareness of the problems of an urbanized people as well as 'the migrant worker system'. His two plays Pacharo and Message from Jubeki address themselves to these two problem areas respectively.

Pacharo is the name of the protagonist of the story. He lives in

the city happily married to a very supportive wife Ntchechi. The play opens with the news of Pacharo's promotion to a new office after passing some professional examination with distinction. The story is about the dreams of Pacharo coming true. These are dreams shared by most Malawian city dwellers today; a big house, company car and a life in hotel (or motel) bars. Whilst it was his wife Ntchechi who encouraged and supported him in pursuing his private studies in order to fulfil their dreams, she is excluded from the celebrations in a typical Malawian husband fashion. Pacharo suggests to a friend Mbachi that they go and celebrate his success:

PACHARO: [...] don't you think it's a good idea that the two of us should celebrate?

MBACHI: Pacharo, this is why I came. You see it would be unreasonable for you to be promoted and then do nothing about it.<sup>12</sup>

This naivety should be seen as typical of Malawian life which seems to see celebration as the crown of all success, no matter at what cost. In the story Pacharo does indeed do something about his success. He first of all, and for the first time, goes to a city bar to celebrate. Whilst there he is hooked to a young working woman Julia who belongs to the new sophisticated, 'disco' generation. Instantly he decides to substitute her for his old traditional wife who has always been beside him in the past. Having decided to marry Julia, he lies to his wife Ntchechi that he is off to the United Kingdom for further studies in order to create an excuse for moving his family back to the village. Having managed to do so, he brings Julia into the house. They live

together for some time during which she becomes pregnant. Meanwhile word reaches his first wife that he never went abroad, and that he brought a new wife into their house in her place. So she returns to the house determined to get her man back. Julia who, on the other hand, always believed Pacharo did not have a wife gets heartbroken and runs out on him. Pacharo gets confused and tries to run away to get drunk in order to forget his problem. The play ends tragically with Pacharo dying in a car crash.

Pacharo may be a simple play, but it tackles a real problem amongst most Malawians who are taking up good jobs today. Toiling to shape careers through private studies, they receive support from their wives who in most cases are not educated themselves or have very little education. The poverty of a low paying job blinkers most husbands from the 'evil' ways of affluence in the city. But when promotion comes, it introduces them to a new life of cocktail parties, night clubs and conferences. An unsophisticated woman easily becomes a burden in such a situation as she cannot communicate with others. So a substitute is often sought. Usually the substitute is a modern young working woman like Julia in Pacharo.

The young women on the other hand are acquiring a good deal of self-confidence and independence, therefore they can take care of themselves without much problem. Faced with Julia's problem they can afford to say:

I can't stand this woman. Let her stay. After all she is your wife. She and your children need your full support. I came because of your lies. I'll now pack up and go.

I'll go and join my friend at the flats. I went to school and I have a well paying job. It won't be a problem to support myself and the child when it's born.<sup>13</sup>

This would have spoken very well for the progress of women in Malawi if it was not for the underlying recklessness it suggests on the part of the young woman; and if it was not for the old one who has come from a traditional society, forced into modernity by her husband without being equipped for this modern life's vagaries. Questions come to mind by the time the play comes to an end: What is society doing for this woman? It is at this score that Thonyi Gondwe's play becomes an indictment of his society.

Message from Jubeki (1980)

This play looks at the effects of migrant labour on Malawians. This is a subject which Andrew Horn would like to see tackled by Malawian playwrights. For many years Malawians have been going to seek employment in the South African mines. Very often those who go out there stay away from home for two to five years. Sometimes some people never return at all. The effects of such absence on families is phenomenal: wives are left to look after their families on no incomes at all or they are faced with temptations of one sort or another. Thonyi Gondwe has chosen to look at one particular family faced with such a situation in Message from Jubeki. Jubeki is a local corruption of the name Johannesburg.

The play is set in a Northern Malawi village. It is about a woman whose husband has been gone to work in the mines for more than



five years and the problem of coping with the required fidelity, loneliness and poverty. Such problems crowd the woman in the form of weird dreams at night, marauding rats in the hut she sleeps in, and suitors who want to take advantage of her loneliness. One of these suitors is a recently returned migrant worker. He uses his experiences of the mines and life in the city of Johannesburg to convince the woman that her husband will never return home. As it turns out, however, what the man tells about her husband are all lies for he does eventually return. His arrival coincides with the wife's submission to the returnee suitor. She thus loses her husband and a home.

The lies that the suitor tells about the woman's husband offer some idea of what most people in Malawi think about the life of migrant workers in South Africa; alcoholism, licentiousness and gambling to name but a few things associated with these people.

A wife waiting for a husband who has gone to the mines on the other hand, has to live with the worries of loving him in one way or another, and making a living for herself where the opportunities for doing so are scanty. Like in Pacharo Thonyi Gondwe's approach to an obvious social problem is to refrain from passing judgement on the issues directly. Rather he presents his drama in a way that provokes thought in the listener.

Sewero (Kapalepale) by Smart Likhaya Mbewe

Sewero is a thirty minute programme, broadcast at 6.30 on Saturday

evenings on Malawi Broadcasting Corporation. This is a peak period by Malawi Broadcasting standards. The producer of the programme is Smart Likhaya Mbewe. All the work is in Chichewa, the national language of the country. The programme is popularly known as Kapalepale. This is derived from the leading character's name in the series. He is always the centre of controversy in the drama.

Most of the episodes depict life in urban centres where the rural and the modern are always in conflict. It would seem that Smart Likhaya Mbewe always aims at establishing, through comedy, an amicable solution to all the problems such a conflict breeds. The end of each presentation takes place in a chief's home where matters are sorted out to the satisfaction of all concerned. A result of this is that the plays are heavily didactic. Perhaps this is in keeping with the meaning of the word Kapalepale itself, which is the Chichewa word for 'weeding a garden'. There are no scripts written for this drama. Smart Likhaya Mbewe creates scenarios which he explains to his actors, and then, together with them improvises the dialogue.

According to Kumpukwe, Mbewe has only had Primary school education and he has not had formal training in broadcasting or theatre. The only things he has done in life which bring him close to the world of theatre and entertainment are his childhood days of singing and dancing at weddings in his village.<sup>14</sup>

After school he went into tailoring. On 4th June, 1964, he joined the M.B.C. as a security guard.<sup>15</sup> The following year he was approached by a producer of a programme called 'Kajekete' to join in as

an actor. This was an improvised drama programme presented on M.B.C. on a weekly basis. Gradually Mbewe was asked to create stories as basis for the programme. It was then that the name of the programme changed to become 'Kapalepale'. In September 1970 Smart Likhaya Mbewe was appointed producer of the programme. This was a remarkable rise for the security guard. His popularity grew from strength to strength so that the M.B.C. asked him to produce yet another theatre programme called Pa majiga (Crossroads).<sup>16</sup>

Lan White and David Kerr have described Smart Likhaya Mbewe's work thus:

Drama in the vernacular has an obvious importance and an instant appeal. The most interesting example is Kapale-Pale, a weekly comedy about an urban trickster (Kapale-Pale himself) who lives by his wits. Smart Likhaya (a former watchman at M.B.C.) who plays the main role is also the producer. He knows the other actors so well that once they are provided with an initial situation (innocent village relatives come to stay), a comedy of consistently high quality is produced entirely by improvisation with only a minimum of direction and subsequent editing.<sup>17</sup>

Mbewe himself has been quoted as saying:

The aim behind my plays is to teach good manners as well as to entertain people.<sup>18</sup>

The initial 'trickster' idea has, over the years, given way to a more overtly didactic moralist one. Kapale-pale the protagonist of the series can no longer be seen as a man apart from his society. As

Kumpukwe points out:

As playwright, Mr Mbewe can be compared to an artist in a traditional African society who functions as spokesman for the society in which he lives, sharing its prejudices and directing its dislikes against what is discontenanced.<sup>19</sup>

Calling Kapale-pale 'spokesman for his society' is romanticizing. He is more of an artist who casts himself in the role of society's moral radar. And working within a government-owned and controlled radio station his morality must toe government views. As Kumpukwe points out:

Mr Mbewe's plays are carefully thought out to produce a calculated effect on Malawian audiences. The story is organized in such a way that it illustrates an idea or teaches a moral. A common moral element unites the plays from week to week. The ideological element in the play's content is linked to the concept of "nation-building". A [...] high proportion of M.B.C.'s programmes deal with such subjects as literacy, public health, agricultural improvement, cultural traditions and social guidance. Mr Mbewe's plays follow the same trend [...]

According to [the producer himself] Kapale-pale is addressed to all families. In some plays the moral will be diverted to the father, in others to the mother, and in others to the children.<sup>20</sup>

A typical example of a Kapalepale play is one addressed to a villager coming to live with a relative in town. Such a person might leave his village believing there are better job opportunities in town than in the village. He goes to town without adequate preparation for life ahead because he believes some relative will look after him there. So he comes to town without any food or blankets. In a typical Malawian fashion he just appears at the house of the relative without ample notice. Mbewe's play in such an instance addresses itself to explaining the need for bringing some bedding with oneself when visiting home folks in town, and giving advance notice rather than just appearing. The views expressed here would not be built on typical traditional Malawian custom, but a mixture of western and African ways.

One might ask about censorship problems here. Kumpukwe says that for Mbewe:

This is not much of a problem [...] since he censors his own plays. No Censorship Board members need to listen to the plays before they are broadcast because Mbewe himself is aware of what kind of plays are suitable for broadcasting.<sup>21</sup>

There is no doubt that this theatre is popular in Malawi although some people, particularly in academic circles, would like to see more sophistication brought into the stories.<sup>22</sup> One wonders however whether this is really possible within the limitations of the medium.

#### Radio Drama in Zambia

Talking about radio drama in Zambia, Etherton says that:

One of the best-known progenitors of vernacular drama on Radio Zambia is David Yumba [who] has taped over 150 plays in Bemba each fifteen minutes long and sponsored by a commercial product.<sup>23</sup>

David Yumba is but one example of the many producers working in the seven vernacular languages of the country. There are people like Mwansa Kapeya whose work has been going on for a long time and also enjoys Yumba's popularity.

All this work like that of Mbewe in Malawi stems from the colonial days of improvised radio drama. Those doing it adlib and use:

the radio medium most creatively by establishing through the usual understatement a whole range of sounds that evoke images of the urban world for rural audiences and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

Sometimes the work is properly scripted. Yumba's work seems to grow from a Christian background. Therefore it often carries an evangelical



flavour about it. He has translated and adapted Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress for the radio as Umwe wa Muntu.<sup>25</sup> Mwansa Kapeya's work on the other hand is more directly related to everyday life in Zambia. His concerns are similar to those of Kasoma. He talks about Zambian society and its responses to change brought about by western technology and ideas. He talks about 'poor living conditions' in Zambia. Two plays selected here show how he goes about his work. These are Akaboshampuku and Nkafuta Limba.<sup>26</sup>

#### Akaboshampuku

This play is about people in urban Zambia. The story is set in Ndola on the Copperbelt. It is about dishonest husbands and wives; immoral girls and boys. The basis of all this immorality is availability of money got through jobs in the copper mines. Now that men are earning good money they can afford mistresses all over the place. Women on the other hand are dissatisfied with what their husbands bring them, so they seek additional money and support from rich people. Young girls want instant pleasure and adventure, so they go for sugar daddies who can provide them with the glories of night club life.

In Akaboshampuku there is a family of James and Hilda Palama. Whilst James busies himself chasing bar girls and secretaries, his wife Hilda has affairs with rich businessmen who give her money or take her on long trips outside the country. She manages to establish a business and uses it as an excuse for her trips abroad. However one day the truth comes out, a quarrel and a fight breaks out between the two.

Each accuses the other of infidelity. They decide they can no longer live as man and wife. Divorce therefore becomes imminent, but neither of them wants to lose their property to the other. The wife claims 50% of their property. Because of this they settle for separation of a kind. The woman moves into a separate bedroom to allow both herself and the husband to continue with their own ways.

In this play Kapeya avoids the easy way out of a court room scene in which things are sorted out. Instead he brings in the idea of separation which is now a common feature amongst township and educated Zambians. In this way he shows how Zambian society is responding to westernisation. Unlike Mbewe in Malawi, Kapeya does not seem to be fettered to government ideology. But fettered he is. One just has to look at his other play Nkafuta Limba.

#### Nkafuta Limba

The message of this play is straight forward: back to the land. Although it focuses on the poverty of a section of Zambian society and seems to want to criticize the existence of such a situation in the country, the criticism is directed at the poor people themselves. So even if he starts the play by saying that:

[...] Poor living conditions of present days are forcing older people to become crooks [...] <sup>27</sup>

he does not dwell on exposing the said poor living conditions.

Instead he settles for proving that the poverty so experienced would have been avoided if the suffering people were to return to their

villages. The narrator in the play emphasizes this. He concludes the play by the following words:

Had Nkafuta Limba gone back to his village like the wife had suggested the family would not have suffered all the shame [arising from his poverty]<sup>28</sup>

This is a message that the Government of Zambia has been trying to get across to its people since the country became independent.<sup>29</sup>

Nkafuta Limba is the story of an elderly man, late into his fifties, who has learnt to exist by his wits rather than try to get a job in the city. He brings his family up on borrowed money which he well knows he cannot pay back. When the owners of the borrowed money and property turn up to collect them he finds all kinds of excuses to postpone repayment. These excuses range from threats on the lenders' lives to lies of all sorts. But one day he meets a money lender who forces his only daughter into marriage without paying the necessary bride price in exchange for the money owing to him.

In a community which still observes the 'bride price' tradition the ending of the old man's tricks is unimaginable. It does not only deny him financial gains, but brings disgrace to him and his family.

#### Film and Television Drama

The history of film work in Malawi and Zambia may be traced back to the late forties when the British Government was getting more and more concerned about ways of improving mass education in the colonies.<sup>30</sup> In 1944 the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies issued a

report on adult and mass education in African society. It talked of various techniques being used to promote such education. Amongst these was the use of visual aids in education, particularly cinema, which was found to produce quick and lasting results. Cinema was to be encouraged because it was felt that:

It may stimulate interest in a curriculum; it may extend in a vivid fashion the knowledge of those who are being taught and the material which may be used in teaching; it may sum up a part or a whole of a curriculum and it may greatly reinforce the emotional and aesthetic appeal which is essential to effective teaching.<sup>31</sup>

Right from the beginning it was recognized that cinema was not only going to be used primarily for instruction, but also for entertainment. The report was very specific about the kind of films that were considered useful. These were:

- (a) News films sought to 'assist the Press and broadcasting in presenting reliable facts' which would eventually lead to the development of a "national" outlook among the people of the colonies;
- (b) documentaries aimed at bringing civilization on the African's doorsteps;
- (c) films to demonstrate techniques or experiments;
- (d) entertainment films.<sup>32</sup>

It is this last category whose growth could be said to be relevant to the development of theatre in the region. One might argue that whilst drama on stage may have been unknown to the people, cinema introduced the various arts it shares with drama to them. The development of television in Zambia is a direct out-growth from cinema work established during the colonial days. And this television is now being fed by

playwrights like Kabwe Kasoma who are firmly established in stage drama. So the development of entertainment films (just as the showing of such films) has a part to play in the development of theatre in Zambia and Malawi.

Talking about these films the Committee on Education in the Colonies argued in their report that:

the production of entertainment and recreational films for colonial audiences is most important. There is much in the history and folklore of colonial peoples and of other peoples, which would provide excellent material for film scripts, for film stories should be taken into account.<sup>33</sup>

The sort of films being advocated were to be ones specially and locally made for the colonies not imported ones. It was argued that:

for the purposes of education and for entertainment, films [...] produced in Europe or America [were] unsuitable for large sections of colonial peoples. The relatively uneducated, as well as the more primitive people [were not familiar with the various technical styles of film presentation]<sup>34</sup>

This argument centred on the belief that the cultural background of the people was not sufficiently developed to cope with the demands of western cinema. The colonies had to produce their own films, although from time to time they could augment these with imported ones.

It was a result of such recommendations that in 1948 the Central African Film Unit was established in Zambia to serve the three territories of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi (then Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland respectively).<sup>35</sup> The aims of this unit were basically to make:

- (a) instructional films for African audiences,
- (b) tourist and publicity films for overseas and



(c) films for Europeans in Central Africa.

Later on after the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was formed the unit's work included the production of publicity and propaganda films to popularise the federation at home and abroad.<sup>36</sup> These aims did not stick very close to the recommendations of the Colonial Office of course. Whilst the Colonial Office seemed to seek a way of liberating the African (through the process of education), the expatriates in the colonies wanted to create an African who did not see the need for such liberation and self-government.

As Smyth shows, the only Africans to stand in the way of perpetuating the colonial presence in Malawi and Zambia at first were those who had been to school and had jobs in the towns of the two territories.<sup>37</sup> Whilst on the one hand they expressed discontent with the colonial administration by way of their own example, on the other they gave the impression that life in the urban centres was much better than that of the village. A result of this was a rush of people from the rural areas into the urban centres. The Central African Film Unit (C.A.F.U.) therefore found it necessary to produce films which countered this view. Inevitably the target audience for such films were the villagers themselves more than the townsfolk whose welfare could be taken care of by other deviations like beerhalls and ballroom dancing clubs. Villagers, like they are today, were in a majority. Films produced were circulated into remote places through mobile vans. This gave rise to the concept of mobile cinema (or 'travelling' cinema to borrow a word much in vogue amongst theatre practitioners).

Just before the C.A.F.U. had been formed a Dr K.L. Little presented a paper on "The Sociological Implications of the Film in Colonial Areas" to the International Committee of the Scientific Film Association. The paper endorsed the policy of encouraging films dealing with entertainment and education arguing that:

The function of the film in either case is to make African or other indigenous peoples socially conscious of themselves in a changing world [...] It should be a means of assisting people to adjust themselves to their changing environment and society [and] to accomplish this the film must present material and lines of action in a meaningful context. [It must be] designed in terms of the characteristics of the indigenous culture. For example, the film could be used as a story-telling medium, a type of medium which is familiar to African culture, and one which traditionally is one of the main forms of instruction and entertainment [...] with regard to technique in film-making for rural Africa, a non-sophisticated technique is necessary [...] Production should be in the vernacular for specific purposes, and the participation on all levels of African personnel is desirable, particularly if they have a knowledge of and pride in their own culture. The use of folk idiom is necessary whenever possible. [...] <sup>38</sup>

These suggestions point to the creation of a people's cinema rather than a high brow culture. The intentions are to reach the widest possible number of people in the territories. Although the audiences expected were not going to have anything to do with its creation, this cinema was aimed at using indigenous cultural material wherever possible. Little even hoped for a time when the African people themselves would take over film production. These ideas were a precursor to the creation of 'popular' entertainment amongst Africans in the colonies.

If there were only two or three languages spoken by the people of

Central Africa, the suggestions given by Little would have been very easy to follow. But the language situation in this region is far more complicated. Zambia alone has seven official languages (if we exclude English)<sup>39</sup> and this is but a very small proportion of an estimated much larger number.<sup>40</sup> Of the seven official languages only four are being used in film production.<sup>41</sup> C.A.F.U. had to reckon with such a situation. To avoid problems of language the unit began by making silent films. For each film they provided a commentary in the main languages which was read out by an African interpreter/cinema van operator during a show. It would seem that even this was not satisfactory. In 1957 Vaughan commented on colonial attempts at producing films for Africans thus:

Over the many years difficulties have beset [...] film units in Africa. Language problems have proved frustrating to the producer; customs and taboos not readily understood by Europeans have added to their task. The most formidable obstacle of all, however, continues to be the inability of minds bred in the atmosphere of a century of colonial rule, to understand the African societies they film.<sup>42</sup>

The work of the C.A.F.U. shared these faults as Smyth shows<sup>43</sup>, but it established the basis for a popular artform.

After attaining independence each of the three countries making the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland went separate ways in film production. In Malawi the job was left to the Department of Information's Film Production unit. Now this unit makes:

films [seeking] to interpret Government policy, objectives and achievements, thereby helping to create an informed and active citizenry and a favourable image of the country and its leadership.<sup>44</sup>

From time to time a film on some cultural aspect of the country comes up, but the bulk of the department's work is government propaganda. This propaganda covers issues like agriculture, health and literacy. The only attempts at creating films outside this area have been done by the University of Malawi at Chancellor College - Dance of Death (based on The Pardoner's Tale), directed by Trevor Whittock, and Mbalame which is based on a folk-tale (directed by David Kerr).

Zambia has continued to produce films under the Ministry of Information Broadcasting and Tourism. Quite apart from film production, there is now a television network. The problems that bedeviled film production still continue to bother television work. Hampered by financial problems, lack of space, qualified personnel and adequate facilities Zambia television remains under the clutches of foreign governments (either directly or indirectly). Statistics of programmes aired by Zambia television in 1971 show that 700 hours were devoted to local programmes whilst 1,440 hours went to imported material.<sup>45</sup> Attempts to reverse this situation are being made. Zambians are being encouraged to write for television. The Chikwakwa Theatre at the University of Zambia has been involved in a programme entitled Play for Today.

Mulenga Ng'andu says that Play for Today on Zambia Television is a direct result of government policy to rejuvenate the country's indigenous culture:

Politically Zambia has just introduced what [might be called a] "cultural revolution" with the hope of getting rid of foreign values, so as to enhance [sic] self identity.

Soon all the government institutions and non-government institutions felt this wind of change. The mass-media were ordered to scrap their foreign-oriented materials and replace them with those reflecting the nation's aspirations.<sup>46</sup>

Such intentions need the backing of not just policy, but personnel to run the show as it were. Zambia television has the technical hands, but not artists. This is where the University of Zambia Drama Group got involved. It has been seen as the main source of artists. So Play for Today is seen as a product of Chikwakwa activities.<sup>47</sup> People like David Kerr and Kabwe Kasoma have been involved in one way or another with television. The latter has had some of his work televised. An example is his play Katongo Chala.

In this play Kasoma is trying to show the root of crime in modern Zambia. The story is about a village boy, Katongo Chala, who migrates into the Copperbelt cities to find a way of continuing with his education through night school as well as a job. When he gets into town things do not prove as simple as he imagined. Relatives no longer behave like they are traditionally expected to do. He learns very quickly that it is the fittest who survive in the city and that the extended family has no place in the city - particularly amongst the upper class. Firstly he is robbed of all his belongings. Secondly he is refused into his own uncle's house. In desperation he gangs up with drop-outs - now turned thieves - planning a robbery. This turns out unsuccessful and they get caught by the police. This is the beginning of a new life diametrically opposed to his dreams and the expectations of his people back in the village.



The question that comes up after the play is: why does all this happen? The answer to this question provides the theme of the play. And this is rural development in Zambia. Unlike Kapeya's Nkafuta Limba, Katongo Chala is calling upon authorities in the country to provide adequate facilities in rural areas. Rather than blame rural people for rushing into the urban centres Kasoma suggests that such migration stems from a desire to run away from unsatisfactory facilities in the rural areas and that the government should address itself to this rather than worry about chasing people from urban centres. This is very much in line with what Kasoma thinks to be the role of theatre in a developing country:

A theatre that is purely for entertainment and nothing else is a luxury for a nation that is in a hurry. This hurry is here defined as an obsession for national development.<sup>48</sup>

So Katongo Chala should really be seen as a kind of didactic drama. The propaganda in it is couched in realism. The play is peopled by real villagers and their experiences of communal life, shared poverty and ignorance. Even those who temporarily peep into western life as immigrant labourers in the South African mines retain their ignorance. If anything, they return home worse off, for their lives are built around dreams of South African cosmopolitan life which they never really experienced rather than realities. Juxtaposed to and contrasted with these dreams are the harsh realities of town life.

The play is basically in two acts. The first act concentrates on depicting village life and the people's dreams. Using songs and drums, the playwright establishes the location of this part of his drama.

Having done so he gives his characters a language stemming from their ethnic background. This is a language which employs riddles, proverbs and styles of speech pertinent to a village situation. The picture of village life suggests harmony in spite of the poverty referred to by the villagers themselves.

In contrast to this the second act which introduces urban life through the experiences of the protagonist of the story, shows a world which leaves a great deal to be desired. The bleak picture of town life comes through the things people within them do to each other, the language they use and the immorality of their ways.

One inevitably asks, who is Kasoma writing for in this instance? Television unlike film is a luxury that ordinary peasants both in town and in the village cannot afford. Given this sort of situation one can only read Katongo Chala as a personal affront addressed to the élité who own television sets, but also live in town and control the reins of power in the country. Only on this score does Kasoma's effort run contrary to the idea of promoting a people's theatre. Until television becomes readily available to the masses its existence is not consistent with the spirit of creating a people's theatre. This leaves the up and coming playwrights of Zambia in a dilemma, particularly if they are part of the band wagon preaching 'true' popularization of theatre in the country.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

- 1 See David Mayer, 'Towards a definition of Popular Theatre' in Western Popular Theatre, David Mayer, et al., p.263.
- 2 Ibid., p.264.
- 3 Ebun Clark, Hubert Ogunde: The Making of Nigerian Theatre, Oxford University Press, p.59.
- 4 Ibid., p.59.
- 5 Ibid., pp.80-81.
- 6 Louis James, in Performance and Politics in Popular Drama, (ed.), David Bradby et al.
- 7 Merville J. Herskovits, 'The Role of Culture-Pattern in the African Acculturative Experience'. A paper presented to the XXVth International Congress of Orientalists, Moscow, 9th - 16th August 1960, in Presence Africaine, Vol.6/7, nos.34/35, pp.7-16.
- 8 Johannes Fabian, 'Popular Culture in Africa: Findings and conjectures'. Africa, 48 (4), 1978, p.315.
- 9 Ibid., p.317.
- 10 Personal Communication from the Producer to the Writer.
- 11 Personal Communication, 26th January, 1982.
- 12 Thonyi Gondwe, Pacharo.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Joyce Kumpukwe, 'S.M. Mbewe, Creator and Producer of Malawian Radio Plays', BARAZA, No.1, June 1983.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Kerr and White, Writing in Malawi (MS), p.2.

- 18 Kumpukwe, op. cit., p.15.
- 19 Ibid., p.15.
- 20 Ibid., p.19.
- 21 Ibid., p.19.
- 22 Michael Nambote, 'The Growth of Popular Theatre in Malawi: A Thumbnail Sketch'. Outlook: a bulletin of language, literature, and culture, No.1, July 1982, pp.56-67.
- 23 Michael Etherton, 'Indigenous Performance in Zambia', in Theatre Quarterly, Vol.III, No.10, April - June 1973, p.45.
- 24 Ibid., p.45.
- 25 MS in the vernacular in present author's custody.
- 26 I am greatly indebted to Messrs. Kapoliyo and Katengo for translating these plays from Bemba. These plays have been broadcast by Z.B.S. Copies in my custody.
- 27 Kapeya, Nkafuta Limba (MS), p.1.
- 28 Ibid., p.21.
- 29 Zambia's rural development policies encourage people to go into agriculture. See David Siddle, 'Rural Development in Zambia', Journal of African Studies 2, pp.271-284.
- 30 See Report on Adult and Mass Education in African Society, in Mass Education in African Society, Colonial Office Publications, No.186, H.M. Stationery Office, 1944.
- 31 Ibid., p.41.
- 32 Ibid., p.41.
- 33 Ibid., p.42.
- 34 Ibid., p.43.
- 35 Smyth, 'The Central African Film Unit's Images of Empire 1948-1963', Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, Vol.3, No.2, 1983, p.131.
- 36 Ibid.

- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Dr K.L. Little, 'The Sociological Implications of the Film in Colonial Areas', March 1949, Colonial Review, pp.15-16.
- 39 Sirarpi Ohannessian and Mubenga Kashoki, Language in Zambia, IAI, 1978, p.27.
- 40 Ibid., pp.9-46.
- 41 Ibid., p.27.
- 42 J. Koyinde Vaughan, 'Africa south of the Sahara and the cinema', Presence Africaine, Nos.XIV-XV, June - September 1957, pp.210-221.
- 43 Smyth, op. cit., pp.13-143.
- 44 Malawi Yearbook 1979, p.24.
- 45 Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism Annual Report 1971, Government Printer, Lusaka, pp.8-9.
- 46 Mulenga Ng'andu, in Chikwakwa Review 1974/75, pp.16-17.
- 47 Ibid., p.17.
- 48 Kasoma, 'Theatre for development', International Theatre Information, 1-2, 1980, p.91.



## CHAPTER NINE \*

THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT IN MALAWI AND ZAMBIA

- MALAWI: 1 Puppetry in Extension Aids Branch  
2 Mbalachanda Workshop by Chancellor  
College Travelling Theatre
- ZAMBIA: 3 Chikwakwa Drama Workshops  
4 International Theatre Institute of  
Zambia Theatre for Development  
Workshop at Chalimbana and follow  
up work by Tafika Theatre

\* Part of this material has been published in a different form elsewhere.

### Theatre for development in Malawi and Zambia

Chapter three was a general introduction to what is termed theatre for development. In this work theatre practitioners are offering their skills to other disciplines, particularly those concerned with the development of the masses. This is done in two ways. One way is to actually teach the masses theatre skills and encourage them to evolve their own theatre in which they articulate their needs. In so doing theatre practitioners believe they make the masses aware of their plight and wish for a better life. In vogue amongst those who advocate this way is the word 'conscientization' borrowed from Paulo Freire, a leading Brazilian adult educator. The word has been defined as 'the process of enabling people to identify their problems as a consequence of a particular social order'.<sup>1</sup> Towards this goal theatre groups have either toured repertoires of plays considered relevant to the masses or conducted drama workshops amongst the masses which culminate in productions created on the spot. The other way is to lend more directly theatre skills to rural development projects. In this, theatre is used as a method of teaching particular issues identified as pertinent to development goals within the communities being visited by theatre practitioners together with extension workers.

This chapter aims to present specific examples of this work as it is being done in Malawi and Zambia. To this end the chapter has been divided into two parts. The first part presents descriptions of

specific projects done by various theatre people in the two countries, namely: (1) puppetry work by the Extension Aids Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Malawi), (2) 1981 Mbalachanda Rural Growth Centre drama workshop by the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre (University of Malawi), (3) Chikwakwa Theatre rural drama tours and workshops in Zambia and (4) International Theatre Institute of Zambia theatre for development at Chalimbana in 1979, along with an example of its results as seen in the work of Tafika Theatre of Lusaka in 1981.

The second part of the chapter is made up of an analysis of this work. This is done through an examination of (a) the rationale put forward by those who are engaged in theatre for development, (b) the theoretical framework on which the work seems to rest both as a process of developing the masses and theatre practice, and (c) the effectiveness of the ideas that are being pursued in practice.

1 Puppet Theatre by the Extension Aids Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources - Malawi

(a) History of Extension Aids in Malawi's Agriculture Department

Whilst it may be claimed that there are more than one agency employing theatre for educational purposes in Malawi, only the Extension Aids Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources has been doing so for a long time. It is the use of puppetry that is central to this work. The history of puppetry in this department is

very much linked to that of the ministry's attempts to improve agricultural production in the country. These attempts started off as a means to commercial ends rather than food production towards self-sufficiency for the people. Although organized government involvement in the field of agriculture did not start until 1909 in Malawi, 'the first recorded instance of direct assistance to village farmers by government' appeared in 1903.<sup>2</sup> The government, through its District Administrative Offices, encouraged farmers to grow cotton which could be sold to the outside world. As a way of helping the farmers to improve their yield the government issued and distributed leaflets written in Chichewa. These showed farmers recommended methods of cultivating the crop. At this point there were no extension services.

It was not until 1909, when the Department of Agriculture was formally established that any attempts at extension work were made. This new department took over the control of cotton growing. It also introduced tobacco growing in the country. But even with the setting up of this department, there was no obvious concerted policy towards controlling agricultural behaviour amongst Africans by the government although educational institutions encouraged agriculture amongst their subjects.<sup>3</sup> This had to wait until 1946. And when it appeared it centred on enactment of 'legislation to prescribe certain soil conserving methods like contour ridging and other land-use practices, with installation of regional boards to enforce them. Fines and short term prison sentences were not unusual'.<sup>4</sup>

The need to encourage better methods of agriculture seems to have

become even more acute in the 1948-49 Great Famine.<sup>5</sup> It was after this that real attempts at extension services in Agriculture began. Following the famine some examination of the country's agrarian problems was done by the government. The idea behind this was to develop a policy:

for the improvement of standards of living beyond subsistence livelihood, it was felt that training centres and extension schools were essential aids in the attainment of the objectives.<sup>6</sup>

Thus by 1958 a number of training schools were opened in the three regions of the country to provide: courses for chiefs, cultivators and farmers; and refresher courses for teachers and instructors. Apart from the legal enforcement the Master Farmer idea was created in which farmers with good cultivation success were paid special premiums. During the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, such methods were supplemented by others. The Department of Agriculture printed a crop production programme - giving market information, guaranteed prices and production targets - which was widely distributed.<sup>7</sup> In this publication were also included hints on the best way to grow certain crops. Extension workers were now employed and sent out to villages to give direct advice to farmers, using posters, pamphlets and illustrated magazines.<sup>8</sup> But in spite of this the major tasks of the Department of Agriculture were regulatory in nature. Conservation and husbandry rules were made and enforced by field staff who prosecuted offenders.<sup>9</sup> This aroused antagonism in the masses, and hampered all efforts to teach farmers more advanced systems of farming.



It is no surprise therefore that all legislation relating to agriculture was repealed on acquisition of independence. The Department of Agriculture was 'directed to abandon regulatory practices and intensify development through education'.<sup>10</sup> In trying to meet this calling the Extension Aids Branch was set up. 'For twenty years it has been operating a fleet of modern, well equipped Mobile Cinema Landrovers called "Yellow Vans" and has won a high reputation for the way it spreads agricultural information throughout the country'.<sup>11</sup> Puppetry was adopted as one of the various methods of teaching farmers new and better methods of agriculture in the country.

This department services other sections of what is now the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources. (Agriculture, Veterinary and Forestry department.)<sup>12</sup> From time to time Extension Aid programmes include material relevant to Ministry of Health extension work too. To do its job properly the Extension Aids Branch has seven sections, namely: editorial, photography, publications, radio, cinema, mobile and maintenance, and evaluation/action research. It is the 'editorial' and 'mobile/maintenance' sections that are particularly central to puppetry work in the department. The 'editorial' section also produces the farmers' magazine Za Achikumbi (Farmers' News) which enjoys a circulation of 32,000<sup>13</sup> and puppet play 'messages'. It also carries out general editorial and translation work relevant to the needs of the department. The 'mobile and maintenance' section tours with films and puppet shows around the country according to pre-arranged schedules throughout most of the year.

(b) History of Puppetry in Extension Aids Branch

Use of puppets in the Extension Aids Branch was started in September 1964 by Mrs P. Bean (an expatriate Publications Officer at the time).<sup>14</sup> Initially work in puppetry was done as a joint programme with the Department of Information as part of the 1964 Election Campaign. So puppetry in this department was not necessarily meant for agricultural development. It was for its potential for political propaganda that it was adopted. The puppets that were on show sang slogans like 'One Man One Vote'. They talked about the removal of the 'requirement' of property for voters. It was only after elections and independence that the Extension Aids Branch started, on an experimental basis, to use puppetry for agricultural as well as health care goals. Now puppets are a regular offering during Cinema campaigns made by the department. Special personnel are recruited and trained to work on puppetry.

(c) Preparation of 'puppets' and 'messages'<sup>15</sup>

The Extension Aids Branch employs a full time technical Assistant whose duties are to make puppets and their costumes. At the moment<sup>16</sup> there is a woman doing this work. She works on a simple pattern. The department uses three basic characters in its puppet theatre, namely: a man, his wife and an agriculture instructor. So the technical assistant works on a set of three puppets. These are hand (glove) puppets. No attempt has been made to use string puppets.



When the puppets are ready the radio section provides matching music to go along with their presentation when the time comes. This usually is South African (black) Simanje-manje or East African Rumba music. It is the sort of music that villagers will have heard over the local radio.

As the puppets are being made other people prepare messages to be passed on to the various audiences which are expected at shows. Such a job requires expert knowledge of the subject to be treated, therefore it involves actual agriculture-trained personnel in the department. All messages so prepared are vetted by an editorial board before they are recorded along with the dramas that are improvised for the puppets. This board includes people qualified in Agriculture as well as mass media techniques. Referring to these messages the Principal Extension Aids Officer says that:

the scripts are developed on the basis of the major agricultural activities in the particular areas at the particular time.<sup>17</sup>

What he means here is that scripts follow a calendar which is divided into sections according to agricultural activity relevant to each period of the year in the country. A typical year in Malawi may be divided into two seasons, namely: dry and wet seasons. Agricultural activities going with each season are as follows:

DRY SEASON (July, August, September and October)	harvesting rest (fallow) clearing and preparation of gardens
WET SEASON (November, December, January, February, March April, May, June)	planting applying fertilizer weeding

The preparation of scripts looks at this sort of break-down and tries to accommodate the needs of each section. Scripts also try to include material not necessarily pegged to seasonal changes like: the honouring of government credit facilities extended to farmers and good animal husbandry. In order to make sure that correct advice goes to each area at the correct time puppet programmes for each van are made at Extension Aids Branch headquarters in Lilongwe.<sup>18</sup> The message at this stage is very brief and precise. It does not aim at creating a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. It is just a straightforward talk about agriculture. There is nothing theatrical about it at this stage. The theatrical dimension is added to it at the recording session.

It is the radio section of the department which takes care of the recording. With the vetted message before them the editorial section prepares a skeleton dramatic script to go along with it. So a script, in outline form, is produced and given to actors, in the radio section, who improvise and use their own words when recording most of the play. The ending of the play which is very didactic is a direct rendition of the vetted message from the editorial board.<sup>19</sup> The idea of the exercise is to play these recordings as puppeteers manipulate their puppets at shows and thus provide dialogues to them.

(d) Presentation of Puppet Shows

Equipped with three puppets, recordings of some agricultural



message like the one in the example of Appendix B, music and a Landrover specially fitted with a puppet stage and loudspeakers at the back, a team of puppet operators go to the field to do their work. The 'mobile and maintenance' section of the department has trained personnel in puppet presentation techniques.

Usually a local extension worker introduces the puppet play and summarizes its message after it has come to an end. When the play has been introduced the puppet operator takes his position behind the stage. The recorded dialogue is then played through loudspeakers whilst the puppet operator moves puppets at appropriate times to indicate which character is speaking. Throughout the entire show the operator remains hidden behind the stage.

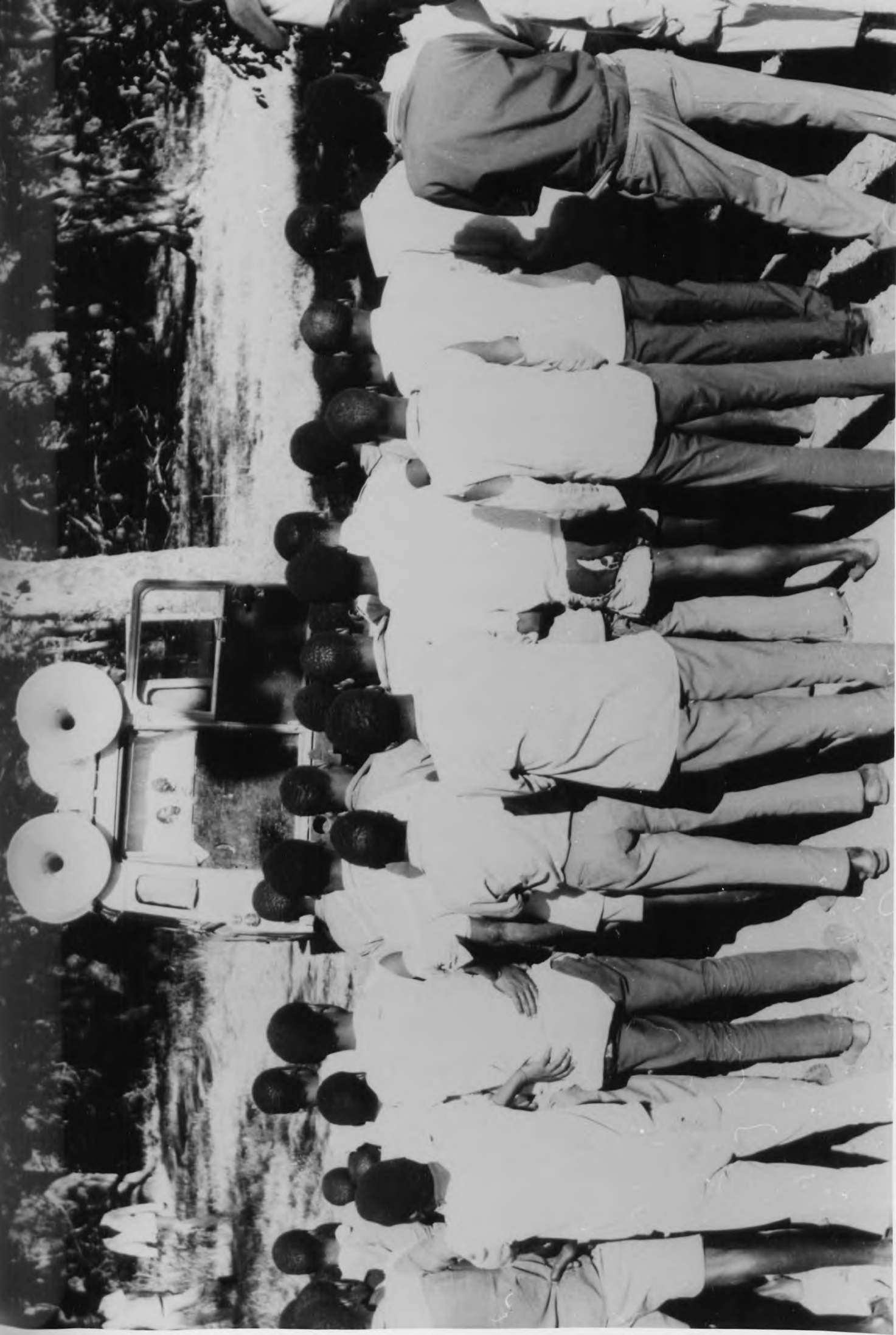
The stage is built at the back of the Landrover:

A vertical board fills the lower two-thirds of the rear entrance of the vehicle with a horizontal shelf (runs) across the top. The space above this represents the stage and simple hand-drawn curtains are suspended from an expanding curtain rod at the front. Behind this is a plain backcloth suspended in the same way. The operator sits at or slightly above the vehicle floor level. The backcloth screens his face from the audience and the rest of the back of the vehicle is screened off by boards and curtains. The soundtrack is played on an open reel [to reel] tape recorder [...] powered by an alternator driven by the vehicle's engine [...].<sup>20</sup> The back door of the vehicle is held open during performances.

Extension Aids Branch controls the procedure to be followed when puppet shows are on. Apart from this there is strict guidance on how many shows should be held per day. Although several performances are held each day in any one area during a campaign lasting about one week, the department insists that:

Not more than six puppet shows should be done per day from Monday to Thursday and only three shows should be done on Friday. Friday afternoon should be reserved for re-fuelling and cleaning equipment.<sup>21</sup>

Puppet shows are done during the day. They complement film shows which are held during the night. The venues for such shows are carefully selected to allow maximum attendance.



Announcements about all shows are done well in advance by local field staff. When vans arrive in a particular area, the public address system fixed to each one of them is used to announce the arrival of the campaign team and when and where exactly shows will be held. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, through special programmes for farmers also makes announcements about such campaigns. A typical presentation during a campaign follows this pattern:

- A. Announcement: Popular music played through loudspeakers, to attract attention of would be audience, until sizeable group collects. Local extension worker makes an introduction.
- B. Puppet show: as in Appendix B.
- C. End of show: Local extension worker summarizes the message of the campaign. If there are questions, they are dealt with here.

Although all the work is done by the puppet operator, whenever he is out in the field he is directly responsible to the resident or local Development Officer or Project Officer who actually works amongst the farming community from day to day. Having arrived in a place the puppet operator along with his colleague - the driver operator who shows films in the evenings of the campaign - plays all tape messages to the Development Officer. This is done so that he knows in advance what they contain. Since he plays the role of master of ceremony at the shows, it is necessary that he knows what the team brings into his area. Instructions from Extension Aids Branch Headquarters state that:

[...] during film shows it will be only the Development Officer or his appointee who will comment on agricultural films. This means that they will introduce the film and summarise the main points on the film after the film is run

through.<sup>22</sup>

This holds true for puppet shows too. The people who operate puppets are really 'puppetry' experts not agriculturists.

(e) Observations and comment

Bradfield says that such

puppet shows have proved popular and effective in Malawi as part of fertilizer and other campaigns.<sup>23</sup>

He goes on to suggest the superiority of such work over straight drama which relies on actual bodies thus:

Puppets are easy to make, and it is easy to put on a puppet play. With human actors several people are needed at each performance and rehearsals are necessary to ensure that the characters are word-perfect.<sup>24</sup>

Current observations support all this and claim that puppets on the whole are very well accepted by the rural population although some extension workers using them have met 'some problems in areas where people dance [Nyau]'.<sup>25</sup> Such problems arose where people saw puppets as demeaning the dance. Elsewhere people have simply seen puppetry as childish and refused to take it seriously even if they went along to watch shows.<sup>26</sup>

Extension Aids Branch keeps records of shows done and estimated audience sizes. The driver-operators make these on the spot. Field staff in attendance spot check them. Records so far made show that about 100 people see puppet shows each day.<sup>27</sup> In 1980, in spite of a shortage of funds, 4,356 puppet shows were held up and down the country



(with an average attendance of 76 people per show).<sup>28</sup> The ratio of each age group at such shows depends, to a large extent, on the area where the show is taking place. Where the shows are seen as childish the majority of the audience will be children. In some places pregnant women will not go to watch puppets for fear of giving birth to puppets instead of ordinary human beings. In such a situation the audience will be predominantly of men and children. Where they see them as a parody of existing indigenous cultural behaviour they are resented. Only very few people, especially children, will attend shows in such a situation.

These objections are made purely on cultural grounds. They arise from the fact that puppetry is not an indigenous tradition amongst Malawians. As it has already been said, this work was started in the Extension Aids Branch by an expatriate officer. How much thought was given to the possibility of such problems is not indicated by any of the present personnel engaged in this work. Although there is an evaluation/action research team which has actually identified the problems, no serious thought on the extent to which puppetry should go on in certain problem areas has been gone into. In spite of these objections puppetry work still goes on.

The fact that farmers do not boycott shows in total does not necessarily mean willingness or acceptance on their part. Several factors must be weighed before such a conclusion is reached. How much of their attendance springs from the fact that this work is being carried out by government agents and would be credit facility and market



controllers? The rural farmer can not afford to antagonize [redacted] X  
 [redacted] such a powerful hand. The politics of extension work in all  
 this should not be minimized.

Rejection of puppetry by the ordinary farmer may be internalized  
 to such an extent that it is missed by practitioners. The 'parody'  
 aspect identified by the Nyau members should be looked at in greater  
 detail here. A masquerade in Nyau society is considered an animal.  
 Being such, no rational behaviour is attributed to it. In fact when a  
 man wears a mask he ceases to be a human being. He belongs to the  
 world of the supernatural which is traditionally seen as totally  
 irrational. No logical thought is expected from the masquerader nor  
 from his world. It would be interesting to see how much of this is  
 transferred to the puppet in the agriculture show. If there is such a  
 transfer what becomes of any messages invested in the puppet play is  
 easy to imagine. They are perhaps only a big joke. But the problem  
 goes further than this if one is to be even more sceptic. How is an  
 adult who engages in such work viewed by his audience? How much of  
 this thinking affects all agriculture extension work?

2 Theatre for Development Workshop at Mbalachanda Rural Growth  
 Centre (Malawi) organized by the Chancellor College Travelling  
 Theatre (University of Malawi) from 15th July to 25th July, 1981

In July, 1981, the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre was  
 invited by the Office of the President and Cabinet to visit a rural

growth centre at Mbalachanda in the Northern Region of Malawi. The workshop described below was a response to this invitation.

(a) Mbalachanda Rural Growth Centre

This is an administrative centre just opened in the Northern Region of Malawi.<sup>29</sup> It is so called because it has been set up in a place where hitherto there was nothing except bush and scattered villages, in the hope that by bringing together such services as a health clinic, primary school, community development assistance, homecraft workers, post office, craft workshop, small business advice and a market it will spur economic growth around itself.

(b) The Workshop on Theatre for Development

The Chancellor College Travelling Theatre has not opened up new ground in conducting such a workshop.<sup>30</sup> The government has been using theatre arts in most of its extension services (particularly in Agricultural extension services, which use a good deal of puppetry and film shows to supplement talks by workers). The difference between the established extension workers' approach and the Travelling Theatre's is in expertise and emphasis of purpose. In Mbalachanda, of course, none of the extension workers had attempted to employ any theatre arts to support them in their work.

Since the Travelling Theatre's formation in 1971, its repertoire has usually consisted of published plays in English, with occasional

improvised drama built out of folk tales. There had never been any attempt to present 'vernacular' drama. Consequently, it has always worked in schools or town halls.

At the invitation of the government to perform at this centre, the Travelling Theatre altered its usual bill to cater for what it considered would be the needs of the people of Mbalachanda and surrounding villages. The government's idea of our visit to the Rural Growth Centre was simply to provide entertainment for the people there at a splendid community hall built together with the various houses in the Centre. In a way, the Travelling Theatre was being asked to justify the presence of the community hall. Instead of fulfilling this calling alone, the Travelling Theatre chose to hold a workshop on theatre for development for eight days with the extension workers based at the centre, then to proceed to show the results of the workshop in the villages as well as the hall.

(c) Planning

The Travelling Theatre gathered, through the central administration of the Rural Growth Centre project, a series of problems that might be experienced by the extension workers in their daily undertakings amongst the people they worked with (and these were made up of villagers and some farm labourers at nearby tobacco estates). A few of the problems identified in advance were falling attendance at adult literary classes and refusal by the villagers (particularly headmen) to accept

utilisation of facilities located in places other than their villages.

Such problems were sought to give the Travelling Theatre team material for building a demonstration sketch in order to give the workers some idea of what the workshop was aimed at. All sketches were to be done in the vernacular languages of the area, namely Tumbuka and Chichewa. An improvised sketch was prepared by some members of the company. Armed with food and a Landrover, the trip to Mbalachanda (400-500 miles away from Chancellor College) was on. The Travelling Theatre team consisted of nine people. A diary entry provides a more vivid description of the whole workshop.

DEPARTURE: 15th July, 1981

ARRIVAL: 16th July, 1981.

(d) The Workshop

16th July, 1981

Morning: Meeting the connection (a business advisor to small business (9a.m.) owners around Mbalachanda). After this we meet other officers at the centre. Explaining our project to the extension workers. This included a demonstration of what the Travelling Theatre had prepared followed by a critical discussion of content and presentation. Workers were quick to comment on the aesthetic aspects of the presentation (demanding reality in props and costuming), but gradually they moved into thematic considerations. The demonstration

was geared towards explaining possible causes for the problems so far identified. The emphasis was on understanding that 'drama' was being used to express an idea. The morning session ended in trying to identify other problems experienced by the extension workers themselves whilst carrying out their duties (i.e., what do they find to be the most common problems they have to deal with on their visits to the villages?). Broke off for lunch at noon.

Afternoon: Back to the community centre. Opened afternoon session with (2 p.m.) some theatre games. The idea being to get the Travelling Theatre team, Primary school teachers (who joined the workshop too) and extension workers to know and trust each other. Thirty minutes of games cleared 'embarrassment complexes', people began to be free with each other. The group split into smaller ones with the workers as the basis for discussing the type of areas to be attended to. There were basically three extension services areas chosen; (a) preventive health - digging pit latrines, garbage heaps and general cleanliness in the home; (b) modern methods of agriculture and the agriculture instructor; and (c) adult literacy. Three members of the Travelling Theatre provided leadership in casting and building improvisations out of identified problems in each area (trying to strike a balance between theme and aesthetics). Group breaks for the day at 5 p.m. The plays are to be in a mixture of Chichewa and



Tumbuka.17th July, 1981

Morning: Continuation of 'group' work. Developing the improvisations.

Afternoon: The three groups come together to show each other what had been achieved so far followed by discussion of the performances (centring on themes rather than the acting). There were three sketches developed.

## SYNOPSIS OF SKETCHES

Sketch I: 'Kufunika kwa ukhondo' (The need for cleanliness)

Cast: Chief, Chief's wife, Chief's friend, Health Assistant.

Scene 1: The chief is visited by the Health Assistant who has come to seek permission to carry out a survey of latrines in the village. Permission granted, a date is agreed on. The chief's own compound is to be the first one to be visited.

Scene 2: Chief and his wife left to discuss the survey. Wife points out how shameful it will be to be discovered as a family without a latrine, and even suggests he gets some labour to dig one quickly; but chief does not see the need especially when there is so much bush around. Argument interrupted by arrival of a friend.

Scene 3: Visitor offered some sweet beer which causes stomach upset. Visitor wants to go to the toilet, chief points to the bush. Having no choice, visitor goes. In visitor's absence wife

fumes, pointing out how ridiculous and shameful all this is. How can a chief be showing his visitors to the bush to relieve themselves? Chief shouts, but stops on reappearance of the visitor who only comes in to say farewell rather hurriedly.

Scene 4: Next scene starts with wife reminding chief of Health Assistant's visit to the village. Chief says he won't be around as he has to visit a friend somewhere. This is just to avoid meeting him. Soon after having his lunch he goes off to visit his friend. Health Assistant arrives soon after and he is disappointed to find the chief has gone away, but he soon finds out why. He talks to the chief's wife about the need for having a latrine in the compound. Wife agrees to everything and reveals that she has tried to persuade her husband to dig one, but to no avail. Health Assistant departs with the promise of another visit.

Scene 5: Chief is visiting his friend. He stands up and excuses himself, going into the bush to relieve himself. Whilst chief is away, Health Assistant arrives to inspect. During greeting formalities the chief rushes on to the scene, running away from the bush. Everybody is startled, but chief cannot explain. Soon after this he bids everybody farewell (in a way running away from Health Assistant who has been trying to explain that he had just been to the chief's house).

Scene 6: Chief is back home with wife who is explaining the visit of

the Health Assistant, but she discovers her husband is absent-minded. On enquiry she is told of how her husband the chief, was nearly stoned and clubbed by kids chasing mice as he was trying to relieve himself in the bush around his friend's compound. Wife is outraged, shouts at the chief and emphasizes that this should be a lesson to him to have a latrine in his compound. She then turns to the audience with rhetorical questions on the shamefulness of not having a latrine for the home. Chief stops her amidst agreement that 'Ok I will dig one, but no need to tell all the world what has happened to me'. The sketch ends with the chief looking for a hoe to go and start digging the pit latrine.

Sketch II: 'Kumanya Mbwana' (Knowledge is Freedom)

Cast: Mr Phiri, Mrs Phiri, Son (Phiri), Mr Mkandawire,  
Mrs Mkandawire, Teacher and Narrator.

Scene 1: The play opens with a narrator entering the circle to tell a story about two families just returning from selling their tobacco crop. One family could count their money (Mr and Mrs Phiri), whilst the other (Mr and Mrs Mkandawire) could not. They help each other to do so and find they have both earned themselves 60 Kwacha from their crop. They retire to their homes where they are called to a public meeting at which a local party man talks about a literacy school being introduced into the village and encourages everybody to join.

Mr Phiri is not ready to waste his time at such a school, so he walks out to occupy himself with more worthy matters. After all, he can count!

Scene 2: Mr Phiri returns home to find his wife preparing food for him and their son. As they eat, the literacy classes issue comes up, but he shrugs it off. Soon after Mr Mkandawire comes in and brings up the same subject, cherishing the opportunity of learning how to count like his friend. But Mr Phiri refuses to have anything to do with such 'nonsense'. They break conversation by leaving for a drink.

Scene 3: A mime scene of a class in session with the narrator explaining what is going on. As he does so he asks questions about the goodness of such a school. He presents pros and cons, leaving it to the audience to decide. Whilst Mr Phiri has refused to attend classes, his wife does. One day he passes by the school and sees the teacher leaning over his wife's shoulder as he tries to help her in her writing. Angry, Mr Phiri goes home.

Scene 4: Back at his house, Mr Phiri is furious; he finds faults in everything his wife is doing. He thinks she is neglecting her duties by going to school - especially at her age! He says he cannot see how she can sit together with her son in the same class. So Mrs Phiri explains that the school she attends is for adults only. She goes on to brag that she can now write, read and count. Mr Phiri does not believe it

until a test is given to her (with the son as the examiner). Then comes the issue of the school teacher leaning over her shoulder - petty jealousy which she manages to deal with. But she cannot convince her husband to join the literacy school.

Scene 5: Two years later (filled in by the narrator). Again the two families are returning from selling their produce. Tables have turned now in a subtle way. Mr and Mrs Mkandawire who could not count at first, can now do so. But more than this, his family has earned double what Mr and Mrs Phiri have got from their sales. Mr Phiri cannot believe it, but his colleague assures him that this has happened because he can now read instructions which go with fertilizer for himself rather than just applying it anyhow. Mr Phiri unhappily gives in to the idea of adult literacy.

Scene 6: The narrator comes in to ask further questions (to the audience) as he rounds the scene up.

Sketch III: 'Nzeru Zayekha' (Mr Know it all)

Cast: Mr Chakufwa and son, Mr Mahara, Agriculture Instructor, and Mr Chidongo.

Scene 1: Beer drinking party in the village where gentlemen are discussing the use of lucky charms in order to get bigger yields from their gardens. Mr Chakufwa claims to be an authority on this. An agricultural instructor joins in the



drinking. The conversation on 'charms' stops. Mr Chakufwa is particularly unhappy to be in the company of this instructor whose job is not only to teach modern methods of agriculture, but also to discourage the use of charms. More to the discomfort of Mr Chakufwa, the instructor introduces the subject of a demonstration lesson in 'tobacco care'. He suggests they use Mr Chakufwa's garden for this. Mr Chakufwa is flattered. He leaves for home in high spirits.

Scene 2: In Mr Chakufwa's garden. He is working with his son in preparation for the 'demonstration day'. Other farmers trickle in and the instructor arrives last. The demonstration is done, everybody goes home leaving Mr Chakufwa and his son behind. As soon as they disappear Mr Chakufwa destroys everything the instructor had done despite the son's remonstrations.

Scene 3: Agricultural Instructor pays a visit to Mr Chakufwa's garden and shouts at him for disobeying his instructions. But Mr Chakufwa sends him away saying he knows what he is doing. Mr Chakufwa goes home to attend to family matters, getting his son to go to school as the holiday is over.

Scene 4: Sometime later Mr Chakufwa in his garden, which has failed. He goes to examine his colleague's (Mr Mahara) and he finds it's doing well. The same is true of Mr Chidongo's. As he is busy admiring Mr Chidongo's garden, the owner appears and asks what is going on. A quarrel follows with Mr Chakufwa

claiming that his colleagues have cast an evil spell on his crop. Whilst this is going on, Mr Mahara returns a parcel of 'charms' which he had collected from Mr Chakufwa, saying that he does not need it anymore. Mr Chakufwa breaks down and goes back to his garden asking why this has to happen to him. He ends by asking the audience to answer him.

18th July, 1981: FREE DAY

19th July, 1981

Morning: The Travelling Theatre works on translating a play from (9 a.m.) English to the vernacular and adapting it for presentation during the workshop. The Lizard's Tail<sup>31</sup> is chosen because it was already in the year's (1980/81) repertoire. Its theme and story is very local, and therefore very likely to go down well even with village audiences. Adaptation includes topics on 'health' and 'adult literacy'.

Afternoon: Continuation of morning work: recasting and rehearsing (2 p.m.) (since the company did not include the original cast with them on the trip).

20th July, 1981

Morning: Most extension workers have to attend to their 'normal' (9 a.m.) duties, so we decide to continue work on The Lizard's Tail which does not involve any of them. Later in the morning meeting with area secretary for the Malawi Congress Party, to

ask for his help in organising venues in the villages. He sees us in rehearsal and goes away very enthusiastic about our exercise. (During the meeting we quickly brief him on what our work is all about.) In all the improvisations heavy emphasis is on the cultural/educational aspects. We emphasize the need for follow-up discussions with the audiences after every performance, so that we can exchange ideas/views on what happens in the plays. We agree to perform at six venues; four villages, one tobacco estate and the community centre.

Afternoon: Rehearsing two plays ('adult literacy' and 'health').

(2 p.m.) Discussion of next day's programme. We agree that the programmes in the villages will be made up of two of our plays and an indigenous dance from the villagers themselves.

### 21st July, 1981

Morning: All teachers not available in the morning as they have to (9 a.m.) invigilate examinations in the school; fortunately none of them is involved in the morning's programme. A visit to Village A (Chikoma). There were no people on our arrival, but drumming does the trick. Within a few minutes of the drumming, people come. We are shown to the 'Bwalo' (ground) where the performances are to be held. Two plays plus their own re-enactment of a typical 'peace time' village beer drinking party. The discussion following our performances



was not forthcoming except for a general comment made by the village headman endorsing the messages of the plays.

Afternoon: Performance at village B (Jeremiya). Word got round to the (2 p.m.) village that we were coming (thanks to the Malawi Congress Party secretary's efforts), but there is nobody except a few women. Explanation is that most men have gone to attend a collective working group which was working to raise funds for village affairs (Chilimika or Chijayo). Group waits, singing, clapping and drumming. One hour later the men show up. We go straight into performance. Two plays: 'Health' and the adaptation. The villagers do a dance called Kamchoma. The discussion at the end had the village headman making comments on how entertaining and educative the two plays were. He also admits that pit latrines are scarce in his village. His own house had an old one which had fallen in, but he was building another house with a new toilet. Thus the old toilet need not be attended to. One man asked about the logic of one of the plays (the adaptation had a court scene with one of the principal witnesses absent). Finally the Health Extension worker took the floor and hammered in the need for observing what the plays talked about: digging pit latrines, garbage pits, etc. He then went on to give them some technical details, like how deep a latrine should be. This was in response to some technical questions.

Evening: Performance at the Community centre purely for the



entertainment of the residents at the growth centre. There were about three hundred people in attendance.

22nd July, 1981

Morning: Group goes to village C (Yoramu Ng'ambi). We found the (9 a.m.) chief waiting for us. Gradually the audience builds up.

'Health' and the adaptation were the bill here. During the discussion the chief, who is also the area Chairman of the Malawi Congress Party, commented on the performances along realistic lines (asked why we did not have proper props). In closing his speech he encouraged his people to comment on what they had seen and made an admission that he did not have a toilet himself, but promised to look into the matter. The Health Extension worker confirmed the importance of having a latrine in the home. He also went over technical details of digging a pit latrine.

Afternoon: Group goes to Mukwa Estate. Finds a very large audience (2 p.m.) already seated and waiting for the performance. The two plays done here were 'Literacy' and 'Agriculture'. During the literacy play, comments and questions were being asked. At a certain point in 'Literacy' the narrator comments on the need for sending a wife in the home to an adult literacy class; one of the audience asked 'what if the wife uses the money for fees on booze?' At another point in the same play one man challenged to be shown where the adult literacy



centre was. These questions were turned to at the end of the shows. The question of the location of the literacy centre was answered by the manager of the estate. Apparently there had been no such centre at the place until not long before our visit. Perhaps this is why the adult literacy man had avoided coming with us throughout the visits. Most people saw the need for knowing how to read and write. One woman cited the example of a person who could not read the 'destination board' on a bus and how embarrassed he feels to ask others to tell him which should be his bus or when he discovers he has boarded the wrong bus.

23rd July, 1981

Morning: FREE

Afternoon: Performance at village D (Kwemani). Initially the whole (2 p.m.) village seems deserted. No proper explanation given.

Gradually (one hour later) people trickle in. Speculation begins amongst the cast (perhaps word about the messages of the plays has already reached the village which has no latrines in sight). The play performed was 'Health'. It was getting dark. Discussion here centred on aesthetics.

Very few men showed up despite adequate advance notice.

They end the visit with their own performance of an indigenous dance. Signs of wear and tear showing in the Travelling Theatre Company.

Evening: Last performance in the community hall. Audience made up of not just residents at the centre, but even villagers who had already been visited during the daytime performances. The workshop group was joined by local 'Vimbuza' (Possession dance) dancers.

24th July, 1981

Morning: FREE

Afternoon: Evaluation of the work done. During this session there was (2 p.m.) concern expressed at the way some extension workers had avoided attending the actual performances. Reasons for this were explored. Some workers felt that the workshop actually exposed their own inefficiency, quite apart from helping them to get messages across in a different way from what they were used to. Questions of continuity were raised.

25th July, 1981: Departure (Back to Zomba).<sup>32</sup>

(e) Comment

The purpose of the workshop from the government's point of view was 'to provide a forum of entertainment, of culture exchange, of education and of team spirit at the centre among the extension workers and also the local people ...'<sup>33</sup> That all these were achieved remains to be seen in what follows after the workshop. Because although the plays were taken out to the villages, the workshop really aimed at the extension workers. The Travelling Theatre aimed at getting the

extension workers to recognize the potential of tackling their work from a more imaginative angle than they had been doing so far. This shows clearly that what was being created is in fact 'propaganda theatre'. Although there was no particular political statement being made, a particular way of teaching and living was being suggested to the extension workers and the villagers respectively. The propaganda embodied in the experience was dialectical. Whilst the plays were preaching a way of behaviour endorsed by the ministries from which the extension workers came, the audience was given a chance to question the content of the plays or challenge the extension workers as government agents to provide services necessary for the fulfillment of what was being demanded of them as villagers. At one venue a member of the audience asked 'where is the school?' when the 'Literacy' play was being performed. The group's consciousness was being awakened. Feedback was becoming a possibility because the tendency to believe that villagers were mere vessels to be filled with knowledge was being broken. The evaluation session at the end of the workshop also revealed some of the weaknesses the extension workers had in fulfilling their duties amongst the villagers. This 'dialectical' nature of the experience is necessary for the survival of any 'theatre for development' programme, because it keeps everybody on their toes (without the feeling of complacency in the extension workers, who in fact represent the government).

The effectiveness of these performances did not depend on just the themes or content of the plays and questions at the end of each



performance, but also on the attitude of the Travelling Theatre team before the extension workers, which was carried over into the villages by the whole workshop team, plus the way the plays were developed and presented at the various venues. Several details had to be taken care of right at the 'creation' stage of the improvisations. 'Health' was aimed at the chief rather than the masses in the way the 'hare' is used in folk tales. This had the effect of defusing resentment from the general public and also of affording criticism without undermining the chief's credibility. Having the chief as the centre of attention in the play also suggests prompting the leadership of the village to take the initiative in carrying out what the plays were preaching.

'Literacy' used the narrator, in the folktale sense, (with unbiased thought-provoking questions embedded in his narrative, unlike those of a typical folk tale; some Brechtian chorus/singer type). An attempt was also made, by the actors, to add depth to otherwise stock characters who would normally be treated in a rather superficial way. In this respect plays attempted to direct emphasis to other less didactic issues (this was particularly true in The Lizard's Tail adaptation) which then became normal to the lives of the characters, and thus to allow the audience to enjoy watching the play without creating a 'defensive' distancing from its message. The question of language was also important in this exercise. By reverting to vernacular languages, the workshop team came down from their 'university' pedestal and joined the masses on their own grounds. More than this, the actors could go about their business without too much worry about 'second language'

competence. In order to break the feeling of being a victimized audience, actors sat with them and acted in the round. Superficially, when it comes to the performance time questions of aesthetics may seem to be of little significance in propaganda theatre<sup>34</sup>, but where you are introducing this amongst people who perhaps have a different type of theatre in their life, you have to spend some time looking into it. The technique of asking questions directly addressed to the audience by the actors is another thing which needs close attention in preparation. Unless these aesthetic issues form an important part of 'theatre for development' in Africa, this theatre is doomed to reduction into everyday 'alien' fun without any didactic effect.

### 3 Chikwakwa Theatre and development in Zambia

The Chikwakwa Theatre of the University of Zambia has always insisted on the idea of taking theatre to the people. For over 15 years its members have done this by either touring a repertoire of plays considered relevant to the needs of the masses or conducting drama workshops in the rural areas of Zambia in the hope that the people can evolve their own theatre thereof.

During its early tours Chikwakwa Theatre concentrated on presenting already prepared packages of drama to their 'visited' audiences. But with time, and very rapidly indeed, this idea grew to include presentations which were worked out by the theatre company together with local volunteers from the places toured. As this was happening the tours changed in format to become drama workshops. These workshops

have matured into a technique of play creation which is unique in African theatre experience. This can best be shown through a study of the play Matteo Sakala<sup>35</sup> which is a direct result of this type of work. But first of all let us look at the drama workshops.

(a) Drama workshop tours: their history and development in Zambia

Michael Etherton talking of theatrical activity in Zambia says that:

what [he found] interesting [in the country was] the widespread existence of touring companies producing plays among the people - frequently political, and entirely self-contained, without any whites around at all - in fact, almost consciously kept a secret from them.<sup>36</sup>

The idea of touring theatrical events in Zambia (as indeed in other parts of Africa) is not a foreign one. From time immemorial traditional performers have moved from village to village singing and presenting dances to groups of both young and old people in the village square. The concept of 'taking theatre to the people' is therefore a misconstrued one. It suggests the existence of a vacuum within the rural communities. What perhaps should be talked about is the idea of 'sharing theatre with the people'. This gives some allowance for the possibility of learning from each other as theatre practitioners from university complexes mingle with villagers or suburban populations. The experiences of early Chikwakwa Theatre tours confirm this possibility. Whilst they set out to

persist with [their] efforts to take meaningful theatre to the people and encourage them to persist with the creation of

meaningful forms of imaginative and dramatic expression in their own communities,<sup>37</sup>

actual experience showed them that they too had a good deal to learn from the people they visited. By 1971 Chikwakwa Theatre enthusiasts had already made three workshops in rural areas.<sup>38</sup> This however was by no means the first time drama workshops were being conducted in the country. Records from colonial days show that even during this period some bodies in the country tried to conduct drama workshops amongst Africans.

Although on the whole theatre activities in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) were developing along racial lines, the intentions of the government to 'improve' the African sometimes ran contrary to the wishes of segregationist or racist theatre minds. The creation of the Northern Rhodesia Youth Council and its involvement in youth recreational activities was one such contradiction.

The Northern Rhodesia Youth Council was an offshoot of the Northern Rhodesia Council for Social Services. It embraced all youth organisations of all races. Whilst it was asked to deal with a growing rate of delinquency amongst European children.<sup>39</sup>

Amongst Africans, with about 40,000 children in towns along the lines of rail who [had] missed schooling because they [were] now too old to benefit from the expansion of education in recent years, the problem [was] more in the sphere of informal education for citizenship.<sup>40</sup>

Establishing of drama and choir groups was considered one method of providing this 'informal education'. An annual festival was also organised by the same organisation at which prizes were awarded for the

best presentations. This was the Annual Choir and Drama Festival.

In 1960 it was reported that its

preliminaries on the Copperbelt were attended by as many as 3,000 people. At the finals in July, H.E. the Governor, Sir Evelyn Hone, opened the proceedings and Lady Hone presented the prizes. The standard reached by these clubs in presenting their own plays or training their own choirs was gratifyingly high and justified the great deal of work that had been put into it.<sup>41</sup>

Such quality was achieved through the workshops that the Council organized for African youth leaders. Chifunyise says that:

Among other projects by the Northern Rhodesia Youth Council were the drama workshops. The first drama workshop was held in Lusaka at the Waddington Center in March 1960, as a way of preparing the choir and drama groups for that year's festival at Mulungushi. The main emphasis in this drama workshop was to coach club leaders and their members various aspects of acting, directing and overall club management.<sup>42</sup>

The festivals launched by this organisation covered the period between 1958 and 1963. The efforts of the Northern Rhodesia Youth Council produced phenomenal results in the field of theatre. In 1963 the Department of Social Welfare reported that the festival had become a national event. Ninety-nine clubs took part in that year's festival. Dr Kenneth Kaunda (now President of Zambia) presented trophies on the occasion. The effectiveness of the Youth Council thus managed to make inroads into a new political set up as its work spilled into the independence era. With the coming of independence the council dropped the name Northern Rhodesia and became Zambia Youth Council in line with the change that had happened to its parent organisation (which had become Zambia Council for Social Welfare).

These changes were not in names only. The financial status of



the organisation deteriorated:

The Zambia Council for Social Services folded up on 31st December, 1968, for financial reasons, and the Government transferred the functions of the Council to [the] Department of Social Welfare [in the Ministry of Labour and Social Services].<sup>43</sup>

This inevitably affected the work of the Zambia Youth Council. As financial problems harassed the parent organisation, the youth wing could not find its base anymore. But as Chifunyise says, the efforts to develop theatre amongst the youth as a means of curbing delinquency or introducing informal education paid off in spite of the collapse of the Zambia Youth Council:

The drama workshop projects, although only two were held by the Northern Rhodesia Youth Council, helped many club leaders in their organisation of drama clubs and the production of good plays and club programs.<sup>44</sup>

These club leaders and other members of the Youth Council, and its Youth Choir/Drama Festival became a major force in Zambia's cultural revolution soon after independence in 1964, as they joined various organisations in the country.

It should be clear now that the idea of conducting drama workshops with the intention of both developing theatre skills as well as informal education amongst participants did not start with the creation of the University of Zambia nor indeed with the work of Michael Etherton and his brainchild, Chikwakwa Theatre. What these have done is to give more concrete shape to the ideas behind such work than any other people who might have been doing this sort of work before. This is why Chikwakwa Theatre work has been included as an example of theatre for development in this chapter.

(b) Chikwakwa Theatre rural drama workshops

Although the name Chikwakwa Theatre did not come up until 1969 it can be safely assumed that all the work done in theatre at the University of Zambia hitherto led to the creation of Chikwakwa. Therefore such work should be seen as part and parcel of Chikwakwa Theatre enterprises. After all it was the same people who participated in such work as well as the Chikwakwa Theatre, namely; students and staff of the University of Zambia.

When the first Chikwakwa Review appeared in 1971 it recorded a total of three drama workshops as having been conducted since 1969. Unfortunately it did not provide reports on the first two held at Kasama (1969) and Chipata (1970). If any information is sought regarding these primal experiments, it must be sought elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> These first experiments are important for a clear understanding of the way policies regarding rural drama workshops came up.

Kasama Workshop 1969

Tom Baldwin talks of a workshop held at Kasama in the Northern Province of Zambia as:

an experiment by the University of Zambia where two plays were rehearsed and performed in Kasama, Northern Province. The aim [of the experiment being] to show students and Zambians interested in staging plays how simple productions can be achieved without the aid of a conventional stage, complex lighting and scenic facilities.<sup>46</sup>

Several things happened at this workshop which indicated the way future work was to follow. First and foremost perhaps was the realization by

organizers of such workshops that the whole experience was going to be and had to be a two-way process. Whilst they had set out to 'teach' they were also going to be taught something themselves. The choice of plays and the way of performing were all going to change as a result of this first encounter with villagers.

Participants to this experiment were drawn from members of the University of Zambia and the local community<sup>47</sup>. The tone of Baldwin's report suggests that he himself and his wife were the directors of the workshop. He says:

The university decided to put on two simple plays in the Zambian bush, to be rehearsed and performed within four days, to show students and local inhabitants alike how basic productions [could] be achieved using only the minimum of materials ... My wife was to produce one play, myself the other.<sup>48</sup>

It is not known in what capacity the Baldwins were leading the team from the University of Zambia. The couple came to Zambia in 1968 when the husband enrolled at the University of Zambia for the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (in English as a second language).<sup>49</sup> At this time Michael Etherton was an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of English.<sup>50</sup>

The thrust of this workshop was towards 'simplistic' drama based on simple stories or plays. This was so because it was believed that:

There are few plays in English which are readily performable without some adaptation into Zambian terms. Students will be all too willing to act in Shakespeare or Soyinka, but in most cases a more lasting knowledge and valuable experience will be gained by starting with something more manageable and less demanding.<sup>51</sup>

In line with such thoughts specially prepared scripts were presented.

These were a rendering of The Pardoner's Tale by Chaucer and a dramatization of a traditional tale, The Talking Drum. Saying that the group decided to work in the 'bush' is some form of romanticizing. The venue of this particular workshop was not so rural. Kasama is a district in its own right. Though not as big as Lusaka or Kitwe, it has its own small infra-structure made up of shops, a few government offices and some public facilities.

Because of the straight-forwardness of the group's intentions organization of the workshop simply followed the division of labour existent in a typical western theatre enterprise, namely; director, stage manager, musician, dance choreographer etc. And so as soon as bodies were identified, work proceeded along such lines with the Baldwins directing one play a piece. It is important to stress that the whole workshop was geared towards one-way traffic, that is it was meant to be for the benefit of the rural communities who 'knew next to nothing' about drama and had nothing to give in return. However working in this sort of atmosphere brought up problems hitherto unanticipated. Whilst the stage management team went out

scrounging the countryside for wood and trying to borrow the necessary furniture from local people<sup>52</sup>

the problem of language came up. The plays had been conceived in English yet most of the anticipated audience did not understand it. Something had to be done about this. Kasama is in a Bemba/Tonga speaking area:

Therefore, as soon as the actors knew their parts, they were encouraged to repeat sentences in the local dialect[...] On

the day of the actual performance a speech would sometimes be delivered in Pidgin English, then Bemba followed by Tonga.<sup>53</sup>

The problem of language was compounded by the need to localize the stories. Mere translation and adaptation to 'Zambian' culture was not enough. Right from the outset the team had decided that the plays should contain local dances and music. But none of the University team were good at any of these so help was sought from the district government clerk at Kasama, who 'knew many of the local customs and traditions'. This meant that the actors (mostly students) 'had the additional burden of learning the songs and dances that he taught them'.<sup>54</sup> This brought in an unexpected addition to the workshop. The learning experience was now becoming a shared one by both the initiators of the workshop and the target audience. This has now become the pattern of all drama workshops organized by Chikwakwa Theatre. The pedantic attitude with which the first Kasama project started has given way to humility and readiness to recognize the existence of local theatrical conventions which Chikwakwa Theatre members are always anxious to learn.

Using a loudspeaker borrowed from the local political party, announcements were made about the performances being prepared. The venue chosen for performances at Kasama was the market square. Having decided on the market venue, the group

collected together a large number of brown paper bags, partly filled them with sand, and placed lighted candles in them. These [were] arranged in a large circle which formed [the] acting area. As the plays were to be performed at night, two large bonfires [were lit] at either end of the acting space to provide additional light.<sup>55</sup>

Having done this the scene was set for the show in the evening. Nearly



3,000 people turned up to see the plays. The experience was an eye opener for the University of Zambia theatre enthusiasts:

[The] first evening resembled more a football match than an evening of plays. The paper bags were [...] moved inwards by the jostling crowds, until the acting area was reduced to only a few feet [...] The people at the back became restless and started to shout and elbow their way to the front, until the evening ended in a wild confusion.<sup>56</sup>

Immediately after this, thoughts on how to stop such confusion preoccupied the minds of the workshop team. The large number of audience was due to the fact that people thought there was a political meeting being held. The following day measures were taken to protect the 'lights' and the acting area. This was achieved by putting a barricade around the circle of paper bags. The local police was also brought in to assist with crowd control.

Having taken such appropriate measures against confusion like that of the night before, performances were held a second time. This time the audience listened and followed the plays:

They shouted advice to the hero in difficulty [...] the actors responded superbly, asking advice from the audience, and using the plot of the play as only a rough guide to what should happen next [...] The crowd also joined in the local songs and dances which [had been] put into the basic script.<sup>57</sup>

In other words, the experience showed that the audience responded to drama in their own way. They were not a 'typical' audience with in-built inhibitions at displaying genuine responses where they were asked for by the text. By the end of the workshop both performers and audience were learners. The university team talked of having learnt something from the workshop in the following words:

provided the plays were short and simple they could be put on

with little rehearsal time and few facilities [...] Using the local language also had an enormous success [...] Finally using music [...] together with local dances and colourful costumes added a spectacular element which was easy to appreciate.<sup>58</sup>

These were important lessons to anybody who was thinking of conducting further drama workshops in the country. The Chikwakwa Theatre certainly learnt a good deal from this workshop and shaped its future work with this Kasama experience in mind.

#### Other workshops

After the Kasama workshop, interest in working with rural communities grew at the University of Zambia. The English Department, which initially was alone in sponsoring drama activity at the University, was joined by the Department of Extra-Mural Studies. This was an added advantage to theatre practitioners as the latter had residential tutors/lecturers stationed at various places in the country. These people became very important liaison officers between visiting drama workshop teams and the rural target communities. Having these residential lecturers to work with made planning of workshops even smoother since advance plans about accommodation, food and transport could now be made.

The Department of Extra-Mural Studies was established at the University in 1967 as part of the government's wishes to provide adult education in the country. The department provides a university type of education especially organized for those who want to study on non-credit basis. The only entry qualification required is the ability to

use English.<sup>59</sup> To this end the department offers a wide range of short and long non-degree courses at centres throughout the country. Several aims and objectives have been postulated for this work. Some of these are: 'the creation of a sense of belonging to the African community and to the wider world community; and the satisfaction of the social, aesthetic, moral and cultural needs of all members of the society'.<sup>60</sup> The coming together of Chikwakwa Theatre and the Department of Extra-Mural Studies meant that drama workshops had to satisfy such aims and objectives in one <sup>way</sup> or another. This was not too difficult a task for Chikwakwa Theatre because its goals were just as broad. The workshops continued to be built on the idea of creating a theatre tradition amongst the people with whom they were held. The procedure remained that of bringing along plays that were specially adapted to what were considered to be the needs of the audiences expected at the workshops' performances.

In 1971 three plays were chosen and produced during the Eastern Province theatre workshop held in Chipata.<sup>61</sup> These were Poisoned Cultural Meat written by Zambia's leading playwright Godfrey Kasoma (now known as Kabwe Kasoma), The Village Comes to Town written by Felix Chibushe and The Mirror written by John Ballikuddende. All the three plays had been written in English. This meant that before performance some time had to be set aside for translating and rehearsing them in an appropriate vernacular language spoken in the province. Apart from this language problem several others were beginning to be noticed. One report mentioned that:

with evening performances every day [...] everyone was active from early morning to midnight [...] we [...] missed the very important opportunity of discussing with our Chipata friends the possibility of continuing with their theatre work after the workshop.<sup>62</sup>

The programmes of the workshops were too ambitious and heavy to allow room for breath. Several issues needed thrashing out for the workshops to really achieve their goals. The kind of reflection shown in the words just quoted was a direct result of the involvement of the Department of Extra-Mural Studies. Its presence ushered into Chikwakwa Theatre a sense of systematic appraisal of its work. At the end of performances either questionnaires were sent out to participants or question sessions were held with audiences to solicit responses to the workshops. Responses to the 1971 performances in the Eastern Province indicated unanimous support for the project. Comments recorded included the following entry:

Reasons given approving the Workshop were that the performances demonstrated:

- (1) How the educated group in society disregards the uneducated
- (2) The difficulties old people have with modern life
- (3) The everyday scene in Zambia
- (4) How people behave in urban and rural areas and the contrast between their attitudes and values
- (5) How some people lost respect for their relatives
- (6) Humour.<sup>63</sup>

The educational aspects of the performances were not missed either.

The plays were seen as pinpointing the badness of pride amongst

educated elites. They were seen as encouraging humility, respect and love amongst people regardless of personal riches and achievements. In a society where the town is seen as a better place than the village, the problems and vagaries of township life exposed in the plays were seen as a lesson and warning to would-be migrants.<sup>64</sup> Comments made by audiences also referred to technical aspects of theatre presentation. For example, some of the audience complained about the bad acoustic and staging facilities. They pointed out that these hampered their enjoyment of the entertainment provided to the full. Out of such comments by the audience Chikwakwa Theatre could think ahead in readiness for future work:

The plays should not be too simplistic, as much time as possible should be spent in villages while allowing time for performances in townships, a smaller group could stay longer and write its own material while in villages [...] more time should be allotted to the creation and arrangement of music and dancing, and more women should be included.<sup>65</sup>

Subsequent workshops tried to accommodate such suggestions. In 1972 a workshop was held in the Western Province of Mongu. The project was described as 'larger in scope [...] and ambitiously aimed to raise a theatre on the edge of the Zambezi flood plain'. An open-air theatre was finally built with the help of local people.<sup>66</sup> Plans were made to 'construct [...] storage and change rooms, to add finishing touches to the theatre, and put more seats'.<sup>67</sup> Quite clearly the question of providing staging facilities was being looked at and tackled most positively.

Apart from theatre activity Chikwakwa Theatre members embarked on



Research into indigenous performances. A research project in traditional dances and folk tales of the Chewa of Lundazi was carried out during August, 1972.<sup>68</sup> This was seen as one way of preparing for a genuine localization of theatre activity in the Chikwakwa Theatre. The aims of this project went far beyond a cosmetic involvement with tradition. Researchers involved in the project tried:

to gain an insight into the underlying meaning of traditional dances and folk tales and also to [...] explore the origins of the dances and folk tales plus their significance in the social system as a whole, past and present.<sup>69</sup>

Such work brought out unexpected projections of how far rural communities were willing to go along with Chikwakwa Theatre ideas about traditional beliefs and behaviour. This was best shown when some girls from the research team were asked not to make recordings of proceedings at a girls' initiation ceremony.<sup>70</sup> Another thing that was quickly learnt by the team members was that they needed more time than they had thought in order to actually and genuinely come to grips with what they were trying to research into. This also meant more money being set aside for the project.

However compounded problems seemed to grow for Chikwakwa Theatre drama workshops, the spirit to improve its work with the masses did not falter. Constantly members reminded each other of guarding against letting their theatre 'degenerating into a theatre which concentrates on the superficial, the amusing, the non-celebral, etc.'<sup>71</sup>

The workshops that followed in 1973 combined lectures and theatre activity. The question of working on meaningful and not too simplistic

plays was tackled. Instead of simply bringing ready-made plays the workshops turned to improvisation and started to create plays on the spot. A workshop held in Kitwe followed this pattern:

After the [lecture] we divided into four groups; headed by the four students from the University [i.e. Chikwakwa Theatre members]. Each group was given a situation which they were to work on and make a sketch out of it. The groups first did some exercises in improvisation and voice projection [...]. In the afternoon the groups worked on the sketches. When each group was ready we gathered together to watch what each group had prepared. After each group, comments were passed and suggestions were made as to how to improve on what was wrong and so on.<sup>72</sup>

Chikwakwa Theatre members here only acted as group leaders. Most of the work and discussion was a shared experience. In this particular workshop there were thirty participants. Work on improvisation was suddenly becoming central in all workshops. It was seen as the best way to inculcate various skills necessary for good acting and presentation of a drama. The play creation at this point in time though, was limited to short sketches rather than full length plays. Chikwakwa Theatre needed more experience in this sort of work. They had to go back to the drawing board as it were and learn a few more tricks. The drawing room for the Chikwakwa Theatre all the time is the Department of English at the University of Zambia which houses lecturers of drama. It is here that the seminal ideas on group play creation started. The best example of such work is the play Matteo Sakala. A look at this text should show what is involved in such work.

(c) The creation of Matteo Sakala

This play was created by some ten students of drama studying under David Kerr in the 1976-77 academic year at the University of Zambia.

The play grew out of improvisation exercises based on Zambian proverbs.

The ten students split into two groups, and each group selected a proverb to work with. The idea being to create a story around the proverbs in such a way as to portray their meanings and significance in Zambian society. One group chose a Chewa proverb: Fodya wako ndiyemwe ali pa mphuno (The tobacco that belongs to you is the one in your nose).

The other group picked a Tonga proverb which says 'The monkeys laughed at each other's ugly faces'. Having selected the proverbs the groups embarked on improvising around them. The main idea of the exercise was simply to gain some 'training in characterization and other dramatic skills'.<sup>73</sup> There was no intention to develop a performance. However when the groups finished improvising and returned to show each other what they had done to the proverbs they felt compelled to do more work on their sketches and evolve a full length production. This meant bringing the two sketches together to make one play.

The first proverb led to a story which involved the humiliation of a proud young man who wished to obtain his chief's thumbprint for some passport papers. The second group came up with a story dealing with a hypocritical 'pompous Minister of National Ethics' who gets scandalized when his wallet is stolen by a young pickpocket 'but who is himself caught a little later being involved in corrupt financial dealings'.<sup>74</sup>

These two sketches were found not sufficient by themselves. So further improvisation on possible developments was carried out. The young man of the first sketch became the protagonist of the entire play which ended up with four acts. The first two acts were linked by making the young man a relation of the Minister who shares his downfall at the end of the second act. In the third act the young man, now jobless, joins and later becomes a leader of the gang which pickpocketed his uncle. By the fourth and last act the young man has degenerated so much that he has to go back to his village if he is to survive in this world at all.

### The play

The first act entitled 'The Passport' spreads over three scenes in which we see Matteo Sakala dreaming about anticipated life in the United Kingdom where he is waiting to go for studies. To get to the United Kingdom he needs a passport. He can only get this after his traditional chief, back in the village, has signed some affidavit documents certifying he was born in Zambia. This necessitates a trip back to his village and its ways, which Matteo is not willing to go through until events force him to do so. Living in the city most of his time, his manners, ways and language have changed. He has become pompous. He looks down upon village life. He sees it as 'still in the stone age'.<sup>75</sup> Because he belongs to the group of very few people who have had some western education in his village, he thinks everybody there should bow to him and do whatever he asks them to do. In other

words he has become arrogant.

The villagers he comes into contact with are quick to notice this arrogance. The chief particularly is quick to notice this. They all blame such arrogance on town life which they say 'scatters [their] children's brains'. They think it is their duty to re-educate Matteo back into line with village manners. This re-education process is a humiliating experience for Matteo. Starting with strong headedness, he refuses to succumb to such a process. Instead he showers abuse on everybody he is dealing with - including the chief from whom he expects to gain some favours. But with time and after both spiritual and physical degradation Matteo temporarily succumbs to the demands of the village. This he does just to get his documents signed by the chief. Thinking he has outwitted his people he runs away, back to Lusaka (the city) only to find his girl friend as well as his sponsors - for the scholarship to the United Kingdom - have jilted him. His dreams are thus shattered. He counted his chicks before eggs had hatched. In this way the act fulfils the proverb which gave it rise.

The second act continues with the misfortunes of Matteo. Having failed to go abroad, he chooses to follow the shortest means to success by trying to get a job through 'nepotism'. He gets one without trouble but only for two weeks. Not long after he is given a job by his uncle who is also Minister of Ethics, does he (the uncle) get the sack for

corruption ... theft by public servant and nepotism ...<sup>76</sup>

These are vagaries he always spoke against as Minister of Ethics. So



it is ironical that he should lose his ministerial portfolio over such charges. Matteo Sakala is swept along in this downfall. The moral of the uncle's story is summarised in the comment by his secretary:

[...] Our people back home in the village say the monkeys laughed each others' ugly faces. But I think this monkey [the minister] called Chitumbo has got the ugliest face.<sup>77</sup>

This thus rounds up the second proverb of the improvisation exercise. For Matteo the world seems to come to a standstill. He cannot understand why misfortune should dog him wherever he goes. All his attempts to make it in life seem to be frustrated in one way or another. That is why he asks:

why is it everything I touch seems to turn to shit?<sup>78</sup>

Matteo does not understand himself, nor does he pause to try and do so. Blindly, he rushes from one mistake to another. It would seem that his upbringing has not prepared him for life in his society. So from this misfortune he rushes on to another when he joins the Lusaka city pickpockets in the third act.

Scene one of the third act treats us to the life of the underground world of pickpockets. Matteo witnesses a former classmate successfully steal from a man standing in a queue trying to board a bus. Compelled by the dexterity and carefree life style of his friend Matteo is persuaded to join his gang rather than waste time looking for a decent job. All he needs to do is 'just become like a mother rapin' shark'. At least 'it's better than drowning'.<sup>79</sup> Becoming such a shark as he quickly learns, involves hardships of their own kind:

Steady: Okay, Killer, how'd you make out today? (Killer

stands to re-enact the scene. Matteo becomes more and more engrossed in the accounts.)

Killer: Ah, nickisi. I eyed this old goat, see, with a big handbag. I tuned I was gonna be loaded, right? Cos the old goat screened load okay. But the bag turned into a portable latrine, man.

Steady: Why? What brewed?

Killer: As I dipped in real neat, I fished out a baby's napkin. Ya man, it was covered in shit.<sup>80</sup>

Such experiences end up very frustrating on the gang. Very often they break into fights. At one such moment Matteo's superiority surfaces as he quickly stops a fight between his friend Steady and Killer shouting:

Matteo: You fellers are wasting your time. How can you organize yourselves when you spend all day kicking each other's guts out?<sup>81</sup>

From this point on he asserts himself and becomes the brains of the gang. He reorganizes procedures and gives a new face to the gang which he renames 'Fresh Air Company':

Matteo: Look at Killer. Got his hands all shitty on the nappy. That needn't happen. You work together. Rational mobilization of personnel. You need division of labour. Number one finds some dope with money. Number two steals - passes it to number three who runs off. Get it? Streamline your channels of communication. Integrate your work force. I wasn't in the world of commerce for nothing.<sup>82</sup>

All this seems smooth talk. Matteo is not really cut out for such business. After all he has not got any track record to boast of. So when Killer expresses his scepticism we understand why:

Killer: [...] But I tune Matteo's a real jive-ass smooth talker. I tune he ain't got the balls for the real action.<sup>83</sup>

These words are proved right when Matteo makes his first and only attempt at pickpocketing, in a bid to prove Killer wrong. He gets caught and receives a good thrashing. His friends desert him. This one experience is enough to make Matteo remember his village. So he returns to his people. Life in town has proved too tough for him.<sup>84</sup>

It is a subdued and humble Matteo who returns to the village in the fourth act. Although he tells a good deal of lies to save his face, he is genuine in his intentions of wanting to stay in the village. He manages to get some land from the chief along with a wife to take care of him. By this time he has come to understand himself and the complicated nature of the world he lives in. He can afford to claim that experience is the best teacher. That is why by the end of the play he can look forward to the birth of a son in his family and say:

Believe me I'll be able to give him some good lessons. A one-man survival course. Who knows, perhaps he'll grow up lucky and have a better life than mine?<sup>85</sup>

This is what the play Matteo Sakala is about: a young man's survival in modern Zambia.

#### Lessons from Matteo Sakala

Performances of this play were scheduled to take place at several venues in and outside Lusaka city. Three performances were held at Matere Community Hall, Ridgeway Campus Theatre and the Natural Resources Development College on 18th January 1977, 15th and 17th February 1977 respectively. During the month of March the play was taken out to Kabine at Nkurumah College. The work that was presented to the public

was described by the theatre group as a play 'still semi-improvised in nature and based on ultimately a cooperative effort both in terms of script and production'.<sup>86</sup>

People seem to have enjoyed the performance.<sup>87</sup> As a result of this success, University of Zambia drama students together with their lecturer David Kerr went on to create another play, along similar lines as those followed in the creation of Matteo Sakala, called Bambo Kachasu.<sup>88</sup> Groups outside the University started to work along the lines of Matteo Sakala.<sup>89</sup> Matteo Sakala was a success because of several reasons: the closeness of themes being treated in the play to Zambian contemporary life; the appropriateness of the language used and the incorporation of indigenous Zambian songs and dances. Although the production was well received by the audiences who watched it, some people noticed a few technical as well as thematic flaws within it. These were largely due to the fact that the work had been 'co-authored' and 'co-produced'.<sup>90</sup> It is interesting to look at the success and failure of the production closely.

The problems that the play depicted are current in Zambian society. But except for corruption amongst political leaders all problems related to the process of urbanization were always there even during the colonial period. A United Nations report of Social Advancement in Non-Self-Governing Territories issued in the 1950s mentions that problems of housing, education and health were acute in the territory of Northern Rhodesia. The report went thus:

The increase in the number of Africans seeking employment in

towns throughout the Territory led to considerable overcrowding in the cities and African Housing on the Copperbelt [was] one of the most difficult problems.<sup>91</sup>

The situation has not improved. A quarter of a century later Independent Zambia is still fighting this problem.<sup>92</sup> The capital of the country, Lusaka, in which Matteo Sakala, the protagonist of our play, meets his suffering has a population of approximately 150,000 people and 12,000 of these are estimated to be squatters living in shanty towns around the perimeters of the city.<sup>93</sup> Most young people from rural areas are trying, like Matteo Sakala, to run away from the poverty, underemployment and boredom of their lives by going to town in the hope of finding paid employment and more exciting lives there.<sup>94</sup> But the harsh realities of life in developing countries hit them in the face as they discover that jobs are not easy to come by. This leads to disillusionment and adoption of antisocial means of survival like hooliganism, theft and so on. The 'Fresh Air Company' of Lusaka pick pockets in the play should be seen in this light. Although Matteo Sakala's presence in the city is not properly explained, he typifies the truth. Most young people in Matteo's position forget their rural homes until things become unbearable. That is if they are lucky to remember at all, otherwise prison becomes their permanent home as it happened to Killer Joy and Steady who, we are told, later 'got caught trying to heist [...]'.<sup>95</sup>

Given this sort of atmosphere in which there is virtually no hope man must survive by his wits. This might mean abandoning all morality as it is known by his society. Matteo's stay at his girl friend's



home is seen as immoral by his parents and the chief of his village:

Chief: You don't have any objections to marrying a girl from the village do you?

Matteo: (FLUSTERED) Objections? No ... It's just that back there in town I've already got a sort of wife.

Chief: Wife!

Sakala: You're married already? Why didn't you tell us?  
[father] We weren't even invited to the wedding?

Matteo: Well, we're not really married. She is a beautiful girl. Works for a firm of lawyers. Her name's Mary. She's crazy about me.

Chief: (ANGRY) And is she your wife or isn't she?

Matteo: No, we never actually got married. We've just shackled up together. You know living together.

Sakala: In the same house!

Chief: (FURIOUS) Without any proper marriage! Sakala, I thought your boy had learnt a lesson. And here he is mouthing these abominations.

Sakala: I'm sorry, mfumu. He doesn't realize what he is saying.

Chief: Obscenities! Despising the daughter of your village!

Matteo: (STANDING AND LOSING CONTROL OF HIS TEMPER) But this has nothing at all to do with the passport. Why drag all this nonsense ...

Chief: "Possposs"! "possposs"! You can stuff your "Possposs" up the anus of Lusaka!<sup>96</sup>

Clearly such 'immorality' is attributed to city ways here. But immoral as this may be one should not ignore the economics behind two young people living together even if they are not married. In the absence of adequate housing, high rental charges and low salaries it seems the most logical thing for young people just beginning their life in the

city to do. Matteo Sakala fails to bring up enough facets to the problems of survival in current Lusaka. This is why by the end of the play one feels the group merely wanted to present a 'return to the land' message which the government of Zambia has tried to get through to the nation with very little success.<sup>97</sup> Such a problem could have been dealt with quite adequately through the commentary that Matteo Sakala is making now and again when he withdraws from the action of the play to become a narrator.

The corruption of Uncle Chitumbo is another theme that relates directly to current Zambian life. In an interview with David Martins, President Kaunda of Zambia talked of the exploitation of the masses by elites in his country in the following terms:

This is one of the things which make me very sad. The idea that a man who yesterday was himself oppressed cannot have the moral and spiritual courage to stand up to temptation [...] This elitist approach to life is a cancer which must be fought.<sup>98</sup>

Mr Chitumbo's sack in the play is part of this fight to get rid of undesirable elements in society. But his return to power, even if it is in a different capacity, by the end of the play talks of another dimension to the game of politics in Zambia. Matteo says of him thus:

As for uncle Chitumbo, you know when he falls he just somehow bounces back up again. His court case was dismissed for lack of evidence. The main exhibits were mysteriously stolen from court. He somehow managed to get himself a good managing director's job in one of the smaller parastatals.<sup>99</sup>

Thematically the play leaves no stone unturned. It poses several questions relating to Zambian society. In the spirit of Chikwakwa Theatre and that of encouraging relevant theatre Matteo Sakala displays

how far this has been done in Zambia.

To achieve this the team which worked on the improvisation relied heavily on their power of observation. The speeches given to the various characters sound genuine. They fit the mouths of those who utter them. The 'Fresh Air Company' formation scene has already been quoted. The power and vividness of this scene is a result of research amongst would be pick-pockets. An account of how this scene was worked out says that:

David Kerr [gave] a brief to the actors playing pickpockets to observe the language of pickpockets, grade 7 drop outs and 'Mishanga' pedlars. (At a later stage David Kerr [went] with these actors for a field trip to Cairo Road, to do some observation ...) <sup>100</sup>

The use of proverbs in African literature has now become a cliché which works in helping to authenticate the indigenusness of African experiences in literature. Sometimes they simply serve to enhance an exotic aura around the literature. But Matteo Sakala went beyond simply employing proverbs in speech to actually making them the backbone of the story. By developing stories which worked out the meaning of the proverbs, the theatre group was going beyond the 'exotism' of Chinua Achebe in say Things Fall Apart <sup>101</sup> where proverbs sound more like an archives' crackle of a page from an old book. The experiment of Matteo Sakala was reshaping language and showing how much alive it was even in post-independent Africa.

With an episodic lay-out the creators of Matteo Sakala do not seem to know how best to link the scenes. At one point they use curtains, at another they use Matteo as a narrator who is, in a sense telling the

audience the story of his life. Because of this lack of consistency in style of presentation the play reads clumsily. Even on stage one visualizes awkward moments of waiting for curtains to be drawn. This problem was dealt with in the next experiment Bambo Kachasu in which 'the presentation of events [was done] fluidly without any curtains or scene breaks, and [...] all the scenes [were portrayed] simultaneously on the stage'.<sup>102</sup> Such fluidity and unity was achieved through the use of a singer who sang commentaries and links between different scenes. David Kerr describes the singer in this way:

His role was something like that of a narrator in a traditional African story, although in other ways his function was more that of a Greek chorus. Sometimes he helped to tell the story; more often he provided a moral commentary on the actions guiding the audience's attitudes to the events;<sup>103</sup>

The ideas which this group came up with are not new to anyone with some knowledge of western theatre. As members of the group themselves conceded, the whole project has similarities with Brecht's ideas of folk theatre. But more than this the experiences of the group seem to be common ones amongst people aiming at creating a theatre for the masses. This is something to be discussed later on in the chapter.

4 The Zambian International Theatre Institute (i) Theatre for Development Workshop at Chalimbana (ii) Follow-up work by Tafika Theatre

(i) Chalimbana Theatre for Development Workshop 1979

The Zambia International Theatre Institute organized a theatre for

development workshop at Chalimbana in August 1979. Participants to the workshop were drawn from all over the world. Several bodies, both local and international, made donations towards the running of the workshop.<sup>104</sup>

The rationale put forward by the International Theatre Institute (I.T.I.) was that extension workers in various agencies of rural development were dissatisfied with existing techniques of communication between them and the masses. It claimed that these people were looking for a fresh way of communicating with the masses. Although they had attempted in the 60s and 70s to improve their methods by turning to drama as a technique for informal education, they had failed because they did not have theatrical expertise.<sup>105</sup>

On the other hand Chikwakwa Theatre work with the masses, though welcome, was found to lack an understanding of the masses themselves. In other words theatre practitioners lacked the expertise and experience of extension workers in dealing with people. Their work was not based on sound research findings, but feelings and current rhetoric in Third World politics. Chikwakwa Theatre's attempts to induce a truly Zambian theatre were impaired by a lack of

time to discuss with their audiences the issues raised by their plays, [to allow] real evaluation of the impact of theatre on rural development to take place.<sup>106</sup>

More than this, the I.T.I. felt that Chikwakwa Theatre lacked 'coordination with social workers and extension officers. It was not based on research on the target audiences'.<sup>107</sup> Time had come for theatre people and extension workers to come together. This is what the I.T.I. tried



to bring about in their Chalimbana theatre for development workshop.

As it happened interest in the workshop was not confined to the I.T.I. organizers alone. The government of Zambia was particularly keen to support it. Quite apart from recognizing the need for a revitalized approach to methods of communicating with the masses, the national party (U.N.I.P.) also saw such attempts as a means to restore Zambian culture to its proper place. The Chairman of the social and cultural committee of the party emphasized, at the opening of the workshop, that:

Theatre is one of the media that is capable of using the performing arts which have always been a source of instruction in [...] African culture. When we wanted to narrate a story of our plight or victory we used song, dance and mime. We also used the dramatic narrative form with animals as characters to project our wisdom and criticise without hurting the feelings of other people.

We used dance and dance-drama to instruct young men how to grow crops, how to hunt and how to live with others. We used song and dance to instruct girls to become good wives and how to handle their responsibilities as mothers [...]<sup>108</sup>

The list went on and on, but what was important here was that the speaker was pointing at the fact that there was nothing really new in what I.T.I. were trying to do. He saw the workshop as a 'positive effort in [Zambian] endeavours to build on [an already existing] cultural heritage.'

The workshop organizers themselves, however, seemed to place very little emphasis on this aspect. This was very much reflected in their aims and choice of participants to the workshop. The aims of the project were:

- To bring together theatre artists from East, Central and Southern Africa so that they may exchange, develop and apply their skills to help solve problems of rural development in their countries.
- To stimulate an awareness among participants of the relevance of theatre arts to the problems of community and the individual in the development of their own communities.
- To identify problem areas in rural development which can be gainfully evaluated and researched for future planning and organisation which should involve the application of skills and insights derived from the performing arts.<sup>109</sup>

Participants came from Zambia, Botswana, Lesotho, Canada, United States of America and Tanzania. Their expertise covered theatre skills, adult education, community development, public health, puppetry, music and research methodology. This wide ranging expertise brought the workshop much closer to the need for having extension/community workers join together with theatre practitioners in their attempts to bring about rural development amongst the masses.

(a) Location of the workshop

The choice of Chalimbana as venue for this workshop was dictated by two factors namely; its proximity to Lusaka City, the capital of Zambia and the availability of a live problem-ridden community on which ideas of the workshop could be tried.

Being only about 40 kilometres from Lusaka, Chalimbana was very accessible to participants coming to the workshop from not just within Zambia, but other parts of the globe. At this distance Chalimbana is not a truly rural community, but what might be termed a suburban one. This means that it displays traits of both the rural and the town in

the life of its inhabitants. More than this, the place suffers certain problems unique to peri-urban areas of the third world. I.T.I. observed that:

Chalimbana's proximity to urban Lusaka [had] produced social stresses common to many similar peri-urban communities elsewhere in Zambia and indeed elsewhere in Africa.<sup>110</sup>

These resulted in community instability, poor housing, malnutrition, thefts, beer drinking, prostitution, witchcraft and all the 'problems associated with rapid social and cultural change'.<sup>111</sup> All these provided a rich source for subject matter to be considered in creating performances during the workshop.

(b) Workshop Methodology

The methodology of the workshop was planned well ahead of the event. Organizers had it in mind that all the work at the workshop should be built around researched material from the Chalimbana community. This meant that participants were expected to carry out research amongst the people in order to identify their ethnic background, their problems, their indigenous theatre conventions. These research findings were to be taken back to the workshop venue where they would be analysed and subsequently form the basis of performances to be taken back to the community. At the end of the performance it was planned to have discussions of issues raised and dealt with by the performances. The planned procedure of the workshop was thus:

- a) development of relevant theatre skills,
- b) research into community problems,

- c) creation of performances based on research findings,
- d) presentation of performances,
- e) questions/discussion of issues raised by performances (with audiences),
- f) evaluation of the whole project by the workshop participants,
- g) planning of follow-up work.

(c) The workshop

The first thing that happened at Chalimbana Teachers Training College (venue of the workshop) was to make everybody aware of what exactly was planned to take place. During this period several issues were thrashed out. The question of research was particularly important here. Trying to avoid using standard research methods, the group agreed on participatory research methods which emphasized the need for making the research target participate in the investigation process itself rather than simply remaining passive. This was something which the Botswana participants at the workshop initiated drawing on their own experience of Laedza Batanani Popular Theatre in their country and the work of Paolo Freire in Latin America.

This participatory research went beyond merely identifying problems. It included making decisions over what problems should be in the performances. Problems were identified and brought to the whole workshop gathering. These findings were scrutinized and discussed in terms of their accuracy and relevancy by the group. Finally participants agreed to regroup the problems as follows:

- a) Water pollution, lack of wells
- b) Excessive drinking, no work
- c) Poor local services, transport, and extension services
- d) Malnutrition among children and high child mortality
- e) Poor transport facilities, roads and bridges
- f) Need to educate women
- g) Poor sanitation, no latrines
- h) Widespread use of witchcraft, lack of incentive and poor motivation to work.<sup>112</sup>

These formed the basis of improvised play scripts which were rehearsed and presented back amongst the Chalimbana dwellers. Two days were set aside for these performances. All performances ended with a discussion of what had been presented in them. Whenever possible villagers were encouraged to join in the performances. The performances covered drama, dance, song and puppetry. The performance strategy followed this pattern:

1. Assemble and summon villagers
2. Set up make-shift stage or puppet theatre
3. Introduce performance to assembled villagers
4. Performance A (Play, Dance)
5. Audience participation (Songs, etc.)
6. Performance B (Dance and Puppet show)
7. Audience invited to form into discussion groups
8. Group discussions
9. Open session - songs, questions and answers



10. Formal thanks to village headmen, teachers, etc.

11. Return to centre: Group debriefing.<sup>113</sup>

(d) Comments

When the workshop was drawing to an end each team made some remarks on their experience with theatre for development. These covered overall administration of the entire workshop, educational and aesthetic aspects of such work, and finally the future of theatre for development in Zambia. It was generally felt that such work needed more time than the workshop provided. This would allow thorough and in-depth participatory research to take place. On the other hand more time spent with a target community would make it possible for people to know better not just the problems therein, but the local culture. This in turn would enable theatre practitioners to evolve presentations which would not only be meaningful to the people but also rooted in their own culture. In this way problems like the one the puppetry group experienced where puppets were identified with witchcraft could be avoided.<sup>114</sup>

Referring to the idea of 'participatory research' during the workshop, Amandina Lihamba - a member of the Tanzanian delegation there - had a few reservations about the way it was followed. She says that:

Participatory research has a lot to recommend it but as far as the workshop in Zambia went [...] the people's participation was very limited. In the end, it was the seminar groups which brought the people what they thought were the solutions to the problems dealt with. Even though there were no overt 'party attitudes' paraded, one felt that behind it all, it was the national government and party wishes which were guiding the hoped for results. The local people participated in the

discussions after the performances but it would be difficult to measure the amount of conscientization achieved through the workshop itself.<sup>115</sup>

It was also felt that the workshop lacked a sense of direction. This was attributed to the fact that 'at the "participatory research" stage [...] the village representatives who were contacted were often not key people in the communities'. For future work it was suggested that those involved should identify 'key people, councillors, village headmen, influential women, in advance of research activities'.<sup>116</sup>

Although the workshop brought together theatre practitioners and extension workers from a variety of fields, there was no firm commitment on the latter's part to provide continuity. It was strongly felt that the idea of theatre for development could only take hold if such people were fully committed to it:

Volunteers in the villages who agreed to do some of the things suggested by the performances could not be expected to carry out a programme of change and development, no matter how well intentioned, without the help of local agencies and extension officers.<sup>117</sup>

It was also generally agreed that the Chalimbana workshop was not an ideal sample of theatre for development work. Delegates were expected only to see it as a demonstration of the capabilities of this work. The superficiality of the workshop removed it from reality. No one in the workshop could guarantee that the work done amongst Chalimbana residents was going to produce results.

Some of the dramas presented around Chalimbana villages were criticized for presenting stereotype characters at the expense of reflecting the real truth of the situation the dramas were dealing with.

A number of participants felt that:

as artists they had not benefited from the workshop as much as they had hoped they would. They felt that the workshop's emphasis had been on community development and not drama and art [...] a better balance between the needs of artists and the needs of community workers would have been desirable.<sup>118</sup>

Commenting on the same issue Amandina Lihamba felt that the workshop had actually 'failed to exploit the strength of theatre [...] instead of pushing the participants to choose and explore the most effective theatre expressions it settled too readily for the easiest'.<sup>119</sup>

In spite of all these criticisms it was also generally agreed by all participants that what the workshop was aiming for should be welcome by everybody in Zambia. The International Theatre Institute of Zambia was called upon to hold further workshops and to sell the idea of theatre for development to the government of Zambia as an approach to 'the diffusion of information in the urban and rural areas [as it was found to be] more effective than radio or the mass media for passing on information [amongst the masses]'.<sup>120</sup> Follow-up projects were therefore planned before delegates dispersed to their various homes. These were to take place in the provinces of the country. Committees leading these provincial projects were:

requested to take into consideration the specific regional problems and on-going development projects by government agencies or community voluntary organisations to which their follow-up projects could be linked.<sup>121</sup>

These projects were directly linked to the International Theatre Institute of Zambia, but local drama groups and local communities were drawn in to make them a reality. The first thing to be done was to

train would be participants in theatre for development ideas. The coaching teams were made up of people who had been to the Chalimbana workshop. Because the work was more directly and obviously connected to work that the government or public agencies were interested in organizers received a helping hand from all sorts of people ranging from government officials to village party leaders. In its report for the Chalimbana Workshop International Theatre Institute of Zambia boasted of having so far approved six projects in Northern, Copperbelt, Southern, Central, Lusaka and Western provinces of the country.<sup>122</sup>

But no matter how successful the Chalimbana workshop might have been, continuity in theatre for development could only be assured if other agencies with financial backing showed some interest in this work. The International Theatre Institute has always said that their work would receive better and enthusiastic response if they had a steady budget. But as things are at the moment the whole organisation

is run on an entirely voluntary basis and [it] is financed from contributions made to it from time to time by international and national organisations. Without a fixed budget very little will be achieved in the way of a meaningful follow-up. The ball is now in the Government's court. Community development, the Ministries of Education, and Agriculture should take note of this challenging experiment and begin to evolve more appropriate methods for promoting rural development and change.<sup>123</sup>

(ii) Tafika Theatre and the Alcohol Theatre Project

The Alcohol Theatre Project was one of the many offshoots of the Zambia International Theatre Institute 'theatre for development' workshop held at Chalimbana in 1979. It was started in September 1981

at Chawana compound in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia by the Tafika Theatre Group based at Kaunda Square within the city. The group is made up of Tapiwa Muchenje, Gabriel Kapili, Brian Njovu, Christine Phiri and Dickson Ngoma. The following month the group moved 120 km from Lusaka to cover some six villages grouped under Muracisompola.<sup>124</sup> The project was carried out in collaboration with a research team, from the Institute for African Studies at the University of Zambia, which was investigating alcoholism and related problems in Zambia. This was part of a world-wide investigation being sponsored by the World Health Organization. In Zambia this coincided with a campaign known as Health for all by the year 2000 A.D. and after. Whilst Tafika Theatre Group only played a supportive role in the investigation on alcoholism, bringing 'health to the people' became their main objective. In doing this they intended:

to use POPULAR theatre - under the term THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT - as a tool for Implementation [of the campaign. The group also intended] to let the local people do the theatre themselves.<sup>125</sup>

This work was geared towards maximizing community involvement in identifying development needs through the process of participatory research as advocated by the Chalimbana workshop of 1979. Tafika Theatre Group's approach was to first of all identify 'general development' needs and then concentrate on those relevant to alcoholism and its problems.<sup>126</sup> Theatre was being used as one way of facilitating all-sided discussion and identification of the problems. In a sense this was a test of what the Chalimbana workshop was trying to promote



in Zambia. On the whole the project stuck to Chalimbana procedures. A few observations were made by Tafika Theatre Group which the workshop had not anticipated.

Although the Chalimbana workshop emphasized the advantages of participatory research, it did not discuss the amount of time that would be required for it to actually produce fruitful and genuine results. Neither did it discuss problems that were likely to be met by anyone trying to use it. Tafika Theatre Group met all these in the raw. They found out that unless one became totally immersed in the life of the community it was almost impossible to establish genuine interaction between the researcher and the community. This meant that instead of simply going into a village and asking questions or engaging in formal discussions with the villagers they had to join them in their everyday life. And they found out that this way none of the villagers 'knew who [they] were because [they] only joined talking groups at taverns, bars, homes, markets etc. just like ordinary local people'.<sup>127</sup> In a sense the group was hiding its identity. Where this failed to work researchers were sometimes taken to be detectives investigating some crime in which case people would refuse to have anything to do with them.

The question of language was taken for granted in the Chalimbana workshop. Tafika Theatre Group discovered that for any work in theatre for development to really succeed its practitioners must not only share the language of the community they are working with, but know the dialects, slang, nuances, etc. that the various sections

making that community develop out of it. This ensured that words used in the dramas that were created were done so in a language that all the local people understood, not just a section.

As it turned out the drama created was concerned with how bad excessive beer drinking can be. Basing themselves on one woman's story of how beer drinking affected her family life Tafika Theatre Group created a play. The woman's account went as follows:

My husband divorced me and took all my two children saying that I caused the death of my other two children because of hunger, which he says was caused by my negligency because of my drunkardness.<sup>128</sup>

Together with this, other comments and views collected during the research period were referred to and included to make the story as truthful and relevant as possible.

Discussions which were held after the show were conducted in two separate groups. One for children whilst the other was for adults.

The group had this to say about after-performance discussion:

The post-performance discussion did not go as planned. That is, to talk to the audience after all the activities. The priest who manages the dance troupe in Chawana advised us not to use this technic [sic]. He told us that if we tell people the show is over and we would like to talk to you, we would never see anybody. He said the people would all go away if we used that method. Instead, his cultural dances troupe continued to perform after we did our play. So while the dances were being performed we scattered into the audience and started asking questions. This formula worked out alright and we ended up forming up groups which got involved and almost forgot there were dances going on.<sup>129</sup>

The holding of the plays alongside dances led to some confusion amongst some of the audience. Some thought the whole performance was a competition between the dancers and the theatre group. Asked to

comment on the day's events some of them said the theatre group had won whilst others argued the dance troupe had. In spite of this confusion some poignant comments were made. These were the ones relevant to the purpose of the exercise, which was to find out what people thought about alcoholism or simply drinking beer.

Some people argued that beer was not bad otherwise 'the Government would not go into Pains brewing it'.<sup>130</sup> Others commented that the group (Tafika Theatre) 'should be bringing such plays [...] every week-end'.<sup>131</sup> Others suggested 'New measures for legal and illegal brewers should be introduced to limit quantity of beer'. The comments noted by the Tafika Group are very interesting indeed:

If more advice is not given now and half the population of this country (Zambia) became like the drunk in the play, [...] what will become of our country.

A lot more recreation activities like this one you have brought us is the answer to the question of drunkenness.

I started drinking because of hunger. My husband never gave me enough money to buy food at home, so I used to go to the tavern to have a free drink of chibuku from friends. The only problem which prevailed later was that of my children, they suffered from malnutrition.

I can not stop drinking beer! Your play is useless.

There is Humanism in practice in your play when the other guy [...] bought beer for his friends. I think besides being entertaining the play was very educative.<sup>132</sup>

Obviously the Tafika Theatre Group felt very satisfied with the results of this project. In his report to the Research Team Tapiwa Muchenje stressed the need for further work on 'alcoholism', but at a local level. Apart from suggesting that the research team should have their

own theatre group, he recommended that local groups be formed in affected areas.<sup>133</sup> When the group conducted a similar tour in Mwachisompola, they went further to provoke participants in the post-performance discussion to suggest what they thought was the best way of dealing with alcoholism in the community.<sup>134</sup>

### Analysis

The examples given in this chapter fall under two groups of practitioners, viz.: government agents and autonomous practitioners. The puppetry work of the Extension Aids Branch in Malawi and the Colonial Youth Council Drama Workshops in Zambia belong to the first group. David Kerr would include these amongst 'institutions and communication media which stem from elitism of colonial education'. Being such they fail to produce results in adult education. And because of this failure they have given rise to the second group to which the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre (Mbalachanda) workshop, Chikwakwa Theatre tours and workshops, and the Zambia International Theatre Institute workshops belong. It is important to make this distinction here because it explains the differences and limitations of each group in their endeavours to 'improve' the masses.

Puppetry work of the Extension Aids Branch in Malawi is carried out by people who have been trained in formal schools and specialist institutions of agriculture. They are literate and in paid employment. Their survival depends on salaries from the government. Within

Malawian society these belong to the 'petit bourgeois'. Unlike these, the farmers to whom the puppetry is directed form the peasantry or proletariat of Malawian society. These depend for their living on what they grow and what they are able to sell to the other group or the government at prices usually dictated either directly or indirectly by the latter. There exists an interesting relationship between these two groups which explains the attitudes and behaviour each of them displays towards each other and the puppetry under discussion here.

Although the Extension Aids Branch workers carry no particular doctrines when they go about their work amongst farmers, they still display certain values and ideas which determine their relationship to the people they work with. Most of these have been inherited from colonial days. These were days which saw nothing good and intelligent amongst the natives of Malawi. Agricultural work that went on at the time assumed that all native methods were bad and had to be replaced by new and modern ones from Europe. The little extension work that was there at the time resorted to coercion rather than humane methods in such work. The coming of independence led to the repeal of all coercive methods and insisted on 'educational' methods, but not on a revaluation of attitudes. So even today, almost twenty years after independence, Malawian peasant farmers are treated as devoid of any intelligence. They have to be fed information in a manner which assumes they know absolutely nothing about 'good and modern agriculture'. They are treated as passive recipients of this information. They cannot question anything that is modern in agriculture.



Led by such a relationship between extension workers and farmers, and an uncompromising attitude on the former group's part, techniques of production and presentation in the puppetry work of the department only appear as integrative propaganda of the worst type. In this, as Szanto says, its exponents attempt:

to render [their] audience and society passive, [their] goal is for [the] audience to accept unquestioningly and uncomplainingly the social conundrums of the present and not challenge the authority of those who perpetuate the dominant and ongoing social institutions.<sup>135</sup>

The puppets in use on campaigns are created away from the audiences that they are meant for. They are not even created out of critical observation of the lives of the expected audiences. The messages they carry are propounded by agriculture specialists in isolation of other personnel involved in the puppetry itself. The bureaucratic procedures insisted upon by the Extension Aids Branch only help to mystify the work of extension personnel.

It is therefore not surprising that some audiences are indifferent to such work. For there is no relationship between the form that this theatre takes and the content it carries. Whilst the messages might be deemed important and integral to the 'agricultural' life of the peasantry of the country, the language which this theatre employs in relaying them is not relevant and not well thought out. By language here is meant a much broader means of communication than 'words' per se. McGrath, talking about the language of theatre says that:

words are not the language of theatre [...] the act of creating theatre has nothing to do with the making of dramatic literature [...],<sup>136</sup>

but understanding the characteristics of expected audiences' entertainment. In other words, for any theatre work amongst peasants to be meaningful and successful, it must be built on the language of their entertainment. This means understanding the culture of the people and borrowing from it the said language. Puppetry by Extension Aids Branch in Malawi has nothing in common with the culture of the people it is taken to. Otherwise some of the opposition referred to earlier on would not be there. Creating scenarios with a typical Malawian family set up is not sufficient in itself.

The object of puppet theatre in this department, just like it is for other extension work therein, is to improve the efficiency of agriculture in the country. Bradfield lists several factors as necessary for any development of efficient agriculture. These include farming efficiency, efficient marketing, conservation and wise use of natural resources, farm management, family welfare, social and economic improvement of the community.<sup>137</sup> This calls for an integrated approach to development. Malawi's policy in rural development has insisted on this approach in some measure. This is why quite apart from agriculture extension workers, one also finds community development and health workers in rural areas of the country. A look at one of these factors in the context of Malawi is worthwhile if only to show how effective agriculture extension work is. The sort of agriculture being encouraged amongst farmers is aimed at increasing the production of cash crops. This means the farmers must also be provided with an efficient, honest and reliable marketing system. In Malawi this job is left in the

hands of the Agricultural Marketing Board (ADMARC) which buys crops from farmers and sells them on the world market. In a country where the majority of the people are not only rural but dependent on agriculture for their livelihood such a board works both as a market and buffer against fluctuating world market prices. Ideally the marketing board should ensure that the farmers get a fair price for their crops. Robert Christiansen responding to an article<sup>138</sup> praising the role of the Malawi Agricultural Marketing Board in the Economist in this respect retorted that:

Malawi government [...] via the marketing board [extracts] financial surpluses from the peasant sector. These surpluses have been used to finance the food consumption of urban and agricultural wage employees, and to assist in the creation of a large scale commercial agricultural sector, the latter being owned largely by the country's political elite.<sup>139</sup>

Measured against this criticism all work in extension geared towards improving peasant agriculture in the country no longer seems benevolent. In this case the work of the Extension Aids Branch is perhaps positive only in as far as it attempts to employ an 'imaginative' way of imparting knowledge to the masses. Beyond this, their work is very limited because it does not encourage a critical spirit amongst those it reaches. It is imaginative for escapist reasons. The appreciation of the puppets that people show neither stems from the messages they carry nor from the format in which they are presented. People only marvel at the dexterity with which the puppets are manipulated by the operators. The messages are taken for granted. The large percentage of children at shows only supports this view.

Puppetry is not an indigenous theatre tradition in Malawi. So any critical appreciation of such work by Malawians can not go beyond simply an expression of 'escapist' fun. They cannot say whether the puppet operator was making a mistake or not. They might comment on the music and the words in the recording because they are recognizable from their own lives, but not on the puppets except where they are rejected totally on cultural grounds.

As far as the Extension Aids Branch people are concerned, the audience does not matter in determining the effectiveness of the puppetry as a medium for relaying specific information. Judging by attendance numbers at shows they believe they can weigh the impact of the messages. At the same time the annual repetition of messages as decided by the agricultural calendar of the country implies they are only absorbed by the audience temporarily. As a work of art this theatre is dead. In fact one could say it is killed at its conception. By being made to set speeches and a set pattern of presentation which totally ignore indigenous aesthetics, puppet theatre of Extension Aids Branch does not only fail to respect audience responses but engages in what David Kerr rightly calls 'manipulative' work. Puppet theatre in Malawi is not and cannot be popular theatre unless it is built on indigenous modes of entertainment. What it is at the moment, if anything, is 'populist' theatre.

Of course Extension Aids Branch does not make any claims to propagating 'popular theatre'. Such rhetoric is left to the other group of practitioners of 'theatre for development'. To a large

extent these are autonomous, although from time to time they come into close contact with the government it is mostly either because they seek approval for their work or because they want support in some particular project. Their ideas in this work are not necessarily directed by government policy.

The work of the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre at Mbalachanda; Chikwakwa Theatre and Zambia International Theatre Institute in Zambia is based on Paulo Freire's ideas on adult education and social change.<sup>140</sup> These ideas are concerned with improving the masses. Some people have said these are:

concerned with the liberation of the poorest of the poor: the marginalized classes who constitute the 'cultures of silence' in many lands.<sup>141</sup>

They claim it is Freire's aim to help 'men and women to overcome their sense of powerlessness to act on their own behalf'.<sup>142</sup> Ross Kidd and Martin Byram interpret this 'sense of powerlessness to act' as mere apathy.<sup>143</sup> These along with other theatre practitioners believe that such a situation can only be corrected by encouraging the said powerless people to participate in the process of shaping their lives. Freire says this should be accompanied by a critical awareness and a keen sense for action. An educational programme that manages to bring this about engages in what he calls a process of 'conscientization'.<sup>144</sup> In practical terms theatre practitioners in Malawi and Zambia have interpreted this as getting the people to identify and discuss their development needs with the view of reaching some solutions and taking appropriate action. Their work therefore involves the masses in



actually identifying problems which form the themes, and the creation of dramas that make up their theatre. In order to avoid the possibility of dominance by a few well placed personalities in such a process, theatre practitioners become 'field workers [ and ] conduct interviews with people' directly. This process is referred to as 'participatory research'.<sup>145</sup>

Freire does not necessarily suggest that theatre should be used as a method for bringing about 'conscientization'. His disciples have chosen it as one way of meeting this goal because they believe that theatre can be used for extension work and adult education very effectively. As entertainment it catches and holds the interest of large numbers of people. As a dramatic way of presenting local problems, it makes the audience and the players themselves see these problems in a fresh and critical way. Through discussion (both during the creation of the play and after performance) people talk about the problems with others and see what can be done about them. Ross Kidd and Martin Byram refer to theatre for development as both a method and a goal. They say that whilst this theatre mediates development messages, its very creation involves the masses in the process that its practitioners believe to be central to active participation in development of rural communities.

The effectiveness of this work can only be measured against what the process of rural and urban development in Malawi and Zambia is like. The best place to start this assessment is Freire's work. His work started in Brazil under socio-political and economic conditions that

did not work in the interest of the masses. Freire's major concern here was to re-awaken the masses to their plight and induce them into activity which would better their lives. With a new government, interested in exploiting the masses, coming to power such efforts proved unpopular.<sup>146</sup> Freire was thus exiled to Chile. There he embarked on yet another programme of conscientization amongst the masses, until he moved to the World Council of Churches to become a consultant on adult education. Since most adult education work has tended to emphasize 'literacy' in their programmes, Freire's ideas on this suffice as an example of how he works.

Stressing the need for demystifying literacy, he has persistently suggested that all adult literacy programmes be truly meaningful to those desiring to be literate.<sup>147</sup> He insists that literacy should go beyond the process of identifying letters of the alphabet or counting figures, to include the process of preparing such people to participate actively in their development. Towards this goal, his classes are built around issues directly related to the existence of the people he works with. Instead of simply teaching 'words' and the various combinations that can be brought to them to make sentences Freire involves the learners in choosing such words and directs the process of generating sentences that reflect relevant issues from their lives not simple meaningless illustrative ones that conventional primers give. In his literacy work he refuses to give priority to reading and writing techniques which require him to 'separate reading the text from reading the context'. He argues that such an approach does not 'consider

"reading" the real life context [which is] lifting a veil from the world, to be the right of the people and thus it reduces literacy to a purely mechanical skill'.<sup>148</sup> He argues that literacy should help to prepare learners to participate in the process of developing themselves.

Being a consultant in adult education for him therefore does not mean becoming:

a cold, neutral uncommitted figure, always disposed to offer technical advice to any problems presented. On the contrary [...] the consultant's role is a political one and [his] work has political implications whatever the field of his expertise.<sup>149</sup>

This is a politician of a particular kind. He emphasizes the recognition and improvement of the masses along socialist lines. He is uncompromising in his demands as a consultant. He says that:

agreement on fundamentals is indispensable to the consulting relationship [as he] would find it impossible [...] to collaborate even minimally on a literacy campaign sponsored by a government that does not represent the people.<sup>150</sup>

Freire is very much aware of the futility of trying to work against the government, even if he were to go into the job only to establish opposition. Having established that he and the government have something in common Freire proceeds to work with the people as a 'co-worker [...] rather than an applier of formulas'.<sup>151</sup>

In the actual teaching situation Freire insists that:

one must not think [...] that learning to read and write precedes 'conscientization' or vice versa. Conscientization occurs simultaneously with the literacy or post-literacy process [...] the word is not something static or disconnected from men's existential experience but a dimension of their thought-language about the world.<sup>152</sup>

Inevitably this calls for an understanding of the learners' culture.

For it forms the basis for relevant education. It

functions as a context [...] in which cultivating the attitude of being a curious and critical subject becomes the point of departure for learning to read and write.<sup>153</sup>

In other words he suggests that every society needs its own materials for teaching. The method of teaching however follows one pattern which involves

critical and democratic participation by the learners in the act of knowing, of which they are subjects.<sup>154</sup>

In a nutshell Freire is calling for a redefinition of what has conventionally been known as adult education. His definition goes beyond merely making illiterate masses knowledgeable in the skills of reading and writing or using a plough or applying fertilizer to their crops. He sees it as also a process of helping the masses to articulate themselves in relation to life around them at various levels (social, political and economic). In this sense all 'development' work becomes adult education. This necessitates a new outlook, and methodology on the part of those who choose to engage in such work. It is on this basis that any work which claims Freire as its mentor must be judged.

Returning to theatre for development in Malawi and Zambia it must be emphasized that this work is only one method amongst several which might bring about what Freire calls critical and creative participation of the masses in their development. It is also important to understand the background to the 'apathy' said to be the target of theatre for development work in order to make proper assessment of its successes and failures. Quick attributes the existence of apathy amongst

Zambia's rural communities to negative rural development policies of the colonial times.<sup>155</sup> He argues that it still exists today because those who took over the reins of government when the country became independent were involved in the propounding of rural development policies that preceded the acquisition of independence and that they have merely continued with these policies.<sup>156</sup>

Whilst most studies of development in independent Africa often assume a clean break between the colonial period and the independence era reality shows the contrary to be the truth. Transition from the former to the latter state has been a good deal more complicated than meets the eye. Multinational cooperations might be the most pronounced face of neo-colonialism, but there are other areas in which it is not so prominently manifested. Since colonial days Zambia has always had a dual economy; a monetized urban sector and a rural underdeveloped sector. During the colonial days there was very little concern with rural development, if anything it was discouraged. Quick gives several reasons for this. Fear of encouraging a competitive African agriculture and that of losing cheap labour for the lucrative copper mines of the Copperbelt were amongst these reasons. The little agriculture that was going on was in the hands of Europeans. These did not want any competition from Africans so they persuaded the government to restrict any assistance in this area to themselves. On top of denying Africans agricultural assistance, legislation was passed which pushed them into the more infertile soils of the country and away from easy access to markets. This inevitably led to extensive migration from the rural



areas into the mining urban centres of the Copperbelt. This way the mines had more labour than they wanted therefore they could afford to pay lower wages. Still for the African such low wages were considered better than life in the village.

Although efforts were made after the second world war to support African farming in the country, this was directed to a selected few. The bulk of the rural community remained untouched. Left on infertile soil, denied of any extension support and other services, rural Zambia held nothing for the rural masses. The apathy that came to be was thus indirectly created by Europeans who wanted to protect their interests in the country. They were only too happy to perpetuate it.

This apathy has continued in the country because nothing has changed radically in terms of the relationship between the town and the rural sector of the country. Still largely dependent on its copper mines Zambia can ill afford expensive labour. So she continues to exploit cheap labour from the rural areas of the country. The positions left by colonial Europeans have been taken over by an elite group with its own ambitions and beliefs detrimental to the development of the masses.<sup>157</sup> Although the political rhetoric of the country suggests some form of 'micro-socialism', nothing in concrete terms has been achieved to bridge the gap between the town and the village, between the educated elite of the country and the illiterate masses of the rural areas.

The situation in Malawi is different. The idea of self-reliance and self-help is a realized dogma in Malawi. Several rural development

projects in the country have been achieved through this idea. Roads criss-crossing most of the rural sector of the country have been constructed and are frequently maintained by villagers on a self-help basis. Schools and teachers' houses have been erected the same way.<sup>158</sup> Currently (since 1968) there is a 'rural piped-water project' under way in the country in which the rural community digs trenches from village to village (at no pay) whilst the government provides piping and technical expertise to connect water and maintain pipes.<sup>159</sup> The way this project is going on shows to what extent villagers participate in rural development in Malawi:

Each project is first discussed at a public meeting attended by local chiefs, members of parliament and party officials. If the community feels the project is a good idea they appoint an overall project committee which carries the authority of all the community leaders [...] Section committees are also formed taking charge of different pipe sections. Finally village committees are set up and they oversee the construction and maintenance of the tap site [etc].<sup>160</sup>

Given such a nearly romantic picture of rural development in the country one wonders what sort of apathy existed at Mbalachanda Rural Growth Centre, to attract the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre there. A brief in-depth look at the area's socio-economic make up reveals that 'apathy' can in fact exist at a deeper level than most development experts imagine.

The creation of the Rural Growth Centres in the country has three main objectives:

- To create focal points of development in remote or neglected areas of Malawi by providing social and economic services to the rural population.

- To contribute to the decentralization of administration and to further community development in order to give rural people an opportunity to better participate in development activities and politics at the local level.
- To contribute to the integration of development activities of the various Ministries in rural areas. 161

Mbalachanda is one of ten centres created in the country under the West Germany Technical Assistance Scheme. At the time of the visit this scheme was being administered by the Office of the President and Cabinet. The centre itself is a small town with all basic social and economic amenities desirable in a town. It has a market, shops, bars, a dispensary, rest house, primary school and a community 'recreation' centre. Surrounding it are some villages and tobacco estates. There are four distinct groups living and using facilities in Mbalachanda. There are: (a) the people who actually run the centre, (b) absent estate owners, (c) villagers who have always been in Mbalachanda from pre-colonial times and (d) the labourers who work on the tobacco estates either as wage-earning labourers or as tenants. Each of these groups leads a life unique to itself and perhaps telling in the way the whole area is 'developing' or indeed being 'underdeveloped'.

The people who run the centre comprise extension workers (agriculture, health, literacy, forestry conservation, home economics and small business advisor), dispensary personnel, postal clerks, primary school teachers, community centre warden, shop and bar owners as well as their employees. These form an economic group of their own with reasonably high incomes comparatively. The villagers on the other hand are self employed. They make their living from subsistence agriculture. The

group of labourers as indicated is made up of those who get a monthly wage and those whose income comes at the end of the tobacco season depending on how well they do on their plot and how much the estate owners are ready to pay for their crop.

Ideally the centre is meant to cater for the villagers who have always lived in Mbalachanda. And it is to these that the extension workers at the centre direct their efforts. When the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre was trying to get a list of problems needing attention in the area, it was from extension workers that they were sought. These confined their observations to villagers. All the problems cited came from amongst these villagers and nowhere else. Nothing was mentioned about life at the centre itself and the resulting relationships between the various people surrounding and affected by it. Yet the coming of an infra-structure of the centre's type has sprung up its own problems. Within the ten days that the group was there several social problems surfaced. These are a result of: the urban-modern nature of the centre amidst a chiefly rural community, the effect of migrant labour which works on the estates, and the development of a dual economy - made up of a subsistence one in the villages and a cash one based on estate ownership, civil service and wage labour. There was tension between villagers and those in paid employment. David Kerr points out that:

Among the [Mbalachanda] villagers this expresses itself in distrust of extension workers from the Project who are identified with the modern sector.<sup>162</sup>

The relationship between absent estate owners and labourers is difficult

to visualize in a positive light. Considering that the estate owners have made no provision for the welfare of tenants and labourers working for them one only envisages a very tenuous and insecure relationship between the two groups.<sup>163</sup> Having no families with them on the estates, farm labourers resort to drunkenness and prostitution. The number of pubs in Mbalachanda far exceeds that of shops or groceries.

Whilst health, literacy, modern methods of agriculture and home economics form the core of extension services being offered to Mbalachanda residents, the real problems of underdevelopment are being left to flourish. Nobody so far seems to have questioned, and called for a check to such developments. If there is apathy in this area it is at this level. The Chancellor College Travelling Theatre found itself cornered into reckoning with these apart from the stereotype list of problems identified by extension workers in the centre.

What is evident now is that the root cause of apathy amongst villagers goes deeper than theatre for development practitioners usually assume. In order for them to fully come to grips with problems of development they cannot rely on extension workers. By insisting that they work together with government extension workers, they deny themselves the opportunity to question strategies which these agents stand for and follow in their work amongst the masses. Even if they employ such a method as 'participatory research' in their investigations of problems, as long as they operate within government lines and policies, they bring upon themselves strictures that make their work ineffective.

Of course the problem of research is not so simple. Chilibumbo



points at other complications that social researchers face in African states. These also affect theatre for development work. He discusses these complications and says that some of the problems in such work

emanate from the political domain. Much of it affects the selection of researchable topics, the question of content and the actual interviewing situations. These problems relate to the nature of the direction, purpose and intents of the post-independent African states.<sup>164</sup>

In countries where the masses have been heavily politicized through the efficiency of a one-party state system, like in Malawi and Zambia, any work with the masses must respect the local party hierarchy. This is so even if the government gives approval to work aimed at the masses - as it happened in the Mbalachanda workshop in Malawi. Work carried out amongst the masses enjoys success or failure depending on which side of the party it is. Going out to invoke a critical outlook amongst the masses outside the party structure and policy may infringe upon a set-up which has its own procedures for doing so. But on the other hand going through the party inevitably means giving up a certain amount of autonomy.

Theatre for development practitioners in Malawi and Zambia have chosen to work within the political set-up in their countries. In this way they have reduced radically the potential impact of their work amongst the masses. Because of this it seems their work is more dedicated to 'development' issues as identified by government planners and politicians than by Freire. Having made this choice, it is easy to carry on with 'participatory research' of a kind. The rhetoric then sounds fervent and impressive:

Participation is both goal and methodology [a] popular theatre programme attempts to increase participation of community members in development projects by involving them in the planning and running of the popular theatre programme.<sup>165</sup>

The wide Freirian goals of education become reduced to simple involvement in already identified 'development projects'.

There is yet another anomaly in this work. Whilst it may be claimed that the community participates 'in the planning and running of the popular theatre', the theatre genre being talked about does not (as an idea) come from them. Although token allusion may be made to a few traditional songs, dances and other cultural artefacts, the truth remains that the theatre process of production or creation - let alone the mode of entertainment itself - is from outside. It is imposed, in a benevolent style, upon the community. What is being said here is that ideally one cannot talk of 'theatre for development' if Freire's ideas on 'cultural context' are taken intact. Participation in Freire's terms means total involvement even at the level of conceptualizing the vehicle of articulation. The educator, it must be remembered, becomes a 'co-worker not an applier of formulas'. 'Theatre for development' as it is being carried out in Malawi and Zambia (and indeed the rest of Africa) is one formula being tried on the masses. Kidd and Byram sum up this very well as they talk about their own work in Botswana's

Laedza Batanani:

Participation is not just 'song and dance'. A villager may join in the songs and participate actively in the discussion but this is a different form of participation than selecting the campaign issues and structuring how they are to be presented for discussion [...] Popular theatre may be 'participatory' in the sense that local people are involved

in producing it, in acting out the dramas and singing the songs, but unless they control the selection of content and the whole educational process they may become willing accomplices in their own domestication [...] unless rural villagers control the popular theatre process they may be used as mere mouthpieces for ideas produced by others which mystify their reality.<sup>166</sup>

The idea of 'theatre for development' is a strait-jacket which is incompatible with the ideas of Freire. Perhaps if the community is left to establish a cultural means of articulating themselves they might come up with something totally different from what is being paraded around at the moment. Even where a theatre of the people has successfully been established, it has not been created for them by some educated elites, as is being done in Malawi and Zambia. It happened in Germany, for instance, around the end of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century as 'a child of its time, born of a marriage between political and artistic movements'.<sup>167</sup> These movements had their roots amongst the masses not just a handful of educated 'bourgeois' sympathisers. There is no suggestion of such movements in Malawi and Zambia. Rhetoric calling for such movements may be there, but it awaits being turned into a practicality.

It is therefore no wonder that the emphasis in 'theatre for development' is on the word 'development' rather than 'theatre'. During the Chalimbana workshop in Zambia artists complained that they were underutilized.<sup>168</sup> In Botswana, Kidd and Byram have called for:

a shift away from a popular theatre oriented programme to a sustained programme of group organization, education, and action in which popular theatre is given a more narrowly defined, less prominent role.<sup>169</sup>

The work of Tafika Theatre emphasizes loyalty to 'data' collected during the so called 'participatory research' stage. They insist there should be no 'distortion of subject matter at all'.<sup>170</sup>

The Mbalachanda workshop in Malawi however suggests that if theatre is going to be used at all in adult education, it must be given as much attention in its creation as the problems it tries to deal with. Of the four plays that were created and presented by the Chancellor College Travelling Theatre at Mbalachanda Mchira wa Mtondori (The Lizard's Tail) was more effective, both as theatre and education, than the others. In fact, whilst the others have died from the Travelling Theatre repertoire this one is still being performed both in urban and rural areas outside Mbalachanda.<sup>171</sup> David Kerr argues that:

the play's main advantage over the three improvised sketches was that by concentrating on domestic marital problems, rather than directly dealing with overtly 'developmental' issues of literacy, sanitation and agriculture, the play was able to avoid what Paulo Freire pejoratively refers to as "Extensionismo" - the tendency to manipulate audience emotions and learning process according to pre-conceived solutions of the animateurs.<sup>172</sup>

The beginning of theatre in this work is the animation process. Having collected, researched the various problems how do theatre practitioners turn them into drama? So far they have followed the method of assigning roles, picking out significant moments and then simply acting them out. In this acting various theatrical conventions from the people's own indigenous culture - dance, song and proverbs - have been employed. Having done this they believe they have created not just an expression of the problems being experienced by the people, but also a theatre belonging to the people rather than from outside.

The preference of Mchira wa Mtondori to the other three sketches in the Mbalachanda experience shows that such an approach to theatre only clouds the issues at stake. As Bas Kershaw would put it: the 'truth' of the problems remains disguised rather than revealed.<sup>173</sup> There is need for a better method. The success of Mchira wa Mtondori was accidental. But a few lessons may be learnt from this accident.

Emphasis in this theatre should be placed on creating authenticity in the animation process. Instead of worrying about the didactic nature of their work, practitioners should humanize the problems forming the basis of their work. They should do this not simply through creation and assigning of roles, but more so through exploring all possible relationships that people experiencing the problems might enter into with each other in various capacities. The process of elaboration, i.e. involvement of indigenous songs, dances and proverbs can then come in to enhance the authenticating of the problems.



NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

- 1 Etherton and Crow, 'Popular Drama and Popular Analysis in Africa' in Tradition for Development, (eds.) Ross Kidd and Nat Collette, p.573.
- 2 D.J. Bradfield, Guide to Extension training, F.A.O., Rome, 1966, p.159.
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- 4 Ibid., p.81.
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- 48 Ibid., p.20.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 1968 Commonwealth University Yearbook.
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### CONCLUSION

The foregoing has attempted to describe theatre in Malawi and Zambia. Besides this, an attempt has also been made to show how this theatre is being shaped. In the description five types of theatre have been identified namely: indigenous, syncretic, literary, popular and developmental. These types are not an accident. They have come about as a direct result of the influence of various forces working upon theatre activity in the region. Isolating types the way we have done here may suggest there is no interrelationship amongst them, but this is not the case. None of these types are static. They are always changing. Distinctions between them are sometimes very fine.

Oftentimes students of African drama treat indigenous traditional theatre as cocooned and impenetrable. They only see it as a possible reservoir for connoisseurs wanting to develop modern theatre in Africa. But this ignores the transformation that these very indigenous theatrical forms are undergoing. Chapter five of this thesis has shown how indigenous traditional performances are changing to suit the times they exist in. The initiation ceremony might exist as traditionally conceived in some parts of Malawian and Zambian society, but there are certain forces coming from outside the immediate milieu in which it exists. The evolution of the Kitchen Party is a case in point. Sociological, economic and political considerations from the

twentieth century are responsible for its characteristics.

When Roscoe laments the failure of Malawi and Zambia to transpose traditional performances into modern theatre, as West Africa has done, one must take this factor into consideration.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps an abundance of such performances does not by itself ensure the evolution of modern theatre. The existence of syncretic theatrical forms like Malipenga points to another possibility that most people seem to ignore. These cast a shadow of doubt on the belief that it is only the modern or urban person who learns from tradition. Malipenga shows how modernity and tradition can marry to produce new cultural forms. It also shows how such a marriage, born of 'free will' as it were, easily becomes indigenized rather than be aborted as the case of 'literary' drama in Malawi and Zambia seems to suggest.

The word 'aborted' is chosen deliberately here. For literary drama was deliberately conceived by academics during the colonial period when they were anxious to evolve a theatre along western lines. This was at a time when to be sophisticated in western ideas was every African's dream. Even when independence came along, the situation remained the same. Instead of evolving a theatre which spoke to the people, those who engaged in theatre continued to present a western type of theatre. The only thing they were aware of was the need for changing the message. Theatre engaged in the rehabilitation of the people's culture. It did not address itself to the needs of the people. And it was not conceived in their own language.

The abortion did not take place until such literary drama was

masqueraded before rural and illiterate people by travelling theatre companies from University campuses. Although rural communities rushed to lap in the alien spectacles being wheeled up and down the country at first, soon enough their rebuff registered.

Accompanied by the presence of artists of leftist inclination this rebuff has prompted fresh appraisal of the role of theatre in the community. This appraisal has led not just to a change in the content of plays brought to the masses, but the whole process of its creation. Whereas in the beginning plays toured and performed amongst the masses were created by individual playwrights, those being done today are being created together with the masses themselves. The work of Chikwaka Theatre from Zambia shows this very clearly. This seems to be an inevitable development where people are talking about creating a theatre for the people. The work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o at Kamiruthi Community Educational Centre in Kenya (before its abolition) would seem to support this contention too.<sup>2</sup> How far drama work being carried out by Ahmadu Bello University's Drama Department in Nigeria will go, one waits to see.<sup>3</sup> But the arguments for a people's theatre are also being made elsewhere in Nigeria. The Laedza Batanani experience in Botswana seems to be firmly established now.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it is not premature to say that there is a revolution taking place in African theatre. A revolution which seeks to replace the 'conventional' playwright in theatre by the presence of a 'creative artist', whose role is simply to help his society evolve meaningful theatre for itself.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

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- 3 See S. Abah and M. Etherton, 'The Samaru Projects: Street Theatre in Northern Nigeria', Theatre Research International, Vol.VII, No.3, Autumn 1982, pp.222-244.
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APPENDICES

- A. Sample of an agricultural message to be included in a Puppet theatre recording.
- B. Example of a Puppet Play.
- C. Report on the Mbalachanda Trip (to Office of the President and Cabinet).
- D. Interview with Ms Amandina Lihamba - member of a Tanzanian Delegation to the Chalimbana Theatre for Development in Zambia (1979).

## APPENDIX A CHAPTER 9

Campaign Number 7, 1982, NorthPreparing the garden, paying back credits,  
buying fertilizer and buying corn seed

Greetings Ladies and Gentlemen, I have come today with the following topics: preparing the garden, paying back credits, buying fertilizer and buying corn seed.

Prepare your gardens early so that you can plant your crop soon after the first rains or to reinforce your ridges. As you make your ridges make sure they cross the slope of the area. If you do this there will be no soil erosion - your gardens will be safe. Make sure each ridge is separated from the other by 15 centimetres.

The credit money which you owe the government is now due. Pay back this money so that your colleagues may have the opportunity to be helped as they try to get implements necessary in the field.

It is advisable to buy all your fertilizer now, before the rainy season. If you plant MH12 corn variety buy 2 bags of Chitowe fertilizer and 2 bags of Suga or CAN per one bag of this variety. If you plant the UCA corn variety or CCA then buy one bag of Chitowe fertilizer and two bags of Suga or the CAN type for every small bag of seedling maize. Hurry up, buy all your fertilizer now, so that when the time comes for applying it in your gardens you will have it all in readiness.



The same applies to this new maize seed. You should buy this long before the rainy season. Buy according to the size of the plot you have reserved for this maize.

Well, God willing, we should meet again. Good-bye.

## APPENDIX B CHAPTER 9

EXAMPLE OF A PUPPET PLAY

SUBJECTS COVERED: Cotton weeding  
 Maize weeding  
 Fertilizer application

CAST: Farmer  
 His wife  
 Extension Advisor

THE PLAY:

1. MUSIC Curtains open  
 Enter farmer and his wife  
 They dance for several minutes

2. DIALOGUE:

WIFE: Husband! Husband!  
 HUSBAND: Yes mother of Mabvuto, what is it?  
 WIFE: When did you last visit the cotton field?  
 HUSBAND: You mean cotton field?  
 WIFE: Yes.  
 HUSBAND: Mmm! It's almost a week ago I last visited it.  
 WIFE: A week ago? Ho! What a long way back.

HUSBAND: Yes you are quite right mother of Mabvuto. It's a long way back and I am sure the field should be full of weeds by now since it was 3 weeks ago that our cotton germinated.

WIFE: Yes, this is true, father of Mabvuto.

HUSBAND: Would I be right, mother of Mabvuto, if I suggested that we start weeding the cotton field tomorrow?

WIFE: Quite right, we have to start weeding in our cotton field tomorrow, other wise the crop will have no food to feed upon and again we may encourage the pests to multiply and consequently damage our crop.

HUSBAND: You are talking sense, mother of Mabvuto.

WIFE: Yes, this is what I think.

HUSBAND: I entirely agree with that, mother of Mabvuto. I think it's right and proper that we start and finish weeding our cotton field on time so that the crop grows vigorously, free from any competition for plant nutrients.

WIFE: Yes, we have to do it.

HUSBAND: I think if we could do this so quickly, we shall only have to concentrate on spraying.

WIFE: Ahaaa!

HUSBAND: While we are weeding our cotton field, we should at the same time remember to thin our cotton.

WIFE: Yes, father of Mabvuto, that's yet another important operation to remember.

HUSBAND: But do you remember the instructions which were given to us by the Extension Worker, mother of Mabvuto?

WIFE: I thought we would be doing it any how?

HUSBAND: No, no, no, not any how, mother of Mabvuto. We still have to follow what ever recommendations are given to us by the Extension Workers; because it's only by doing so that we are likely to have high yields and good returns from our farming business.

WIFE: I think so too.

- HUSBAND: According to the thinning instructions in cotton they say we should always thin to 3 strong plants per planting station.
- WIFE: I can remember that now.
- HUSBAND: Can you?
- WIFE: Yes.
- HUSBAND: That's it. This also lessens the chance for light and food competition among the plants themselves.
- WIFE: Quite right, husband.
- HUSBAND: I think so.
- WIFE: I think we should also observe the instruction not to break the ridge but to rebuild it when we are doing the weeding business, shouldn't we?
- HUSBAND: We have to observe that.
- WIFE: Mmmm!
- HUSBAND: What do you think, about weeding in maize?
- WIFE: I think we have to start weeding immediately so that our crop doesn't get choked by weeds.
- HUSBAND: There, you are quite right, mother of Mabvuto.
- WIFE: Yes, we have to do that.
- HUSBAND: I heartily agree with you mother of Mabvuto. Now, since we have a lot of work to do on the farm, I have this as our work-plan. Every morning will be devoted to weeding in the cotton field and every afternoon devoted to weeding in the maize field. How about that mother of Mabvuto?
- WIFE: That's reasonable.
- HUSBAND: Yes, this is because I want to see to it that weeding operations in both maize and cotton fields finish at almost the same time.
- WIFE: That will be very good, my husband.

- HUSBAND: We also have to observe an additional instruction on weeding, which is, "Weed as you rebuild the ridges".
- WIFE: Have we to do that again in maize?
- HUSBAND: Yes, very much so. This is equally important because it helps to improve the root system of the crop which results in good root anchorage.
- WIFE: What about thinning, do we have to bother doing it in maize?
- HUSBAND: Ho! mother of Mabvuto, have you already forgotten that thinning is as important in maize as it is in cotton?
- WIFE: Sorry husband, I am too forgetful.
- HUSBAND: You will forget your head, if you're not careful! Any way let me tell you. We should also remember to thin our maize to 3 strong plants per planting station as soon as we engage ourselves in the weeding business.
- WIFE: I think this is exactly what our extension worker says, not so, husband.
- HUSBAND: Exactly the same.
- WIFE: What about fertilizer application in maize, when do we start it?
- HUSBAND: I must commend you, mother of Mabvuto for remembering to ask me.
- WIFE: Have I done right?
- HUSBAND: Quite right. We will have to do this operation as soon as we finish weeding when the crop will be measuring knee height.
- WIFE: I haven't forgotten the instructions for this operation. I can remember the extension worker telling us at the meeting which took place on 22nd December 1976 that we should always use a recommended cup size.
- HUSBAND: Yes, you really can remember now. Let me help. As you can remember, he also gave an example of X200 fertilizer cup in use. He said that it was better to apply one per station to leave a distance of 3" from the



planting station to the dollop and to fill the dollop with soil after application.

WIFE: Husband, you appear to be well informed about most operations in farming now, don't you?

HUSBAND: I think it's because I always turn to extension workers anytime I am in difficulties on anything concerning farming.

WIFE: I am sure we shall benefit a lot from farming if we follow all that we have been discussing.

HUSBAND: But now mother of Mabvuto, shall we dance a bit to refresh ourselves?

WIFE: Why not? Let's dance to a Simanjemanje record.

SONG: .....

3. MUSIC: They dance for several minutes.

Towards the end of the music they exit.

Enter extension advisor who continues dancing.

4. ADVISORY TALK:

EXTENSION

ADVISOR: Hello ladies and gentlemen, my today's talk is on cotton weeding, maize weeding and fertilizer application in maize.

Cotton gardens must be weeded early to avoid competition for nutrients in the soil between weeds and cotton. If the cotton field is weedy, it is easy for pests to spoil the cotton because even if you spray the cotton the chemical will not be so effective. When weeding in cotton field, do not break the ridges but make the ridges bigger. After weeding, thin the cotton to three plants per planting station.

Maize should also be weeded early to avoid competition between weeds and your maize. Do not break the ridges when weeding in your maize garden, instead make the ridges bigger. When you are weeding thin your maize to three plants per plant station.

Soon after weeding apply fertilizer in your maize field.

Apply fertilizer on both sides of the planting station. The holes should be three inches from the plant and three inches deep. When applying fertilizer use the cup you were given at the ADMARC market at the time you bought your fertilizer.

Thank you for listening, until next time, good-bye for now.

5. MUSIC: The advisor dances.

Exit.

Curtains close.

The end.

## APPENDIX C CHAPTER 9

REPORT ON THE MBALACHANDA TRIP

From: The Chancellor College Travelling Theatre  
(D. Kerr & C. Kamlongera)

To: The Secretary, Office of the President and Cabinet  
(Attention: Mr. G.R.E.K. Chimwaza)

Date: 28th July, 1981

Subject: Trip Report - Theatre for Development Workshop at Mbalachanda Rural Growth Centre conducted by The Travelling Theatre from Department of Fine and Performing Arts, Chancellor College.

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1. Assignment Details

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of the trip was to try and provide a forum of; entertainment, cultural exchange, education, team spirit at the centre among extension workers and also the local people (villagers and estate workers surrounding the Mbalachanda Rural Growth Centre).

1.2 Authority

The Secretary to the President and Cabinet's letters both Ref. No. Dev.21.10C.15 dated 27th May, 1981 and 15th July, 1981. The Principal's (Chancellor College) reply to my memo of 29th May, 1981.

1.3 Personnel Involved

The Travelling Theatre Company:

- (a) Mr. N.I. Nyasulu - student
- (b) Mr. E. Kanyongolo - student

- (c) Mr. V. Harawa - student
- (d) Miss O. Moyo - student
- (e) Miss P. Twea - student
- (f) Mr. S. Mbaraka - student
- (g) Mr. M. Nambote - student
- (h) Mr. D. Kerr - lecturer in Drama
- (i) Mr. C. Kamlongera - lecturer in Drama

Mbalachanda Extension Workers:

- (a) Mr. Nkona - Small Businesses Promotion Officer
- (b) Mr. Banda - Agriculture Extension Field Assistant
- (c) Mr. Kalema - Health Assistant
- (d) Mr. Lundu - Forestry Assistant (Wood Energy)
- (e) Mr. Kumwenda - Enumerator
- (f) Miss Nyirenda - Play Group Teacher
- (g) Mr. Kachere - Community Development Assistant
- (h) Mr. Nswoya - Primary School Teacher at the Model Sch.
- (i) Mr. Sululu - Primary School Teacher at the Model Sch.
- (j) Mr. Mazunda - Primary School Teacher at the Model Sch.

1.4 Dates Involved

15th July to 25th July, 1981.

2. Work Accomplished

- 2.1 All the work was conducted in Chichewa and Tumbuka. Only when dealing with extension workers was English ever used.
- 2.2 We started the workshop by explaining who we were and what we had gone to do at the Centre. We explained our methodology. We gave the participants from the Centre details of our programme.
- 2.3 Starting by identification of problems encountered by Extension workers we went into trying to find reasons for these. After this we embarked on improvisation work - creating plays dealing with the problems as themes - in small groups containing at least one extension worker in each. Some time was spent on polishing the sketches both aesthetically and thematically.
- 2.4 Three sketches plus a Chichewa cum Tumbuka translation of The Lizard's Tail by Enoch Timpunza-Mvula were prepared for presentation. The sketches dealt with the following broad themes:

- (1) The need for digging pit latrines and refuse pits;

- (2) The importance of attending adult literacy and Homecraft classes (Kwacha and Nkomia classes);
- (3) The advantages of following modern methods of agriculture and listening to the Agriculture Field Assistant.
- (4) The integration of the Rural G. Project with the needs of the local community.

2.5 Six venues surrounding the Mbalachanda Rural Growth Centre were selected for performances. All sites were visited:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Estimated adult attendance</u>	
(a) Chikoma Village	35	
(b) Jeremiya Village	65	
(c) Yoramun Ng'ambi Village	35	
(d) Mukwa Estate	over 300	
(e) Kwemani Village	30	
(f) Mbalachanda Community Centre	300	first night
Mbalachanda Community Centre	400-500	second night

2.6 At all venues except Mukwa Estate the villagers participated in the programme by presenting some dances and songs. Discussions followed all performances except those at the Community Centre.

2.7 We arranged an evaluation meeting with the extension workers at the end of the programme which centred on the successes and failures of the extension workers themselves. Questions relating to the possibility of continuity along the lines of the workshop were looked into.

### 3. Problems Encountered

3.1 Some Extension Workers showed scepticism about the viability of our intentions, perhaps because we were suggesting a more integrated approach to extension work i.e. the extension workers should work as a team rather than separate departments since we found that almost all their problems were related in some way or another. But whilst some extension workers expressed this scepticism, the villagers and audiences in the hall received our visit very positively. They want more visits.

3.2 The Community Centre warden did not seem to belong to the place consequently he showed no interest in the exercise and



so the question of entertainment and continuity could not be thrashed out to the full as this depended on his cooperation and interest in the workshop. With the warden interested it should be easy to establish a dramatic theatre tradition in Mbalachanda. This could involve dancers, singers from the villages around the place.

- 3.3 The Community Development Extension worker had 'family problems' which seemed to affect his work. He pulled out of the workshop without offering any explanation or excuse. This was regretted as one of the plays devised was actually in his field (of work). The only Kwacha School heard to be still in existence was the one at Mukwa, but the one at the centre itself had folded. This was in fact embarrassing where a play dealt with adult literacy or homecraft classes.
- 3.4 The Agriculture Field Assistant had to attend to some urgent business before we actually started performances. Although his place was taken by a student, he was missed where technical questions were asked after performances. He should have been around to listen to the Estate Manager and his Kapitawo at Mukwa Estate who endorsed our work. Their comment was that the plays dealt with fundamental problems which were being met on the estate.
- 3.5 The Travelling Theatre had to buy food with its own money. This has meant a depletion of Travelling Theatre resources which would be impossible to countenance in future trips. Is there a possibility that the Office of the President and Cabinet could help in this direction in the event of other similar workshops?

#### 4. Follow-up Action Required

- 4.1 The need for cooperation amongst extension workers needs stressing. Perhaps some 'official' thrust to this end is necessary. A monthly 'get together' for brain-storming amongst them is the thing required otherwise for most extension workers the centre could become a "holiday camp".
- 4.2 Another trip in future should follow. This would serve two purposes; (i) ensure continuity and reinforcement of ideas just developed in the workshop (ii) get the people in and around Mbalachanda to work along the lines the Extension Workers suggest to them, before they see themselves reflected in the sketches/plays again. The villages which were visited expressed a wish to see more of the kind of work which had been done by the workshop.

- 4.3 The Community Centre Warden should be told and educated into appreciating the local cultural material available. He does not have to go outside Mbalachanda in order to provide entertainment in the hall.
- 4.4 Extension workers should follow up the workshop by visiting and reinforcing the messages of the plays presented to the people (Mr. Nkona - the small businesses advisor - and the primary school teachers have expressed a wish to start a Drama club based on the primary school pupils and staff).

## 5. Response of Participants

- 5.1 In both formal and informal discussions there was a strong consensus among the participants that the workshop and performances had been a great success and pointed the way to further promising developments in similar theatre projects.

CHANCELLOR COLLEGE

University of Malawi

DRAMA WORKSHOP AND TRAVELLING THEATRE TO MBALACHANDA

JULY 15TH TO JULY 25TH

PROJECTED PROGRAMME

<u>Wed. 15th July</u>	Leave Zomba. Arrive Mbalachanda.
<u>Thu. 16th July</u>	A.M. Meet extension workers. Identify their skills and areas of interest. P.M. Warm up theatre and dance exercises.
<u>Fri. 17th July</u>	A.M. Demonstration of improvisation by Chancellor team split into groups (3). Discuss plots of three plays. P.M. Start work in groups on improvisations to create the plays. End with a sketch.
<u>Sat. 18th July</u>	A.M. Each group polishes its play and demonstrates to whole group. Follow-up discussions if time permits. P.M. Chancellor group + few interested extension workers go to village to show improvisations and ask for criticisms.
<u>Sun. 19th July</u>	Free day in Mzuzu.
<u>Mon. 20th July</u>	Workshop continues. Improving and demonstrating plays. Skilled and interested extension workers start to be identified.
<u>Tues. 21st July</u>	Workshop continues. Plays to be perfected. Evening - performance of the three plays in Mbalachanda.
<u>Wed. 22nd July</u>	A.M. Small group selected from extension workers to supplement Chancellor group. Re-rehearse 3 plays with new casts. P.M. Perform in one of villages + discussion.
<u>Thu. 23rd July</u>	Performances and discussions in villages.
<u>Fri. 24th July</u>	A.M. Evaluation of whole project with extension workers + other interested persons. P.M. and evening - free.
<u>Sat. 25th July</u>	Return to Zomba.

## APPENDIX D CHAPTER 9

INTERVIEW ON CHALIMBANA THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT (ZAMBIA) - MS LIHAMBWAHow did you know about the Workshop?

The department of Art, Music and Theatre received an invitation from I.T.I. through Chifunyise. Two of us went.

Why did you go?

Theatre for development had received so much attention because of the projects in Botswana and Latin America that I felt there was definitely something we in Tanzania could learn. Up to that time most of our experience was through adult education and we felt there was a chance for us to expand and use theatre in added areas of social development.

Did you participate in any of the activities?

When we arrived in Zambia, I found myself put as a 'resource person' in one of the dance groups. I participated in creating a dance-drama dealing with health.

What did you feel about participatory research?      Did it bring about the conscientization aimed for?

Participatory research has a lot to recommend it but as far as the workshop in Zambia went, I felt that the people's participation was very limited. In the end, it was the seminar groups which brought the people what they thought were the solutions to the problems dealt with. Even though there were no overt 'party attitudes' paraded, one felt that behind it all, it was the national government and party wishes which were guiding the hoped-for results. The local people participated in the discussions after the performances but it would be difficult to measure the amount of conscientization achieved through the workshop itself. Unfortunately I have not been able to get any information about the 'follow through' which was supposed to have been undertaken by the Zambian participants after the workshop which would clearly indicate the effects of such a project on a long-term basis.

What lasting impressions did you get from the experience?

Primarily that Theatre for National or Social Development has tremendous possibilities but it requires more thought on methodology and hoped-for results. Also, some of the limitations for this kind of project clarified themselves especially in terms of the objectives to be achieved.

Do you think there are any ways in which the workshop could have been improved?

I thought that the workshop had failed to exploit the 'strengths'



of theatre and therefore instead of pushing the participants to choose and explore the most effective theatre expressions it settled too readily for the easiest. I think this plagues most projects of this kind.

How different is this work from your own in Tanzania?

The Zambian experience inspired us very much and led to some experimentation of our own. Our project, however, is different from the Zambian project in many ways but the most important is the departure from taking a performance by outsiders to a local people to situating the project in the participating area. The performances, the discussions and whatever decisions are taken for action are for and by the people themselves. The outsiders are allowed in as participants. There is emphasis on exploiting theatre expressions which the people not only are familiar with but also want.

Do you see any future in this kind of theatre?

I think the future holds great possibilities for this kind of theatre but it will need more clarity on approaches by those participating in both ideological and practical areas.